



Sheryl Luxenburg specialises in hyper-realism, which is the translation of what is found in the 3D real world into the creative world of the flat painting, through the initial use of an architectural blueprint. She uses this genre to create a dynamic tension between what you see and what is reflected back at you, revelling in the duality of vision.

JD Adam Kitchen Shop, watercolour, 18 x 30" (45 x 76cm), 140lb (300gsm) Arches, 2004, Private Collection



Painting two planes of sensory perception

I have spent my career dedicated to presenting the objectivity of my subjects, taking advantage of illusional depth and emphasizing with paint a flattened three dimensional look. Capturing this ocular perception is a hallmark quality of the 'Photorealism Art Movement', which began in the United States in the late 1960s. I became fascinated with these techniques 30 years ago when studying under the famous American painter, Tom Blackwell at Keene State College in New Hampshire.

Because the intention of this level of hyper-realism is the suggestion of casualness, my subjects are always found rather than arranged. In the initial stages of a painting, I take many photographs of the subject from as many different angles as is possible, all under the same atmospheric lighting conditions. Working onsite is critical to the creation of a monochromatic underpainting. This accurate rendering serves as my architectural blueprint, determining composition, focal point and spatial proportions. Later in the studio, the photographs yield information about all the other details.

Through the years, I have maintained an allegiance to water based media. In my compositions, I strive for accuracy and precision on architectural elements and glaze using an airbrush to suggest motion, for fading images into the background and in this particular body of work, for painting transparent window reflections.

Glebe Side Kids Shop, watercolour, 18 x 30" (45 x 76cm), 140lb (300gsm) Arches, 2004, Collection of Kelsey Kennedy

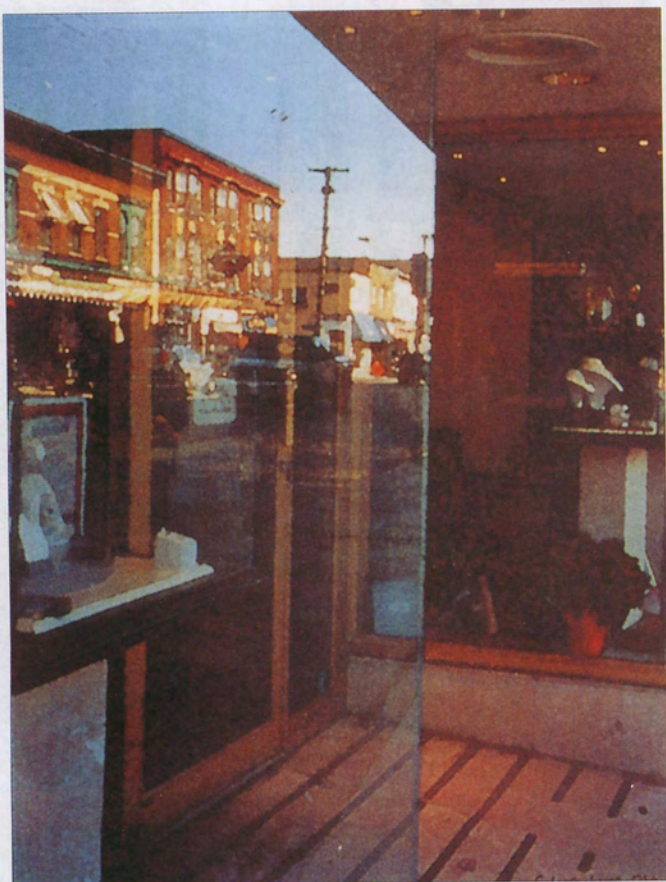
storefront window reflection paintings

Bank Street in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada's capital city, is a lively neighbourhood chock full of trendy boutiques. Strolling along the sidewalk, the storefront windows invite the passer-by to notice the window dressings with alternating views of across the street through the reflective surfaces. As the light changes from the sun's radiance on the plate glass windows, the reflections interplay between the two contrasting elements. Both compete for your attention. It is this competing attention that intrigues me.

