

Whether working in her native Ireland or around her home in Brooklyn, Elizabeth O'Reilly is attracted to locations displaying evidence of their history. "I find myself curious about abandoned homes, fallow farms, and decaying industrial sites," she explains. "I wonder about these once-vigorous places that are now filled with a poignant loneliness. When I find locations where nature has reclaimed the space formerly occupied by people,

I consider the formal aspects of organizing the shapes and colors into a painting."

That activity takes place entirely on location, with O'Reilly standing at a French easel and working on small Masonite panels that have been sanded and covered with two coats of acrylic gesso. "I prepare a number of different-sized panels and pack them in my car along with all my supplies," she explains. "Occasionally I tone a panel with a wash of raw sienna or burnt sienna, but most are left white. I

decide which one to use after I determine a compositional format."

O'Reilly spends about three intensive hours on each painting, carefully evaluating the arrangement of shapes and colors until she has captured her impression of the place. "I avoid scenes that are too picturesque or pretty," she comments, "and prefer close-up views of places that are run-down."

O'Reilly begins a painting by making a loose sketch of a scene with a fluid mixture of raw sienna and turpentine. "Figuring

out the composition is my first consideration," she explains. "I want to divide the rectangle into interesting proportions, and I look for variety in both the shapes and sizes of the forms, as well as in the way lines break into the perimeter. I use thinned raw sienna for this initial drawing because I can easily wipe the paint off and redraw the scene, and because the earth tone always works well with the subsequent layers of color."

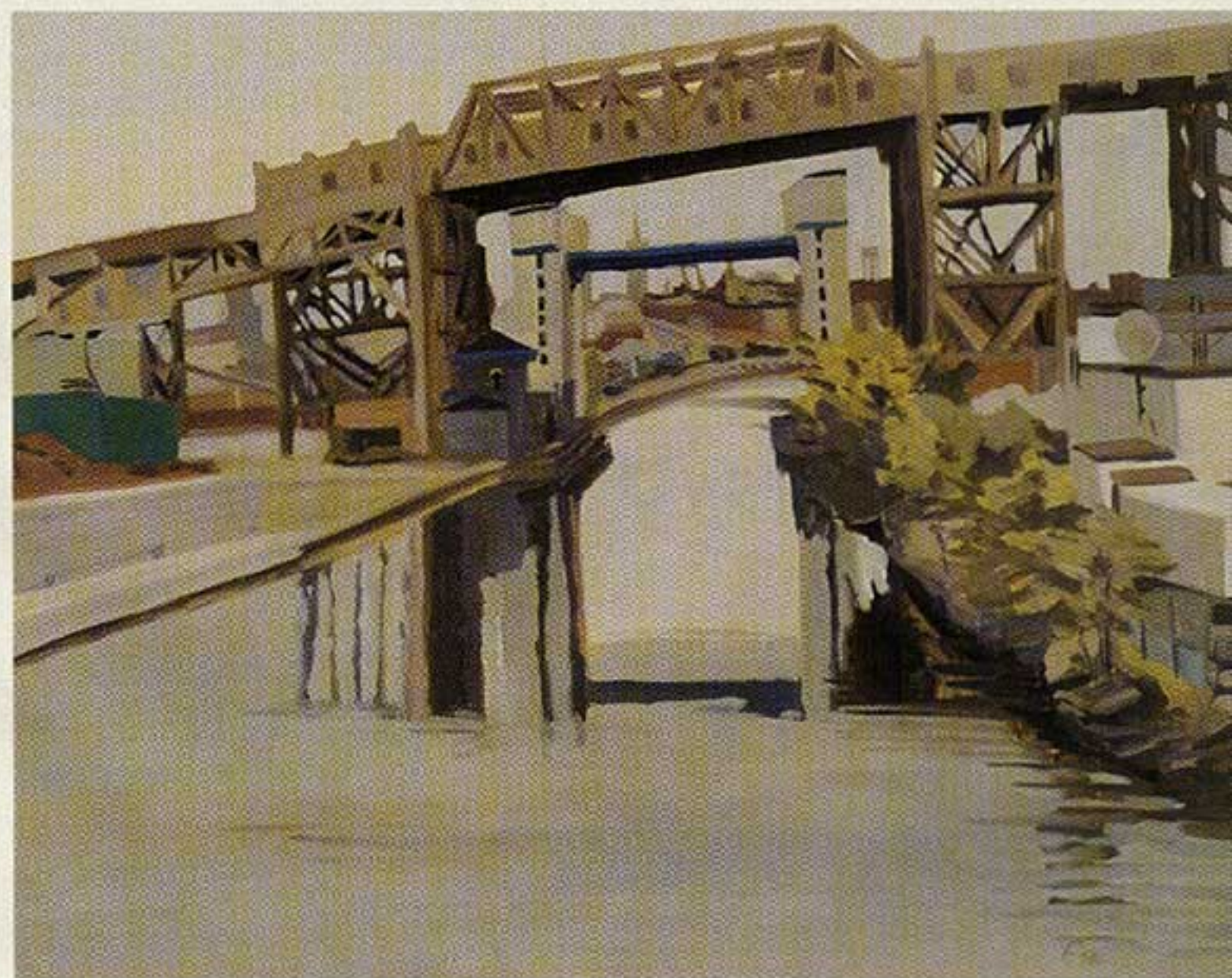
Because O'Reilly likes a more intimate connection



between the viewer and a landscape, very few of her paintings show a broad expanse of space. In this way, her work defies many viewers' expectations of a landscape. "I seek to draw the viewer in, both to survey the landscape and to submit to pure color and form," O'Reilly says. "I aim for a fresh openness in the work and feel the loose and active brushwork contributes to the energy in the paintings. I keep the pictures small so I can capture the intimacy and intensity of my direct painting experience."

