

A painting of a blue door with a window and a handle. The door is painted a vibrant blue and has a central window with a dark interior. A white handle is visible on the right side of the door. The text 'ELEANOR RAY' is overlaid in white, uppercase letters across the center of the image. The painting style is visible, with brushstrokes and a textured surface.

ELEANOR RAY



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Eleanor Ray
Paintings

NOVEMBER 18 - DECEMBER 24, 2015



FRONTISPIECE:

Ground Floor, 101 Spring Street
2015 oil on panel 6 x 8 in.

LEFT:

Squash Court II
2015 oil on panel 6¾ x 9 in.

Eleanor Ray: Specific Spaces

by Nora Griffin

The room I entered was a dream of this room.

—John Ashbery

An ancient Roman wall painting; the Matisse Chapel; a foliage-framed doorway in Florida; Donald Judd's building at 101 Spring Street; snowdrifts in Reykjavik. In Eleanor Ray's paintings there is no hierarchy between the sacred and the quotidian; between culture and a slice of nature. Her oil-on-panel works are delicately mimetic representations of places that she has observed, inhabited, and loved. The fact that they are small (the largest measures 8"x10") is integral to her approach to painting, not a self-effacing gesture. The scale grants her subject matter a cosmological immensity that recalls 14th century Sienese panel painting in which the physical world becomes a jewel box for the viewer to behold. There is a proportional sharpness to



LEFT:

Matisse Chapel, Vence
2015 oil on panel 6¼ x 7 in.

RIGHT:

Assisi Night
oil on panel 6 x 8 in.



Ray's painterly touch that nicely matches the brushed on oil pigment. This is especially apparent in her paintings of the Judd Foundation in SoHo, where the elegant dimensions of the rooms, furniture, and windows are rendered with an assured hand.

Matisse completed the Chapelle du Rosaire in Vence in 1951, and in 1968 Judd purchased 101 Spring Street. Each constitutes an apotheosis of modern art in which art and space are reconciled as one. Ray has made two paintings of the chapel's exterior,

one a close-up of the white facade with framing palm trees, the other a wider view of the building with a blue-outlined circle, one sign that this is not an ordinary house of worship. We are left to imagine what's inside: Green, blue, and yellow stained glass, tile murals depicting the Virgin and Child and the Stations of the Cross, and vibrantly-colored vestments.

Ray's Judd paintings are a sensory treat that showcase both artists' equal fascination with surface and form. A painting of a solitary aluminum cube, transparent as glass, glows in the center of a white-walled, wood-floored room. Space is everywhere. Ray imagines the color of the building's facade an un-nameable blue, somewhere between robin egg and slate gray. The sunlight, the pink vertical of an Ad Reinhardt, and the warm wood of the straight-back chairs are seamlessly integrated into the picture plane. There is a strange thrill to seeing Judd, the giant of Minimalism, collapsed into these tableaux. A transmutation across time and mediums takes place in this work as we come to understand that Ray's paintings are as specific as Judd's art.

A solo show in 2014 and a project-space show in 2013 (both at Steven Harvey Fine Art Projects) focused primarily on New York moments—a café's grid of windows; the green frame of a construction fence; the staircase of the New York Studio School. The paintings remind us that the finest realism can sometimes communicate abstraction with greater efficacy than an "abstract" painting

101 Spring Street
2014 oil on panel 6 x 8 in.



can. In her new work, Ray continues this line of investigation, but she has refined her subject matter to an explicit degree, as Art and Space take center stage. *San Marco Stairs* depicts Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* from the vantage point of the steps that lead to it. It is as if Ray, like the monks who would pass the fresco every day, was walking towards it to receive a blessing. It is this spatial time travel that grabs our attention as much as the soft blue, pink, and yellow replica of the Annunciation scene. Two painted views of the interior of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna couple the real architectural space of the basilica with the illusionistic arches and buildings of the 6th century AD wall mosaic. It's interesting to note that Ray chooses a section of mosaic that contains no people, a kind of mirror-world to her uninhabited spaces. Ray's presence in these paintings is one of the embedded complexities of her work that lends it a forceful subjectivity.

In 2012 Ray made a series of paintings of her primitive studio-in-the-woods at the Byrdcliffe Art Colony in Woodstock, NY. Three years later she has painted another studio series, this time of the eye-popping Mediterranean seen from her bedroom window at the BAU Institute/Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France. Showing the environments where the paintings were created is a generous approach to revealing her life in art. Other non-art related works, such as *Squash Court II*, *Florida Doorway*, and *Beach in Vik*, radiate a mysterious personal connection for Ray. But parallels to the art-site paintings can be found here, too. The squash court's indeter-

San Marco Stairs
2014 oil on panel 6 x 5½ in.

