

## English Reports

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## SUNDERLAND, UK

JOYCE RYCKMAN:  
INTERNATIONAL  
FLIPBOOK FESTIVAL

7 November – 8 December 2006  
Reg Vardy Gallery  
School of Arts, Design,  
Media & Culture  
University of Sunderland  
Ashburne House, Ryhope Road  
Sunderland, SR2 7EF  
Tel.: 0191 515 2128  
www.regvardygallery.org



October, 2006 (detail)  
Colour print

The International Flipbook Festival is a rare celebration of hand-powered cinema, spotlighting a largely overlooked yet ubiquitous art form. From photographic pioneers like Edward Muybridge and Thomas Edison to Andy Warhol and Joe Fafard, artists of every kind have used this unassuming precursor of the moving pictures both as a creative tool and an art product.

Designed by Rama Hoffpauir, a contemporary artist from Minnesota, this exhibition presents over one hundred flipbooks produced by artists from across Europe and North America.

The original event was conceived four years ago as a film festival without the film; the flipbooks are submitted into one of four categories: Live Action, Animation, Experimental, and Documentary, and, as is the tradition in film festivals, The International Flipbook Festival will be awarding prizes in each category.

Among the international and hugely diverse group of participants is Montreal artist, Joyce Ryckman, known for her photo-based work since the early 1980's. This venue turned out to be unexpectedly suited

for an artist preoccupied with the subtleties of both movement and light.

Taken from her 1999 work *Où il est question de la nature; les saisons*, Ryckman's entry is a nostalgic reflection on the passage of time as echoed in the minutiae of nature.

Titled simply *October*, it offers a cursory visual meditation, a soft plunge into inky darkness leading to a gently unfolding mystery of the seasons, in this case fall. With but a touch of colour, the photographs in Ryckman's flipbook are shadow infused and painterly, as is most of her work.

As the pages skip by, a sensation takes hold even before the eye begins to grasp the emerging image. The viewer is instantly drawn into an enigmatic, almost primordial space, desperate for light, for life. It unfolds unhurriedly, taking the form of dark woods, of rough, peeling bark. Closer and closer, a yellowed leaf held gently in someone's hand, and then back to the velvety darkness, back to the beginning.

In the myriad kaleidoscopic images presented at this fascinating festival, including Scott Blake's strikingly contemporary barcode portraits and Erika Adams' oriental flavoured flipbooks, Ryckman's sensuously melancholic visual stroll stands out for its sophisticated pictorial originality.

Following its European premiere, The International Flipbook Festival will tour North America, with stops at Space 1026 in Philadelphia, Little Cakes Gallery in New York City, and Western Front Gallery in Vancouver.

Dorota Kozinska

## VANCOUVER

ALESSANDRO PAPETTI:  
RECENT WORKS

November 2006  
Buschlen Mowatt Galleries  
1445 West Georgia Street  
Vancouver, B.C. V6G 2T3  
Tel.: (604) 682-1234  
www.buschlenmowatt.com



Madrid  
Oil on linen 2006  
53 1/8" x 80 3/4"  
Courtesy: Paris-Metropolitana di Passy

Milanese painter Alessandro Papetti as always, paints in the most sinister romantic fashion. Moving from his water study paintings of the 1980s to the empty factory paintings of the mid 1990s, his new accelerated and blurred cityscapes show off the characteristic melancholy nature of his work particularly well. Papetti's practice in the area of painting has lasted almost thirty years culminating most recently in his 2003 painting show in Venice alongside the Biennale. His solo show at the Buschlen Mowatt Galleries in Vancouver brought the rain drenched urban outdoors flooding into the usually austere gallery. Papetti's new work demonstrates the continuance of his trademark brushstroke of blurred motion washed in monochromatic colors of tonal grays and nocturnal blues.

