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BY BRITTA KONAU



# The Stuff of Tales



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With painting styles that differ widely, Nancy Morgan Barnes, William B. Hoyt, and Tollef Runquist all consider still lifes to be important parts of their oeuvre. Their work in the genre is of a special kind: narrative and personal. Using objects of private significance in their arrangements, the artists tell more or less transparent stories but always leave enough interpretive room for viewers to imagine narratives of their own.

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NANCY MORGAN BARNES

WILLIAM B. HOYT

TOLLEF RUNQUIST



## TOLLEF RUNQUIST

Born in Sharon, Connecticut, to a Norwegian mother and a Swedish father who is also a painter, Runquist encountered the power of the artistic imagination early in his life. At age 16, he participated in a group show at the Paris New York Kent Gallery in Kent, Connecticut. Having spent summers in Maine all his life, Runquist moved here in 2003 looking for a fair amount of solitude and a supportive art community. Runquist shows regularly at the Dowling Walsh Gallery in Rockland and the Ober Gallery in Kent, Connecticut.

Tollef Runquist's work encompasses a range of subjects and styles. As the artist explains it, "I feel no particular loyalty to realism or my own past work." He has painted scenes in local towns, narrative still lifes, interiors, and representations of strongly patterned textiles, working on all simultaneously. What ties these subjects together is the artist's graphic rendering of flattened space and a blithe and loose application of paint that, rather than depicting its subjects, seems to abbreviate them with a few quick strokes of the brush. Runquist clearly loves the physicality of paint and emotional power of color. Splatters, drips, and compositional changes are left visible as evidence of the artist's hand and mind. Lately, he has extended his pictorial elements and interests to include patterns

and repetitions, suffusing his work with a decorative quality.

Since 2011 Runquist has executed still lifes of chaotic arrangements of toys—sections of the artist's seven-year-old son's play areas in which Legos, toy cars, stuffed animals, and wooden train tracks all coexist in a careless and carefree manner. Runquist is attracted to the sensuousness of the jumble of shapes, which he translates into areas of increased attention and areas of calmer space. To some extent, the toys function as excuses for abstract mark making and the use of bright colors; they allow the artist to play as well. An indication of this appears in the shadows or doubles of objects occurring in several of these still lifes, which are prints of the wet shapes next to them.

*Lemon*, titled after the yellow in its

upper left corner, is complexly structured by balances, diagonals, and repetitions of shapes and colors. According to Runquist, the toy arrangements and the narratives his son relates while playing keep changing, creating a welcome challenge for the painter to figure out "a way to capture and stretch time, as it were." The still lifes are thus very personal representations of the artist's and his son's unconditional presence. Instead of capturing the particulars of the assembled objects, Runquist muses, "the paintings are like poems, integrating pictorial moments into something more abstract." **MH+D**

*For more information, see Resources on page 94.*



■ ..... *Lemon*, 2012, oil on canvas, 30" x 40"