



Inside

Mark Bell, Pierre Dorion, Dorian FitzGerald, Sara Hartland-Rowe, Maria Hupfield, Denyse Thomasos, and collaborators Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky

Curated by John Armstrong

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Over the past sixty or so years artists have sought to merge easel painting and its secondary support, the wall, in many ways. Indeed the whole gallery or ‘white cube,’ has been engaged, questioned and at times, dramatically altered. These ‘wallworks’ are most often temporary and have served to extend painting’s reach to an architectural scale, physically occupying the viewer’s entire visual field and at times extending and confounding the architecture through trompe l’oeil. Painting may also be held in tension with issues of sculpture and space — it may serve as applied relief on the wall, lean against the wall or break through the wall — all of which intensify issues of physical presence and pictorial illusion. Painting may also combine with other visual forms such as still photography, projection, performance and text — associations that seek to expand and confound the language of painting.

Inside includes the works of eight artists who use the various technologies and traditions — both ‘commercial’ and ‘fine art’ — to engage the Blackwood Gallery’s two exhibition spaces and reflect on the established categories of interior painting. Several of the artists paint directly on the Blackwood’s walls or floor; other artists exhibit mural-sized or more intimately scaled easel paintings.

Most of the artists in the exhibition practice easel painting, and are known for their searching, and at times playful, interrogation of a variety of architectural spaces. These artists have periodically taken on the challenge of creating temporary or permanent wallworks in order to extend and challenge their own painting production. Other artists in the exhibition come to painting as a way to underline an architectural intervention that draws on a range of practices, such as drawing, sculpture, design or craft. All of these artists connect painting in its many guises — from illusionistic or schematic tableau to a celebration of paint’s physical nature — to built interior spaces that ask us as viewers to reconsider painting’s longstanding critical and poetic engagement with the rooms we inhabit.

Mark Bell

In *Reverse Obsolescence (Deerfield Hall)*, Toronto artist Mark Bell created a perspectival rendering of an atrium interior in University of Toronto Mississauga's recently constructed Deerfield Hall (2014, Perkins + Will Architects) improbably reimagined in a future state of ruin. We are perhaps reminded of Nazi architect Albert Speer's grandiose plan of designing public buildings with their eventual decay in mind, to imitate the grandeur and romance of Ancient Roman ruins.

In creating *Reverse Obsolescence...*, Bell used a chalk line tool to draw the orthogonals of perspective that structure his precise if crumbling interior view of Deerfield Hall's atrium — a view he derived from the architects' speculative rendering of the space prior to construction. In the finished work, Bell misted the wall with water, allowing the denser areas of chalk to bleed into one another, creating greater contrast in some areas while obliterating information in others in order to suggest the artwork's destruction. The illusion of water damage to the wallwork is echoed in the depiction of the atrium's lower level as filled with floodwater and floating detritus.

Bell's pronounced use of one-point perspective refers to the markedly schematic and artificial construction of space found in *Christ Washing His Disciples' Feet*, a mural-scaled painting by Venetian Renaissance artist Jacopo Tintoretto in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario that Bell has long been fascinated by. In a cheeky gesture that punctuates the contrivance of perspectival calculation, Bell has left the nail in the wall that marks the artwork's central vanishing point and served as an anchor for his myriad chalk-line snaps.

Mark Bell (born Toronto 1964) completed his undergraduate studies at OCAD University in 1989, and in 2009 he received a Masters degree from Chelsea College of Art in London, UK. A selection of his solo exhibitions in public galleries include the following: Detail, Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto (2007); The Truth About Falling, YYY Artists' Outlet, Toronto, Ontario (2006); History Painting, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario (2003), Information Passagegalerie, Künstlerhaus, Vienna (2001). Group exhibitions: More Sad Presentiments, Open Studio, Toronto (2012); Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women, The Bear Gallery, London, UK (2009); Copycat, Kenderdine Art Gallery, Saskatoon (1997). He has attended a number of artist residencies in Canada and Europe: Ballinglen Arts Foundation, Republic of Ireland (2006); Pouch Cove, Newfoundland (2002); Galichnick Art Colony, Macedonia. (2002); Atelierhaus des Bundes, Austria (2001). Bell is one of the founding members of the artist collective Painting Disorders. He lives in Toronto where he is represented by General Hardware Contemporary.
markcroftonbell.com

Pierre Dorion

The two photo-based easel paintings by Montreal artist **Pierre Dorion** depict architectural details of the exterior of the Blackwood's e|gallery—a long, thin gallery located in the University of Toronto Mississauga's award-winning Communication, Culture and Technology Building, designed in 2004 by Montreal architects Saucier + Perrotte. The intimately scaled *Blackwood I* (2014) depicts an inconspicuous ceiling corner as seen at eye level from an adjacent overlook. As much a homage to the intricacy and inventiveness of contemporary architecture as a playful recognition of a camera's inability to accurately capture differing light sources, the painting posits soft mauve and drab green shadows that might fall on this minimalist juncture of a wall and a ceiling with an opening slot of indirect fluorescent lighting.

