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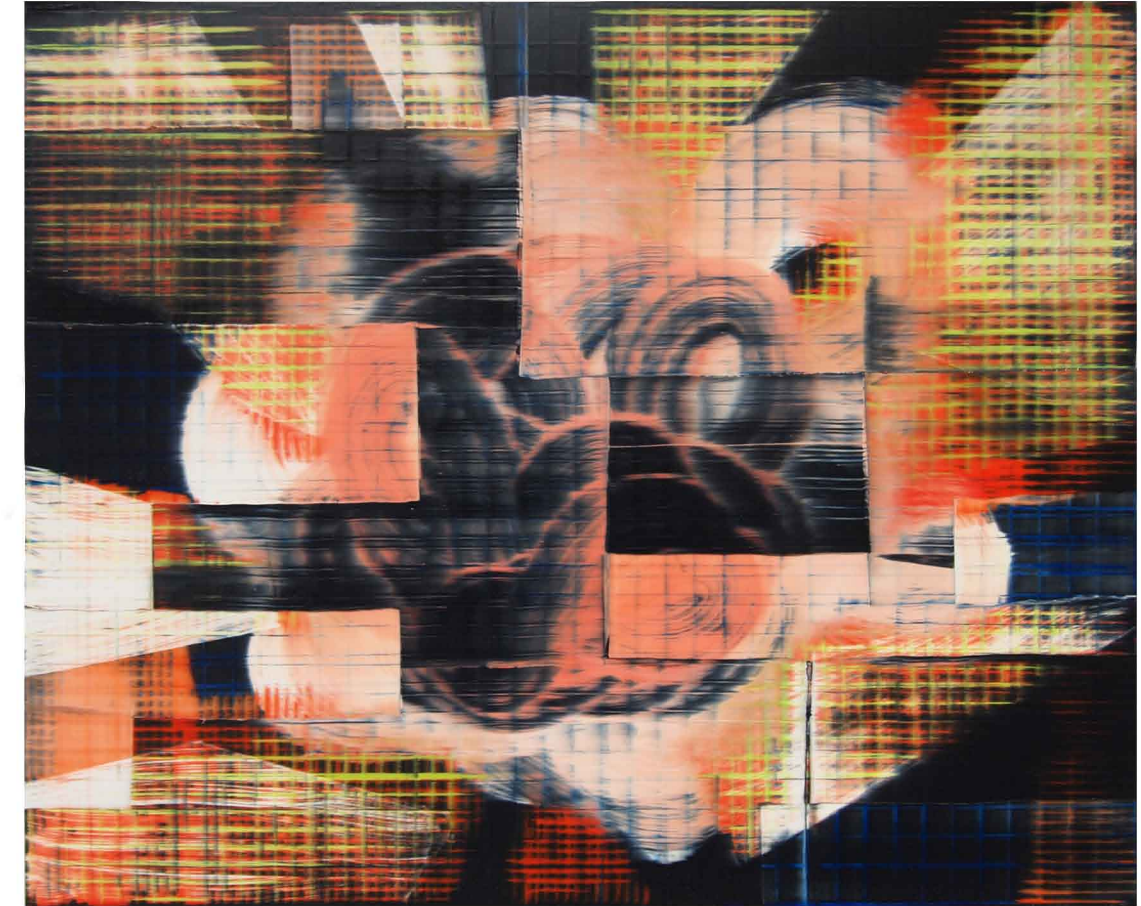
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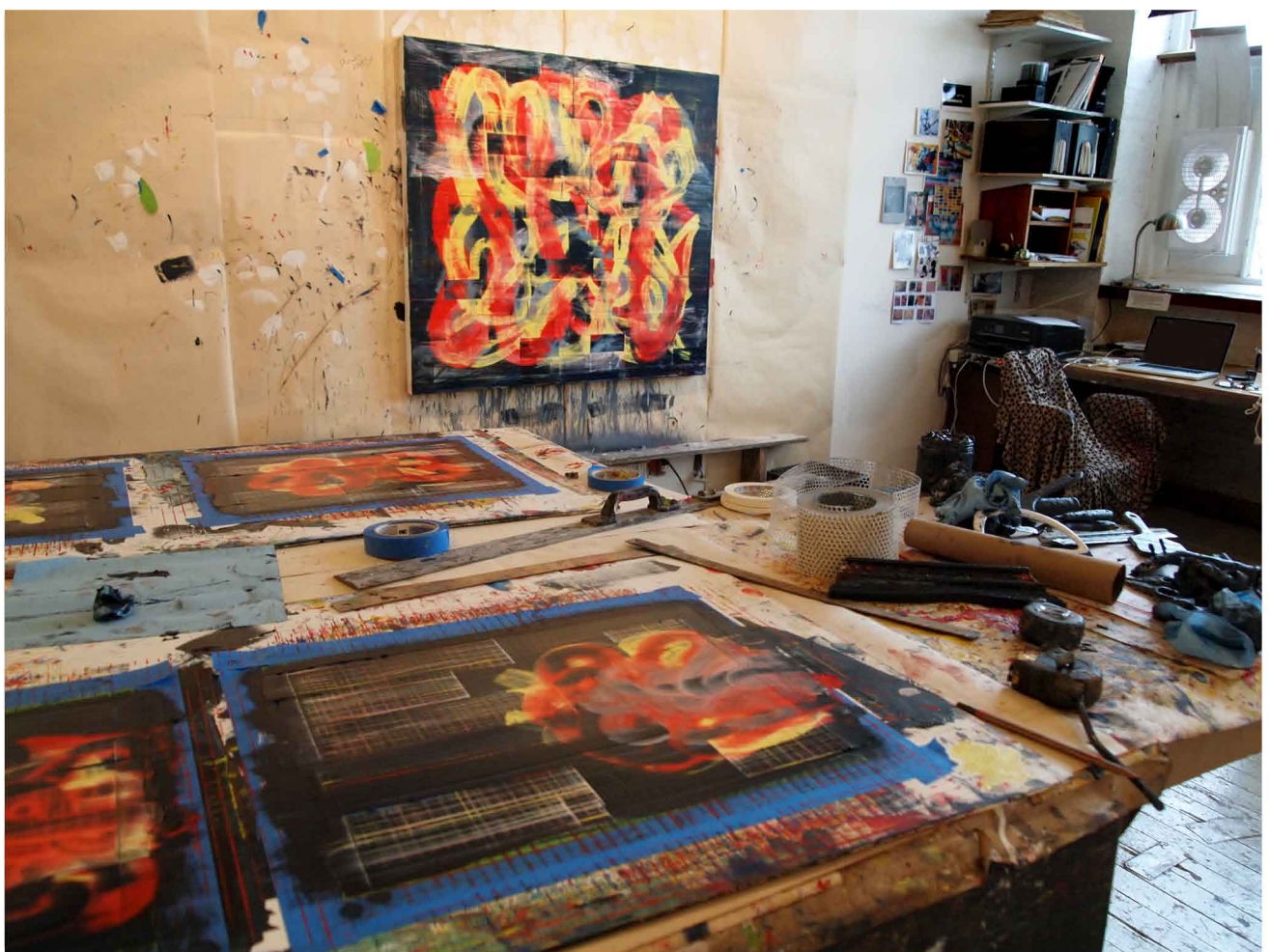
Kelowna Art Gallery Dossiers