Papetti has performed these kinds of intricate investigations into motion and static tension before. "Madrid" in particular, gleams with still pools of rain dully reflected on the speeding cars. Papetti's brush contains a kind of mercurial bravura, seemingly careless and loosely directed towards the fast moving cars as if to speed the scene along. "Nudo-Mattino" has a woman as subject lying naked on a bed, the brushwork folds of the sheet violently swept towards her. There is urgency in these works as well as the despair of stillness, the inability to capture movement in the static nature of his medium. "Paris-Metropolitana di Passy" clearly articulates this tension as the brushwork slows down enough for once to reveal the buildings in clear detail. The intimacy of seeing the cityscape up close and in detail is contrasted with the blurred frame of the window that Papetti allows us

to see. In response to the fast blurring nature of all of his works on canvas, Papetti has remarked that 'the present is elusive, as soon as it is here, it is already in the past.'

Mel Lam

PAINT:  
THE NEXT GENERATION

September 20, 2006  
to February 27, 2007  
Vancouver Art Gallery  
750 Hornby Street  
Vancouver, BC  
(604) 662-4719  
www.vanartgallery.bc.ca

"Paint" – the Vancouver Art Gallery's first survey of local painting in twenty years, in a context dominated by a famed photo-conceptualist school – is a landmark event. Organized by guest curator Neil Campbell in three parts, it moves through an ambitious review of four decades of painting since the sixties. After spotlighting two mid-career artists, Jessica Stockholder and Peter Schuyff, who left for New York in the eighties, the show culminates with seven emerging Vancouver painters: Matthew Brown, Arabella Campbell, Tim Gardner, Holger Kalberg, Elizabeth McIntosh, Charlie Roberts and Etienne Zack.

Campbell, a painter and instructor at Emily Carr Institute, repositions painting as a valid and relevant medium in a scene long dominated by photo-based conceptual art. While there is no common style here among the seven emerging artists (most have been Campbell's



students), they do share fresh enthusiasm for the expressive range of paint, pushing the historical and once-privileged medium into new places.

Etienne Zack and Holger Kalberg use illusion to create fantastic imaginative worlds from familiar objects and surroundings. Zack inserts images of objects seen in the street or studio into tableaux constructed with a shallow perspective. In his canvas "Upright" (2005-6), a heap of studio items – paint pots, storage bins, pieces of wood and plastic – pile up randomly against the picture plane, jostling and threatening collapse. Holger Kalberg finds his architectural and landscape spaces in photographs. In "Structure with Track" (2006), trees, fence posts and grass define a vacant outdoor enclosure abruptly intersected by an elevated track-like construction.

Elizabeth McIntosh's "Untitled (Red, Purple and Blue)" (2005-06) is a network of linked triangles of solid hues and dark values, created with free-hand drawing, inflected surfaces and irregularly scaled which are far from hard-edge geometry. Arabella Campbell's "Painters' Tape Blue" (2005) is a square stretched canvas covered with up to 70 layers of carefully, hand-brushed acrylic paint in an even blue, mimicking that of the familiar material. For both, the engagement of the body in the painting process is central.

In Charlie Roberts' "Untitled" (2006) watercolour gives a responsive fluidity for his playful cataloguing of endless remembered faces, bodies and artworks. The mask-like figures of Matthew Brown rise from an intersection of fantasy, digital technology and portrait tradition. In "Laughing Green" (2004) Brown

scans a casual sketch into a computer graphics program to produce the image which he then paints into an alien being with oddly dissonant elements of digital coolness and painterly warmth. In his small scale, photo-realistic watercolours of ordinary figures in wilderness settings, Tim Gardner juxtaposes the banal with the sublime in a way that challenges our reading of both.

By including Jessica Stockholder and Peter Schuyff frames his debate around the sensory versus the conceptual. In her "Of Standing Float Roots in Thin Air" (2006) – which suspends an arm chair, picnic table and colourful plastic bins from the ceiling – Stockholder expands painting onto three dimensional surfaces and into architectural space, revealing metaphorical meanings in physical materials. Schuyff is as insistently anti-intellectual as he is dexterous in pieces such as "Phillus" (1980), a wall sized canvas covered with a repeated geometric motif, meticulously painted in numerous layers of oil paint.

