

Andrew Gifford
NEW YORK PAINTINGS

FOREWORD BY JOHN BERENDT

John Martin Gallery



7-12 MAY: SPRING MASTERS,
PARK AVENUE ARMORY, NEW YORK
22 MAY-12 JUNE: JOHN MARTIN GALLERY,
38 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W1S 4JG

Photograph: Ryan Parker

ANDREW GIFFORD'S NEW YORK

By John Berendt

Last year, an artist friend called to say that an English painter, Andrew Gifford, was on his way to New York to create a series of urban landscapes; he asked if Gifford could stay in my empty guest quarters for a week or so while he roamed the city painting. "He'll be no bother," my friend assured me. "He paints *plein air*, so he'll be out of the house most of the time anyway. He's very likeable, but more than that he's a brilliant artist. You'll see."

Naturally, I went straight to Gifford's website to have a look at his work, and what I saw amazed me. I scrolled through his oil paintings, utterly transfixed. His impressionist landscapes, beyond being strikingly beautiful, were bold and energetic. They were exercises in the nuanced play of light and dark. Recognizable shapes emerged from juxtaposed applications of color rather than from outlines drawn. His brush strokes were assertive, muscular, complex, and layered. His colors were arresting. His textures were palpable and surprisingly realistic. There was nothing tentative about his work. And in virtually every painting, he achieved that special magic by which a hasty dab or squiggle of paint becomes a meaningful detail in the viewer's eye—something that only the most accomplished painters can carry off. There was also that winning, albeit deceptive, touch: he made it all look absolutely effortless.

In the work I saw on line, Gifford had demonstrated his genius most dramatically by painting the same landscapes over and over, each time from the same perspective but at different times of day or night—an artistic sleight of hand that made explicit the evolving character of landscapes in changing light. Gifford had done this impressively in London, Jerusalem, Ramallah and elsewhere. I was filled with anticipation. In any case, I readily agreed to provide a home base for the first of his two New York painting expeditions represented in this catalog.

He arrived on a summer evening somewhat later than he'd expected. On the way in from the airport, as it turned out, he had caught sight of the Empire State Building from a hazy distance and had impulsively stopped his taxicab in order to set up his apparatus and make an oil sketch of it. When, upon arrival at my house, he produced the painting from his knapsack, I congratulated him on having truly hit the ground running.

Nor did he slacken his pace over the next ten days. After an early breakfast, he would generally leave the house for a full day of painting and location scouting, returning in the early evening with three or four small oil paintings, brimming with excitement over having found locations to his liking, and then heading out again to paint under a nighttime sky. By chance I happened to see him at work one night on Seventh Avenue. He had a miner's lamp strapped to his head, the better to see the painting taking shape on his easel, and he was exchanging easy banter with a respectful audience of half a dozen people.

Since his paintings were completely dependent on the light, and in as much as the moments he chose were often fleeting ones—the first or last light of day—I asked how much time this left him to capture the effect before it was gone.



—*Seventh Avenue, Day*
oil on canvas, 173 x 138 cm, 68 x 51¼ ins

"It's often only fifteen minutes," he said.

He never used photographs to record the moment, so I wondered how he managed to get it all down in time.

"By painting quickly."

His answer was neither boast nor exaggeration. In fact, it explained the energy inherent in his work. It was the energy that he put into these hurried sketches that he would later take particular pains to transfer onto the larger, more finished studio renderings.

I wondered how his view of the city might distinguish his New York paintings from those of other artists.

"New York is full of people and cars," he said. "I can't ignore them the way I did in my night paintings of Clapham Commons years ago. In many ways they *are* the subject. Actually, what is strange is when you look above head level, Manhattan is very still, impersonal, huge planes of glass and steel, unmoving, rigid. All the movement and humanity happens at street level. My paintings reflect this in the concentrated energy and layering of the paint."

