



THIS PAGE

**Moonlight,  
Central Park**

by Mary Reilly, 2007,  
graphite, 23" x 18".  
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

**Vacant Lot,  
Manhattan**

by Anthony Mitri, 2007,  
charcoal, 18" x 16".  
Collection the artist.

M. Reilly 11



# The Beauty of New York City in Black and White

For artists **Anthony Mitri** and **Mary Reilly**, who work in charcoal and graphite respectively, drawing is the medium that has helped them develop a personal vision and unique style. | **by Naomi Ekperigin**

**N**ew York City carries an allure that can be seen in television, movies, and many paintings and drawings by great artists. It is considered a cultural and artistic mecca, where creative people can express themselves and find their niche. Its neighborhoods, each with its own distinct smells, colors, and landmarks, have attracted not only tourists, but also painters, sculptors, and draftsmen from around the world for more than 100 years. However, many of the city's residents and visitors forget the history behind the imposing buildings and fast-moving streets, and many more long for the solitude and individual connection that such a busy environment often lacks. Artists Anthony Mitri and Mary Reilly create drawings that provide the viewer with these intimate moments of New York, allowing them to see below the surface while rendering the city's various faces in breathtaking detail.

BELOW

**Seward Park,  
New York City**

by Anthony Mitri, 2007,  
charcoal, 15 x 32".  
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

**Space in the Lower  
East Side, Manhattan**

by Anthony Mitri, 2007,  
charcoal, 15 x 25".  
Collection the artist.

## Anthony Mitri: Drawing the Face of New York

San Diego artist Anthony Mitri creates charcoal drawings of cityscapes and landscapes so realistically rendered that many viewers initially mistake them for black-and-white photographs. Upon closer inspection, one can see that these drawings are the work of a finely skilled hand, an artist who slowly builds up layers of charcoal to create lifelike shading.

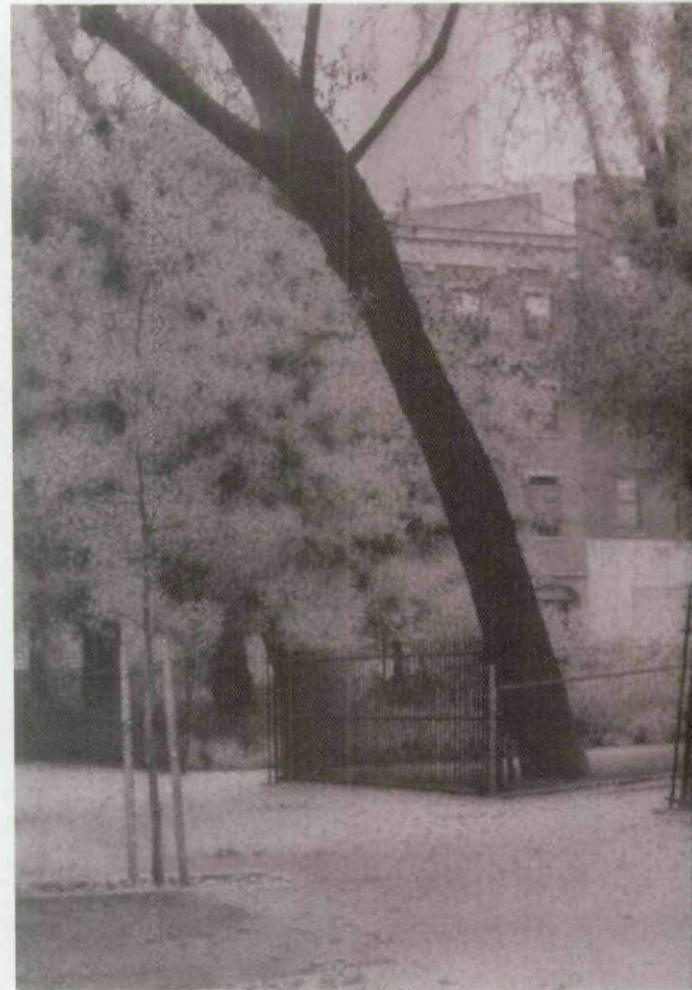
Despite Mitri's commitment to realism, the artist primarily relies on the feelings he has about a location when choosing a subject, and considers himself an expressionist in that respect. "My choice is driven largely by a feeling I have about a setting," he explains. "What I see is directly tied to what I feel. I need to 'discover' it, so to speak, with my eyes. I also think my mood at a given moment influences the way I see something, which in turn affects the way I feel about it."

As a youth, Mitri's first art lessons came from his mother, who worked as a commercial artist in department-store advertising. Other than two years of classes at the Cooper School of Art, in Cleveland, he is largely self-taught. He developed a love of music early in life and went on to study piano for several years at the Cleveland Music School Settlement. His path took a sharp turn in college, where he majored in geology. Although these studies seem to create a circuitous route to an art career, Mitri feels that they deeply influenced his creative style. "Studying geology, for example, afforded me a new pair of eyes with which to see landscapes," the artist explains. "And I listen to music while I paint. Mood in music and mood in a piece of art are the same for me."

