



***TERRAIN, MIGRATION, PLACE:
FOUR WEST COAST PAINTERS***
May 18, 2023 — June 30, 2023



Installation shot of *Terrain, Migration, Place: Four West Coast Painters* at Marion Scott Gallery.

Opening on May 18 and continuing until June 30, 2023, *Terrain, Migration, Place: Four West Coast Painters* at Marion Scott Gallery features the work of Edward Epp, Landon Mackenzie, Vicky Marshall and Carolyn Stockbridge. Showcasing a different facet of each artist’s practice, the exhibition is composed of both small-scale and monumentally-sized works that engage with ideas having to do with local environments, historical mapmaking, waterways,

and passages, while displaying a wide range of painting strategies and modalities within abstraction, figuration, and monochrome.

The exhibition marks a slight departure from the gallery’s usual programming, which has in recent years focused mainly on contemporary and modern Inuit art forms. While continuing to champion the work of artists of Inuit and Indigenous heritage, the gallery has also begun broadening its

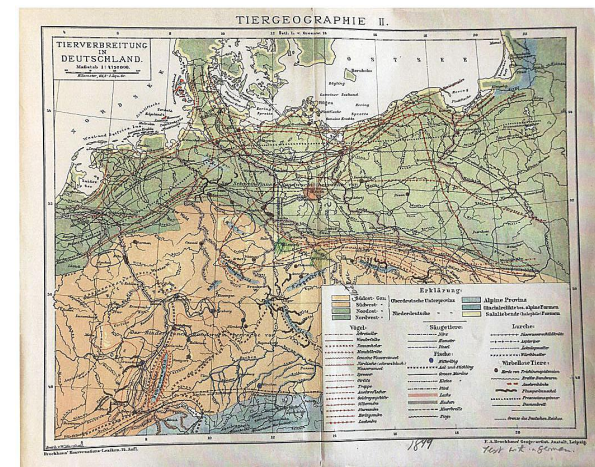
mission to include contemporary local and national artists, situating *Terrain, Migration, Place* as the first of many upcoming shows that will reflect this expanding trajectory. Many of the works in this exhibition have been created in the past few years, demonstrating how the four artists, each with their own unique visual language and approach, respond and relate to shifting conditions in our current milieu.

Anchoring the exhibition is *Bird Map* (2019), a large-scale oil painting by Landon Mackenzie characterized by its brightly coloured and criss-crossing patterns of dots, crosses, lines, and splotches. Amongst this exciting visual chaos, closer looking reveals familiarity, and one is able to make out the crisp black lines which outline the shape of the European continent. This is because the work itself is directly based on a nineteenth-century map of Europe that the Vancouver-based artist acquired from a Berlin flea market, under the impression that she was purchasing a military map to accompany her atlas of World War II battle lines. To her surprise, a German friend later translated the map, explaining that it actually represented bird sightings and migration patterns spotted and mailed in by locals to the University of Berlin, a realization which only further piqued Mackenzie's interest.

Despite its title, *Bird Map* charts a world of movement that includes much more than just avian migration routes. When utilising the legend Mackenzie has provided, we see that red lines, each differentiated through the inclusion of arrows, alternating dots, crosses, plus signs, and squares, mark the travel habits of birds, including those of screaming eagles, peregrine falcons, and herring gulls. Meanwhile, blue lines reveal the trajectories of mammals in motion, such as hamsters and ground squirrels, alongside reptiles like freshwater turtles and viper snakes. Fish species, such as



Landon Mackenzie, *Bird Map*, 2019, oil on linen, 84 x 112 in.