Looking at Andrew Gifford's New York paintings all together, I can feel the pace and rush of the city I live in, especially in his Times Square and Seventh Avenue paintings. His views along Central Park South capture the sparkling elegance of the city's architectural majesty. He recognizes the brawny sweep of its bridges and elevated rails, the intimacy of the bar on Ninth Avenue and the lonely shut-in feel of the views from his hotel window in Queens where he witnessed a blizzard on his second visit (during one of the coldest winters on record.)

The most haunting works in this collection, for me at least, are those of Heritage Park, where the original Yankee Stadium stood for eighty-seven years until it was demolished in 2010. The two lovely paintings of the baseball diamond against the hulking, monolithic backdrop of the Bronx apartment houses are quiet and serene, but full of ghosts. The transformation from dusk to nighttime is nowhere more eerily evocative than here.

I find a great deal to admire in these paintings. But oddly enough, it was one minor detail of one small painting that struck me most forcefully. One evening, Gifford came in from a day of painting and put a small oil sketch in front of me.

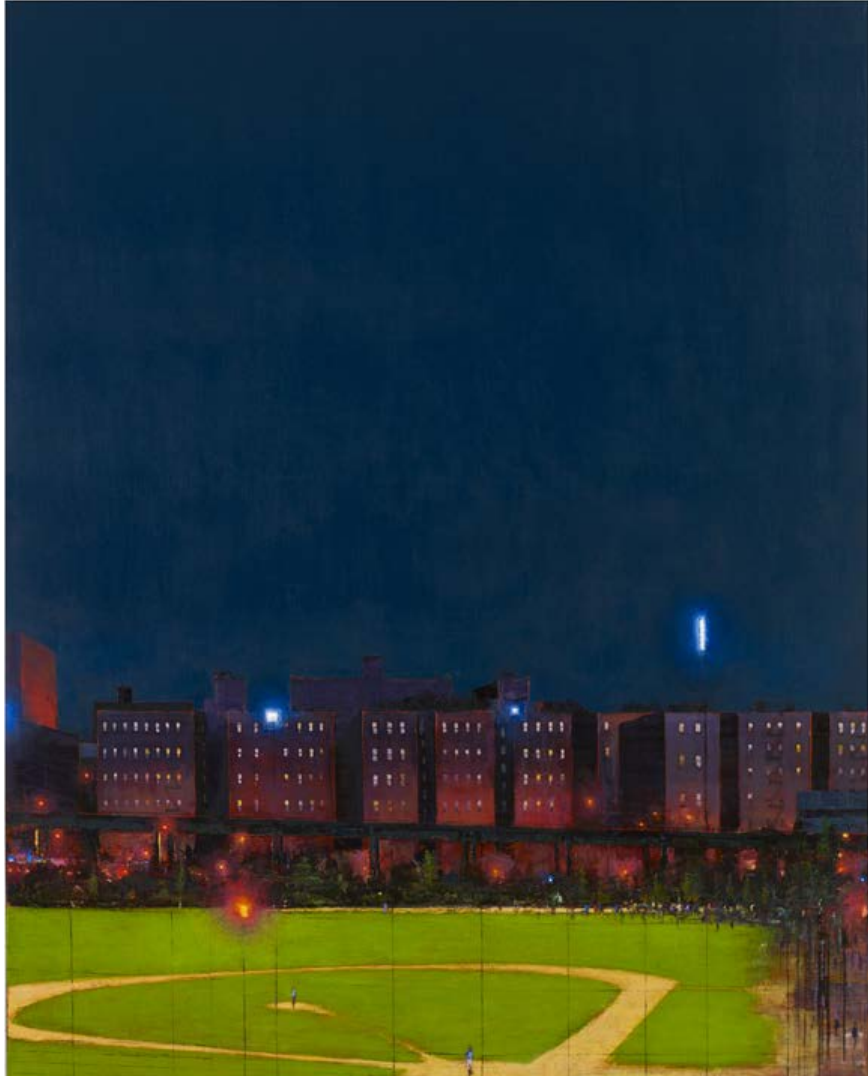
"Recognize this?" he asked.