Perhaps it is this focus on mood and not color that attracted him to working with charcoal. Mitri only began working in his current style within the last five years; he previously worked in ink, graphite, and watercolor—but mostly he painted in oil. "I continued working in oil—primarily landscapes in a heavy, impasto technique—through 1999, when I shifted to a different technique of oil washes and a more abstract style," the artist recalls. He says that he always favored cool colors, regardless of the medium he was working in, and that the lighting in his oil landscapes is not so different from the lighting in the pieces he now draws. "When I was an oil painter I always leaned toward subdued, muted color. Going from muted oils to black and white wasn't a huge jump for me.

"I began to work in this current style of charcoal in early 2002. The first pieces were experimental," he continues.

"Having used charcoal in a much looser style previously, I had much to learn about the medium in the context of a tighter, more realistic method." A three-year sojourn to France served as inspiration for this developing style. "I have always been moved by nature," Mitri explains. "I grew up in an area southeast of Cleveland; it's a largely forested landscape of rivers, hills, valleys, and small farms and towns, and I found similar settings in the Calvados region of Normandy. I love the feel of autumn fields in warm hues and of bare trees against cool, gray skies."







ABOVE

**West 54th Street From the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY**

by Anthony Mitri, 2006, charcoal, 36 x 16½. Private collection.

"A drawing with many architectural elements like this one takes much longer than a natural subject, such as a field of flowers," Mitri says. "This piece took about six months to complete."

OPPOSITE PAGE

**Central Park at Fifth Avenue, New York, NY**

by Anthony Mitri, 2006, charcoal, 21½ x 17. Private collection.

"I'm not surprised that some of my favorite moments are those spent in public parks in the heart of the city," says Mitri when explaining paintings such as this one. "Skirting the fenced boundary of Central Park, where city touches nature, I get a taste of both of the worlds I love so much."

His emphasis on the mood of a piece can be seen in his lighting choices, especially in his cityscapes. Like many artists, Mitri places great emphasis on lighting in a scene, and considers it to be his strongest tool for evoking a certain emotional response from the viewer. The artist's favorite season has always been fall, when the colors change and the weather cools. "The lighting in my drawings appears as though I am in my scene on a cool, overcast day in late autumn," he explains. "Even when I find myself at a particular location on a hot, humid day in August, I won't render that bright summer lighting in the final drawing—I'll draw that scene as if it's under gray autumn sky." The artist depicts the chosen scene in the way that is most appealing to him, even if the realities of the view do not dictate the use of certain choices—emotions trump the visual facts of a landscape, for his ultimate goal is to express his inner feelings about a subject.

Although Mitri initially focused on rural landscapes similar to the ones in which he grew up, the artist finds himself equally moved by the symbiotic relationship between city and nature that exists in large cities such as Paris and New York. He has never lived in New York for a significant period of time but he has visited frequently with his wife, who lived and worked there for 13 years. They took two weeklong trips in 2003 and 2005, during which they strolled through neighborhoods in downtown Manhattan, and Mitri took the photographs that inspired his latest series of New York cityscapes. The artist is excited by the variety and sharp contrasts that exist in these drawings. "There's a diversity of architectural interest in the city," he explains. "Just as a portrait artist may be inspired by the face of a certain individual, a specific setting may inspire an artist of a cityscape. The 'architectural face' of an old city such as New York—at once aged and young—possesses a personality as much its own as that of each individual who has come to be a New Yorker." When Mitri describes his favorite New York City locations, it seems that he seeks out the best of both worlds: city and nature, found in the major parks and in areas of the East and West Village. Take, for example, the drawing *Central Park at Fifth Avenue, New York, NY*. "This space caught my eye as I walked the boundary of Central Park in the autumn of 2003," the artist remembers. In this piece, Mitri highlights the interface of art and nature, as the architectural complexity of the skyscraper contrasts with the natural simplicity of the tree branches on a crisp fall day. Both the building and the tree are rendered in intricate detail, one no less vital because of the presence of the other.

In the drawing *Vacant Lot, Manhattan* the artist focuses on an empty space nestled between several tall buildings. "This scene was striking to me for many reasons," Mitri says. "The obvious void created by the demolished building, the graffiti on the sides of the buildings, the variety of architectural styles present at that location, and the old, dark building



OPPOSITE PAGE, ABOVE

**3:15 p.m., Penn Station,  
New York, NY**

by Anthony Mitri, 2005, charcoal, 12¼ x 18½. Collection the artist.

"The Penn Station drawings gave me the opportunity to experiment with another aspect of the charcoal medium: texture, and how a relatively large area looks and feels in solid black," the artist says.

