



## PAINTERS ON PAINTINGS

Xico Greenwald on Diana Horowitz

March 4, 2025



Diana Horowitz, *Cows in Banner, WY, 2024*, Oil on aluminum, 5 x 7 inches.

In her latest exhibition at Bookstein Projects, on view through April 18th, artist Diana Horowitz presents more than thirty paintings made over the last three years. Executed “*en plein air*” around her hometown of New York City, up and down the boot of Italy, knee-deep in the grassy plains of Wyoming, or on the beaches of Cape Cod, the pictures gathered here are imbued with rare sensitivity to the beauty of the world around us. Though these works are small, mostly just six or seven inches wide, they are an eyeful.

The plein air practice of painting in the landscape began in the 18th century. Before the invention of the paint tube in 1843, artists working outside transported

their oil paint first in pig bladders and then using glass syringes. Back then, creating outdoor “*études*,” or studies from nature, was cumbersome. Furthermore, on-location landscape painting was considered useful only insofar as it provided artists with private reference materials that they could then use inside the studio to inform more substantial “finished” historical landscapes. After the invention of the paint tube, Impressionists popularized open air painting. Yet today, with the advent of photography, the practice may strike some as anachronistic.

In 1996, as a senior in high school in Washington DC, I interned with the National Gallery of Art’s Department of Exhibition Design during the installation of a show titled “In the Light of Italy: Corot and Early Open-Air Painting.” That exhibit highlighted initial landscape studies by artist Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot made between 1825 and 1828 during the painter’s first visit to Rome. I vividly remember seeing Corot’s jewellike canvases emerging from their wood crates, bright with the light of the Roman Campagna. Curator Philip Conisbee, writing in the show catalog, noted that none of the “*études*” on display at the National Gallery had ever been publicly exhibited during Corot’s lifetime. Back then, Conisbee explained, “still life and landscape painting were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy of the genres, because lowly nature was their subject and their basis in perception was contradictory to the more cerebral, conceptual approach of ideal, imaginative art, which was invested with a moral dimension.”

As a still life painter, I share Horowitz’s devotion to working from direct observation. Like Horowitz, I too value the immediacy, the vitality, that comes from first-hand encounters with the natural world. And, in a time where AI art is on the rise, the experience of human “touch” in a painting feels more important than ever. In her show at Bookstein Projects, Horowitz invites visitors to reconsider the importance of the alla prima landscape tradition as an unexhausted source of artistic inspiration, demonstrating that plein air painting can still lead to vibrant, stand-alone artworks.



Diana Horowitz, *South From Uptown, Overcast*, 2022, Oil on Masonite, 6 x 6 inches.

washy mid-value earthtones describing the brick, steel and glass of Manhattan real estate with the wobbly grace of an Anne Ryan collage. A needle tower, often viewed as a blight on the New York City skyline, its shape determined more by greed than any other consideration, is transfigured here into an essential compositional element, as the pale pink sky, painted with a slight impasto, creates positive/negative tension, locking like a puzzle piece around the buildings below.

Or consider “Cows in Banner, WY,” 2024, an artwork that at first glance looks loosely painted with soft focus. Here brushstrokes of yellow green weave together to convey dry, discolored prairie grasses as cows graze and laze on a hillside. But a close look discloses great precision. Horowitz captures a range of bovine poses, cows standing or sitting, with just a few well placed strokes. A sense of deep space is effectively communicated with tiny black dots representing cattle a mile away on a faraway hilltop. The clouds of Big Sky country seem to have the same sort of soft edges as the grasslands but on the far right of the horizon line the hilltop comes into sharp focus as the light changes from overcast to crisp. Horowitz’s attention is present in every detail.

All the works in this show are just as satisfying as these two, picked more or less at random. I encourage visitors to this exhibition to put their phones aside and live fully, if vicariously, through Horowitz as she delights in carrying on the *plein air* tradition.

Xico Greenwald is a painter and art critic based in New York.

Greenwald, Xico, “Xico Greenwald on Diana Horowitz,” *Painters on Paintings*, Mar 4, 2025.  
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Whether depicting newly constructed high-rise condos, low-income housing developments in the outer boroughs, or a picturesque European village at the foot of the Alps, Horowitz’s diminutive landscapes at Bookstein Projects offer up big-time visual pleasure. Refreshingly, she adjusts her painterly approach with each change of scenery, alternating her surfaces between linen, Masonite and aluminum, while also changing up her paint handling, scale, layout and color palette from picture to picture. Here the artist’s eye and hand are alive to the scene before her, translating her visual sensations into softly applied strokes of carefully calibrated colors that seem to sing together. The pictures here buzz with life as Horowitz finds painterly solutions to represent what she sees and feels.

Take, for example, “South From Uptown, Overcast,” 2022, one in a series of four views in this show looking toward midtown Manhattan. The bottom half of the composition features a harmony of thinly painted,



Xico Greenwald, *Basket of Fruit, Yellow Butterflies and Jug*, 2025, Oil on canvas over panel, 48 x 54 inches.