

# Andrea Bolley *Uneasy Beauty*



## Uneasy Beauty The Painting of Andrea Bolley

Andrea Bolley stands considering the large sheet of paper taped down onto her tilted drawing board. She is folding pieces of grey construction paper, playing with shapes, twisting, redoubling. She places these shapes on the white paper and then moves them, bends, tears bits off, until the grey shapes achieve a general flow of shape that pleases her.

She marks the positions of the shapes with a pencil and then lifts them off. Working onto her hands a pair of disposable rubber gloves like those used by doctors, she scoops up white acrylic gel and coats the construction paper shapes. She spreads gel, too, on the pencilled areas of the drawing paper and settles the shapes into place. She works the gel with a scraper. She used to use oddments of cardboard from framing shops as scrapers, but now prefers the plastic scrapers used in automotive work because she can bear down harder with them. She works more gel into the shapes with the scraper, adjusting them, cementing, sometimes building them with more torn paper scraps, sculpting. Because the gel sets quickly, she works intently and rapidly.

While she works she always listens to music playing loudly, eclectic tapes she has recorded from the radio and records, music with a high energy level: Delta and Chicago blues, gospel, Motown, Coltrane, Art Pepper, Dizzy Gillespie... The music seems to impel and cocoon her.

I break in on her concentration to ask, "When you've got the white paper with the construction paper shapes sitting on it, how do you decide what colours the painting's going to be? How do you get at the feeling of the painting? Is the main thing sculptural, with colour as just something added, or...?"

"No, no!" she says. "Colour's the predominant thing. I'm thinking of the colours I'm going to use before I even start, and the colours of the ground dictate the colours of the shapes, even the shapes of the shapes."

She is mixing a deep purple colour with PVA and trying it on scrap paper to see what she's getting. She applies this ground with a scraper. The purple differs in colour according to its thickness and the way she works it. When she has a balance in the depth and weight of colour applied over the entire ground, she applies another colour — a worked-up red — that she pastes and scrapes and works until she has brought the purple to a rich and complicated brown.

Then, with a small sponge and water, she begins to thin the paint here and there, texturing it. The water dissolves the wet acrylic, leaving differing densities of colour, leaving a distressed look — leprous patches, scars, scabs and clots which are a continuation of the concerns in her earliest paintings in the *Teron* and *Skinflick* series.

*Venus Series, "It wouldn't be make believe if you believed in me" 2003; paper, acrylic on canvas*

She steps back to consider the complicated texture of the ground. It covers about two thirds of the white paper. Her deployment of negative space in her works on paper has lately become increasingly dramatic. Even in this preliminary state of the painting, even before she has touched the grey construction paper shapes, the relationship between the painted ground and the whiteness of the paper is bold and startling. The ground is not simply *surrounded* by whiteness; ground and negative space interact, move into each other, intensify each other.



*Emage #023 1983*  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper

She dips her finger into the purple paint and then works the colour into the central construction paper shape. Aretha Franklin is blasting. She steps back again, estimating the colour's effect. With a contained urgency, she unscrews the lids on jars, jerks lids off tins, squeezes out colour. She shifts from foot to foot in front of the painting as if at any second she might start dancing.

The shapes are now set fairly hard. The colours she is applying follow the contours of the folded paper, dramatizing its depths and thicknesses. As she rubs in different colours with her fingertip, ground and shapes are pulled into changing balances. The intensity of her concentration is almost palpable. As her fingertip coats, smoothes, scores, and highlights, it is as if she is connected to the painting by a current, as if a brush would impede the flow of energy.

Suddenly she is stripping off the masking tape that has held the paper on the board. She lifts the wet, heavy sheet and pins it up onto the studio wall. Aretha Franklin has given way to the implacable beat and gravel declaration of Howlin' Wolf. Standing in front of the painting, she weaves slightly as if again about to break into steps.

Then she is back into the painting again with sponge and water, modulating the ground around one of the shapes, changing the balance, changing the way we read the painting, and with her fingertip strengthening an edge, dramatizing, here working in a streak of white, there uncovering a patch of purple underpainting darkened now to something nearing black. At last she just stands. Drops the sponge, sets down the Sealtest ice-cream container of muddied water. Strips off the rubber gloves and tosses them onto her work table. Turns off the tape deck.

The sudden silence seems to buzz.

I feel exhausted.

She has been working for four and a half hours.

Andrea Bolley was born in Guelph in 1949. She grew up in an artistic household and studied at the University of Guelph before moving to Windsor to study Fine Arts.

Her early work at Windsor tended towards the figurative, but she quickly fell under the influence of the prevailing colour field painting. Across the river at the Detroit Institute of Arts, she was able to look at paintings and listen to lecturers and painters from New York. And it was in New York that she experienced what she has subsequently described as “a spiritual awakening.”

This St. Paul-on-the-Damascus-Road conversion happened to her at the Whitney Museum of American Art, where she had gone to see the Jules Olitski show. “The exhibition changed my whole attitude to what a painting was about.” Looking at those paintings, she says, she became dedicated to the *idea* of painting. “I looked at them, and this sounds sentimental, but it’s what happened. I thought, ‘Yes. Yes, this is how you can spend your life.’”