OPPOSITE PAGE, BELOW

**10:37 p.m., Penn  
Station, New York,  
NY**

by Anthony Mitri, 2005,  
charcoal, 12¼ x 18½.  
Collection the artist

**"Just as a portrait artist may be inspired by the face of a certain individual, a specific setting may inspire an artist of a cityscape. The architectural 'face' of an old city such as New York—at once aged and young—possesses a personality as much its own as that of each individual who has come to be a New Yorker."**

**—Anthony Mitri**

in the center, which I could see on the next block over through the empty space." As one can imagine from the great detail, Mitri's charcoal cityscapes take several months to complete, and he works at home in his studio, using reference photos taken on-site. When on location, the artist spends most of his time walking around the space, viewing it from different angles to find the most effective composition. When he is moved by a particular perspective or angle, he looks at the scene through the viewfinder of his 35-mm Minolta camera and snaps as few as three photographs before moving on. This may seem surprising to other artists, many of whom take hundreds of photos and take elements from several of them to create a single drawing. But Mitri does not find this method suitable for his style, because it is the mood and emotion evoked by a location that pulls him in and stays with him long after he's left the site. "By the time I take out my camera, I already know what I want; all I have to do at this point is frame and shoot," Mitri explains when asked about his process. "When I'm working on a drawing—which can sometimes be months after taking the photograph—it still feels like I'm getting up and going to work on that site."

To maintain this feeling, Mitri develops his photographs in full color, even though he works in black and white, because that provides him "with as realistic a memory of the location as possible," he says. "It's that particular moment on-site that I seek to capture back home, and that includes the colors." The artist compares his process with charcoal to his previous experience with watercolor and oil painting and finds he approaches the media similarly. "Just as paint can be applied in a series of glazes, one can begin applying charcoal lightly and gradually add successive layers to achieve the desired value," he explains. "There's also a limit to how much charcoal can be erased, depending, in part, on how much pressure I use to apply it. Because of this, I still think like a painter—I constantly think ahead and visualize the value contrasts I wish to achieve."

Mitri prefers 300-lb Arches hot-pressed paper for its smoothness and weight. Before beginning his drawing, he drags fine sandpaper vertically and horizontally across the surface. This creates a linenlike texture, a kind of cross-hatching that he feels lends the piece a sense of roughness and history, similar to an old film strip. Although he creates highly detailed work over a long period of time, Mitri does not spray his drawings with fixative until he is completely finished. "Fixative makes the paper grainy," he explains. "The charcoal that's been sprayed ends up having a different texture than the previous layers." To prevent smudging as he draws, the artist uses a makeshift mahlbridge he made with wedges of wood.