The diversity and unevenness of the emerging artists featured in "Paint", do not, in my opinion, constitute a new wave of important painting. The show's real contribution is to expose some committed painting that poses a serious challenge to entrenched practices. Above all, it proves the power and validity of paint as a contemporary medium.

Joan Richardson

**Holger Kalberg,**  
*Structure with Track*, 2006,  
Oil on canvas, 60" x 66"  
Courtesy of the artist and Monte Clark  
Gallery, Vancouver/Toronto  
Photo: Trevor Mills, Vancouver Art Gallery



## SASKATOON

### WALLY DION: RED WORKER

October 20 – November 10, 2006  
AKA Gallery,  
424 – 20th Street W  
Saskatoon, SK  
Tel.: (306) 652-0044  
www.akagallery.org



**Pipe Carrier**  
Acrylic on canvas, 2006  
Courtesy AKA Gallery

Wally Dion's "Red Worker" is an exhibition of portraits and working drawings mostly in the International Social Realist style of the 1930s. But instead of heroic American riveters, industrious Chinese collective farmers, or an army of backslapping Soviet proletariat, we see First Nations' men hauling pipe, cutting wood and nursing. As curator Ruth Cuthand explains, by 2025 the population of Saskatchewan is predicted to be 50% Aboriginal. While some predict a collapse of the province, "Dion's work refutes this by presenting the 'Red Worker', who will be more than ready to meet this challenge."

"Red Worker" is an exhilarating exhibition. Dion manages to honour Aboriginal people without patronizing, anthropologizing or inflating them. Suspending his play on Social Realism for the moment, there are some fine paintings and drawings of First Nations people here. The small portrait of Peter Buck is sensitive and homey. The large self-portrait offers an almost Mannerist depiction of the artist as distracted hero. There is a stylistic unevenness in the show, but this doesn't read as a search for a personal style as much

as a self-conscious strategy, an attempt to reach back into art history and reinsert positive depictions of Aboriginal people.

We are used to looking at noble savages, dignified chiefs, and the few other tropes of passive authenticity afforded to Aboriginal people. Dion interrupts this visual narrative with images of Indians as active

workers—and not as fishers, hunters and hewers of wood, but contemporary construction workers, etc. Dion's message is not only addressed to the naysayers who cannot imagine a thriving future Saskatchewan guided by an Aboriginal majority, but also to Aboriginal people themselves who need to see images of their productive selves.

Aside from this agenda, I am excited by the painting. Dion is not rushing into self-expression; he is more of a classicist slowly building up his skills. The inclusion of his murals studies not only suggest the scale of his ambition, but also demonstrate the care he takes in his craft. "Pipe Carrier," for example, is a nearly floor to ceiling, mural sized painting made up of numerous small canvases. A young Indian guy carries a length of pipe. He is not posing, but was glimpsed while working, and the casual moment is captured and memorialized. The pun on pipe carrier, suggests that traditional ways and contemporary work are not incompatible, perhaps



even that such work has a sacred aspect. But what is immediately striking is the skilful rendering of his casual dignity. Dion is part of a new generation of Aboriginal artists who are painting past colonialism and into a positive future.

A quick word about the venue: my pleasure with this exhibition is inseparable from the venue and the opening. Since AKA moved from its up-the-stairs-and-away-from-the-public perch, common to so many artist-run centres, and into their storefront space, they have attracted a new community. The less intimidating location paired with the galleries' commitment to adventurous quality attracted a very mixed crowd at the opening, including many Aboriginal people who might not have otherwise seen such a show.

David Garneau

## TORONTO

### ANSEL ADAMS & ALFRED EISENSTAEDT

November 18, 2006 –  
February 4, 2007  
Art Gallery of Ontario  
317 Dundas Street West  
Toronto, Ont.  
Tel.: (416) 979-6648  
www.ago.net



**Alfred Eisenstaedt**  
*Examination of German Dancer  
in the Third Reich*  
1934  
Gelatin silver print  
(c) Art Gallery of Ontario

Works by two giants in the medium of black and white photography, Ansel Adams (1902–1984) and Alfred Eisenstaedt (1898–1995), on display at the AGO offer a curious mélange of two diverse worlds.