If a subject includes buildings that must be carefully placed in perspective, the painting process takes longer because O'Reilly will make a detailed drawing before adding color. "I may spend the first day working out the drawing and return a second day to paint," she explains. "No matter how complicated the scene, though, I never allow the image to appear labored or stiff. I always want the oil paint to appear fresh and fluid."

O'Reilly's palette comprises titanium white, raw sienna, cadmium yellow, lemon yellow, Old Hol-



Above: *Gowanus Canal—Under the Bridges*, 1999, oil, 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 18. Collection the artist.

Right: *Gowanus Canal at Smith & Ninth Street Bridge*, 1999, oil, 14 x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$. Courtesy George Billis Gallery, New York, New York.

Opposite page, left: *Pylons Under Hamilton Avenue Bridge*, 1999, oil, 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{2}$. Courtesy George Billis Gallery, New York, New York.

Opposite page, right: *Pylons and Many Greens, Union Street*, 1999, oil, 15 x 8. Private collection.



land golden green regular and deep, cadmium red, alizarin crimson, burnt sienna, French ultramarine blue, cobalt blue, and cerulean blue. After the initial sketching with turpentine-thinned paint, the artist modifies her paints with a medium made from

equal parts turpentine and stand oil.

In recent years, O'Reilly has alternated between painting in Ireland and the United States. "I grew up in Ireland in a family of nine children and moved to the United States with my husband in 1986," she

explains. "I go back to Ireland three or four times a year, sometimes to the remote island of Gola in Donegal, and other times to Ballycastle, where the Ballinglen Arts Foundation runs a residency program for artists. I leave painting supplies and an

easel in Ireland so I don't have to carry them back and forth, and I have a car available to get me around the country and provide a sheltered place to work."

Because the weather in Ireland is often cold and rainy, O'Reilly frequently sits in the backseat of her



Glen Span Arch, Central Park,
1999, oil, 11½ x 16. Courtesy
George Billis Gallery,
New York, New York.

*Gowanus Expressway
With Crossing Gate,*
1999, oil, 18½ x 15.
Collection the artist.



car and paints the view out the window. "Even when it's chilly and the wind is blowing, I can usually stand at my French half easel and paint, but when it's stormy and bitter cold, I have to move into the car and work as best I can," she explains. "I had to

work from the car when I was in Clearmont, Wyoming, in 1995 at the Ucross Foundation. I'm hardy and relish the feeling of being outside, but there are some weather conditions that make it impossible to paint outdoors."

O'Reilly has always been interested in art but has relied on teaching to support herself. "I loved painting as a child, but my mother died when I was very young, and my father had to move to the United States to earn enough money to support the fam-

ily. He sent money back so I could attend a boarding school," she explains. "I couldn't afford to go to art school, so I took advantage of a government-subsidized program to train teachers. After a few years of teaching in Ireland, I was able to move to New



Above: *Late Afternoon, Paulinskill Falls*, 1999, oil, 16 x 11. Private collection.

Opposite page, above: *Potato Ridges, Lios na Rann*, 1996, oil, 9 x 17. Collection Catherine Magan.

Opposite page, below: *Fall at Paulinskill Falls*, 1999, oil, 10 x 16. Courtesy Taylor Gallery, Dublin, Ireland.

York, secure a teaching position, and begin graduate studies in art on a part-time basis." O'Reilly earned a M.F.A. degree from Brooklyn College in 1992 and began teaching high school and college students in various programs. She currently teaches drawing fundamentals at Parsons School of Design in New York City.

Like many who paint outdoors, O'Reilly enjoys working alongside other artists. She frequently arranges painting excursions with her close friend and former teacher, Lois Dodd, as well as with the artists Diana Horowitz and Arthur Kvarnstrom. "Their company, insights, and camaraderie make the process less isolating and more fun," she says.

O'Reilly's oil paintings have been included in a number of exhibitions, including several in New York City organized by the National Academy Museum and School of Fine Art, Prince Street Gallery, the Irish Arts Center, Sears Peyton Gallery, and George Billis Gallery. She has also exhibited her paintings in Ireland and is represented there by the Taylor Gallery in Dublin. O'Reilly has received many awards and fellowships, including ones from the Ballinglen Arts Foundation, the Ragdale Foundation, the Ucross Foundation, and the Pollock-Krasner Foundation. ■

M. Stephen Doherty is the editor-in-chief of American Artist.