

PAINTED LANDSCAPES

Contemporary Views



Schiffer

LAUREN P. DELLA MONICA

ELIZABETH O'REILLY

(B. 1957)

Elizabeth O'Reilly's urban landscapes may be rendered in watercolor on paper, oil on panel, or in collage. Regardless of the medium she chooses, O'Reilly composes her intimate pictures with careful attention to highly saturated colors and bright light in her subject landscapes. Often featuring the streets of Brooklyn in her jewel-like paintings, O'Reilly presents these urban vistas to the viewer as cleaned-up, sparkling, beautiful moments in time. Alive with bright color, as seen through O'Reilly's vision, otherwise unadorned, non-descript places become vibrant landscapes.

O'Reilly's work shows us the beauty in small, urban spaces. *Third Street with Circle* (Fig. 22) depicts the point of intersection of a river and bridge with all the attendant signage and fencing—a cacophony of railings, gates, streetlights, and traffic signals in electric shades of primary colors against a backdrop of a clean, grey street and pale sky. The juxtaposition of such vibrant colors gives the small painting a large presence and illustrates the complex combination of factors at play in such an urban space. O'Reilly's slightly loose application of paint gives the city scene a painterly quality normally found in more traditional, rural landscapes.

O'Reilly's paintings operate, from a distance, much like her collages in their ability to capture the simple beauty of somewhat austere, urban spaces. In the collages, such as *Barges and Tanks* (Fig. 23), done in the studio after an on-site oil painting of the scene, the serene grey background of water and sky is painted in watercolor and the objects are layered atop the surface. The shadows and ripples on the water take on their own forms. The barges and tanks are comprised of a buildup of vertical strips of brightly colored paper. The industrial nature of the scene is almost forgotten in the presence of such delicacy and beauty of the colored paper that comprises it. The bright colors of the barges and industrial components at the pier glisten in red, yellow, green, and blue.

O'Reilly takes on a decidedly unattractive building in *Grain Terminal Reflected* (Fig. 21) and paints its gentle reflection in the urban water so gracefully as to make it fluid and appealing. The paint is applied in loose brushstrokes that suggest motion on the water's surface. The hard, cold grain building in the top half of the painting becomes quite soft and appealing in its reflection. Colorful containers enliven the color palette of the composition. The familiar mix of land, sky, and water adorned with an element of architecture takes on new resonance in O'Reilly's unexpected urban landscapes.

O'Reilly was born in Ireland where she studied at the National University of Ireland before coming to New York in 1986. She lives in New York City. O'Reilly received her MFA from Brooklyn College in 1992. She has taught at Brooklyn College, the National Academy, the New School, and Parsons School of Design. Her work is in various corporate and public collections, including: the U.S. Department of State, Washington, DC; the Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee; the Sarah Moody Gallery at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa; and the Office of Public Works, Ireland. She is represented by George Billis Gallery, New York.



Fig. 21: Elizabeth O'Reilly. *Grain Terminal Reflected*, 2011. Oil on panel: 19 x 13 inches.
Courtesy of George Billis Gallery.



Fig. 22: Elizabeth O'Reilly. *Third Street with Circle*, 2011. Oil on panel: 16 x 16 inches.
Courtesy of George Billis Gallery.



Fig. 23: Elizabeth O'Reilly. *Barges and Tanks*, 2011. Watercolor collage: 7 x 10 1/4 inches. Private Collection. Courtesy of George Billis Gallery.