He knew I would. It was a view of my street, looking toward my house from down the block. I was enchanted. But one particular aspect of it gripped me. It wasn't the sweep of townhouse façades, which he'd captured perfectly in quick, masterful strokes, nor was it the range of iconic New York front stoops; he'd aced those as well. It was the patches of bright sunlight bursting through the foliage and splashing onto the sidewalk. I'd seen those countless times, but had never given them a moment's thought. Looking at them now in the painting, however, they told me that it was mid-afternoon on a baking hot summer day and that a languorous mood had overtaken the neighborhood. It surprised me to discover that mere splashes of light on the sidewalk, carefully observed and expertly rendered, could be as effective in evoking the special nature of my street at that moment as the splendid architecture and the line of beautiful trees.

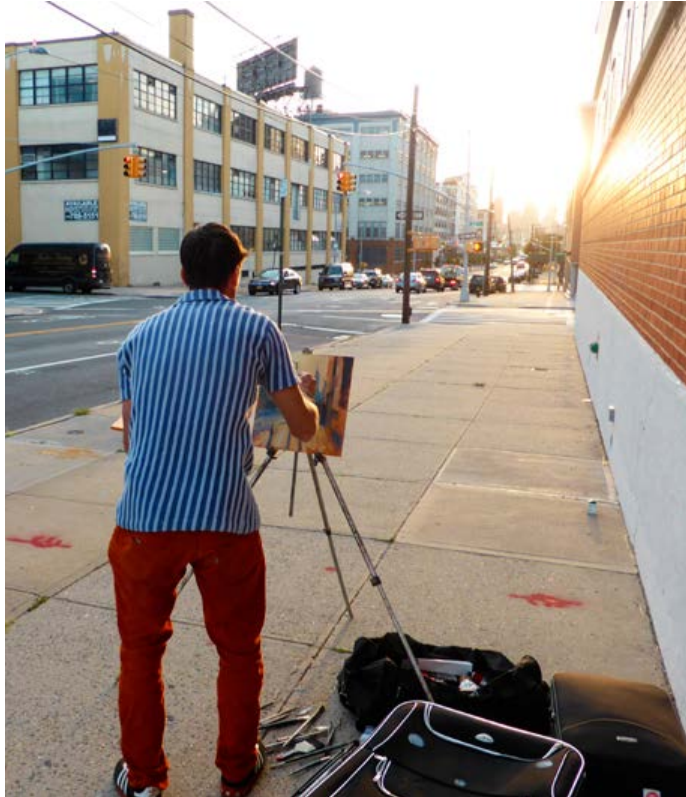
John Berendt is the author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*



—*Heritage Park, the Bronx, Last Light*
oil on canvas, 132 x 100 cm, 52 x 39¼ ins



—*Heritage Park, the Bronx, Night*
oil on canvas, 132 x 100 cm, 52 x 39¼ ins



AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2014

"I arrived in New York on a heat wave at the very end of August. I hadn't been on a serious painting trip for a while and had an excess of energy that needed to spill out into the work. I asked Rodney, the airport cabbie, to pull over on Queens Boulevard to paint a view of the Empire State Building in the hazy golden fishbowl light of late summer. As it was his neighbourhood, Rodney circled round trying to find me some turps. This was my arrival in New York ... painting full of optimism ... the sun drenched boulevard leading straight into the belly of Manhattan."



