

Les Femmes Folles

WOMEN IN ART

MARY REILLY, ARTIST

JANUARY 11, 2015



"Jack Loves Kat" graphite on paper

Mary Reilly is exhibiting recent drawings memorializing tree carvings or "graffiti" found within the woods of Alley Pond Park, Queens in a solo show, Graffiti Trees, at Garvey Simon Art Access in New York City thru February 8, 2015.

Mary Reilly (b.1963 in Yorktown, New York) studied art at SUNY Purchase, the School of Visual Arts, the Art Students League of New York, and the National Academy School of Fine Arts. After a career as a graphic designer, she began pursuing her career as an artist full time and studied with artists Frederick Brosen and Sharon Sprung. Her work is included in the permanent collection of the New-York Historical Society and has been exhibited at The Museum of the City of New York, The Arsenal Gallery in Central Park, The Arkansas Arts Center, the National Academy of Design and numerous other venues. She currently lives in Stowe, Vermont.

She generously shares with LFF about how she came to this body of work; what she thinks of the NYC art scene for women; the best advice she's received regarding pursuing art, the biggest issue in her career and more...

Where are you from? How did you get into art?

I grew up in Yorktown, NY but spent my adult life living in New York City. Growing up, I loved to draw. I had a brief career in graphic arts but later gravitated to fine art, going back to my favorite medium, pencils.

Tell me about your inspirations, process.

Since my early childhood, nature has had a profound affect on me in ways that I cherish. For my subject matter, I try to find and emphasize the beauty of locations and images in nature which are often beyond one's passing glance. I generally choose a place that I feel has a tranquil, isolated and slightly mysterious quality to it as well. For me, working in graphite, using the techniques I've learned and cultivated over the years, has been extremely gratifying. I tone my paper with up to eight layers of graphite before starting my drawing, taking the surface to a middle tone then pushing the darks and lifting the lights. This process creates subtle shifts in the tone that are in harmonious contrast with the sharpness of the minute details, helping me create a sensuality and a mood in each piece.



"Graffiti Tree" graphite on paper

Tell me about your current/upcoming show/exhibit/project and why it's important to you.

My current exhibition, Graffiti Trees, is a bit of a departure from my previous work in that there is human intervention in my landscapes. The inspiration for this series started with my first walk through Alley Pond Park, Queens. Walking through the parks woods, I realized that I had stumbled upon something very interesting. What I found there was acre upon acre of trees with history spelled all over them. Almost every tree had been marked by someone who had strolled through. There were hearts with initials and names carved into them, some with the year dating back to the 1930's. There were names of rock and heavy metal bands that had probably been left by groups of kids hanging out. Occasionally I would find a cute, humorous carving. These woods were alive with nostalgia. I found the faceless initials carved into the trees and what might be the story behind them to be most interesting.

Do you think your city is a good place for women in art? Do you show your work elsewhere/is there a difference in how your work is received?

I show my work exclusively in New York City. New York City is as good a place as any for a woman artist. Sexism still exists in New York, as elsewhere, but the sheer number of galleries and women gallery owners affords a greater opportunity for a woman artist.



“Led Zeppelin” graphite on paper

Artist Wanda Ewing, who curated and titled the original LFF exhibit, examined the perspective of femininity and race in her work, and spoke positively of feminism, saying “yes, it is still relevant” to have exhibits and forums for women in art; does feminism play a role in your work?

I view my artwork as more romantic than feminist.

If you could make one wish for art today, what would it be?

