

## CATALOG STATEMENT FOR CATHERINE KOENIG B. KOENIG

From my earliest memory, my mother was a working artist. One memory that stands out most clearly is sitting for a portrait while my mother painted me. I was in the sixth grade. I learned, very young, how to sit still in an almost trance-like state to be the subject of a portrait. In this instance, I wore my favorite sweater and held a shell. Although the face and sweater belonged to me, the shell was my mother's territory, her personal signature. In a similar way, I still carry something that belongs to my mother in both my art and my life.

My mother's work was always an area of her life that she spoke of in terms of successes and failures; however, it somehow remained her private realm. I was accustomed to the idea of both parents being working artists; my father was also an artist, who worked in a sporadic fashion. My father liked company as he painted, while he smoked, whistled, and was generally affable. My mother's painting process was different. Her painting was her private world. She didn't like the company of her three children as she worked, preferring to work alone and in silence.

The world inside my mother's pictures reflect the concentrated silence in which she worked; the resonating air inside a shell, the colors subdued and toned down to their quietest notes. Her work takes a direct path forward into ever more technical achievement and potency of image.

My mother's paintings moved, over time, from a uniquely American brand of realism, through abstraction, and back to a personal form of real/surrealism. I like to think of her paintings, from the late 1970s onward as being "cloaked" in realism, yet with an inner core of the language of classicism, abstract thought and the inner world of dreams and yearnings.

Classical style has consistently affected my mother's work, the elegance of Piero Della Francesca, tied with the stalwart abstraction of Agnes Martin. These artists influenced her by their sympathetic quietness and structural sense. In addition to a classical structure, my mother's paintings also exercise a sense of playfulness. A potent subject such as a bowler hat refers to a male figure in sometimes a somber, but often a lighthearted manner. Objects in her paintings are utilized for their inner meanings as well as their aesthetic quality. These objects are things that she *loves*. The subject of the figure is also often presented as an object, analogous to items like a shell or a stone. Even the flesh in the figure works are rendered in colors similar to these inanimate objects.

For many years, my mother has painted every day. When someone is deeply engaged in the art making process, the works in progress are constantly in mind. In this manner, paintings are worked on both in and out of the studio. Since my mother and I are both painters we discuss problems and concerns about our

work on a regular basis. These thoughts are interjected in our conversations of everyday things, as her work is an essential part of her life.

My mother has always had a strong work ethic that keeps her working consistently. She prefers to work through the difficult transitional periods of her art, rather than pausing. There are several bodies of work and subjects that she works on intensively, then puts aside, picking them up at a later stage. Her subjects are the traditional subjects of art, the still life, the figure, and the portrait. These subjects are infused with symbols and distinct personas. Objects are depicted with an eagle eye, technical mastery and the artist's complete absorption.

I will always carry my mother's images, distinct, strong, with their elegant surfaces, in my mind's eye. These things exist in my thoughts of my mother as a separate but integral part of her being.