Dorion's larger *Blackwood II* (2014) is based on the artist's photograph of a backlit frosted glass panel on the exterior wall of the e|gallery. The CCT Building's novel wall treatment is cropped out of its architectural context and painted in careful gradations that emphasize the luminescence of the translucent wall while suggesting an ethereal rejigging of the vertical stripe paintings of the iconic Abstract Expressionist painter Barnett Newman. In both *Blackwood I & II*, Dorion has shifted the actual colour of the white ceiling corner or sharper acid green of the backlit wall panel in his choice of greyed pastels that suggest a mid-century domestic interior—as perhaps seen in the fading light of early evening.

Pierre Dorion (born Ottawa, 1959) completed his Bachelor in Visual Arts at the University of Ottawa in 1981. In 1983 he began his solo career, marked by an exhibition at the Yarlow-Salzman Gallery, Toronto in 1984. A selection of his solo exhibitions in public galleries include the following: *Autoportraits 1990-1994*, Centre international d'art contemporain (CIAC), Montreal (1994), *Pierre Dorion*, Art Gallery at York University, Toronto (1995, touring); *Pierre Dorion: Peinture et photographie*, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal (2010); *Pierre Dorion*, Musée d'art contemporain, Montreal (2012, touring). His group exhibitions include *Aurora Boréalis*, CIAC, Montreal (1984); *Anninovanta*, Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna (1991); *À ciel ouvert: Le Nouveau Pleinairisme*, Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (2012). In 1997, Dorion was awarded the *prix Louis-Comtois* from the City of Montreal in collaboration with AGAC (Association des galeries d'art contemporain). He lives in Montreal and is represented by Galerie René Blouin in Montreal, Diaz Contemporary in Toronto, and Jack Shainman Gallery in New York.
galeriereneblouin.com, diazcontemporary.ca, jackshainman.com

Dorian FitzGerald

Over the course of the exhibition, Toronto artist **Dorian FitzGerald** will periodically work in the gallery on a poured cloisonné diptych painting depicting a sumptuous Parisian sitting room. The source for *Salon, Apartment of Valerian Rybar and Jean-François Daigre, Rue du Bac, Paris* is a two-page photographic spread in the October 1989 issue of *Architectural Digest*. The photograph accompanies a retrospective article celebrating 1970s-era internationally acclaimed collaborative interior designers Rybar and Daigre. In FitzGerald's view of the lavish interior we see several times over—due to the mirrored paneling on the room's walls and ceiling—a gilded Regency mirror, a Roman portrait bust, two Louis XV chairs, and many other *objets d'art*.

FitzGerald explores images of lifestyle excess and the display of ostentatious wealth in many of his paintings, *Salon, Apartment of Valerian Rybar* included. He dissects and compresses these images through digital contour tracing using raster or vector graphics. FitzGerald sets the complexity of this contour analysis to produce a digital drawing that looks like an overly intricate paint-by-number sketch that he transfers onto his painting. He then either traces a contour line around a shape with caulking to create a reservoir area or teases paint up to the edge of each shape with an awl. He applies the liquid acrylic paint using squeeze bottles with superfine nozzles used for silk painting. For this exhibition, if FitzGerald is not at work in the gallery, we encounter his squeeze-bottle palette and other tools set out on a platform that he uses to suspend himself over the painting.

FitzGerald's palette of 42 colours is digitally determined based on his analysis of several divergently printed copies of the October 1989 *Architectural Digest* that he purchased on eBay. The compressed image, the restricted palette of tinted blacks, mahoganies, and golds all transform and degrade the image, suggesting endless reproduction and circulation of carefully crafted veneers of the good life. FitzGerald is also mindful of his own complicity in elite consumerism by producing museum-scaled artworks, suggesting an oblique critique of contemporary painting and the art market.

