



Escaping a Date With the Wrecking Ball

Ellen Harvey knew her landscapes were doomed when she painted them. Most of them, anyway.

Ellen Harvey routinely places her art in the path of destruction, where it can be smashed, painted over or demolished by construction. But that doesn't mean she holds it any less dear. "I'm actually very attached to my artwork," Ms. Harvey said recently from her studio in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, taking a break to discuss her forthcoming book, "New York Beautification Project" (Gregory R. Miller & Company), in which she writes about a body of work that has almost entirely been erased since its creation about six years ago. "But I suppose that I think that everyone can make art and that it's nice to treat it lightly and not have it taken as so precious."

Between the summer of 1999 and the spring of 2001 Ms. Harvey embarked on a

little folly. Mixing the goals of city beautification advocates and outlaw graffiti artists, she planted 40 small oval paintings of trees, mountains and streams, evoking 18th- and 19th-century painters like Albert Bierstadt and Caspar David Friedrich, on the 20th-century New York landscape. She put them on places that were already marked by graffiti artists: "I wondered what it would be like — at a time when everyone was expressing themselves in a codified aesthetic that people see as being aggressive — to make something incredibly small and very pretty."

After finishing the project, Ms. Harvey kept track of the scattered landscapes as best she could. "It just depended on whether they were in places where I went quite a lot," she said. "The ones in my neighbor-

hood I visited quite regularly. But the ones farther off, I didn't. People in their neighborhoods tend to give me reports if they've disappeared." Late last year, as the book was being prepared for publication, she embarked on "a big tour" to look for them, she said. There were few remnants; most had ended up, with the walls that held them, in rubble heaps or painted over by others who thought their own work more beautiful. "Gentrification was a real killer," she said. One piece that had lasted was painted on an unfinished portion of a mural across from the Bronx River Art Center on East Tremont Avenue in the Tremont section of the South Bronx. The bucolic classical scene, based on Claude Lorraine, is a survivor: it was still there last weekend when Ms. Harvey returned and took the pictures here. KATHRYN SHATTUCK