



Small text caption describing the bowl, likely mentioning its origin or historical context.



Small text caption describing the spoons, likely mentioning their design or historical context.

CONTENT:

Sarah Williams

Leslie Lewis Sigler

The Personalities of Old Things

Leslie Lewis Sigler sees old things not as useless, but as beautiful and rich, with a deep history. On her shelves: a rotary phone circa the 1950s or 1960s, a genuine tintype maternity photo of Leslie pregnant with her first child, a 1949 penny candy machine restored by her husband's uncle, a typewriter from an assemblage artist she traded one of her paintings for. She loves to admire the way her two sons, ages six and eight, and their friends interact with curiosity at such heavy, old things that are no longer commonly used today. She hopes her art inspires viewers to think differently about the things they already have.

Leslie's portraits of silver antique tableware are informed by the silver's function, form, and condition. Each piece was created for very specific-use cases: berry spoon, ice cream fork, jelly spoon, butter knife with an offset spatula side, tomato fork, macaroni spoon, fish fork, olive fork. A piece with filigree around the edge seems very fanciful and proper to Leslie. A piece may be polished, have a patina, or be tarnished, which might suggest a rough or well-used life.

"As I'm painting these objects, I'm thinking about what kind of person they would be," she says of her naming conventions. The Crush is her painting of a silver creamer where the position of the handle, to Leslie, suggests a hand on the hip. "Sometimes I'll paint the same object over

and over, with different reflections, and they take on different personalities,” she says. Her painting of the same creamer with darker reflections she named.

The Skeptic

She started painting silver in 2011. During her off time as a graphic designer, she initially painted portraits of single tableware: forks, spoons, and serving utensils. In 2020, the isolation Leslie felt during the COVID lockdown was echoed in her paintings, so she began grouping objects together. Topiles of silver necks and odd couples leaning on each other affectionately, she added companionship and warm paint tones to balance the cold silver. Recently, she’s been painting copper pieces, which she sees as more whimsical, so in her paintings she plays with perspective, expanding the abstract element and making it harder to tell what the painting is of, such as zooming in on the bird’s eye view of a Jell-O mold so that it looks like a flower.



The use cases for copper were hyper-specific, often decorative or as a form for cake or Jell-O. To Leslie, the copper molds are a metaphor for what she is currently going through in her midlife: where before, she and her husband were growing up within their parents' structures, now, they have become caretakers, or the "molds," for their children as well as for their aging parents. In addition to the size (with the increasingly larger sizes, such as 40 x 40 and 60 x 60, being cumbersome to move and store on the heavy composite panel), the most daunting thing about the newest large copper pieces is the complexity, requiring her to mix the colors separately for the copper's kaleidoscope reflections. "Which," she explains, "is exciting to me, but the actual execution is sometimes very hard. But I like a challenge." texture of composite panel; her crisp edges and light, simple backgrounds; simple shadows; and the reflections she emphasizes as "tiny, abstract moments" bring contrast and complement such true-to-life representational art. They are all true reflections—she doesn't manufacture them in her paintings, but she does manipulate and create the reflection by what she's wearing, or a colored object she's holding up. "Some of it's chance," she says as she points to the greens in one painting as a reflection of the trees and leaves outside her kitchen window. The flesh-colored reflections are unintentional, distorted self-portraits present in all her work. "I can tell where I am in each one," she explains.

After selecting her photograph(s), she draws, does a full underpainting of all one color, layers on the background, and finally paints the subject in color. Each color application requires at least an hour of mixing oil and paints. She gets more excited about a painting than she did in the beginning because the colors come out more vibrantly in oil; she comes to love the painting even more as she spends more time with it and it becomes a different object.



Leslie's grandmother gave her a silver spoon as a birthday gift during college, as she did with all her kids and grandkids. A couple years later, a domed butter dish—a huge sphere on a pedestal with a tiny little place for butter inside. Always with a note about what the item was for and where and when her grandmother found it. Each time, Leslie was grateful, but, as could be expected, didn't appreciate the gesture until she was older. As time went on, Leslie realized what an influence her late grandmother, someone who was always very supportive, was for her. "I think as you age as a parent, too, you kind of realize how much of your parents and grandparents you are, or how much of them is in you," she says. "So, it becomes more and more special to realize that the sweet little innocent gifts she gave me have become such a big part of my life and my career and my inspiration." Before her grandmother died in 2018, she came to one of Leslie's shows. Despite the fragility of being late in life, her grandmother always wanted to be there, and at the show her grandmother was her same fancy self, in a prim matching outfit. Along with silver, her grandmother's joy in hosting holiday dinners is another of Leslie's heirlooms. Leslie has made a point to continue the tradition of getting out the silver for holiday meals—a tradition from her Texan family that she has brought to California. She admires these "things that literally passed through families over generations and generations," she says, "because silver just sticks around. It's so special, it's associated with gathering families or gathering people."

Leslie's now on silver utensil portrait #250, despite offshoots into other material subjects like silver platters and copper. "Sometimes I think, 'Am I ever going get bored with silver?' But then I think about how exciting the subtle changes have been to me," she muses—like the de-emphasis on shadows, how the colors have changed from moody to more contemporary backgrounds. Besides, could one ever get bored with a cherished memory?

leslielewissigler.com

Instagram: [leslielewissigler_artist](https://www.instagram.com/leslielewissigler_artist)

Written by Katie Shiver

Photography by Daniel Garcia