Dorian FitzGerald (born Toronto, 1975) completed his Bachelor of Arts in Art and Art History at Sheridan/University of Toronto Mississauga in 2001. A selection of his exhibitions in public galleries include the following: *The Painting Project* – Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal (2013); *Quebec and Canadian Art, 1980-2010: New Acquisitions*, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal (2011); *Empire of Dreams: Phenomenology of the Built Environment*, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto (2010); *Carte Blanche: Volume 2—Painting*, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, Toronto (2008). FitzGerald lives in Toronto where he is represented by the Clint Roenisch Gallery. clintroenisch.com

Sara Hartland-Rowe

Halifax artist **Sara Hartland-Rowe** builds shifting narratives using collaged images to survey humanity's conduct. Hartland-Rowe collects poignant or troubling photographs from newspapers to use as source material for her drawings—a toddler dressed as a suicide bomber, a crouching child distressed by famine, a man in underwear aiming an assault rifle. In *Sparrow in Midwinter* (2015), approximately half of Hartland-Rowe's protagonists are sketched by the artist on her travels—to, in the present case, Mississauga—or as she moves through Halifax as a commuter, sits in public spaces, or pauses to record events in her workday. Here, Hartland-Rowe's subjects go about routine activities such as shopping, walking, and conversing.

Hartland-Rowe draws in ink on transparent, pastel-tinted scraps of polyester organza that maintain the intimate sketchbook scale of her initial drawings. Her unadorned gesture drawings are organized into overlapping groupings to shared formal properties—for example, all the figures are theatrically gesturing with their hands—or narrative possibilities—a child is seen running past an armed soldier.

From the decidedly local and terrestrial, we move on to the other drawn and painted elements in *Sparrow in Midwinter* that articulate a contemporary moral dilemma in broadly metaphoric terms. The artwork's principal motif is an arc of coins falling and spinning across the wall from left to right. This balletic tumble signifies the 'heads or tails' nature of fate, the role of chance in determining such grand binaries as success or failure, abundance or scarcity, salvation or purgatory. The ellipses of the foreshortened coins are drawn with dextrous assurance using willow charcoal and a string anchored by pins at two fixed points; then, the coins are given form with layers of painted and offset printed watercolour, which allows destiny an evanescent, even seductive quality that the wallwork's many diminutive protagonists seem perfectly oblivious to. Through this seemingly purposeful kingdom of prosaic activity stylized wind forms blow. The artist thinks of this wind as omnipresent aether.

Sara Hartland-Rowe (born Kampala, Uganda, 1958) completed her Bachelor of Arts at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax in 1990 and her MFA at University of Illinois at Chicago in 1993. A selection of her solo exhibitions in public galleries include the following: *Look to the Living*, Mount Saint Vincent University Gallery (2012); *Spin, Measure, Cut*, Ross Creek Centre for the Arts (2008); *All things good and pure*, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (2007); *The Prince*, Durham Art Gallery (2004); *Last Judgement*, Dalhousie University Art Gallery (2002); *Days Are Where We Live*, Museum London (2000). Hartland-Rowe has exhibited across Canada and abroad, and has received grants from the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture. She has recently completed a major commission for the Halifax Municipality: *Travellers*, Dartmouth Bridge Terminus (2014). Hartland-Rowe lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Maria Hupfield

East Wind Brings a New Day: Revisited (2015), a supergraphic wallwork and installation by Brooklyn-based artist **Maria Hupfield**, juxtaposes images of the Ontario landscape with sculptural elements that reflect Anishinaabe culture. The central element in the installation is a shower curtain upon which Hupfield has cheekily painted a version of 'Group of Seven' progenitor Tom Thomson's iconic early 20th-century *West Wind* in the 'Indian Group of Seven' member Norval Morrisseau's equally iconic 1970s Woodlands style. Thomson's curvilinear Art Nouveau stylization melds seamlessly with Morrisseau's biomorphism. Seeing a version of the Georgian Bay's storm-battered *West Wind* pines transplanted into a setting of domestic décor (and personal hygiene) is bracing, and humourously mirrored by the smudged drawing of a Thunderbird on the wall above from which a lit pink light bulb hangs on a red electrical cord. Further along, four pine two-by-four studs lean against the wall; the back of studs are painted fluorescent pink which reflects onto the wall; each individual stud is painted in one or the colours of the four directions—red, yellow, black, white—echoing the perpendicular supergraphic rendering of water and sky on the adjacent wall.

