

SUSAN YELAVICH

(b. 1950, Glen Ridge, New Jersey)

MFA Painting, 1975

Susan Yelavich in Richard Brooker's (MFA Painting, 1973) studio at Cranbrook Academy of Art, c.1973. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Richard Brooker

A literary impulse, both readerly and writerly, courses through the work and career of Susan Yelavich, an emeritus professor of design studies at the Parsons School of Design, a division of New York City's famed bastion of critical theory, The New School. Having completed her undergraduate studies in art and art history at Brown University in 1972, she applied to Cranbrook Academy of Art to pursue graduate studies in painting in 1973. Her education in both the interpretation of art and its making would find its place in her subsequent activities as a writer, critic, educator, and curator.

After Cranbrook, Yelavich ventured to New York City, where she pursued her artistic practice, which by that point had shifted more towards sculpture. Taking a "day job" that would last twenty-five years at the newly formed Cooper Hewitt, the national design museum of the Smithsonian Institution, would help her "pivot from painting to writing,"¹ and lead to a four-decade career focused on the import and impact of design. At the Cooper Hewitt, Yelavich would organize the transdisciplinary conference and publication, *The Edge of the Millennium: An International Critique of Architecture, Urban Planning, Product and Communication Design* (1994), as well as curate exhibitions such as *Design for Life* (1997) and *Inside Design Now* (2003), the museum's triennial of contemporary design.

Yelavich is a fellow of the American Academy in Rome, and was awarded its Rolland Prize in Design in 2003. Her books include *Contemporary World Interiors* (2007) and *Design as Future-Making* (2014, co-authored with Barbara Adams), among others. Her numerous essays deftly blend history, theory, and criticism as they reflect on the power of design to conjure other worlds. It is this imaginative power, which design shares with writing, that is the subject of her most recent publication, *Thinking Design through Literature* (2019). In it, Yelavich mines various writing genres—fictive, real, and poetic—to explore the world of designed objects and places in the literary imagination. A novel examination of a plethora of things—escalators and skyscrapers, robots and radios, pottery and parks—*Thinking Design through Literature* examines the social life of objects through the writings of César Aïres, Nicholson Baker, Lydia Davis, Orhan Pamuk, and Virginia Woolf, among others. AB