

CONVERSATION APPLIANCES

A couple of can openers inspire Marty Walsh's latest art exhibit

If a picture is worth a thousand words, Marty Walsh isn't getting any change back. Her series of single-object still-lives continues to captivate gallery audiences with their combination of light nostalgia and austere gravity. Cowboys and Indians. Scout badges. Lunch boxes. Monopoly pawns. These are all things that spark conversations of bittersweet remembrance. And those are the conversations that Walsh likes best.

"I first engage with objects in an intuitive way. That's the background of the process, and I'm fully aware of it," she says. "But meaning is always revealed through dialogue, and that dialogue usually happens afterward, with the excitement and melancholy of people responding to the finished work."

Best known for her haunting portraits of atomic-age kitchen appliances, Walsh hears a lot of stories in her Trifecta Gallery at The Arts Factory. People can't help but reminisce about the blenders or coffeepots from their childhoods. Even can openers evoke some pretty deep thoughts.

In her original appliance series, Walsh included one called the Swing-a-Way. Later, while browsing antiques at the Funk House, she found an almost identical product, but this one was labeled Maid of Honor, referring to a line of mid-century dishware and appliances marketed by Sears to young wives. The Maid of Honor became her daily can opener—"The best one I've ever had!" Besides opening the green beans, it made her consider function versus marketing and the place of the can opener in modern American life.

"While a blender is a luxury item, the can opener was more important, a vital item in an American kitchen," she says. "The marketing of small appliances to brides-to-be in the 1950s had to seduce them to believe that happiness is for sale."

And so that's how a can opener inspired Walsh to create her upcoming show at the Winchester Gallery.

Maid of Honor and the Tap Boy brings a different point of view toward appliances than her previous work. The exhibit will include portraits of the convenient, electric "Maid" in opposition to the "Tap Boy," a brand of traditional, manual can opener. Walsh is also incorporating futurist design such as googie patterns and mid-century advertising images of "brides in wedding dresses oohing and ahing over refrigerators and washing machines."

Like in her previous series, Walsh hopes that these paintings encourage remembrance and dialogue. "I'm searching for the balance between the melancholy and the nostalgia. I hope that's what others find, too."

— Rebecca Zisch



MAID OF HONOR AND THE TAP BOY

Dates:

Dec. 11 through Jan. 16

Times:

8 a.m.-7:30 p.m.

Monday-Friday;

10 a.m.-8 p.m.

Saturday-Sunday

Place:

Winchester Gallery,
3130 S. McLeod, 455-7340