

The Night, the Saint, and the City

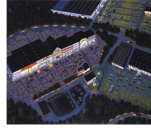
THE CANVAS – JULY 2008

By Carl Little

Jacquette, Goodwin, and Solotaine

A Wal-Mart Flyover with Yvonne Jacquette

Day or night, the world looks different from high in the air. For thirty-five years, painter Yvonne Jacquette has focused her art on the aerial view, flying in airplanes or scaling the heights of tall buildings to create her striking images of cities and countryside, harbors and islands. From New York City to Japan, from San Francisco to Maine, she has reenergized and redefined the concept of the bird's-eye view, lending it mystery, emotion, and unusual beauty.



Jacquette often finds the beautiful where others see blight or eyesore. Her nighttime views of the Maine Yankee nuclear power plant in Wiscasset, for example, reveal a darkly gorgeous complex. Likewise, big-box stores in Augusta shimmer in artificial light, their acres of parking lots resembling patterned carpet or computer circuitry.

From the airport at Owl's Head, not far from her home in the Mid coast, Jacquette set out to explore Maine's capital (she had already composed aerial night paintings of Belfast and Rockland). The "vast spread of parking lots and the lighting at night" attracted the painter to this particular spot, as did, she notes, the "angling of buildings one to another."

Not until she landed did Jacquette learn, from the pilot of the small airplane she had hired, that the main building in her view was Wal-Mart. This knowledge, in her words, "stimulated pushing the color as a comment on 'less natural' nature."

And that's what we have in Jacquette's paintings: sprawls of artificial light connected by roads cut out of woodland. The view from on high is mesmerizing; a terrible beauty, you might say, is born.

Yvonne Jacquette's paintings bring a sense of magic to the physical features of cityscapes and landscapes as viewed from airplanes and high buildings. Many of her works incorporate multiple perspectives or composite viewpoints, while in others feathery brushstrokes abstract and soften the physical features of the landscape. Recent shows include *Urban Landscape* at Susan Maasch Fine Art and *Under New York Skies: Nocturnes* by Yvonne Jacquette at Museum of the City of New York.

Wal-Mart and Other "Big Box" Stores, Augusta ME II, 2006

Oil on canvas, 58 by 69 3/4 inches.

Courtesy DC Moore Gallery, NYC

Alison Goodwin's Saint Fisherman

In religious paintings, a nimbus of gold encircling the head of a figure signifies holiness—a mark of the sacred. When the painter Alison Goodwin gives a Maine fisherman dashing over the waves in a motorboat one of these golden headpieces, she draws on several centuries of iconography. And in doing so, she elevates this simple man in his waterproof Grundens to, if not sainthood, the status of blessed symbol.

In Goodwin's rendering, this man in his yellow cap, enveloped in the odors of fish guts and gasoline, is deserving of special honor. "I have a reverence for the way they make a living," the painter explains, "battling nature day after day." The fishermen not only keep Maine honest, they "give it a holiness."

This is Saint Fisherman, intent on harvesting a living from the sea, dashing from his homely bait shack to some last vestige of working waterfront, preparing for another day on the Gulf of Maine. Less heroic than humble, he is more the kin of Marsden Hartley's beloved Newfoundlanders than George Bellows's larger-than-life Monhegan islanders.



With the energy of a folk artist, Goodwin employs a bold diagonal—a small boat—and simplified renderings of landscape elements—water, trees, clouds—to create her icon. The spinning-top-like motor churns the sea; bait spills over the edge of buckets; the prow of the boat seems ready to fly over treetops and ledges. With his large hands and determined shoulders, the fisher of the sea goes forth over the waters.

Represented by Greenhut Galleries of Portland for the past twenty years, Alison Goodwin is well known for her saturated, turbulent color and untruly, skewed perspectives. Her original work has been featured in numerous solo exhibits at the Greenhut and in galleries outside Maine, and her prints have been distributed worldwide.

Fish Guts and Gasoline, 2008

Acrylic paint, oil bar and pastel on Arches paper, 56 by 34 inches

Courtesy Greenhut Gallerie



Robert Solotaine Paints Portland

Downloading Robert Solotaine's *View from the 11th Floor—Night* on a slow computer, the sky appears first: brushy gray with white and yellow streaks. What appears to be a ship's mast turns out to be a communications tower atop a high-rise. The city of Portland gradually resolves—lighted offices and apartments, rooftops, streets—with the rest of Maine spreading out behind, a line of mountains visible in the distance.

By the time the parking lot at the bottom of the painting emerges with its yellow lines and directional arrows, the viewer is completely absorbed in the scene. First drawn to the lights in this dark cityscape, the eye then discovers the details: a billboard with a large X, a car parked with its headlights on, a bit of foliage on the side of a building.

We can't see the people in their rooms, as in a Hopper painting, and yet Solotaine presents the city as a living thing, each structure evidence of the emotions and industry taking place within. Light is key to his mission, he says—the electricity remains a sign of life even if it illuminates only a blank wall.

This is not a scenic panorama; this is not "the grand view." This slice of Portland captured by paint and brush resembles a theatrical set design, a slightly discordant and run-down backdrop in front of which people will act out their lives. "Affection does not play a leading role in my paintings of Maine cities," Solotaine admits, "but involvement with shapes and light (and making a record) carries the day." And, he might have added, the night.

Robert Solotaine's recent shows include *Urban Seen* at the Portland Museum of Art and *Urban Landscape* at Susan Maasch Fine Arts. For more Solotaine: Gleason Fine Art, Susan Maasch Fine Arts, Mast Cove Galleries, and www.robertsolotaine.com

View from the 11th Floor—Night, October 1978

Oil on Masonite, 25 3/4 by 37 5/8 inches.

Portland Museum of Art, gift of the artist

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