CELTIA REISMAN
Born 1950

Celia Reisman has nearly always paid close attention to the visual world. She attributes much of her interest in observation and imagery to having grown up as a child of deaf parents. Having to rely more heavily on his sense of sight, Celia’s father in particular was keen to point things out that she hadn’t noticed. Eventually Reisman developed a strong desire and ability to look closely at the world. This includes the unexceptional and ordinary parts of neighborhoods and spaces that appear in most of her work. “Wherever I land – be it Philadelphia, Vermont, or foreign countries...I really love to look around and find domestic places that have a quirky quality because of some ornament, color or foliage. [There is] nothing interesting about the places I select, and yet I find them captivating. Almost like an outdoor still life.”

As a young person, Reisman excelled at art. She eventually won a National Scholastic Award, which enabled her to study art at Carnegie Mellon University and Yale University. She was influenced in part by her work with R.B. Kitaj, an American artist who, among other processes, used bright colors, thin pain application and overlapping elements to create paintings that resembled collages and graphic designs. Reisman is an award-winning artist, and has taught and served as Visiting Critic in numerous art departments within the Northeastern US. She currently lives and works in Merion, Pennsylvania and Stafford, Vermont.

Photo credits: Courtesy of the Artist
ABOUT THE PAINTING

Several structures sit close together on a neighborhood street. The sharp lines of the buildings, rooftops, and railings contrast with the soft shapes of bushes and trees. Warm colors capture the muted glow of late afternoon or perhaps waning autumn sunlight. The largely green, blue, and yellow color palette is broken up by a few small details painted in dark rusty red. Every architectural element is incomplete, some part of each extending beyond the painting’s view. The one exception is a small cream-colored garage opened to a deep gray interior and trapezoidal awning.

Like much of Reisman’s work, this painting reflects very careful attention having been paid to a single location. She returns to a chosen site multiple times and often at different times of day, using her car as a “roving studio”. During each visit, Reisman makes observational drawings and writes notes about things that catch her eye. Information from these sketches and her memory combine to form the final composition.

Reisman was attracted to the place featured in Angel Awning “because of the strong, stark, crisp edges of the small garage. The bright red of the two small fences, the red edge on the rooftop and the dark opening of the garage door made it feel like an altarpiece...a place of rest.” To Reisman, this otherwise unremarkable structure represented a special and maybe even reverent space, distinct from its surroundings. When people view her paintings, Reisman wishes that something new might get revealed to them about the everyday world. “I hope they see the beauty and mystery and the magic that I see.”

LET'S LOOK

• What is your first reaction to this artwork? Why do you think you responded that way?

• Describe the kinds of lines and colors you see. How did the artist use these to create the mood - or feeling - of this painting?

• Close your eyes and describe the artwork from memory. Why did you remember what you remembered? Why did you forget what you forgot?

• What seems normal about this painting? What is strange or mysterious?

• No people appear in this painting. Why do you think that is? What feeling would this painting give you if Reisman had included people in it?

• How might your interpretation of this painting be different from someone in another culture?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

VISUAL ARTS

Re-ordered Structures
When Celia Reisman sketches one location many times, she selects the parts of that site that interest her the most and incorporates them into the final painted image. According to Reisman, her process is “not about consistency but about creating another order.”

Find images or take several photos of a structure of your choosing – it could be a local barbershop, a house, or a famous landmark. Be sure the pictures reflect a similar point of view but different times of day and even seasons, if applicable. Carefully look through the images and begin to cut out parts of each one that capture your attention. Re-assemble the structure using mostly or only the pieces you found most interesting. What do you call this new structure? What does it say about you?

Observational Drawings
Celia Reisman often visits a location several times before painting it, at different times of day, to make sketches and notes about what she notices. Scientists in the field use similar skills of careful observation and recording data over a long period of time. Choose a living organism that you have easy access to (an outside plant or pet make great subjects). For one week, take 10 minutes every day to observe your subject. Sketch what you see. Note the date, time, and any interesting observations you made that day. After a week, review your sketches and recorded notes. What conclusions can you draw from having looked more carefully at this organism? What new questions do you have about it?

MATH

Angle Awning
Many artists, including Reisman, skillfully use lines and angles to give the illusion of height, width and depth within a 2-dimensional artwork. We call this creating perspective. Using a printed copy of Angel Awning and a protractor, find examples of each of the following types of angles in the painting: acute, obtuse, right, straight, and reflex. Which kind of angle appears the most? While you are looking closely, do you notice anything unusual about the proportions and perspectives in this piece? Do all the buildings abide by the same dimensional “rules”? 

Science

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