

ARTSCENE

The Monthly Digest to Art in Southern California

SANDRA SALLIN

(Koplin Gallery, West Hollywood)

Since World War I the 20th Century has witnessed fragmented art emphasizing process, concept and deconstruction. However, over that past twenty years there has been a renewed interest in figurative, reconstructive art. Sandra Sallin champions the latter by creating figurative art that aspires to the sublime. She is not concerned with art that reflects irony or world weariness.

Sallin's light, casual manner belies her art, which is exacting and flawless. She researches her subject matter, carefully choosing each flower that she will depict. The blooms must have historical and emotional resonance like the rose, which symbolizes earthly passion, or the tulip that connotes perfect love. In addition, Sallin explores materials until she finds the right pencils and erasers for a drawing, or perfect brushes for a painting. Preparing her canvas is also significant to achieving the right effect. Thirty layers of gesso are each sanded with progressively finer sand paper until the surface is as sensual and soft as a petal before the painting begins. Then to maintain an unflawed line Sallin works with a magnifying glass. Each work takes one to four months to complete.

When asked how she achieves the lush, rich black background, she exclaims, "I hold my breath." Mixing red, green, burnt umber back and ultramarine blue, she carefully works the background until it is absolutely smooth, so as not to distract from the image. The blooms are thus spotlighted on a darkened stage. Though inanimate, they become metaphors of dances, poised for an enigmatic, mesmerizing

performance. The abstract patterns formed by reflections in a crystal vase accompany the blossoms, while the black ground sets the tone.

Influenced by Early Netherlandish painting and illuminated manuscripts, Sallin adores the vehicle she has chosen. Although she sees the finished product in her mind's eye before painting, she makes numerous sketches before starting. The care and ritual of preparation poetically reinforces the content. What is conveyed is a reminder of the times when life was at it's best.

Sallin presents work that has an underlying sense of hope, with no hint of a shadow of mortality. Robert Browning's words come to mind: "Ah a man's reach should exceed his grasp/Or what's heaven for."



*Sandra Sallin, "Prelude," oil on canvas over panel,
30 x 37 1/2" 1996*