

Art Mûr, Scope, New York, March 6 – March 10, 2013

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Mathieu Lévesque, Galerie Trois Points, Volta, New York, 2013.
Photo : Frédéric Bouchard, courtesy of Galerie Trois Points, Montreal

Mathieu Lévesque

Galerie Trois Points, Volta, New York, March 7–March 10, 2013

Evidence of Mathieu Lévesque's current painterly concerns can be seen in his creative output as far back as 2003. Liberal employment of negative space, vibrant and localized use of colour, and an appreciation of lacquered wood as a painting support are all approaches that appear in *Mathieu Lévesque @ VOLTA NY*; here they are carried to their logical, albeit minimal conclusion. The 6th edition of VOLTA NY, a solo-project invitational art fair, debuted in the cobblestone and cast-iron district of Soho this year, and Galerie Trois Points' presentation of Lévesque's work, against this historically rich backdrop, served the art handsomely.

The artist says he is "fascinated by the boundary areas between painting, sculptural, and architectural disciplines" and, more than ever, he successfully navigates the axis of these considerations. Lévesque's works initially appear paper-thin and origami-like; they seem like large folded rectangles that float just off the wall. They are actually wood panels, made to appear weightless by the glowing, colourful hues that emanate from behind; a reflected-light effect achieved by the careful application of neon colours along the bevelled back edges of these rectilinear forms. All painting is an experience with reflected light, and the convention employed here makes clever use of this phenomenon to highlight, and in some ways subvert, the materiality of these objects. A primary example is *Losange jaune* (2013), a diamond-shaped, natural wood panel encircled by a nimbus of yellow and pink. The movement of Lévesque's paint application from the edges of the picture plane to the back of it mitigates the understanding of his work as strictly painting, positioning it somewhere closer to bas-relief sculpture. In *Losange blanc* (2013), a white diamond form would all but disappear if not for the faint yellow glow that surrounds it. *Losange bois* (2013) takes this effect one step further by pitting the warm, walnut tones of a quadrangular wood panel against an acrid, red radiance. The juxtaposition of dark and light here creates the optical illusion of depth, calling to mind the artist's MFA exhibition, wherein he literally cut a negative space into the wall of the gallery.

Lévesque's shaped panels, his interest in the edges of a painting, and his championing of the underlying supports align him with formalists like Newman, Stella, and the Minimalist Donald Judd, whom I thought of when viewing a corner installation of six near-identical square wood panels, differing from one another only in terms of wood grain façade and the reflected colour each work projected onto the supporting wall. These differences, though slight, are the actual loci of concern from which Lévesque operates. His position, if we assume it, may reframe our aesthetic priorities enough to facilitate the savouring of details we might otherwise have missed.

[Enrico Gomez]



Exhibition view, Art Mûr, Scope, New York, 2013.
Photo : James Hall, courtesy of Art Mûr, Montreal

Art Mûr

Scope, New York, March 6–March 10, 2013

The 12th edition of SCOPE New York Art Fair premiered in an unusual location: the historic James A. Farley Post Office. This Neoclassical building, with its colonnade of 16m high Corinthian columns, was an impressive setting for an event that is typically of mixed quality. This year's fair, boasting over seventy-five international galleries, was no exception (a life-size, mirrored horse sculpture near the entrance gave little cause for optimism).

The Art Mûr booth quickly allayed these reservations with the humorous sculptural installation *Maintiens le droit* (2012), consisting of a fallen, fiberglass "Mountie," his legs chewed through by the taxidermic beaver at his feet. Doubling as the RCMP motto "Defend the Law," the title hints that the artist duo Cooke-Sasseville perhaps implicates this woodland creature as a heroic defender of its own natural inclinations.

Art Mûr organized its offerings at SCOPE along themes of ecology and relations between Canada and First Nations people. Other artists addressing ecological concerns included Karine Giboulo and Diana Thorneycroft, who shone with the immediately understandable *Group of Seven Awkward Moments (Davis Strait)* (2007), a dark riff on Lawren Harris' *Icebergs, Davis Strait*, in which sledgers float on a dwindling shard of once-solid ice.

The First Nations-themed works commanded attention with three large red and white circular compositions that read like digital colour-field mandalas or abstract targets. These digital prints, *Meditation on Red* (2013) by Anishinaabe artist Nadia Myre, give a close-up view of beadwork in Canadian flag colours, conflating issues of nationalism, Aboriginal heritage, and aesthetic modernism so subtly that it's easy to initially miss their nuanced worth. Sonny Assu showed an acrylic painting in pleasing, if familiar, tropes of Pacific-Northwestern Indigenous graphics, and Nicholas Galanin offered compelling examples from his *S'igeika'awu: Ghost* series (2009): three ceramic and horsehair masks in vaguely Northwest Coast Aboriginal style, covered in blue chinoiserie patterning, their Delft finish serving as a marker of the colonial tradition of appropriating and bastardizing indigenous art forms. Recent Laureate of the 2013 Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, Rebecca Belmore was represented by *Fringe* (2013), a large digital print of a woman lying on her side, facing away from the viewer, with a grizzly, diagonal suture dripping red beadwork down the length of her back. The title refers at once to the drape of traditional handicraft within the scene and also to a people's ability to emerge from the outskirts of consideration, fashioning self-expression and autonomous creative domain from their own history, however challenging or difficult. In an art fair filled with its share of glitz and pageantry, the integrity and conceptual gravitas of these First Nations artists, though recondit, was a much-needed bright spot.

[Enrico Gomez]