

CITY AND COUNTRY: THE ART OF LISA BRESLOW



In oils, watercolors and monotypes, this artist conveys her unique vision of the world.



Central Park, Before Dawn, 2010, Oil and pencil on panel, 20 X 50 inches

by Sara Evans

There is a profound mystery at the heart of Lisa Breslow's work, an uncanny ability to draw the viewer into her visual world. I first saw her paintings in a Tonalist retrospective at the Spanierman Gallery, "In a Tonalist Mood," in the company of such important painters as George Inness, Arthur Wesley Dow, J.M. Whistler, Henry Prellwitz and John Francis Murphy. And among these, two small, contemporary paintings by Lisa Breslow were a stand-out. They compelled me into her moody world. One was a

landscape, the other a scene of Central Park—and both evoked and surpassed many of the classic works on view.

Breslow, who is pretty and elfin, is a serious painter with an impressive resume. Her current solo show, *Cityscapes/Landscapes*, is on view at the Academy Art Museum in Easton, Maryland until the end of May. Erik Neil, who is the director of that museum, has been following Breslow's career closely and over time. He notes, "I have known Lisa for a long time, and worked with her on the



Flowers in a Glass 3, 2010, Oil and pencil on panel, 12 X 12 inches



Island Bay 2, 2005, Oil on panel, 20x20 inches

"Picturing Long Island" exhibit at the Heckscher Museum on Long Island. I have followed her evolution from Tonalism to her cityscapes, and have noted the emergence of a crisper, more contemporary style. These urban scenes demonstrate evolving skills and vision, and a new sense of light. Seeing her growth as an artist made me sure this work would appeal to the visitors to our museum. There is nothing sentimental or saccharine about Lisa Breslow's work, which is a pitfall for many realistic artists. Rather, her work is

rigorous, disciplined and honest."

Breslow has had many solo shows at major galleries both in New York City and Connecticut. She has also participated in group shows in New York, Philadelphia, Long Island, Massachusetts and Minnesota. She has been the recipient of major prizes, grants and residencies, including the Scottish Cawdor residency, two prestigious Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grants and the S.J. Wallace Truman prize awarded by the august National Academy in New York City.

"But," Lisa Breslow insists, "it wasn't until I rented a studio in Long Island City that I really began to find my true identity as an artist." That simple move, the move across New York City's East River, was a transformative event for this artist. Previously, she had set up shop in her one bedroom apartment in Chelsea she shares with her husband. "Moving to my studio moved me out of my comfort zone," Breslow observes. "It has forced me to grow as an artist."

An artist whose every work evinces a powerful



West Village Street, Winter's Day 1, 2009, Oil and pencil on panel, 24 X 24 inches



Meadow #2, 2003, Oil on Panel, 10 X 10 inches

sense of place, this new studio space, looking back at the Manhattan skyline from across the river, gave Breslow a whole new perspective and steered her work in multiple new directions. It was a place to work and paint without any distractions. After years of working in Central Park, Breslow's art suddenly took off, becoming both lighter and more transparent, and moving gradually towards increased abstraction.

Central Park has been an important focal point for her work. She has painted it in all seasons, and at all times of day. She has painted the park in oils and in watercolors, and then in monotypes that capture the park's mysterious qualities, the sense of its being both the center of the city and somehow apart from it. Buildings advance and recede; their lights shine and are reflected in the lake. Lake and trees, the surrounding buildings, all coalesce into a compelling and enigmatic whole in this work. "Central Park at night is magic," Lisa Breslow observes. "It has a timeless, 19th century quality." Perhaps these feelings explain why this work, the Central Park paintings and monotypes, evoke J.M Whistler's exquisite "Nocturnes," his moody, Tonalist paintings of fogbound London and misty Paris in the late 19th century. Tiffany and Co. have chosen one of Breslow's Central Park paintings for its London store, a way of affirming their New York roots.

In contrast, Long Island City is drably post-industrial. Its mundane qualities have forced Breslow to take another look at the city. The city from her studio window is suffused with the ordinary: "Once I started painting cityscapes, I couldn't stop," she observes. "It surrounds me; it's how I experience life." She paints trucks making deliveries and people going about their daily lives. Because this artist is so observant and sees her world with such clarity, she records the different qualities of light and finds beauty and mystery in observing and painting the intricate patterns of urban life. Her studio continues to nurture her as an artist. "It is," she notes simply, "my haven."

Lisa Breslow paints her oil paintings on thick wooden boards, which give the work added heft and gravitas. Her early landscapes are not pretty pictures; they are darkly intense and moody, capturing coming storms and late afternoons. Having grown up on Long Island, the daughter of an artist, she is particularly attuned to coast and sea. Although she has never studied printmaking, she now makes monotypes. "I fell in love with making monotypes," she observes. "You have to learn to let yourself go; you never know exactly what you're going to get. There is a surprise element." She paints on a plexiglass plate, and then pulls a single paper print. "It's a great way to explore a subject."

One day not long ago, Breslow bought a few flowers at a corner bodega and set them in a glass in her studio window. And painted them. And then again, and some more. She affirms, "It becomes a way of binding nature and the city, of bridging

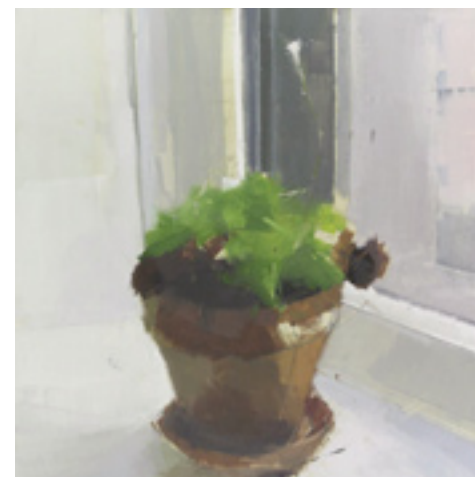


Flowers in a Glass 1, 2010, 12 x 12 inches, oil and pencil on panel

indoors and out."

Lisa Breslow has a close and successful relationship with her dealer, Kathryn Markel, who has galleries in both Chelsea and Bridgehampton. Markel, who represents numerous important artists notes, "Because Lisa started out as a landscape painter whose work was concerned with light and atmosphere, as she contemplates the built environment, her cityscapes have a sense of light and air. You can just feel the fog, and she emphasizes the greenery of the city. That's what makes them so real. Her work is a study in contrasts - between nature and man, greenery and concrete, abstraction and realism." This rare skill, that of bridging urban and rural scenes, the man-made environment and nature itself, animates and compels Lisa Breslow to newer visions and to an increasingly impressive body of work.

Lisa Breslow's current show, "Cityscapes / Landscapes" is on view at the Academy Art Museum in Easton, Maryland until May 29. (www.academyartmuseum.org). She is represented by Kathryn Markel Fine Arts, 529 West 20th Street, New York City, N.Y. 10011, 212.366.5368 (www.markelfinearts.com) ♦



Cactus Flower, 2010, 12 x 12 inches, oil and pencil on panel



Long Island City Street #2, 2008, Oil and pencil on panel, 20 X 20 inches



Heartland, 2005, 8 X 8 inches, oil on panel