

TIBOR DE NAGY

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A View From the Porch

Celebrated Philadelphia-based painter Sarah McEneaney gives pride of place on the canvas to the serene companionship of animals.



'Porch Life,' by Sarah McEneaney, 2026. Detail. Via Tibor de Nagy Gallery

By **MARIO NAVES**

The title of Sarah McEneaney's tenth solo exhibition at Tibor de Nagy Gallery, "[Porch Life](#)," takes its inspiration from a painting of the same name completed this year. Measuring twice as wide as it is high, the image is bucolic in temper. An older woman with frazzled hair, that would be Ms. McEneaney, sits on a porch swing at a backyard terrace. She's either writing in a journal or drawing in a sketchbook. Nearby is an orange tabby and what looks like a terrier mix. A pair of cats sit on an interior window ledge looking out at the viewer. The

composition is dominated by a lush array of greenery. From the looks of it, porch life is pretty good.

Those who have followed Ms. McEneaney's work over the years know that her life and art have not always been easy. Utilizing painting as a form of autobiography, she has addressed difficult subjects including rape and illness. A harrowing suite of canvases detailing a bout with breast cancer still resonates with viewers who saw them in 2006 at Tibor de Nagy's much-missed 5th Avenue space. Since then, Ms. McEneaney has painted pictures that are less fraught with tragedy but no less predicated on direct experience. She has documented trips to China and Ireland, paid homage to her Philadelphia neighborhood, and similarly done justice to the cats and dogs in her care.



'Studio Early 2025,' by Sarah McEneaney, 2025. Detail. Via Tibor de Nagy Gallery

As for the cats and dogs in the "Porch Life" painting: Take note of an unexpected doubling of time and space that occurs between the tabby and the terrier, both of which simultaneously occupy different places in the composition. Once this dynamic is spotted, the animals become a locus of memory — happy memories, it seems. The perspective of the picture is skewed, less in the manner of the Sienese painter Sassetta, a favorite of the artist's, than the humble dioramas typical of Folk Art. Ms. McEneaney culls the latter's homely rectitude to scrappy effect. She has the courage of her idiosyncrasies.

The pictures share commonalities with those of an early 20th-century painter, Florine Stettheimer. A hyperbolic eccentric whose equally eccentric family hobnobbed with the international avant-garde, Stettheimer painted subjects close at hand, looking to folk art and upscale cartoons for inspiration. Ms. McEneaney is a more prosaic temperament, but both artists stay true to the details of hearth and home, and take seriously the exigencies of picture-making, particularly in terms of surface. Ms. McEneaney's thorough and often scrabbly touch is an abiding pleasure.



‘Daniel and Vincent’s Tiverton, RI,’ by Sarah McEneaney, 2025. Detail. Via Tibor de Nagy Gallery

Ms. McEneaney first came on the scene with works done in egg tempera, a fast-drying medium composed of egg yolks, water, and pigment. Painting nerds may miss its distinctive weight and sheen in the newer acrylic panels, but, in truth, Ms. McEneaney has found her way around acrylics, an attribute that points, in part, to improvements in manufacturing, but primarily to material ingenuity. Among the most engaging of the pictures are those dedicated to her workplace. “Studio Early 2025” (2025), with its collaged oddments and exacting run of textures, is a loving ode to the creative life, as is an attendant panel, “Studio Julius” (2025) — Julius being the aforementioned tabby.

Nitpickers will take issue with Ms. McEneaney’s handling of human anatomy. Even allowing for her stylistic tics, the rickety proportions of form in “SP 2025” (2025) will put some viewers’ teeth on edge. But then there are “Brassua Lake Rockwood, ME” and “Daniel and Vincent’s Tiverton, RI” (both 2025), both of which are reveries, deeply felt and diligently rendered, on the consolations afforded by place and circumstance. Gratitude is the order of the day at Tibor de Nagy. Ms. McEneaney’s paintings are well worth attending to.

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