

## **Eva Marie Fitzsimmons Long Statement: "Revival"**

During the hour of mass in a church left in progress, there is much to fixate on. There is a certain stillness that comes about through the interruption in construction during the mass, during this sacred time the workers must halt their progress, causing the restoration to continue for longer than it would if the building was vacated during the process. How, though, can such a prominent place of pilgrimage be shut down?

The construction of temporary structures, scaffolding, in particular, allows for a temporarily altered space to create a completely new experience, in stark contrast to that which was had before. This highlighting of what is impermanent places value in the process by which a product comes about, which operates in conjunction with the process by which a painting is created. This is through layers. Layers of paint allow for decisions to be made in the compositional and color choices that are then settled upon and painted in a flattened, or color-blocked aesthetic. This specificity that is not always necessarily obvious in the final product can be related to the process of a restoration, the revival of what once was new. Is there even a product of a restoration if the structure and its intricacies are made to appear as they were before falling to some extent of decay? This process by which the church is restored can be the product of these paintings, the subject that creates a balance between what is old and what is new.

In this contemporary world, the church slowly seems to move away from prominence. Through the obscuring of the obviously religious structures in some paintings, or their being brought forth in others, this struggle between the powers of God and man is illustrated. These powers are not to be seen as completely separate entities, they are related in many senses, as the church is a construct of man. Just as man has created churches, and kept them adhering to a specific aesthetic, man has created the scaffolding that inhabits these sacred spaces and interrupts their effects that potentially may affect the churchgoer. It must not be forgotten that through the entirety of this restoration, there are thousands of people walking down the aisles and praying to their God each week.

Just as there is a 'style' in which churches are created, though it has progressed to be what it is today. There is a style in which modernity is painted. Continuing down the paths that precisionists, such as Charles Sheeler, have forged, this series of paintings uses early modernism to depict the shift from traditional, typically Gothic, architecture to that of clean lines, steel components, and the visibly interconnected network of them. This style that idealizes the modern suits the modernization of the church as architecture as well as an institution. Further, this pushes the structures to be seen as simply that which they are, moving into the realm of abstraction and away from the solidity of the church. Modernity as an idea can be experienced without being able to visualize the entire building of a church, but can be seen in the almost deification of certain elements crucial to the progression of architecture

and design past that which initially constructed the churches of old. Today, we worship our technological advancements, just as would have been a product of the invention of steel scaffolding when it was 'new.'

Through the specific choice of color and composition, these paintings seek to create a meditative state that calls back to the experience from which they were derived. This looking and seeing the beauty in the contrast between reconstruction and tradition, the contrast between stillness and labor is recreated. By departing from the naturalistic colors just enough, these paintings become rich with the play between complements, as well as with colors only slightly different from one another. Using slight contrast between warm and cool, the scaffolding stands in front, or fades into the background, as the constant pull between foreground and background creates a flattened space through the careful use of a limited palette. The element of this flattened space that is so integral to these paintings is its unifying of the church and the temporary structures within it. This union solidifies the in-between state that the building lies in, proliferating an experience that will only exist for a limited amount of time.

The documentation of this initial experience came about through one venture. This venture began with observation, sitting through one hour of mass and staring up from the pew to see the beauty in what some may refer to as a distraction. The church had been transformed into a construction site, with orange cones, sections blocked by yellow tape, white tarps and layers of steel scaffolding up to the ceilings. Through this one can see some small glimmers of stained glass or statues of saints hidden behind the structures. There were even television screens showing the altar for those who did not have a clear line of sight. While mass is typically a time for prayer, for participation, it is easy to get lost in the intricacies of the structures that first seem to overpower the spiritual space. After sixty long minutes of observation, the next step is to use the camera as a sort of view-finder in capturing the moments that were most compelling. Through this, many compositions were derived, though many were later cropped further, using bits of larger paintings to create smaller ones and vice versa. This gathering of compositions was done when the mass had just let out, and the chaos of the moving mass attendees ensued. This speeding up of movement contrasted with the stillness of the mass, as well as created a more frantic need to capture each and every image of interest, a sort of triage in choosing the most important ones.

This derivation of these compositions from one particular excursion mimics the one-time passerby or tourist churchgoer. Because the paintings are being created over a much longer period of time, the aspect of memory and abstraction is further called upon. The images do not fully capture the experience, but the paintings call back to an experience rather than simply a chosen composition. As they are further abstracted, the works allow for a feeling of 'zooming in' that happens when one looks deeper into an area, discovering just what is most intriguing. Because of this, these paintings reach beyond this location specificity that becomes so integral to their creation. They bring back feelings of

faith and religious without preaching for or against it as an institution. It becomes necessary to see the church as a seemingly stagnant structure that, though some may be quite clandestine, undergoes many changes through the many restorations in structure as well as policy. This is illustrated through the choice of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City, a landmark that provides a unique opportunity to study the contrast between construction and tradition.

The subjects of my fixations oscillate between what is modern and new, and what gives a strong contrast in the space it inhabits. This could be a tall building behind a quaint rooftop, a skyscraper reflected in a large window, or a decaying warehouse painted to appear new once more. This is all related in their being manmade, being structures that have come about through the progress of man, or decayed in his neglect. This comes to terms in the reconstruction of what we deem culturally important. For now, the church lives on as a structure worth repairing, but an old factory with a long history itself may be left to fall to ruin before being demolished. No matter what moment in their rather temporary lives these structures are in, I seek to create a memorialization of their being and capture what will hardly be as everlasting as a structure such as the great pyramids in the state in which I experience it. This personal experience of looking, seeing and being intrigued with what may have been taken for granted is what drives the creation of my paintings. The moments within the changes that may come to pass, combined with the memories of my observations, become the subject.