

Nick Miller: Truckscapes at the New York Studio School

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Nick Miller *Interior truck-view, Lough Key* 2006. Oil on linen, 48 x 60 inches. Courtesy Rubicon Gallery, Dublin

The New York Studio School, within easy walking distance of Chelsea, presents in its gallery an aesthetic dramatically at odds with dominant art fashion. Nick Miller, a 46-year-old English artist, lives in rural Ireland. He paints landscapes working from a mobile studio in his truck, hence the title of this exhibition. At first glance these painterly oil on linen landscapes might seem to come from the era of Constable. *From Cogan's shed* (2004) shows in meticulous detail a landscape with hardly any signs of human habitation. Some of the pictures belong to a slightly later period. *Hazel catkins* (2006), a large drawing, shows a close up detail which would not be out of place in the art of one of Constable's Romantic successors. In Northern Europe plein air painting has always been a dicey affair. Sketch outside between rain showers, and then you can retreat into the studio to do the full painting. By working from his truck, Miller has nicely resolved that problem. You see the inviting moistness of the landscape in his pictures.

What typically separates modernist from old master painting is the absence of a frame. An unframed Poussin feels naked, while framing a Sean Scully would be absurd. When Francis Bacon insisted that his paintings be framed under glass, he treated them as proto-installations, allowing viewers to put themselves in the picture. A traditional work of art needs to be separated by the frame from its environment, while contemporary paintings aspire to structure the larger space within which they are hung. By including representations of frames, marking the back door of his truck at the margins of his pictures, Miller creates a place within the contemporary art world for his traditional-seeming landscapes.

In *From Cogan's shed* the frame is barely visible on the left, and in *Ben Bulbin crags with birds* (2008) it appears at the very top. And in *To Kilronan* (2005) we see the truck's frame at the top and on both sides. But then *Interior truck-view, Lough Key* (2006) gives away the secret, by including just a small picture of the landscape within a painting showing the interior of the truck, with the rack of brushes and paints. Just as many Matisse drawings and paintings made in Nice in the 1920s and 30s incorporate a representation of himself making the work of art, so Miller includes images of his working space in his landscapes. The effect is to bring us into the working process.

Just as we see Matisse representing his model, so we see Miller engaged in depicting his landscape. This is why unlike almost all Chelsea art, these paintings demand to be contemplated with loving close attention.