In this body of work, I have explored the transitory effects of light on the window's reflective surfaces and captured the linear



Aveda Spa, watercolour, 21 x 30" (53 x 76cm), 140lb (300gsm) Arches, 2004



Jewellery Shop, watercolour, 21 x 30" (53 x 76cm), 140lb(300gsm) Arches, 2004, Private Collection

and abstract patterns of the physical realities within the properties of the glass. As I discovered the unexpected shapes that were hidden in the reflection's visual clutter, I was delightfully challenged by the complicated sensory overload in these images.

I drew my inspiration for this body of work from the Analytical Cubism movement (the combined efforts of Picasso and Braque), who expressed the transparent superimposition of objects, in which objects were deconstructed into their component parts, and of Cezanne who created the flattened depiction of space expressing space in strong geometric terms. □

Arbour Environmental Shop, watercolour, 18 x 30" (45 x 76cm), 140lb. Arches, 2004, CSPWC National Watercolour Collection

Art in the Making antique shop

This work was conceived in the dead of winter when remnants of dirty snow and frozen slush covered the city streets. The panes of glass cast a blue-grey hue, and reminded me of the colour of the ice blue grotto I observed in the glacial crevasses while vacationing in Switzerland. This experience influenced the choice of colours I used.

Transparent, non-staining:

Cobalt Blue, Viridian

Semi-transparent:

Burnt Sienna, Prussian Blue

Semi-opaque / opaque:

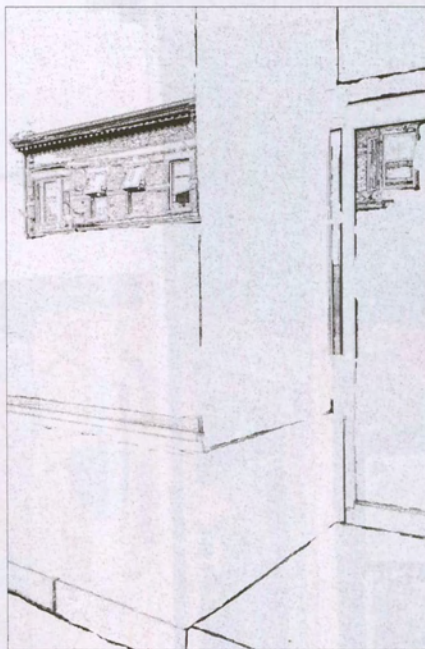
Cadmium Red

Whitened/ Blackened transparent:

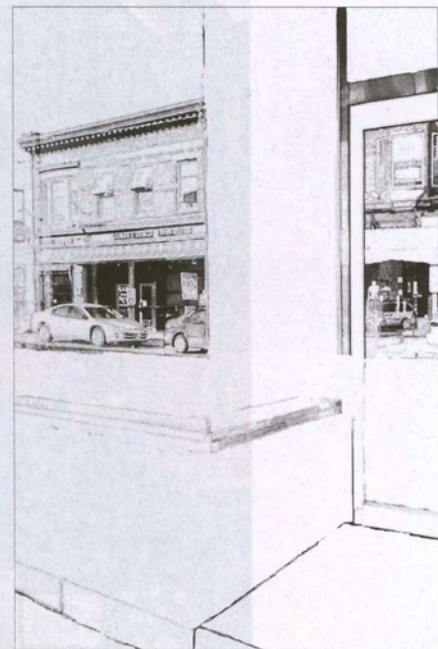
Burnt Umber, Raw Umber

Opaque:

Yellow Ochre, Naples Yellow, Payne's Grey



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STAGE 1

preliminary en plein air rough linear perspective

The night before I began this drawing, I soaked and stretched a sheet of 140 lb. Arches watercolour paper and taped it securely to a lightweight foam core board. On the first day, as soon as I arrived at the site, I took many photographs of the storefront from many angles. Because the sun's radiance onto the plate glass window reflection changed constantly, I worked quickly.