Hupfield includes a number of objects in her installation that she has used in her performances that combine references to Anishinaabe practices and storytelling, the history of performance art and contemporary culture. Perched atop one of the pine boards is a felt pyramid decorated with gold metal jingles, noisemakers traditionally made by Ojibwa women from rolled chewing tobacco lids that are sewn onto dresses used in a healing dance. On the floor is a black felt circle, the implied site of a performance, upon which sits a pair of gold lamé evening gloves; above, taped to the wall is a gold Mylar survival blanket. Drawings of the artist's crouching silhouette appear on the wall at floor level, and indicate her presence while she worked on the installation. Had we been present to see the performance the artist left of the remnants of, we would surely have witnessed Hupfield hybridizing, internalizing, colouring and eventually bringing the First Nations and European grand narratives of the natural world indoors.

Maria Hupfield (born Parry Sound, 1975), Anishnaabe (Ojibwa) and a member of Wasauksing First Nation, Ontario, completed her Bachelor of Arts in Art and Art History at Sheridan/University of Toronto Mississauga in 1999 and her MFA at York University in 2004. A selection of her solo exhibitions in public galleries include the following: *Strange Customs Prevail*, Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba (2011). Her group exhibitions include: *Land, Art, Horizons: Land Reflected in Contemporary Native American Art*, North American Native Museum, Zurich (2014); *Changing Hands III* Museum of Arts and Design, New York (2012); *Beat Nation: Art, Hip Hop and Aboriginal Culture*, Vancouver Art Gallery (2012, travelling). In 1995, she founded the community arts program 7th Generation Image Makers at Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. She is a 2014 recipient of the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painting and Sculpture Grant, the AIM residency at the Bronx Museum and a member of Social Health Performance Club, Panoply Performance Lab, Brooklyn. Hupfield lives in Brooklyn, New York, and is represented by Galerie Hugues Charbonneau, Montreal.

mariahupfield.wordpress.com

Denyse Thomasos

Burial at Gorée is a mural-scaled painting of a chaotic and perspectively contradictory interior space that New York artist **Denyse Thomasos** (1964-2012) created in 1993. From 1990 through 1995, Thomasos lived in Philadelphia, where she wrestled with balancing her developing interest in abstract painting with her continuing need to reflect in her artwork her identity as a Trinidadian Canadian living in the United States. Thomasos was mindful of the international reach of Trinidad's colonial history of slavery and indentured servitude, which subjugated indigenous Caribs, Africans, and South and East Asians, and found parallels in Philadelphia's colonial history. Thomasos's paintings that preceded *Burial at Gorée* specifically (and less abstractly) represented the 18th-century slave ships that transported kidnapped Africans from the Guinea coast to landings along the Delaware River. In some of these large-scale paintings, her motifs included slave ships' claustrophobic sleeping platforms, and in others, representations of the ships' looming hulls.

The attitude of disquiet and menace is present in *Burial at Gorée*, with the black-and-white gestural brushstrokes that she characterized in 1993 as "lashes of a whip." Thomasos built her dramatic layers of orthogonals of perspective over many painting sessions, to slowly create a constructed space that neared a point of congestion. She characterised congestion as being both a visual phenomenon, as well as a physical reality: the risk of too many strata of painted marks merging to become as undifferentiated, inexpressive mass of flat acrylic paint. Thomasos thought of the space depicted in *Burial at Gorée* as being that of a holding area or place of confinement for slaves arriving in the Delaware Valley. *Burial at Gorée* was not Thomasos's original title for the painting. Some years later, she renamed the work to point to her original intention. The Île de Gorée, an island off Dakar, Senegal, was used as a debarkation point in the 18th-century Atlantic slave trade.

Denyse Thomasos (born Port of Spain, Trinidad, 1964–died New York City 2012) completed her Bachelor of Arts in Art and Art History at Sheridan/University of Toronto Mississauga in 1987 and her MFA at Yale University in 1989. A selection of her solo exhibitions in public galleries include the following: *Kingdom Come*, Oakville Galleries (2011); *Epistrophe: Wall Paintings by Denyse Thomasos*, Foreman Art Gallery, Bishop's University, Sherbrooke (2006, travelling); *Hybrid Nations in Swing Space: Wallworks*, Art Gallery of Ontario (2005). Her group exhibitions include *Bird Watching*, BRIC Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn (2006); *Painters 15*, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art North York (2003); *Quiet as it's Kept*, Christine König Galerie, Vienna, Austria (2002). Thomasos has won numerous awards and artist residencies including a New York Foundation for the Arts Award (2008), Bellagio Foundation Residency (2001), Yaddo Residency, Joan Mitchell Award (1998), Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship (1997), and a PEW Foundation Fellowship (1995). In 2007, she was named the first recipient of the Genevieve McMillan/Reba Stewart Chair in Painting at the Maryland Institute College of Art, recognizing outstanding contributions made by women artists. Thomasos lived in the East Village, New York City. Her estate is represented by Olga Korper Gallery.

