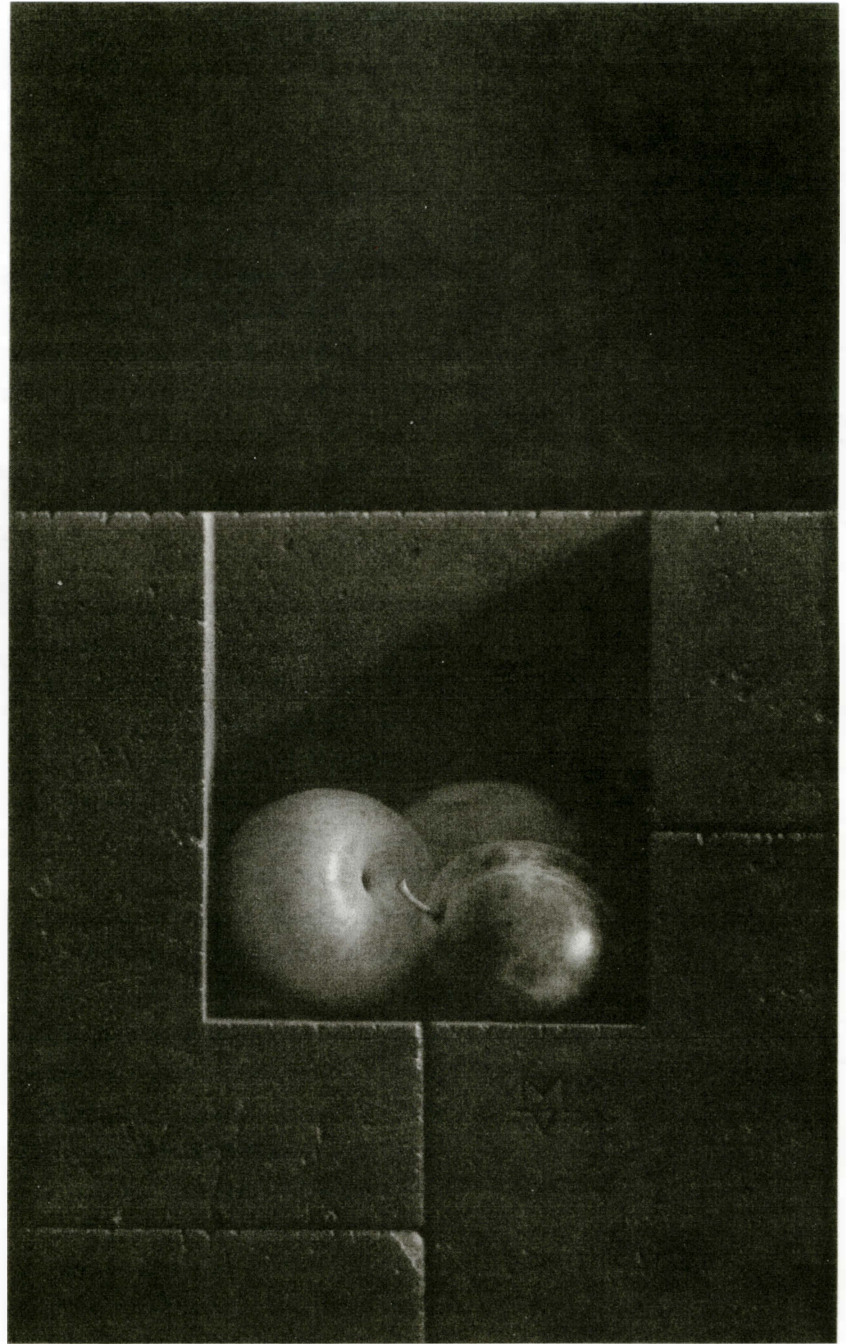


Joyce Henri Robinson, from A Gift from the Heart: American Art
from the Collection of James and Barbara Palmer, pub. by the
Palmer Museum of Art, 2013

friendship and mentorship—a fitting, even karmic, coincidence.

This notion that a work of art can function as a repository for personal memories is notably evident in the work of another contemporary artist, G. Daniel Massad, who is represented by several stunning pastels in the Palmers' collection (see p. 150). The very title of *Reliquary* (2005, fig. 16) suggests as much, though in this instance the memories evoked are not directly connected to people the artist has loved and lost. According to Massad, this particular still life has “roots” in a trip to Rome in 1999, a sojourn that had “a long ripple effect” on his work. He recalls seeing “all those reliquaries” in medieval cathedrals and crypts, as well as in Baroque churches, containers of saintly relics, vessels of sacred viscera, evidence of the divine in the form of human remains.

