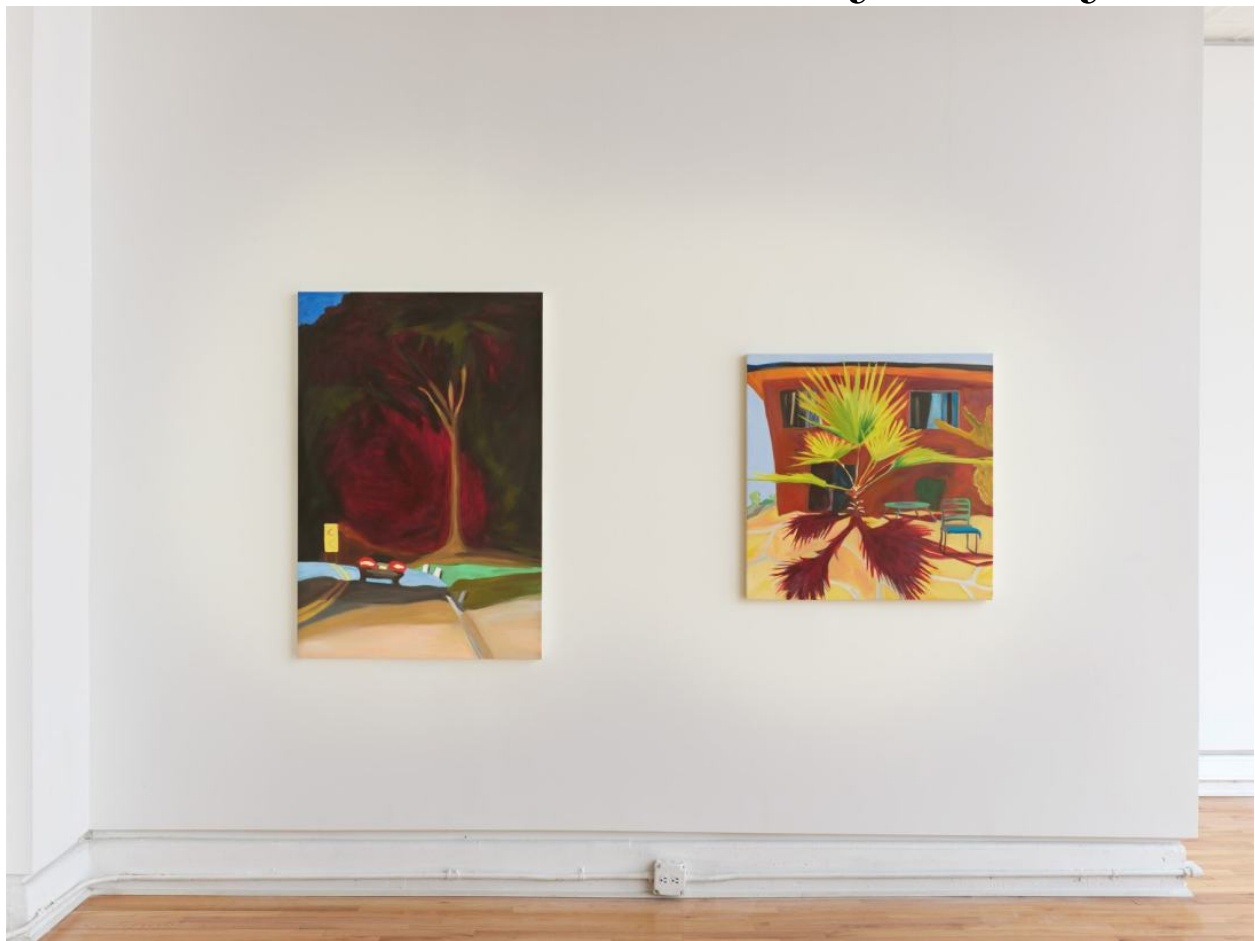


CRISTIN TIERNEY

ANTE

Up the ANTE

Modern Stillness: Maureen O’Leary’s “Both/And” at Cristin Tierney Gallery

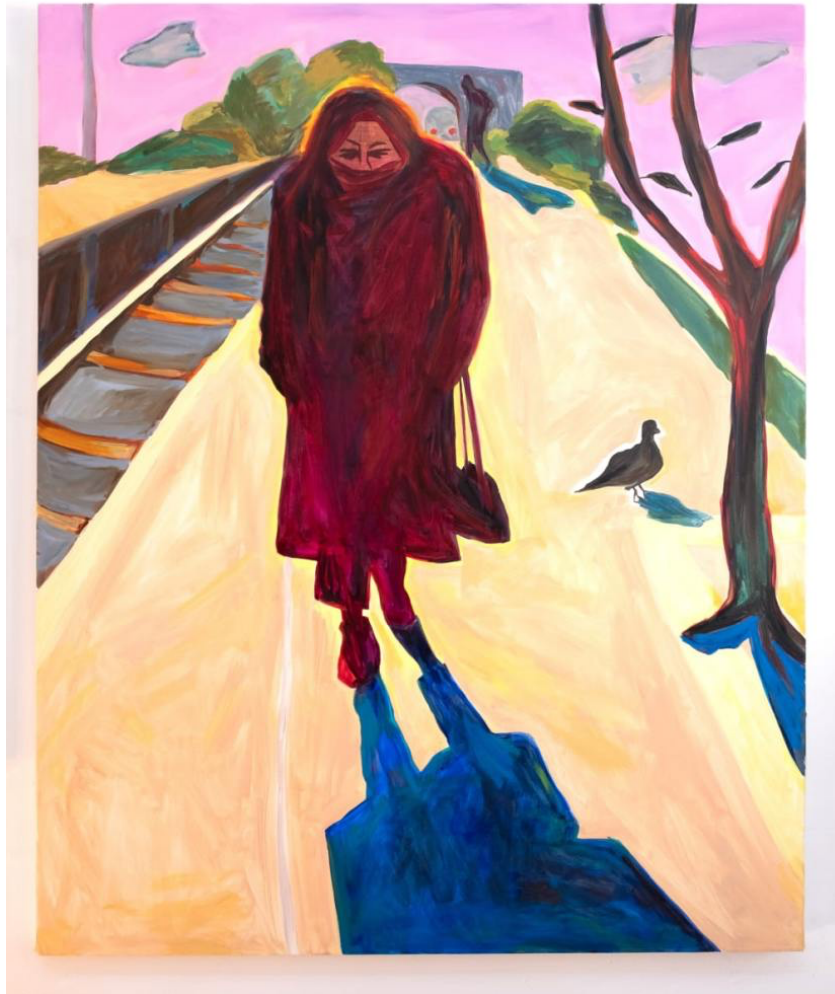


Audra Lambert, May 16, 2022

In *Both/And*, Maureen O’Leary’s exhibition on view at Cristin Tierney Gallery through May 27, the artist presents a cinematic body of narrative imagery engaging with moments of stillness in nature and in her subjects’

CRISTIN TIERNEY

everyday lives. Drawing on modern portraiture and fusing these impulses within the contemplation embedded within the everyday, O'Leary's ability to evoke stillness in her subjects is indicative of both her competence as a painter and her discerning knowledge of art history. Focusing in this exhibition review on the figurative paintings on view, it is apparent that the artist presents everyday scenes subtly removed from the digital realm. This adds a timeless quality to the imagery in these compositions. One result of this careful presentation is that artist's portraits and landscapes manage to slow the eye, effectively expressing the psychological charge infusing these painted scenes. The artist's works freeze individual moments in time, distinctly separating each out from a successive series of events to instead simmer and soak in the silence of these specific snapshots.