—*Empire State Building From Queens Boulevard*
35.5 x 34.5 cm, 14 x 13½ ins



— *Seventh Avenue Day Study*
22 x 21 cm, 10 x 10 ins



— *Seventh Avenue Night Study*
30.5 x 29 cm, 12 x 11½ ins



—*Seventh Avenue, Day*
oil on canvas, 173 x 138 cm, 68 x 51¼ ins



—*Heritage Park Night, Study*
oil on panel, 12 x 16 cm, 6 x 6¼ ins



— *John's House*
oil on panel, 25.5 x 25.5 cm, 10 x 10 ins



— *Manhattan from Port Liberté, Study I (top)*
oil on panel, 15 x 16 cm, 6 x 6¼ ins

— *Manhattan from Port Liberté, Study II*
oil on panel, 21 x 22 cm, 8¼ x 8¾ ins



— *Manhattan from Port Liberté, Study IV*
oil on panel, 21 x 22 cm, 8¼ x 8¾ ins



—*Manhattan from Port Liberté, Study III.*
oil on panel, 21 x 22 cm, 8¼ x 8¾ ins



— *Manhattan from Port Liberté, I*
oil on canvas, 50 x 40 ins, 125 x 100 cm



— *Manhattan from Port Liberté, II*
oil on canvas, 50 x 40 ins, 125 x 100 cm



— *Manhattan from Port Liberté, III*
oil on canvas, 50 x 40 ins, 125 x 100 cm



“Everywhere I put up my easel, from Harlem to Brooklyn, I got a hugely positive response. I was thankful for this because putting up an easel in Times Square at night with a torch strapped to your head and trying to make an oil painting is quite a test of nerve. People asked ‘why not just paint from a photograph’ ... Well photographs are impossibly static – it is in the energy created by attempting to capture the people, cars and lights constantly changing and moving that gives the painting a greater reality... not mannered marks but reactive marks, a kind of energy exchange.”



—*Broadway in the Rain*
oil on panel, 34 x 27 cm, 13½ x 10¾ ins



— *Times Square, Night*
oil on canvas, 173 x 138 cm, 68 x 51¼ ins



— *Manhattan Bridge from Brooklyn, Night*
oil on panel, 33.5 x 35.5 cm, 13¼ x 14 ins



—*Night Study from the Flat Iron Building*
oil on panel, 30.5 x 28 cm, 12 x 11 ins



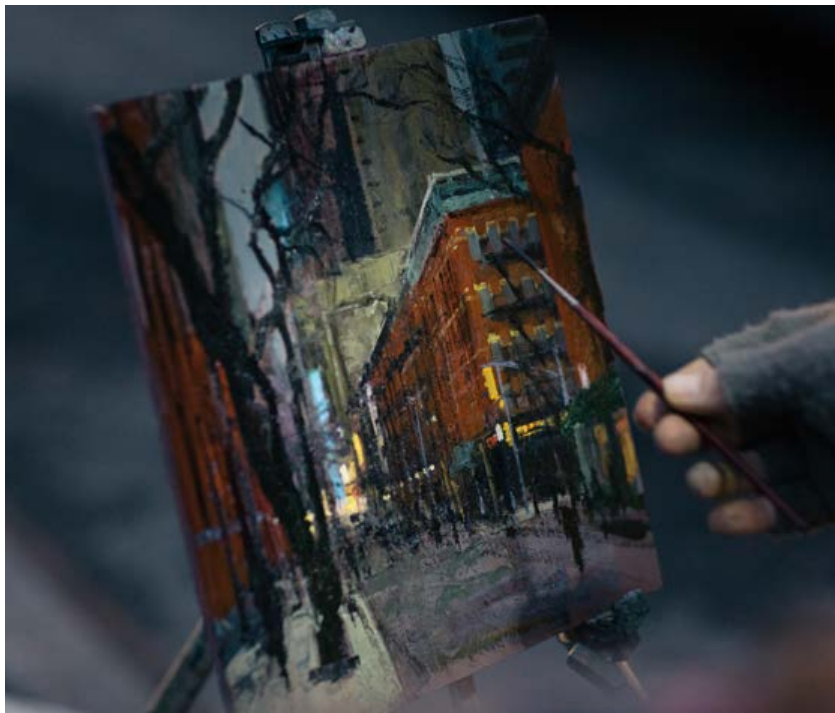
—*Central Park South, Looking East, Last Light, Summer*
oil on panel, 22 x 21 cm, 8¼ x 8¼ ins



