



*Foiled*

### SURFACE TREATMENT

While the COVID-19 situation is keeping the galleries closed, we will keep your art experiences alive by offering some new and special online exhibitions. Today we have a second special online exhibition for you.

What: "More Than Still Life: Works by Berry Fritz"  
Where: [themonitor.com/art](http://themonitor.com/art)

### **Opposites Attract**

A selection of still life paintings exceeded their genre in this beautiful online exhibition.

BY NANCY MOYER

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

McAllen artist Berry Fritz takes the traditional still life genre to a refreshing level with her online exhibition for [www.themonitor.com/art](http://www.themonitor.com/art)

"More Than Still Life" features a series of paintings that expand the expected still life subjects with actual life references. Although the vast output of Fritz' work features direct still life subjects, selections for this exhibition were made from works that included depictions of living birds. "Putting birds into human environments in my paintings is a kind of notional reversal of humans inserting themselves into the natural

world or wilderness,” commented Fritz. “It is silly wishful thinking on my part, but imagine how wonderful it would be if all creatures, including us, could communicate and live together peaceably.”

The paintings are primarily classic indoor scenes with delightfully placed feathered life forms appearing as a logical part of the setting although they disturb – in the nicest way – the typical solemnity of the classic genre. Although still life painting over the centuries has vacillated to reflect the current social or political environment, so these paintings have included subjects that are not constant; like our own 21<sup>st</sup> century lives, there is the sense that change can occur at any moment. There are a few works without birds, such as “Seduction”, where a similar energy suggests that this scene is also transitional. Many of the works show us a passage of living time rather than a finality.

Fritz’ artistic concern lies primarily with color and light opportunities, and her paintings demonstrate meticulous color control and usually let two opposite hues dominate the composition. In “Breakfast Blues”, small, yet distinct, areas of cool blue are enveloped in reddish-brown tones and warm neutrals. Appearing to have just flown in, the little bird pops to life against the warm hues and could burst into flight at any time, completely disregarding the genre in which it finds itself. The objects in “Remains of the Day” offer a more successful timing for the sparrows.

“Foiled” offers a play of color relationships between the objects and bird. Vivid orange and yellow vibrate against a blue-grey ground. There is also a psychological tension between the bird and its protected prey of grapes and peaches, adding the whimsical element often typical of this artist.

The arrangements are at eye level, “It’s just habit,” she says. The lighting is controlled and often manipulated. “Yellowhead with Fruit” is a masterful creation on a number of levels, but the play of light goes a long way toward the success of the image. Coming in strongly from the right side of the canvas, light slides around the rim of the fruit bowl erupting in tonal contrast as it passes the apples, creating excitement. The reflections and shadows of the apple slices on the varnished table reinforce the elliptical composition and strengthen the implied connection between the parrot’s gaze and the vulnerable slices.

“I hardly ever have gone in for unusual lighting schemes.” she continued. “I like reality. The idea of distorting something for the idea of being unique has never appealed to me.” Fritz also believes in harnessing the visual power of the actual object as opposed to working from a photograph. Many artists who capture their subjects from photographs risk eliminating an empathetic dimension from the work, resulting in a lifeless image. Ironically, by painting from the actual objects, Fritz gives life to her *nature morte* paintings.

“I do use photos for the birds,” she confessed, “except once for a dead white-wing dove

painting. It's unfortunate, but there was so much more detail than even the best photo could provide. I'm hoping that one day a parrot or kiskadee will drop dead in my backyard. But that hasn't happened yet."

*Nancy Moyer, Professor Emerita of Art, is an art critic for The Monitor. She may be reached at [nmoyer@rgv.rr.com](mailto:nmoyer@rgv.rr.com)*