KENNY HARRIS

A Painterly Atmosphere

By Mackenzie McCreary

1

"Some artists hide the struggle," Kenny Harris says. "I like the idea that I'm finding my way as I'm painting and I want to take the viewer along for the ride."

In a new solo show at George Billis Gallery in New York, Harris brings 15 new works showcasing his idyllic interiors and architectural paintings from his travels in Italy. The show opens with a reception on Thursday, November 5, from 6 to 8 p.m.

Most of Harris' work reflects on places he's been and are often organized by location. When he began painting, he knew he wanted travel to be part of the process and worked hard to bake it into his practice. Last year, he traveled to Como, Italy in the summer, then went south to Naples for the winter. The process of painting helps the artist digest and reflect on his experiences, working more from memory than from photography or on-site sketches.

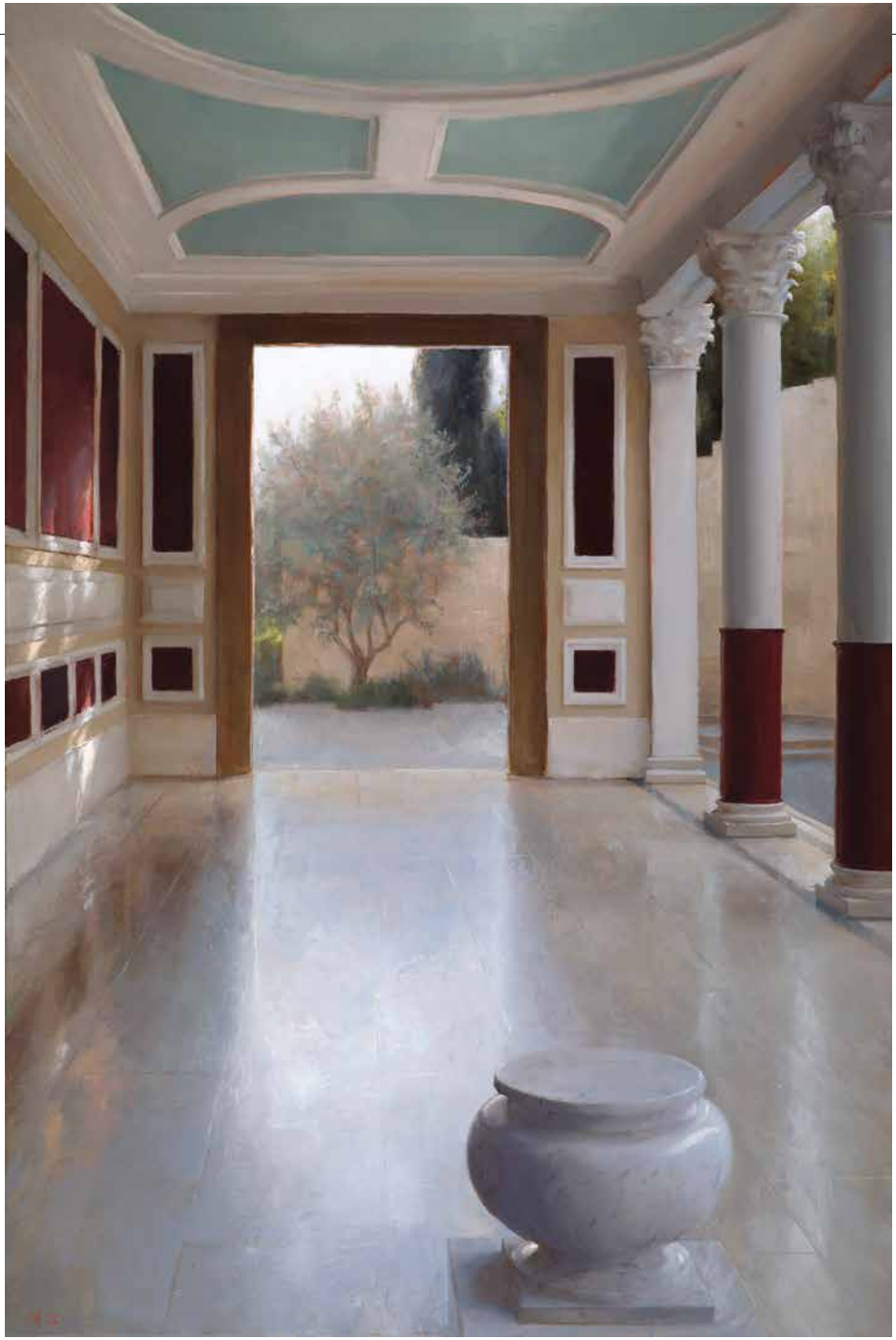
"I want the composition to grab you, the atmosphere to pull you in, and the paint surface to be the reward,"

