

The Life of Things

Simone Dinnerstein

My father's *Triptych* has loomed large in my life. It tells the story of my parents right before I was conceived, through my infancy. It's a story that I find endlessly fascinating. Who were they then?

As a child, I understood the tale of the *Triptych* as a real-life fairy tale. My parents had no money. They lived in an attic in Germany in a room with half a roof, sleeping on the floor, surrounded by furniture borrowed from the neighbor's garden. With characteristic disregard for rules, my dad began a hugely ambitious painting—his first painting out of art school—despite the fact that his Fulbright grant was expressly for printmaking.

My parents returned to Brooklyn, my dad sold his first drawing, and they thought that somehow gave them enough money to have a baby. Me. A New York art dealer, George Staempfli, then visited my dad's studio and bought the *Triptych* unfinished. The monthly payment installments (Staempfli was so wise not to give it in a lump sum!) supported the Dinnersteins' new addition for the next two years.

So the *Triptych* was born at the same time as I was, and it contains my parents' DNA just as much as I do. When I look at the *Triptych* I see where I come from. And if I wanted to tell someone who I really am deep inside, I would just need to show them those three panels.

My father's primary interest in art is in its humanity. He is not drawn to the surface of his subjects, to the rendering. He is interested in the life of things. He will travel across continents to see paintings that move and inspire him. In fact, that is pretty much the only reason he travels. He isn't concerned with the historical context of a painting, or the color theory behind it, or the iconography within it.

It is difficult to explain what draws him to respond to a painting, and what causes him to paint the way he does. I suspect that this is because he thinks in visual language.



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Handwritten notes on lined paper, including the word "Hitch" and some illegible scribbles.

Handwritten list of words and phrases:

fat	roll er
men	a then
aman	ther
a bowl	is hav
well-	usome
aby by	iz law

Handwritten notes and a drawing of a face with various labels:

- Smaller eyes to cut down on nose pillars
- Longer feet to the a
- Just not know the
- and will be a
- and in position
- for the (scent)

All of his paintings and drawings tell stories. They aren't allegorical or illustrative or didactic. They simply tell the story of the person who is modeling, of the apples on the plate. And that is not something that can be translated into words.

Simone Dinnerstein at the Palmer Museum of Art, Penn State University, June 2009