—*Central Park South, Looking East, First Light, Winter*
oil on panel, 22 x 21 cm, 8¼ x 8¼ ins



—*Garage, Harlem*
oil on panel, 33.5 x 35.5 cm, 13¼ x 14 ins



JANUARY 2015

"When I arrived in New York in January the temperature was completely reversed, I went from the oven into the freezer. At first it was icy minus 13, but clear and the light was less hazy... people moved differently, more hunched, black clothes, their rhythms had changed. Then came the rain, one day it poured down all day, blasting staves of water in sheets...luckily the City has awnings down every street. On Seventh Avenue I painted under the Carnegie Hall awning, the road became a river perfectly reflecting the traffic and neon lights in liquid columns of intense colour. I love painting transient moments ... it's these times when your pulse quickens and you paint completely instinctively."



— *49th Street, Hell's Kitchen towards Times Square*
oil on panel, 30.5 x 29 cm, 12 x 11¼ ins



—*Seventh Avenue from Carnegie Hall, Rain*
oil on panel, 30.5 x 30.5 cm, 12 x 12 ins



—*Snow on 9th Avenue*
oil on panel, 24 x 30.5 cm, 9½ x 12 ins



—*From a bar on 9th Avenue, Night*
oil on panel, 26 x 25.5 cm, 10¼ x 10 ins

“After the rain came the snow, a 'super storm' had been forecast. I had been hoping to paint the city in the snow but this was all getting quite biblical. At the very start of my first trip from the airport in the summer I had seen a church that I wanted to paint and found it six months later after a huge hike through Queens. I put the church central in the composition, it had real presence like a dour Caspar-David Friedrich with the snow laden sky looming behind it and the headstones in the foreground reflecting the shapes of the Manhattan skyline...”



— *View of St Raphael's and Manhattan, Queens. Approaching snowstorm*
oil on panel 40.5 x 38 cm, 16 x 15 ins



—*Bridge, Queens*
oil on panel, 25.5 x 26 cm, 10 x 10¼ ins



— *Queensboro Bridge with Advertising Hoarding*
oil on panel, 25.5 x 25.5 cm, 10 x 10 ins



—From the *Platform 40th Street Station, Queens*
oil on panel, 25.5 x 26 cm, 10 x 10¼ ins



— *14th Street from the Highline, Snow on Awnings*
oil on panel, 40.5 x 38 cm, 16 x 15 ins