The photography of American Ansel Adams is virtually synonymous with the American West, especially the Sierra Nevada towering mountain range that inspired the Sierra Club. Adams recorded nature's spectacular beauty with particular dedication and brilliance, leaving behind such magnificent visual documents as *Mono-lith*, *The Face of Half Dome* (1927) and *Moonrise over Hernandez, New Mexico* (1941).

Greatly influenced by renowned photographer Alfred Stieglitz, he quoted him in his 1985 autobiography, saying: "(he) taught me what became my first commandment: 'Art is the affirmation of life.'"

This conviction resonates in his stunning photographs of mountain peaks and escarpments, but the AGO exhibition also offers Adams's rare early photographs, architectural and urban views, as well as portraits of friends and contemporary subjects of the 1930s.

Among them is a group of photographs of Stieglitz's wife, painter Georgia O'Keeffe captured with her guide, Orville Cox, on a 1937 road trip. In one striking composition, the two, wearing wide-brimmed black hats, are silhouetted against

an angry, cloudy sky, shot from an unsuspecting angle with Adams's signature economy.

A very different aesthetic permeates the work of German photographer, Alfred Eisenstaedt. A preeminent photojournalist of his time, spanning eight decades of the twentieth century, he was the man behind the camera that captured some of the most enduring images of modern history.

Perhaps his most reproduced photograph, is the kiss in Times Square on V-J Day. Eisenstaedt had been following the sailor who was "running along the street grabbing any and every girl in sight. Whether she was a grandmother, stout, thin, old, didn't make any difference. None of the pictures that were possible pleased me. Then, suddenly in a flash, I saw something white being grabbed. I turned around and clicked the moment the sailor kissed the nurse."

That same instinct is behind hundreds of photographs Eisenstaedt left behind, images that captured the lives of ordinary people and everyday moments. His perception and unique sense of timing infused these scenes with unassuming spontaneity.

Eisenstaedt's straightforward photographs are an unusual complement to Adams's monumental vistas. The visual poetry of such timeless images as *Rose and Driftwood* by Adams is in contrast with the



**Ansel Adams**  
*Rose and Driftwood, San Francisco*  
About 1932  
Gelatin silver print  
22.9 x 28.9 cm  
The Lane Collection  
Used with permission of the Trustees of  
The Ansel Adams Publishing  
Rights Trust. All Rights Reserved.  
X-01687

documentary, unpretentious style of Eisenstaedt, and although the two share the same medium, they remain worlds apart.

Dorota Kozinska

## GATINEAU

### PETRA: LOST CITY OF STONE

To January 2, 2007  
Canadian Museum of Civilization  
100 Laurier St.  
Tel.: 1 (800) 555-5621  
www.civilization.ca

The ancient desert city of Petra, literally built out of the red sandstone cliffs and landscape by the Nabataeans is a fascinating tale of how civilizations rise and fall, the stuff of history itself. The Nabataeans were famous traders who transformed this desert site in south Jordan with its narrow (once guarded) entrance passage route and complex structures of temples, tombs and living spaces. While many of the 3000 former structures have long since vanished, returned to the desert, there are others that have remained, and capture the atmosphere of this metropolis as it was when it prospered between the 1st century BC and the 3rd century AD. The commercial expanse of the Nabataean Empire extended through what are now the states of Jordan, Israel, Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

What is most evident from the capstones, architectural features and various sculpture and craft elements in this show, is how influenced by the diverse cultures Nabataean art, and architecture, actually were. These people accessed cultural and religious influences from Hellenistic Greece, Egypt, Judea, Palestine, Mesopotamia and their own Arabian region. And all of this was achieved in one of the harshest climates on earth. Most significant was the extensive drainage, water capturing and well spaces buried within the mountains developed by these ancient peoples so that they could withstand significant droughts with less hardship. Their elaborate dams, terraced water, irrigation channels, cisterns, pools and waterways were unparalleled in the world. Camel caravans of traders would stop in Petra to be safeguarded before going on their way, and paid a fee for this. Safe passage was guaranteed through their lands, or those of their neighbour traders, but equally fees were exacted for this. The population of Petra reached





The City of Petra in Jordan  
Courtesy: Jordan Tourist Board  
© Jane Taylor, www.janetaylorphotos

20,000 in 50 AD and by 100AD the Nabataeans controlled the entire Arabian incense trade.