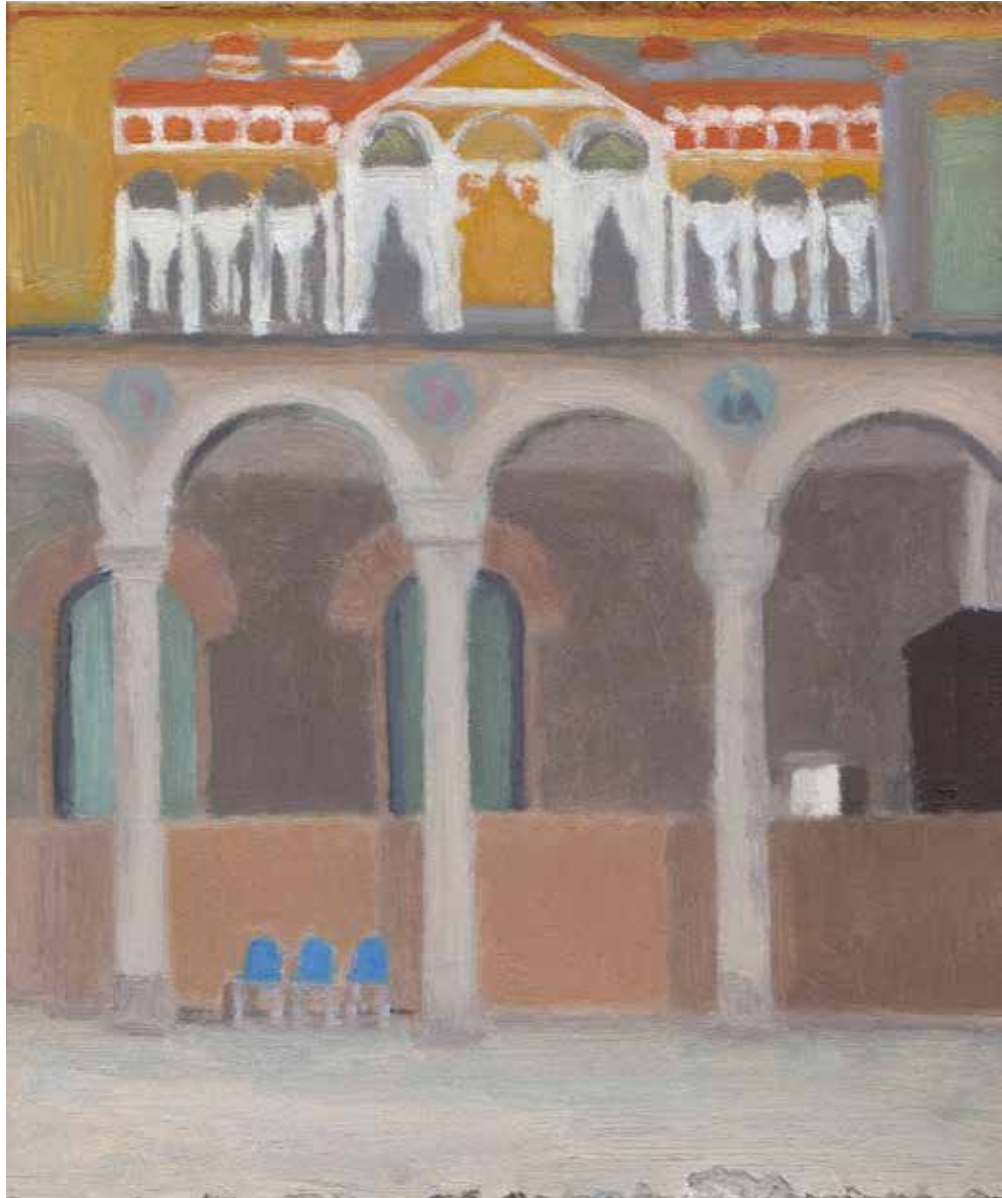


minate space and glass panes could easily be mistaken for a Minimalist sculpture, were it not for the title.

For Gaston Bachelard “miniature is an exercise that has metaphysical freshness; it allows us to be world conscious at slight risk.” There is a discernible worldliness to Ray’s paintings, and their hand-held size has a talismanic component. A powerful impulse towards possession arises from the marriage of the scale to the sanctified beauty she depicts. Desirous impulse may include: I want to have faith; I want that beach view; I want a cast-iron loft. Simply, we want to be where Ray stood. Or, if we too were once visitors to these sites, we may now remember them afresh through her paintings.