Clyfford Still, Jules Olitski, and Helen Frankenthaler were among the most important influences on Andrea Bolley, though Twombly, Scully, and Rothko were also unavoidable. Her awakening to painting was to colour field painting. In an artist’s statement for the *Spring 75 Exhibition* in Kingston, Ontario, she noted, “Intuition is the substance of art... Although visual images are stimulating, what is important in painting is paint.” She has, in many ways, remained faithful to that particular vision.

Andrea’s early comments about her process of “colour exploration” also resonate with her current work. She notes, “My recent canvases utilize very limited value contrasts, usually within one or two analogous hues. When more than one colour is used, the second is revealed by scraping to the underpainting. In some cases, that scraping becomes a very aggressive and intuitively subtractive type of drawing. The composition and structure of my canvas develop through the process of colour exploration and I find the mystery

of tonal painting provides a surface inviting prolonged inspection.”



The idea of *surfaces* is a useful one with which to approach a Bolley painting. Because her earliest paintings were in bands and panels, she jokingly called them the *Teron* series, naming them after the billboard company. In one way, however, the reference was perfectly

*Paper Painting #5 Branzioni 2004*  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper

serious. She was fascinated by billboards that had been pasted over with white paper, fascinated by the way colours and shapes bled through the white paper in the rain.

“I like things that look as if time has worked on them,” she says, “things that are worn and weathered, things with a patina.” She told me one day that when she was little more than a child, she’d been taken to see the Giotto and Cimabue frescoes in the Upper Church at Assisi. She remembers being intensely attracted not by the figures or events of the Legend of St. Francis, but by the fading, the crumbling, the decay.



*Venus Agosto* 1997; paper, acrylic on canvas

But surfaces, engaging as they are, also make us wonder what is beneath them, and Andrea’s early canvases suggest tense and uncomfortable depths.

Following the *Teron* series, she painted three more series, all of them closely related — *Skinflick*, *Scratch*, and *Scars and Marks*. These were shown between 1975 and 1977 in the Pollock Gallery and in group shows in Ontario.

The paintings in the *Skinflick* series were made by layering colours one on top of the other. Their surfaces are shiny because Andrea used large amounts of PVA gel with the acrylic. She wanted, she says, a “wet look.” Here and there she allowed the underpainting to puncture the skin of the painting so that the hidden colours burst through.



She was working on these paintings while living in an apartment and studio on Yonge Street. At the nearest corner store she used to see the local hookers every day, and because of their skimpy clothes, she noticed the needle marks, the scrapes, the bruises, blotches, and scars. “The scars and marks on the skin,” she says, “are like the unexplained history of a life.”

She rejects entirely the idea that these paintings are in any sense political or feminist or even referential — but they

*Skinflick Series #27* 1975; acrylic on paper



*Venus Luglio* 1997; paper, acrylic on canvas

and beads of paint. She pushed the paint into ridges, making reliefs on the skin of each painting. And, as in her earlier series, she allowed the underpainting to emerge in places through the generally sombre skins. But perhaps because she used fewer fleshy tones, these paintings do not disturb us in quite the same way that some of the *Skinflick* series do.

Andrea's first major exhibition in 1977 at the Pollock Gallery featured paintings that she called the *Tilt* series. This series brought together all the concerns that had been occupying her since Windsor. Kay Woods reviewed the show with great sensitivity in the March/April issue of *artscanada*.

The work of Andrea Bolley at the Pollock Gallery shows a confident self-assurance not often seen in an artist's first major exhibition. The two series displayed, called *Tilt* in acrylic on canvas and the *Feathering* series on paper, are colour field paintings suggesting elements or techniques from such masters as Frankenthaler, Still, and Olitski transformed into a mode of painting that displays Bolley's own personal vision and a common interest in the sensation of colour.

Every painting reflects a basic hue even though it has been built up from many layers of colours that can be detected around the edges or in some 'open' areas. The artist has rejected pure, clear hues for sombre, dingy ochres and browns, or greyed and muted blues and purples, that hark back to Helen Frankenthaler's unconventional and unexpected palette. Bolley's colours are mixed and blended to her own particular sensitivities, creating unusual tones and combinations that are not simply interesting but exciting and sensuous as well. She shows a sureness in her knowledge of colour relationships and is not afraid to use the *ugly*.

remain, for whatever reason, mysterious and uncomfortable. As Andrea puts it, "the paintings have skins of their own and I think it is the wounds in the skin which disturb us."