In this early phase I was concerned with defining the composition, rendering the broad outline and setting the tonal atmosphere. I set down my equipment at the edge of the curb and began an initial monochrome drawing using a water-soluble graphite pencil. This drafting instrument is not unlike regular graphite pencils, however since it is water-soluble, it can be blended and worked easily with the application of water.

STAGE 2

monochrome en plein air sketch to develop horizon line

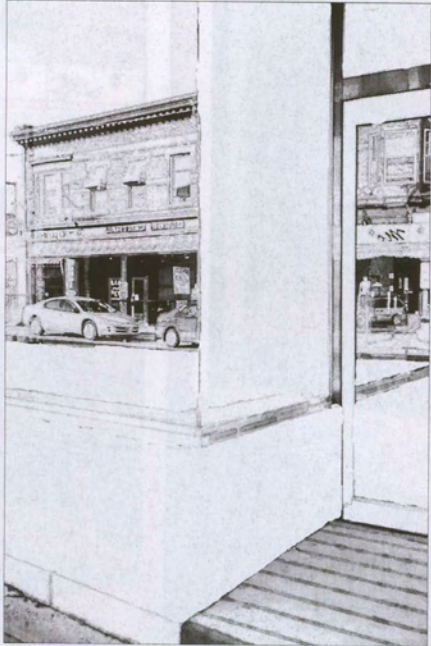
With the aid of this pencil, I worked on the overall spatial relationships and figure ground proportions. I delineated the borders of the 3 separate window panes in order to understand how they were to relate to one another. If I was to confirm a primary focus, I realized that this also needed to serve as the 'horizon line' in the drawing. This line needed to be placed at eye level regardless of where the viewer was looking.

I continued developing the 'horizon line' by beginning at the left window of the painting, precisely at the square dentil feature on the building roof's trim. This way the viewer's eye would begin at this architectural detail, continue down to the cars on the street, and then scan clear across to the right side of the right window in the painting. I wanted the viewer's eye to follow from left to right across a relatively straight horizontal line. The entire area above this horizontal line, which is in fact the reflection of what is happening across the street would serve as the primary backdrop to the entire composition.

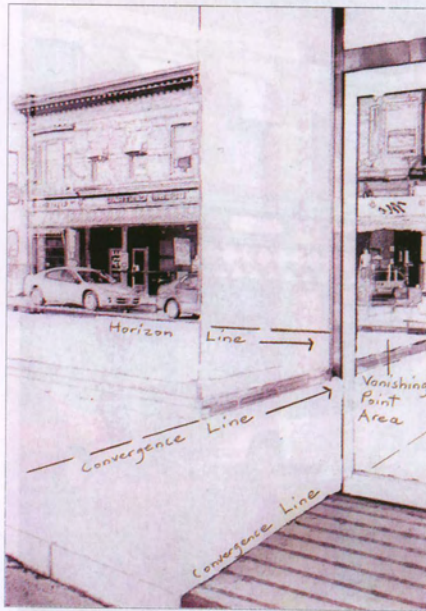
STAGE 3

monochrome sketch determines how horizon line meets vanishing point

I continued working on what I refer to as an 'underpainting' using the water soluble pencil. I drew in the front entrance step and sidewalk. This assisted me in placing the 'convergence line', which would lead directly to the 'vanishing point'. The 'vanishing point' is the point to which all convergence lines, parallel to the viewer, recede. In other words, this is where the attention to contrast leads the eye into a focal point and then disappears. Because I specialize in painting city streets, most of my paintings include variations on this one point linear perspective.



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STAGE 4

illustrated horizon, convergence + vanishing point lines

Here I have illustrated how these lines recede in one point perspective.

