



Off-road artistry: A photo by painter Nick Miller frames his perspective.

Opening a Door on His Creative Process

By BLAKE GORNIE
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NEW YORK — You could say that emerging Irish artist Nick Miller is the un-Morandi.

Giorgio Morandi is being feted uptown in an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum. Everyone knows about it.

Miller's gallery show is tucked away in the exhibition space of the New York Studio School, a peculiar art academy that has hung on for decades in Greenwich Village. It's pure chance I got to it at all, though it's one of the season's best shows.

Morandi was a taciturn Italian hachelor, a stay-at-home Catholic who sometime worked for months or even years on one tiny still life.

Miller, who is 46 and lives with his wife and two sons, is a witty, London-born Jew ("the only one in County Sligo," he jokes). He paints big landscapes that are all about being out and about, in as close contact with the world as he can manage.

He manages, thanks to an old boxtruck he's fitted up as a studio on wheels. With one inside wall hung with a canvas, Miller rolls up to a scene that interests him, throws the back door open and there he is, ready to paint the view.

Crucially, however, Miller doesn't only paint the view. He renders his whole act of painting it. His landscapes come edged with peculiar strips of abstract mess that it can take a while to figure out: What we're seeing is the frame of the truck's 40-inch-wide rear door, along with the slathered paint that ends up there when Miller reaches out to scrape his tools on it.

Painting, these pictures declare, is not about seeing how things are. It's a very material process that constructs a view of one place, from another, with an artist in the middle busy doing the constructing.

Of course, that's true of every figurative painting, even a Morandi bottle scene. But Morandi, like many artists, takes some pains to hide his artifice: Compare a photo of a bottle-forest in Mo-

they're barely anything alike. Rather than hiding his artifice, Miller wants to get the act itself of painting into each picture he makes. He says, "It's like performance art, my work."

That, in itself, is hardly novel. It's what an abstract expressionist like Jackson Pollock put front and center: Every mark you see on the canvas is also a clear record of an action that the artist took. (It so happens that the Studio School was founded by AbEx-ers, and to some extent still keeps that flame alive.)

The notion that a painting should reveal the act of making it is even older than that. It's already there in the impressionists' brush strokes, which were supposed to be an instant record of a moment of encounter between an artist painting out-of-doors and the out-of-doors he or she's in.

But Miller takes all this one step further, or at least off to one side. He insists his truck puts him in a special place: He's making large, indoor studio paintings — he calls them "Trucksapes" — that happen to reveal the nature that's outside. He's in a tight space, so close to his canvas he can't see the whole thing at once; that's also how Pollock worked. But he's also looking beyond it, out to infinity.

Pollock is there in every Miller — in the slathered paint on the truck's door frame, and then also in the presence of that slather as an abstract passage on the surface of the finished canvas. But so is Monet's "impression" of a world beyond the frame, seen through the picture's surface.

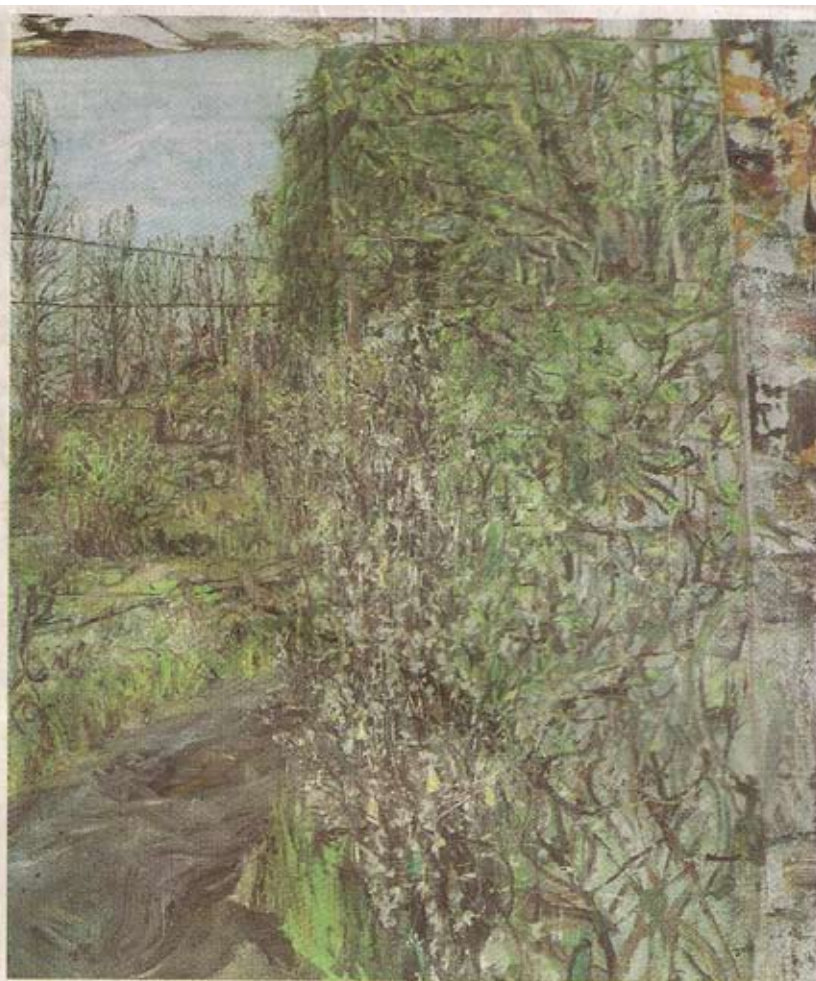
A Miller is a Monet edged in Pollock splashes. Or it's a Pollock with a Monet hung on top of it. Either way, it's a synthesized vision that works.

Nick Miller's *Trucksapes* runs through Oct. 25 at the New York Studio School, at 8 W. Eighth St. Call 212-673-6406 or visit www.nyss.org/gallery.asp.

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View From the Truck

VIDEO | To see Nick Miller discuss his work, visit washingtonpost.com/



"Lane, Blackthorn, 2007," one of Miller's "Trucksapes" on exhibit in New York.

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