

CONTEMPORARY CAPE COD ARTISTS PEOPLE & PLACES

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In college, Jennifer O'Connell began as a psychology major but soon moved onto art. She was interested in painting figures in a setting, in finding "the story behind the person." In graduate school at the University of New Hampshire, her soon-to-be husband, also an artist, was her model. Eager to get on with his own painting, however, he'd exit and "what was left was the chair and other objects in the room," she says. As she explains it, she "became interested by default" in painting interiors. "It's funny," she muses, "how breakthroughs happen."

In the last decade, since those days in graduate school, she has been painting brightly colored vacant rooms. Then several years ago, she says, she "came full circle," and began putting figures back into her paintings. Whereas, formerly, the figure was dominant, now the figure or figures are just incidental to the space.

Although the interiors she paints are mostly in homes where she's lived, she finds that a place can tell you a lot about the people who occupy it. "If someone gave you the key to their house, walking around it could probably give you a better sense of the person than if you talked to him for five minutes."

The houses that have inspired her to paint include a rented vacation home in New Hampshire; a nineteenth-century Colonial in Hadley, Massachusetts; an old Victorian in Bennington, Vermont; a rustic house in Boothbay, Maine; and the one she lives in now, a Cape in Belchertown, Massachusetts. But, in many ways, the interiors she paints could be anywhere in any house.

When she comes to Cape Cod in the summers, as she did during her childhood, she finds her favorite town is now Wellfleet. Painting the places where she lives gives her time "to digest the space." It involves the "intimacy of occupying the place. I feel like I need to be familiar with the things around me. I think that comes through in my painting. You get a sense of humanity."

She finds it interesting to paint objects just the way someone has left them. For example, she woke up one night and went downstairs and was struck "by the way the light was falling" on a cup and cardboard take-out container left on the coffee table. She later painted that in nighttime color, bathed in green and blue. "The time of day is a big factor," she says, even though she is painting indoors. "Night is more moody."

Yet even her night pictures have bright colors, which, she says, are inspired by reality, but she

"definitely heightens them, pushing them in certain directions. You have to set up the symphony in terms of color. You have to direct the viewer's eye through the light and color and shapes."

There are often windows in her paintings, which, of course, are a source of light. Her rooms at night are lit by lamps that cast shadows in vivid colors. O'Connell's colors have a glow and vitality that bring you into the room. The part of the room she chooses and the perspective she selects structure the composition with a diversity of shapes. The furniture, windows, doorways, curtains, lamps, fireplace, books or papers on a table, and even the patterns of light across a floor or wall seem carefully arranged. There is a sense of home and ease. Her paintings invite you into a moment in time, a glimpse of real life, quiet and colorful.

O'Connell begins a painting with a pencil sketch of the area on canvas. That provides the structure and keeps her in touch with the abstract elements of the work. "The challenge," she says, "is trying to create the illusion of space, of taking a three-dimensional world into a two-dimensional space." After adding color to the drawing, she takes it to her studio to continue. During the process, she may return to the site, where objects and

lighting may have changed, and she may decide to alter the picture.

She often works on as many as ten paintings at a time. In that way, the paintings “inform” one another. O’Connell is mindful of the need for control, “but at a certain point you have to relinquish control,” she says, and let the painting guide you. She is likely to “edit” and remove an object “because it interferes with the abstract flow of the painting.”

“As I’m looking at an interior,” O’Connell says, “I’m bringing something of myself into it.” Her mood is invested into the painting. “An interior to me is a portal to a lot of associations I have.” She continues: “I paint a lot of old objects, which have sort of become my cast of characters from one painting to another.” For example, a maple night table, which belonged to her grandmother, reminds her of the times she spent at her apartment, which was decorated with her needlework and other beautiful objects. “A globe that appears in a lot of my paintings was a gift from my husband before we were married.” The objects she includes in her paintings reflect associations that all seem pleasant, colorful, warm, and homey.