STAGE 5

left and right window, painted prior to glaze

In the left and right windows only, I painted the furniture items for display behind the glass as well as the east facing reflection across the street. In the left window, I rendered an antique dresser and chair and in the right window, an antique chair upholstered in a striped cloth. The placement of these display items was important to the overall relationship they were to have to the 'horizon line'. I was mindful to reveal the furniture as somewhat softer or recessive in relationship to the street scene. As is true in real life, furniture in display windows often compete for your attention with the view across the street. The interplay between these two contrasting elements is what is fascinating about the composition. How this is represented, is critical to the painting's success.

Although I sketched the images in the middle window pane, I intentionally resisted painting this area. What was most important at this stage was to establish a perceptual continuity between the left and right window panes.



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STAGE 6

middle window, painted prior to glaze

I then painted the middle window pane's reflection of across the street and the chair behind the glass. Because the middle and right panes face each other at a 90 degree angle, the middle pane's reflection of across the street is different from the other two. This reflection faces north onto the adjacent street corner.

As I completed the window sill, I couldn't help being distracted into the right pane's 'vanishing point' area. I then realized that I would have to represent the middle pane's reflective glass corner profile in the right window pane's reflection. I was delighted because this would add intrigue in the 'vanishing point' area. Normally I airbrush my 'vanishing points' and they go unnoticed. ▶

STAGE 7

up close view, left window glazed

Ever so faintly I painted the electrical hydro lines attached to the building and in the sky, the HVAC vent found on the shop's ceiling, and the snow covered pavement under the two parked cars.

All the rest of this left window section was completed by glazing with the use of an airbrush loaded with a highly watered down base of Naples Yellow, Cobalt Blue and Gum Arabic. Using this combination, I selectively covered the surface of the dresser and chair and had it extend along the left border, narrowly streaking up towards the roof of the building.

Like no other technique, glazing is superb for capturing this type of delicate atmospheric nuances and for creating luminosity not possible in ordinary mixed washes. When colours are mixed optically, not physically, they are less likely to contaminate one another. Applying thin transparent layers of paint one on top of the other is a difficult skill to master and should be used with disciplined prudence. I have always found it difficult to predict how the glazing will affect the colour harmony of the final painting, and this can be a problem because glazed areas attract the observer's eye more than other surfaces. Herein lies my rationale for using an airbrush to maintain control over the process, even if it means I have to go to the trouble of carefully masking out the areas I need to protect.



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STAGE 8

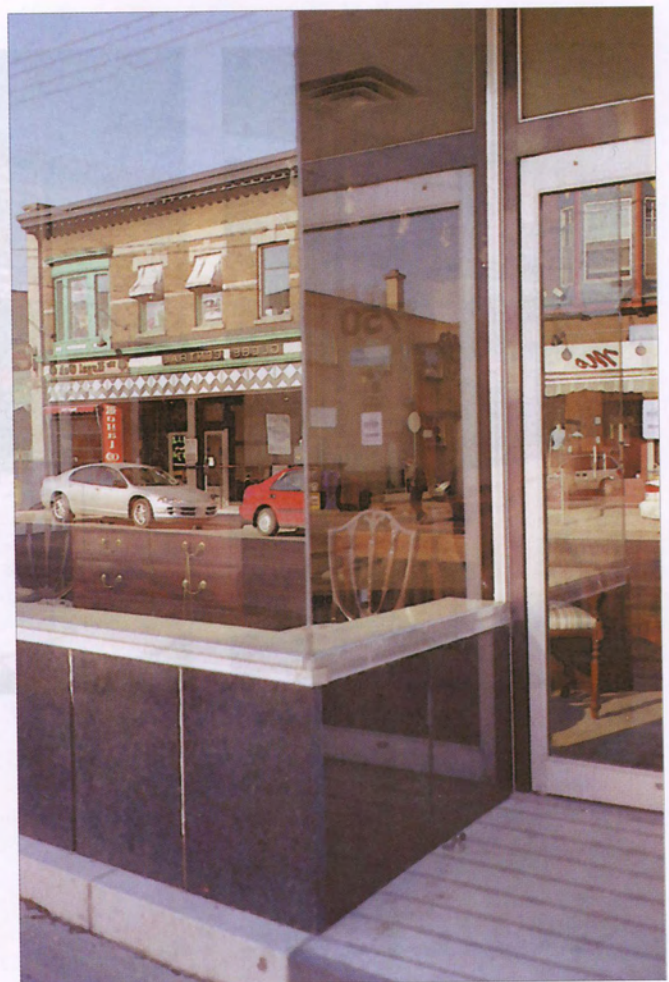
up close view, middle and right window glazed

