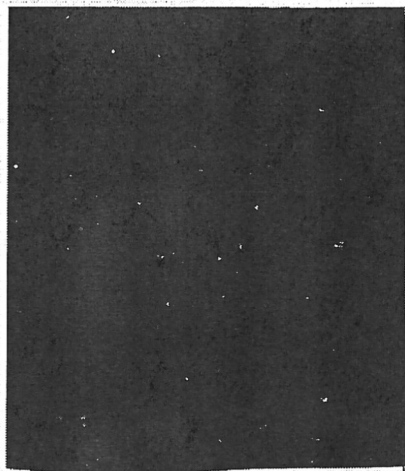




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HARRIS' OILS APPROACH WARP 2

Art Review by Sue Kurzman

As an antidote to the next eight or nine years of rain we'll be getting here in Richmond, may I suggest absorbing some of the light radiating from the photon-drenched works by Nicholas James Harris. Just park your boat near the Reynolds Gallery at 1514 West Main Street and go upstairs. There are twenty paintings hanging around just waiting to illuminate the dank caverns of Richmonders' rain-soaked brains.

Harris' format is small by some modernists' agendas. ("Dome of the National Museum of Natural History, Hazy Summer Afternoon" measures only 7 by 7 inches, making the typeset title almost as wide as the painting itself.) But these paintings are white dwarf stars, emitting a lot of wattage. In this piece, the dome is burnished into the haze of summer heat, exemplary of Harris' deft command of oils, and of his ability to interpret atmosphere through them. And like a magnifying glass, his use of a tight field focus intensifies the volume of light which falls onto a massive architectural subject. Harris' crack-erjack composition, using rooftops as abstract planes, defines space on a realistic scale, proving, at least in art, that size really doesn't matter.

"Dormer and Portico Amid Oak Trees" is another example of Harris' proficient miniaturization of the monumental. A

bold swath of white porch cuts the work horizontally while the perpendicular thrust of three subtly lit urns and columns draw your eye upwards. This competing movement creates dynamic energy which moves like a tornado through a trailer court.

The only time Harris' tiny dynamics don't rain particle beams on the viewer is when he strays from his study of paint as light and turns to work which deals more with interpretive scenarios. "Apartment Entrance Through Maple Branches" seems to get tangled up in the organic twists of the maple's limbs. The man made structure of the apartment entrance competes with the tree's wild growth. There aren't any leaves on the tree. Perhaps it wasn't receiving enough sun from the weakly defined light source in the work.

But Harris doesn't stumble often; my only other complaint is again about the tree. It's in "Bay Window and Tree: Crozet House." The tree lurks around on the left side of the painting and blocks your view of a nice horizontally sweeping composition. Then it grabs your eye and leads your vision out of the frame. Fortunately, this kind of compositional faux-pas occurs in this show about as often as a sunny weekend hits Richmond.

If you do swim over to the Reynolds Gallery, don't forget to bathe in the golden glow of "Yellow House, Maywood, Sunny Summer Afternoon." A yellow clapboard house with several Arts and Crafts style rooflines gracefully define this study. The "Yellow House" not only exudes light, it's the plus-ultra in technique. Check out the way Harris blends the edge of the rooflines into the foliage and the brushwork of the delicate shadows falling under the eaves onto the walls of the house. Look at the sky over the trees. No thunder clouds in sight.

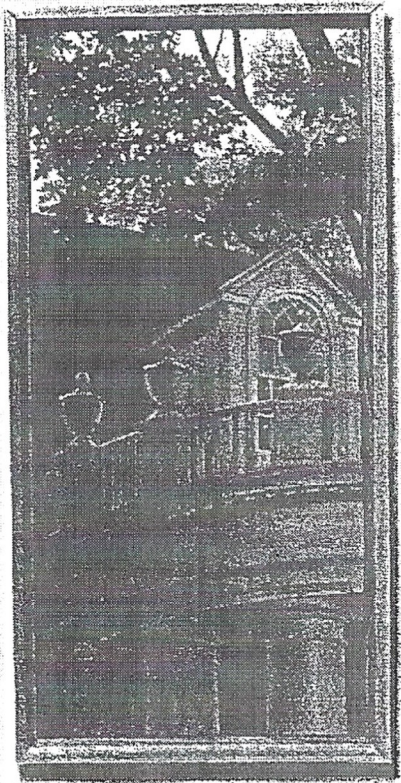


Photo by Ben Haley

"Dormer and Portico Amid Oak Trees"