

Artist Statement

Hellen Colman

My work is concerned with relationships and interactions. Traditionally, the object is the subject of still life painting, but my subject is the drama and tension created and carried by the objects.

I grew up in the land of Borges, Cortázar and Onetti – the writers of feelings, emotions and subjective realities – in the south of South America.

My life in Chicago started a struggle for surviving without my beloved words in my native Spanish. I used to have an infinite amount of words to describe the most subtle nuances of feelings. I found myself with a very few English words to explain an even broader chord of feelings. This challenge made me rethink and rediscover my emotions to be able to communicate them using such a reduced vocabulary.

My paintings reflect this struggle.

In my earlier work, arrangements of sophisticated and eclectic found objects fill the pictorial space in a somehow conventional still life. My new work reduced deliberately the amount and kind of objects involved; just a few ordinary glass containers, as actors in a stage, express the nudity of the emotion, bereft of the non-essential dress.

The choice of ordinary shapes – rather than refined and elegant objects – emphasizes the metaphysical sense that transcends the objects themselves. The glass embodies the sense of fragility and degrees of transparency in relationships. The reflective and prismatic qualities of the glass make the objects being observed, always changing as changing conditions prevail; the bottles relate to each other, but also they relate to the changing environment. Sometimes their shadows and transparencies modify the austere stage-like space; sometimes the bottles reflect the space and as a result are modified by it in this fashion.

The intimate scale of my work and softness of the pastel convey an atmosphere of whispering conversations, an invitation to come in and share secrets.

The body of work represents a formal exploration into the construction of alternative languages to express the sentiment.