



ROBORANT REVIEW



# Catherine Maize, Recent Paintings, Paul Thiebaud Gallery

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Catherine Maize's exhibition, *Recent Paintings*, at Paul Thiebaud Gallery, elevates the quotidian to the realm of masterpieces in miniature, employing soft, organic tones, atmospheric light, and a loose facture of brushwork. Throughout 21 oil paintings, no work measures more than 8 inches, and many are just 4-6 inches on the longest side, her diminutive bucolic artworks display painting's potential to pull us from digital screens and into the depths of analog life.

Maize's art practice thrives through roots deeply embedded in the Midwest, having lived in Michigan for more than three decades after getting a BFA and MFA at Indiana University. The exhibition feels as if a handwritten story whose author is genuinely taken by the tranquil rhythm of rural life as the length of days fades. Two paintings depict solitudinous houses, one draped under autumn's long shadow the other imbued by winter's light along with a lone self-portrait are outliers of the show's focus, one and a half dozen still life evoking memory's soft edges.



Shelf, 2023, oil on panel, 4" x 8"

In Maize's *Recent Paintings*, vessels emerge as protagonists, poised at the edges of tables or balanced on otherwise bare shelves, drawing our gaze with the same softness as a whisper animating silence. Vases are carefully arranged as if a curator's eclectic modern collection inspired by an era when their antecedents were less for decoration and more utilitarian. While Cézanne's post-impressionistic color planes enrich the canvases, soft hints of Jean-Baptiste Siméon Chardin inform the compositions that feature fruit, yet it is the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi who most clearly inspires Maize.

Morandi once said, "I am essentially a painter of the kind of still life composition that communicates a sense of tranquillity and privacy, moods which I have always valued above all else." Maize summons such moods through her painterly brushstrokes, emphasizing

atmosphere over precision and a shadow's depth of silence, gently focusing our eyes on privacy's effect on perception.



*(Untitled) Landscape, 2023, oil on panel, 6" x 7"*

In *(Untitled) Landscape*, the artist offers us the exterior within which her still life could reside. The house's door and windows are hardly more than a suggestion; the structure acts as an archetype for rural life. The piece's red underpainting offsets the foliage's changing greens, coupled with a harvested amber field and the chimneys' shadow cast long across the roof, all suggesting days are shortening and life is decelerating towards a contemplative time.



*Bowls on Table, 2025, oil on panel, 6" x 6"*

*Bowls on Table* tells us of the beauty in rural life's quiet persistence as enamelware dishes separated by homemade bread rest on a honey-colored farmhouse table. The ordinary objects take on a meditative mood in the painting's cool light as a visually textured blue-gray background, and golden ochre paint layers highlight Maize's ability to create a complexity of depth through visual texture.

Beyond her skillful use of scumbling to suggest depth, she does so through the table's geometry receding into the distance of constrained space, constructing a dynamic composition that at just 6 inches by 6 inches combines Chardin's 18th-century still life celebrating the ordinary with Cézanne's dynamic color patches to romantically evoke houses where food is made by hand.



Chair and Table with Yellow Vase, 2025, oil on panel, 7" x 5"



The solitude of simple life appears within reach through *Chair and Table with Yellow Vase*. The artist creates ambiguous edges and casts dark shadows on the yellow floor, contrasted by the pastel periwinkle wall. Her underpainting, scumbling, and bright light hold our attention, yet it is her clear use of a horizon line and orthogonals that pull our eye through the picture, allowing us to linger in a room comprised almost entirely of negative space.



Yellow Carafe with Vases, 2025, oil on panel, 5" x 8"

Morandi's influence is best felt in the exhibit's most colorful painting, *Yellow Carafe with Vases*, where we find *Recent Paintings*' brightest celebration of the 20th-century Italian painter's meditative still life depicting his serial collection of vases. Maize similarly employs such objects as the Italian painter did to bring us into the mystery of silence that long inspired Morandi, who once mused, "Everything is a mystery, ourselves, and all things both simple and humble."

Catherine Maize's *Recent Paintings* at Paul Thiebaud Gallery draw from the abstract realm of imagination, blurring the edges of reality's forms, visually summoning the quiet corners of rural life, capturing the essence of Giorgio Morandi's simply prescient idea, "To achieve understanding it is necessary not to see many things, but to look hard at what you do see."

Maize skillfully paints such humble simplicity, offering us room to introspectively explore the organic nature of ideas, uninterrupted by the digital world's demand for attention. In the artist's small, powerful corners of quiet farmhouses far from the city's sounds, she turns our gaze from the glow of a screen to the beautiful nature of light and objects' ability to create shadow. Maize makes the ordinary interesting, reminding us, amidst the acceleration of life, that her quiet, stillness, and simplicity can give us back needed portions of the attention and tranquility society seems to have lost.