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The Blue Paintings

Landon Mackenzie, *Neurotransmitter*, Art 45, Montreal.
October 17 November 8, 2008

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ACTUALITÉS/EXPOSITIONS

Montreal

The Blue Paintings

Landon Mackenzie, *Neurotransmitter*, Art 45, Montreal, October 17 – November 8, 2008

Landon Mackenzie has produced a painting show in Montreal at Art 45, where the colours and contents in each of the canvases push their expected boundaries into each other, colliding, to extend possible meanings. The residue of her actions is a suite of seven paintings that plot out a versatility in the use of materials as well as subject matter. Mackenzie's paint handling and choice of imagery becomes an agency for free flowing associations between her tryst with abstraction, representation and making this affair public.

In the essay 'What Metaphors Mean' Donald Davidson states, "Metaphor is the dream work of language and like all dream work, its interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator. The interpretation of dreams requires collaboration between a dreamer and a waker, even if they were the same person; and the act of interpretation is itself a work of the imagination. So understanding a metaphor is as much a creative endeavor as making a metaphor, and as little guided by rules."¹

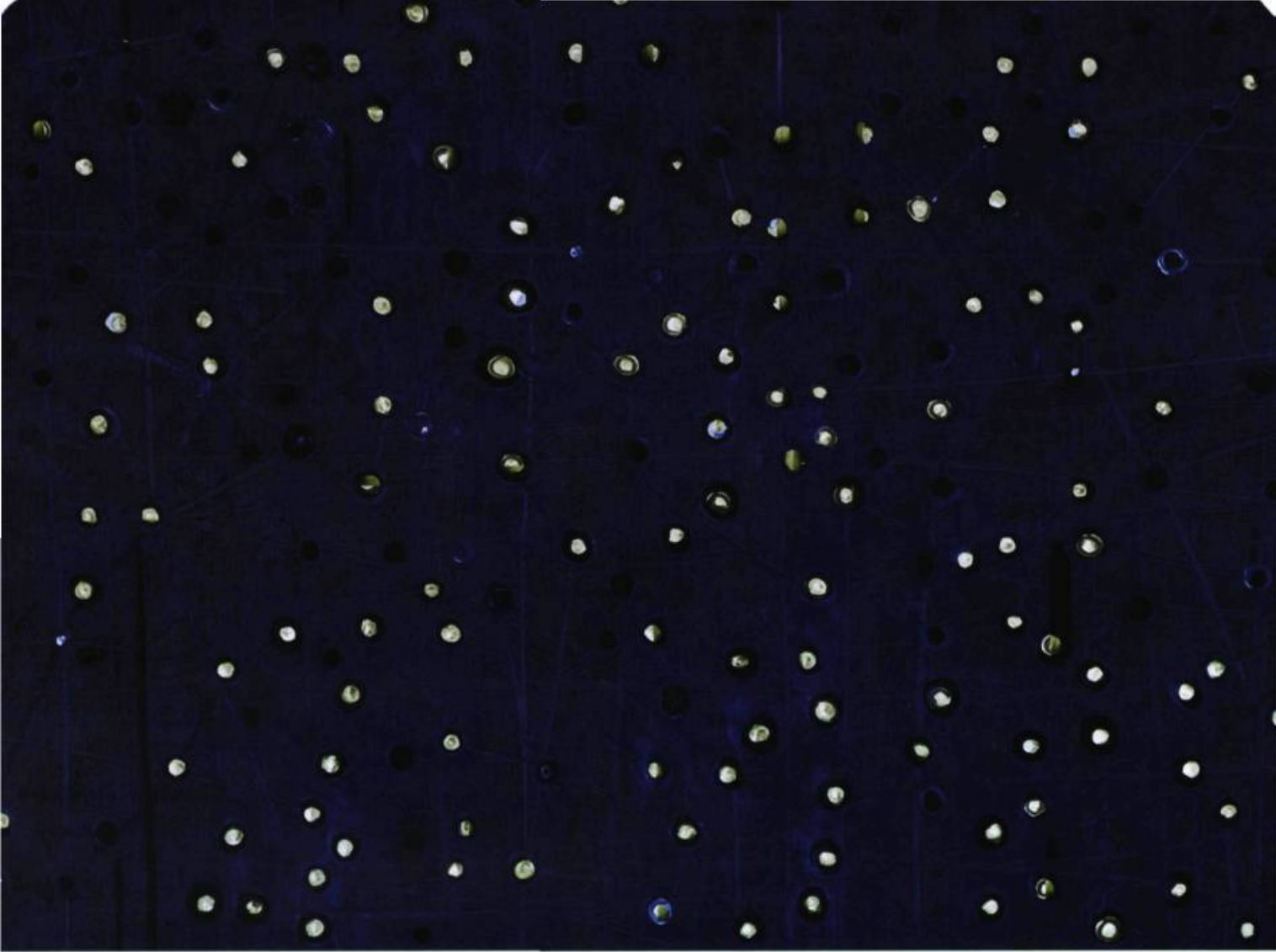
This quote from Davidson is an excellent course-plotting tool to see the sights that Landon Mackenzie makes visible in contemplating the flexible nature of metaphors; we are allowed to go deeper into the poetry of the painter and current of her imagination.

