



following the paint

Simon Andrew

Mira Godard Gallery

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Mira Godard Gallery
22 Hazelton Avenue
Toronto
Canada
M5R 2E2
416.964.8197

www.godardgallery.com

STATEMENT

During the process of painting, possible courses of action become apparent. The way the paint is initially applied, often suggests the direction in which the image might evolve. A quick gestural mark can hint at a distant field or an outcrop of land. This is not totally unlike the way a word, grabbed from the blue, might suggest the path a poem could take or a casual phrase of music dictate the progression of a composition. I try to respond to this feedback, that the medium supplies, as thoughtfully as I can. Frequently, I am lead away from objective reality and towards an unanticipated visual journey. But on arriving at this new place, the process pulls me towards the observation of what I have in front of me. It is as if, having made an inkblot, I see a vague hint of something in it, which I then proceed to work on, to make that thing more recognizable. I find working like this has the effect of making the painting a more powerful and relevant visual experience, probably because the results cannot be entirely known beforehand. These paintings, one might say, straddle two domains, that of the sensed and the seen. These fulcrums are unavoidably different for each work, but these dissimilarities are also the very reason my interest is sustained.

Simon Andrew.

SIMON ANDREW: PAINTERLY PROVOCATIONS FROM A MID-ATLANTICIST

MICHAEL GLOVER

Any artist's studio is a site of battle. Any painting is to a greater or a lesser degree a tussle between abstraction and figuration. I am provoked into these thoughts by a visit to the studio of Simon Andrew, a mid-career artist who was born in Portsmouth, England, lived much of his early life in Cornwall (many members of his family still live there), studied painting in Newcastle in the far North of England, and who has since 1991 lived and painted in both Canada and England.

His current studio, in a house just outside Kingston, on a spit of land at the confluence of Lake Ontario and the St Lawrence River - 'if you keep going in that direction,' Simon says, pointing in the general direction of the St Lawrence River - 'you will eventually get to England' - holds much in common with many another artist's studio. Its floor coverings are partially shredded by zestful overuse. There is the usual generous clutter of artist's materials – turps; varnish; brushes; fat, partially squeezed out tubes of paint; and old tins that would once have contained CANADA Corn Starch and Cornish Gingerbread Cookies, now pressed into new service. And there also is a superabundance of work - finished work and work in the making. How different this is from, say, Howard Hodgkins' studio just around the corner from the British Museum, I tell Simon. In that huge space (it was once a dairy) just a handful of paintings are on display - or rather, they are not on display at all because they are turned to face the wall.

Things could scarcely be different here. There are a good number of them right in front of my eyes. One wall consists entirely of rows of shelves on which are displayed a couple of dozen of them, oil on board or oil on canvas, many relatively small. Two or three larger ones sit on the floor. The studio itself is a wooden space completely surrounded by nature - woodland to the back and water to the side, and I swivel away from the wall to look in the direction of the room-width window at my back when Simon mentions that it gives onto a marvellous view of Wolfe Island just across the water. Not in the middle of summer though, I see, mildly disappointed. The window space is entirely engulfed, and that grand panorama completely occluded, by vegetation at this time of year.

Simon is fundamentally a painter of landscape, though there are other kinds of paintings here too - a London street scene, another of the Thames looking downriver from Blackfriars in the general direction of Tower Bridge, and some interiors of people in their rooms being carefully defined by everything with which they have chosen to surround themselves. The landscapes skip readily from Canada to England and back again, and as I look I ask myself whether Simon is a Canadian painter or an English one - or perhaps an amalgam of the two. Occasionally there is a painting which in its size and its sweep seems to come close to embodying a notion of the Great Outdoors and the heady metaphysical baggage that such an idea drags along in its wake, but it is the exception rather than the rule.

In order to orientate ourselves a little better, we talk about some of his influences, and artists he might regard as his touchstones. Howard Hodgkin has been important to him, he tells me, the way he lays down bold, slathering swathes of colour, and you can indeed see Hodgkin in the curvaceous swooping brushstrokes applied to some of the larger works here. Corot is a touchstone too - for a slightly different reason, and one which relates in part to issues of cultural identity. His landscapes resonate for me no matter where in the world I happen to see them, Simon says. Is it this ability to resonate anywhere that separates great artists from the also-rans?

