



# Sarah Lamb's tasteful still lifes

*Painter's food portraits look good enough to eat and are served at galleries from New York to San Francisco*

BY ROGER MORRIS || PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT CRAIG

It is 8:30 in the morning, and Sarah Lamb looks ready to prepare breakfast.

Eggs have been taken from the refrigerator in the corner, and a gleaming copper pan stands ready for the onslaught of the omelette whisk. But Lamb, who does love to cook, is not in the kitchen of her old stone house in Romansville, Pa., but is instead in the studio a few yards up the hillside in a converted garage.

She peers at the eggs and the gleaming pan, arranged at eye level on a bread board to the left of her easel, and with precise brush strokes begins turning the vessel, brown-colored on the canvas, into gleaming metal, like a scrubwoman removing tarnish. Five brushes protrude at juxtaposed angles from her left hand, a daubing rag in her right, while her palate hangs immobile from the bottom the easel, bright daubs of paint clinging to its vertical surface.

"I'm drawn to the texture of things," she explains smiling, her brilliant eyes gazing intently from under the brim of her Coca-Cola baseball hat. "I love to paint chocolate and soap. And fuzzy peaches, shiny fish, the flour dusting on baked bread." For someone who both cooks and paints mostly food-oriented still lifes that collectors pay up to \$30,000 to hang, Lamb, in her mid-30s, shows no signs of calorie overload – she is trim, almost petite in her dark smock, fading blue jeans and Dutch-girl sandals.

She points to a small panel painting of a dessert, leaning against a table, ready to be cut and framed. "I finished that on Friday, and my dealer in New York called a few hours later, and said, 'You know I don't

want to suggest what you paint, but I have a client who's inquiring if you have any more desserts.' The timing was incredible!"

Other paintings are propped around the studio – one of empty wine bottles, another of ducks ready to be plucked, a third of sliced prosciutto. Four brushes in her left hand now, the other in her right with the rag, she turns back to her canvas and continues to work on the texture of the copper pot.

These are good days for Lamb, although she worries like everyone else about the economy. Her still lifes and occasional landscapes sell well at Spanierman gallery in New York ("I'm fortunate to be in a gallery with a lot of dead guys whose paintings are expensive"), Meredith Long in Houston and John Spence in San Francisco. She and her husband of five years, the successful portrait artist David Larned, live in a small,



Sarah Lamb, accompanied by pug Weezie, works in her studio, a converted garage, at the Romansville, Pa., home she shares with husband, artist David Larned. Above: "Eggs & Copper," painted in 2009, reflects Lamb's interest in different textures.



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lovely old farmstead once owned by the actor Claude Rains, and they regularly entertain local friends and fellow painters from their days in New York City, where they met. Her young pug, Weezie, paces the studio to keep her company.

Lamb grew up in Georgia, where her mother – “an army brat” – settled after a divorce, and the occasional soft strands of southern speech – the flat, un-rounded “i” vowels – cling to her voice like fuzz on one of her painted peaches.

Her mother and grandmother encouraged her when she started painting watercolors as a child, along with taking ballet and tennis lessons. “But painting was the only thing I was good at. My grandmother paid for all my classes.” Lamb’s desire to actually become a painter dates to “when we came to Washington when I was 12 or 13 to see the exhibit on three generations of Wyeths. I became totally obsessed with Andrew Wyeth.”

During studies at Brenau University in Gainesville, Ga., Lamb started painting oils, spent a semester in Florence, and studied in Atlanta with Sarah Brown, who taught her still life and portrait art – although she grows less enamored with the latter.

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Louise,’ and I wanted to drive across country to take a workshop with Jacob Collins in San Francisco.” Her folks convinced her to fly instead. Next, she studied with the artist Ted Jacobs in France before rejoining Collins at Water Street Atelier in New York. Eventually, she found herself drawing and painting all day – in the morning with Jacobs, in the afternoon for her livelihood as an assistant to a muralist, and in the evening at the Art Students League.

It was during this period that she was introduced to her future husband by a mutual friend. “Unlike everyone else I knew at the time, David was so dapper,” Lamb remembers. “And then when he said he had just brought a house in Chadds Ford, where Wyeth lived, I almost fell over.”

Nine months later, he popped the question in a very artistic manner. Both had become friends with local painter

George “Frolic” Weymouth, founder of the Brandywine Conservancy, which operates the Brandywine River Museum. “David called me in New York and said there was a painting Frolic wanted me to see, and I needed to come down.” When they arrived at the museum, Lamb was surprised to see an early self-portrait of Larned hanging on the wall.

“Great,” she thought, “they bought one of David’s paintings.” But when she drew close enough to see the identification card, “It read ‘Will you marry me, Sarah?’ ” as Larned stared at her from the painting. They were soon wed in Weymouth’s chapel in the woods overlooking the Brandywine.

The couple gave up Larned’s house three years ago to move to their current home, where the converted garage has side-by-side, his-and-her studios. Still, they tend to keep each other at arm’s length while they’re working. Plus, as a portraitist, he has a constant flow of sitters.

Not surprisingly, one of Larned’s portraits is of Lamb, although she says, “I think I was a poor sitter.” Fortunately, neither wants to poach on the other’s field.

“When we go to a museum,” Lamb says, “David goes off to look at the portraits, and I search out the still lifes.”