2

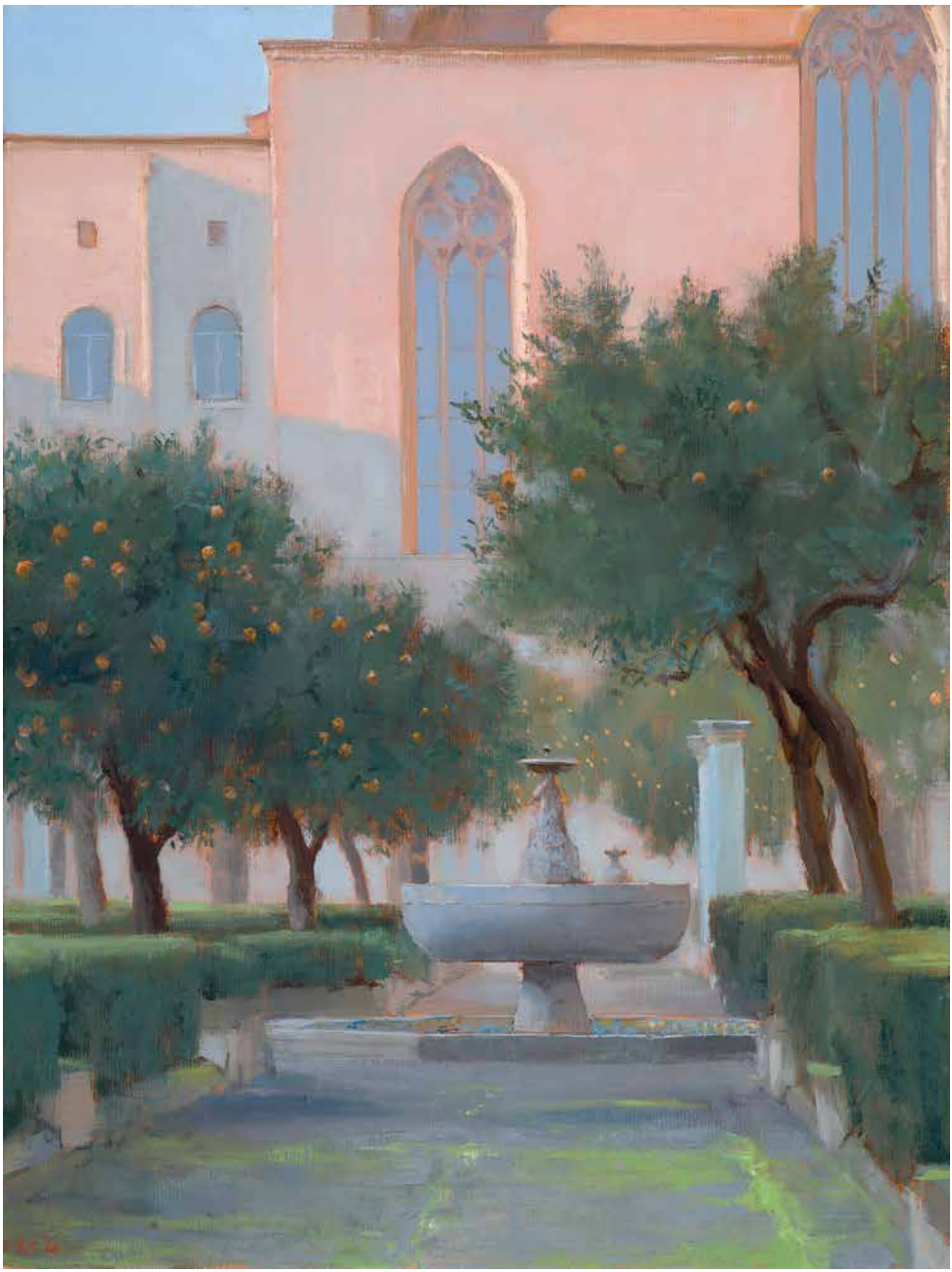
1
Dorothee's Daybed, Amsterdam, oil on panel, 16 x 24 in.

2
Villa Erba Interior, oil on canvas, 40 x 30in.

3
Getty Villa, oil on canvas, 36 x 24 in.



3



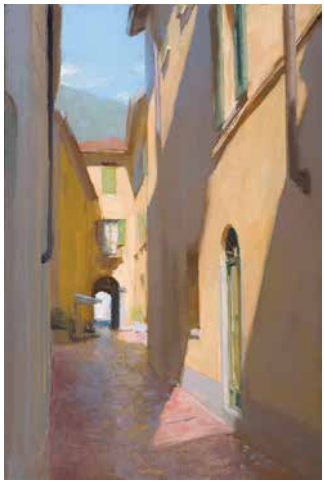
4

5

4
Monastero di Santa Chiara, Naples, oil on linen, 16 x 12 in.

5
Interior, Morning, oil on canvas, 24 x 16 in.

6
Side Street, Como, Italy, oil on panel, 15 x 10 in.



6

Harris says. "As you get closer, things fall apart, the paint gets heavier and your eye keeps moving around for a complete experience."

Harris is drawn to the juxtaposition of highly intricate marble or wainscotting beside fabrics and surfaces where he can utilize more gestural techniques. "I get excited by those crisp details lying right next to a more modern, heavy attack of paint and mark-making," he says. This dichotomy is apparent in Harris' piece titled *Villa Erba Interior*, where architectural sculptures and detailed tiling lie just outside the door of a room where paint swirls on the cream and pink walls.

Most of the artist's work features portals and pathways of some sort. Windows, doors and winding roads offer the viewer a hint of what lies just beyond view. "I think of these as passages, ways to divide space, shape light and bring the viewer on a journey," Harris says. "I'm always looking for situations where the eye is guided not only around the flat picture plane, but also invited in."

Harris says he approaches each piece in a different way, not wanting to lay out a set plan that he must follow. Rather, he lets the painting develop itself through his hand. "These are the games we play in our heads as painters to keep everyone on their toes," he says. "I like to push the materials to get certain effects, but I don't know that I want to achieve that when I start."

Inspired by works of Johannes Vermeer and Diego Velázquez, the artist seeks to replicate the liveliness of the brushwork as well as the deeply immersive atmosphere of the masters. However, he also aims to create a pleasurable experience for the viewer.

"I'm not painting profound, political works," Harris says. "But they are a way of exploring the world around us, digesting experiences and giving our brains a break from the modern world."

While most works portray Italy, the show also features artwork from several other locales, including Amsterdam and New York. The show hangs through December 5.

George Billis Gallery 526 W. 26th Street, Suite 209 • New York, NY, 10001 • (917) 273-8621 • www.georgebillis.com