Jordan Broadworth

*Vital Binaries: Recent Works
on Mylar*



Jordan Broadworth (Canadian, b. 1968) *wolver*, 2012, oil on Mylar,
14 x 17 in. (35.5 x 43.1 cm). Collection of the artist.



The artist's studio, New York, 2012.

Available Light

Abstract paintings must be as real as those created by the sixteenth-century Italians.

– Frank Stella

The sheer and complex visual loveliness of Jordan Broadworth's work acts as an invitation to stop and look further at his pieces, to see what we can fathom of their

meaning. For if we just give an appreciative but cursory glance at the colours, virtual textures, and overall structure and form of the works, but do not attempt to apprehend the artist's psychological and emotional content, we are missing out on a great deal of the depth to be felt and pleasure to be had from his art.

So what is it that we are looking at when we examine these works? This exhibition of recent paintings done with oil on Mylar contains a selection of examples in this

medium from the last two years. They are all the same size and all are produced by Broadworth's idiosyncratic process of adding, then subtracting (by means of scraping and rubbing away), until they reach their points of completion. They are not depictions of anything seen in the real world – that is probably fairly immediately apparent. If they depict anything, it is as witnesses to the processes they have undergone to reach their finished states. The works actually look somewhat impersonal, industrial even, with the feeling of having

been formed as accidental accretions through some non-human means. There is no expressive, authorial touch muscling its way into these pieces. But the traces and vestiges are, of course, from human activity, human thought, energy and labour.

New York artist Eric Fischl has said that abstraction is an esoteric language, and the *New Yorker's* Peter Schjeldahl has referred to abstract art as having a small audience, just the way jazz music does. So there is nothing easy about the notion of looking further, it will be a step-by-step walk into a *terra incognita*. First we have the sensation or illusion of luminescence created by means of colour and its layering. There are grids that come into being, and then disintegrate as our eye moves across the composition. Some works have centralized nexes of energy, knots of form, and in other areas a calm sort of undulating gesture. These are beautiful paintings that demonstrate an amazing variety of form considering their rather tight parameters of production. They feel urban and modern and are visual parallels to the mass of interfering noises on a crowded downtown street: cacophonous.

Only some pieces have a centralized focus, others are more all-over, with dispersed fields of visual energy. *magnetic nowhere* is one of the most highly energized in the show, with its big, wide, curving swathes of red. The painting called *outside script* divides – almost – into slightly misbehaved symmetrical squares. A work called *rabies and recovery* almost becomes confused it is so complex. In *rare pacing* the central portion of the composition is interrupted by a swiped band. Things are in flux and shifting – nothing is stable or continuous. This aspect of the work is almost humorous, and keeps the viewer just slightly off balance.