In the paintings that followed the *Skinflick*, *Scratch*, and *Scars and Marks* series, Andrea pursued her interest in the surface and in what shows through the surface. Again the paintings are shiny, but they are also more textured than her previous surfaces. Here, Andrea used a scraper precisely because of its artisan aspect. She wanted a non-traditional look and liked the way the scraper left ridges, irregularities,

Surface colour is uniformly sombre but by no means dead. Bolley has introduced a number of methods to enliven the chromatic all-overness: vitality is achieved through texture and by varying the value of the surface hue — both methods reminiscent of 1950 paintings of Clyfford Still. The seemingly random, loose gesture of paint application [Still's gesture was more directional] adds a textural quality that enriches the surface and creates a dynamic windblown effect... In some paintings the artist has opened up the dense, tactile surface to reveal small patches of bright colour. In *Tilt No.39* the dull ochre surface applied over dark blue and burgundy is dotted by small areas of light blue, burnt orange, and by one highlighted splash of pink. However, most of these open areas break up the surface too accidentally and in too many places. The most successful paintings are those with few disrupting open areas, or else they are left out altogether. Another way of creating interest and breaking the monotony of the surface is suggested by the title *Tilt*, whereby a narrow band of a different hue is placed along one edge somewhat in the Olitski format, angled slightly to tilt the central mass away from the literal edge of the canvas; yet it does not seem to imply an opening into space. A better and more original application of the 'tilt' is established by subtly manoeuvring the application of paint along an undefined line or angle within the body of the painting, while keeping the surface texture and colour intact. In this way the sameness of the surface is relieved yet no opposing coloured area separates the composition.

Andrea Bolley has produced serious paintings of a high quality. The basis for a unique visual image is already present; only time is needed for this artist to perfect and round out a style that already points to a personal expression.

But disaster was about to strike.

During the course of the *Tilt* exhibition a visitor remarked to Andrea in the gallery that her paintings put him strongly in mind of those of Charles Gagnon. She had never seen any of Gagnon's work and immediately went out to look. The similarities were undeniable. This was the second time that something of this sort had happened to her. The fields of some of her undergraduate paintings had resembled those of David Bolduc, with whose work she'd been, again, unfamiliar.

It is not particularly surprising that artists working in the same tradition and with influences in common will produce work with a family likeness. Andrea, was, however, devastated.

The arts in general are much indebted to their period and it is usually only in looking back that one sees clearly the taller trees in the forest. Time tends to be unkind to much artistic endeavour and what once seemed radical or radiant can soon invite a shrug. I experienced precisely this at a retrospective show of Philip

Guston. The last period of his abstract expressionist painting was curiously lacking in energy and emotion; the paintings were vitiated by a prettiness. That he erupted into the barbaric cartoon-like paintings which now define him is understandable in the context of his career and in the context of that career within an aging art movement.

Andrea Bolley had a similar moment of crisis. Looking at Gagnon's work brought her to a complete halt. She was unable to paint for six months. During that period of trial she took a deliberate decision to move into a technique and into a new set of formal concerns that would mark her work off from the work of other painters.

She had decided to bring into her paintings a collage and sculptural quality. The result was a fusion between colour field painting and process art. In 1978, after a great

burst of creativity, she exhibited at the Pollock Gallery and in San Francisco a show called *Paper Paintings*. These pointed the way for all her subsequent work.

The *Paper Paintings* remain wonderfully successful. She made the paintings in the following way: first, she stained the canvas, and then applied PVA gel to the canvas and to the thin paper which she was pulling off a roll and pasting up onto the canvas, scraping pushing, ripping.

"I wanted a rougher look," she says. "I wanted them to be me and no one else. I wanted something no one else was doing. It was like *drawing* with paper. You got it up there on the canvas, and started moving it around." When she had achieved the shapes and the surface, she went back into the painting and reworked the field with her hands and with a scraper. "I enjoyed the manner of it," she says. "It was very physical. A real physical struggle. The paper rumbled up like an elephant's skin. And in some of them there were *shields* of paper buckling up over each other like tectonic plates."

Over the next two years, Andrea worked on the *Wrap* series, the title coming from the wrapping or construction paper she used to make the paintings. The show opened in April 1980 at the Pollock Gallery and was warmly reviewed by John Bentley Mays in *The Globe and Mail*.



*Paper Painting #102* 1978; paper, acrylic on canvas

It takes only a few moments to understand how the works on canvas are fabricated. Over a complicated stratum built up from dark acrylic paints — earthy ferrous browns, intense mineral blues — Bolley lays one or more pieces of construction paper, saturated with binders and glues. [Often these pieces are originally the same size as the large rectangular canvases the artist favours.]

Then the hard physical part of the process begins. Bolley crowds and pushes the sheets of pliable paper toward their final positions, either in the canvas' middle range or at some point in the stable design. The formal objects which result — variations or deformations of the rectangular sheet she started with — maintain an uneasy, sullen conformity to the rectangular frame.

If there is drama in these works, it is not to be found in the distribution of these forms, but in their disturbed surfaces. The tormented, ripped shapes have been forced down and glued to the canvas or underlying paper surfaces, but all the rumples and crinkles acquired during their positioning have then been frozen in place with icy-white acrylic gels. Instead of touching up [by sanding or overpainting] the surfaces of the paintings to give them the dry-cleaned, fastidious look of tasteful abstraction, Bolley has left them as uncompromised documents of the hard work it took to make them.

This new rigour in Bolley's artistic procedure is also evident in her colour range, which has been narrowed and cooled. In the last couple of years, the blues have become central to Bolley's working — the blues in both senses.

