

ny21
7443158

Art in America

JULY-AUGUST 1977

77

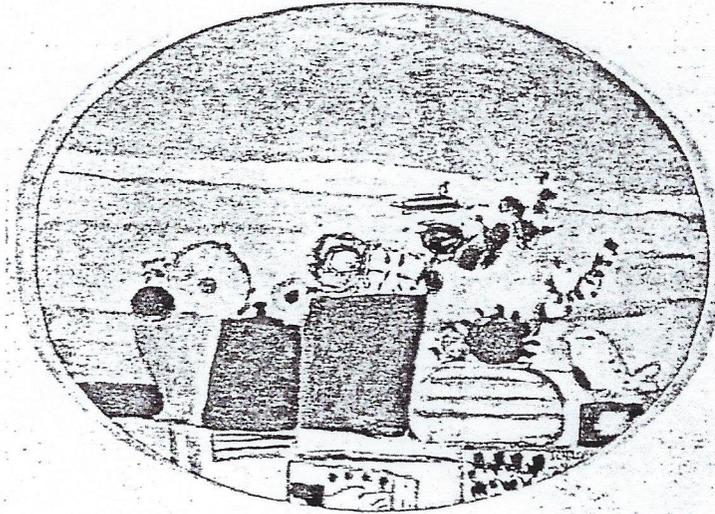
Edith Schloss at Ingber

Edith Schloss's modestly scaled, unabashedly lyrical, very appealing oils and watercolors combine views of the bay of La Spezia, Italy with still-life objects from the artist's studio there. In terms of spatial organization, the combination amounts to something of a tour de force. The objects—flowers, fruit, jars, birds—are right in the foreground and usually lined up along the bottom edge. They are painted in a flat, droll, childlike manner, sometimes verging on abstraction, and often in bright, highly saturated colors. Sometimes they appear to be resting on the beach, or conceivably on a windowsill, but most often they aren't resting on anything, having somehow materialized, or been superimposed by force, over the other details of seascape. One has the feeling of looking past them only half successfully to the smaller, more gestural details in the distance: across a vacant middle ground (beach?) to the lovely bay in its various rich blues and moods, a few brushstrokes for a boat riding the waves, and finally a green lump of island with a mark indicating a light-house.

The paintings work in terms of the contrast, as well as the connection, between these seaside studio objects and the sea itself. There are as it were two focuses: close-up and long-shot. The presence of relatively large white areas, particularly in the most recent paintings, helps to keep the bright, decorative color from being too pretty. Whereas in some of the

JULY/AUGUST 1977 99

Edith Schloss: *Big Oval with Robin*, 1972, oil on canvas; at Ingber.



oils from the early '70s the luscious reds of flowers or the greens and yellows of other objects are somewhat confectionary against the blue of the sea, paintings like *Squall*, 1975, and *Last Sunday in August*, 1976, seem to have seen and solved the problem. The new paintings are somewhat tighter and calmer as well, with more defining of areas.

One of the best paintings in this show was *La Festa*, 1976, which has a flaming red sea (the only such) and which includes a bemused-looking elephant facing left and a bird facing right in a witty caravan of more and less inanimate things along the bottom. As one moves from painting to painting, the still-life figures become old friends, queuing up for some mission we know nothing about (unless it's just to get together to look at the sea), tall, short, elegant, frumpy, abstract, realistic, painted-in, transparent. They sometimes sprawl awkwardly, seemingly at random, looking rather lost, but always appealingly so. In their deployment, and deportment, their aura of somehow belonging where they are, they convince one that this is what objects must be like, this is what they do when left to their own devices.

Schloss's roots are in the Abstract-Expressionist '40s, and it is clear throughout her work that both feeling and form come from within as well as without. The boxes she exhibited in the '50s and continues to make (though no longer considering them her major work) combine very small found objects in an understated lyricism. Restraint is a key to the success of her paintings as well. Her recent show was a mini-retrospective, including paintings from the past eight years as well as several of the boxes. Eight watercolors formed a series in themselves, more even in tone and abstract in feeling than the oils. On the whole her successes are small rather than large, which isn't to demean them; they are genuine and they come often. Her angle is indeed fresh and always lively, her eye for contours and her placements are invariably right. With subject matter as potentially dangerous as the glorious Mediterranean, her restraint—tact—seems especially appropriate.

—Charles North