Talking of Hodgkin reminds me of what Hodgkin once said to me about his paintings. They often fool people, he said, because they seem to tend so far towards abstraction. Hodgkin denies the charge of abstraction. Each one is a summary of an emotional situation, he once said to me, very emphatically. Does that remark help to illuminate Simon's work in some way? Simon's work is fully rooted in the figurative tradition - you can always tease out a recognisable motif if you look hard enough, even in the landscape paintings which incline towards abstraction. 'In fact, it's hard to paint abstract,' Simon comments, 'because the eye is so perceptive. Micro-organisms can so closely resemble the work of Jackson Pollock.' In fact, the paintings which seem to hover on the cusp of abstraction are amongst the most interesting in this room. The best of Simon's paintings look rapidly realised, as if a rush was upon him to grasp something which might have vanished altogether had it been laboured over - he tells me, touchingly self-apologetically, that he has a short attention span, and that it is perhaps for this reason that he makes few large paintings. Largeness demands a huge commitment of time. The brush strokes feel hectic, the result of rapid sparring with the materiality of paint. The canvases are defined by their surface agitation. The skies are often turbulent or broodingly oppressive, as if they have a large part to play in the drama of what is being represented. The shapes may be comfortingly familiar, but what is pent inside these rectangles causes an unusual degree of discomfort. These are paintings which have been wrested from indecision, paintings which seem to have begun life not so much with any determination to paint landscape in general or any single landscape in particular, but in the laying down of brushstrokes in that first effort to make something from nothing. Only as the painting accumulates, by stroke of brush, palette knife or finger, does it become realised as landscape. They seem to have come alive quickly, by some deft act of prestidigitation.

We also need to ask ourselves what kinds of landscapes these are. Generally speaking, this is not exacting, plein air painting. These are not faithful documentations of a particular place, seen on a particular day in winter or summer. This is not Monet with his easel, stop-watching in front of the facade of Rouen Cathedral. Simon is not a slave to the season's clock. He pays little attention to the seasons. They are wilder than that. These are factitious landscapes, seizings from memory. They are embodiments of the feel of place when we are no longer there, emotional after-images if you like, dream locations snatched from the air, times captured outside of time. They often feel embryonic, as if the making might have continued had it not been abruptly abandoned. He can be fascinated by the power of small things to arrest our attention. He can suddenly batten down on particular kinds of shapeliness - the Penzance swimming pool, for example. Here is a painting of the Minack Theatre in Cornwall.

It is outdoors, beside the water. Simon has given us just a corner of it, a fence, a post, to lead the eye on. He swings between North America and England with great aplomb, as if he is a mid-Atlanticist above all things else. A space can open out until it yawns – the Canadian side of his temperament has seized hold of the brush. The next moment you are looking at something quite different, in tone and atmosphere - a small, unsplashy rendering of a chapel in Raglan, Wales, feels suffused with the intimacy, of scale and mood, of a particular kind of English landscape. The eye is forever restless, never quite satisfied. There is always something to be wrested from nothing. That is the thrill of the painter's chase.

Michael Glover is an art critic for the *Independent*, London and a London correspondent of *ArtNews*. He regularly contributes to *The Times*, *The Financial Times*, *The New Statesman* and *The Economist*.

BIO

Simon Andrew was born in Portsmouth, spent his formative years in Penwith, Cornwall, studied science at Queen's University, Canada and fine art at Newcastle University where he received his MFA. While Simon was at Newcastle he was the beneficiary of The Lawrence Atwell Scholarship Award from Skinners' Hall, London. U.K. Simon was awarded first prize (Northern Region) for his work in The Laing National Landscape Competition. London. His work was also selected for The Hunting Group Contemporary Art Competition. He has received arts council grants and is represented in major corporate collections, including Glaxo Wellcome, Hewlett Packard, Canadian Business Development Bank, Fidelity Investments and Her Majesty the Queen in Right. Simon has produced art for the artistic ventures of Mel Gibson and the Canadian multi - Juno Award winning group The Tragically Hip. He has attended residencies in both Canada and abroad and was the recipient of a full fellowship award from The Vermont Studio Center, USA. Recently Simon won first prize for his work in Exposures, an exhibition which was judged by curators from contemporary public art galleries in Canada. He has had numerous solo shows at galleries both public and commercial at home and abroad. Currently Simon works in Canada and England.