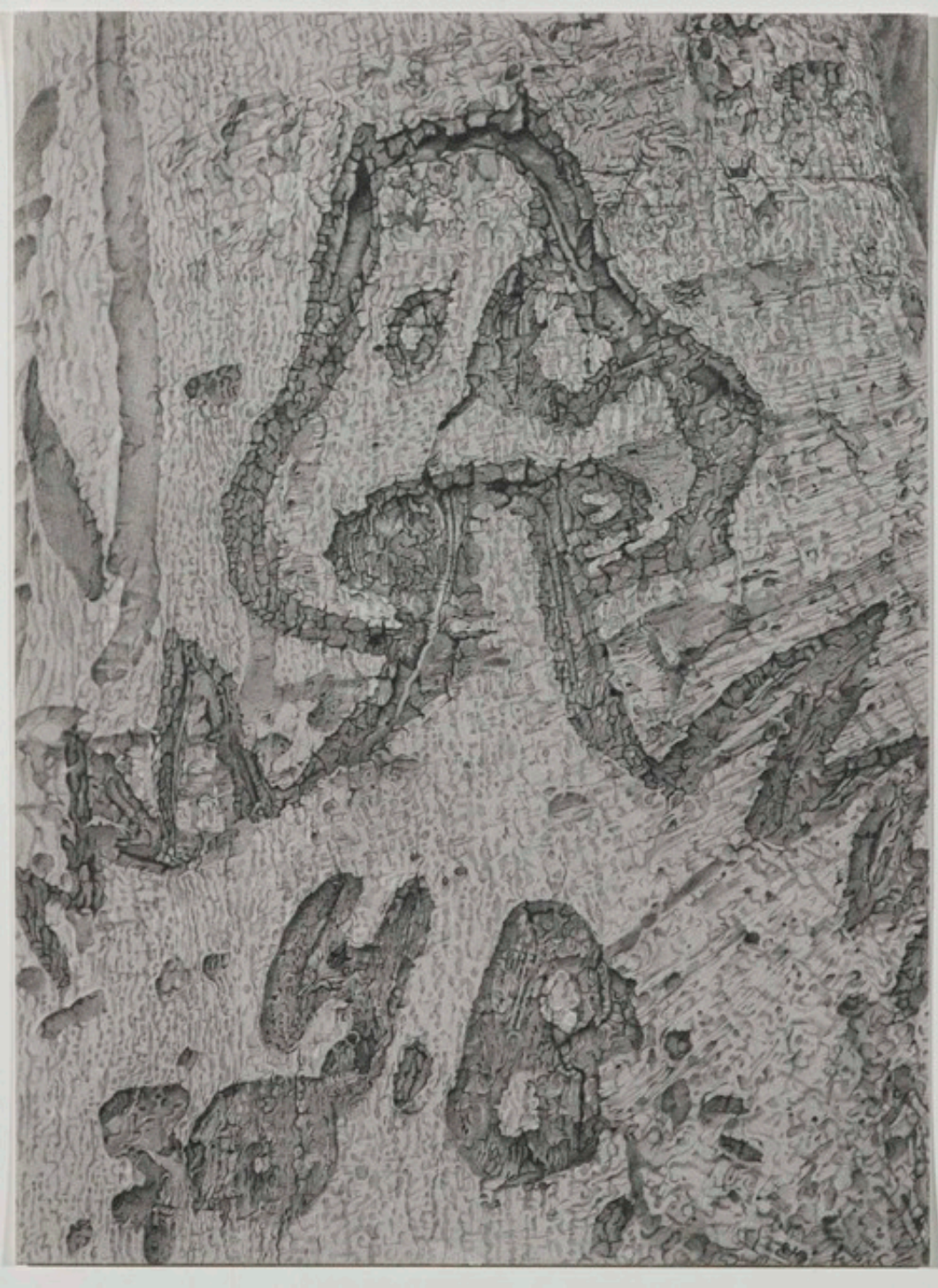
I wish for a return to an art that embraces personal vision, authenticity, poetry and craft. The triumph of Pop Art has created too much art of detached irony. I long to see an art of genuine feeling return.

What do you think is the most important issue facing artists—and/or artists who are women—today?

As a woman artist who is raising a family, I have found that balancing the responsibilities of child rearing against the need for creative autonomy to have been the biggest issue that I have had to face.

Ewing’s advice to aspiring artists was “you’ve got to develop the skill of when to listen and when not to;” and “Leave. Gain perspective.” What is the most helpful advice you have received?

The best advice that I have ever been given was not to allow other peoples expectations to dictate my work. To let my artwork come from using my internal voice and not external comments.



"Mushroom Man" graphite on paper