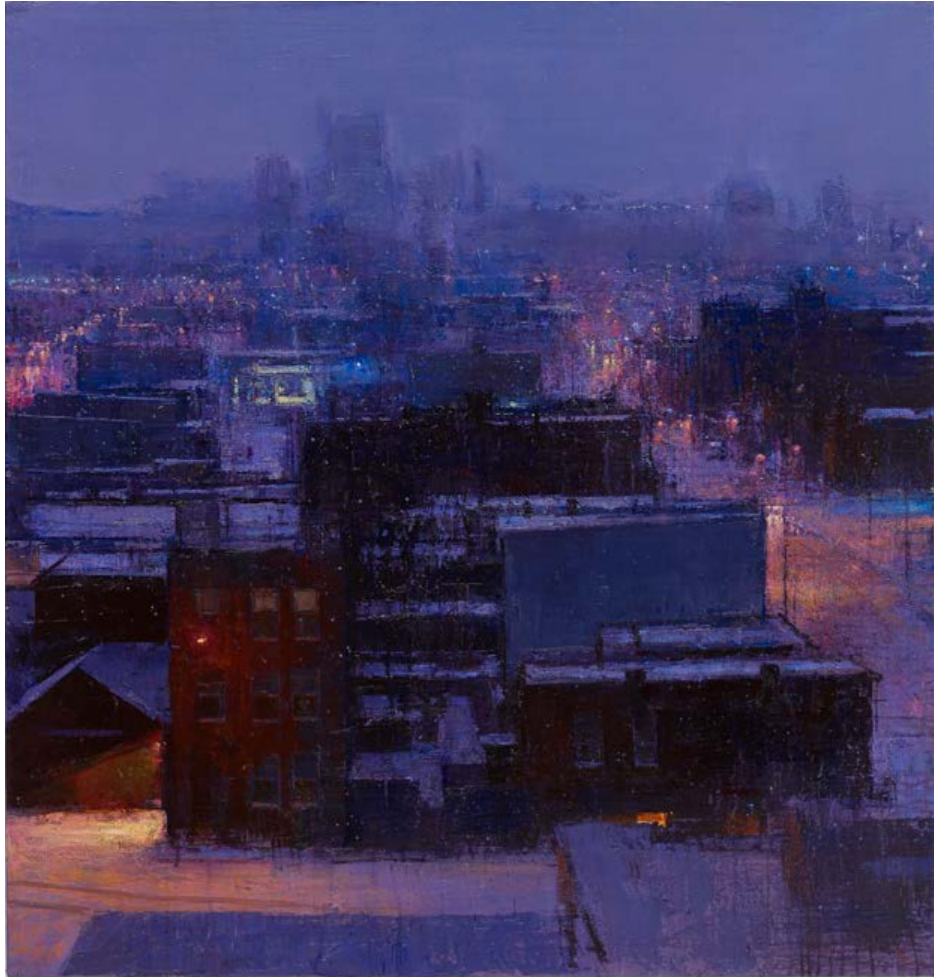


— *View of Manhattan from hotel window in Queens*
oil on panel 30.5 x 24 cm, 12 x 9½ ins



—*Blizzard from my hotel window, Queens, I*
oil on canvas 100 x 95 cm, 39½ x 37½ ins

"In Queens I found a solitary red brick hotel, with a Bates Motel vibe and I immediately knew that I should paint from it. I checked in and the view out was perfect, plain and simple but I knew it would change when the weather worsened. I was holed up in that room for three days painting solidly. The large window opened fully so there was no reflection problems, just a few interior snow drifts when the blizzard arrived. It was three days of being completely immersed in one view, consumed by the changing light and colour. I was pleased with the very mauve painting that I made as the light faded. I had already made two paintings of the blizzard in the day and as the natural light started to fade I started a third..you have about fifteen minutes when the last natural light mixes with the artificial light of the city and refracts off the snow and swirling flakes – a palette of mauve, blues and magentas that is so fleeting you just have to let loose."

