

ISLAND WEISS GALLERY

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# Dina Brodsky

## Cycling Guide to Lilliput

May 20<sup>th</sup> – June 20<sup>th</sup>

Island Weiss Gallery is pleased to present *Cycling Guide to Lilliput*, a solo exhibition featuring over fifty miniature landscape paintings in the tondo format by Dina Brodsky, to be held May 20 through June 20, 2015. The first chapter of many to come, the show consists of images culled from the artist's experiences and memories of long-distance bicycle riding alone through Europe over the course of ten years. Mostly measuring two inches in diameter, the paintings provide secretive glimpses, as if through keyholes, into views that seem to open onto surprisingly expansive spaces filled with a startling verisimilitude. Painted with the controlled discipline that their size demands, the scenes combine tiny details and closely observed atmospheric light, making them reminiscent of American nineteenth-century landscapes by artists such as George Inness—whose combinations of warm skies and cool grounds are often in Brodsky's mind—Albert Bierstadt, and Fitz Henry Lane. Although Brodsky admires the visceral qualities of large-scale paintings, she is compelled by the intimacy of the small format, in which each scene, framed on its own, presents a unique opportunity for reflection.

Brodsky paints on Plexiglas (or Mylar mounted on Plexiglas), which she says is the closest approximation possible to the traditional miniature-painting medium of ivory. The translucency provided by her surfaces enhances their luminosity. Many of the paintings are from the biker's perspective, with low vantage points toward far horizons and large skies. These consist of cloud formations, indicative of what is in store for a day ahead of riding, or of sunsets that combine the feeling of reverie elicited by such transitional times (as in American Tonalist paintings) with the satisfaction of nearing the end of a long arduous trip. Often the images provide the sensation of seeing places in passing, the pace of biking affording a wider and more extensive visual scope than can be attained from a car. In some of the works, mists obscure the way forward, expressing the suspense of Brodsky's chosen mode of travel. In others, the vantage points are more focused, leading from the ground into icicle-laden tree boughs or into swamps, backlit eerily by what in a couple instances could be distant forest fires. In Number 43 (and all the works are numbered), Brodsky captured a moment that felt like a spiritual epiphany. Suddenly at the end of twelve-hours of riding, she was rewarded with one of her "few really perfect days"—she is often riding in the rain, wind, and cold. Her jewel-like image captures the almost surreal light toward sunset that is both brilliantly intense and refreshingly cool, while the road stretches unhesitatingly onward.

Brodsky's paintings of her biking travels are derived from intricate drawings in ballpoint pen kept in a travel journal, which is also filled with nearly microscopic writing in the spirit of Charlotte Bronte (one of Brodsky's journals is on view in the show). In size, Brodsky's images can be related to portrait miniatures, which were keepsakes of attachment in the colonial era. Her landscapes seem similarly to sustain memories, something that, given our overload of visual stimuli today, seems increasingly difficult to do. Brodsky's process is in this spirit. She states: "painting is partially an act of meditation, of being able to hold something still enough in my mind that I can capture an image of it."

The exhibition also includes a number of Brodsky's earlier works, such as depictions from a series of views looking into abandoned buildings; especially conducive to the peephole perspective, these were among the artist's first works in her current format. Other images are in the tradition of botanical and animal specimen portraits in which early nineteenth-century American painters sought to merge natural science and art. *Ales Stenar* is a trompe l'oeil image in the shape of a painter's palette in which lumps of paint around the edges blend into the landscape itself; the double illusion expresses Brodsky's delight in creating worlds within worlds, affording a kind of travel in art that parallels her bicycle journeys.

That our sense of scale is altered in looking through Brodsky's portals gives them a spiritual aspect and we become like the boy in Robert Louis Stevenson's poem *The Kingdom*, who ruled as king of a magical land until his mother's call to tea led him to find how very big his nurse appeared to be.

Born in Minsk, Belarus, Brodsky emigrated at age nine with her family to the United States in 1990; she currently lives in New York City, where she paints and teaches art. She studied at the Amsterdam Academy of Art in the Netherlands, and received her BFA from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and her MFA from the New York Academy of Art. She has had solo exhibitions in Paris, New York, Florida, and Massachusetts and has participated recently in many group shows in the United States and Europe. Her many awards include the Prince of Wales Scholarship (2006) and residencies at St. Barth's (2011) and Les Sablonnières (2014).

Lisa N. Peters

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