

PATRICK MIKHAIL GALLERY



COLIN MUIR DORWARD | LE LEGS ENJOYING FRESH AIR | OIL ON CANVAS | 72 X 48 INCHES | 2012

COLIN MUIR DORWARD

PATRICK MIKHAIL GALLERY



COLIN MUIR DORWARD | LABYRINTHINEON | OIL ON CANVAS | 63 X 55 INCHES | 2012 | RBC CANADIAN PAINTING COMPETITION WINNER | RBC CORPORATE ART COLLECTION

PATRICK MIKHAIL GALLERY

COLIN MUIR DORWARD

EDUCATION

2013 Masters of Fine Arts, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada
2007 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Visual Arts. Major in Painting and Drawing Minor in Printmaking,
Emily Carr University of Art and Design, Vancouver, Canada

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2013 Some Paintings Enjoying Fresh Air, Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa, Canada
2013 New Ottawa Artist Spotlight, SAW Gallery, Ottawa, Canada
2010 Colin Muir Dorward, Gallery Rye, Montréal, Canada

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2014 Primer: Colin Muir Dorward, Natasha Mazurka, Amy Schissel, & Andrew Smith, Patrick Mikhail Gallery, Ottawa, Canada
2013 RBC Canadian Painting Competition 2013, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Canada
2013 Colin Muir Dorward & Scott Everingham: Selected Paintings, Patrick Mikhail Gallery, Ottawa, Canada
2012 RBC Canadian Painting Competition 2012, The Power Plant, Toronto, Canada
2011 Works on Paper, Redbird Gallery, Montréal, Canada
2011 Hang One!, District 101, Montréal, Canada
2011 L'art chaud: explorations dans l'érotique, Espace les Neuf Soeurs, Montréal, Canada
2009 Collaborative Exhibition with Megan Hepburn, Parc-ex Apartment, Montréal, Canada
2008 MFA Gallery, Concordia University, Montréal, Canada
2007 The Old School House Arts Centre, Qualicum Beach, Canada
2006 Strangers in a Stranger Land, Little Mountain Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
2005 And There They Hang, Concourse Gallery, Vancouver, Canada
2004 Painting, Butchershop Floor, Vancouver, Canada

AWARDS

2013 Finalist: 15th Annual RBC Canadian Painting Competition
2012 Finalist: 14th Annual RBC Canadian Painting Competition
2010 Full admission scholarship, University of Ottawa
2003 Christopher Investments Scholarship

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COLLECTIONS

City of Ottawa
RBC Corporate Art Collection
Private Collections

ARTICLES

- 2013 Bustos, Alejandro. "Saw Gallery: Exploring the Boundaries of Imageland with Colin Muir Dorward." Apartment 613. N.p., 11 Mar. 2013. Web. 11 March, 2013.
- 2013 Simpson, Peter. "Time, Space and Art." Ottawa Citizen, 16 February, 2013, Arts sec.: 1-2. Print.
- 2013 Simpson, Peter. "Ottawa Artist a Finalist for \$25,000 RBC Painting Award." Ottawa Citizen. N.p., 27 June 2012. Web. 5 March, 2013.
- 2013 Van Dyk, Spencer. "A Degree Painted by Hand ... or Not." Ed. Adam Feibel. The Fulcrum. 28 February, 2013. Arts sec.: 10. Print.
- 2013 Ruby TFO. "Colin Muir Dorward." 20 February, 2013. Web.
<http://www.rubytfo.tv/billet/recherche/colin%20dorward>
- 2012 Runciman, Jessa, and Colin M. Dorward. "Colin Muir Dorward The RBC Canadian Painting Competition Interview Series." Editorial. The Walrus, 12 November, 2012. Web.
- 2012 RBC Canadian painting Competition, Exhibition Catalogue, Fall 2012, pp. 22-23.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- 2012-2013 Teacher's Assistant, painting, art history/theory, University of Ottawa
- 2012 Research and Writing Internship, National Gallery of Canada
- 2009-2012 Painting instructor, Creative Boosat Arts and Language School, Montreal

Colin Muir Dorward's laid-back perception: new paintings at SAW Gallery

February 15, 2013. 4:18 pm • Section: [Arts](#), [Big Beat](#)



Colin Muir Dorward with his painting "Legs Enjoying Fresh Air," at SAW Gallery in Ottawa. (Photo by Chris Mikula, Ottawa Citizen)

What: New Paintings by Colin Muir Dorward

Where & when: to March 23 at [SAW Gallery, 67 Nicholas St., in Arts Court](#). Vernissage is 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. today, Friday, Feb. 15, at the gallery. Free admission.

The Dorwards of perception have been hung.

