

GLADSTONE GALLERY

Bruce Hainley, "Best of 2006: Maureen Gallace," *Artforum*, December 2006, p 294-295.

ARTFORUM

*I wanted to get as far as my proto-dream-house,
my crypto-dream-house, that crooked box
set up on pilings, shingled green,
a sort of artichoke of a house, but greener
(boiled with bicarbonate of soda?),
protected from spring tides by a palisade
of—are they railroad ties?
(Many things about this place are dubious.)
I'd like to retire there and do nothing,
or nothing much, forever, in two bare rooms:
look through binoculars, read boring books,
old, long, long books, and write down useless
notes,
talk to myself, and, foggy days,
watch the droplets slipping, heavy with light.*

—Elizabeth Bishop, from "The End of March"



MAUREEN GALLACE frequently paints houses—the buildings and landscapes, destinations nearby and routes to and from her hometown of Monroe, Connecticut; views and memories of views, abstract and yet faithful to the proto-crypto-structures that give meaning to the phrase “where I come from.”

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At a moment with too much talk of things being done *over there* so that they don't happen *here at home*, there is little talk of how the elusive construct of "homeland security" is a proto- and crypto-fantasy. While it would be remiss to yoke too swiftly the construct to Gallace's paintings, the resolution of her work, which at first glance can seem as innocuous as a Christmas card, allows a place for thinking about the political unconscious of domesticity, even if that is not "why" the work is made.

Her pictures of structures—utterly unnostalgic and strange—manage to make most other contemporary painting look thin, overeager, and, in the end, fearful. This was clear at the Art Institute of Chicago's generous exhibition of Gallace's recent landscapes, portraits, and still lifes, organized by James Rondeau in collaboration with the artist. After some time with her work, it is difficult to imagine looking at the stridencies of Lisa Yuskavage, John Currin, Julie Mehretu, et al., so desperate they are to disappear vulnerability behind historical posing and earnest gimmickry, risking little or nothing.

Instead, Gallace's paintings, while at times taciturn and recalcitrant, convey a self and its privacies, a world where light registers an emotional state, color marks the temperature of temperament, and brushwork tracks a psychic meteorology. Take *Cape Cod, Winter, 2004*, a meditation on the empathetic possibility of ice blues, salt grays, and littoral neutrality depicted in the uncluttered form of two white, unwindowed, undooed, unenterable units, where light is slant and erasing, and consider it in relation to *February, 2005*, with its huddled, crimson buildings and sloe-eyed entrances, snowy fields, and snow-laced trees warmed by an early spring's sudden, unexpected arrival. Nature, of course, doesn't care whether anyone finds it welcoming or not.

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Gallace confronts this natural obliviousness in the accuracy of her views, and yet she also renders the mood—hers, anyone’s—that allows certain winter days, months, to seem starker or more resplendent than others. *February*’s valentine remains all the more moving and cherry-blossom tender because it refuses conclusiveness: Despite Gallace’s unerring composition, which aims to make the casual perfect, she manages to engage the cheerful flux of the daily, the interruption of being, sunlight breaking through cloud.



Opposite page: **Maureen Gallace, *Cape Cod, Winter*, 2004**, oil on panel, 11 x 14". This page, clockwise from top left: **Maureen Gallace, *Long Island*, 2006**, oil on linen, 10 x 10". **Maureen Gallace, *February*, 2005**, oil on panel, 11 x 14". **Maureen Gallace, *Bryan*, 2003**, oil on panel, 9 x 12".

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Gallace uses her own photographs as source material, winnowing particular vantages of her local knowledge, but these are little more than placeholders, as it should be obvious from looking that the artist abjures making work “about” photography or the photographic. Her pictures take up a lineage, from

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Cézanne and Gwen John to Morandi and Ryman, of what could be called homemade, rather than machine-made, modernity: As much as they are “about” painting, they approach a site, allegorical and not, a concept as well as an actuality, called “home”—the place where sexuality and being are formed, where anyone first begins to think about who he or she is and desires, the question of *leaving* home, and the possibility of homelessness, in the offing.

At this point, in an earlier draft of this text, I mentioned Neil Young’s *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere* and then swerved into some kind of catchy autobiographical ramble about my own bedroom when I was growing up, a converted attic space where I would listen to records (Donna Summer, Blondie, X), read, do whatever—nothing, or almost nothing—for hours on end, in a room with a door I could lock from the inside, a room that helped form, I guess, whoever I am. But the first person now catches in my throat like a fish bone. I remember reading something about memoir being a kind of disfigurement or defacement. So much more intense to convey something—dark, salt, intimate—that mines the personal by way of the oblique, seemingly neutral, or mute. Gallace’s untimely, unlikely considerations of earthly abidance provide the challenge of such observation, evidence heavy with light.