

## ***Frame-up* (1997) / Joey P. Mánlapaz (b. 1954)**

**Suzanne Scott and Lynne M. Constantine**

How can a hyperrealist painting capture the movement and dynamism of a postmodern metropolis? In *Frame-up*, Joey Mánlapaz presents an arresting answer. By looking intently at—and really seeing—all of what is displayed in and reflected from the window of an antique dealer's storefront in the Eastern Market section of Washington, D.C., the artist is able to capture the attitude and ambience of that area of the city as well as its "real" appearance.

*Frame-up* is one of five large oil paintings in Joey Mánlapaz's Reflections Series. The antique store, which is something of a local landmark, is in the neighborhood where Mánlapaz lives and works. The painting is notable for its technical perfection, yet it is equally compelling emotionally. The viewer sees the window itself, the not-atypical antique store fare in the display behind the glass, and the reflections on the glass of the trees, traffic lights, stores, and people on the streets. Mánla-

paz says that the effect of simultaneity is intended to reflect the psychologic experience of viewing the shop's window. "The effect is akin to the experience of looking, or, perhaps, is a metaphor for looking," she said. "You think you see something, and it's a reflection."

Mánlapaz earned her MFA in painting from George Washington University in Washington, D.C., in 1980, and has been painting local street scenes since 1989. She works only in oil on linen, and she always works on a single series of paintings at a time. "I take a lot of photos on site, and then I create a composite from the different photos," she said. "I work on one piece until it is almost complete, and I set it aside and look at it for a while, and then go back to it later to put on the finishing touches."

In an interview, Mánlapaz said that people have told her that her early work reminds them of Edward Hopper's. She said, however, the great-

est influences on her painting are Richard Estes and Richard Diebenkorn. Like Estes' work, Mánlapaz's is so life-like that it is almost photographic. Her finely honed technical skills as a painter allow her to recreate the world around her in painstaking detail. Yet Mánlapaz, like other hyperrealist painters working in the post-photographic era, is not trying to paint like a photographer; rather, she uses realism as a technique to help her explore the emotional truth of the visible world. Unlike a photograph, which typically captures a single instant in time, each of Mánlapaz's paintings is the product of weeks, and sometimes months, of work. That temporal dimension adds layers of experience to the painting, much as a well-known landscape becomes richer and more complex each time the viewer encounters it. Time and the demands of her medium allow Mánlapaz to capture what no photographer could in each of the scenes she paints. Not only does she choose the subject matter carefully, with the light just the way she wants it, but she also seeks to understand and convey why the scene has an emotional impact on her. In short, Mánlapaz uses the technique of hyperrealism, but to her own end, as a reflection of the painter's sensibility.

Mánlapaz said she started painting street scenes when she noticed how lonely a 19th-

century building looked while construction was going on around it. She painted the building because she was drawn to it, not because she wanted to document the city. "Gradually, the old buildings and their individual characters are disappearing," she said, "Instead, we now see imposing but impersonal buildings."

After she felt she had discovered everything she could in the subject matter of her Reflections Series, Mánlapaz turned to what she called the "accessories" of the street, such as hot dog stands. Like her reflection paintings, her accessory paintings allowed her to capture the feel of the city's rhythms. "Hot dog stands are icons of the city's pace," she said. "They are an important part of the urban landscape, where people grab a quick lunch before running on to something else."

Mánlapaz's work is in the collections of corporate and government agencies and private collectors. She has been commissioned to create work for a number of firms around the world, and her work frequently appears in gallery and museum exhibitions in Washington, D.C. She is currently an adjunct professor of drawing and painting at the Corcoran College of Art and Design in Washington.

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*Frame-up*, 32" x 38" oil on linen, 1997. Used by permission of the artist.