

ELI BORNOWSKY (VANCOUVER), GEOFFREY FARMER (VANCOUVER), ELI LANGER (TORONTO/LOS ANGELES),  
DEREK SULLIVAN (TORONTO), KIKA THORNE (VICTORIA/TORONTO) AND HOLLY WARD (VANCOUVER)  
GASOLINE RAINBOWS  
JANUARY 26 TO MARCH 18, 2007

In the process and product of formal investigation not a lot means something specific. I can talk about formalism as an artistic practice that gestures towards meaning. It is a practice that is more interested in ambiguity than acting as a vehicle for clearly translating specific meaning or functioning as a pedagogical model to tender understanding. The formal signs of an abstract painting, sculpture, video or film do not engage as solid signs. A random shape, repeating pattern or soundless rhythms do not build obvious relationships between work and viewer or viewer and viewer. The works in *Gasoline Rainbows* do not unravel like a novel or come together like a puzzle. They are not a problem to be solved or looked up like a definition. Their meaning occurs as experience. We relate to them in a manner that reflects the sensory way we encounter the world.

This group exhibition brings together work by six multidisciplinary artists who take abstraction to the edge of representation. Eli Bornowsky, Geoffrey Farmer, Eli Langer, Derek Sullivan, Kika Thorne and Holly Ward question the use of abstraction through their own formal explorations. Many of the works directly reference, and as such represent, the modernist paradigm in relation to the visual arts. In some ways the works are like caricatures of Modernism, simplifying and exaggerating its familiar aesthetic canon, typified by artists working in the mid-twentieth century, as if stuck in the move away from representation. This reappraisal of formal concerns is a turn toward the processes of abstraction and onto a plane of surfaces linked to this paradigm through visual and conceptual references. It follows a return to the studio in order to focus on formal and material relationships, which attempt to address the intangible and unstable relations between artist, viewer and object.

My curiosity leads me to look for something common to the artists' approaches, and to articulate the particularities of each formal and material process. This investigation into form for form's sake is not to

set Modernism up as a foil, but to illuminate the specific qualities of aesthetic exploration, using form to shape ideas. Vivid colours, bold forms, elaborate compositions become tangible objects that evoke intangible ideas, materializing abstract thought through abstract forms.

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière draws a line between aesthetic and political practices in order to discuss the manner in which they intersect. For him, "[a]rtistic practices are 'ways of doing and making' that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relations they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility."<sup>1</sup> This relationship to aesthetic production is a distinction that sets artistic practices apart from other modes of understanding. It establishes a means of engaging in society in general, and more specifically as a means to function as a political being.

Rancière uses the classic notion of Modernity as a paradigm to establish a distinction specific to artistic practices, but also to show how it operates as a shared and common mode of entry. He celebrates Modernism for its attempt to define what it did — what is particular to aesthetic practice — and chastises it for separating itself from all other ways of being and for not understanding its power. This power, the power of form, is that its meaning becomes foreign to itself and that it has "the intention of the unintentional."<sup>2</sup> Simply stated, "The aesthetic regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from an hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres."<sup>3</sup> The regime or realm Rancière is describing is a place where artistic practice enters into the realm of the political, in part as "evidence of democratic equality."<sup>4</sup> What is particular to the way in which the artists in *Gasoline Rainbows* place an emphasis on aesthetic form is an attempt to create an expanded and common point of entry, drawing viewers and response without relying on familiar imagery embedded into already established

hierarchies of looking that contain traceable meanings. The abstract and undeniable articulation of material becomes a democratic invitation for engagement. The point of entry is preferential, privileging a desire for the work to be experienced over the delivery of a concrete message. In each work in this exhibition the relationship between material and content is established through formal considerations while remaining indiscernible. It is not important for meaning and form to come so directly together and maybe it is more essential that they hover outside of the normative hierarchies of understanding. The purpose of the formal play is to remind us of this indeterminacy that no artwork will retain its original integrity or its initial meaning. This is not a cynical approach, but more of an understanding of the power of appearance that invisible meanings translate into formal substance, which in turn materialize into specific and meaningful experiences.—  
Jenifer Pappararo

- 1 Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. Continuum, New York, 2004, p13.
- 2 *Ibid*, p23.
- 3 *Ibid*, p23.
- 4 *Ibid*, p14.

#### ARTISTS' TALKS

Saturday, January 27 · Derek Sullivan and Eli Langer, 3pm  
Thursday, February 15 · Eli Bornowsky and Holly Ward, 7pm  
Thursday, March 1 · Geoffrey Farmer and Kika Thorne, 7pm

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