Blue is a notoriously hard colour to use. It is capable of tricky shifts between raunchiness and ethereal spirituality, through impudence, gloom and radiant joy. But the blues of Bolley's designs, which modulate from almost white to the greenish blue of glacial ice, have no such humane reference; they've got a kind of arid, absolute-zero frigidity that could have been imported from the moon.



*Imagin V-2* 1984; paper, acrylic on canvas

Bolley's use of such moon-cold colouring contrasts with and confirms the mood of pounding and bruising, and resistance to the treatment, that pervades the paintings — a mood found also in that musical genre called the blues... And it's hard not to hear the blues in the irony, defiance, and the street-tough disdain for painterly prettiness built into these strong constructions.

Some of the paintings in the *Wrap* series suggest that the construction paper actually is wrapping something up and hiding it from us. The larger sheets of paper are sometimes connected — taped up, as it were — by strips of masking tape that are disconcerting and awkward, if not ugly.

Andrea said of them, "I'm frightened of things becoming too pretty or too easy so sometimes I deliberately make things... well, *awkward* and off-balance. I sometimes deny the balance and symmetry people expect." This remark could well apply to all her paintings.



*Wrap Series #24* 1980  
construction paper, acrylic on paper

The paintings that followed the *Wrap* series were unlike any paintings Andrea had done before. They were far more sculptural. The folded paper shapes stand in places as much as three-quarters of an inch above the surface of the canvas. She named these paintings the *Imagin* series. She derived this word from the Latin *imago* — meaning “an image, copy, or likeness” — and from the Latin *imagines*, which were wax death masks placed in the atria of Roman houses and carried in funeral processions. “The series is named,” she says, “in honour of my mother, who was terminally ill while I was painting them.”

During this period, Andrea became interested in masks and costumes and in the ritual ways of dealing with death. She thought of the shapes she was making as being somehow like masks. The mask protects and transforms the wearer, and these shapes in the paintings she thought of as “body masks.” Some of the shapes are like wings, others like cloaks; all somehow suggest the human body.

The blue and purple grounds are in almost operatic turmoil. They suggest stormy and dramatic night skies. The shapes seem to be rising or floating, and this sense of upward movement is intensified by rising white lines that are scored through the paint surface to the underlying white gesso. The shapes themselves are painted in reds, pinks, purples, blues, and greens. These colours are far from pretty; they remind one immediately of the *Skinflick* series. These are the colours of bruises and wounds. They remind us, too, of meat, of carcasses, and it is probably not coincidental that Andrea has a great admiration for Francis Bacon and Chaim Soutine.

Because of their undeniable “rising” and “floating” quality, these paintings are easily thought of in religious terms — as icons almost, as paintings about the freeing of the spirit from the weary flesh. “They have an odd presence,” she says. “They’re awkward. I wanted those shapes to look as if they’d gone through a lot.”

Over the next five years, Andrea painted her way through two major series, *Faktura* and *Constructus*. *Faktura* — from the Latin for *fabric* — was a term used by the constructivists to refer to the way thicknesses of paint approximated fabric. In the *Faktura*

paintings, Andrea departed from her earlier work in two important ways: she began with this series to use the origami-like shapes which have since become almost a signature, and she used a brush instead of a scraper in the painting of the grounds. The *Faktura* paintings are so richly coloured that they can only be called lush. The most successful works in this series — paintings like *La Stupenda* and *Testa Rosa* — have an almost Eastern gorgeousness; the less successful ones verge on the pretty and tend to be rather cloying. These paintings are very much finished and polished and tend to lack that deliberate awkwardness, that lack of ease, which is so much a part of Andrea’s sensibility.

The *Constructus* series might be seen as a reaction against the *Faktura* paintings. They are less finished, more free, more raw. They all seem marked by a great energy and urgency. They are done with a scraper rather than a brush.



The grounds are a return to the earlier concerns with texture and marking, and employ the new technique of sponging down through layers of paint. This technique produces the fascinating grounds seen in such paintings as *Hard Bop*.

There followed the *Veduta* series, the *Prego* series, and then the *Venus* series, in which she started using a striped wallpaper with which to “draw” her shapes. Currently a new series seems to be starting, energized by



*Faktura Mina* 1986; paper, acrylic on canvas

*Veduta Gris* 1991; paper, acrylic on canvas

a recent stay in Bermuda. She is using the black-striped paper in a more conventional collage manner to suggest sails on gorgeous seas, triangles with all the gaiety of Raoul Dufy's Fauvist seascapes.

Through all the years and all the series, one thing has remained constant — improvisation. She wants the paintings to avoid *conscious* manipulation. She wants the paintings to exhibit struggle. "The best paintings," Andrea says, "always arrive with an element of surprise."

Alkis Klonaridis of the Klonaridis Gallery wrote particularly well of Andrea's work and I am pleased to leave the summation to him.

