

Henry Lee McFee
and Formalist Realism
in American Still Life
1923–1936



A Center Gallery Publication

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13 June–2 August 1987

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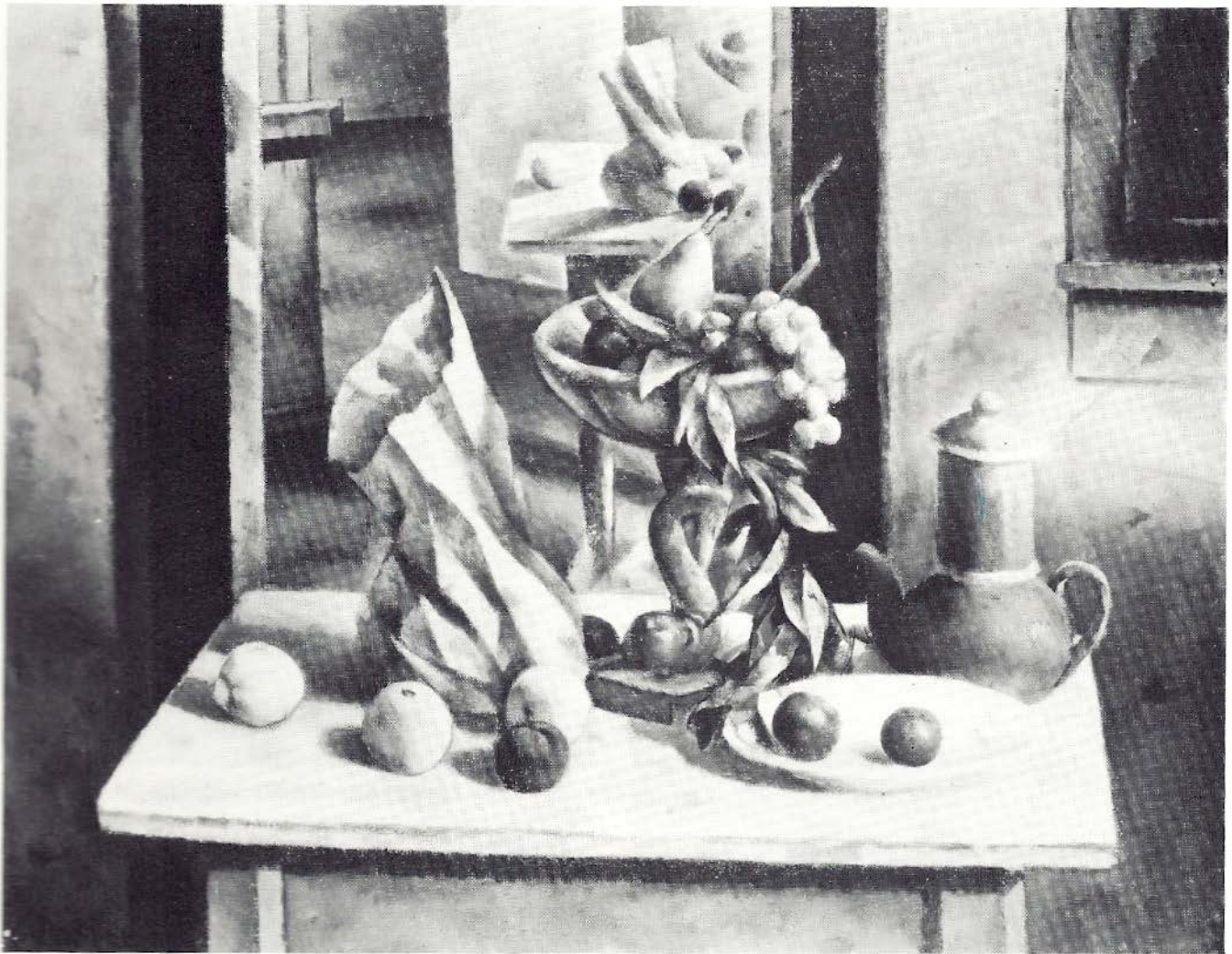


Figure 104. Henry Lee McFee. *The Blue Compote*. 1930–31. Oil. (Present location unknown.)

the modern work—It is necessary in a way to [illegible] up his group but his real interest lies I believe in the illustration of contemporary life—Burchfield, Hopper, Luks, and the worst of all contemporaries Chapin. He can place them readily and does so in surprising numbers. He tells me constantly how difficult it is to place my pictures.⁴

Later in the same letter McFee asked Dasburg:

Did you note that we were not included in the nineteen American Moderns at the 1st Modern Museum's show. And did you notice who was?⁵

Difficulties with Rehn notwithstanding, McFee persevered with the gallery, and his next one-man show, containing both paintings and drawings, was held from 7 to 28 January 1933. Following the pattern of the exhibitions of 1927 and 1929, fullest representation was given to McFee's effort in still life: of the

fifteen oils in the exhibition, eight were still lifes. *The Branch* (fig. 64) was the only holdover in this genre from the 1929 exhibition. Also included were *Still Life with Carafe* (fig. 103) and possibly the still life bought by Mrs. Rockefeller (fig. 101), which, if exhibited, was called *Glass Pitcher*.

Once again critics focused their praise on the still lifes. The critic writing in *Art News* was most sensitive to the nature of McFee's development in still life since the 1929 exhibition:

... at each fresh showing of his work he gains in decorative power by arriving at continually larger combinations of light and dark, by increasing the complexity of his angles, and by a greater simplicity in the spacing of his parts.

His quite recent "Still Life With Red [Striped] Curtain" [pl. 14] is easily the handsomest of his many decorative arrangements, is more clear cut and more monumentally developed. The small *Glass Pitcher* [possibly