Mousehole Harbour with Flash IV
oil on canvas
48" x 60"
2011





The South Bank towards Tower Bridge
oil 6" x 20" 2012



South Wales Farmland

oil 6" x 20" 2012



Jude's Bedroom
oil 16" x 16" 2012



Staircase in Cornish House

oil 16" x 20" 2012



Tereife Library

oil 16" x 20" 2012



Cornish House with Piano

oil 16" x 20" 2012



Rothko Room Visitor, Tate Modern

oil 12" x 15" 2012

Velasquez after Paul
oil 27" x 22" 2012



Guanajuato University Buildings

oil 20" x 16" 2012



Guanajuato Building with Two Roads

oil 20" x 16" 2012





No Entry Street

oil 12" x 15" 2010



Regent Terrace from Roof, Mousehole

oil 12" x 15" 2008



Landscape near Gananoque
oil on ply 6" X 12" 2012



LA

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Hedges and Fields with Orange Sky (detail)

oil 16" x 20" 2012

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Landscape Near Swansea

oil on ply 6" X 12" 2012





Hedges and Fields with Orange Sky

oil 16" x 20" 2012



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River and Mountains
oil 48 x 60" 2012

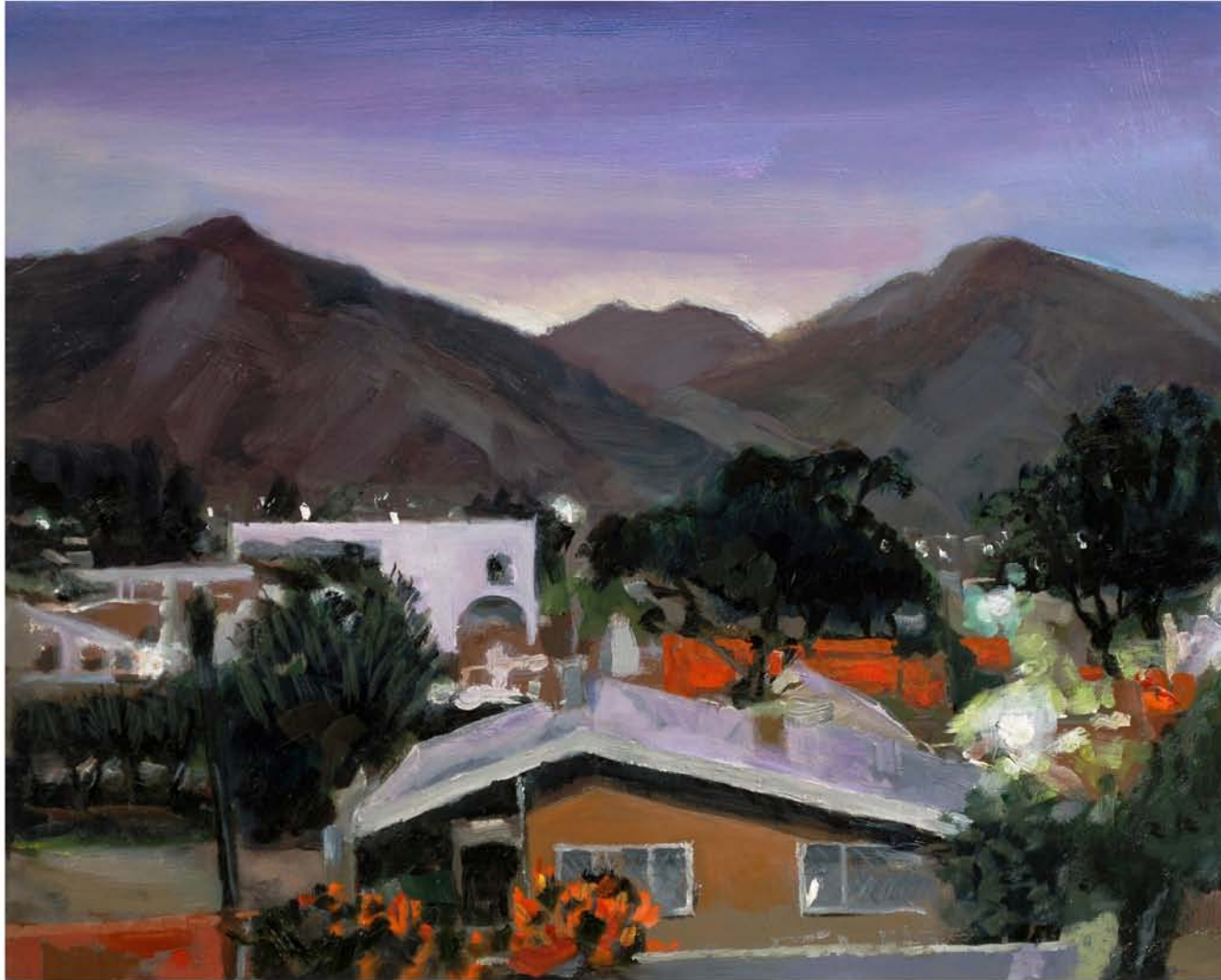
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Outside the City at Dusk
oil 60" X 60" 2012





