



Artist Erica Pollock in her studio. (Photo by Anna Simonak)

## Making Her Mark

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By Wylie Schwartz

Deriving inspiration from the urban landscape, local artist Erica Pollock's spirited compositions depict the people and places she observes on the street while visiting cities like New York and San Francisco. A painter of modern life, Pollock uses a contemporary realist approach to explore aspects of a scene that might otherwise go unnoticed, finding beauty in the unexpected and the overlooked.

In her latest body of work, on view at the State of the Art Gallery through Nov. 30, there is evidence of a new tactic in pursuit of her goal, where the figures become secondary design elements giving way to an emphasis on shadow and light. The result is a heightened state of reflection, where the shadowy forms appear to express more about the inner world of the figures than the figures themselves.

As a new member of the State of the Art Gallery, Pollock's latest series will be showcased in an exhibition highlighting works by the gallery's four newest members, along with Andrea King, Leslie Brill, and Ethel Vrana. A native Ithacan, Pollock studied art at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco where she developed an artistic curiosity for the urban environment and her particular style of urban realism. After receiving her degree in painting and sculpture, Pollock relocated to Ithaca where she has lived and worked since 2006.

Ithaca Times: How did you become interested in studying art?

Erica Pollock: I was majoring in plant science at Cornell, and there was a part of me that had always wanted to draw. I kept telling myself that if I was going to draw I would have done it by now, because we tend to think we're either born with this talent or not, but I realized that I would be unfulfilled in life if I went through life and never learned to draw. I enrolled in a painting class in the art department and I ended up getting an A, so I thought, okay, maybe I can do this.

IT: Could you elaborate on your particular form of creative practice?

Pollock: I paint in a contemporary realist style, and I am very influenced by the urban environment. I love watching people and deriving things from watching them. I've always been an introspective person and so I actually learn a lot from watching people. Most of my reference material comes from the cities. My first body of work was based on trying to take a very commonplace scene which you would ordinarily not pay much attention to and to present it to people. Once it's in the form of a painting, people stop to look the subject matter whereas in real life, the scene would have barely caught their eye.

IT: How was this work different from the scenes you are painting now?

Pollock: In this new body of work I'm showing at the State of the Art, I'm cropping the scenes much more. I'm just giving a piece of the story, and it's amazing how much this technique leads your focus to a different aspect. A lot of these paintings draw much more from the shadows and the streets rather than the physical people, or buildings and the cars. I wanted people to move beyond the physical subject matter, or the personality of the person walking and to reflect deeper upon what is being presented. It's still a continuation of what I have been doing but it's definitely a different direction.

IT: In the age of endless possibilities offered by new media, why would anyone still paint?

Pollock: I think that in our generation we are brought up looking at images, and so painting is a very easy way to communicate. People respond to paintings very easily, as they do with photography. With new media you really have to delve deeper into what you are seeing, and so I think that painting is a way to outreach to a larger audience. From the time we are children we grow up looking at picture books and then magazines and art, we see still images all the time and we are in a sense automatically trained to interpret them from a very young age.

IT: Are you concerned with what's going on in the broader world of art or do you work independently of this concern?

Pollock: Some of both. When I am working on a body of work, I keep up to date by reading through some basic art magazines like Artnews and Art in America, but I find that I cannot delve too deeply into what other people are doing because I lose a sense of what my art is about. I find my art becoming too much like the person I'm reading about... I start trying to emulate these qualities rather than paint what is natural to me. However, I go through periods where I do lots of research and reading, but during that time I do very little painting.

IT: Who are your artistic influences?

Pollock: Edward Hopper is an artist who I've heard people make a lot of comparisons to my style, so I started to read more about his work. I really like the work of the sculpture Manuel Neri - his sculptures, while figurative, are very impersonal and I think I'm starting to see more of that aspect emerging within my work. I've also been looking a lot at Eric Fischl's work, and while I find some of the subject matter disturbing, he is not just painting figures in an environment, but presents the viewer with aspect of the world, most of the time a slightly taboo subject, leaving the viewer with a lot to think about. Alyssa Monks is another favorite of mine right now. She paints photorealistic images of herself in the bathroom. Her works very beautiful and just like Fischl's, it instills you with a sense of reflection afterwards towards yourself and the world.

IT: Do you feel as though being classified as a 'regional artist' is an inhibitor to your professional career as an artist?

Pollock: I think every artist has their home, and I don't see my art as being limited to this region - while I'm showing a lot here I do show other places, I am starting to expand, and I think expansion is really important. I love being in this region with the abundance of local artists. There's truly a great artist's community here and I'm happy to be a part of it.

IT: What are you currently working on?

Pollock: I just finished with this new series, so right now I'm taking a bit of a break to see where I want to go next in my work.

IT: This year you participated in the NYFA Artist Mark program. How did this work out for you?

Pollock: It helped in a lot of ways. Most obviously, I realized how much the marketing and business side of art has to play in the art world, and so now I'm spending a lot more time networking and making sure collectors and curators see my work and presenting my work to juried shows. I think one of the best ways the program helped, is to remind us to constantly come back to our art, to write about our work and talk about it. When you have to write about your work, it makes you really think about where your art is going and I think it's one of the most important things you can do to move your art in a direction.