60 Painters

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From the ancient efforts to fashion mirrored surfaces out of stone, to the latest scientific studies on the role of mirror neurons in the brain's capacity for empathy, the desire to seek understanding of ourselves and our world through the expanded view of the mirror's reflection seems at the core of human nature. The mirror is our third eye. It is the eye that expands our perspective and peers into our blind spots. It is the eye that reflects our own gaze, turning our inquiries inward as we work to reconcile our hopes and expectations with the view of a new illusive reality.

For me and the other painters I know, this third eye has never existed solely in the glassy reflections of a pool of water or shiny sheet of metal. As painters, we are driven to forge new third eyes in paint. From the sanctuary of the artist's studio, we strive to convey a vision born of our personal passions, convictions, fears and desires. But our creations are not mere images. They are casts of our methods and materials, a reflection not just of our thoughts and ideas but of our process and our touch. The views from these third eyes are meant to be seen in the flesh.

At 6*0 Painters,* viewers were given a special opportunity to experience an array of paintings face to face. They could confront each work as a visceral object and respond to the physicality of its skin and the scale of its presence. At such a large exhibition, the stories and sensations of one painting can blur into the experience of the next, each painting inevitably catching the glint of another and then another. Soon they become entwined in an endless hall of mirrors, reverberating in an infinite visual conversation.

This banter among artworks expands the purview of each work, inviting endless comparisons and juxtapositions. At 6*0 Painters,* as I looked at Melanie Authier's "S*cavenger"* with its wafts of smoky glazes and shards of mysterious light, I imagined it was the dream she must have dreamt when she fell asleep upon the frail and fantastical oasis of Tristram Lansdowne's "T*ypus Montis Ventris"*. And as I stood before Alexander Irving's "F*latman 3"*, I smiled wondering if one of the planar forms of Sandra Meigs' "T*he Distance of the Minute Hand"* had escaped from its appointed position and snuck on to Irving's stage to proclaim its own singular glory. Relationships and connections among seemingly disparate works abound. Bearing witness to this dance of ideas is part of the thrill of looking at paintings.

Part of this dance is expressed in the physicality of each painting's surface. As a painter, my first question is always: What does the p*aint* reveal? There are as many possible approaches as there are painters. Does the surface negate the hand or celebrate it? Does it make palpable the labour of construction or does it look to be the remnants of an effortless rowdy play? Does the painting reach out in a sprawling embrace or does it shyly await an intimate

encounter? Is the paint made to hover in gauzy veils of light, or does it loaf about in meaty globs like a schlump?

Many paintings are built through the cumulative traces of the artist's hand. In the works of Susanna Heller and Denyse Thomasos, gritty impassioned struggles become embedded in raw, uncensored gestures. In Heller's foreboding "E*n Garde!"*, her rough and relentless performance releases an epic battle of torment and liberation. In Thomasos' "A*lbatross"*, planks of color teeter on ghostly structures, the tracks of her body's movement stacked and trapped in a sinister entanglement.

Gentler spirits reign in the works of Will Gorlitz and Mara Korkola whose quiet but astute observations are captured in subtle and sensitive articulations. The view in Gorlitz's "A*rboretum Larix Sibirica"* is emphatically askew, a mechanical trope unnatural to the human eye. But the painted image is undoubtedly from an eloquent and attentive hand, transforming a whimsical snapshot into a contemplative statement. Korkola displays a similarly delicate approach but with a more spontaneous flair. In "N*o Place 250"*, her series of small panels align like cells sliced from a film strip, but her images defy the inertia of the camera's frozen stills. A flurry of brushstrokes reflects every movement of her roving and responsive hand.

Of course many painters trade the individuality of their gesture for inventive techniques that tease the viewer with mystifying textures and tricks. Strangely similar processes can produce strikingly different results. In "R*evolve"*, we witness the extruded miracles of Sasha Pierce as she flaunts her keen sensibility for the forensics of ornament. The result is a seductive balance between the optical and tactile, the painterly and the punctilious. Dorian Fitzgerald customizes his own method of extrusion in his reproduction of an image from NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory. Forming an opaque veneer from puddles of pigment, Fitzgerald creates a spectacle of digital compression writ large. The meticulous results strike a glamorous pose.

With far less precision and far more girth, the works of Nicole Collins and Kim Dorland annihilate the artist's hand and wage war on representation itself. Mounds of paint exude apocalyptic states in brooding sculptural surfaces. Dorland's "L*ori in Blue Shirt"* manifests an irrepressible carnality, the erupting figure radiating a neon aura like a post-traumatic aftershock. But there are no survivors in Collins' "B*lack Flag for Painting"*. The obliteration is complete. The painting process is transformed into a burial ritual, and the painting's thick black surface oozes like a decaying corpse.

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It seems fitting that this parade of painting's vital and varied materiality would be displayed amidst the looming specter of its lenticular kin. Installed in Humber College's film studios, 6*0 Painters* confronted the digital superstructure head on. Shelley Adler's monumental "N*icky"* jostled for position before an overbearing expanse of green screen, while roomfuls of

paintings seemed to emanate light from within to counter the absorbing darkness of the studio's blackened walls. Paintings from the likes of Matt Bahen, Bogdan Luca and Wanda Koop rose to the occasion, emerging from the dark with a cinematic presence, bringing to mind the words of Marcel Broodthaers: "You believe you have seen a painting, but nevertheless you have seen a film."[1]

Painters constantly duel with the digital image as both nemesis and muse. In Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins' abstract diptych, I recognize the skeletal twin of my own figurative "T*hin-Skinned"*. While I retain the human visage of my digital source, Marman and Borins zoom right to their image's digital core. Both strategies grapple with an image's metamorphosis as it moves stealthily from coherence to corruption.

In the ongoing clash between paint and pixels, Monica Tap and Anda Kubis seek a truce with their digital rivals. Translating the camera's frozen blur into an exuberant patchwork of brushstrokes, Tap reconciles the camera's static glimpse with the sauntering sensuality of her patient painter's eye. In "B*oundless"*, Anda Kubis magnifies and intensifies Tap's vibrant strokes, but conspires to form a closer alliance with the digital mode. Her cheeky reproductions of luscious swipes of paint fool the viewer's trusting eye. Printed directly on the canvas, these saturated simulacrums masquerade amidst the actual viscous substance. Paint and printout mingle in a sly farce of surface and screen.

6*0 Painters* engaged a panoply of sensations and a surfeit of stories. These are just some of my personal reflections. My perspective is filtered through my particular interests as a painter, my role as a participant in the exhibition, and my unwavering conviction that painting's inherent ability to summon empathic responses is rooted in its bodily presence. But the view of every painting is seen through the glare of the viewer's own reflection. As painters, we can only hold up our work as a proposition. We may be image-makers or object-makers, alchemists or architects. We may be clairvoyants or exorcists, jesters or poets. Ultimately, we are makers of mirrors, inviting viewers to look beyond the confines of the habitual and to peer through our third eye.

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[1] Daniel Birnbaum, "Where is Painting Now?" P<u>ainting,</u> ed. Terry R. Myers (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2011) 158.