On the middle window pane, I painted the three track lights hanging from the shop's ceiling, a second HVAC vent, the backwards number 750 address and the right window's door frame reflection onto and beneath the sill. Again the same mixture of glaze was airbrushed over the surface of the entire window.

The right window's reflection was the most complicated of the three as I had to create the middle pane's glass corner profile. I outlined the corner with a deeper grey pigment and glazed the plate glass as I did with the other two panes. In order to accentuate the semi-opacity of the glass, I painted a few pronounced vertical streaks over the parked car. I then adjusted the shadows around the upholstered chair by creating a flood of sunlight streaming through the entrance door and alternatively darkening the area underneath the glass corner profile.

FINAL STAGE

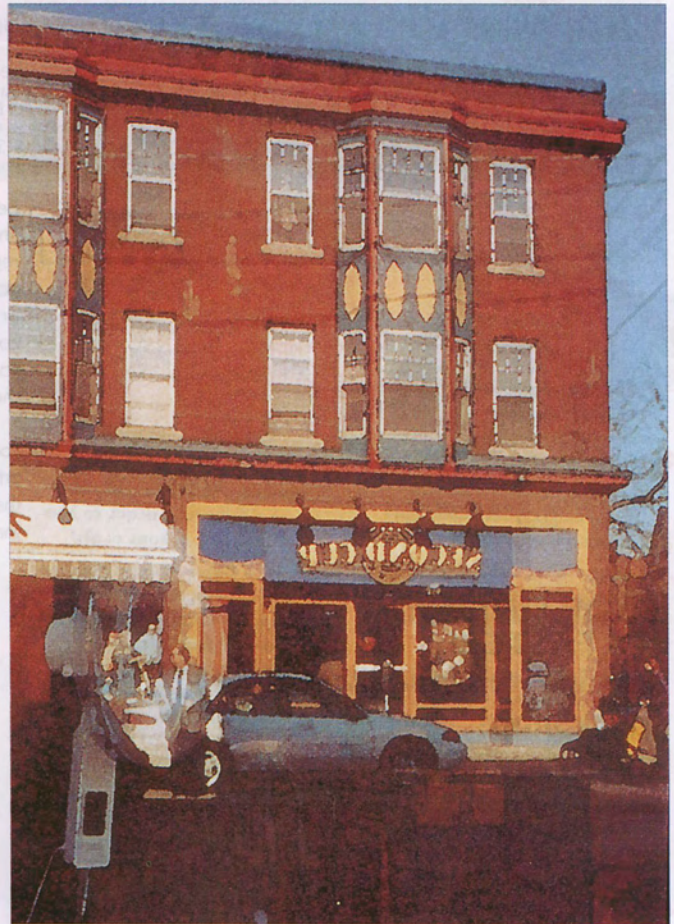
**Antique Shop, watercolour,
140lb (300gsm) Arches cp paper,
8 x 12" (20 x 30cm)
Completed antique shop painting**



“Applying thin transparent layers of paint one on top of the other is a difficult skill to master and should be used with disciplined prudence.”



Antique Store/Right Side, watercolour,
18 x 30" (45 x 76cm), 140lb (300gsm) Arches, 2004



Antique Store 2nd Cup, watercolour,
21 x 30" (53 x 76cm), 140lb (300gsm) Arches, 2004