



WOMEN'S WORK
IN WOMEN'S ART



LORI LARUSSO

Lori Larusso's work is about domesticity. Her paintings involve domestic objects in domestic spaces engaged in domestic scenarios. She creates sumptuous visual images in bright color that remind us of the paradisiacal homes featured in mid-century magazine spreads in publications like *Good Housekeeping* and *Better Homes and Gardens* or the perfectly captured living spaces that populate our Instagram feeds today, both of which she cites as inspiration for her practice.

In making her work, Larusso considers how the consumption of these images indoctrinates women, forcing us to desire a kind of perfection in our homes, both in terms of the physical space and the lives we live within their walls. She is quick to note how all of these images are manipulated and meant to manipulate us; magazine spreads are entirely staged and Instagram posts are almost always arranged and filtered to give us the best impression of a space, and not the lived reality.

Larusso is deeply interested in how these images prescribe a sort of unattainable domestic perfection. To her, this engagement is deeply tied to the invisibility of domestic labor in our modern societies. Housework has always fallen in the realm of women's labor, and since industrialization this work has been unwaged and thus rendered invisible. As such, our abilities to perform domestic labor have historically been tied to our "talents" as women, while the physicality of that labor has largely been obscured, leaving women in the impossible position of having to keep a home without ever appearing to do so.

In her paintings, Larusso creates vibrant and stylized forms composed in a similar manner to the images she refers to, while simultaneously subverting the perfection one would find in such scenes. For instance, works like *If You Can Bake a Cake, You Can Make a Bomb* and *If You Can Mop a Floor, You Can Participate in a Sympathetic Strike* feature stylized middle-class kitchen spaces, not unlike those found in her source material imagery. But whereas in a magazine or on social media such spaces would be tidy and pristine, Larusso's kitchens are overwhelmed with mess, both literally and figuratively. The composition—comprised of two cut metal panels painted in a trompe l'oeil style—uses tricks of perspective to create a physically smaller depiction of the kitchen space next to a much larger panel containing the mess, giving more literal space to this disarray and therefore making it feel unbearably large. In so doing, Larusso makes clear that these spaces are real and that they require labor—traditionally women's labor—to make them appear effortlessly pristine.

Furthermore, the titles of the works—and all the others in the series—make specific reference to applying skills involved in domestic labor towards revolutionary action. She is urging housewives—and by extension all women—to see that they can use their domestic talents in social and political activism. In this way, Larusso connects her critiques of domesticity as a form of performative femininity to broader feminist theory and activism. Not only does her work make visible the invisible labor women exert in maintaining a home, but she entreats them to employ the same sorts of labor to fight against oppression.



EATING ANIMALS (BUGS, FLYING), 2017

Acrylic on shaped panel
30.5" x 35"