



Natura morta

Stories without words. Colorful and sumptuous, her pictures remind us of 17th-century painting masterpieces. World-renowned photographer and Pollock-Krasner Foundation award winner Paulette Tavormina creates worlds – and brings them to still life.





Vanitas III The Letter, After P. C. (2015)



Vanitas V Journeys, After D. B. (2015)



Flowers and Fish III, After G. V. S. (2012)

Copy by **Bettina Bono**
Photos by **Paulette Tavormina**

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Photographer and WORLD.MINDS member Paulette Tavormina.

There they lie, the fruits of summer. A little plum peeks out from between some plump peaches, and its stem seems to be reaching for a pear. A tiny ladybug is resting, cuddled into the fuzzy skin of a peach. And then it happens: the fall. The hapless little ladybug slips down into the bottom recesses of the fruit bowl. Within a matter of seconds, hours of work are ruined, and Paulette Tavormina has to start over. The seeming effortlessness with which this New York photographer's still lifes are arranged is deceptive: «It is in the nature of things that objects fall. The secret lies in keeping the balance.» For days at a time she will hole up in her studio and rebuild her compositions from scratch. Flowers, fruits, leaves – everything needs to be procured afresh, every day. Her obsession with detail and attention to authenticity as well as painstaking research have been ingrained in Paulette for many years. As a prop and food specialist in Hollywood, she has collaborated with Oliver Stone (Nixon) among other filmmakers. Time and time again, the same scenes would be re-shot, always requiring the 'identical' grilled steak in its place on the plate and the proper period crockery to adorn the film set's table.

HER FIRST LOVE: ANTIQUES

Despite her Sicilian roots, she was born and raised in Long Island, New York, often spending afternoons with her grandmother. When she was eight years old her grandmother took her to visit her first antique store: "I remember exactly. The shop was chock-full of stuff and untidy – a paradise." Back then her grandmother bought her a little wooden table, not unlike those Paulette uses to arrange her items on today. This was the origin of her passion for objects. Paulette began to collect: tiny pieces of crockery, postcards, dice, shells – her girl's bedroom became a museum for small objects. She would arrange her finds in such a way that they told stories.

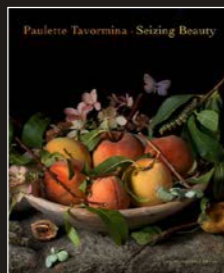
THE MAGIC OF OBJECTS

Her siblings made fun of her passion. And apparently they continue to do so, but now they provide their sister with items from their travels – shells from Norway and honey bees from their gardens. She collects snails from her cousin's villa in Palermo, and pomegranates from their garden at Menfi, Sicily. It can take Paulette months

to gather the suitable objects for one of her compositions. Often these items will be found on travels and at flea markets. Like the chestnut from the orchards in Versailles: "I like the idea that Marie-Antoinette may have looked at these trees." Another object that Paulette fell in love with in Paris is a small brass scale – a lucky find. Later she spotted its twin in a Vermeer painting. Paulette was working as a commercial photographer and food stylist for cookbooks when she came to know more about the works of classical 17th century artists from her painter friend while living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She is particularly fascinated and inspired by the compositions of Giovanna Garzoni and Maria Sibylla Merian. "I was thrilled. They were the reason I wanted to create my own *Natura Morta* images – in photography, of course."

LIKE THE OLD MASTERS

Despite the fact that flowers, being both delicate and intractable, present a real challenge to photographers, Paulette really enjoys working with them. And so, it hardly comes as a surprise that her favorite photograph depicts roses, her mother's pearl necklace, sealed letters – and the little brass scale from Paris; a composition that she has dedicated to her mother. Here, too, the highlight on one of the rose petals proves that Paulette – like a 17th-century painter – applies the same dramaturgy and dedication to coax the light to delicately kiss the objects as in the works of the Old Masters. And just as Paul Cézanne once claimed: "I will astonish Paris with an apple!", we now know that Paulette can do this with a bowl of fruit and flowers.



Seizing Beauty
Photographic still lifes by Paulette Tavormina. 160 Pages. The Monacelli Press.

Colnaghi, the world renowned Old Master gallery in London, showed 22 of Tavormina's photographs alongside their paintings in the exhibit "Seizing Beauty – The Dialogue between Old Master Still Lifes and Paulette Tavormina's photographs". Next show: Colnaghi gallery in Madrid, fall 2017.



Vanitas IV Dreams, After A. C. (2015)