

By  
**JEFF JOYCE**

Sharon Captured in Paint

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Colleen McGuire's exhibition of landscape paintings, "Night and Day" opened over Labor Day weekend at Standard Space. The sunlit, almost Scandinavian feel of the gallery in Sharon, Conn., is a perfect setting for the fresh, sturdy oil-on-panel paintings. Gallery owner Theo Coulombe is an accomplished landscape artist himself, using the big format camera to make monumental yet remarkably subtle prints.

You may have seen McGuire around town on occasion, tall and athletic, going at her portable French easel with the brushes. I find her enormously brave. Whenever I paint en plein air, it's furtive and secret, using water-based media on mostly small boards or salvaged book covers in or near my car so as not to be spotted. I don't want anyone to see my failures.



*'Shell (Extra Mart)', oil on panel, 13.5 x 24", 2023*

McGuire is out in full view, in pursuit of the pitch-perfect moment, the exact color combination that captures a familiar local vignette, however mundane the subject may seem at first. No one could paint the local Shell gas station at night in a more monumental, majestic fashion. Or those boxy USPS trucks parked at the post office. Thankfully, McGuire's work has no judgy critique of suburban sprawl. She paints the gas station with reverence as if it were the Parthenon lit up at night. She takes paradise and paints a parking lot (literally), and it's all good. "Standing and watching" is what poet Jimmy Schuyler called this sort of beneficent engagement with the world, and he is the correct poet to cite in reference to McGuire's paintings.

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She paints in lush, fat brushstrokes that always honor the integrity of the wood panel surface. This work is very New York School painting, and the precedent for her generous style is Fairfield Porter, the artist who epitomizes New England Summer.

The comparison to Porter may be too obvious and still not quite right. Her true spirit animal is Lois Dodd, the ninety-six-year-old master of the Heaven-in-a-Wildflower approach to painting. (There's a great photo of Dodd by Maine photographer Benjamin Magro: rail thin, standing in the middle of a wet country road in a plastic rain poncho, big floppy hat and hiking shoes. She totes a portable French easel, her collapsible stool around her neck like a yoke. Sweet and kind, perhaps, but there's also a no-nonsense tenacity: a badass feminist hero. Google the photo, it's wonderful). Confirming my instinct, Colleen told me some of the paintings in the show were done while in residence on Dodd's Maine property.



Metro North Station I, oil on panel, 14 x 17.5", 2023

The best paintings are of Sharon, and a few surrounding landmarks (like the Metro North train station that connects residents to NYC). The Pleasure Principle is at work in these paintings, which capture a particular aspect of this region. Along the way, New York School painting (Katz, Porter, Dodd, and Freilicher) became associated with The Good Life. Manicured green lawns and carefully tended flowerbeds, yet in Sharon black bears, bobcats and rattlesnakes are close in the mix. On summer mornings, an amusing parade passes my open kitchen window facing onto the road: a tractor groans by, pulling tandem trailers piled high with hay bales, followed closely by a couple of

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electrical and plumbing contractor trucks, and right behind, engine gunning, a multi-million-dollar 1967 Ferrari 250 GTB, and finally, a woman in running shorts huffing past, several miles into her morning run.

Often when people want to compliment an artist they say, “you’re so gifted,” with the implication that the ability to paint well is some celestial package dropped by the gods, wrapped with a bow. McGuire is a gifted painter. But the gift comes from the work. Getting out there, doing it every day, to be present at the rare moment when the paint cooperates and becomes something wonderful, all by itself. That’s the gift. But you have to show up to receive it, day or night.

*Jeff Joyce is an artist in Sharon, Conn.*



'Yellow Garage', oil on panel, 13 x 16", 2021