



"The Yellow Teapot (Breakfast with Calvin)," oil, 24" x 30"

THE ARTS

FEAST OF COLOR

*There's a sense of wonder and fantasy
in the art of David Lebow.*

By Dianne Cauble

Juicy-sweet watermelon slices, jelly beans spilling from a porcelain bowl, cream-filled pastries and cherry tarts dolloped with whipped cream and surrounded by sunburst, fuchsia and crimson floral bouquets. . . David Lebow whips up a provocative feast with an enchanting, carnival color display of primary blues, yellows, and reds. The response to his work is immediate and powerful, circus candy in assorted flavors for adults who affectionately remember the magical parts of childhood. Using bright colors and unusual shapes, Lebow creates

looser, more accessible still lifes, a departure from the typical, somber renderings that appear stiff and untouchable.

"I like to cut the fruits and let them drip onto the table next to a loaded platter of fresh pastries," says Lebow.

Plump, cinnamon-coated rolls and ripe, red pears, fresh-sliced and glistening, are mouth watering and irresistible.

Wearing a multi-colored tam over a thick tangle of dark curls, Lebow sits cross-legged on the floor sipping herbal tea and discussing his approach to color.

"I'm not a timid painter and I've learned to get a cleaner color," says Lebow. "Color is fun and exciting, though I've got no prejudice against using black. I like to place a vibrant color next to a cooler one—putting down a bright orange next to green apples. I let the colors play off of one another."

His work is light and airy, following the spirit of 19th century artist William Merritt Chase who believed that paint should appear blown on a canvas. Lebow reveals his sense of wonder and magical connection to youthful fantasy with a variety of

props and playthings. In his sun-washed studio, Lebow paints a whimsical twist on the traditional still life using a collection of unusual toys, victorian dolls, devil masks, wooden marionettes, knights in armor, and scary objects that line the shelves of his workspace.

"I've collected odd toys over the years and a lot of my inspiration comes from childhood thoughts and wild imaginings," says Lebow. "I'm moved by color, flow and composition—it's a lot like being a jazz musician. Though, I remain true to the subject, I like to be expressive at the same time."

Growing up in Tulsa, Oklahoma, Lebow was influenced by his mother's still life oil paintings. She taught him the basics and demonstrated her own talent and technical skills with difficult pieces such as eggs broken into a ceramic bowl.

"When I was young, I wanted to be a cartoonist," says Lebow. "I practiced copying comic books and *Mad Magazine* drawings."

Still expressing an affection for cartoons, Lebow recently painted a rainbow of tropical fruits and flowers in "The Yellow Teapot (Breakfast with Calvin)" which includes the



Sunday comics on the breakfast table.

When Lebow graduated from high school, he immediately moved to Los Angeles where he attended the Art Center College of Design and subsequently the Art Students League in New York. Lebow admits he may have been a little premature in going right from high school into art college.

"I was only eighteen at the time and I worshipped my instructors. I did anything they recommended until I finally gained enough confidence to develop my own style. A lot of painting I'm doing now is diametrically opposed to what I was taught in school," he says. "I learned to attack the canvas on a large scale—mass first. I'm still conscious of that but I prefer to start with a very small space. I try to be very focused."

Lebow's attention to detail often means he takes a half day just to choreograph a still life. Flowers wilt and fruit overripens during the course of a painting and he's constantly making adjustments to the setting.

"I work inside my studio most of the time so I can control the environment," says Lebow. "I prefer to paint from life, although sometimes I use photos. Recently, I did a



"Red Gate on East DeVargas," oil, 14" x 18"



"Lillies and Pears," oil, 22" x 24"

bacchanal scene with ten different figures, so I posed each of the people separately and took photos. Then I brought them all together in a preliminary sketch which became the basis for an oil study. From that I developed the final product."

The bacchanal scene titled "The Road to Excess" will be on display at The Museum of Fine Arts through March 31.

In his vibrant still lifes, Lebow juxtaposes abstract backgrounds against hand-painted porcelain vases bursting with blooms, contrasting soft edges against sharp angles.

"If it doesn't please and excite me, then it won't work," he says. "I'm very hard on myself—it must be exciting and thrilling. I really reject a lot of pieces. I can't paint for a particular market. I paint for myself, and through my painting I've realized that I'm learning to know myself. I used to be more interested in genres—domestic or storytelling scenes. Now, I'm interested in simpler

things: colors, lines, and shapes that play off one another."

Lebow prefers to leave his work open to interpretation by collectors. Stressing that his paintings don't necessarily relay a particular message, he enjoys painting portraits that are completely timeless. A recent portrait of "The Actress," a young woman wearing a floppy, purple hat and floral dress immediately captures her saucy essence and strong personality. The tilt of her face and expressive, blue eyes reveal a playful attitude.