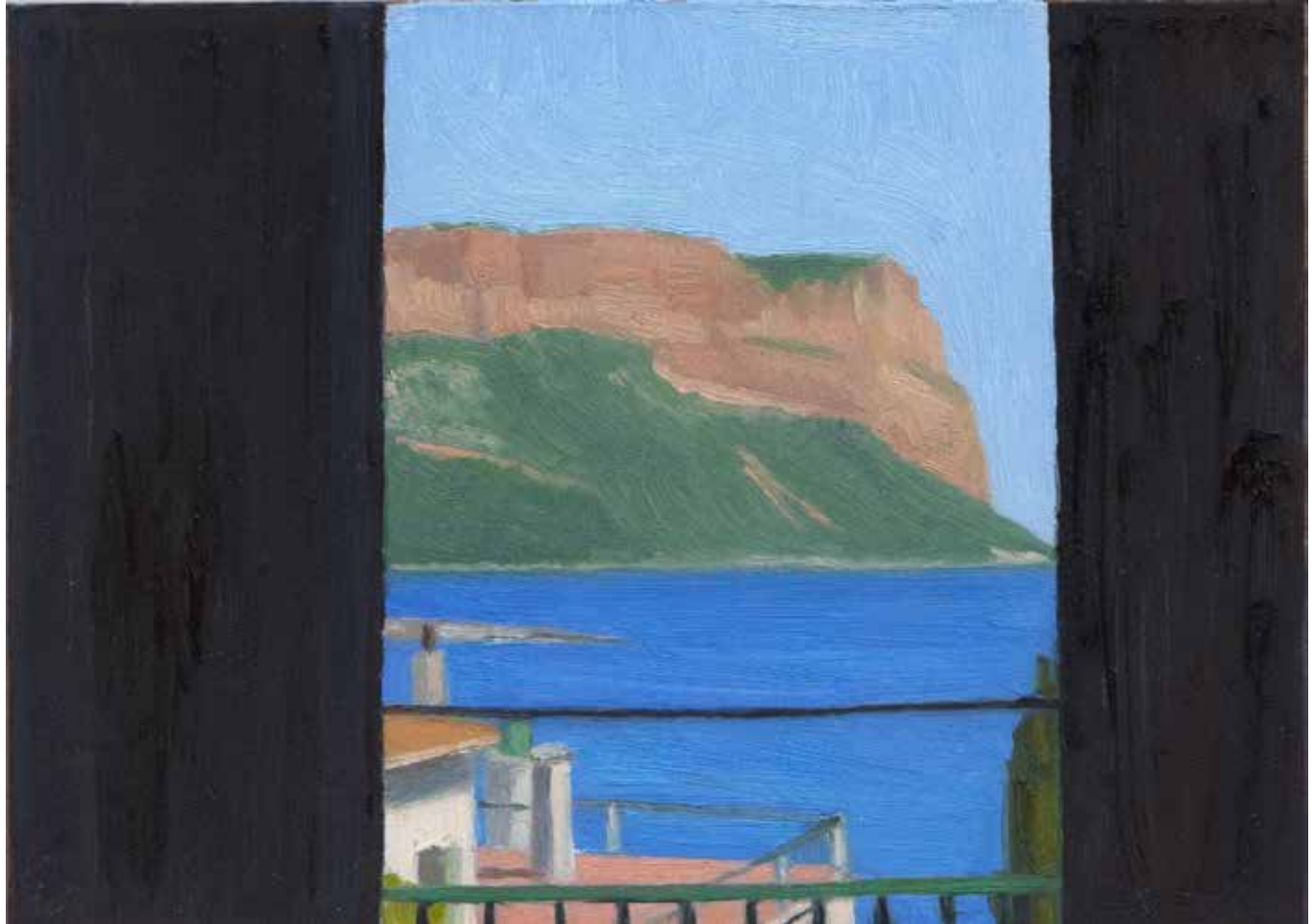
The tangible lushness of these paintings is always tempered by intellectual inquiry. The hidden muse of this show is the invention and manifold uses of perspective, from the Roman Empress Livia’s private wall painting of a garden of paradise, to the flattened Byzantine space of the Ravenna mosaics, to the radical breakthrough in one-point perspective employed by Fra Angelico, a melding of civic and divine authority. These choices indicate a passionate interest in paint as a vehicle of illusion—from the pagan pleasures of a beautiful room to the mathematical proportions that lead to spiritual transcendence. Moving from one Eleanor Ray painting to the next, it becomes apparent that there is little difference between the two.

Ravenna Mosaics II
(Sant’Apollinare Nuovo)
2015 oil on panel 6 x 7 in.





Avignon Fresco (Chambre du Cerf)
2015 oil on panel 6 x 6½ in.



Cassis
2015 oil on panel 5 x 7 in.



Villa di Livia
2015 oil on panel 6½ x 8 in.



Vence (Chapelle du Rosaire)
2015 oil on panel 7 x 9 in.



101 Spring Street
2014 oil on panel 6 x 8 in.



Atelier Cézanne, Aix
2015 oil on panel 5¼ x 5¾ in.



Vik Beach
2015 oil on panel 6 x 7 in.



Museum Windows
2015 oil on panel 5½ x 7 in.



LEFT:

101 Spring Street Exterior
2015 oil on panel 9 x 8 in.

RIGHT:

Nora's Studio
2015 oil on panel 7¼ x 8 in.

FRONT COVER:

Spring Street Doorway (detail)
2015 oil on panel 6½ x 8 in.

BACK COVER:

Mercer Street
2015 oil on panel 6½ x 7¾ in.



