



Priscilla Warren Roberts (1916 - 2001)

Tulips, circa 1950

unsigned

oil on board

24" x 18"

Magical Realist?

Priscilla Roberts described herself as a realist painter, not the “magic realist” critics and curators labeled her. Implied in the difference between the terms is that Roberts’ method of viewing the world was, to her, straightforward, while others saw in her still-lives and portraits the uncovered magic of everyday things.¹ In the United States, the magic realist movement can be traced to the seminal 1943 exhibition *American Realists and Magic Realists* at the Museum of Modern Art. The title of the exhibition suggests that the struggle to define what separated the two styles existed as long as the magic realist movement itself. Alfred H. Barr, the inaugural director of MOMA, attempted to clarify magic realism as: “a term sometimes applied to work of painters who by means of an exact realist technique try to make plausible and convincing their improbable, dreamlike or fantastic visions.”²

In its highly stylized composition and moderately skewed palette, *Tulips* is a fine cross-section of realism and fantastic vision. The arrangement hints at animation, as if the flowers bent themselves over for an improved view of their environment. The almost eerie greens and purples are further evidence of altered perception, and the scattered leaves and petals confirm that, like all things alive, the subject is also in decay, a fact that anchors the composition in the “real” world.

Roberts was born in Glen Ridge, New Jersey and was determined from a young age to be an artist. She studied briefly at Radcliffe College and the Yale School of Art, but received her primary art instruction at the Art Students League and the National Academy of Design. She lived the majority of her life in Wilton, Connecticut and her artwork can be found in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Dallas Museum of Fine Art, and other institutions. She exhibited extensively at the National Academy of Design, winning both the Hallgarten Prize in 1947 and the Proctor Portrait Prize in 1969.³

Provenance: From the artist, to a private Connecticut collection, to the gallery.

Presentation Notes: In a 4" contemporary Whistler-style gilt frame.

