

Family Jewels

Paintings by Lisa Ficarelli-Halpern

BY JANET MAZUR
PAINTINGS BY LISA FICARELLI-HALPERN

Imagine an art exhibit inspired mainly by one's mother-in-law, or more exactly, by her costume jewelry. Fresh off the heels of her recent solo exhibit, *Family Jewels*, artist Lisa Ficarelli-Halpern portrays the sparkly, shimmery, silvery jewelry from the collection her late mother-in-law bequeathed to her in 2004. Comprising predominantly still life subject matter, the exhibition featured two dozen oil paintings and prints, spanning a seven-year period of creation.





“It’s beautiful, fun stuff,” said Ficarelli-Halpern. “I love sparkly material and the way it can liven up a world. It reminds me of candy and holidays. I use jewelry in my paintings as a way to communicate these positive feelings to other people and to remember Martha,” she added. “Martha was a dynamo, and a great role model in her passion for her work. I greatly miss her.”

Ficarelli-Halpern’s late mother-in-law, Martha Crary Halpern, was an avid collector of many kinds of objects and an assistant curator of American decorative art of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. At the time of her death, she owned every piece of the Joan Rivers QVC jewelry collection. Given that the collection was so extensive, the artist was able to reconstruct many classic still life scenes using the brooches, earrings, and other jewelry.

Ficarelli-Halpern has been developing this body of work, “Vanitas Contemporarius,” since 2007. The theme describes society’s preoccupation with temporal objects and trends, and the ways these entities help to define human personality.

As a resident of Shrewsbury, New Jersey, Ficarelli-Halpern is fully immersed in the art world as a working artist and teacher. She is an adjunct professor of art at New Jersey City University and Brookdale Community College in Lincroft, New Jersey. Her paintings and prints have been widely exhibited in galleries from Chicago to New York to Florida, as well as throughout New Jersey. *Family Jewels* exhibited at The Crary Art Gallery in Warren, Pennsylvania, from October 18 to November 8, 2014.

What made this upcoming exhibit so intriguing is not only the subject matter, but the web of familial connections. When Ficarelli-Halpern learned of an open call for proposals at the Crary Art Gallery, it dawned on her that her mother-

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Small Passion, Oil on Panel (10" x 8")
© 2011

Page 20 (Clockwise from top left):
Bouquet Pastorale, Oil on Canvas
(18" x 14") © 2009

Dutch Floral with Drapery, Oil on Canvas (50" x 38")* © 2014

Still Life with Snake and Butterflies, Oil on Linen (12" x 10") © 2010

Still Life with Floral and Landscape, Oil on Canvas (50" x 42")* © 2014

Page 22:

Dutch Bouquet, Oil on Canvas (48" x 34")* © 2014

Page 23 (top to bottom):
Still Life with Pomegranates, Oil on Linen (12" x 14") © 2013

Concert of Birds, Oil on Linen (22" x 28") © 2010

Baroque Red, Oil on Linen (14" x 14") © 2012

*Most recent works specifically painted for *Family Jewels* exhibition





in-law's aunt, Genevieve Walker Crary, actually started the gallery. "It's especially meaningful because *Family Jewels* opened on the 10th anniversary of Martha's passing," Ficarelli-Halpern said.

In *Family Jewels*, as in her other work, Ficarelli-Halpern plays with the concept of mixing eras—a traditional 17th century Dutch-inspired still life with a shiny silver cell phone tossed into the mix; a 21st century man in a Marie Antoinette wig talking on his cell phone. As she explains it, the more familiar elements in the work combine with trendier, technology-based objects to create a setting that many different viewers can relate to.

The response to the paintings has been very positive, especially with women, who often find a personal connection. "Many viewers have told me how a painting will remind them of a beloved family member, an aunt or grandmother, who owned jewelry like Martha's. Some of the work has a strong, nostalgic quality, which is also evocative of the historic art that I am referencing. Creating these paintings has afforded me a way to remain connected to her, celebrating and remembering while in process, and sharing my memories with others through the finished works."