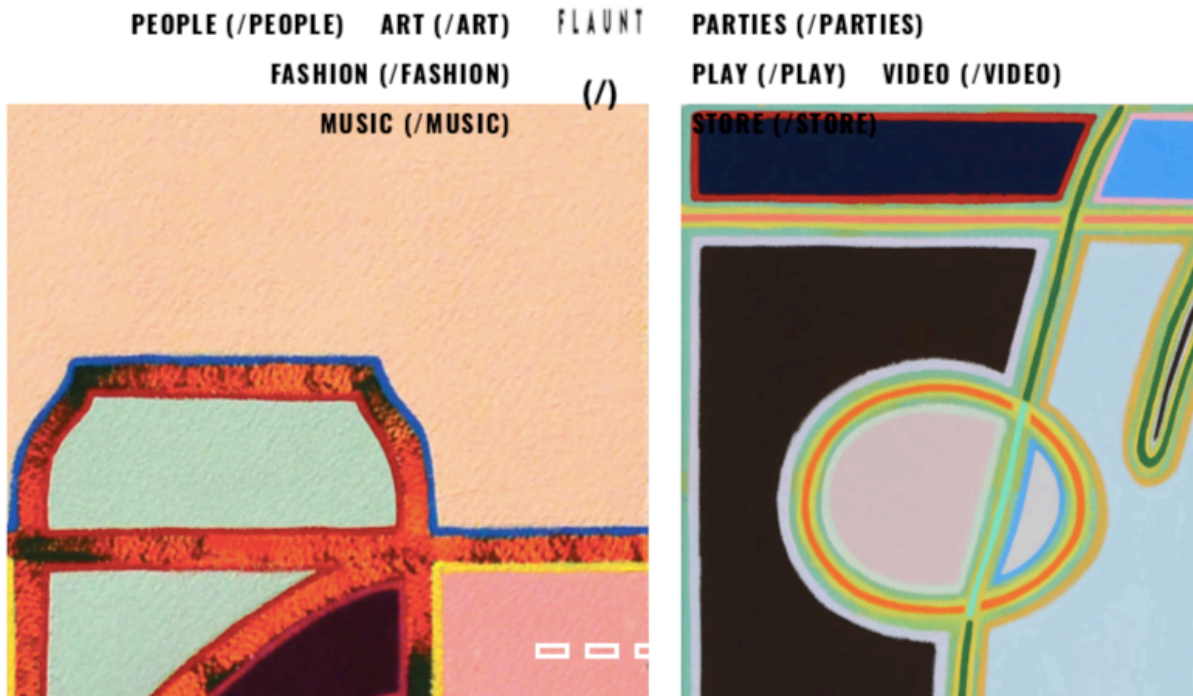


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The Beautiful Fruits of Artist Holly Coulis — Flaunt Magazine

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## THE BEAUTIFUL FRUITS OF ARTIST HOLLY COULIS

BY CAYLA MIHALOVICH (/CONTENT?AUTHOR=5BCFF6FA71C10B8D31AAEECC)

It's peach season in Athens, Georgia. I ask Holly Coulis how many she'll eat in a day.

"Probably in the beginning, I have two to three and then in the end I'm like, 'I guess I'll eat a peach.'" We talk about how beautiful peaches are: an object whose ripeness signifies the age of summer, tinting all of Georgia with shades of sweater-like coral.

"I rarely look at a scene. It's more about shapes of things I know. Things like oranges, lemons, cherries: they're all very easy shapes," Coulis says. Coulis is best known for her still life paintings, which boast a range of cheeky colors that announce themselves without hesitation. They are familiar objects represented in an unfamiliar way: flat and undescribed, reduced to their essence and thoughtfully arranged to feel as though they are a family of their own. On canvas, the objects become more than just a cup, a mango, a vase or an artichoke. It's as though we enter a kitchen whose objects assert themselves with a renewed sense of vitality; disposing of the mundane, cardboard tasks of routine life in exchange for a reconfigured wonderland where everything feels exciting and appetizing again. "Sometimes there will be a mother and kid in the grocery store and their clothes together will be a great color combo. His shirt and her sandals!" Coulis says glowingly. She is an enthusiastic observer, one who does not overlook any of her surroundings. This zest for life makes its way onto her canvases, where we can appreciate the objects we hold every day.

Coulis grew up in Toronto, Canada where she studied sculpture and installation, and later moved to Boston to pursue an MFA in sculpture. During the last four months of her MFA, she discovered her love for painting, which presented itself as a "more abstracted, dreamlike state to make art in." It was "less easy to pin down. Less the picture of what you're looking at and more how it was created." Coulis tells me that she has not picked up sculpture in the 16 years since then. To move from a three-dimensional art form to still life paintings was not the only turn Coulis made along the way.

Like many artists, she has experienced multiple evolutions in her trajectory. While the subjects of her paintings once orbited detailed portraits of men and women overlaid with varying shapes and objects, she became more drawn to the pure representation of objects, and gradually excluded people altogether. "Maybe the still life is a ghost of the people. Like the people are somehow implied but they're not in the paintings," she tells me. The objects become an abstraction of what we'd find in real life, but everything remains true: how the shapes hold, the vibrancy of the colors, the shadows and reflections. Coulis says, "I find it interesting that still life can be an abstraction, but also something that everyone knows. And

everyone has had experiences with a still life, I imagine. Everyone has drunk out of a cup and put it on a surface." The evidence of human life exists without showing humanity explicitly, so that the objects, the things left behind, then tell the story of what was once there.

Written by Cayla Mihalovich