

Strawberry, Lemon, Orange and Raspberry

by Lynne Belluscio

In case you are ever in a Trivial Pursuit game and need to know the first flavors of Jell-O -- this is the answer: strawberry, lemon, orange and raspberry.

Up until recently, the Jell-O Gallery had three paintings -- lemon, orange and raspberry, but we were missing strawberry. Then, about a year ago we were contacted by the son of a man who worked for Jell-O. His father worked in the office until it closed in 1964, and like many other managers, he was told he could take any of the paintings on his office wall. After his father died, he didn't know what to do with the paintings and put them into an auction and that's when we were aware that they existed.

To make a long story short, the Jell-O Gallery bought the strawberry painting, although it wasn't in very good condition. It needed professional restoration. That can cost a couple of thousand dollars, so I applied for a grant through the Lower Hudson Conference of Historical Agencies and Museum, which has funds available through the New York State Council of the Arts. We have had successful applications through LHCHA before.

Last spring I took the strawberry painting to Westlake Conservators in Skaneateles so they could do a condition report. Then we submitted the grant proposal and during the summer we were notified that our request for \$2,749.50 was approved. It took a while for the check to arrive, but the day that we had the check deposited, I called Westlake Conservators and told them to start work.

It took several weeks to complete the restoration and I received a call two weeks ago to say that it was finished and I could come to pick it up. I couldn't wait to see it, so on Friday I drove over to Skaneateles to pick it up. Everyone there, really liked the Jell-O painting, and the next day I put it above the other three in the Jell-O Gallery.

My favorite is still the lemon Jell-O but the strawberry is wonderful. All four images were used as illustrations on the small leaflets that were in packages of



Jell-O in the 1920s. These paintings are unsigned, but attributed to Angus MacDonall (1875-1927). He was an illustrator for *Scribner's*, *Harper's*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *Life Magazine*. The Gallery has several of his signed paintings. And the Woodward Library has his painting of "Jack and the Beanstalk." He was born in St. Louis, Missouri but moved to Westport, Connecticut where he worked with a group of artists.

The work on this painting included removing the painting from the frame, consolidating the paint to prevent further loss. The tears were vapor treated and the surface dirt and grime was removed with aqueous solutions. The oxidized varnish was removed as well as small places where the painting had been "repaired" with modern paint. After the old stretcher was repaired, and the canvas was lined, the canvas was reattached.

Then an isolating layer of varnish was applied and small losses were filled with Modostuc. Where there was paint loss, the conservator inpainted, making sure the colors matched exactly. Another coat of protective varnish was applied, and a protective dust board was attached to the back. As you can see, this type of work is only for the professionals.

So now, when folks come to the Jell-O Gallery, we can tell them to look at these four beautiful Jell-O still-lifes -- and they can answer the question, "What are the first four flavors of Jell-O?"