The paintings of Colin Muir Dorward, at SAW Gallery to March 23, mess with perception in various and gleeful ways.

There is the perception of space, which Dorward thwarts habitually, as if he cannot help himself. In *Grievance Calculator*, the painting that got him on last year's shortlist for the [RBC Canadian Painting Competition](#), the comfort of domestic interiors is pushed to the margins by a rambunctious swirl of limbs and

other things that dominate the centre of the split panel.

Even one's perception of how a painting is made is challenged. Dorward painted the right panel of *Grievance Calculator* in his studio at the University of Ottawa, where he will soon complete his MFA, but he painted the left panel at home. Together they are initially chaotic but settle into a coherent and increasingly universal statement on the blurring between work and private life.



“Grievance Calculator,” by Colin Muir Dorward at SAW Gallery in Ottawa.

Dorward's work typically straddles disparate worlds. Even in love he does it: he's an artist and his girlfriend is an economist. (When I ask Dorward, an Edmonton native, if the MFA brought him to Ottawa he says, “Yes. That and a girl.”) He works with paints and she with percentiles, which seems a polarized match, though, now that I think of it, they're both in their own way focused on the big picture.

Dorward resists getting too focused on details. When I ask him the title of one painting he says, “You know, it's not titled yet. It was still wet when I moved it here so I haven't really had a chance to think about it.” Is there a title for the exhibition? “I don't think so. We haven't talked about it. I think it's probably just going to say my name.” (For the record, SAW curator Jason St-Laurent bills the show as one in his New Artist Spotlight series.)

Dorward's is a refreshing approach, a mix of talent and come-what-may attitude. He says he'll choose a title "if there's something in the painting that I really want people to see," but he's content with whatever people see. Dorward is a very good and open-minded painter, distinctive but not dogmatic.

Another example: I note the defining mix of styles in his work, where realism happily flirts with surrealism in one, with impressionism in another. He says, "In a way I'm always painting like a realist painter because everything I'm putting down on the canvas is referenced from an optical experience that I'm having as I'm painting. I don't want to think of styles because I don't want to be tied into a style. That leaves me free to grab from whatever style is sitting in the back of my imagination."

In both *Grievance Calculator* and in *Mealtime* — a spectacular, seven-foot-wide round portrait — the style plumbed from the back of Dorward's mind could be described as Van Gogh gone even more mad than he so famously was. Two artists, nude and one-eyed, sprawl over a cluttered studio table and munch on paint. "Anyone who knows me would recognize my face there," Dorward says. If he's not recognized, that's okay too.

All this adds to the beguiling mix of lightness and substance in Dorward's work, which toy with your sense of them as either serious or humorous, until you realize that in almost every case they are both.

Because the building that houses his studio on campus was once a seminary, and because he was struck by the powerful emotion of artists' behind renaissance works of Christ being crucified, he wanted to do a painting of "a crucifixion without having it actually looking like a crucifixion . . . without any suffering and pain." He created a realist landscape of the campus behind a surreal cross, the prosaicness of the former accentuating the weirdness of the latter. Perched atop the cross are two legs, and they look rather comfortable up there. I ask, does this painting have a title? Yes, he says, it's *Legs Enjoying Fresh Air*.

In another painting, another pair of disembodied legs gamely tries to get into a pair of pants, which of the many items scattered about the frame are the only ones of any possible use to legs. It's absurdly funny, yet it's also a pointed comment on being unfulfilled in a modern, consumerist life stuffed with every gadget and trinket imaginable. The title is, *Legs Trying to Fit in*.

"It's a bit of a safety net for me, the humour," Dorward says. "I think a person that can walk into the room and toss a few jokes around is easier to be with." He adds that because he's from a "comfortable" background, he doesn't feel entitled to make "severe" paintings.

Dorward didn't win the RBC prize last year. Too bad it wasn't an award for being unpretentious. He'd be hard to beat.



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RBC finalist Colin Muir Dorward's Grievance Calculator 2012

FEATURE

Janet Werner on What Makes a Good Painting, Artist Statements, Professionalization Pressures & More



By David Balzer

POSTED: NOVEMBER 28, 2012

Montreal-based painter Janet Werner knows painting. She's been practicing her unique, rigorous brand of portraiture for well over two decades, and she has been teaching students in the medium for almost as long: after a decade at the University of Saskatchewan, she began at Concordia University, where she currently teaches and is now chair of the department of studio arts. This year, Werner returns as a juror for the RBC Canadian Painting Competition, which she first co-judged in 2002 and whose winner will be announced tomorrow evening at the Power Plant in Toronto. In this interview for Canadian Art, Werner discusses the range of this year's nominees, the challenges young painters face in discussing their work, the difficulty of pinning down a contemporary Canadian aesthetic, and more

David Balzer: What defines this year's finalists?

