

Review from: 'CITY Newspaper', Rochester, USA, September 23, 2009, p24

This article is also available through the CITY newspaper website:

<http://www.rochestercitynewspaper.com/e...er-Harris/>

ART REVIEW: Sharon Gordon and Peter Harris

The space between

By Rebecca Rafferty on September 23, 2009

You've heard that old adage, "It's not the destination, but the journey." How many times have you finally arrived at a location or at a goal, only to experience an anticlimactic, underwhelming result? So after a rest, we plot our next move. Life is transition. For the two painters currently up at the Oxford Gallery, the journey is the point. Their focus lingers on the space between the start and the finish, defiantly immortalizing the visual white noise of our passage.

Though both artists choose oil as their medium, Sharon Gordon and Peter Harris couldn't differ more in style and subject matter. Gordon's textured, mysterious works make the viewers feel as though they are approaching the glow of an urban area from the far-off dusky rurals; Harris has us enveloped in those little pockets of well-defined city light. Gordon's rich and complicated tonalities are stacked Rothko-like, and oscillate between abstract and representational. Her enigmatic "River XX" has areas of pale gray-blue and deeper indigos divided by a line of bright white and yellow, making it seem like we are looking across a body of water at a horizon of harbor lights.

Gordon's atmospheres buzz with motion; we are being swifted through environs of shifting light and air. The horizontal motion indicated by the brushwork in "Terrain IX" reminds me exactly of whizzing by a distant commercial scrap in the wintry night. Pale lights amid a vague dark tree line in the central stripe fade to a greenish-blue snow before giving way to the dim again. But that's just how my mind filled in the picture - Gordon invites the viewer to bring themselves to the wistfully lovely scenes. "Reflect II" seems especially like land: a golden field and tree line, a grayish pale autumnal sky. Other works are vaguer by far, their forms seeming to dissolve before your eyes.

By contrast, Harris's work is crisp and clear, portraits of usually bustling worlds in the still hours. In "Night Lot, 12:30AM," rows of 18-wheelers slumber under the near-daylight glow of tall lot-lights burning, regardless of the absence of human presence, like a dozen amber suns in an ink-black sky. The damp ground of the lot reflects them like the still surface of a lake. Aptly placed close-by is Gordon's "Terrain VI," in which a similar red-gold radiance permeates both the sky and the calm face of the water, cut by a shadowy line of land in the distance.

Harris captures extreme minutiae in his work, whether he reveals his hand or not: in some pieces the painting is photographically tight, while other works have visible brushy

texture, though the energetic air alone conveys motion in a quiet, frozen world.

The artists share a common ground in the isolated feeling the viewer gains from their images. Though Harris's works are full of man's additions to the landscape (roads, bridges, buildings, cars) and are flooded with artificial light, the loneliness of the scenes is pervasive. This is true even in the midst of activity, as in "Downtown, 8:50 PM," where we stand in the middle of a city avenue lined with tall buildings and chains of streetlamps trailing to the vanishing point, with a couple of cars lazily approaching. Gordon's "River V" maroons the viewer under a golden sky's furrowed brow, hanging contemplative and large over a low horizon of raised and rushing white strokes, muffled in the distance.

Over and over, the color choices of the two painters point out, Impressionist-like, the transitory and breathtaking effects of light and weather on the world. Harris's "Expressway, 11:35 PM" has a bright orange lamp-lit pavement under a deep black sky. Gordon's "Distant Land III" might be an abandoned urban ruin on the precipice of a waterfall, under a massive stretch of brown sky. This odd color is surprisingly comforting in its warm tones, and the bank of mist below both conceals and enhances the eerie lights. By the time I reached the small canvas of "Snowy Drive, 11:45 PM," I began to picture Harris stopping and snapping pictures every mile or so of his journeys, seduced by the pale orange curve in the road, the twin red taillights ahead, the dim cobweb of power lines, and wondered how he ever reached his destinations.

Interestingly, much of the activity and focus is on the horizon lines of the images - even with Harris's expressways, most of the activity of cars and lights is concentrated on that line. Lights tower above, and reflections stretch toward us at the bottom of the pictures, but our focus is on that distant middle horizon, aiming at where we're going. And of course, when we get there, the picture will have changed.