

Artist Statement:

These paintings are artificial business park landscapes. They are compiled with cars, gas stations, traffic lights and illuminated signs schematically reproducing those of big chains such as McDonald's, Canadian Tire, Wal-Mart, Costco, Wendy's and Tim Hortons. Through this subject matter, I aim to engage the viewer into dense manifestations of contemporary life, car-culture, consumerism, and sprawl, with reverence to past tradition of Canadian landscape painting and modernist abstraction.

The paintings portray colourful and busy landscapes but also present a dark realism, revisiting the Canadian landscape tradition in terms not of natural but of commercial space, where ubiquitous retail outlets dictate use of the land and proclaim its occupation. The crowded compositions map out a "Geography of Nowhere", a term coined by the author James Howard Kunstler in his 1993 book by the same name exploring the effects of sprawl, civil planning and the automobile on American society. I grew up in a small community amidst residential subdivisions and a short highway commute through the sprawl of commercial retail centres. This sort of nowhere typical of the outskirts of large North American cities has become the focus of my paintings.

My process involves taking lots of photography, scouting points of reference in business parks and from scaling hills and foliage to capture overhead views. I then cut up and reassemble the photos into large photomontage studies. The photomontages serve as a way to develop and compile the space in my paintings; like an urban planner mapping and carving out a man made labyrinth from the natural environment. The photomontages break away from a single frame of perspective and give me a means to create new and more interesting compositions. I like the way the space becomes activated, there are portions in which the scale is believable and others where it breaks down, like a glitch in the matrix.

The paintings become their own fabricated environments; where placement of advertising, roads and infrastructure break up otherwise picturesque scenery. The spaces are deceiving, and perspective is skewed. Sparse foliage and encroached wildlife are integrated in small details. Seasonal effects of rain and snow also provide atmospheric frameworks. I want my paintings to represent a sense of excess and consumption, with subject matter open to interpretations ranging from romantic, folky or humorous to politically charged with appropriation and environmental impact. Thankyou to Studio 21 for hosting this exhibition.

I am grateful to acknowledge the support of Arts Nova Scotia in the creation of this work.

