

Artists explore fresh ideas in landscape work

Gilbert Bouchard, A special to the Edmonton Journal

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EDMONTON – Those who avoid landscape shows at The Works because they think the artistic genre is too traditional or boring are missing out on some cutting-edge work. Artists at the eclectic festival are producing intellectually and artistically daring work that explores not only the way they represent landscapes, but also how we see and think about the landscape.

Val Nelson's Minding the gap show explores how, as a matter of course, we selectively break up and fragment landscapes in our memory, particularly when we're on vacation. The paintings and drawings in the show, which are based on a 2006 trip she took to London, England, are physically missing objects and landscape features.

"On vacation, you'll often see things that are important or beautiful to you, but won't be in the guidebook. My role as an artist is to highlight things that people are seeing and thinking, but doing so in a way they don't always fully notice or think about," says the Vancouver painter.

"The idea of the traveller for me is also a metaphor for the journey we take across our larger lives. Travelling is so much about being in the moment and having an opportunity to create intense memories and even reinvent yourself."

The show's title, based on a warning given in the London subway system to "mind the gap" between the platform and the floor of the trains, reflects the artist's theories on how extensive reliance on a city's subway system while on holidays can warp your experience of that city.

"This got me thinking about how the tube works (on your perceptions) and how you go from these pods of (visual) information at the different destinations you visit broken up with these stretches of you being on the null-space that is the tube where you have no information at all."

Two takes on Alberta

Jeff Collins is of two minds about the Alberta landscape, a reality artistically reflected in his One Person, Two Personae: Landscapes and Mindscapes from Alberta show.

On one hand, Collins has a great love of Alberta's romantic and traditional landscape vistas, reflected by a series of traditional representational, old-school landscapes that pay homage to great landscape painters. On the other, he has less-than-totally positive feelings about our province's red-hot development regime, a reality he comments on via a series of chaotic and wildly coloured abstract paintings.

The artist, who lives and paints in downtown Edmonton, says he's been "living in a construction zone for the past year," a reality that led him to contrast the two different takes on landscapes.

"I'm exploring that connection between industry, rampant development and the environment by balancing the abstract component against the romantic," he says. "I want us to ask questions and watch where we are treading."

The Works Festival continues until Wednesday.

Reviews

Works Art & Design Festival site No. 11: Val Nelson's Minding the gap

Showing at: ManuLife Place Granite Walls, main and second floors, 10180 101st St.

Until: Held over until Aug. 25; venue hours are 6 a.m. to 1 a.m. daily.

Works Art & Design Festival site No. 9: Jeff Collins' One Person, Two Personae: Landscapes and Mindscapes from Alberta

Showing at: Sutton Place Hotel's Capitals restaurant, 10235 101 St.

Until: Held over until Sept. 3; venue hours are Monday to Friday, 6:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. to 10 p.m.; Saturday, Sunday and Canada Day, 6:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

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