Half of the exhibition is composed of two large 228 cm x 310 4 cm multi-coloured paintings. Both have simple geometric patterns in the center of the canvasses similar to those of East-Asian tantric charts. This aspect of Mackenzie's composition offers us a sense of

a collected human forces—body, mind, and heart simultaneously. From that point, Mackenzie takes us into her realm of discovery.

In one of these large works, *MRI/ICE CAPES*, a concentric circular pattern is bombarded by transparent daubs of paint. This change in the dominant pattern is a subtle variation in colour and form that causes organic forms to appear. These shapes seem to be growing or existing independently from the circles. This is not the only force at work in this canvas; linear patterns emerge from the corners of the canvas to shake up the surroundings. In this combination of marks and forms, we can see every action Mackenzie has made as part of the whole. There is a sense of entropy in the work. All the elements combined seem to be a measure of the disorganization of the universe.

The second large painting, *Spider* is structured with lines—or rather multi-coloured rectangular bands—which could be narrow colour charts. As in *MRI/ICE CAPES* the central form, is a loosely painted square formed by a combination of smaller yellow squares. Around the yellow rectangle, more rectangular forms appear to be moving in every direction. There is a degree of order within the painting of these brightly coloured bars, having equal amounts of colour in each square; however, along with this ordered distribution of paint, the sense of control becomes an indescribable energy that incites these bars to meet each other as they fly off into any direction on the picture plane. In sections of *Spider*, the rectangular forms become hidden behind cloudy



forms that resemble bits of the sky or galaxies. We are left guessing if we have missed a small piece of the patterning in the painting that could show us unique combinations of events.

On the wall opposite these two large works are five smaller canvasses. Three of these pieces are similar in size 91.4 cm x 122 cm and hue—all shades of white with hints of colour. These white paintings, collectively titled *Neurotransmitter* have colour build-ups in areas of the canvases. These colourful interruptions in the white lines mimic organic forms like mold and internal organs—the white lines connecting them like arteries. The crossing and meeting of the lines of whites and colours at the same time have an active spirit as strokes of paint, some precise and controlled, others quick gestures.

The show is completed with two blue paintings. The surfaces are accented by light yellow paint applications, which become a tower of light in one canvas or small beacons throughout the blue surface on the other.

In all the works, the build-up of the layers interact to create the finished pictures. The under painting is not a hint or tone of the final image; rather it is a part of the whole. Each piece is imbued with the presence of a poet-painter's sighting of what life has to offer, and in doing this, Mackenzie invites us into a common space. Mackenzie describes her process as followed: "What I am doing is combining my obsession with medical information— with my obsession with map-making and Canada as a fictional site for new discoveries,

I see the works as a template for the imagination of my audience." Mackenzie's paintings act as visual prompts or personal insights into how we perceive our ever-changing world.

In the paintings, we are offered a chance to engage with the private involvement of the artist to find expression. Mackenzie's metaphors include her choices of subject and materials as well as the particular moments the work is made and viewed.

The paintings are colourful arrangements that can be looked at and given different meanings by each viewer.

The paintings could be viewed as a masquerade ball where costumes are being exchanged between the dance partners. The dancers are Mackenzie's application of paint to the surface and the representation of forms, some with societal codes attached others independent. The dance or exchange between these possibilities reveals hidden meanings, which tries not to betray any other meaning. There is no clear end. Her imagination is at work processing and revealing itself.

NATALIE OLANICK

Natalie Olanick is a visual artist, writer, educator and curator. She received her Master's Degree from the University of Windsor in 1998. She has written for various art magazines and catalogues including *Ciel Variable*, *Lola*, *Mercer Union* and *B-312*.

NOTE

¹ From a publication of essays from a symposium 'The Metaphor: the Conceptual Leap' edited by Sheldon Sacks, The University of Chicago Press, 1979.