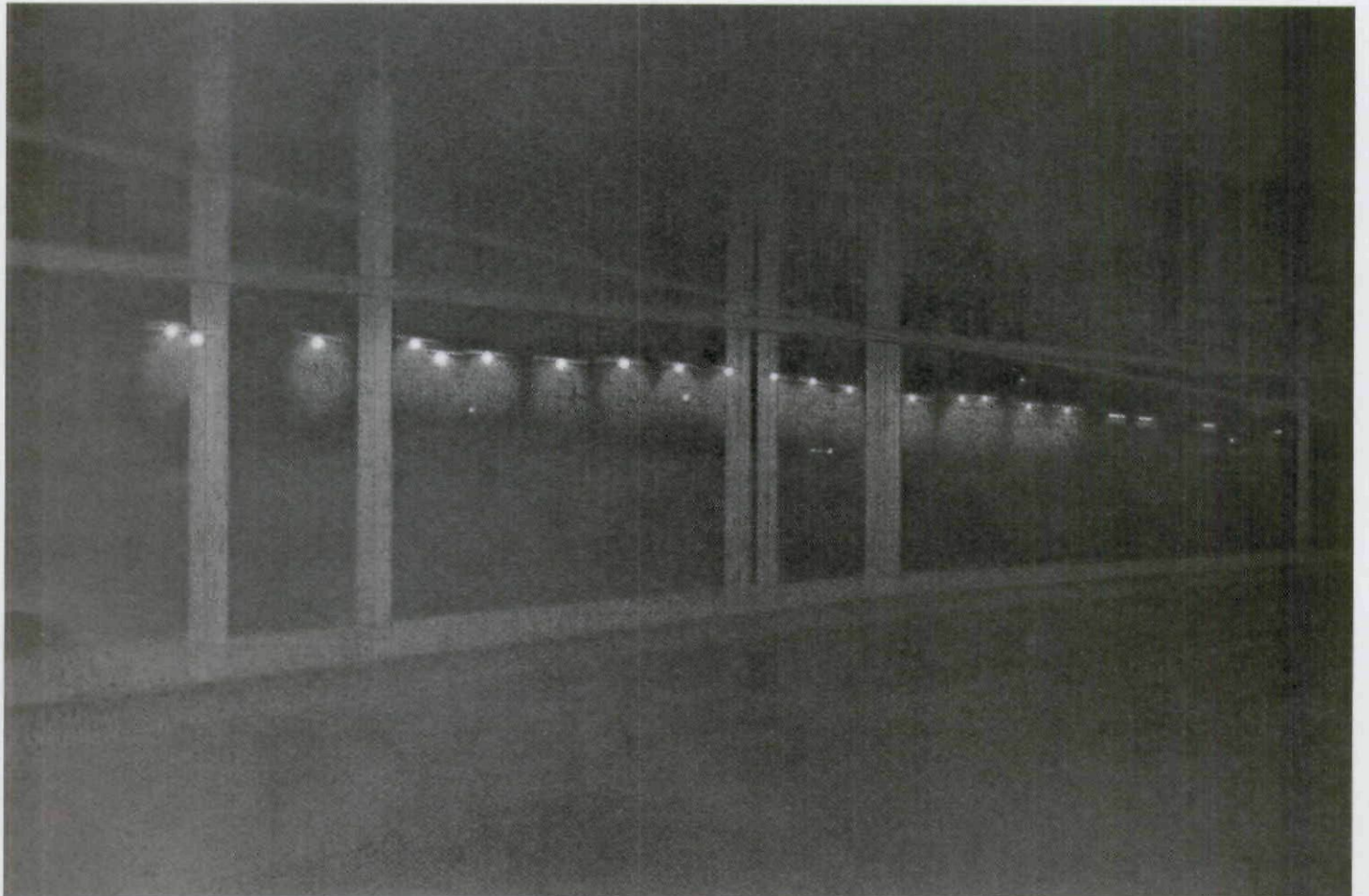
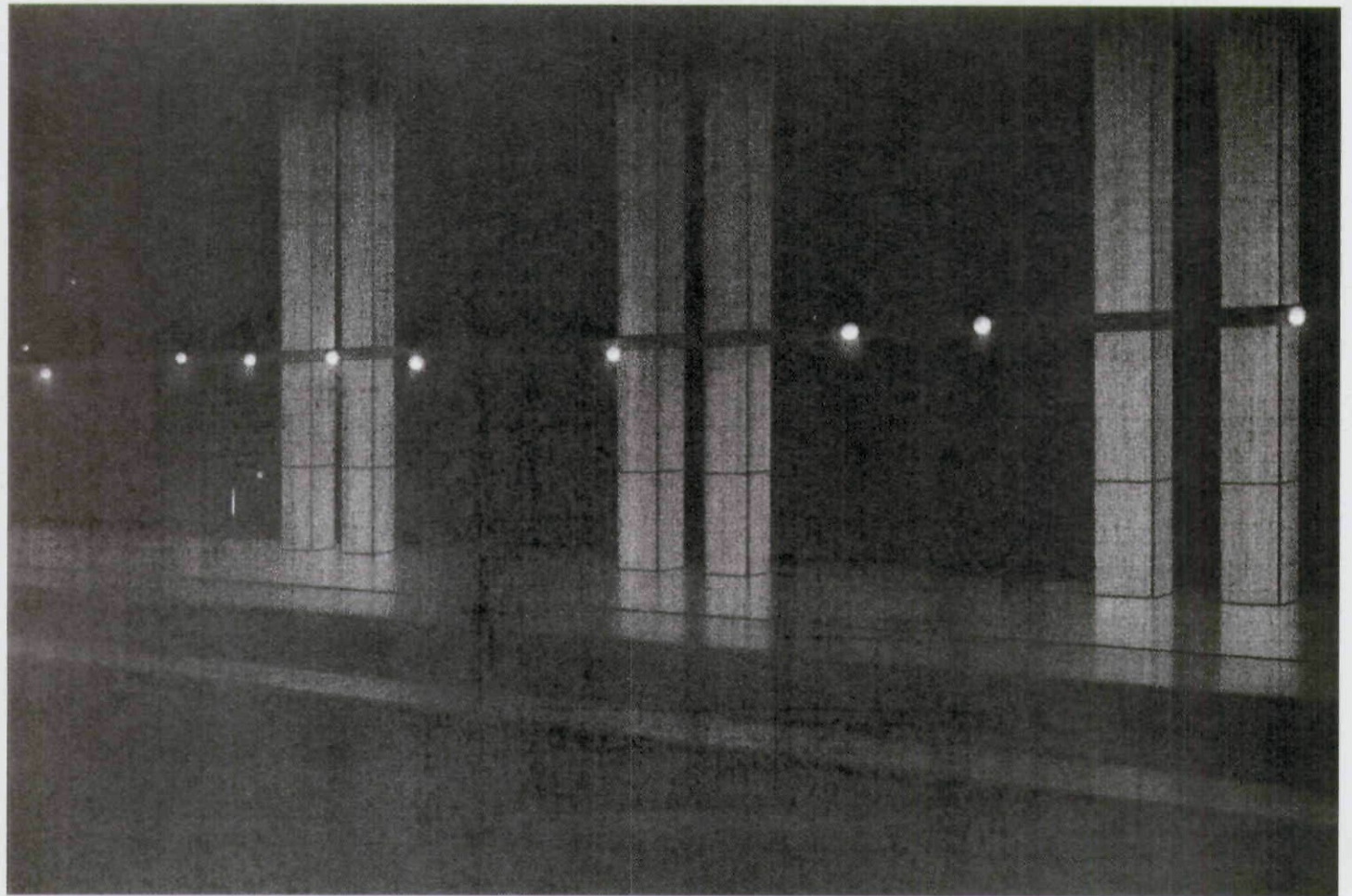
Mitri's technique for executing his drawings is fine-tuned, but he still is tested when working in charcoal. "Exploring the different ways to use charcoal and the different effects that can be produced is the most challenging—and the most exciting—aspect of the

process," he says. "A painter must choose values and hues and must consider relative temperatures and the emotional effects of different hues as they prepare their palette. Likewise, I choose which charcoal will enhance or detract from the desired emotional effect, illusion of distance, or other devices. For example, blue-gray charcoals will create the illusion of greater distance from the viewer, whereas warm yellow-gray charcoals tend to pull the viewer's eye relatively closer to the foreground."