Once lost to history and time after an earthquake in AD363 destroyed the city, Petra was rediscovered by the Swiss explorer Johann Burckhardt in 1812. It attracted the Romantic explorers despite the perils of travel in this region and like Burckhardt; they would often disguise themselves as Arabs, learn the various languages or the rudiments thereof, and hire local tribal peoples to assist them in voyaging there. Petra became a lost wonder of the ancient world and as such, it fascinated the Romantics and later on, the Victorians. Petra was a manifestation of lost history, a sort of Atlantis, suggesting that beyond the Western imagination and achievement there were indeed past civilizations, immeasurably accomplished in their own right.

As co-curator Glenn Markoe from the Cincinnati Art Museum states: "This project is more than just an antiquities show. It is about the preservation of an ancient culture, which represents the precious heritage of modern people, a heritage that needs to be preserved. With the show as impetus, we were able to save Petra's most important sculpture – a monumental stone bust of Dushara, Petras chief divinity – all 2100 pounds of him. Thanks to this effort, this landmark will no longer erode from exposure to the wind and the elements, but can be preserved and appreciated in a museum setting."

It somehow seems fitting that the *Petra* exhibition, celebrating the eighth wonder of the world, a city of great wealth, vitality and prosperity,

literally carved out of the landscape, should be presented in Gatineau, inside Douglas Cardinal's Museum of Civilization, a building that itself references a topography and landscape aesthetic. One can also enjoy *The Bedouin of Petra* a photo documentary exhibit that focuses of that city's last inhabitants, the Bedouin Bedouins, whose lives have been transformed from pastoral nomads who lived in tents and caves, to modern day urban dwellers living in cinder block and stone houses, and who work in the tourist industry.

John K. Grande

## MONTREAL

### RODNEY GRAHAM

October 5, 2006 – January 7, 2007  
Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal  
185 Ste. Catherine St. W.  
Montreal, Qc H2X 3X5  
Tel.: (514) 847-6232  
www.macm.org



*How I Became a Ramblin' Man*, 1999 (detail)  
Photo courtesy Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal

Following on the heels of the superb Anselm Kiefer exhibition, and being shown in tandem with another German artist, the irreverently surreal Neo Rauch, Canadian Rodney Graham fights the competition with bells and whistles. Literally. A selection of his most recent works at the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal includes films and video projections with sound effects that reverberate across the halls. In a selection of some of his recent major works, Graham takes the viewer on a sophisticated tour of western pop culture, and he does it in his unique style. Graham's originality lies not so much in his witty appropriation and re-appropriation of cultural icons, many have done that, but rather in the wonderful irony and paradox that mark his works.

Not averse to placing himself in his compositions, he dons the cowboy hat in a broad take on the classic western in a short film *How I Became a Ramblin' Man*, and a philosopher's robe in an impersonation of Erasmus in an installation titled *Allegory of Folly: Study for an Equestrian Monument in the Form of a Wind Vane*. In another short, *Lobbing Potatoes at a Gong*, Graham parodies the performances that took place in the 1960's club scene, and while the deafening sound of the gong and the absurdity of the activity will keep the viewer rooted to the spot, it is the *Torqued Chandelier Release* that truly entrances.

