

Extreme Painting

Various venues, Montreal, Canada

That Montreal has always been a proverbial Mecca for Modernist painters, boasting such luminaries as Paul-Émile Borduas, Jean-Paul Riopelle, Claude Tousignant and Yves Gaucher, among many others, is something of a truism. In a series of 16 exhibitions mounted across the city under the umbrella theme of 'Extreme Painting', that magnetic status continued to hold.

The extremes in 'Extreme Painting' were clear in two banner exhibitions. One, at Galerie Division, featured artists including Kim Dorland, Martin Golland, Andre Ethier and Allison Schulnik. The other, at Galerie René Blouin, included Dorland again, as well as mavericks Wil Murray and Chris Kline. One of the highlights at Galerie Division, Golland's impressive repertoire complemented the viscous surfaces of Schulnik and Dorland with their own hauntingly allusive mien. Indeed, there is a suggestive quality in his paintings that is his alone, and a genuine edginess, too. Calgary native Murray, now based in Berlin, showed violently exclamatory and hair-raisingly extrusive surfaces that invoked Looney Tunes cartoons and libidinal excesses – splendidly untidy work. Murray's paintings, with their resplendent humps of re-affixed painting skins, towering excrescences and glutted sponges of paint, void their intestines with spectacular abandon.

At Galerie Dominique Bouffard the work of David Lafrance – with its luminous amulets, ecstasy flowers, folk artefacts, overall high humidity and decidedly Cajun feel – established its own order of extremities mixed in a kind of painterly jambalaya. At Galerie Simon Blais, an exhibition of the late Serge Lemoyne's gregarious abstracts reiterated his importance, while,

at Galerie Push, Calgary-born, Brooklyn-based Patrick Lundeen offered his own extreme painting practice with its overtly shamanistic personae and, in his latest series 'Mad Masks' (2010) – based on manipulated found pages from *Mad* magazine – it reached a radical apogee well at the outer reaches of creative insanity.

'Summertime in Paris' at Parisian Laundry was a survey of the gallery's artists and guest artists. Work by David Armstrong Six, BGL, Valérie Blass, Jennifer Lefort and Janet Werner was included, as well as that by Justin Stephens and New York-based Cordy Ryman. Lefort, Stephens and Werner, a generationally-tiered trio (the former two resolute abstractionists, the latter one of Canada's foremost figurative painters) exhibited work that revealed the possibilities still available for canvas-bound painting. And Ryman's tiny, funky, experimental and entirely winning work was an epiphany in itself.

At Projex-Mtl were works by artists such as Emilio Chapela-Perez, Yves Tessier, Peter Schuyff and Sean Montgomery. Tessier showed highly idiosyncratic and diverting figurative paintings, while Schuyff presented iconic abstracts painted over found paintings from the thrift store.

Finally, Galerie Donald Browne showed the work of a journeyman, senior Canadian painter Paul Bureau, who offered both fitting summation and hectic consummation of the various themes of 'Extreme Painting' in the form of two huge and extrusive oils: one red and the other black, titled respectively *One on One (R/Y/W)* and *One on One (B/W)* (both 2010) and a legion of smaller works, seemingly knee-deep in endless decalitres of Dutch oil paint. These three-metre paintings possess a deep, unchanging quiet, somehow laden in their immanently mutable and furrowed surfaces. However hypnotic their effects, it's near-impossible to assume a passive or static stance in front of them. They press upon your body image in such a way that they reveal themselves less as shadowy mirror than symbiotic partner. Though Bureau's paintings have little in common with Abstract Expressionist painting, one characteristic they do share – and with many of the other works in 'Extreme Painting' – is an explicit materiality. The materiality here was so sensuous and tactual that the prospect of experiencing his works slowly over time was its own reward.

Bureau's practice, like that of Golland, is an open space of interrogation and signification. Why? Perhaps because these painters return to the very basics of painting – colour, materiality, texture, line – just as abstract painters as different as Piet Mondrian, Robert Ryman and Tomma Abts have done. But whether sumptuous in their viscosity or spare and suggestive, these paintings, like so many others included in 'Extreme Painting', triggered a real snare for the embodied eye.

James D. Campbell