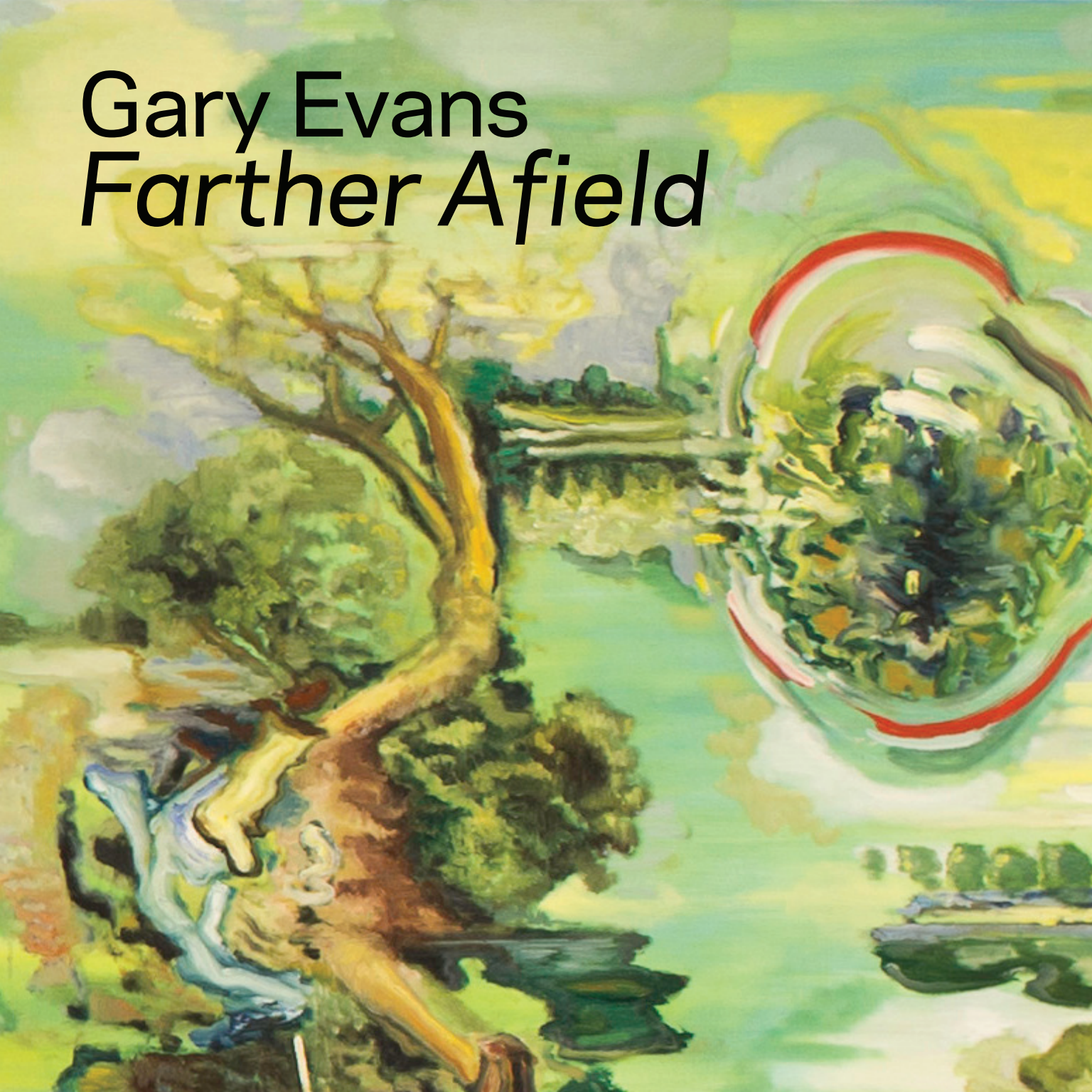


Gary Evans
Farther Afield





Two
2015
oil on canvas
107 x 137 cm

Gary Evans *Farther Afield*

Introduction by Stuart Reid and Renée van der Avoird

Essay by Pearl Van Geest

MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, Ontario



At the Mouth of the Woods
2014
oil on canvas
183 x 244 cm

Introduction

Gary Evans is a celebrated regional artist known for his experimental abstract paintings rooted in the landscape genre. The MacLaren Art Centre is pleased to present *Farther Afield*, a solo exhibition that combines a selection of Evans' oil paintings from 2005 to 2016 in the Janice Laking Gallery with recent paper collages in The Carnegie Room.

Although materially dissimilar, Evans' collages and paintings share key similarities: both are built from fragmented sources as part of an additive process. Furthermore, both are inspired by visual stimuli that surround the artist. The paintings—exuberant and intensely layered—challenge traditional notions of perception. They emphasize the psychological experience of travelling through space, and the shapes we encounter along the way. Some are set locally, such as *Gathered Landscape* (2006), in which Barrie's Molson Park (now Park Place shopping centre) reverberates with a cluster of hovering forms that shift between near and far, motion and stillness. In later works, Evans takes imagined landscapes as his subject. *Four in One* (2016), the most recent and most abstract painting in the show, portrays floating, organic forms cut away from meandering trails of negative space. Teeming with inventive colour, these paintings challenge us to view the world from an alternative vantage point, accelerated by spinning perceptions of movement through time and space.