Inspired by an experiment conceived by Isaac Newton, Graham's silent film of an opulent crystal chandelier suspended and rotating on its own axis is a mesmerising enigma, a brilliant artifice of shimmering movement. The dry crackling sound of the projector provides an unsettling accompaniment to this spellbinding spectacle. A similar aesthetic is echoed in *Screen Door*, the MAC's latest acquisition. In this pure silver replica of Elvis Presley's aluminium back screen door removed from his Graceland mansion, Graham transform an ubiquitous object into a religious relic, paying tribute to both a cultural legend and an unforgettable era.

At once entertaining and thought provoking, this exhibition should not be missed.

Dorota Kozinska

### GIRODET: OSSIANTIC DRAWINGS

October 21, 2006 –  
January 21, 2007  
Montreal Museum of Fine Arts  
1380 Sherbrooke Street West  
Tel.: (514) 285-2000  
www.mmfa.qc.ca



*Le Chant d'Evirallina*  
Black chalk and gray and brown wash  
heightened with white,  
and traces of pen and crayon  
20.8 x 25.5 cm  
Photo courtesy Musée Girodet, Montargis

Neoclassicism is in vogue. Romanticism is back. And whether incorporated into contemporary aesthetic or dished out in its pure form, this colourful and volatile epoch is once again captivating the imagination of both the public and curators.

The latest exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, a retrospective of 130 works by Romantic French painter Anne-Louis Girodet (1767-1824), attests to this renewed fascination. Although billed as one of the pillars of Romanticism's early period, on par with David and Delacroix, Girodet's style resembles more the mannerism of Henry Fuseli, with oblique bodies echoing the Swiss artist's paintings, like his iconic *The Nightmare*.

Witness to the great historical upheaval of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic rule, he painted the legendary and the mythical, works infused with sensuality and emotion.

But while best known for his paintings, Girodet was in fact also an immensely talented draftsman, as can be seen in the MMFA show, which includes a large number of his drawings. Notable among them is a group of sketches on the theme of the Celtic legend of Ossian, a popular subject for artists at the time. Based on a cycle of poems, which



the Scottish author James Macpherson claimed to have translated from ancient sources, Girodet's chalk and crayon drawings captivate by the fluidity of their lines and the poetic treatment of the human body. Despite their obvious debt to both Fuseli and English Neoclassical sculptor John Flaxman, their originality is due as much to Girodet's technique as to his visionary talent. The unexpected heightening of tones with white gouache, imparting a strange, disembodied quality to these works, is but one of the aspects that renders them so seductive.

Perhaps Girodet's ambition to transform poetry into painting and vice versa accounts for it. (He himself wrote poetry and devoted his time to translating classical literature.) Characterized by this virtuoso technique and complex iconography, Girodet's Ossianic drawings were executed as both studies for paintings and as independent works. One group of wash drawings, including *Fingal Lamenting the Death of Malvina*, may have been created as part of an unpublished serial project.

Together they form an important body of work and a major segment of the exhibition, strangely apart from the surrounding monumental tableaux.

Dorota Kozinska

## RANDALL ANDERSON: ZOOM!

Sept. 2006 – Sept. 2008  
Faculty of Fine Arts Sculpture Court  
Concordia University  
Ste. Catherine St. W.  
[www.fofagallery.concordia.ca](http://www.fofagallery.concordia.ca)

*Zoom!*, Randall Anderson's winning proposal for Concordia University's 2006 Sculpture Court Competition, appears at first glance to be a human figure pushing forward into a storm of flapping sheets of paper. Only when moving around the back do we discover that the form is in fact a hollow shell.

The work has been catching the attention of passersby since its installation last September on Ste. Catherine Street, between Guy and McKay. It will occupy the new Faculty of Fine Arts building's outdoor courtyard for two years.



*Zoom!*  
Photo courtesy the artist

At a time when figurative sculpture is a rare animal in contemporary art, Anderson deals resolutely with the body. Yet he does it in an oblique fashion. The work describes the negative shape of an invisible human presence. It speaks to us of our hurried lives and the swirling maelstrom of information which envelops us. "It's about the information which is replacing the body, a concrete avatar", Anderson explains.