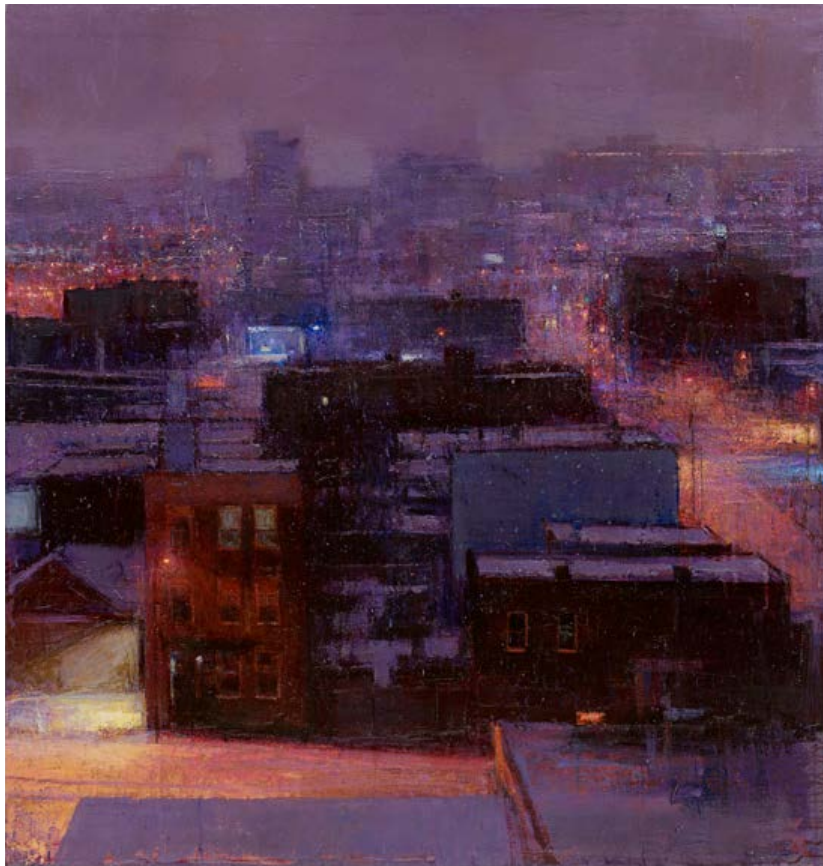


—*Blizzard from my hotel window, Queens, II*
oil on canvas 100 x 95 cm, 39½ x 37½ ins



— *Winter Evening Study I, Queens (top)*
oil on panel 30.5 x 30.5 cm, 12 x 12 ins

— *Winter Evening Study II, Queens*
oil on panel 30.5 x 30.5 cm, 12 x 12 ins



—*Blizzard from my hotel window, Queens, III*
oil on canvas 100 x 95 cm, 39½ x 37½ ins



—*Blizzard from my hotel window, Queens*
oil on canvas 100 x 95 cm, 39½ x 37½ ins



— *The Dakota Building from Central Park*
oil on panel, 30.5 x 30.5 cm, 12 x 12 ins



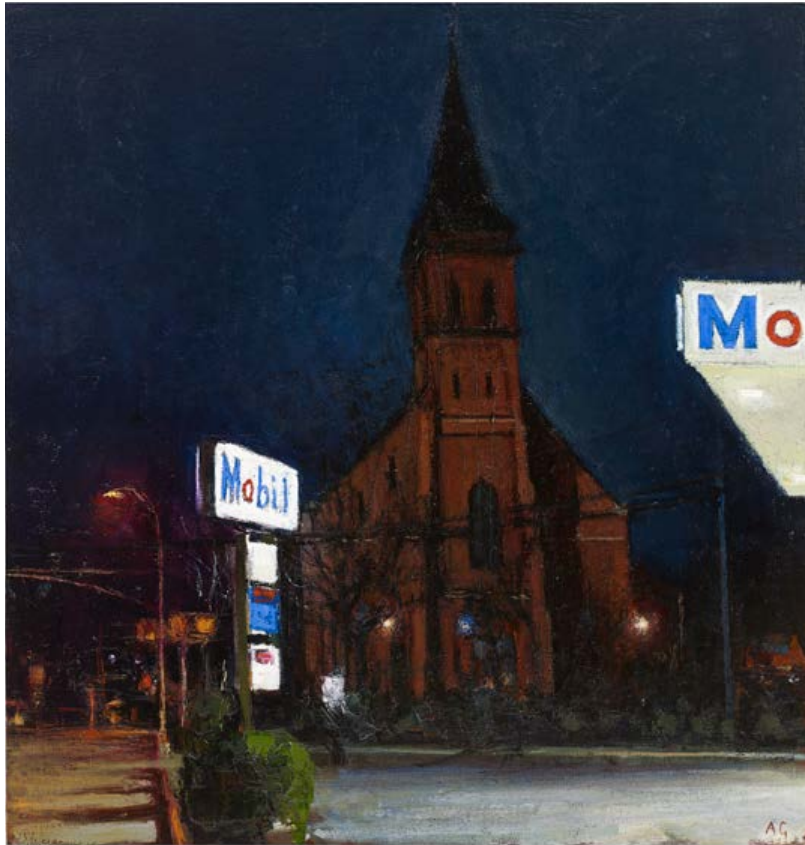
—*Columbus Circle, Early Winter Light*
oil on panel, 31 x 30.5 cm, 12¼ x 12 ins



