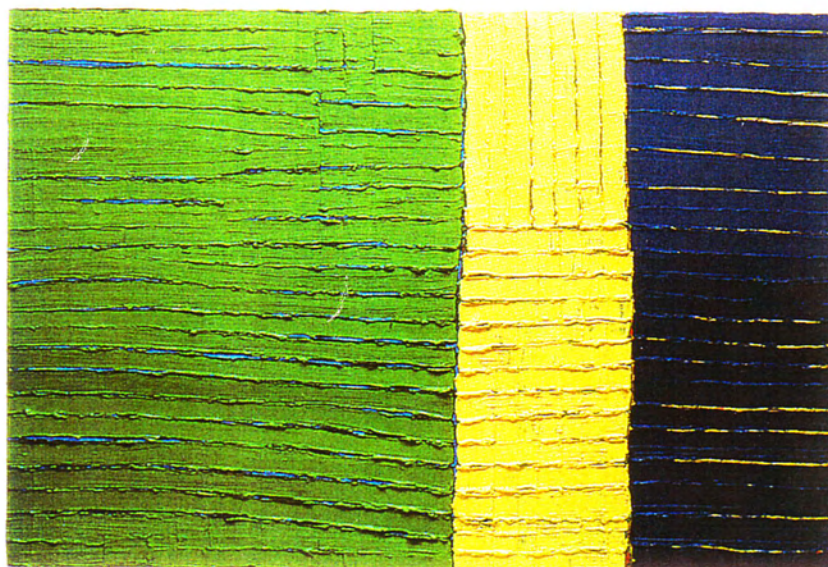


The French Fusion Legion

Guido Molinari, Sean Scully, Joan Mitchell and Jack Bush. What these painters have in common is that they occupy the all-time-favourite list of Montreal painter **Paul Bureau**. "What holds all my work together is an attraction to the physical matter of paint," Bureau says, referring to the shift from *Les Efflorescences*, 1997, to his recent series of abstractions, which carry simple titles like *Fusion*, 2000, or *Surfaces*, 2002. In the earlier work he lathered oil paint on small canvasses and came up with a sort of viscous and painterly vegetation, as if nature were a pigmentary market garden. In the subsequent series he keeps the paint thick, building up the surface with eight to ten variously coloured layers.

Surfaces, then, is a genial and conscious deception. These paintings are more about what is below the meaning of their name than about the name itself. Bureau was excited by the fact that the only way to read how many colours he had used was by looking at the edges. "I've always had a great excitement for colour, and in the last three years I've restrained myself from using black.



I find infinite possibilities through clashes of colour. I never use the paint pure from the tube. It's always mixed and the colour range tends to develop spontaneously."

The paintings are gorgeous and unusual. What stays with you are his combinations—mauve/green, brown/pink and grey/yellow—as does the way the various pigments peek through alternating horizontal and

Paul Bureau: *surfaces*, 2002. Oil on canvas. 101 x 152 cm

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vertical troughs of paint. They're like aerial photographs of land cultivated by a farmer who has gone *fauve*. Or who has been Bushed.

Bureau is an unapologetic abstract painter who loves landscape. He was living in Paris when he realized the connection between topography and aesthetics. "I was able to separate myself from my origins when I was in France from 1985 to '93. I had started working with oil paint during the last two years and a friend from Quebec would visit me regularly. One day she said, 'With this new body of work, you're coming back to your country.'"

Bureau had studied with Guido Molinari at Concordia in the '80s and was aware of the important tradition of abstract painting in Montreal. He suffered a kind of aesthetic homesickness. "I began to long for my origins. One of the other things that drew me back was the profusion of land and nature. I realized how much I had been missing it."

In the decade since his return, Bureau's painting has grown in virtuosity and mystery. He

continues to apply one colour at a time over the entire surface of the canvas. "It would

be cheating to only work a portion, like doing an express version of my own painting. But I don't feel at all confined because I have so much to explore. When you ask me where my work is going, I just think of words like liberty and spontaneity. But do I find painting easy? I'd say it's innate and I do love it. So just give me the stretchers and the paint." For Paul Bureau the equation goes something like this: stretchers + paint = fusion. ■

