

Art

Found Objects

Francesca Fuchs makes paintings of everything around her including other people's art.

BY KELLY KLAASMEYER

Francesca Fuchs is an artist who always seems to have a good answer to the question "What to paint?" Over the years, she has turned wallpaper, her friends, her kitchen and her breastfeeding baby into great paintings, sometimes on a wall-size scale. Fuchs has an amazing ability to match her impressive painting skills with smart ideas; in her hands, kitchen cabinets become emotionally resonant and a breastfeeding baby becomes an abstracted mural. (She is one of the rare artists to successfully make art about motherhood.) Fuchs's talent for finding evocative content in the domestic is on display again in her new show "(Re)collection: Paintings of Framed Paintings, Drawings, Prints and Photos" at Texas Gallery.

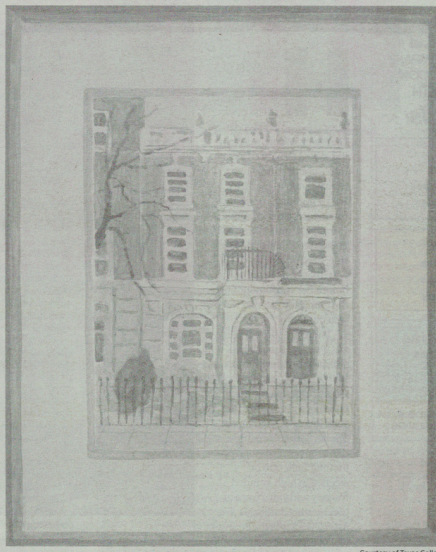
The exhibit's title is pretty self-explanatory, but it doesn't convey the emotional impact of the work. Fuchs has taken the "paintings, drawings, prints and photos" hung on the walls of her current home, her childhood home and her grandmother's home as source material for her work. The images become a collection of biographical clues about the artist, but they primarily strike a chord with the viewer. We all have something hanging on our wall that we don't even notice anymore, some print that just became part of the domestic landscape. It tells visitors something about us that we are unaware of. These are the images you don't notice until you move and take them down. They're the kinds of things that blended into the woodwork at a grandparent's house, the things you didn't pay attention to until you had to help clear out the house after he or she died. Suddenly, something you took for granted and barely noticed becomes a poignant symbol, a clue to the person who is gone. Possessions tell stories about us, and the kinds of images we surround ourselves with tell particularly vivid ones.

In the collection of works in this show, Fuchs is painting other artists' photos, paint-

ings, drawings and prints — but not in a *trompe l'oeil* fashion. Every piece is filtered through Fuchs and loosely rendered in her translucent, faded-looking brushwork. The paled and slightly indistinct drawings feel like the fuzzy details of a vaguely remembered image. And this is where the work really succeeds visually. Fuchs has rendered images as diverse as a Mark Flood painting, an 18th-century engraving and the decorations of an ancient red-figured vase and brought them together in a cohesive and beautifully hung show.

All the works are about the size of the original, including frames, although some of the smaller originals are painted a little larger. All the paintings are less than "sofa-size," and Fuchs has clustered 48 of them salon-style across one soaring wall in the main room of Texas Gallery.

The wall contains still lifes with fish, with bottles, with plants. There is a pencil portrait identified as a Richter (Gerhard), a kitschy drawing of mushrooms, a steamship and a cubist figure. Given Fuchs's style, you're never quite sure of the source. Some things look as if they might be hobbyist paintings; others could be by professionals mimicking the awkward style of a hobbyist. Or maybe it's the other way around? A painting of a stretched piece of fabric with a brown abstract braid design screams the '70s. Other works reflect a similar predilection for geometric abstraction. Fuchs and her husband, Bill Davenport, are both artists and their home contains paintings by other Houston art-



Framed Drawing: 10 Harley Gardens asks you to pay attention.

painting of a huge white bull is undoubtedly English. Fuchs explains that a painting of a London townhouse at 10 Harley Garden was of her grandmother's home. An artist apparently drew the houses in the neighborhood and tried to sell the drawings to the house's occupants. Fuchs's grandmother, now about turn 100, kindly bought one.

As with everyone's pictures, there are stories behind all the images Fuchs has painted. She

remembers the painting of the white bull from her childhood; it was owned by the man who lived on the lower level of her grandmother's townhouse. Fuchs remembers him cooking fabulous dinners and entertaining children by secretly turning on a light to illuminate the bull painting, making it seem to appear like magic. I asked Fuchs about the photo of a dancing couple. It's a found image she has in her house. She doesn't know the people, but likes the image of a happy dancing couple of her parent's generation. And Fuchs's paintings work like that. Her personal stories are interesting, but they aren't necessary for the work and they aren't something the artist wants to link to the paintings. Fuchs isn't trying to give us her stories; she's making work that leads us to construct our own narratives and connections.

"(Re)collection" is the kind of show I wish a museum would buy in toto. (Fuchs is on the shortlist of talented Houston artists who should be much better appreciated at home and beyond.) The individual works are wonderful, but it's the interplay of all those disparate images with each other that turns the paintings into an intriguing installation. Fuchs's deft painting combines with the mystery of how and why all these images came to be together to create a fascinating body of work.

"Francesca Fuchs, (Re)collection: Paintings of Framed Paintings, Drawings, Prints and Photos"

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