One of the things I admire most about Andrea Bolley's paintings is that they are so very personal to her and are unlike anything out there in the world. I also am interested in the fact that her pictures are totally abstract and have evolved over the years according to their own logic. Her colour sense is different from that of a colourist in that it is mainly colour put to the service of conveying volume and a sense of a deepish billowing, atmospheric space as opposed to the flat colour of most colourist paintings.

In the pictures of the last year or so, we find the collage elements result in clusters of origami-like geometric shapes. These clusters allow her to use groupings of bright colours on them which give the pictures a playfulness and allow her to compose her colours in phrases and to juxtapose one phrase against another rather than juxtapose single colours against each other.



*Venus #237* 1996  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper

Andrea is an eccentric painter and it is these personal eccentricities both of colour and composition that make her pictures unique to herself and surprising and interesting to the viewer. They are sensual, lustful pictures that reflect a rich personality.

John Metcalf

John Metcalf is a writer and editor living in Ottawa. His most recent books are *An Aesthetic Underground: A Literary Memoir* and *Standing Stones*.



## Andrea Bolley Uneasy Beauty

“Stripes are pretty dominant; you can’t run away from them. They are a very graphic image having nothing to do with the abstract.”

– Andrea Bolley, 2004

In 1995, Andrea Bolley's life altered dramatically. She relocated her Toronto studio to Jarvis Street, and was no longer living and working in the same space. This tumultuous personal situation prompted a new direction in her painting. As the artist recalled in an interview recently, “When I moved studios, I wanted the work to change, but I wasn’t sure in what direction. And I still wanted to use... paper.”

This change was in the form of a happenstance — a piece of black and white striped wrapping paper left in her new studio. Andrea Bolley was attracted to the design: it was immediately provocative, and offered an alternative to her previous practice of manipulating construction paper. At the same time, the pattern presented an aesthetic challenge to the artist. She remembers wondering, “Would it have enough strength or would it become too decorative?” Ultimately, the “found object” became a part of the work, not as in traditional collage, but in Bolley’s perception, “in the sense of holding the painting like an anchor.”

With simplicity and elegance, the striped paper retained its bold graphic quality, its own identity. The pattern inherently had nothing to do with a painterly field. Bolley with some trepidation took up a new challenge by uniting these extremely disparate elements in a series of paintings. She may have been thinking of other examples of bold striping in art, such as the paintings of Frank Stella and Sean Scully, or, architecturally, the 14th-century Sienna cathedral and its modern parallel, the Cleveland Museum of Art.

The artist named her first paintings using striped paper the *Venus* series. The title is a play on Venice, Italy. Bolley visited the city a number of times during these years and remains very fond of it. Her admiration may have its roots in being taken by her father as a ten-year-old to an exhibition of painted views of Venice by Canaletto. While bold stripes are not a dominant feature of the architecture of *La Serenissima*, one can perhaps stretch the visual image to incorporate the official black and white garb of the *gondolieri*, or the boldly-painted striped wooden poles that are the docking posts for the gondolas and private boats on the Grand Canal, or even the tiny striped sunbathers’ cabanas that appear en masse at the Lido each summer.

Bolley knew that the title *Venus* would recall ancient feminine icons like the *Venus di Milo* and a myriad of ancient Greek mythologies. Venus is an open reference to women as symbols of beauty and objects of desire. Venus has been depicted by artists over the centuries as voluptuous, according to the fashion and the sexual

*Venus Luna* 1997; paper, acrylic on canvas

appetites of the day. In fact, this character is the subject of many great paintings by Venetian artists. In 1508, Giorgione created a subtle *Sleeping Venus*, housed in the Gemaldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden; Titian presented the subject in all of her majesty in his *Venus of Urbino* (1538), found in the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence; and Veronese's *Mars and Venus* (c.1580) — in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York — is a depiction of an episode of Greek myth.



*Venus #128* 1996; paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper

Bolley's first foray using the striped paper, *Venus #128* (1995), explores the more formal idea of figure and ground, painting and process. The image started with folding and ripping a single piece of paper, and then manipulating and pushing it across the ground. The striped paper presents a resilient image, indeed anchoring the painting as she had predicted.

The striped paper also facilitated the speed of making the painting. She employed it in the very tactile and direct manner she had used previously: by manipulating PVA gel, paint, and paper simultaneously. She took up the challenge of the striped paper and began to use various sizes of black stripes on a white background. She was able to find narrower and wider black and white stripes commercially produced in sheets of gift wrap and rolls of wallpaper.



Sometimes in the paintings, the stripes themselves are over-painted; sometimes they are hidden by a fragile veil or skin of paint. The artist explains that, in covering the manufactured paper with the action or imprint of the hand, she intentionally amplifies the dichotomies present in the work.

In 1997, the pieces gained more energy, structure, and balance from the folded, striped paper. In *Venus #325*, the central chevron or "tie shape" is joined by three other pieces of paper trying to come together on

*Venus #325* 1997; paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper

a gestural field of ochre and blue. To create these exceedingly painterly surfaces, Bolley laid down the darkest grounds first using a plastic scraper.

