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*Some San Francisco Ballerinas*, 2011, by Elizabeth Barlow. Oil on linen, 24" x 30".

#### BY LOUISE BUYO

WHEN ARTSCUTTLEBUTT.COM MEMBER Elizabeth Barlow ([www.elizabethbarlowart.com](http://www.elizabethbarlowart.com)) looks at a worn book or an iridescent string of pearls, she sees personal objects imbued with the distinct personalities of their owners. In this context, a tube of red lipstick can be seen as a hallmark of femininity.

"In my current work, I am exploring portraiture that uses belongings, rather than faces, to explore the human experience," relates the 53-year-old oil painter. "For me, all these things tell a story about their owner, revealing so much about that individual's psyche and life experiences and narrative."

Just six months ago, Barlow began a new series, *In Their Shoes*, that delves more deeply into this theme.

"I've become fascinated with shoes as emblems," explains Barlow. "The choices people make while wearing them. Your shoes describe your way of life. They can illuminate who we are — or want to be."

Take, for example, *Allen's Dress Boots*, a still life of an Oregon cattle rancher's formal footwear.

"Allen Fletcher died in 2010 at 99

glorious years of age. He wore these beloved boots to the Pendleton Roundup every year. They show the amazing character of the man who wore them. I find that really moving and profound," she states.

So far, she has completed five works in the new series. Her most ambitious painting to date is *Some San Francisco Ballerinas* (above) which depicts 20 pairs of pointe shoes once used during performances by dancers from the San Francisco Ballet.

"I hadn't originally planned to expand the paintings to include groups, but when I started collecting the used pointe shoes I realized that I was in the possession of many women's stories."

This year, Barlow hopes to present an exhibition of the series in its entirety: "I feel these stories are powerful and will have even greater impact and resonance when viewed together. The deep emotional content inherent in these very personal objects presents rich opportunities for storytelling." **PA**

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