

Susan Homer  
Statement

In *To the Lighthouse*, Virginia Woolf's main character, Mrs. Ramsey, pauses at the threshold of her dining room after dinner. She looks back and realizes, as she passes through the door, that the scene behind her has shifted. The present has become the past.

I look upon my own work—large paintings of imaginary gardens and smaller still-life scenes—as thresholds of a similar nature. At one level, as I finish a piece, it literally becomes a record of my past action. On another, the subjects I have long chosen to paint—birds, flowers, and patterns—are of personal and emotional significance, or records of a different sort. The dishes and linens in my still lifes were my grandmother's; the flowers in my larger paintings are often from my Brooklyn garden but remind me of New England, where I grew up; and the patterned scrims recall the wallpapers and fabrics that decorated my family's house and my grandmother's. My paintings, like an old house, contain many levels of memories.

Further along in *To the Lighthouse*, Woolf describes the Ramseys' summer house when no one is in it. Time has passed; several family members have died. "Trifling airs" creep silently through each of the rooms, around the corners and up the stairs. Toads have nosed their way in and swallows nest in the drawing room. How would it be to experience one's house or garden when no one is in it? The birds in my paintings are like viewers who have entered a dense past when no one is there to see them, perhaps through an open window, once the hostess has left.

When I look out through the window into my garden, I am struck by how wildly busy it is. Nature is constantly at work, more obviously so when I'm not present to frighten or distract. My larger paintings are inspired by this experience, and I paint them in much the same way as I garden: I create them over months; they evolve and change countless times before they are finished; and along the way, they seem to develop minds of their own. While I compose the elements initially, at a certain point in the process, these same elements command a more organic organization, one better suited to them.

My love of what I paint and my reasons for painting it have not wavered over time. They come from the depths of my experience and underlie everything I make. Within the patterns of daily life and the process of painting itself, I find constancy. Yet, it is the gentle upheavals in both that are at the heart of my work.