The work is built upon his interest in bulletin boards, paper not virtual, and inspired both by Italian sculptor Umberto Boccioni's bronze studies of movement and body casts by contemporary British artist Antony Gormley. It's also a convincing outgrowth of his background in performance art.

Faced with the challenge of creating a work for an open public space, Anderson has taken gentle possession of the 10m by 13m plaza, enclosed by highly polished walls, an indentation in the university's Ste. Catherine Street façade. By using forton, a resin based plaster of Paris, Anderson's work echoes the surface and feel of classical sculpture. At the same time, this hardy material will endure outdoor installation.

After mere months on site, the crevices of the almost 3 m high work are already beginning to harbour an accretion of pollution and insect life. This is not a cold rarified monument. The experience of the street is reflected and integrated in the choice of both subject and medium.

Anne Lewis

## FREDERICTON

### STEPHEN MAY: EMBODIMENTS

24 September 2006 –  
14 January 2007  
The Beaverbrook Art Gallery  
P.O. Box 605  
703 Queen Street  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5A6  
Tel.: (506) 458-8545  
[www.beaverbrookartgallery.org](http://www.beaverbrookartgallery.org)

Stephen May, as stated in the gallery's press release, is a painter's painter, but that does not mean that his paintings are not accessible to the lay public. Quite the opposite, they have wide appeal to anyone with the eyes to see and an appreciation of beauty. The exhibition is a wide retrospective of the artist's work from his art school days to the present time. He paints realistically in oil on canvas. I should be up front and state, and I do so with pleasure, that Stephen was once my painting student at Mount Allison University, from 1979 to 1983. Even then, he was a very fine painter. I take no credit for his success as his talent is all off his own making.

The artist's statement refers to the way that May puts paint to canvas. It is often with a wide brush and the paint is applied very broadly. However, when looking at his work at the proper viewing distance his paintings come together to form remarkably realistic images. In some ways his work is related to Impressionism. One of his paintings is even titled: *Dead Trout, Homage to Manet* (1991). The homage is self-evident in his application of paint in this large, 137.2x152.4cm, work. It is a very beautiful painting of a very simple subject. In fact all his subjects are simple, ranging from still-lives to paintings of children's toys to a number of self-portraits.

Another homage, this time to Goya, is a painting of a can of Campbell's tomato soup. *Soup Can (Homage to Goya)* (2004), could be seen as a comment on the work of Andy Warhol although May's painting is free from any sense of irony that is implied by the pop artist's painting of the same subject and is painted in a lot more interesting way. It is the act of painting that appears to be important to May

and that puts him into very good company as far as I am concerned. It does, however, leave him at the post in regard to today's Post Modern movement where everything is about subject and technique is all, but forgotten. I have often heard artists, and not a few critics, sneer about 'mere' skill as being of little importance in the larger scheme of things such as their thoughts on the world's affairs. May is certainly skillful and his paintings of a dead canary or a toy boat are unlikely to lead to world peace, but they are pleasant to look at and they do fit nicely into the history of art.



*Self portrait with green and purple*, 2005  
oil on board  
48.2 x 42.2 cm  
Collection of the Artist

There are a large number of self-portraits in the exhibition. In fact a whole wall of them and they are a very different matter from the other paintings in the exhibition. They cover the period from 1982 until 2005 and they are unrelenting in their realism. These are pictures of the artist with all his warts. They are what I call mirror portraits painted from life as the artist paints himself from a mirror image rather than from a photograph. May looks hard and long at himself and shows that he knows that he is mortal. They are wonderful paintings. I was drawn in particular to his *Self-portrait with green and purple* (2005), one of the artist's latest works in the exhibition. This strong image illustrates that May continues to become better as he grows older. This exhibition is worth a look if only to understand that the grand tradition of easel painting is still being done well.

