

THE BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

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Diana Horowitz: *Light is a Place*

By David Whelan



Diana Horowitz, *Siena, February*, 2024. Oil on panel, 6 x 6 inches.

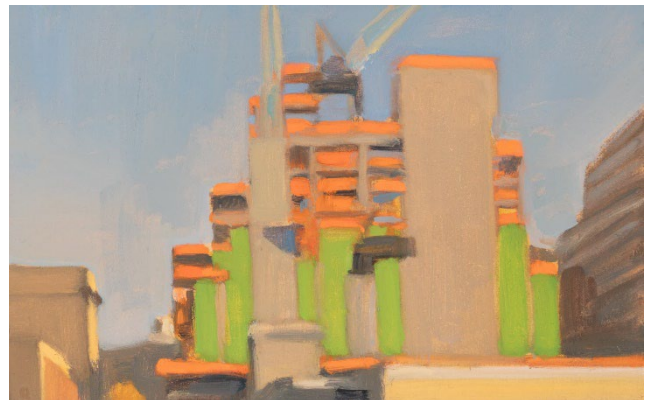
In Diana Horowitz's exhibition *Light is a Place* at Bookstein Projects, we see a row of small-scale paintings, intimate and portable, depicting subjects that range from the Manhattan skyline to hilltop towns in Italy, cows grazing in a field, and the momentary release of fireworks at night. There is a strong sense of atmospheric perspective in every painting: edges soften, forms are less clear further away, and everything becomes bluer as it recedes into pictorial depth. Horowitz's paintings live within this untouchable place, far in the distance.

It's revealing to consider what is missing from Horowitz's paintings. In traditional landscape painting, a foregrounded object is set against a middle ground and a background, leading the eye gradually into the distance. Horowitz omits the foreground in her paintings entirely. Here, vision isn't seized by a sharp shadow or a burst of intense color, but rather rests in the understated interaction of light and shadow, warmth and coolness.

These subtleties hold our attention, although it is a tenuous and delicate capture.

In *Siena, February* (2024) we see a loose abstract landscape of distant hills and built structures. Land, sky, and buildings come together with subtle modulations of brown, green, and yellow. Closer to us is a bright wedge shape of soft orange-pink light surrounded by dark green. The moment merely suggests a road bending around an illuminated wall, surrounded by dark green foliage. It is a stepping stone for our perception. It's fascinating to see how Horowitz, despite her incredible attention and focus, avoids any rigidity or containment. Her pursuit of harmony remains open and porous.

Most of the paintings offer an unobstructed view. *Construction from Pier 40* (2024) is a beautiful outlier, showing us a new building being erected, blocking the rest of the city. Its stacked planes crowd the center of the picture plane, guiding our attention around this rising edifice—but not before we enjoy its abstract construction on the canvas. Swatches of warm gray abut bright green and orange; I am not aware of another artist who pairs the color of concrete so beautifully with that of neon plastic, harmonizing both while keeping them dramatic and charged.



Diana Horowitz, *Construction from Pier 40*, 2024. Oil on masonite, 5 x 8 inches.



Diana Horowitz, *Fireworks Anguillara*, 2024. Oil on linen, 12 x 8 inches.

Shadows are scarce in Horowitz's paintings. Light and atmosphere proliferate. However, in a series of three nocturnal works, we see the inverse. Painted from a drawing the artist made on scene, *Fireworks Anguillara* (2024) shows a firework exploding low over the horizon. As is the case in so much of Horowitz's work, we view the spectacle from an elevated position, most likely a balcony. Even the solitary firework is below our line of sight. In the distance a familiar smoky haze lingers. Elsewhere, parts of the city are lit up by electric light that punctuates the darkness, creating a composition that leads our eye into the picture and down the coastline. The paint here is characteristically thin, scraped down to the canvas in parts, showing the artist's propensity for staying close to the surface.

The painting that affected me the most in this exhibition was *Upper Manhattan, Haze* (2021). There are several paintings of Manhattan on view here that show the city from above, looking down from on high and softening the city's grid, flirting with disappearance. But this painting shows a portion of the city that I don't recognize. There is an overwhelming haze throughout the picture that radiates with gray light. Three stout apartment buildings stand in a row across a river, behind them another row on the horizon, slightly cooler in the distance. There is barely any contrast

in this painting, only a few judicious modulations of color and tone. And yet it held my attention—more than that, it gripped my heart, and made the distance between me and the world palpable.

Many landscape painters aspire to capture a particular sensation of light. By translating the interaction of light from a given landscape into a painting, the artist can evoke a sense of place. Horowitz does this not by focusing on a specific object, but rather the indefinable space that surrounds her. Her paintings invite us to step into her view and dwell in this middle space. The places we want to be, the things we want of ourselves, often feel like they are somewhere out on the horizon, in places we can only observe. In this space of yearning, Horowitz offers a hazy image, one affected by atmosphere, obscured and clarified by light. In her mirage-like pictures, we understand that the self is just as hazy and hard to define as the atmosphere around us.



Diana Horowitz, *Upper Manhattan, Haze*, 2021. Oil on aluminum, 5 x 7 inches.

David Whelan is an artist living and working in Brooklyn.