

### *Heron with Zinnias and Bullfrogs*

The Great Blue Heron is a striking, but fairly recent, addition to our habitat. Ten years ago I might have found several in the estuaries of Somes Sound below our lot but I would not have seen them close to the garden. Their appearance in our yard is a great example of how species can be connected - in the last ten years herons in the Northeast US have benefited from the return of beavers. The beaver population on Kitteridge Brook has created a network of small pools and connecting streams, fish and amphibians have moved in, and the herons are here stalking their prey within visual range of my lettuce and tomatoes. For a large bird, almost 4' tall, the Great Blue is often difficult to see because they stand perfectly still until they spring forward to catch their prey - in this case an American Bullfrog hiding beneath the flowers.

The yellow fluted jardiniere belonged to my great grandmother and came to me with a Christmas cactus planted in it. It is marked "Italy" and has all the dings and scratches associated with long and casual use, but the thick pale yellow glaze catches the light beautifully and it's a wonderful container for bright annual flowers, like the State Fair zinnias in this painting.

This composition is set in late August, on a day when thunderstorms are brewing in the afternoon, the sky turns dark and the clouds have a greenish cast. The native Ilex has bloomed and formed the small red berries that will feed the Cedar Waxwings in the fall, and the hops have climbed the hoop house and formed thousands of papery many-petaled flowers. The heron hunts the bullfrog, who is well disguised by his spots, and skin the color of leaf litter in the bog. Everything waits on the storm.