

A COMMON TREASURY

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Nature and its constantly changing effects have provided a rich source of subject material for my research into the paintings contained in this exhibition. My interpretation of nature and its translation into an image is the result of a hybrid of influences: an academic background in sociology, studio art, a somewhat Francocentric history of art, and my urban background. I bring this intellectual culture to the landscape, constructing a representation of nature which embodies conceptual and aesthetic considerations.

I intend my paintings, within the exhibition, to be a symbol for the necessity to conserve nature on public lands, as well as provide a healing function, a respite from the complexities of modern society through their beauty.

My representation of nature, therefore, is not an accurate depiction of the real world but a transformation of it into a place of sensual pleasure, a fictitious world of unspoiled nature on public land. It is achieved by my choice of site, by my method of presentation, by my manipulation of the formal elements of art and by the exclusion of any subject matter that would threaten the construction of an ideal protected world.

The research for the exhibition was conducted at two publicly owned nature conservation sites located near Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Beaver Creek and Cranberry Flats.

Since the historical use of landscape often served as a symbol of material wealth of the private landowner and I wish my painting to serve another function, the celebration of nature in the public park system, I have represented public land.

Because I am from Saskatoon, these sites are deeply familiar to me and give the paintings a character, an intimacy, a commitment, that reflect a love of these sites and a concern for their protection for future generations as public lands, hence the title of the exhibition, A Common Treasury.

Beaver Creek and Cranberry Flats are popular recreation sites. Painting 'en plein air' at these sites is a social activity, one that involves leaving the secluded studio and encountering other people. Throughout the day there is a steady flow of people passing by; many stop to watch the artist at work and chat.

However, in my paintings I have selectively edited out the people and any depiction of human influence on the land, concentrating instead on the beauty of untouched nature, creating therefore a fictitious representation of these sites.

My statement about the beauty of nature and its intrinsic value is further enhanced by the style, the method of presentation and the media I have chosen to represent it.

My depiction of nature appears as direct and simple as the pictorial theme. The paint becomes one with the

subject. The paintings were executed quickly, in oils, the earlier paintings in this exhibition en plein air, with no underpainting, little layering and nothing hidden from view. The paint is applied vigorously, in small patches, with thick impasto. The direction of the brush stroke is matched to the complexity and confusion of the undergrowth and cloud formations that have been portrayed and small interstices of canvas have been left open, giving a luminosity to the paintings. The technical simplicity of the works contribute to the statement as the deliberate artlessness has a strong thematic base. The landscape paintings can appear the product of the sites they portray. They are painted as if out of the material and with the sensibility of the site, that is my intention and it demonstrates a Fauve influence.

However, this deceptively simple style hides the complexity of thought involved in choosing the motif, composing the paintings and the colour work contained in the images.

The paintings are carefully composed by choosing a viewpoint and a format which best express the qualities I am seeking in a scene. The essential form of a painting is generally established in the early stages of its execution. Depth and space are shown without resorting to linear perspective and are suggested by the overlap of successive planes and diminution and contrasts of scale. A larger portion of the canvas is devoted to the foreground than the sky as the complexity of the foliage and my

appreciation of its abstract qualities provide me with the opportunity to immerse myself in colour and texture. The overall composition becomes an armature for the elaboration of the surface, brushwork and colour.

The use of colour in the paintings is bold, often pure color and somewhat improvisational, although linked to nature. It has been mixed from the three primaries with the addition of white.

My painting process has evolved during the course of painting this exhibition. I've moved indoors to the studio and that allows for more reflection and for a reworking and layering of the surface, a move towards more complexity in technique and increased concern with the painterly potentialities of the theme. This development can be observed in the most recent paintings within the exhibition and reflects the direction Monet's late paintings have inspired in me, works I studied in France during 1988, preceding my sojourn at graduate school.

Monet's heavily worked surface - layer upon layer of stippling, traveling, and broad brush strokes - observed in the "Water Lily Series", has been exemplary in my development. Similarly, the expressive quality of the paint surface in Soutine's mature work, a series of wind-tossed trees, and the use of heavy texture and the rugged handling of paint contained in the canvases of Eugène Leroy, a contemporary French painter, have provided me with direction.

The expansion of scale in the most recent paintings

likewise reflects the impact of my study trip to France and my ambition to paint in a similar scale to Monet's "Water Lily" series, a scale which envelopes the spectator. The large scale speaks of the status I have given the subject, in a similar fashion to the paintings of Courbet. The large scale is also thematic and strengthens the overall statement of nature surrounding us.

The expansion of scale necessitated a move indoors and a reliance on photography that I have taken at the sites, based on previous interpretations of the landscape.

The relationship between the paintings and the photographs is never one way, each informs the other. I have compiled a body of photographs as a sort of repertory of potential subjects, which might be used in deciding which motifs to paint on site or in the studio or how to frame a particular scene. The colour relationship developed in a painting may lead to similar colour work in a photograph.

The mediation of the photograph gives me a degree of distance, a means to disengage myself from the motif and see it as an object of art, I am subsequently involved with the formal elements to a greater extent than when I paint out of doors. Sometimes, when utilizing photographs, I rearrange the forms for aesthetic reasons, creating a collage of images which can be the basis for the composition of a painting.

The interrelationship between art and audience is important to me and I regard it as a communal interchange.

Consideration of the audience plays an active role in my art and the feedback from people attending my exhibitions is beneficial to my art development as it encourages me to look at my art from many views.

The title, A Common Treasury, can be interpreted on another level, as referring to the wealth of artistic influences or the bank of scholarship and theories about art that an artist can research and draw upon as he or she formulates his or her own style, and audience response.

My painting is a composite of styles based on the research I have conducted. Artists working with landscape themes from many countries have been studied. The Fauves have been mentioned. So has Monet. It would have been impossible to paint landscape and not be inspired by Cezanne. His work, a deep commitment to nature, has been a source of admiration. The sensuous love of oil paint contained in the work of Eugène Le Roy, Soutines's expressive paint quality and the thick impasto of Van Gogh can be observed in the paintings. The landscape work of Jennifer Bartlett and Paterson Ewen are other significant influences.

I have installed the exhibition without an accompanying text or captions to direct the audience other than the title of the exhibition and the titles of the individual works. The appreciation of the exhibition is left to the spectator, who can interpret the paintings on more than one level, from their own viewpoint and background. No artist can control the interpretation of his or her work.

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