olgakorpergallery.com, lennonweinberg.com

Rhonda Wepler and Trevor Mahovsky

In *Don't be sad that it is over, be happy that it ever began*, San Francisco artist Rhonda Wepler and Toronto artist Trevor Mahovsky recreate a contemporary poster-and-knickknack-covered UTM student dorm wall in drippy (mainly black) enamel paint over mesh-and-plaster forms. This panoply of memorabilia and pop culture is actually an interconnected and self-supporting bas relief that sits on the floor and leans up against the gallery wall, straddling the traditional terrains of sculpture and painting.

Wepler was an undergraduate UTM student and lived in the campus's residences in the mid 90s; some of the treasures included in *Don't be sad...* are renditions of the objects she displayed in her room, such as the dreamcatcher and the comb. Wepler and Mahovsky viewed contemporary UTM dorm rooms during a recent site visit as well, and their artwork reflects this research in objects such as a sport fan's foam hand or an inflatable valentine heart. The posters reflect the standard sizes of posters and postcards that students might purchase from market-style vendors that periodically appear on campuses. The artists painstakingly created a number of stencils through which to spray paint cut-out silhouette images onto their sculpted posters, snapshots and magazine pages. We see, for example, the poster for the mid-90s musical *Rent*, a picture of two young women mugging for the camera, or pages from the magazine *Short Hair Styles*.

Don't be sad... references the history of painting and sculpture as well: the string of gaudy pink Chinese lanterns plugged into an invented wall plug allude to the American portrait painter John Singer Sargent's late nineteenth-century work *Carnation, Lily, Lily, Rose*, which depicts two young girls intently lighting lanterns in a garden in the early evening; the overall black bas-relief is a nod to the American mid twentieth-century sculptor Louise Nevelson's black bas-relief montages of offcuts, the uncompromising austere modernist. But the yellow light emitted by the lanterns reflects the artists' interest in acknowledging Sargent's painted illusionism in his rendition of lantern-light on the faces of the girls. Wepler and Mahovsky's dorm wall is seen at night.

Rhonda Wepler (born Winnipeg, 1972) and **Trevor Mahovsky** (born Calgary, 1969) have worked collaboratively since 2004. Wepler completed her Bachelor of Arts in Art and Art History at Sheridan/University of Toronto Mississauga in 1997. Trevor Mahovsky completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts at the University of Calgary in 1992. Both artists have MFA degrees from the University of British Columbia, where they met in 1996. Wepler and Mahovsky initially developed their collaborative practice in Vancouver from 2004-2012.

A selection of their solo exhibitions in public galleries include the following: *Veneers + Walks*, MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie (2014); *Wepler and Mahovsky*, Acme Project Space, London, UK (2014); *The*

Searchers, Art Gallery of Hamilton (2012). Their group exhibitions include *Wabi Sabi*, Alter Space, San Francisco (2014); *Persuasive Visions*, Vancouver Art Gallery (2013); *It is what it is*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (2010). Their project *All Night Convenience*, commissioned for the 2012 edition of Toronto's Nuit Blanche, has also travelled to Atlanta's Flux Night (2013) and Detroit's DLectricity (2014). Wepler's work has also been exhibited in *Art Hypermarkets: Contesting Consumerism*, Palazzo delle Papesse, Siena (2004) and *Domicile*, COCA, Seattle (2004). Mahovsky's work has been shown in *Crossing the Line*, Queen's Museum of Art (2001), and he has written for catalogues and journals such as *Artforum* and *Canadian Art*. Residencies include: Acme, London (2014); Artspace, Sydney (2011). Wepler and Mahovsky were also the 2014 recipients of the Glenfiddich Prize, for which they completed a residency at Glenfiddich Distillery in Dufftown, Scotland. Their practice continues after relocating to different cities: Mahovsky lives in Toronto, Wepler in San Francisco. They are represented by the Pari Nadimi Gallery, Toronto.

wepplermahovsky.com