Unlike the ornate reliquaries venerated by legions of faithful pilgrims throughout the ages, Massad's reliquary consists of a shallow niche set within a stone wall whose pitted, cracked surface reveals the ravages of time. Set before us are remarkably lifelike specimens of fruit, hardly the stuff of sacred relics. And, yet, there is something haunting about this laconic display of nature's fecundity, expressed so beautifully in the gorgeous, bluish-purple waxy bloom of that almost-too-ripe plum. Perhaps it's the raking theatrical light or that unyielding expanse of black—one is tempted to say “void”—that occupies so much of the composition. Our senses are aroused: sight, touch, and taste, to be sure, and perhaps even hearing, given the hushed stillness that permeates the pastel. For Massad, *Reliquary* is not so much about enshrining relics of the past as it is about asking us to ponder ephemeral pleasures in the here and now,



“the beautiful present on the edge of vanishing—or retreating—into memory,” as he so eloquently phrases it.⁵³

The seductive appeal of Massad's work is magnified by the artist's meticulous technique, which involves X-Acto knives and minuscule

Fig. 17 (opposite)
Chuck Close, *Leslie/Watercolor II*, 1986, watercolor, gouache, and pencil on paper, 30¼ x 22¼ inches

shards of pastel and endless hours of exacting concentration (he typically works top to bottom, left to right, and yields about two square inches per day).⁵⁴ In Massad's fictive universe, illusionism is pushed to its extreme, and evidence of the painter's hand is nowhere in sight. Viewers at times are mystified by his work, enthralled by the magic of his mimesis, which he characterizes as *almost* trompe l'oeil:

I've come to see my path as parallel to trompe l'oeil, sometimes running close enough to it to allow me the pleasure of chatting with its practitioners, just over the conceptual fence, as it were. Technically, we have a lot in common, including a tendency to deploy highly detailed surfaces (architectural fragments, in my case) that share the picture's plane. And occasionally I find fingerprints on the glass, as if a viewer had tried to test the reality of an object, like birds pecking at the grapes of Zeuxis. But my own intention is still the same, still clear: to reenact as fully as I can my own experience of the world by layering into my work the minutiae that subtly differentiates one thing from another, that records its history of use, that reveals its place in the life cycle—the minutiae that mesmerize me and that I have been "reading" all my life.⁵⁵

Massad invites viewers to come close, to enter his world, to see what he sees, and he believes that his lifework has meaning only when other human beings make that journey with him.

Despite the hypnotic verism of Massad's pastels, and though we might consider it high praise

to call them "photographic," they are, of course, made of pure pigment that has been painstakingly worked into fibers of paper. Chuck Close is an artist who well understands that mark making—hand to paper, hand to canvas, hand to plate or woodblock—is the heart of the artistic enterprise, whether the result is a Photorealist street scene, a trompe l'oeil still life, or an abstract painting. That fact was made markedly clear in late 1988, when the artist experienced a collapsed artery in his spine that left him a quadriplegic. Since that time, Close has regained some movement and has continued painting with the aid of brushes strapped to his hands. The Palmers' *Leslie/Watercolor II* (fig. 17) dates to 1986, well before what Close refers to as "The Event"; however, the loose handling and vibrant chromaticism of the piece anticipate the direction Close's work has taken in recent years.

As the title suggests, *Leslie/Watercolor II* is one of a pair of watercolor portraits of the artist's wife, Leslie. Side by side, the two watercolors could hardly be more different, yet both clearly derive from the same source, a photograph of Leslie sporting a favorite brightly checked shirt, taken not long after the birth of their second child.⁵⁶ *Leslie/Watercolor I* (1986, fig. 18) is exactly what one might expect from the artist who made his name in the late 1960s as a Photorealist painter of over-life-size faces, his own included. The verisimilitude of the first watercolor gives way to a pulsating display of irregular orbs, blocks, and dabs of pure color in the second, with individual prismatic cells all held in check by the armature of a faint, delicately limned pencil grid. The grid, of course, was a device Close had used throughout his career to transfer and enlarge his portraits from photograph to canvas. Here, it serves as a matrix