Commuter Platform with Dogwood (My Mother) Maureen O'Leary, oil on linen, 2022

In works such as *Commuter Platform with Dogwood (My Mother)* and *High Rise Neighbor*, the artist isolates individuals, presenting them within a seemingly static scene. These works maintain a dialogue with an existing impulse in art theory toward slowly digesting the image presented to the viewer, known as the Slow Art movement. In addition, O'Leary's tendency to present the individual framed within a clearly defined landscape continues the visual lexicon ignited during Modern French painting of the Second Empire: the imagery which defines a potent individualism in painting, overthrowing the prevailing trend of genre painting prevalent at the time.

Arthur P. Shimamura, PhD documented the Slow Art Movement in an article for *Psychology Today* in 2014. The author outlines that "...the Slow Art movement is grounded on the premise that one should savor artworks in a conscious and deliberate manner rather than simply gulp each one down as "eye candy." Phil Terry conceived the idea in 2014 when he spent hours at the Jewish Museum in New York focusing primarily on two abstract paintings—Hans Hoffman's *Fantasia* and Jackson Pollock's *Convergence*." (1) Aligned with Shimamura's assertions that one should savor artworks "in a conscious and deliberate manner," O'Leary's paintings employ two distinct formal qualities which support a conscious recognition of the imagery presented in her works. In the aforementioned works, the artist renders her subjects in outlines that are clearly defined and distinct from their surroundings. The figure is presented in a different color, contrasting their individual bodies from the nearby environment. The artist also takes the additional step of presenting individual figures who are wrapped in themselves rather than engaging in conversation or activity with any nearby figures. Whether walking alone, pensively, or smoking a cigarette, O'Leary paints her subjects with a deliberate focus on their introspection, encouraging a conscious means of engaging with the composition for her viewer.



High Rise Neighbors, Maureen O'Leary, oil on linen, 2021

Stephen Eisenmann in the historical survey text, *Nineteenth Century Art: A Critical History*, denotes that the origins of modern painting were formed during the salons held at the of the French Second Empire. The author notes the shift in consciousness espoused by painters at the time, revealing that “Individualism and commodified consciousness – masked

and justified by a crude ideology of Naturalism....replaced history painting.” Among the French painters of the mid-1850s, individualism prevailed as a means of expressing unique identity, as Eisenmann specifies that among these French Second Empire artists, “Individualism was dialectally refined to include both personal autonomy and the popular collectivity,” thus ushering in Modernism in France at close of the Second Empire. (2)

This since ingrained sense of individualism informed many of the earliest photographs and films emerging during the 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly in Western traditions. It is this persistent sense of framing an individual’s psychological experience of the world around them that infuses Maureen O’Leary’s works in *Both/And* with a potent sense of self-awareness. In *Scholar on a Tour*, a figure is wrapped in reading an article, seemingly oblivious, on a hero’s journey toward attaining a personal sense of truth and understanding of one aspect of their lived reality – while remaining distant from their physical surroundings. This rapturous, analog sense of self-involvement with reading material in a town square exudes a cinematic sense of discovery, a Cindy Sherman-esque vignette framed within de Chirico-style environs.



Scholar on a Tour, Maureen O'Leary, oil on linen, 2022

In *Both/And*, the artist brings a keen awareness of the subject to light via a careful attention to color and composition, allowing for a reframing of our experience as viewers capable of navigating this nuanced understanding of stillness in action in contemporary painting.

Both/And : a solo show of works by Maureen O'Leary, remains on view at Cristin Tierney Gallery, 219 Bowery Fl 2 in Manhattan through Friday May 27th.

(1) Shimamura, Arthur P. "The Slow Art Movement: It's More than Meets the Eye." *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers. Accessed May 16, 2022. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/in-the-brain-the-beholder/201411/the-slow-art-movement-its-more-meets-the-eye. >

CRISTIN TIERNEY

(2) Eisenman, Stephen, Thomas E. Crow, Brian Lukacher, Linda Nochlin, David L. Phillips, and Frances K. Pohl. *Nineteenth-Century Art: A Critical History*. New York, NY: Thames et Hudson, 2020 (281)