

## Quebec painting pair exploits perceptions

Intriguing exhibits showcase Montréal artists

By Nancy Tousley, Calgary Herald, Review  
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*Homologous Fields*: Dil Hildebrand and Tyler Los-Jones, at Truck Gallery through Nov. 5; and Stéphane La Rue and Martin Bennett at TrépanierBaer Gallery through Nov. 21.

If a sample of two is anything to go on, younger painters in Québec are interested in playing with perception and punching some space into the plane of the canvas that their elders, like Guido Molinari, Yves Gaucher or the great Claude Tousignant, kept flat for decades.

Dil Hildebrand and Stéphane La Rue, two Montréal artists who are showing here at different galleries, each have professed their desire to make space in painting. Their appearance here at the same time is entirely a coincidence, but instructive nonetheless. As good as it is to see Montréal painting in Calgary, it is especially good to watch artists from the same milieu with the same goal, making space, go about it in such different ways.

At Truck Gallery, Hildebrand, who shows in Montréal with Pierre-Francois Ouellette, piles on theatrical effects that include painted illusions and frank use of the materiality of paint itself. Hildebrand plays paint as the conjuror of illusion against paint as paint on loaded surfaces that give the eye a workout.

At TrépanierBaer Gallery, La Rue, who shows in Montréal with Roger Bellemare, plays off geometric figures painted on canvas or wood against the shape or surface of the support, so that a sense of space arises in the disjunction, often with a display of wit.

Two divergent sensibilities are at work in these exhibitions. Where Hildebrand is messy, intuitive and romantic, La Rue is elegant, intellectual and minimalist. Where Hildebrand's surfaces contain draperies of acrylic paint, lumps of paint dragged downward by gravity and heavy impasto contrasted with smooth passages, La Rue's surfaces are flat, thin and smooth, but with material tooth and, on the wooden pieces, subtle low relief.

Both artists work up optical pushes and pulls, but where La Rue wants to work as simply as possible with materials, Hildebrand creates a mash up of the diverse things that paint can be made to do in relation to a surface.

*The Blues* (2009), like many Hildebrands, is a landscape image overlaid with reflections of an architectural interior. Are we looking at the middle ground brush

and distant mountain through a window? The rubble at the forward edge of the painting, which seems to be on the viewer's side of an invisible glass plane, would suggest no. Hildebrand confuses inside and outside, nature and culture, and abstraction and representation. He fogs the idea of painting-as window at the same time that he literally states the idea.

The illusion of landscape and reflection on the right side of the painting is balanced on the left by sheets of acrylic paint that dangle from the surface. Paint is a material, all right, Hildebrand turns it into something like fabric. Beneath the 3-D effect is a deeper painted space that points to a surface composed of layers that step back into space. The reflections and the veiled landscape pull back, the dangling paint pushes forward. The composition of *The Blues*, made during a residency at the Banff Centre, is complex, moving the eye from front to back, back to front and across a diagonal from front left to back right, or from paint to mountain.

By contrast, the optical workings of La Rue's black-and-white paintings, which make up the greater part of the show, are clear and easy to see, once the eye catches on. And this makes them no less intriguing. The angled sides of black geometric shapes, seen in relation to white rectangles of canvas underneath them, appear to make forms twist, planes tilt or advance and white-and-black surfaces sometimes vie for who's on top.

The French title of the exhibition, *Sens Dessus Dessous*, translates as *The Sense of Above and Below*, pinpointing the source of the visual dynamic. Accompanying La Rue's exhibition is show of small black-and-white paintings by former Albertan Martin Bennett. Here the black image on a white ground is a branch or branches, which with increased looking becomes more and more abstract, achieving another kind of flip-flop in perception.

Accompanying Hildebrand is a polygonal sculpture, *Black Hole* (2009), by Calgary sculptor Tyler Los-Jones, a recent graduate of the Alberta College of Art & Design. The artist plays off the disparate outside, which is black, and inside of the work, which reveals cavities of gleaming red and blue pyramidal forms. The reference here is apparently to inner and outer space.

These are the kinds of shows that separate the minimalists from the maximalists, but each of them has a lot to recommend it. See them both for the most beneficial effect.

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