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Fay Sciarra in her studio with "Shoe Dream."

Women's personal effects become icons in Fay Sciarra's paintings, on view at the Anne Reid Gallery at Princeton Day School.

You can't always get what you want. But if you paint it, you can sort of have it.

A self-described "shoe person," artist Fay Sciarra, who is wearing hot pink Converse All Stars on this particular autumn day, does not have closets filled with Manolo Blahniks and Jimmy Choos — but she does have canvases that are.

Her first "Shoe Dream," which some may have seen in the window of Go For Baroque in Princeton while waiting in evening rush-hour traffic, was a reverse painting on glass. Ms. Sciarra has an eye for scavenging windows from architecturally interesting old houses, and this particular window has diamond-shaped leaded panes, each filled with a sexy, high-heeled pointy-toed shoe.

"Shoes are provocative, a symbol of powerful women, icons of female sexuality," says Ms. Sciarra. "They are also wonderful colorful objects and appeal to me as visual symbols for a still life, as opposed to a bowl of fruit. We are what we wear. What does it say about our culture when women spend \$1,000 on Prada shoes?"

Her second "Shoe Dream" is an acrylic on canvas

with strappy pink and green shoes, plaid and houndstooth check shoes, a leopardskin boot, an outrageous shoe with flame-like designs her son, Sam, had to have and never wore, and a high-heeled basketball shoe. For reference material, she photographs the shoes at DSW and prints out pictures from the Internet of more high-end shoes. As for the pink All Stars on her feet, "It's always a conundrum what to walk in in New York City and not get blisters — and these are the ticket." The artist's "Shoe Dream" paintings are only part of the fun at the Anne Reid Art Gallery at Princeton Day School in the exhibit Fay

Sciarra: Original Paintings on Canvas, Glass and Found Objects on view Nov. 28 to Dec. 16. There are also paintings of women's brassieres titled "36B."

"That's not my size," she is quick to point out. "This series is a whimsical statement on the feminist movement." She plans to continue the series with women's reading glasses, elegant purses and evening bags.

While shopping on the Upper East Side with Sam, 12, the two spotted a \$4,000 Judith Leiber poodle purse. "I bet that winds up in one of your paintings," Sam said," recounts Ms. Sciarra from her treehouse-style studio over the garage of her Lawrenceville home. "I'm playing with the idea of status symbols," she says, and although there is whimsy in these paintings, they also have a sadder, more serious side. "Art has a higher purpose of connecting you to something bigger than yourself."

Much of the work in the show is new. The ambitious "Magnolia Center," painted on an old cathedral window. It was conceived in spring, when the magnolia outside Ms. Sciarra's studio was in bloom.

"I wanted to capture the feeling of ambrosia, of being encapsulated in blossoms," she says.

David Sciarra, her husband, would haul the window down the stairs of her studio and out to the patio every morning where she made her sketches. The painting shows the outside of her salmon pink stuccoed studio behind the blossoming tree, from which faceless children swing and climb, and a dog like Ms. Sciarra's dog, Georgia, sleeps below. Sam and his friends served as models.

"The more mature I become as an artist, the more I am willing to take risks with altered reality," she says. Not having faces and paring down to the essences "makes it odder and more suggestive, a magical reality. Other people can project the faces of their world onto them."

And that is what makes this painting sad, Ms. Sciarra says, because other people's children may have grown and see this moment of childlike wonder as so fleeting.

Although she has been selling many of her larger paintings recently and is exhibited in galleries from coast to coast, Ms. Sciarra's art career began only 12 years ago. Her mother, an artist, died from ovarian cancer and bequeathed her painting supplies to Ms. Sciarra, instructing her to paint illustrations for children's books. Prior to then, the former TV producer had never picked up a paintbrush. She prides herself on being self-taught.

"Painting was therapy for me, a way of mothering myself... a form of meditation. Even though my art came from a place of grief, the work that sprang forth is filled with joy," she writes on her Web site.

Much of the work is autobiographical. "It's the personal detail that gives it a soul," says Ms. Sciarra. "Sleeping Porch,"

painted on convex glass, was modeled after a place the Sciarra family rented one summer in Camden, Maine. It is surrounded by water on three sides, and one can peer inside the windows and see the lava lamp and camera Sam had left on the table, as well as a loon on the water through a window on the other side.

While her early influences were Pierre Bonnard, Milton Avery, Marc Chagall, Henri Matisse and Frida Kahlo — and continue to be — in recent times she finds herself inspired by Romare Bearden and Wayne Thiebaud. She is painting in a less detailed, more graphic way, using larger brushes, and including more mixed media and collage. In “Outdoor Shower,” for example, she uses rhinestones to create water sprinkling from a nozzle.

“Romare Bearden trusted his impulses, like jazz, and his images sprang from his life, going back to his childhood memories,” says Ms. Sciarra, who minored in art history at the University of Michigan. “Wayne Thiebaud, originally a cartoonist and commercial illustrator, elevated everyday objects, such as men’s ties, French fries and cakes, to fine art. I’m doing that in my own way, with a feminist perspective. Mine are more detailed.”

“Lenore’s Chapeaux” is a painting of vintage hats and hatboxes, based on the collection Ms. Sciarra inherited from her great aunt Lenore. A coating of varnish makes the whole work glitter like the jewels that sparkle from the mesh of a hat.

For the past four years, Georgia — named for Georgia O’Keeffe, not Ray Charles’ “Georgia on My Mind” — has been appearing in the paintings. When Georgia goes out to play in the backyard at 3 a.m., it’s Ms. Sciarra who has to wake up and let the dog back in. “It’s such a calm and magical time when I can watch the fireflies and listen to the crickets,” she says. So she painted “Night Garden,” including the four chairs in her backyard, onto a sawed-off top of an old door with windows.

One of her more psychologically complex works is “The Façade.” An old rustic sled sits sideways atop a Grecian column with peeling paint. On the slats of the sled is painted the façade of a McMansion, complete with three-car garage and colonial-style windows. The front of the McMansion is dotted with little yellow daisies. Through the slats we can see the dismembered limbs and eyeballs of dolls hanging from wires. Outside the house is a portrait of the smiling couple — Mr. And Mrs. Have Everything, Ms. Sciarra calls them.

“It reminds me of that horrible story of the man who murdered his wife in Hopewell,” says Ms. Sciarra. “All homes look exactly like that, but what’s really going on behind closed doors?” Fay Sciarra: Original Paintings on Canvas, Glass and Found Objects is on view at the Anne Reid Art Gallery, Princeton Day School, 650 The Great Road, Princeton, Nov. 28-Dec. 16. Gallery hours: Mon.-Fri. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Artist’s reception and book signing with the authors of Sacred Spaces, featuring Ms. Sciarra’s artwork, Dec. 2, 5-8 p.m.

For information, call (609) 924-6700. Fay Sciarra on the Web: www.faysciarra.com