In the works from 1996 and 1997, Bolley's use of ochre was influenced by the colours of the Italian landscape. As artists over the centuries have discovered, she found that her time in Italy and the Mediterranean light had a major effect on her palette. The soft ochre is a more passionate contrast to the striped paper. In *Venus #275*, the ochre is coupled with a madder red ground and the striped paper seems to gently constrict an otherwise rotund, voluptuous painterly landscape or "body."

In contrast, the striped paper in *Venus #236* is twisted into a knotted rope so tight and full of tension that it almost garrotes the painterly surface of this small, narrow work. The stripes are also twisted in three paintings, *Venus Spiaggia* (Italian for "public beach"), *Venus Luna*, and *Venus Biondo* (a play on the English word "blonde"). Here, however, they become a soft, decorative garland. Bolley has said repeatedly in interviews, "I draw with the paper": she uses it not as collage but as a drawing element.

Bolley altered her process in three important works of the Venus series: *Venus #505*, *#506*, and *#507*. In *Venus #506*, she laid down a ground of bright yellow and red, and then almost covered the ground with folded pieces of striped paper. Finally, she applied layers of



*Venus #236* 1996; paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper

paint manipulated in a very rough action so that the stripes were almost obliterated, barely existing under a surface that appears weathered and tough. She likes the idea that in studying these tactile surfaces, the viewer may wish to peel off the layers of paint to discover what is hidden underneath.

When the folded paper becomes more agitated, Andrea Bolley deliberately chooses a cooler ground to tone down the energy, again creating a contrast between the dynamics of paper and paint. As the artist says, "I go back and forth to blue." She has used the colour blue as early as 1979 to create what she describes as "that kind of icy cool look" — a look without hot emotions. She is also aware that this colour choice can present aesthetic difficulties, as *The Globe and Mail* critic John Bentley Mays succinctly noted in his review of her early work (April 23, 1980). Certainly an "icy cool look" is successfully gained in *Venus Fredda* (1998), where the emerging figure on the field is a more formal chevron or "tie shape" that has links to the artist's previous *Imagin* series.

In 2004, Andrea Bolley was invited to work as Artist in Residence by the Masterworks Foundation of Bermuda. She was given residence in a boathouse/ guesthouse on the water, offered a space for her studio, and was asked to teach some children's art classes. The four-month period in Bermuda culminated in an exhibition of the work she produced there.

One of the aspects of the island that Bolley found most intriguing was its colour. As Bolley explained at the time to Nancy Acton of *The Royal Gazette* (April 7, 2004), "Bermuda is one big botanical garden, so I thought I should do a series of paintings in four sections of colour, each based on the predominant colours that I feel are really the essence [of the island]: blue (water), creamy-beige (limestone and palm trees), green (vegetation), and pinky-lavender (sunsets)."

In a number of pieces in Bolley's "green" series, the folded paper shapes are house-like, an allusion to Bermuda houses, but perhaps also a reflection of her feelings of pathos at the lack of her own house for the first time in many years. The simple, almost childlike image of the "dream house" may be a tribute to a recently-deceased Toronto artist and friend, Tonie Leshyk, who used similar



*Venus Fredda* 1998; paper, acrylic on canvas

images. Moreover, Bolley admits to being drawn to a house she could see across the water from her Bermuda lodgings. Inquiries revealed that it belonged to W.W. Denslow, illustrator of L. Frank Baum's book *The Wizard of Oz*. The discovery was meaningful to Bolley, for she has long admired the 1939 film version of Baum's book.

During Bolley's stay, it was winter on the island. The actual colour of the surrounding water ranged from blue to black, not the crystal aquamarine associated with other vacation destinations and Bermuda springs and summers. Bolley

discovered that the variants of the blues in the water and sky were affected by the light reflected on salt particles in the air. Watching the activity on a very windy day at the Dinghy Club, Bolley was stimulated by the hues of the water and the simple shapes of the sails.

Again, "going back to blue" and using wrapping paper-sized stripes, she began a project of making eleven pieces for her exhibition on the island. She paced herself, starting with one folded piece of paper and the ground, and then,

in the second piece, two — until, in the eleventh work, there were eleven pieces of folded striped paper somewhat claustrophobically existing with the ground. These paper images extend beyond the restrictions of the format, one leading to the next, and so on.

Andrea Bolley's random folding process means, in the artist's words, "that [she] will never know where the placement of the shapes will be until the folding is finished." However, once the striped piece or pieces of paper are folded, the result determines how she will apply and work with them. Nancy Acton describes the ensuing steps in Bolley's process: once the ground is prepared, "working quickly with sponges, cloths and water, she thins or thickens the layers of paint to reveal the varying densities of colour."

Like Venice, Bermuda is not generally associated with black and white stripes. However, Bolley sees such stripes alluding to all the stepped roofs and their severe black shadows in dazzling sunlight. Stepped roofs were designed for the century-old Bermuda homes so that rainwater could be collected for household use.

Originally, Bolley over-painted the black in the stripes, but observed that the results were then too soft for her liking. She decided to rework the stripes and over-painted the white areas so they would appear more precise, perhaps like the crisp sail images that may have inspired her. She also learned to cope with the high levels of humidity that curled the paper, lifted the tape, and altered her painting technique.