Farm Buildings on Hill Side

oil 16" x 20" 2012



Ajijic

oil 16" x 20" 2012



Still Life with Hyacinth
oil 12" x 15" 2012



Chinese Lanterns with Square Fabrics

oil 12" x 15" 2012

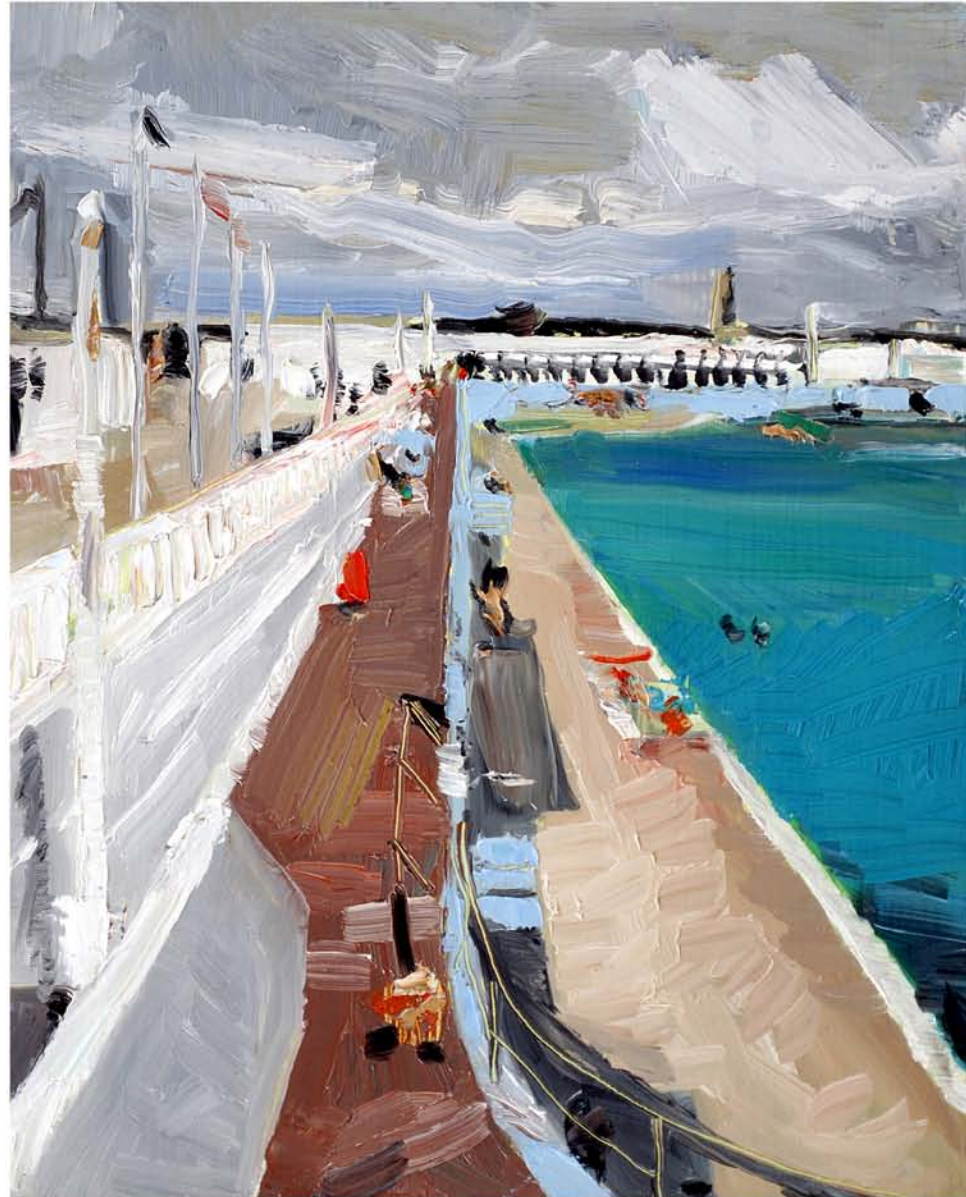


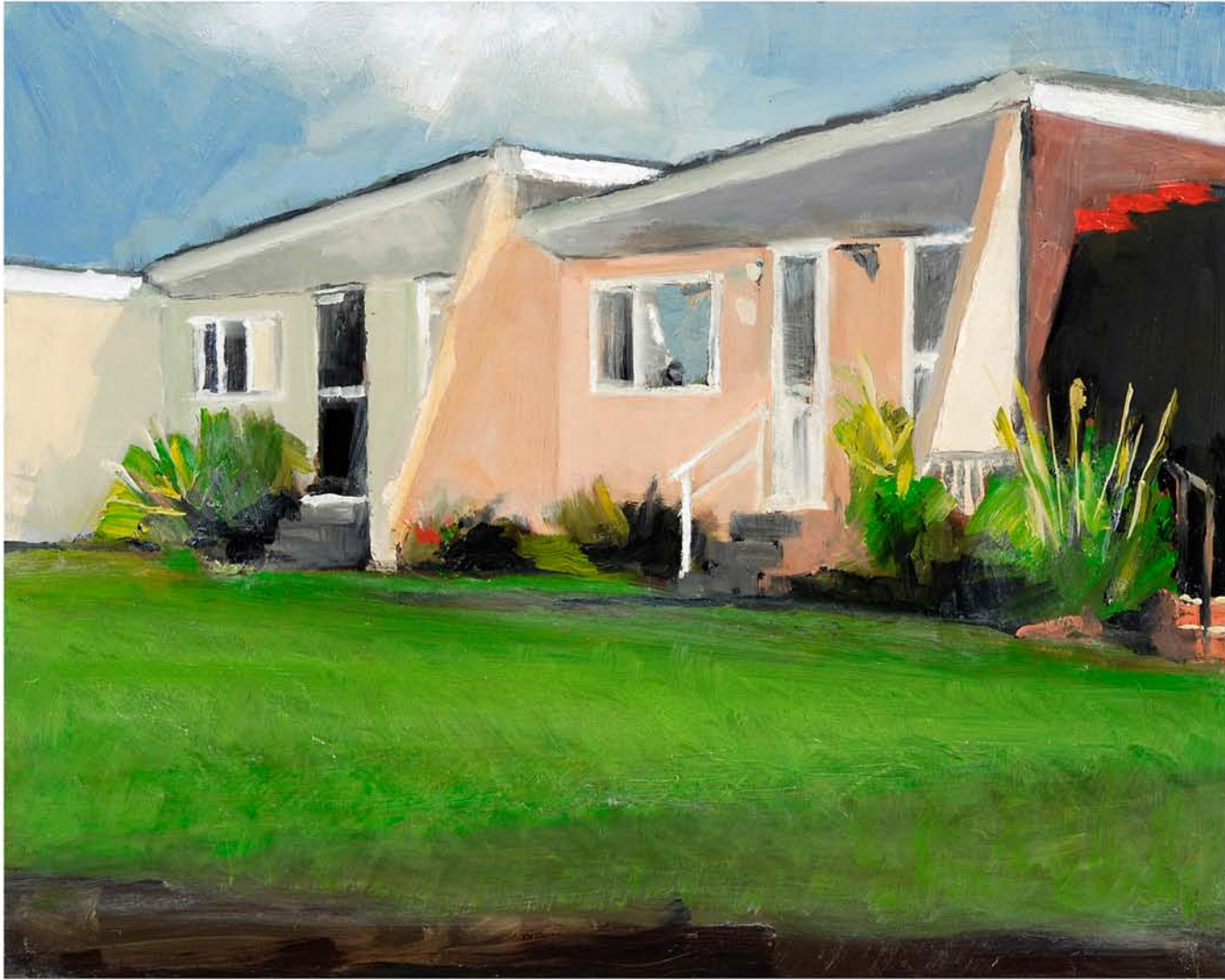
Evening Light on Penzance Swimming Pool

oil 12" x 15" 2012

Penzance Swimming Pool & Marazion

oil 12" x 15" 2012





Cornish Chalet

oil 12" x 15" 2012



Anniversary Party at Tereife

oil 36" x 36" 2012



Jeremy's Bedroom
oil 48" x 60" 2012



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