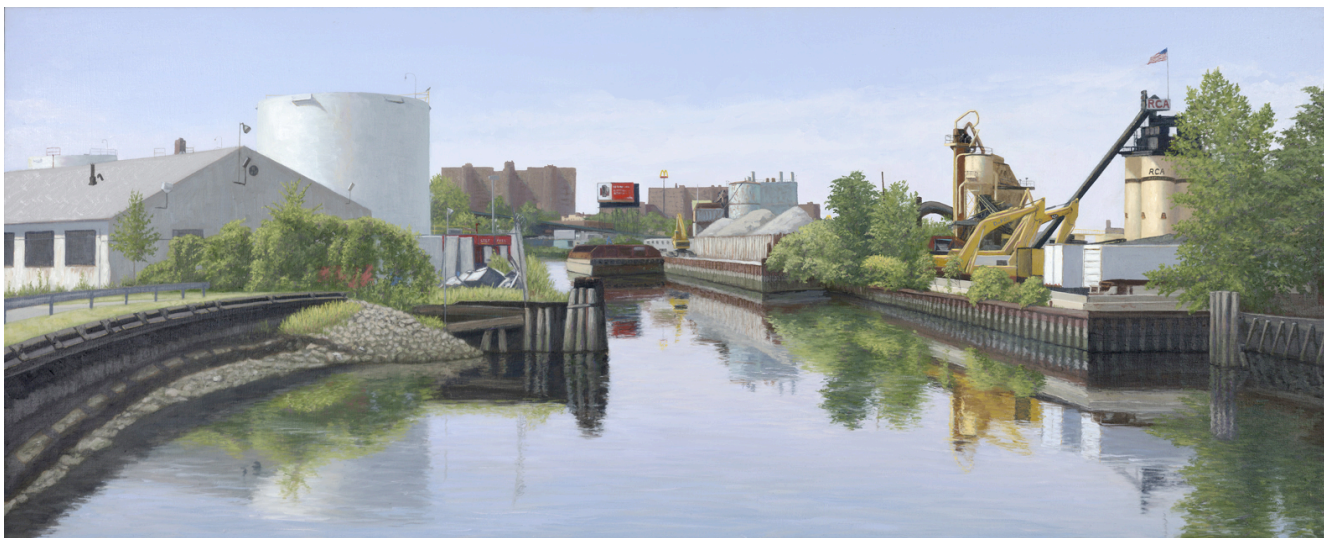


VALERI LARKO

There are tantalizing areas of New York City that most of us never see; the outskirts of the boroughs are populated with the haunting mechanical forms of infrastructure and industry, past and present, the inner-workings of this great city.

[Valeri Larko](#) has devoted the last twenty-five years to studying industrial archeology. Devotion is not too strong a word for a woman who insists on painting on-site throughout the city's brutal summers and winters. "Wind is frustrating...I'll weigh the easel down with a rock or screw eyehooks into the stretcher bars and stake it down." The most extreme weather will find her in her car, the steering wheel commandeered as an easel. This resolve is more than a physical challenge. As the paintings develop over weeks and months so does her familiarity with the neighborhood. As she meets the people who live in the outer-boroughs of Queens, the Bronx and Brooklyn, signs of their lives and culture become a vibrant refrain within her work.

Larko's heritage is the romance of the [Machine Age](#). [Charles Sheeler](#) and [Ralston Crawford](#), two of its most celebrated artists, were inspired by the architectural structures of commerce, both as a reflection of the life of its working people, and the monumental beauty of the geometric forms themselves. Elevated railways, factories, bridges, the piers and pilings by the water's edge spoke of the inventiveness, vitality, and resilience of an industrial society.



Eastchester Barge Canal, 2011, oil on linen, 24" x 60"

These subjects are evident in 'Eastchester Barge Canal'. An empty red billboard in the distance guides our eyes through the long distance of the canal. The placid calmness of carefully modeled storage tanks and pyramids of gravel under a blue sky, mirrored in the surface of the sky-blue water belie the awareness of abandoned machinery and environmental damage. It is painted with attention to detail and great respect for all of its contained history.



Billboard, 144th Street, Bronx, 2011, oil on linen, 42" x 30"

'Billboard, 144th Street, Bronx' is a composition of grays and pastels broken by the bold dark arrow of the billboard's base from below. These angles are repeated in the pattern of the fire escape stairs and their shadows on the building behind it, which also honors the local graffiti artists. The sky is a muted gray turning to lavender as it reaches towards the horizon, the pale yellow billboard glows like a sun. Brick red horizontal tops of the roll-up gates come in from either side, stabilizing the composition, this color is also picked up on the fire escape steel. A shadow of a streetlamp repeats the angle once more on the street and sidewalk. The most intense color is the detail of a tenant's laundry, bright turquoise, hanging on a line from the lower windows.



Factory, West Farm Road, Bronx, 2012, oil on linen 16" x 20"

This exhibit particularly reflects the rich material Larko has explored in the Bronx. ‘Factory, West Farm Road, Bronx’ is a powerful example of an image that evokes in the viewer the history of hard labor. Again, Larko uses a series of diagonals, from the worn machinery, to the broken lines of a parking lot, a fence topped with razor wire, and broken steps, to reinvigorate the original dynamic energy of the site. She shows how it’s now been transformed into a rusted canvas for the younger artists of the area.

“When I’m working on-site, I get to meet some of the kids who make the graffiti...they’re always so proud to have their graffiti in my painting. Even if they are anonymous everyone wants their art to be seen.”

Questions for Valeri Larko

B What brings you to these abandoned industrial areas?

VL It started when I moved to Jersey City, New Jersey, right after I finished art school. One constant in my art is my preference for painting from life, so when I found myself living in a heavily industrial part of the state, I decided to start painting what was around me.

B When did you realize this was your passion?

VL It developed over time. I love to paint and I love being outside and being fully engaged in the world around me. I never know what I'm going to see or who I'm going to meet when I paint on location. There is nothing like hanging out in a fascinating (if often overlooked) part of the urban environment and trying to capture the essence of that place over an extended period of time.

KEEPING IT REAL: New Paintings by Valeri Larko

June 28th – July 28th

Opening reception: Thursday, June 28th, 6 - 8 PM

Gallery Talk Saturday, June 30th, 3 PM

J. Cacciola Gallery, 537 West 23rd Street, New York, NY, 10011

Tel. 212-462-4646 www.jcacciolagallery.com

More work of Larko's can be seen on her website, valerilarko.com and at these upcoming exhibitions:

BRONX LAB: Style Wars

July 19th, 2012 – January 6th, 2013

Opening reception: Friday, July 20, 2012: from 5 - 8 pm

The Bronx Museum, 1040 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY 10456

<http://www.bronxmuseum.org>

The Barbara Frigerio Gallery, Via dell'Orso, 12 (entrata Via Giovasso) 20121 Milano

Tel. 02 36593924 : <http://www.barbarafrigeriogallery.it>

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