

NICHOLAS EVANS-CATO

George Billis Gallery

It is one thing to be capable of making poetry out of Paris in the rain. But the Farragut housing projects? The view from the F train stop at Smith and 9th Street?

Nicholas Evans-Cato is an impressive cityscape painter with a gift for conveying the effect of damp on atmospheric light. He captures the diffuse luster of rain-drenched streets with grace and conviction. His most compelling subject is the geometry of architecture as it emerges from the obscurity of mist and rain, solidifying as it moves into the foreground.

Weather conditions are not employed for romantic Brigadoon effects. They simply subdue the anecdotal elements of urban scenery. There is no narrative suggested by passers-by, no distracting bursts of color heated by sunlight. What counts is the play between the gridded logic of street plans and the rising rectangles of urban architecture.

"Web" (2006), a winter scene, is one of the loveliest paintings in the show. Snow is in the air but only enough to shroud the middle distance and heighten the planar structure of the foreground building. The view sweeps from left to right, running from the cantilevered planes of an industrial rooftop to the broad, flat expanse of a parking lot. Whitened by a light dusting of snow, each plane hovers slightly in space. The vertical distance between them is muted by the snow cover.

The effect is dynamic. It hints at moving geological plates while simultaneously observing realistic space. ("Caldera," 2006, is a warm-weather variation on the same scene. Daylight clarifies the local: the Vinegar Hill section of Williamsburg.) Curving rooflines in the foreground create a fish-eye effect, suggesting that what began in plein air was adjusted and worked to completion in the studio. Borrowed from the camera, the curvilinear movement is a deliberately aestheticizing and contemporizing device. Mr. Evans-Cato uses it effectively, though he does not need it.

With 25 paintings on view, the exhibition is dense and satisfying.

— *Maureen Mullarkey*

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ART IN BRIEF



Nicholas Evans-Cato, "Bow" (2006).