"I think a number of changes have occurred within my painting," says Lebow. "I got a little away from myself when I first came to Santa Fe. I was so overwhelmed by the clarity and the beauty. Now I've moved more toward center. The atmosphere is so clean and clear, it affects my sensibilities and my perception."

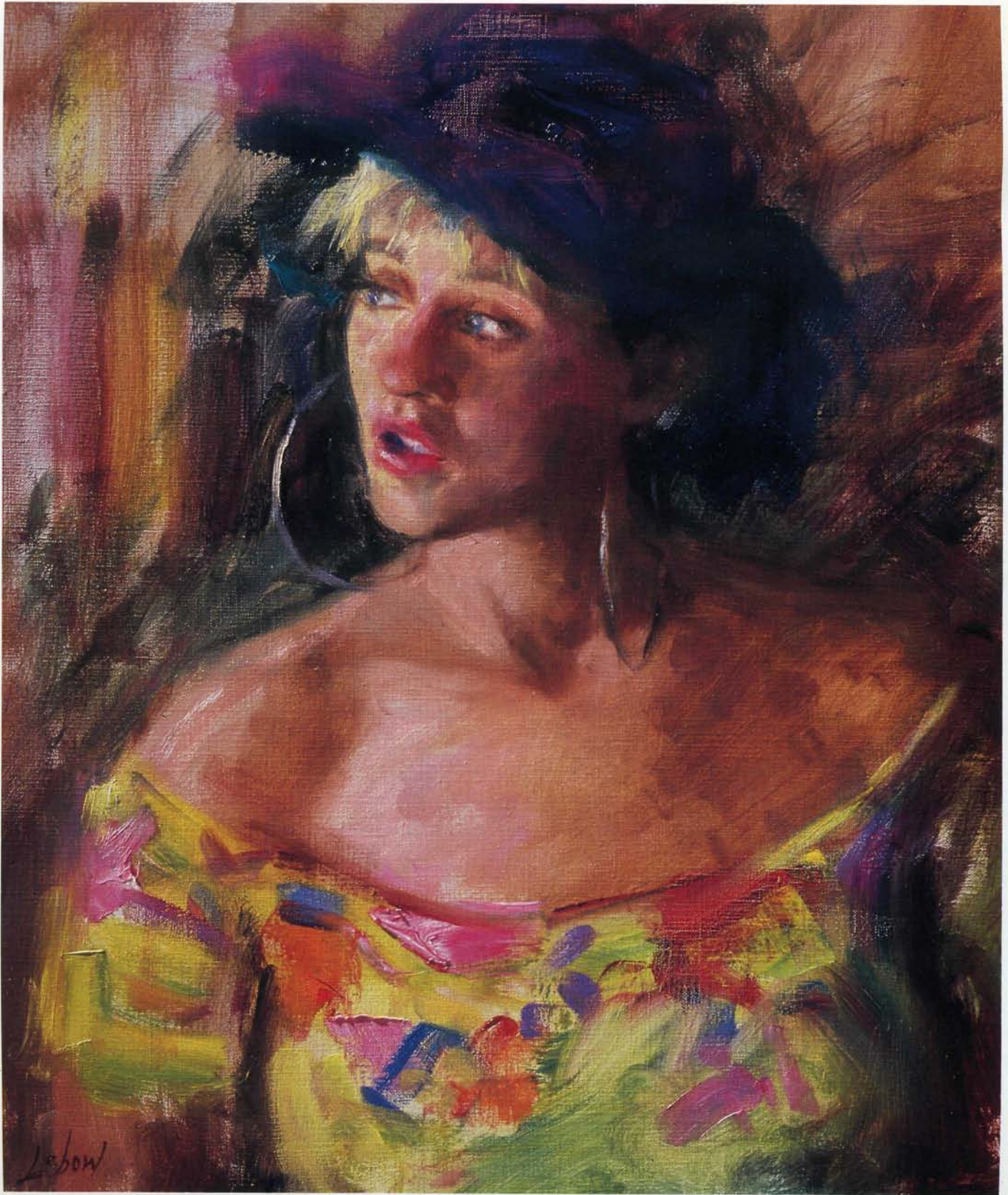
Living and painting in Taos for several

months, Lebow eventually wound up in Santa Fe and prefers the local art community to the New York/LA scene.

"I think clearer here. It's so beautiful and I'm happier and content which is reflected in my bold colors."

Displaying a fresh enthusiasm and curiosity generally found in young children, Lebow's playful visions border on the unusual, a mystical exploration into a child's imagination that combines former experiences with bold, new images. There exists an "Alice in Wonderland" innocence to his style. The crayola colors reveal Lebow's own pleasure and enjoyment of life. As such, almost anything can happen, and does.

David Lebow's work may be seen at Linda McAdoo Galleries, located at 503 Canyon Road. Hours: 10:00-5:00 Monday-Saturday and 10:00-3:00 Sunday. (505) 983-7182.



"The Actress," oil, 20" x 24"