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Visual Art/Interview: David Wilson - Urban alienation caught luminously on canvas

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I was first captivated by David Wilson's work while taking a much-needed break from my statistics course at a local coffeehouse. Looking up from my textbook I noticed a striking painting depicting a police car shimmering across a rainy Vancouver street. The combination of the colours and painting technique intrigued my mind in a way my statistics textbook below me never could. After a little investigation into the origins of the work, I got in contact with David Wilson, who graciously agreed to enlighten us about his work, his life, and the ongoing development of his evolving style.

Can you describe your painting technique for me?

My work represents reality, though not necessarily in a realistic fashion . . . Modern art is made up of so many different styles and techniques that I find it difficult to compare it to other present-day movements in painting, at least one that I would fit into.

Do you look towards other artists for inspiration?

The challenge for me is to create a visual vocabulary that can filter out all the other influences one can easily be inundated by. In that respect, I think that painting in a unique way can be incredibly difficult. It is too simple to be inspired by someone and to then go and recreate that sensation. This is something I believe artists struggle with . . . the challenge to make [one's art] truly theirs."

How did you go about developing your painting method and style?

I used to be a high realist. I really wanted to move away from that, and have worked to loosen up my style. [As a result], I found [this new work] to be a much more physical expression. It essentially came about by being attracted to artists whose work were completely unlike mine, but were able to communicate visually in a powerful and at times, provocative manner. I wanted my work to have the same sort of presence that captivated a viewer. In so doing, I found that this form of expression to be so much more gratifying for me to explore.

Can you tell me about some of your new work?

My most recent work has come about through a process of development that looks to engage the viewer on different levels. During the past few months I have taken to painting on found cardboard boxes, a painting material that is a very receptive surface to work on. Rather than using the words and graphics to form an image, the text and image remains separate and allows the viewer to mentally draw them together. My work on canvas advances this concept of appropriating found text by recording random snippets of text found through a variety of sources (conversations, lyrics, newspapers, books, etc.) encountered throughout the day. They are then combined into unrelated images, which are derived from visual found materials, direct observation or memory. The work on canvas is painted with the text first and then an unrelated image follows. The loosely painted representations of reality combines with the graphic text, to allow the viewer to personally create an awareness of 'common notions' of reality.

In many of your paintings you depict urban cityscapes. Why?

Within the city, we are surrounded by largely unnoticed and seemingly inadvertent abstract compositions. People, structures and reworked geography place their individual marks in the city. When those marks are observed from a distance, definite designs begin to appear. They are the attestation of North American civilization attempting to bring order to chaos, striving to manage what is unmanageable and rendering it usable for its advantage.

Are your paintings open to interpretation or are they determinate in their meaning?

I enjoy creating paintings that present the opportunity to form a narrative component for the viewer. Some works present a story to the viewer, if they wish to engage it as such . . . there is always something fresh to be seen in a work that physically does not change. It is our own thoughts and ideas that we bring to the visual experience that allow us to see something new in a familiar image.

Wilson will be participating in the Arts Umbrella Splash Live Art Auction in October 2006. Any inquires regarding Wilson's upcoming exhibitions for email notification can be found via www.davidwilson.ca.