Janet Werner: The range of styles and approaches. There are different types of abstraction and different types of figuration. Usually the applicants are recently completed or currently completing their MFA studies, which means they've been to a different region to do their undergraduate and then they come to a different region to do their graduate work. You're getting a mixture of influences.

This is one of the really interesting things that happens to young artists when they're at that moment of developing their voice. You inevitably carry influences of the school and the teacher that you've had when you transplant yourself to another location. But then everything is up in the air. Usually, but not always, there is a kind of crisis that people go through when they reach graduate school. At times, they want to let go of the things they feel had defined them during their undergraduate degree and change. So, from my perspective, as someone who teaches at an institution and is looking at these applicants, it's interesting for me to see them having gone to a new place. I can see

where they came from and how they may be shifting.

DB: So it's still true that academic institutions carry with them certain stylistic methodologies?

JW: I believe that's inescapable.

DB: Do you think it's more the case now than it used to be?

JW: No. Now, there's a lot more crossover and a lot more information-sharing, maybe because of social media and Internet resources. There's an awareness of what's going on across the country and internationally. Students are savvy. It's not so local. But you do still see the influence of the immediate community.

DB: Are students continuing to choose institutions based on their stylistic methodologies and how well they are suited for them, or are they imbibing these methodologies as they study?

JW: It's a complicated question: Why do they go where they go? Sometimes it's because the faculty attracts them, but the reputation of the institution and the opportunities it offers are also considerations. Funding is very important. Teaching opportunities as well. Location, too. Many people will come to Montreal because they want to be in a big city. Some will go to the University of Saskatchewan because they have better funding.

DB: If there's such a breadth of styles and painters, how can you, as a juror, tell what's good anymore?

JW: I was just asking myself that, because I'm not sure how this is going to go when the RBC jury meets again. So far only the regional juries have met; we've not met altogether. And with so few works—we have one actual work from each person, and a few more in reproduction—it seems a bit insane.

However, I think the context for the work is quite important, and that's one of my issues with the process that I'll be bringing up. It may be impossible to look at one work and say which is the best painting. Certain things you can tell: quality of the surface, skill level. But there are other conceptual aspects to the work that will probably not reveal themselves in the viewing of a single piece.

What's a good painting? You can sort of smell it and taste it. Having said that, sometimes things that smell bad or taste bad are more interesting. In the end, they last longer.

DB: Do you think in contemporary terms it maybe comes down more to the painter than the painting? Is it more the conceptual grounding that the painter chooses for herself or himself than any individual work that matters?

JW: One of the things that reveals itself in the process of shortlisting is influences. You can always see the frame of reference, but if the influences are too obvious, then it becomes less interesting. You're looking for the moment when you see the reference points, but there's something else that makes a work move just slightly away from what you've seen before to something more unusual, unique or personal—somehow exceeding the bounds, the frame out of which the work is being made. That's when something exciting happens, when it's possible to see something you haven't seen before, something fresh or unpredictable.

DB: Are you using support text to judge the worth of the artists?

JW: Yes. Each artist has had to produce a short text that's about two paragraphs. It's a really nice length, just long enough to get a sense of the thinking behind the work. It definitely fills in a bit of the picture in terms of giving grounding or intelligence to the work.

DB: It must also be true that in some cases someone struggles to describe what they do, but is still a great painter.


JW: Yes.

DB: Do you find, as a teacher, that young painters are having an easier or more difficult time talking about what they're doing?


JW: I think they're getting... better. Because the pressure is really strong. There's a professionalization of practice, an awareness of the necessity of being able to promote what you do and to articulate what you do in different contexts.

There's also so much competition in different media. Even painters now work in multiple media. It used to be that painters were just painters. I do think it's harder to be a painter and do other things, because of the nature of the labour involved: it's something you do by hand. Even so, painters are working in other media, and there's a huge openness to the porousness of being able to cross media. It's not only okay, but also—now—a plus.

DB: Do you see it as a plus?



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JW: Not necessarily. I just think it's really hard to paint well. So hard that even if you spend all your time doing it you may not succeed. Multimedia can dilute it, make it about something else—make it a conceptual thing.

DB: But you would say that in this day and age it's absolutely essential for a painter (and for that matter, an artist of any kind) to be able to talk about their work in some sense?

JW: Yes. Wait, let me contradict that. Anna Gaskell just came and spoke at Concordia. It seems to me that the more successful you are, the less you have to be able to speak about your work.

