

in conversation

Louise Fishman WITH SHARON BUTLER

Sharon Butler sat down with Louise Fishman in her cozy 23rd Street apartment to discuss her two current exhibitions: *Five Decades*, a 50-year retrospective at Tilton Gallery (September 5 – October 13), and *Louise Fishman*, at Cheim & Read (September 13 – October 27). She will also show with her mother Gertrude Fisher-Fishman and aunt Razel Kapustin at the Woodmere Art Museum in Philadelphia (*Generations*, October 13, 2012 – January 6, 2013). Fishman talked fervently about her recent residency in Venice, her new spouse Ingrid, and how her experiences have shaped her work.

SHARON BUTLER (RAIL): Let's start by talking about your new work at Cheim & Read. I was knocked out by the color—especially the vibrant blues. Your fall 2011 residency at the Emily Harvey Foundation in Venice seems to have had a potent effect on your use of color.

LOUISE FISHMAN: Oh, big time. Blue has followed me for a very long time. A while ago, I was looking at a painting I made when I was an undergraduate at Tyler sometime in the '50s, maybe even '60; it was the first abstract painting that I actually finished. It was full of blues and in a way it was like Picasso's Blue period, which I certainly looked at a lot. I didn't really care for it as much as I cared for his later work, the Cubist and Surrealist stuff—I thought it was a youthful expression. I'm not sure what blue is, in terms of color theory; they've done so many color studies. For me it was water and sky. But the blue *now* is so deliberate. I didn't say, oh I'm going to use blue because Venice is surrounded by water, or because the sky reflects in the water and on the buildings, or that the Titians are full of blue, or the city is full of these blues. I've known Ingrid for a very long time, because



Portrait of the artist. Pencil on paper by Phong Bui.

since the late 1960s I knew writer and critic Jill Johnston, her spouse of 30 years. But one of the things I hadn't noticed about her till Jill died and I went to various memorials and events that Ingrid had organized was that her eyes are this Danish blue. I was really struck by that. I mean you do look in your lover's eyes, right? Plus, I bought this vase in Murano that is actually iridescent. This blue, which later appeared in my paintings, was all over the shops in Venice and Murano including the Glass Museum. I got very involved in Venetian glass and still am.

RAIL: Those vivid colors mystified painters for centuries. In our country, Colonial painters doggedly tried to recreate the Venetian artists' paint recipes, but they couldn't figure out how they did it. For you, blue has specific meaning and has become talismanic—that Ingrid's eyes were blue was a signal.

FISHMAN: Yes. I'm in my early 70s, and I do think about my mortality: how much time do I have left to paint, what am I going to look at, what do I want to do with my time to make it rich and continue to make it rich? So all of those things take on poignancy that I think, as a young person, I may not have had—I may have noticed her blue eyes, but I don't think I would have integrated it the way I have. While living in Venice, I did a series of watercolor books, Japanese books that fold out, as well as regular drawing books. Plus I did drawings and watercolors every single day. And I took