Virgil Hammock





Sans titre, 2006  
Gouache on panel  
24 in x 30 in  
Photo: Daniel Roussel

## FRANÇOIS VINCENT: RECENT WORKS

January 31 – March 3, 2007  
Galerie Simon Blais  
5420, Saint-Laurent Blvd.  
Montréal (Québec) Canada H2T 1S1  
Phone: (514) 849-1165  
Fax: (514) 849-1862  
www.galeriesimonblais.com

*Painting is a thundering collision of different worlds, intended to create a new world in, and from, the struggle with one another, a new world which is the work of art. Each work originates just as does the cosmos – through catastrophes which out of the chaotic din of instruments ultimately create a symphony, the music of the spheres.*

Wassily Kandinsky

There is a definite subtle rumbling in François Vincent's immaculate studio. It may not be a celestial symphony as yet, but a prelude to a new body of work in this artist's career. Well-known to the French public, Vincent has been exhibiting his paintings since the 1970's, establishing himself quickly as a master of visual precision and attention to the painterly process.

His works emanate a quiet solitude reminiscent of the still scenes by Edward Hopper, but marked by Vincent's signature palette of subdued hues of grey and blue. Navigating with ease in his monochromatic universe, Vincent has always been preoccupied as much with the calibre of his work as with its visual composition. Sculptural and somewhat theatrical – Vincent teaches at the department of stage design at the National Theatre School in Montreal – his paintings carried a bit of narrative that made them immediately accessible... but never intimate. The figures in those works were too distant to communicate, suspended in their own reverie, balancing on globes or meditating still on empty beaches, they seemed oblivious to the viewer. Vincent's interiors continued this circumspect reflection on spatiality, as did his still lifes, pleasing to the eye for their understated tonality but already altering, metamorphosing into something other, beyond our agreed understanding of their structure and meaning. The use of past tense is intentional, for these works

are no more. They have been broken up and re-configured, and that's when the murmur of change, of collision, of re-birth began.

On the surface, the new direction took hold with an enlarged photo scan of one of Vincent's drawings from his sketchpad. It not only focused his attention on the subtleties of the lines; he was also intrigued by the vertical split that became clearly visible on the copied page.

This was the catalyst for an explosion of new images that have taken the artist a little by surprise. A quiet, introspective man, Vincent cannot help but analyze his work, but there are moments when the intellect can be the greatest obstacle to the creative process.

This is such moment. For what his happening to his art is no less than a revolution, and it began with an execution of sorts, when the artist made the conscious decision to "evacuate" the human figure from his compositions. Words Vincent uses when talking about his work speak of his preoccupation with space and time: "Gesture vs. non-gesture, the elements of constructed space, synthesis." Enamoured of Italian neo-classicism (Morandi) with its 'purity and

attention to detail', he is not averse to the metaphysical aspect of these works, and all these diverse elements and predilections have now finally found their expression.

"Painting gives me great happiness, great satisfaction," Vincent says. "I have transformed my work, and have arrived in a future of which I had a premonition, but still as illusion." That's where the element of surprise came into play, for hard as he may, Vincent cannot escape the fact that he is fully into a new production, and the future is now. With the human figure excised from the composition, what is left are oblique boulders, jagged forms like giant rock faces, and floating abstract shapes, all held together by some invisible energy that rumbles underneath like an approaching storm. Most of the paintings – vinyl treated gouache on board – are split into two images, many still linked to the original idea of two opposing universes. A geometric, architectural drawing on one side engages in a dialogue with an abstract painting on the other, and the clash of the two is at times awkward.

Like an allegory for the battle of intellect and spirit, they clearly reflect Vincent's own inner struggle. Already engaged in a new painterly vision, he is still holding on to the established gesture, to the comforting structure of a cube, to a familiar aesthetic. It is when he lets go, that the painting really speaks. When the painting is all there is, its new, raw presence waiting to be tamed. Vincent has all the tools, the experience to carry out the task. He does it by applying striking colour notations to the lugubrious structures, backlighting them, creating in the process an unusual sense of perspective. There is a new symbiotic communion in these compositions. While the works are still split into two images, these are now kindred realms, born of the same gesture. Freed from "intent", the latest paintings are a world apart from Vincent's earlier production, and although still clearly his own, they converse in an entirely new visual language.

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