

DONALD JURNEY

The Poetry of Place

In the first chapter of Donald Journey's career, his focus was rooted in the tradition of landscape painting and painting in plein air. In the artist's upcoming show at George Billis Gallery in Fairfield, Connecticut, Journey will showcase 11 paintings in an entirely new genre involving interiors and figures.

"I painted the world as it is for a long time. Now I'm enjoying making my own world," Journey shares of his new approach. During his time as a landscape painter, the artist explains that he "took many trips to France to draw the landscape. One learns, over the course of years of painting and drawing, a certain vocabulary of forms. Because I could not always find what I wished to paint, I began making 'my own France' in paintings. I wanted to tell my own truth about France and so, more and more, I began to paint from imagination. I was much more interested in the poetry of place than in the facts."

This impulse now informs his new exploration of interiors and figures *in* interiors. "In imagining the spaces, and in painting figures within them, I become both set designer and casting chief," Journey says.



1
House by the Sea, oil on linrn, 36 x 30"

2
The Greengrocer, oil on panel, 16 x 16"

3
A Moment in the Marais, oil on panel, 16 x 16"

4
Café Society, oil on linen, 30 x 36"



2



3



4

“As I begin to define a space, my imagination leads me to often invent a narrative. The space then begins to support the idea and the figures, if they are there, take on a life within the space. People often say to me, ‘how can you do that out of your head? The only reply is that, while it can be taxing, working from imagination is exactly what playwrights and the writers of novels do. We allow them to make up anything they wish, willing to go along. So, too, I hope to show my viewers things that never were, but which are as real as any memory they may have.’”

In *Café Society*, a favorite of Jurney’s, and one of the largest pieces in his new collection of work, the artist had quite the challenge of incorporating still life, figures and “some quite complex architecture with both mirrors and gilding,” he says. “Because the scene is entirely made up,

it required [a lot of] thought to have it all come together. Although not at all like the Café Royal in London, it shares with it a sense of the glamour of other times that are still resonant in our own.”

In yet another detailed, larger scale piece, we see a unique, layered perspective in *House by the Sea*, depicting an indoor/outdoor space in three parts. “The quite detailed area in which we’re standing is replete with all the details one might readily find outside a summer house,” says Jurney. “We then glimpse the dim interior on our way to the final door which opens onto a glorious coastal day. It seems always to bring smiles and thoughts of a much-awaited vacation.”

Inspired by nostalgia, *The Greengrocer* depicts a produce shop taken from Jurney’s memories and experience as a student living in New York City. “I was

always fascinated by the awnings and the mysterious shadows, particularly on rainy days, with lights on within the shops,” says Jurney. “When I was first working as an artist, I made many drawings of shops like this on the Upper West Side. One of those drawings is [now] in the collection of the Museum of the City of New York.”

Overall, Jurney enjoys constructing places of resonance for him that often includes “figures in quotidian pursuits, implying stories,” but he encourages viewers to engage in thinking about these places and what’s happening within them.

The solo show of Jurney’s works at George Billis Gallery opens May 25 and closes on July 2. ●

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