March 1, 2007

OKSHTEYN’S “AFTER LIFES” OFFER THOUGHT-PROVOKING COUNTERPOINT TO MEDICI STILL LIFES

An exhibition of contemporary still lifes by Ukrainian-born artist Shimon Okshteyn opens April 1 at the Memorial Art Gallery and remains on view through May 27.

In *After Lifes*, Okshteyn reinterprets nine classic paintings in monochrome, then adds colorful hand-made frames accented with found objects. The monumental works offer a thought-provoking counterpoint to the art in the much larger companion show, *Natura Morta: Still Life Painting and the Medici Collections*. Indeed one of the works (pictured at left) is a reinterpretation of Filippo Napolitano’s *Two Citrons*, which is included in *Natura Morta*.

*After Lifes: Recent Work by Shimon Okshteyn* is sponsored by Deanne Molinari.

Celebrating overindulgence

“Okshteyn’s earlier paintings of objects that are rapidly disappearing from everyday life staggered the viewer with virtuoso technique and magnificent proportions,” says MAG director of exhibition Marie Via, who selected one of them (of a derby hat) for the Gallery’s 2000 exhibition *New Realism for a New Millennium*. “The ‘after lifes’ venture a step further, mourning not only what is lost to us but confronting our own trivialization of beauty and celebration of overindulgence.”

In Okshteyn’s loving recreations of 17th-century masterpieces, it’s not just the paintings that are testaments to excess and abundance. That duty also falls to the frame, which is no longer just the container of the message but has become the message itself. The fruits and flowers that embellish these frames are unabashedly artificial, as are the birds, bees and butterflies. Even the paint spilling onto one of the canvases turns out not to be real.

About the artist

Born in 1951 in Chernovtsky, Ukraine, Shimon Okshteyn received a BFA from Odessa Art Institute. In 1979 he emigrated to the United States, where he settled in Springfield, MA. Since 1989 he has lived and worked in New York City and Southampton, NY.

In 1997 his work was selected for the Biennale Internationale Dell’Arte Contemporanea in Florence, Italy, and in 2001 he was invited to be a visiting artist in the printmaking department at Washington University in St. Louis.

Okshteyn’s work has been exhibited around the world and is in museum collections including the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, and the Museum of Contemporary Russian Art in Nizhiny Novgorod, Russia. Most recently, he had a solo show at Stux Gallery, New York City, and a retrospective at the State Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia.


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CHECKLIST
After Lifes: New Work by Shimon Okshteyn
April 1–May 27, 2007

Works by Shimon Okshteyn
(b. 1951, Chernovtsy, Ukraine)

Basket with Broken Glasses, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
86 x 108 inches
Private collection

Basket with Peaches and Grapes, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
82 x 89 inches
Courtesy the artist and Stefan Stux Gallery, New York

Fruit Still Life with Peaches, Grapes and Apricots, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
52 x 41½ inches
Courtesy the artist and Stefan Stux Gallery, New York

Still Life, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
110 x 86 inches
Courtesy the artist and Stefan Stux Gallery, New York

Still Life with Flowers and Curtain, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
44 x 54 inches
Courtesy the artist and Stefan Stux Gallery, New York

Still Life with Flowers, Cat and Mousetrap, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
108 x 86 inches
Private collection

Still Life with Fruit and Lobster, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
98 x 100 inches
Private collection

Still Life with Lemon, Oranges and Glass of Wine, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
92 x 80 inches
Private collection

Still Life with Two Citrons, 2005
Graphite and charcoal on canvas with mixed media frame
44 x 52 inches
Courtesy the artist and Stefan Stux Gallery, New York

All sizes include frames.