

Paul Bernhardt's *Machinations*

currently showing at ARTsPLACE Artist-run Centre, Annapolis Royal through June 15, 2014

A question of tensions between compliance and resistance

An interview by Nadine Belliveau, Visual Artist and ARTsPLACE Artist-run centre Committee Member

Paul Bernhardt's current show Machinations explores landscape and structures of contemporary environment by means of his wonderful drawings and inspiring paintings.

Nadine: Who or what has been your major influence for the inspiration of this body of work?

Paul: The work is sourced from drawings and sketches I made at a number of sites around Alberta. The sites are what I would consider contemporary landscape – some of them may be more industrial, and others more urban in nature, but for the vast majority of us this is our landscape reality. Aesthetically speaking there are, of course, many different influences that have been absorbed along the way, it is very difficult for me to narrow it down to one. In the past I have certainly looked closely at contemporary German painting though.

Nadine: What do you expect from your viewers?

Paul: I don't think I can *expect* anything from my viewers. I can hope that my viewers approach the work with an open mind, and spend enough time with the work that it might reveal itself more fully to them, or not – that is really all I can ask.

Nadine: What is the mandate of your paintings?

Paul: I don't know that the paintings have a mandate per say. To me a mandate suggests some kind of agenda or function, and I don't necessarily believe art needs to fill a prescribed role. Ideally my paintings should act as visual propositions; as questions more than answers. If the work facilitates a dialogue or provokes thought, and of course provides an engaging visual experience, then I would consider it a success.

Nadine: How do you choose the varying elements within the paintings?

Paul: The various elements usually arise from my experience of making the source drawings. The process often requires that I spend days drawing at a given site, so the length of experience often generates associations or incidents that may find their way into the final painting. Other times it may be through subsequent research about the history of a location, or subject matter that relates. For me, the narratives generated within the paintings make sense – so I wouldn't necessarily see them as “contrasting” themes.

Nadine: How do you start your paintings?

Paul: They don't all start the same way. Some may start as pure abstraction – pouring and pushing the paint around in an effort to create an interesting ground before I lay in an image. Other paintings may start with a more structured composition/drawing which I subsequently “mess up”.

Nadine: How do you feed your creativity?

Paul: Ideally looking at good art can feed creativity, however it isn't always possible to be in the company of inspiring art for me. I love a wide variety of music, and often times I will try to capture something of a certain band or performer's sound in my work – through the pursuit of a certain mood or feel. Cinema can also be a great source of inspiration if it's well done – however I feel like great movies are getting fewer and farther between these days. I also find walks outside – particularly in nature – are very good for the head.

Nadine: How do you choose your palettes?

Paul: My palettes are determined by a combination of chance and stubborn will. I try to use combinations that are unfamiliar to me or somewhat unpredictable, – having said that, I have a fairly

clear idea what “feel” or atmosphere I want the painting to have, and I will usually keep working until I find it.

Nadine: Are you able to create full-time?

Paul: Yes, I’ve been very fortunate to sustain my art practice with very little need for other sources of income although I do teach at the University of Alberta from time to time.

Nadine: What are you creating now?

Paul: I am currently working on paintings sourced primarily from found images of machines – both historical and contemporary that range from the banal (bank machines, punch clocks) to the extraordinary (drone cockpits, early computers, psychological experiments). The paintings raise questions around the issue of mediation - our relationship to these machines, to each other, and to images themselves.

This exhibition is certainly worth seeing. One should plan to sit and contemplate this work seriously. I agree with Bernhardt when he says that his work engages visual complexity that invites fresh, if uncomfortable, insight into contemporary culture by creating a space for the poetry of allegory and metaphor.

N. Belliveau, May 2014

Born in Uxbridge, Ontario, Paul Bernhardt holds a BFA from NSCAD University (2003), and an MFA (painting) from Purchase College: State University of New York (2007). His work has been exhibited in both Canada and the United States. Highlights in his exhibition record include TIMELAND: The 2010 Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art, the 2005 RBC New Canadian Painting Competition at the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, and numerous solo shows at both commercial and public galleries across Canada. He is represented at a number of commercial galleries, and his work has been collected in both North America and Europe.

Nadine Belliveau is a visual artist from the Baie Sainte-Marie, Digby County, Nova Scotia where she has been creating professionally since 1971. A graduate of NSCAD, of Université de Moncton & Université Sainte-Anne, her contribution to the arts has been as an artist, as an educator at the community, school and university levels, as a founder of two galleries, as member of art associations, as past treasurer of ARCAC, as past chair of the Association acadienne des artistes de la Nouvelle-Écosse and as past representative of the south west regional members of VANS. Her paintings explore the essence of nature by means of abstraction and decorative expression.

The Annapolis Region Community Arts Council gratefully acknowledges the support of the Province of Nova Scotia, through The Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage, the Canada Council for the Arts, our membership and community.

Gallery hours: Tuesday to Thursday 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.

Weekends 1-4 p.m. (by volunteer, please call ahead)

For more information please contact:

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