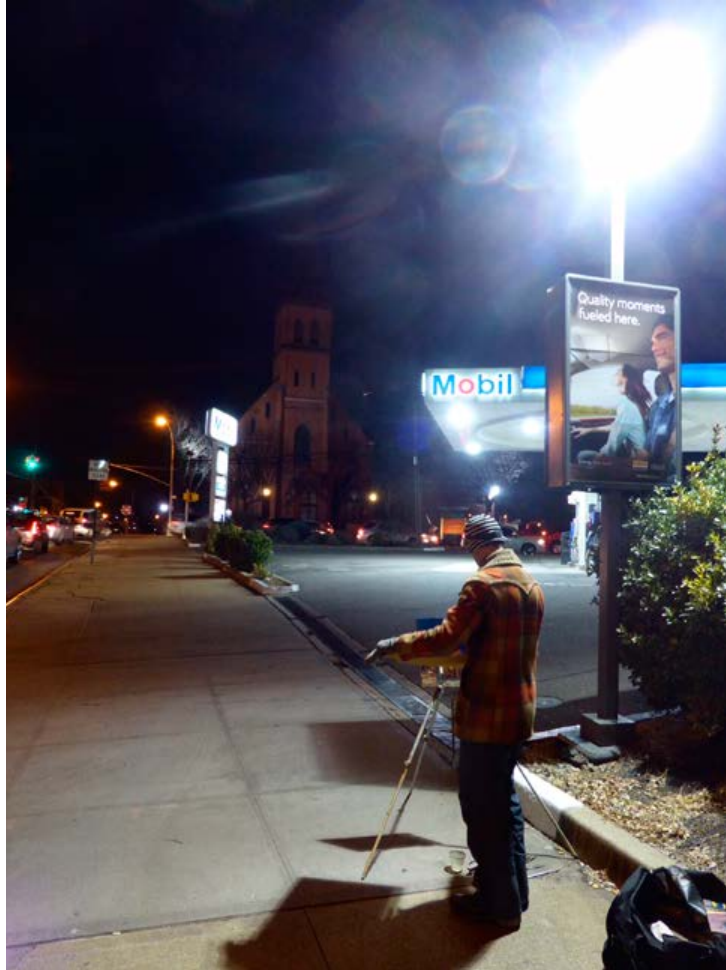
—*Fifth Avenue, Winter Trees*
oil on panel, 30.5 x 30.5 cm, 12 x 12 ins



— *View from Columbus Circle, Winter Sunlight*
oil on panel, 26 x 25.5 cm, 10¼ x 10 ins



—*St Raphaels, Queens*
oil on panel, 41 x 38 cm, 16 x 15 ins



Andrew Gifford was born in Yorkshire and grew up outside Middlesbrough. He graduated from the University of Newcastle in 1992 and has since built an international reputation for his innovative landscape paintings and light installations. His work has been widely exhibited, with solo public shows at The University of Northumbria (2014), Leeds City Art Gallery (2004), Fruitmarket Gallery Edinburgh (2001) and Middlesbrough Art Gallery (2000). In 2013 his exhibition, 'Two Cities, Paintings from Jerusalem and Ramallah', toured with the British Council to the Al Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem and the AM Qattan Foundation, Ramallah. Andrew Gifford's paintings are represented in the permanent collections of the New Art Gallery, Walsall, Cartwright Hall, Bradford, Middlesbrough Art Gallery and Chatsworth House as well as in private collections in Europe, USA and Asia. A monograph on the artist's work was published in 2005.

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Films and interviews with Andrew Gifford can be seen at www.jmlondon.com/films.
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