

ALEXANDRE

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Art in Review

By HOLLAND COTTER

Loren MacIver Terry Dintenfass Gallery 50 West 57th Street Manhattan Through Nov. 6

This lovely show encompasses nearly 50 years of work by the 84-year-old Loren MacIver. The earliest painting, "My House" (1936), is characteristic of much that follows. Oil paint is handled with the discretion usually applied to pastel, and everyday life is transmuted into the emblematic. The house in her painting, for example, is a fantastic Klee-like interior of ramparts, pillars and arches, in which individual details -- a lamp, a mouse, a handful of candies, a window bright with daylight, another with the moon showing through -- float in a burnished, honey-colored glow.

Many of these homely objects recur throughout Ms. MacIver's work. The candies reappear in an ambrosial still life titled "French Penny Candy" (1967), which commemorates the many years the artist lived in Europe. And the show's largest painting, "New York Sunset" (1980), has red, pink and yellow light pouring through an open city window, recalling the "perpetual sunset, comprehensive, consoling," described by the poet Elizabeth Bishop.

Ms. MacIver and Bishop, who died in 1979, were close, lifelong friends. Their work shares a devotion to the things of this world, an often childlike freshness of vision and somber undercurrents, evident in "Bretagne" (1965), with its incised, suturelike lines and dark, lichen-patterned surface. Ms. MacIver's work rarely suggests Bishop's psychic uneasiness, however, and it can occasionally look almost too fine-spun and sweet. But her remarkable image of a light-radiating fish swimming through ash-gray waters (in reality, Ms. MacIver saw the fish lying on ice in a market window) has a lyricism and a gravity any poet would treasure. HOLLAND COTTER

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