Guiding the viewer's eye is the goal of every artist, and Mitri strives to not only move him or her through the piece but also create a sense of intimacy between the viewer and his subject. He considers himself a portrait artist who works one-on-one with his subject and engages in a dialogue to get a sense of the personality of a building or area. "My goal is to present the face of my location undistracted by other elements, the way a portrait artist might—and truly convey its essence."

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## Mary Reilly: Capturing the Transience of Nature

New York-based artist Mary Reilly also combines a love of the city with her commitment to a realistic style. Like Mitri, her emotions guide her toward her subject matter, and she seeks to share this with the viewer in her graphite drawings. However, unlike Mitri, Reilly focuses on the areas of New York City that are often forgotten or ignored by visitors and natives alike: the serene parks and gardens outside of the city center, where one can enjoy solitude, quiet walks, and uninterrupted observation.

Reilly was raised in Westchester County, adjacent to the Bronx, and has lived in New York City since graduating from high school. She worked as a graphic designer for many years before making the decision to focus on her career as a fine artist. She's studied at many of the city's best art schools, but it was not until she began her work at the National Academy that she found her current preferred technique and subject matter. "Three years after having my first child, I began taking classes at the National Academy," Reilly recalls. "Sharon Sprung's life-drawing class was a turning point for me. We worked in charcoal, but I quickly

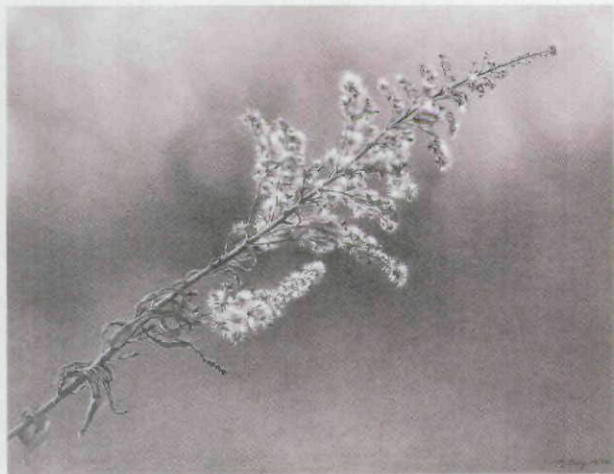
abandoned it for my favorite medium: graphite." Reilly adopted her instructor's technique of toning her paper with layers of graphite before starting her drawing, taking the surface to a middle tone that she can then subtly manipulate with pencils, erasers, and other drawing tools.

As she honed this technique, Reilly experimented with various subject matter. "In the beginning I drew architectural spaces, using my own photographs as a guide," she remembers. "I was thrilled with the process and the results of this technique, but I knew that I needed to find a subject matter that was personal for me, so I used my love of nature as inspiration." During this process of discovery, Reilly began taking a watercolor class taught by Rick Brosen. Ironically, it was in studying another medium that she found a welcoming environment in which to explore her vision and take greater risks. "For several years I worked independently in the classroom, using graphite," the artist says. "It was a supportive environment where I could really focus on developing my personal style."

Her first forays into drawing nature scenes began about seven years ago and were based on areas of Prince Edward Island, located off the eastern coast of Canada. In these instances, she was moved by photographs of the area and felt compelled to draw from them. Reilly had found exactly what she had been seeking—a truly clear vision—and she was thrilled. "Carving out the gentle details of nature with the quiet, silvery patina and sensual feel of graphite became the perfect outlet for me," the artist says contentedly. After this experience, she purposely set out to develop a new body of work that explored this vision.

Like Mitri, Reilly was moved by an emotional response to her subject and began furthering her interest by seeking areas that could provide the same excitement and beauty of the island photographs. She found it while walking around the north woods of Central Park, in Manhattan. "You forget you're in the city when you're in those woods," the artist says. "I was completely transported to the place I saw on Prince Edward Island, and I found myself totally immersed in the serenity of the natural side of New York City." The development of this style and clear vision can be seen in the drawings *North Woods I* and *North Woods II*.

The positive experience in Central Park prompted Reilly to research parks and wooded areas in the other four boroughs,



ABOVE

### **North Woods II**

by Mary Reilly, 2006, graphite, 18 x 23½.  
Collection the artist.

"I'm less interested in areas of the parks where you find a lot of people and baseball fields and playgrounds," says Reilly. "You don't see buildings in the north woods—it's like you're transported to the Adirondacks."

OPPOSITE PAGE

### **North Woods I**

by Mary Reilly,  
2006, graphite,  
50 x 33½.  
Collection the artist.



BELOW LEFT

**Bronx River**

by Mary Reilly, 2006,  
graphite, 38 x 50.  
Collection the artist.