I love Gaskell; she is a photographer and she obviously doesn't teach. In her talk she was so inarticulate, so childlike. She didn't seem to feel as if she had to articulate, because the work is the evidence. It's interesting and strong. If you don't teach and you're successful, you don't really have to force yourself into words.

DB: It's a luxury.

JW: Yes. I'm of a mixed mind on whether that's okay or not. Because in some ways, it's truer to be inarticulate than to be able to speak well about your art. Being able to speak about your art doesn't make it better, at all. But there's a lot of pressure, in order for young artists to become visible: critics aren't necessarily writing about their work; someone has to speak about it.

DB: Earlier you mentioned different regional influences on the finalists. Is it possible, now, with all the cross-border exhibitions, curation and whatnot going on, to discuss Canadian painting?

JW: I don't think so. Again, I just think that everyone knows what's going on everywhere. You're subject to these influences.

DB: Perhaps regionalism can come into play institutionally—the way students are taught, how accessible MFA programs are to them. Perhaps there's more credentialism in Canada because education's generally cheaper?

JW: Well, my reference points these days are largely the Canadians, the Canadian scene. I'm so inside it I'm not seeing what's going on in other countries or institutions.

What I can say, in the context of the RBC Canadian Painting Competition, is that when it first started I was very suspect of it. It didn't have much status. It didn't seem to be a good idea. I was on one of the first juries, in 2002. Myself and Roger Bellemare were both on the jury in 2002 and we're on it again this year. There were very few applicants.



Now, there's an awareness about the award; it's come into its own as a thing. I think, with the higher profile that it gives to painting, it is, in a way, strengthening the profile of painting in the country—as being quite respectable and having a lot of potential, as being something innovative rather than retrograde. It's become a pretty positive identity-building thing for Canadian painting. At the same time, I do have doubts that competition is good. But that seems to be the way things are going now, with the Sobey Award, the Scotiabank Photography Award, the Grange Prize, et cetera.

DB: After all these years, is painting finally no longer having to justify its existence?

JW: Paint is understood differently now. I think it's been successfully integrated. It can and does feel contemporary.

This interview has been edited and condensed. To view all the finalists in this year's RBC Canadian Painting Competition, [please visit our slideshow.](#)


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Colin Muir Dorward

By Jessa Runciman



Visual Art

The RBC Canadian Painting Competition interview series

Published on November 12, 2012

THE WALRUS



Painting and photography courtesy of Colin Muir Dorward *Grievance Calculator*, oil on canvas (180 x 163 centimetres).

Colin Muir Dorward is an Ottawa-based artist; he was born in Edmonton in 1979. He holds a BFA from Emily Carr University of Art + Design, and is currently an MFA student at the University of Ottawa.

Why did you choose painting as your medium?

Painting offers a chance for a slow-burning career. Many painters do their best work late in life, and that seems like a nice carrot at the end of a stick to chase after. I'm better at endurance-based activities, and painting is a bit like that.

What are the recurring themes in your work?

The work I'm doing now is similar to what I was doing badly during my undergrad, which is trying to tell life stories. Then, I was attempting the biggest stories, like love and death, but I stopped because I was terrible. Recently I've been doing that again, but focusing on smaller, more mundane stories—simple ideas like getting hungry, or wanting to go for a run, or the frustration of not doing something properly. You can't necessarily see that articulated in the picture, but it comes through in the work's sensibility.

What do you think this year's CPC short list says about where painting is in Canada right now?

Maybe we don't have to reference the Group of Seven any more, or address what they've done. I think that Canadian painting has always been a lot about the land, and now some very good art comes out of approaching the land in different ways.



The artist in his studio.

Who or what are your influences?

[Harold Klunder](#) opened up a lot of possibilities for me, a lot of things I didn't realize one could do with paint. Music is also an influence for me. I try to cultivate a certain aesthetic in different pictures by listening to different kinds of music. It affects me the same way the colour of light affects me. I can see it.

Does theory inform your work?

Theory is something that happens beside my painting. It's a buddy that my painting can hang out with. It's something I can read when things aren't going well.

What do you like about being an artist in Ottawa?

It's a small community with a lot of serious artists. That's a nice change from Montreal, which is full of young artists, many of whom are not serious, right? That's good for getting energy and ideas, but here I take comfort in being around artists who have been painting for longer than I have been alive. It makes being an artist seem like a realistic goal, compared to Montreal where it felt more like a fantasy.

Does Canadian art have a distinctive an outlook or a feeling?

Canadian art is too big to package up into dominant flavours. I think Canada's a great place to be because there are no overbearing forces indicating how or what people should be painting.

This interview has been condensed and edited for publication. See all fifteen finalists at TheWalrus.ca/cpc.

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