

WM BROWN



Artist's Studio

I worked as a private chef before I studied painting. I spent summers on Martha's Vineyard, catering parties and making food for a couple of families. I always loved the look, smell, and colors of fresh summer foods, including the meats and fish that I served. However, it wasn't until after I graduated from art school that I began to paint culinary subjects. Around that time, I made my first meat paintings. It started as part of a body of work I titled "From the Kitchen to the Table," a series of paintings that focused on place settings, food preparations and different cuts of meat. It was the first time my background as a private chef began to enter the studio.

As the daughter of a butcher, painting meat became a way to build connection with my father, who at the time had little experience with painting and fine art. My meat paintings provided an entry point for him, allowing us a new opportunity to share our passions with one another. Growing up in the early '80s, there were times when my brother and I would go with my father to the mom-and-pop supermarket where he worked. He would dress us in meat coats that would just about touch the floor and set us up on chairs, feeding chunks of meat into the meat grinder to make hamburger. I remember sides of beef hanging in the cooler, which is less common these days as so much butchering today happens in the slaughterhouse or meat packing plants and arrives at the supermarket in smaller portions. But these massive sides of meat were a powerful sight to a child, hanging there in the refrigerated room from meat hooks. I remember that my father wore a chain-mail metal glove to protect his left hand while cutting swiftly with his right. I loved watching him work, the speed

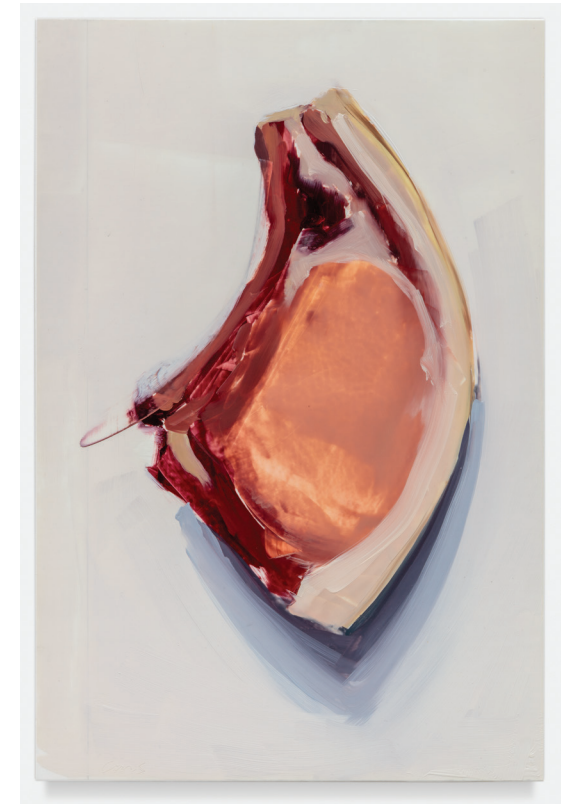
and precision with which he moved. And I can easily recall the smell of his work boots, such a distinct aroma of aged beef.

The color of raw meat is just so sumptuous and fun to paint. So many varieties of reds and maroons, creamy whites, and sometimes a surprising blue. It carries so many different meanings for me, but I think I continue to paint it because of the power food has to connect us to place, to memory and to people.

I occasionally paint meat from life, but more often take photographs to work from. Painting for me is very much about immediate response—a visceral, physical experience. I work quickly and intensely; I usually make a painting in one go, which can take anywhere from 1 to 8 hours. If the painting doesn't work out, I scrape it down. If the painting is larger, it can take more time, but I try to finish the work while the initial paint is still wet, because I like to work my colors into one another and scrape the surface for a softening effect. The sometimes blurred or obscured outcome of the subject matter is somewhat of a defiance to painting exactly what is in front of me, an intentional obscuration of what the subject is. This invites participation, encouraging the viewer to complete the subject from their own memory or understanding. To bring their life experience to the painting.

T-Bone steaks are my all-time favorite to paint and to eat! Visually, the bone divides the two triangles of meat, which gives a beautiful contrast to the rich reds. It has amazing flavor. The fat that crisps up around the meat is so delicious. I love to eat those tasty bits right from the bone.





*Images courtesy of the artist, Carrie Mae Smith,
and her gallery, Lowell Ryan Projects in Los Angeles.
Photographs by Charles White at JWPictures.com*