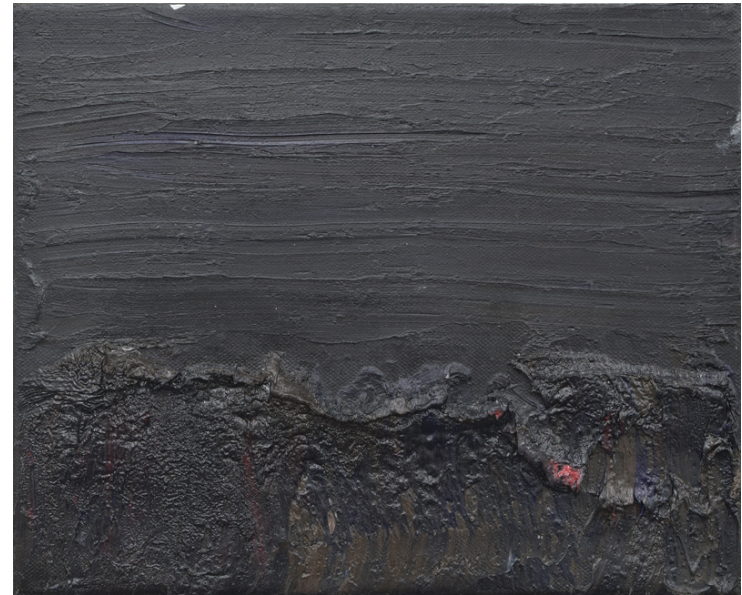


Map of Europe documenting bird and animal migration patterns, c. late 19th century. Courtesy of Landon Mackenzie.

eels, sea trout, and smelt, are tracked in dark brown, while black is reserved for invertebrates including tapeworms and butterflies. All of this is further complicated by the speckled yellow, pink, and blue backdrop of the work, which imitates the explosive effect of confetti, giving the work a buzzing, celebratory sense of action.

Deeply influenced by the history of map-making, and equally invested in questioning the sense of permanence and neutrality that often accompanies the practice of cartography, Mackenzie often retraces archival maps and diagrams, searching for bits of information which reveal traces of life and movement, or ways of experiencing the landscape which cannot be neatly pinned down, systematized, or even pictured. Her research-driven process explores both local, regional, and international geographies, thus problematizing the notion of rigid borders and neatly defined nation-states. “In marking a map there is always the question of language and representation and politics,” she says.¹ In her quest to map out the diversity of physical and psychic worlds she traverses, Mackenzie’s canvases often become dominated by intricate, layered networks of interconnected lines, each mark signalling a felt encounter with visible and non-visible phenomena.

Countering Mackenzie’s vibrant, multi-coloured canvas is the monochromatic work of UK-born, Vancouver-based artist Carolyn Stockbridge, represented in the exhibition by a series of small-scale black paintings alongside one larger-sized piece. Influenced by the principles of abstract expressionism and the work of artists like Ad Reinhardt and Agnes Martin, Stockbridge’s historically-informed practice reflects her belief in abstract painting as a vehicle of communication and consciousness, offering infinite



Carolyn Stockbridge, *Untitled (wave)*, 2019, oil on canvas, 9.75 x 12 in.

possibilities within its absence of preconceived figures or forms. Her thickly textured black paintings are similar to palimpsests, composed of layers and layers of pigment and material such as grit and beeswax, which are applied—and often removed and reapplied—with industrial tools such as squeegees and scrapers. The spontaneous and intensive process results in the creation of luxurious, tactile surfaces, which are built up in certain areas and thinned out in others, sometimes incorporating flecks of bright colour or revealing a glistening silver undercoat beneath all the layers of blackness. This tactility is particularly evident in *Untitled (wave)*, (2019) where black paint is congealed in a thick layer on the bottom half of the canvas, creating a sculptural form reminiscent of ocean waves, or perhaps the rocky ridges of a mountain range. “Landscape is an inevitable influence, [including] the



Carolyn Stockbridge, *Untitled (landscape)*, 2019, oil on canvas, 10 x 8 in.

inner landscape, the psychological state of being, and the landscape of humanity,” Stockbridge says. “Even in the purely abstract paintings, there’s always a horizon line.”²