Broadworth's titles seem to have been grabbed from his immediate environment, or recent personal events. They are not clues to meaning, but are to do with the meaning of

things at other levels. They are like flotsam seen on the surface of a body of water, with the real meaning seen only when we dive down into that pond or lake.

The artist also works on canvas producing large-sized paintings, and his activity on Mylar feeds back and forth, into and then back out of those works. Interestingly, Broadworth still draws representationally, from either still lifes, or street views, an activity he finds important and valuable.

Broadworth's work stands very much in a self-conscious relation to the art of other practitioners of art, both current and historical. This is one of its strengths. At the foundation of his practice is the contribution of the Abstract Expressionists, although he is fond of great art from the past from much earlier time periods as well. He is a great enthusiast for art, and when he kindly responded to my requests for information in preparation for this publication and exhibition, he listed a plethora of artists whose work has been important to him. His formative training at NSCAD, with its emphasis on methodological rigour (carried over from minimalist art), has served him well.

The term "pure painting" comes to mind in looking at Broadworth's work, which was coined first in a 1912 essay by the French writer Guillaume Apollinaire. He was writing with excitement about the first abstract paintings being produced in Europe in which no depicted subject got in the way of the formal means of art. Broadworth has stripped down his machine in a similar manner.

Broadworth's title for this show, *Vital Binaries*, would appear to have been taken from that of one of his works, *vital binary*. Thinking of binaries, his work can certainly be seen from the angle of paired opposites being brought into a charged kind of harmony: yin/yang, linear/painterly, light/dark, grid vs. gesture, push/pull – each pair

yoked together to their mutual benefit.

Ultimately his work becomes mostly about light, coloured light as reflected back to our eyes as we look at the paintings. The luminosity is a mirage, an illusion, but a highly captivating one. And this luminosity is one of the main carriers of the emotion in the work. Canadian painter David Milne thought and wrote about the aesthetic emotion, of how feeling entered a work of art. " ... singleness of heart, sincerity beyond anything possible in daily life, is essential in painting," he said. ¹

Eventually viewers of Broadworth's paintings may come up against the notion of emptiness – an emptiness that is actually a sort of poised fullness, one of total possibility, bulging like the surface tension of water in a brimming glass. There is the same sort of compression to it, which leads to feelings of excitement. It calls to mind the Fool card in the Tarot deck, which is the card about beginnings and of unlimited potential.

Liz Wylie

Liz Wylie is Curator of the Kelowna Art Gallery.

1. David Milne, quoted in David Silcox, *Painting Place: The Life and Work of David B Milne*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996, p. 264.

Artist's Statement

Paintings lead double lives nowadays. Every flesh-and-blood work spawns a pixilated and highly itinerate twin. How we read and interpret paintings has changed through the experience of viewing work on-line. Serving as a *control group* for immediate experience is one of painting's most important and enduring functions. Painting has always demanded the one-on-one physical encounter. But the much more social backlit proxy has its own unique glow, as it moves from screen to screen. As with many of us, some paintings simply look cooler on-line. My work functions in the gap between the immediate and the mediated – informed by displacement as much as by the corporeal and material.

My paintings are the end results of a pre-determined series of actions; each action occupies a separate layer and is assigned a specific colour. Layers may contain geometric shapes, a variety of grids, or a tightly packed gesture. The disjuncture between the way that time is held in the making and subsequent viewing of a painting is a central concern. The drying time left between layers is as critical as the painting of each layer. The content and assembly varies from work to work but the final stage is always the same: layers are compressed and time is collapsed as I draw a blade across the surface. The result is a smooth, uniform surface and a leveling between figure and ground, gesture and structure, chance and intention.

List of Works

Please note: all works are in oil on Mylar, which has been mounted to paper. The Mylar sheets are all 14 x 17 inches (35.5 x 43.1 cm) in size. They are all in the collection of the artist.

1. *burn pit*, 2012
2. *comp reclaim*, 2012
3. *compound*, 2012
4. *crux*, 2012
5. *current status*, 2012
6. *gangway*, 2012
7. *implant copy*, 2012
8. *incognito hit*, 2012
9. *magnetic nowhere*, 2012
10. *midnight scurry*, 2012
11. *on*, 2012
12. *outside script*, 2012
13. *papered saw*, 2012
14. *rabies and recovery*, 2012
15. *rare pacing*, 2012
16. *road show*, 2012
17. *scrap continuum*, 2012
18. *structural stripped*, 2012
19. *wolfer*, 2012
20. *wrecked substitute*, 2011
21. *chance divide*, 2013
22. *graph vs. host*, 2013
23. *periodic succession*, 2013
24. *clip opening*, 2013
25. *satellite tag*, 2013