BELOW RIGHT

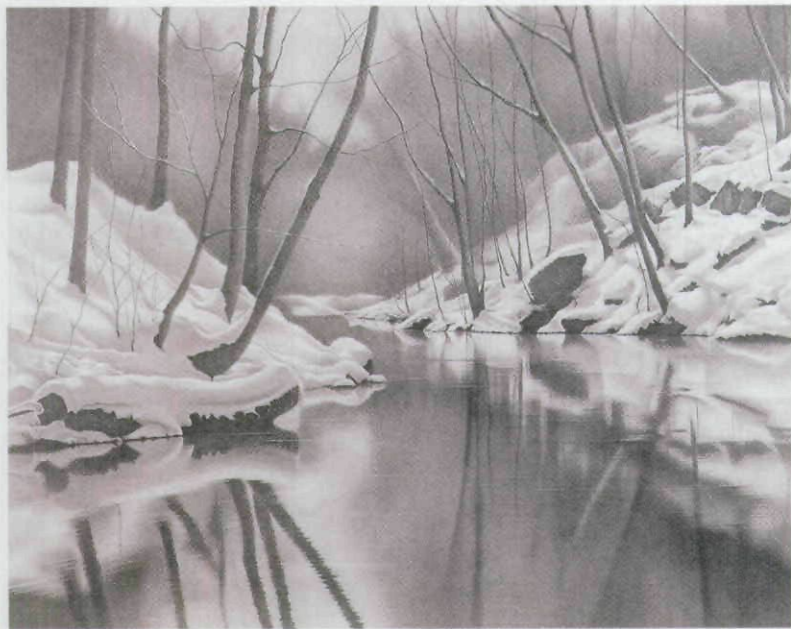
**Spring Pond,  
Staten Island**

by Mary Reilly, 2007,  
graphite, 23½ x 18.  
Collection the artist.

OPPOSITE PAGE

**Clove Lake,  
Staten Island**

by Mary Reilly, 2007,  
graphite, 23½ x 18.  
Collection the artist.