Well versed in colour theory, Stockbridge makes use of brighter pigments in subtle doses, such as in *Untitled (landscape)*, (2019), where yellow paint is dappled throughout the centre of the work, and glimpses of that silver undercoat are visible at the edges of the canvas. Are we looking at the fading artificial lights of a cityscape at night, or deep into the surface of a reflective waterway? “Colour is always an experiment, interrupting the monochrome,” says Stockbridge. “Silver is a colour of conductivity– it signals that something is going on underneath.” Raising more questions than answers, the painting invites its viewers into a contemplative space, where manifold associations and interpretations are allowed and even encouraged. Blackness, here, becomes less of a void and more of a grounding point for new life, rebirth, and re-imagining, an aperture where nothingness gives way to possibility, to anything and everything. “It’s the colour of resistance, of consciousness and openness,” Stockbridge says. She prefers oil paint for its natural dynamism and flexibility: “It’s very much alive.” The medium’s long drying time also allows Stockbridge to “explore the idea of addition and subtraction” through continual and extended experimentation. Like Mackenzie, she views the process of painting as one which is implicitly loaded with meaning. “Within the layers [of paint], information is held,” she says. Abstraction becomes a vehicle of communication in her work, revealing and concealing data to varying degrees. “Painting conditions often replicate or take up the conditions of human life,” Stockbridge notes. Thus, her paintings, situated within and tied to particular times and spaces, reflect the shifting



Edward Epp, *Skeena-Near Terrace*, 2018, acrylic on canvas, 11 x 48 in.

psychological, social, and environmental states involved in their making.

Depicting British Columbia's north-western landscapes with ethereal, pastel-toned colour palettes and richly expressive brushstrokes, three paintings by Edward Epp serve as a prime example of the Shawnigan Lake, BC-based artist's *plein air* practice. The highly gestural, semi-abstract works demonstrate Epp's unique ability to capture various local environments through observation and subtle, intuitive deployments of texture and pigment. Initially trained in formalist painting at the University of Saskatchewan, Epp was deeply influenced by the painterly, prairie-focused landscapes of Dorothy Knowles and David T. Alexander, as well as the more abstract work of Otto Rogers. Motivated by an "ethical perspective" and a "world-embracing vision," Epp describes himself as a "restless globetrotter," having spent years travelling and living throughout Canada as well as overseas. After twenty years in northern British Columbia, he dedicated

a decade of his life to teaching art in Africa, at the University of Liberia and the University of Botswana. A later journey took him to China, where he spent two months travelling all over and taking in the vast country, before finally settling on Vancouver Island, where he lives and works now. These diverse experiences and cultural encounters have cemented Epp's belief in painting as a method to connect with and fully take in the ever-shifting environments surrounding him. His landscape paintings are largely made outdoors and on site, reflecting his belief in "the spiritual principle of authenticity in *plein air*" as well as his contention that "authenticity [comes from] getting to know the space you live in, getting it through your system, depicting those spaces." This understanding of space also takes time, requiring humility and deep patience: "Even if you're sincere, it takes a long time to understand the environment you're in," he says. "Painting is a way to feel [these] things. It's baring your soul. It's a deeply personal, subjective experience."

His practice is not only about landscapes, however; it's also about the people and communities inhabiting the myriad spaces that Epp has called home at different points in his life. As a dedicated art teacher and counsellor, he has a habit of "making connections with people on the land, and weaving this reality into the works." While his scenic paintings can veer towards the abstract and often lack a direct depiction of human presence or activity, the ease with which Epp can produce a particular sense of place, simply through an amalgamation of melding pigments and gestural, suggestive brushstrokes, reveals his distinct and holistic understanding of ecology and the relationships between living beings and the natural world. Epp's elongated portrayal of the golden banks of the Skeena River near Terrace, BC is a serene, soft-hued representation of the important waterway, which has historically served as a vital transportation route for Indigenous peoples, particularly the Tsimshian and the Gitksan. *Winter Grass-Snow-Near Saikuz* (2018), painted by the Saik'uz First Nation Reserve in Vanderhoof, BC, is even more subtle in its artistic language, where the negative space of the canvas dominates, becoming a snowy field interrupted only by loose, lengthy strokes of blue-black paint producing the effect of a craggy, forested mountain range in the far distance. Another landscape by Epp delivers a sublime view of Vancouver Island's Cowichan Bay where the sky, composed of melding light blue tones with patches of exposed canvas and touches of metallic paint; in the distance, a freighter drifts along the still waters, hinting at the bay's industrial function as a hub for commercial fishing and trade. Often clearly labelled and identified in his own handwriting, these works function as a testimony to the artist's presence in a particular area at a particular time and state, even sometimes carrying physical bits of the land with



Edward Epp, *Freighter-Cowichan Bay*, 2003, acrylic on canvas, 47 x 54.25 in.

them in the form of raindrop stains or a stray piece of grass cemented within layers of acrylic paint.

