

Excerpt from Ethos on the Line essay by Lisa Corrin from Mike Glier, *Along a Long Line* from Hard Press Editions, Lenox. 2009

“Living things are violent and lovely, nurturing and bloodthirsty, modest and flamboyant, in short, full of destructive and constructive possibility. The way I touch the panel is an enactment of these complex processes and impulses. With this work I’m trying to break down what I see as a false dichotomy between ‘nature’ and human culture. I am trying to express this conviction through touch and subjectivity. I freely allow my personal experience to filter my observations of the place in which I am painting to indicate that complete objectivity is impossible since we are embedded in the context of the natural world and can not see its shape fully from our position within it. If one is riding inside a car, for example, one can sense what the exterior looks like and make a good estimation of its shape and detail, but one can never fully describe the vehicle until one is on the outside. The door of our car is locked, however, so we are always estimating, using our perceptual apparatus to sense if we are in a Cadillac or a Toyota and if it is heading to the beach or a cliff. I think it is useful to drop the pretense of objectivity and acknowledge that human perception is quirky and unstable. But, as a result, it is a highly flexible and adaptive tool.”

The immediacy of Glier’s paintings is a correlative to the urgent sense that, as the earth comes perilously close to losing its ability to sustain life and human beings fail to reflect critically on their symbiotic relationship to its eco-systems, this might be the last time such places can be seen in this way. Glier set out to discover specific “motifs” of place, whether in the Arctic, the Amazon, the Caribbean or Manhattan Island, to serve as anchors while he tuned himself both to the visible and the imperceptible transformations eddying around them. The discipline of routine enabled him to erect his easel on the edge of a roaring river, a rocky outcropping, or between the lattice of a catwalk, and to concentrate his attention on defining characteristics of the local—its essential textures and shapes, the negative spaces between forms, the unique tonal qualities that required him to adjust his palette and his perspective, hour by hour and day after day.

For Glier, to be present is to be a witness to history. His urgent mark-making also marks this tenuous moment in time with a concurrent sense of impending loss. Like Church’s paintings or Audubon’s ornithological inventory, the next generation may well look upon Glier’s paintings as anachronisms. Or, perhaps, they might experience the same nostalgia many of today’s museum visitors often feel for the world of the impressionists. Worse climatic conditions in the future might make Glier’s strident palette and lush tangles of leaves seem as eccentric and phantasmagoric as Church’s Technicolor sunsets do to a contemporary viewer.