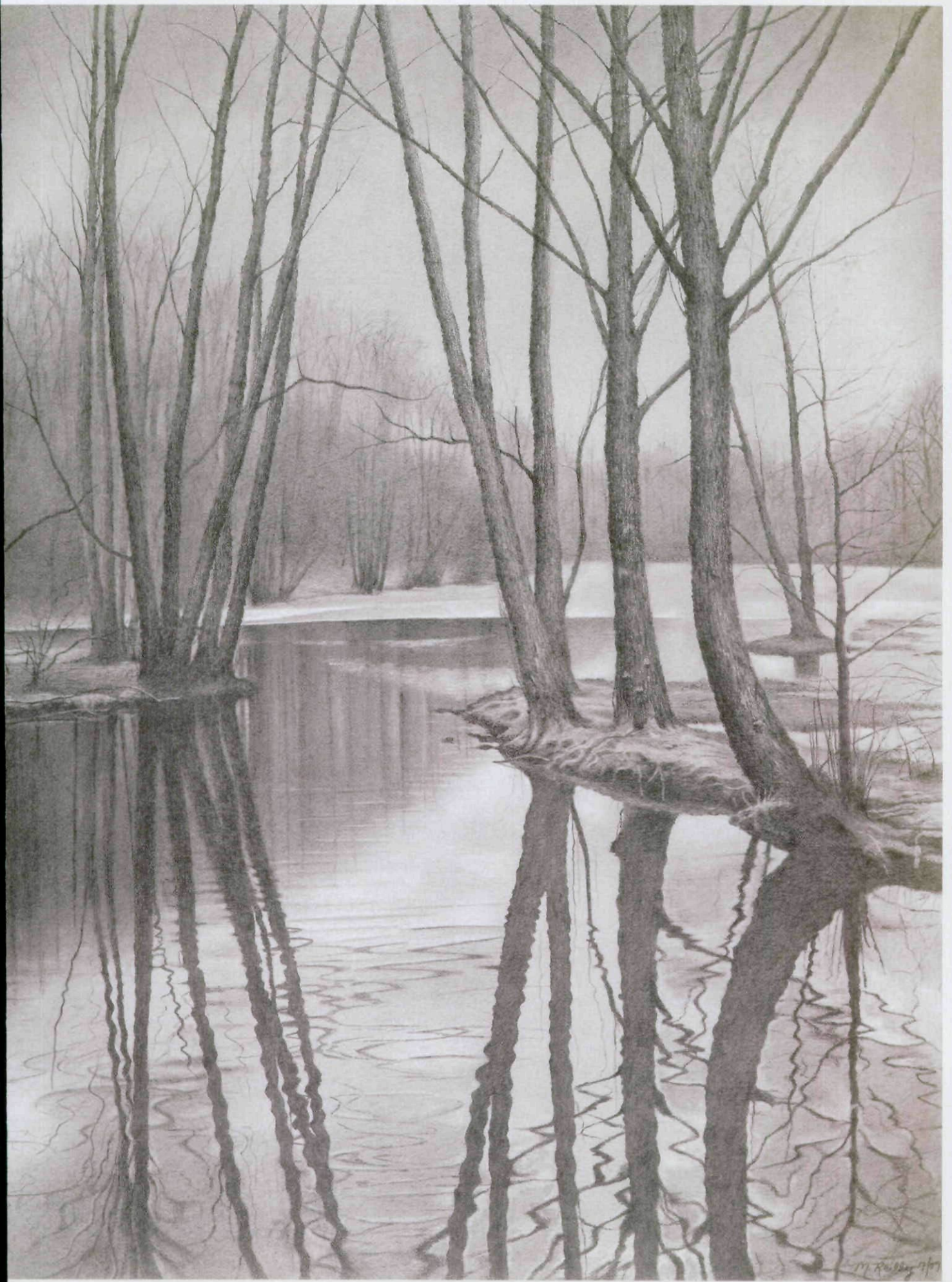


and she began taking long trips to the areas of New York that tourists rarely see, and natives often forget. “I went to eight ancient forests and took walks along the Staten Island shore, and I was blown away by the beauty. There were so many densely wooded areas—huge, natural, unpopulated.” For Reilly, there is no need to block out the passersby and bustle of the New York City that Mitri edits out of his *Central Park at Fifth Avenue, New York, NY*, and *West 54th Street From the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY*. Mitri works in busy locals and creates an intimate environment, engaging in a dialogue with his subject, but for Reilly this is effortless, as her chosen areas of New York City are often as quiet as any countryside—and this is exactly what the artist seeks to communicate. “I’m trying to find these isolated spots and make the viewer feel as though they, too, are alone and isolated,” she explains. “I want to show people the peace and solitude here that you would normally find outside of New York City and convey that emotion.” This task seems well suited to a New York City transplant who spent her childhood a stone’s throw away from the five boroughs, developing a love and respect for nature.

While creating these drawings and choosing her subject matter, Reilly found her own view of New York City changed. “I had only been to Staten Island once before,” she sheepishly admits. “Since visiting all its parks, taking photographs of the shoreline and the wooded areas, I’m in awe of the magnitude of its beauty.” She takes great care in capturing this beauty, taking up to 10 rolls of film on location, then reviewing them in her studio before settling on the few that will

serve as the basis for a drawing. When she has decided on a composition, she begins the layering technique taught to her by Sprung to create a sense of depth and a rich tone that instantly strikes the viewer. “I tone the paper with six to eight layers of graphite, depending on the subject,” Reilly explains. “With a lighter subject, like the snow-covered rocks in *Bronx River*, I use fewer layers. For intensely focused floral scenes, such as *North Woods II*, I make the background dark and blurred, and use several layers to create this photographlike effect. After applying each layer I rub it in with a chamois cloth. Generally, it takes up to five days to prepare the drawing surface, depending on the size of the piece.” After reaching a middle tone that she’s satisfied with, the artist spends one week laying in the initial drawing, and an additional four to five weeks working in the details. Reilly has an intense work ethic, devoting seven hours a day, five days a week to a given piece. Surprisingly, she finds that she utilizes her time better now than she did before her children were born. “I get totally engrossed in my work while they’re at school. I know the time I have available, and I use it.”

Like any draftsman, Reilly’s biggest technical challenge is avoiding smudging, and she makes sure to touch her surface as little as possible while she works. “When I do use my hand for stability—most often when working on details—I use my pinky finger, which I wrap with acetate. The acetate is smooth and will glide over the graphite instead of smudging or lifting it.” To create the reflective surfaces on the water in such drawings as *Spring Pond* and *Clove Lake*, Reilly uses erasers to lift the reflection of the sky as seen in the water,



"The shift to drawing nature in graphite was really just my going back to the core of who I am, the marriage of my love of nature and my love of drawing. Carving out the gentle details of nature with the quiet silvery patina and sensual feel of graphite became the perfect outlet for me."  
 —Mary Reilly



**LEFT**  
**Moonrise, Staten Island**

by Mary Reilly, 2007, graphite, 28 x 38%. Collection the artist.

"I took this photograph in the early evening, in the winter," the artist says. "I pretty much know at the end of the day, when I have several rolls of film, which ones will work. Something about the composition, subject, lighting, and general mood—if it's all there when I take the photo, I know it's going to be a winner."

**OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT**  
**The Pool**

by Mary Reilly, 2006, graphite, 18 x 23%. Collection the artist.

**OPPOSITE PAGE, RIGHT**  
**Nature Study, Harlem Meer**

by Mary Reilly, 2007, graphite, 18 x 13%. Collection the artist.

