**Amy Pollien**

***Pheasant in the Corn with Apples***

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The background of this painting depicts the October garden, after the beautiful white ears of Silver Queen corn have been harvested and the giant, bright green corn stalks have faded to gold and grey. I tie them into “shocks'' both to cultivate and fertilize the soil around them and to provide shelter for the garden wildlife. Mice and voles over-winter in the tangled roots and game birds visit to eat seeds and bugs.

The pheasant cock was a lone visitor but the turkeys and spruce grouse often visit in flocks. I think this must have been a young male without a harem and he spent a few days poking around in the corn and broccoli plants during the last few warm days. His color was startling each time - nothing else in the garden is that color of peacock green/blue in any season.

The apple variety is Blue Pearmain, a Maine antique. I purchased the tree from Fedco nearly 20 years ago and it has taken a long time to mature - it only started bearing regular crops five years ago. The fruit is sought after for baking whole since the thick skin holds its shape in the oven without needing support. Here’s the description from Fedco:

Moderately juicy flesh, firm, dense and slightly crisp, sweet with a bit of a tart background flavor. Incredibly beautiful medium to very large fruit is streaked and splashed with purplish red, mottled with russet and covered with a distinct dusty blue bloom. In a pie, it has just enough firmness and a good balance of sweet and tart with hints of pear. Tart coarse yellow sauce cooks up in a couple minutes. Tasty eaten out of hand.

This apple is my favorite of the varieties I grow, for both eating and painting. The color and appearance of the outside, the taste and fragrance, and the coarse golden flesh are all exemplary. Even the tree itself is a marvel; my 20-year-old tree (growing in sub-optimal conditions) is easily 15’ by 20’ and covered in the spring with large white single-petal blossoms beloved by the bees.

Here is Thoreau’s mention of the Blue Permain in “Wild Apples”, in which he has a chapter on each stage of ripening:

The Last Gleaning

By the middle of November the wild apples have lost some of their brilliancy, and have chiefly fallen. A great part is decayed on the ground, and the sound ones are more palatable than before. The note of the chickadee sounds now more distinct, as you wander amid the old trees, and the autumnal dandelion is half-closed and tearful. But still, if you are a skilful gleaner, you may get many a pocket-full even of grafted fruit, long after apples are supposed to be gone out-of-doors. I know a Blue-Pearmain tree, growing within the edge of a swamp, almost as good as wild. You would not suppose that there was any fruit left there, on the first survey, but you must look according to system. Those which lie exposed are quite brown and rotten now, or perchance a few still show one blooming cheek here and there amid the wet leaves. Nevertheless, with experienced eyes, I explore amid the bare alders and the huckleberry-bushes and the withered sedge, and in the crevices of the rocks, which are full of leaves, and pry under the fallen and decaying, ferns, which, with apple and alder leaves, thickly strew the ground. For I know that they lie concealed, fallen into hollows long since and covered up by the leaves of the tree itself,—a proper kind of packing. From these lurking-places, anywhere within the circumference of the tree, I draw forth the fruit, all wet and glossy, maybe nibbled by rabbits and hollowed out by crickets and perhaps with a leaf or two cemented to it, (as Curzon an old manuscript from a monastery's mouldy cellar,) but still with a rich bloom on it, and at least as ripe and well kept, if not better than those in barrels, more crisp and lively than they. If these resources fail to yield anything, I have learned to look between the bases of the suckers which spring thickly from some horizontal limb, for now and then one lodges there, or in the very midst of an alder-clump, where they are covered by leaves, safe from cows which may have smelled them out. If I am sharp-set, for I do not refuse the Blue-Permain, I fill my pockets on each side; and as I retrace my steps in the frosty eve, being perhaps four or five miles from home, I eat one first from this side, and then from that, to keep my balance.