The exhibition includes two paper-based works and two oil on canvas works by Sechelt-based painter Vicky Marshall, touching on environmental themes which reflect the artist's concern with preserving and protecting regional and local ecosystems and her belief that art "should have something to say." Born in Sheffield, UK, Marshall has lived in Canada since an early age and views herself as a painter who is "very rooted in the West Coast." Having created a significant amount of her works *plein air*, she has now



Vicky Marshall, *Zig Zag*, 2022, oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in.

gravitated to studio work and is based on BC's Sunshine Coast, where, as she notes, "nature becomes a part of you." Through metaphorical means as well as direct observation, the artist responds to current devastating events such as the Okanagan wildfires of the past few summers, which she personally witnessed during a road trip through the region. "These fires, the bad logging practices that started them...they have to be addressed," she notes urgently. One of Marshall's canvases, entitled *Zig Zag* (2022), is a dramatic portrayal of an erupting volcano surrounded by a thick pyroclastic cloud made up of vigorous, swirling brushstrokes. The clever title references the twisting, turning stream of fiery lava that flows through the centre of the conical form, while Marshall's generous application of pigment gives the scene a

lively, textured presence. Like Stockbridge, Marshall prefers to work with oil paints, as she appreciates "the way it dries, how you can layer the paint, manipulate it, scrape it off."

While *Zig Zag* warns of the catastrophic potential in ignoring environmental issues, much of Marshall's work is also optimistic in tone, dedicated to advancing a tender appreciation of the earth's ability to rejuvenate and sustain itself against all odds. Visiting Summerland, BC, after her previous brush with wildfire season, Marshall discovered the presence of new growth blooming amongst the charred wilderness. Creating sketches and taking photographs of her revelatory discovery, she produced *Yellow* (2021), which depicts a close up view of a burnt out forest floor, with jutting branch lines, and rocks and stumps composed of dappled shades of grey, brown, and black. The work is enlivened by



Vicky Marshall, *October*, 2021, oil & charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 in.

the insertion of a small, bright yellow shrub at the bottom of the canvas, signalling the beginning of a regenerative process and highlighting the resiliency inherent to nature. “I want there to be hope,” says Marshall. Her works on paper echo this sentiment; in *October* (2021), a brush of colourful flowers and fauna has begun to take over the ashy forest grounds. Another work on paper, *They Will Fall* (2022), employs expressive brush and linework to depict a quintessentially Pacific Northwest forest scene. “Landscapes are very moving,” says Marshall. Her paintings, once described by *Galleries West* editor Portia Priegert as “raw and delicious,” invite viewers into a world of texture, tonality, and expression—all advanced and compounded by the urgent messages they seek to convey.³

The history of painting on Canada’s West Coast is one that has been dominated by depictions of vast landscapes and awe-inspiring natural scenery. Each artist in *Terrain*,

Migration, Place contends with this history while also imbuing it with their own critical understandings of what it means to be here today. Some, like Stockbridge and Mackenzie, forgo the figurative tradition completely in favour of more abstracted explorations of space, territory, and the environmental data that is implicitly captured in the act of painting a canvas. Others, like Epp and Marshall, draw on their direct observations and experiences with the lands and waters surrounding them, utilizing expressive visual techniques to convey ethical issues and messages. Together, they present a wide and exciting range of contemporary, locally-based approaches to painting and place.

— Mitra Kazemi

¹ Landon Mackenzie Mackenzie and Didier Bigo, “Vancouver is not where it is supposed to be: An interview with Landon Mackenzie,” *Cultures & Conflits* (December 5, 2009). Accessed at <https://journals.openedition.org/conflits/17414>.

² In conversation with the author, May 11, 2023. Unless otherwise noted, all quotes from artists are from exchanges between the author and the artist during the months of April and May, 2023.

³ Portia Priegert, “Vicky Marshall,” *Galleries West*, September 7, 2015. Accessed at <https://www.gallerieswest.ca/magazine/stories/vicky-marshall/>.