When asked, Andrea Bolley admitted that if she had had the time, she would have created many more paintings. If she had been able to create 30 images, would #30 with thirty folded pieces of striped paper



*Venus #505* 1999

*Venus #506* 1999

*Venus #507* 1999

paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper

overlap and completely obliterate the ground, becoming almost sculptural?

Does the Bermuda series present another artistic challenge by Andrea Bolley to herself, another enigma, another dichotomy? By virtue of Bolley's intensely tactile and direct process, one feels the shared duality of fragility and inherent strength in the striped paper, in the paper used as the ground, in the paint — and, as a consequence, in this exceptional period of her work.

Valerie Greenfield Thompson  
July 2004

Valerie Greenfield Thompson lives and works in Toronto. She is an independent curator and writer with 25 years of public gallery and museum experience in Canada and Italy.



*Branzoni Denslow #75* 2004  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper



*Paper Painting #10 Branzioni* 2004  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper

## List of Works

- Skinflick Series #27* 1975  
acrylic on paper  
53.0 x 72.5 cm  
Collection of the Art Gallery of Windsor; Purchase, 1976
- Paper Painting #102* 1978  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
152.0 x 182.0 cm  
Collection of the Thames Art Gallery;  
Gift of Tony Calzetta (G2004.08.03)
- Wrap Series #24* 1980  
construction paper, acrylic on paper  
105.0 x 75.0 cm  
Collection of the Art Gallery of Windsor; Purchased  
with funds contributed by the Allstate Foundation  
and the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation  
through Wintario, 1981
- Emage #023* 1983  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
29.5 x 28.5 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Imagin V-2* 1984  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
164.5 x 195.0 cm  
Collection of John Schweitzer
- Faktura Mina* 1986  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
183.0 x 183.0 cm  
Collection of AMEX Canada Inc.
- Veduta Gris* 1991  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
165.5 x 184.0 cm  
Collection of Terry Burgoyne
- Venus #128* 1996  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
119.0 x 88.0 cm  
Private collection
- Venus #236* 1996  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
33.0 x 18.0 cm  
Collection of Rob Jull
- Venus #237* 1996  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
33.0 x 33.0 cm  
Collection of George Lawrie
- Venus #325* 1997  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
32.5 x 33.0 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Venus Agosto* 1997  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
96.5 x 96.5 cm  
Collection of Robert Gage
- Venus Biondo* 1997  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
97.0 x 97.0 cm  
Collection of Kevin and Roger Garland
- Venus Luglio* 1997  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
96.5 x 96.5 cm  
Collection of Robert Gage
- Venus Luna* 1997  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
97.0 x 127.0 cm  
Collection of Warren Daub
- Venus Spiaggia* 1997  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
97.0 x 97.0 cm  
Collection of Kevin and Roger Garland
- Venus Fredda* 1998  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
97.0 x 97.0 cm  
Private collection
- Venus #505* 1999  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
54.0 x 55.0 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Venus #506* 1999  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
54.0 x 55.0 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Venus #507* 1999  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
54.0 x 55.0 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Venus Series, "It wouldn't be make believe  
if you believed in me"* 2003  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
128.0 x 128.0 cm  
Collection of Corkin / Shopland Gallery
- Branzioni Denslow #75* 2004  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
49.0 x 41.0 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Branzioni Duarte* 2004  
paper, acrylic on canvas  
128.5 x 128.0 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Paper Painting #5 Branzioni* 2004  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
48.0 x 40.0 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Paper Painting #10 Branzioni* 2004  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
49.0 x 40.0 cm  
Collection of the artist
- Paper Painting #23 Branzioni* 2004  
paper, acrylic on stonehenge paper  
48.0 x 41.0 cm  
Collection of the artist

**Andrea Bolley** (b.1949, Guelph Ontario)

BFA, University of Windsor, 1975

**Solo Exhibitions** (1980 to present)

- 2004 Thames Art Gallery, Chatham
- 2004 Masterworks, Bermuda
- 2003 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 2002 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 2000 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 1999 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 1998 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 1997 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 1996 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 1995 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 1994 Gallery 132, Toronto
- 1993 Upper Canada Brewing Company, Toronto
- 1991 Klonaridis Gallery, Toronto
- 1990 Klonaridis Gallery, Toronto
- 1989 Klonaridis Gallery, Toronto
- 1986 Gallery One, Toronto
- 1985 Gallery One, Toronto
- 1984 Gallery One, Toronto
- 1981 Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Toronto
- 1980 Pollock Gallery, Toronto