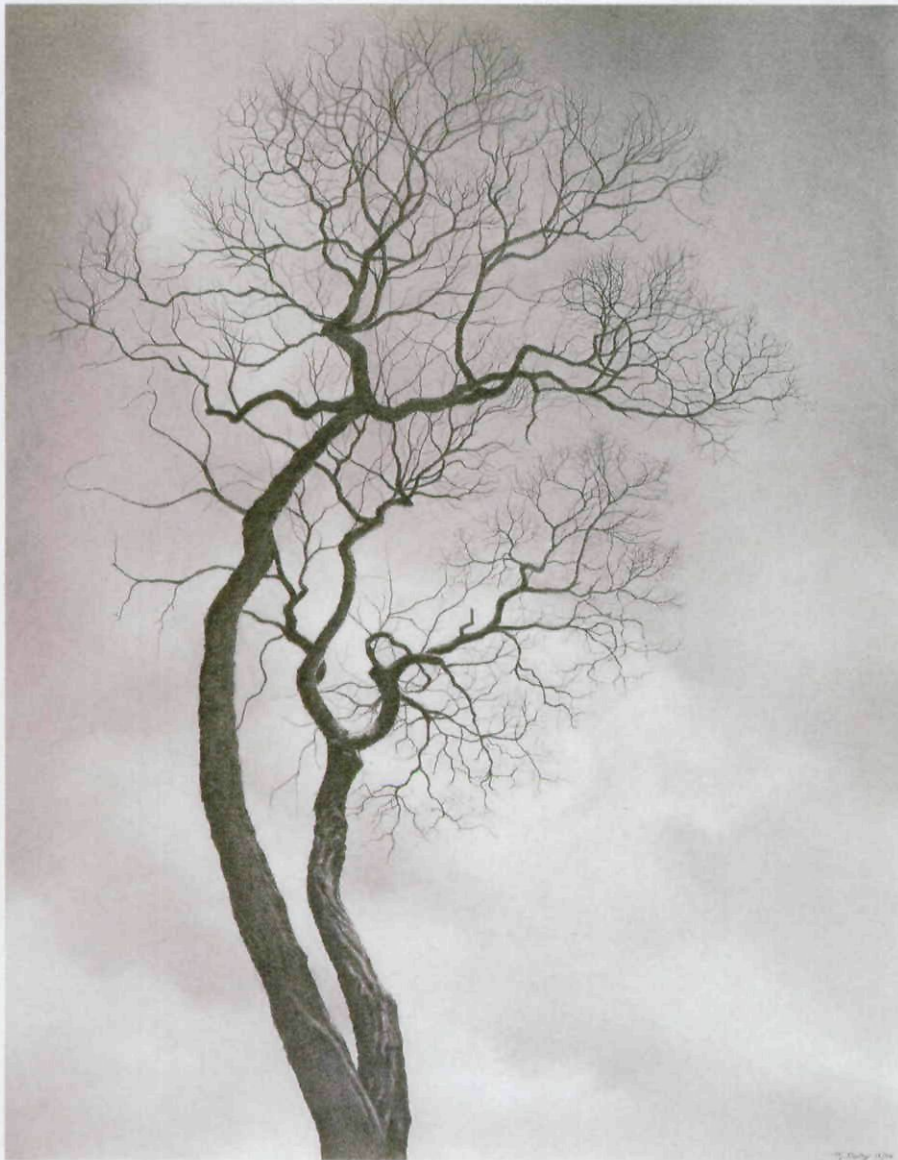
and then lays in the dark reflection of the trees or grass. Looking at these drawings, one can sense a feeling of serenity that belies the locations on which they are based; the intimate views of the hidden nooks of New York City are just as moving as Mitri's precise renderings of the city's landmarks.

Reilly began working in oil, but found the shift to graphite drawings to be rather easy—for her it was less of an experiment and more like returning to a first love. "I don't place much importance on the switch in medium because I started out drawing in black and white. I just went back to what I do best and to what I have a passion for," she explains. "The difference is that I went back with a technique that I enjoy and with a clear vision. Not only did that enrich my work personally and technically but I now feel that it is complete in itself, and I don't miss working in color."

Although she finds herself truly fulfilled with her new subject matter and technique, Reilly understands the difficulties that come with switching media and taking risks. She advises other artists interested in making the transition

to have patience. "The change may bring on some failure at first," she admits, referencing her initial drawings that, although well executed, were not to her liking. "The transition is an investment, particularly once you realize what subject matter you respond to personally and what awakens you as an artist."

Indeed, both Mitri and Reilly seek to awaken not only themselves but also viewers of their work, as they place New York City in a context as exciting and fresh as the metropolis itself. Both artists are moved by the emotion provoked by their locations and provide an intimate view of their subject—no matter how simple or unimportant it may seem. The details of Mitri's ornate windows and building facades are rendered as sensitively as Reilly's snow-covered tree branches and flowers. In both the natural and manmade, there is a beauty and grace that is highlighted through not only the artists' choices of subject but also through the skill and care with which they bring that subject to life and expose its emotional power.



## About the Artists

**Anthony Mitri** studied piano at the Cleveland Music School Settlement before attending the Cooper School of Art, also in Cleveland, and Kent State University, in Kent, Ohio. After majoring in geology and teaching music, Mitri began his professional art career in 1989. He took classes at the Athenaeum School of Fine Art, in La Jolla, California, which prompted a move to San Diego, where he now resides. In addition to solo exhibitions throughout the United States and in France, Mitri's work has been featured in numerous group exhibitions in New York and California. He is also a highly skilled pianist and music instructor. Mitri is represented by Forum Gallery, in Los Angeles, where his work was recently featured in a solo exhibition in the summer of 2007. For more information on the artist, visit his gallery's website at [www.forumgallery.com](http://www.forumgallery.com).

New York native **Mary Reilly** studied art at SUNY Purchase, in upstate New York, and at the School of Visual Arts, the Art Students League of New York, and the National Academy School of Fine Arts, all in Manhattan. After a career as a graphic designer, she began pursuing her art career full time and has studied with such instructors as Rick Brosen and Sharon Sprung. She currently lives in Manhattan, where she is represented by DFN Gallery. For more information on Reilly, visit her gallery's website at [www.dfn-gallery.com](http://www.dfn-gallery.com).

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