

# Art in America

INTERNATIONAL REVIEW

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## PHILADELPHIA SARAH McENEANEY Locks

Sarah McEneaney:  
*Viaduct, West Poplar*,  
2013, egg tempera  
on wood, 36 by 48  
inches; at Locks.

Sarah McEneaney's exhibition "Trestletown," titled after her neighborhood in the Callowhill district of Philadelphia, just northeast of City Hall, featured 14 paintings that highlight her passion for local activism and that document her studio practice. Ranging in size from 1½ to 4 feet per side and made since 2010, the works convey the painter's engagement with the city in which she has lived and worked for 30-some years, having completed her certificate in painting at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in 1979.

For more than a decade, McEneaney has worked tirelessly to convert Trestletown's defunct Reading Viaduct into an elevated park. The initiative, scheduled to break ground next summer, stems from her commitment to blocking a proposed baseball stadium for the Phillies from being built smack in the middle of the neighborhood. Indeed, her ongoing connection to baseball (despite her neighborhood preservation efforts, she is a big fan of the team) and the fraught, never-realized project of building the stadium were suggested via the show's first and last paintings. The artist is depicted wearing a Phillies sweatshirt in *Twilight* (2012), an egg-tempera-on-panel painting, and then sitting with two friends at a game in *Baseball!* (2010), a square egg-tempera-on-wood composition oriented like a baseball diamond. The subject matter in the remaining paintings is the complex cityscape that includes McEneaney's home studio and the urban jungle surrounding it: industrial buildings (some hollow, others converted into residential condominiums), abandoned lots, murals (real and imagined) and graffiti tags, the artist assessing and imagining a rapidly changing ecosystem and skyline.

*Viaduct, West Poplar* (2013), an egg-tempera-on-wood painting, shows McEneaney from the back on a swing suspended from one of the viaduct's rusty ribs, with her elderly dog Trixie, her environs in receding perspective, echoing the architectonic structure and clouds of Raphael's *School of Athens*. The acrylic-on-linen *Trestletown, 10th and Hamilton, 10th Floor* (2012)



features diagonal lines and sharp angles that bend the rules of perspective to accommodate an excess of visual information: threadlike blades of grass, miniature bricks, lacy metal fences and brightly colored buildings in delicate brushstrokes ornament the landscape. The artist is depicted multiple times in the composition: riding her bicycle, peering from a 10th-floor balcony, and wading through the viaduct's overgrown weeds. Like Renaissance *spalliera* and *cassone* panels, many works repeat the same figures within single compositions: *D and P Redux* (2012), executed in mixed water-based mediums, shows McEneaney and her pets two times, once facing the viewer and once facing away.

McEneaney attends equally to human and animal characters, as well as natural foliage and man-made constructions, building up a vibrant cast for the episodic narratives that unfold. She continues her long-standing interest in art history, both in citing canonical works—*Red Cross* (2011), an acrylic and collage on paper, evokes Mantegna's *Dead Christ* and Spanish old master crucifixions—and in sampling various painterly styles. Her canvases often recall Florine Stettheimer's scenes, and feature passages redolent of Abstract Expressionism. Splat-ter marks cover the studio floor seen in two 2013 self-portraits, *SP Studio* and *Studio 2013*. In both, explosive splashes and broad, emphatic brushstrokes contrast with the almost calligraphic marks in which McEneaney has rendered the beloved pets, furnishings and paintings that populate her studio space.

—Jennie Hirsh

LOCKSGALLERY

LG

600 Washington Square South  
Philadelphia PA 19106  
tel 215.629.1000 fax 215.629.3868  
info@locksgallery.com  
www.locksgallery.com