**Selected Group Exhibitions** (1980 to present)

- 2004 *Painters in Paradise* (Masterworks), Guild Hall, London, UK
- 2003 *The YES Show*, Toronto
- 2003 Stewart Hall Art Gallery, Québec
- 2001 Tatar/Alexander Gallery, Toronto
- 1999 Robert Kidd Gallery, Birmingham, Michigan
- 1999 *Art for Heart*, Toronto
- 1998 *Twenty Five*, 469 Gallery, Toronto
- 1998 *Art for Heart*, Toronto
- 1998 *Painting*, Art Rental, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto
- 1997 *Art for Heart*, Toronto
- 1996 *Art for Heart*, Toronto
- 1995 *Art for Heart*, Toronto
- 1993 *Triangle*, New York
- 1991 *Triangle 10th Anniversary Show*, Bennington College, Vermont
- 1991 Usdan Gallery, Bennington College, Vermont
- 1991 Magnum Books (with Rohinton Mistry), Ottawa
- 1990 Klonaridis Gallery, Toronto
- 1990 *Une Perspective de XV ans*, Andrea Bolley / Tony Calzetta, Mississauga Civic Centre
- 1989 *Une Perspective de XV ans*, Andrea Bolley / Tony Calzetta, Galerie John A. Schweitzer, Montréal
- 1988 Klonaridis Gallery, Toronto
- 1987 Gallery One, Toronto
- 1985 *Triangle*, New York
- 1985 Gallery One, Toronto
- 1984 Gallery One, Toronto
- 1981 *Future Traditions, View Point 29 by 9*, Art Gallery of Hamilton
- 1981 *The Artist and the City*, Art Gallery of Ontario Extension Services, Toronto
- 1980 *Toronto Group Show*, Alberta College of Art, Calgary
- 1980 Grapestakes Gallery, San Francisco

**Collections**

Abitibi Paper; American Express; Animal Clinic, Toronto; Art Gallery of Windsor; Arthur Gelgoot & Associates; Arts & Communications; Bells & Whistles, Toronto; Body Blue, Toronto; Butterfield + Robinson, Toronto; Canada Council Art Bank; Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce; Casey House; Charles River Associates; Chatelaine Magazine; Ciconne Simone; Citicorp (Canada) Ltd.; Citibank Canada, Toronto; Davies, Ward & Beck; Donovan Data Systems; Dot & Dash Sign & Design; Epitome Pictures, Toronto; Fudge Design; Geddes & Rubin; Goldstein & Sons, Toronto; Guaranty Trust; Hand Held Health; Harris/McCully New York; Hoax Couture; Hyatt Hotels; Imperial Oil, Toronto; J.E. Seagram Ltd.; Kyle Spenser Design; Leap Consulting; Labatts of Canada Ltd.; Macy's USA; Masterworks Foundation, Bermuda; Martel Real Estate, Toronto; Max Factor Ltd.; McGill Club; National Carpet; Party Central; Prego, Toronto; *Premiere Magazine*; Realestate Portfolio Management; Remax Focus Inc.; Robert Gage; Taylor Made Design; Thames Art Gallery; Silent Wave, UK; St. John Group, Toronto; Seven Continents, Toronto; The Elmwood Club; *The Toronto Sun*; Toronto Dominion Bank; Triangle, New York; Verity Club, Toronto; Vincent Planning, Toronto; plus private collections in Canada, the United States, and Europe.

**Awards and Grants** (1980 to present)

- 1985 Ontario Arts Council Grant
- 1984 Ontario Arts Council Grant
- 1980 Canada Council Short Term Grant
- 1980 OSA Purchase Award; J.E. Seagram & Son Ltd.

**Publications** (1980 to present)

*The Royal Gazette*, April 2004, Nancy Acton  
*Ottawa Citizen*, Visual Arts, November 1991, Nancy Beale  
*Arts Sake*, Peter Templemann, September 1990  
*Vie Des Arts*, Expositions Couplées, 1990, Monique Brunet-Weinmann  
*Une Perspective de XV Ans*, Andrea Bolley / Tony Calzetta, 1989, John Metcalf  
*The Globe and Mail*, August 1986, Robert Everett Green  
*Avenue Magazine*, December 1984, Bare Essence, Merike Lugus  
*artscanada*, Fall 1980, Andrea Bolley, Gerald Needham  
*The Calgary Herald*, October 1980, ACA Show Reflects Toronto, Nancy Tousley  
*The Globe and Mail*, April 23, 1980, Andrea Bolley, John Bentley Mays

**Commissions** (1980 to present)

- 1994 Prego Della Piazza, Toronto
- 1984 Yonge Street Diner, Toronto

Visit [www.andreabolley.com](http://www.andreabolley.com) for a complete listing

# Andrea Bolley *Uneasy Beauty*

August 13 – October 3, 2004

**Curator** Carl Lavoy  
**Writers** Valerie Greenfield Thompson, John Metcalf\*  
**Editor** Alison Kenzie  
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\*John Metcalf's essay first appeared in a publication produced by Galerie John A. Schweitzer, Montréal, in 1989 to accompany the exhibition *Andrea Bolley / Tony Calzetta, Une Perspective de XV Ans: 1974–1989*. Given that the essay is still relevant, it has been re-edited and updated for this publication.

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**Thames Art Gallery**  
**Chatham Cultural Centre**  
75 William Street North  
Chatham, Ontario N7M 4L4 Canada  
Phone (519) 360 1998  
[www.chatham-kent.ca/ccc](http://www.chatham-kent.ca/ccc)

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