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GALLERY-GOING

An Evocative Painter of Parks

By JOHN GOODRICH

Phyllis Floyd's 12 watercolors at the Painting Center discard everything extraneous — fancy technique, coy narratives — in order to capture essential impressions of New York City parks. Her work rewards with rich subtleties that belie her rather austere approach.

Ms. Floyd's deliberative and somewhat abstracted style doesn't exploit watercolor's possibilities for fleet, calligraphic strokes and fluid blends of color. The artist, however, takes advantage of the medium's unique luminosity, modulating her color washes to catch the weight of light. In "Madison Square Park #165" (2001), a sea of medium green fills the lower half of the image, imparting a shadowy thickness to the entire foreground. Above, evocatively distant, a thin stripe of brighter green announces a patch of sunlight. A shaded tree in the foreground speaks to an illuminated trunk in the background; the artist beautifully contrasts the former's retiring, purplish hues with the latter's brilliant warmth, conveyed by white paper glowing through an intense, dilute yellow wash. Ms. Floyd's shapes are obtuse, almost clumsy, but when animated by her colors, they compellingly describe light-saturated spaces.

In a number of the watercolors, park-goers read and chat on benches and lawns. These images cohere, intriguingly, from purely optical rather than social cues; the artist captures the immediacy of light while leaving her figures mostly featureless. Even so, Ms. Floyd conveys the individuality of gestures, so that in "Bryant Park #117" (2002), one can almost hear the conversation connecting four people across intervals of paperwhite shirts, pink arms, and dark green foliage. Ms. Floyd has neglected to include the legs of one chair, but so sure are her forms that the man occupying it holds comfortably in air.

Two watercolors depict studio scenes of artists intently drawing. In "At Minerva's #2" (2007), blue and reddish-umber planes coalesce as the form of a man, their upward sweep culminating in his gaze across a spacious jumble of drawing pads, chairs, and sections of floor. As with many of Ms. Floyd's figures, his pose is at once mute and eloquent — a poignant account of a fellow artist struggling to define his surroundings.

Gallery owners have to be resourceful in a city like New York, and in the case of Bruno Marina, survival has required a novel tactic: After an opening reception in the gallery's attractive exhibition space, the artwork is moved several doors down Atlantic Avenue to a spacious furniture showroom to take advantage of the greater foot traffic there. The gallery then serves as an extension of the showroom. This arrangement means that gallery-goers who miss the opening must contend with an expanse of sofas and lamps.

Under these conditions, some art works would be reduced to accessories. Fortunately, Kamilla Talbot's oil paintings and watercolor landscapes of New York, Iceland, and Puerto Rico are strong enough to command their own interest. The artist's painterly surfaces and structures of heightened colors suggest a connection with

Hans Hofmann School luminaries like Nell Blaine, Louisa Matthiasdottir, and Albert Kresch. Ms. Talbot's images, though, have a purposeful lyricism recognizably her own.

Like most of the more than 20 works here, "Bessastað á River 15" (2006) is smallish (less than 2 feet wide), but packs a punch. This painting muscularly shapes the folds of an Icelandic valley in verdant greens and browns. In the mid-distance, a slim, pale waterfall bisects a rocky bluff, anchoring a particular point in space; it converses with other discreet events, like the lone tree perched on a ridge, and the light note of a sheep grazing a foreground field. The artist

isn't simply depicting space, but invigorating it with a hierarchy of movements, with broad rhythms leading to, and elaborated by, telling details. Two larger paintings here don't achieve quite this pictorial intensity, but a number of the watercolors do, and in them the fluidity of the medium mirrors the liveliness of structure. In "Long Island Dune" (2004), a large sand bank, indicated by an area of blank paper framed by tints of sky and water, climbs fully three-fourths of the paper's vertical dimension. It extends palpably above one's point of view, turning the paper itself into an elastic field. In "Surfers 3" (2006), blue and gray washes establish a watery surface receding under an opalescent sky. Swaths of bare paper become trails of foam carrying and buffeting the dark, scratchy notes of surfers. While hardly revolutionary in style, these small compositions show vivid and original perceptions, finding their voices in a language of form.

Floyd until March 24 (52 Greene St., between Broome and Grand streets, 212-343-1060);

Talbot until April 29 (384 Atlantic Ave., between Hoyt and Bond streets, Brooklyn, 718-797-2077).



Phyllis Floyd, 'Bryant Park #117' (2002). PAINTING CENTER