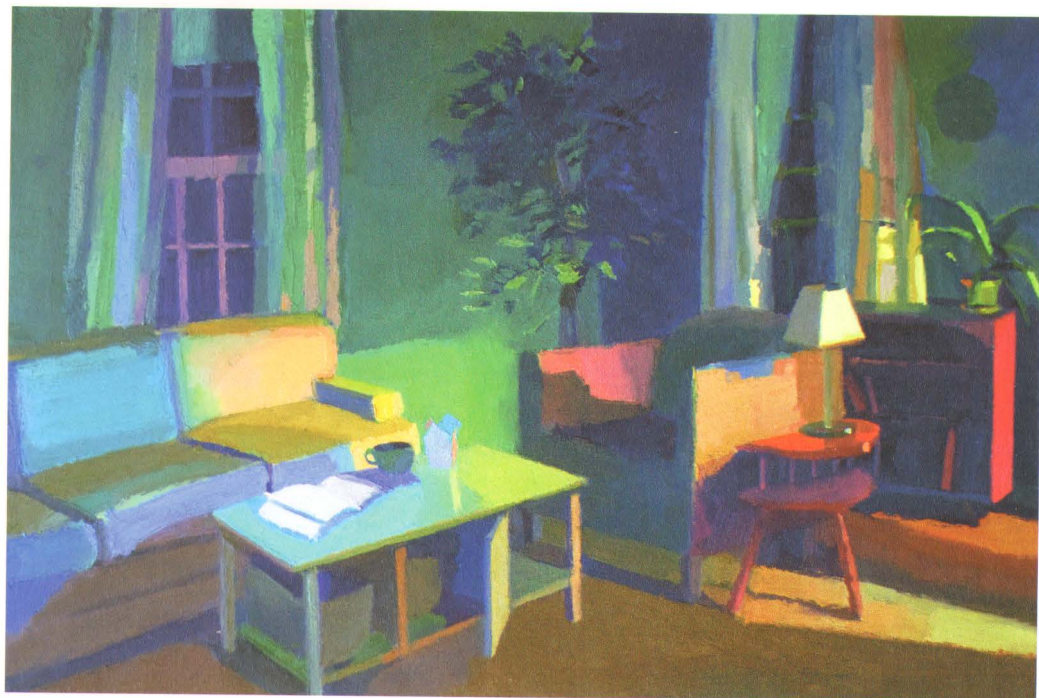
Work and Play. 2012, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches. Courtesy of Left Bank Gallery, Wellfleet, Massachusetts



***Puzzle Break.** 2011, oil on canvas, 24 x 30 inches. Courtesy of Adam Cave Fine Art, Raleigh, North Carolina*



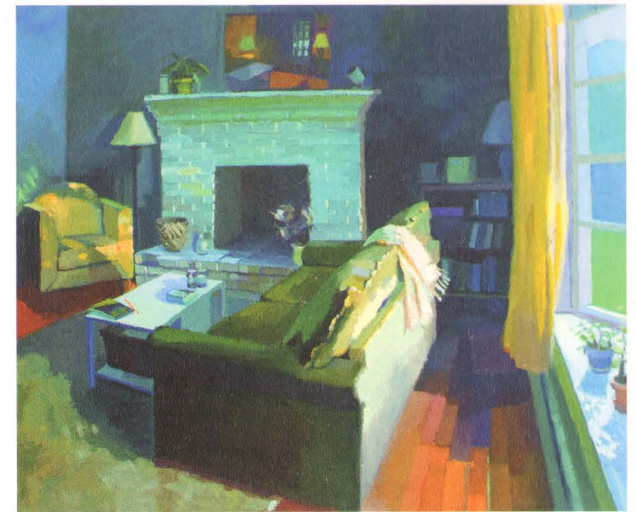
***Topiary.** 2012, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches. Courtesy of Left Bank Gallery, Wellfleet, Massachusetts*



***Stretching Shadows.** 2009, oil on canvas, 24 x 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist*



It's Your Move. 2008, oil on canvas, 24 x 48 inches.
Courtesy of the artist



Bay Window. 2011, oil on canvas, 30 x 36 inches.
Collection of Richard Gold, Oakland, California



At the Lake House. 2011, oil on canvas, 24 x 40 inches.
Courtesy of Adam Cave Fine Art, Raleigh, North Carolina