



*Losing the Plot*, 2006,  
oil on canvas, 29" x 31"

## DRIVEBY PAINTING

### HANNAH COLE (CFA'05) TAKES A FRESH LOOK OUT THE WINDSHIELD

**DRIVING THE FAMILIAR** route home or even traveling cross-country on a highway, most of us barely see what's on the side of the road. Not Hannah Cole. When she's in her Ford Ranger, heading up I-93 just north of Boston or tooling down a two-lane road out

West, she's soaking it all up, alive to the nuances of the moment. For the past few years, Cole (CFA'05) has been capturing those vistas in paintings and drawings, and with several shows behind her, she is attracting more attention than most young artists.

"Why do so many things happen in cars?" asks a character in Richard

Ford's novel *The Lay of the Land*. "Are they the only interior life left?" Those are Cole's questions, too. She finds the view through her windshield "a kind of a metaphor for a person's interior world and for the relationship between that interior private world and the world outside."

Take her 2006 painting *Northslope*, which shows a view from the driver's side window, the snowy rock formations across the highway contrasting with the fall colors of the road just past reflected in the side mirror. And then there's *Losing the Plot*, focusing on a car interior, with webs of frost cracking the windshield. "It's an intricately planned, well-executed painting,"



PHOTO BY JESSICA SHARP (COM'08)

Her subject is the road — and the feelings she has about the places she sees — but Hannah Cole paints in this studio in Somerville, Massachusetts.

writes Cate McQuaid in the *Boston Globe*. "Cole has scrutinized an experience most people wish would just be over, and in the small details she has found surprising beauty."

And what better metaphor for life in America? "It represents the best of being an American — forward movement and technology and progress and hope, the American dream and the frontier mentality," Cole says. "But it also represents the negative side. I'm driving in my car, isolated from others, contributing to my carbon footprint."

Cole picks her scenes carefully — they are places filled with meaning for her; her paintings and drawings are based on photographs and sketches made on subsequent trips, during which her husband drives. "They are infused with the feelings I have while I'm there, since they are places I'm very familiar with," she says. "I think they are personal; I have my own relationship to the place. Boston is fraught with all my demons. It's where I grew up and went to school, but it's also where the people I love most are. It's an emotionally complex and rich place for me." When she was working on an M.F.A. in painting at the College of Fine Arts, studying with Professor John Walker and Associate Professor

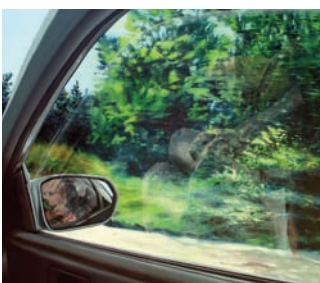
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***Life Returned to Normal (The Color Field Painting)*, 2006, oil on canvas, 37" x 44"**

Richard Ryan Cole's reputation was as something of a contrarian realist painter amid a sea of post-modernist abstraction. "She was tenacious and very intense," says Walker. "She developed a very good eye."

Currently represented by Alpha Gallery in Boston, Cole is making a living as a painter — no garrets for her. She's co-curating an exhibition



***Closer Than They Appear*, 2005, oil on canvas, 37" x 42"**

at BU's Sherman Gallery in March, about, appropriately enough, road trips, and in January she's off to Venice, to teach painting with BU's study abroad program for a semester.

These days, she says, she's painting on carved panels. "They are almost sculptures to begin with, and there's a painting on there, but they are beginning to break open the frame," she says. Still, something is familiar. Then it becomes clear: there's just a trace of the view from behind the wheel.

**TAYLOR McNEIL**