The collages are a surprising departure for Evans. Emphasizing the visual impact of our increasingly mediated culture, he arranges excised imagery from fashion magazines into carefully constructed spatial collisions. Decontextualized, these fragments depict abstracted formal structures that echo the mysterious and furtive energies of his paintings. The suggestive depths of the paintings give way to flatness in the collages. However, the textures embodied in the photographic shards still translate a cognitive experience of perceptual volatility.

Accompanying *Farther Afield* is an essay by Pearl Van Geest, a Guelph-based writer and painter. Van Geest considers the malleability of contemporary painting, and how Evans' practice fits within this fluctuating realm. The principle of complementarity is central to her thesis. Referencing physics, philosophy and art history, she reflects on Evans' ability to "hold seemingly opposing tendencies in fluid suspension" in both his paintings and collages. Van Geest leaves us with a clear picture of Evans' prolific artistic output, one that continuously circles back to the splendour—and strangeness—of nature.

—STUART REID and RENÉE VAN DER AVOIRD, Exhibition Curators



Gary Evans: *Farther Afield*, installation view, MacLaren Art Centre, 2016

Sweet Spots, Densities and Rhythm

by PEARL VAN GEEST, guest essayist

*Art is the inversion and transformation of nature's profusion.*¹
—Elizabeth Grosz

Painting, especially as it is manipulated contemporarily, is a contradictory medium. It is fugitive and malleable and shifty. These probably contribute more to its strength and durability than do opposite characteristics equally as attributable to it—its ability to be emphatic, direct and expressive. One canvas alone can carry a multiplicity of perspectives and interpretive potential. Just when you think that you have it sorted out, you see things another way. Painting really can have it all.

Gary Evans makes paintings on whose surfaces a range of perspectives are marked. They hold seemingly opposing tendencies in fluid suspension. Exuberant movement and stillness; open space and restrictive boundaries; recognizable forms and a dissolution of contour; stability and flux; deep depth of field and shallow surface manipulations; optical effects and palpable tactility; elusiveness and bravado; the fanciful and the carefully observed; as well as macro and micro viewpoints, are amongst the contrapositions that vibrate between each other. Colour, rhythmic line and strange yet often familiar shapes and forms draw us in. As we look more—and give ourselves over to the looking—the play between these intersecting sets of complementary qualities reveals unexpected associations; they create integral rhythms, and generate new sensations and feelings.

Rhythm is laid down on the canvases in ripples, broken lines, colours and undulations. In *Two* (2015), for example, these marks swarm and traverse the canvas, coalescing and congealing into shapes that change and reappear out of the periphery to reform in other permutations when the eye rests upon them again. Evans' shifting forms are delineated by transitory contours temporarily created by the push of marks outward as much as they are created by the marks that construct a perimeter. The swift and then slow brush strokes reverberate around some vortex that periodically releases its hold in alternative pulses of expansion and contraction.



Gary Evans: *Farther Afield*, installation view, MacLaren Art Centre, 2016

This fluctuation of shape and form is especially evident in *Down to the Valley (After Rubens)* (2014). In it, some smudgy shapes are relatively solid but even these threaten to break apart at any moment. Colour-laden strokes are applied onto a hot orange background that is cleverly painted over in sections in hues close to the central orange so even that stability quivers and in parts is also engaged in “the battle between the foreground and background”² that Evans asserts as a constitutive part of his paintings. In this battle, receding spaces temporarily open up, suggesting private, mysterious and alluring places. We become the distant observer: a voyeur longing for secrets that can only be discovered within sweet spots amongst a tangle of lines, a flash of colour here, or a small little circle there. In *Down to the Valley (After Rubens)*, Evans leaves us to our own devices to find our way in, through and around a composition that teeters deliciously on the edge of dissolution. Different views emerge as perspectives shift and vie for prominence.

From theoretical physics, the principle of complementarity makes a striking analogy as a way to approach painting practiced in such a manner. In his book, *A Beautiful Question: Finding Nature's Deep Design*, Frank Wilczek, winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics, writes that, “from his immersion in the quantum world, where contradiction and truth are near neighbours, Niels Bohr drew the lesson of complementarity: no one perspective exhausts reality, and different perspectives may be valuable, yet mutually exclusive.”³ In some ways Gary Evans' art practice can be seen as a parallel exploration to that undertaken by the physicists Wilczek writes about, and while there are different aims between the worlds of art and science in their investigations of the material plane,⁴ the principle of complementarity holds true for both. Even the play between the ordinary and the strange is included in this party—and is at home in both worlds.

Things do get really strange and wild in *Florida (Piper)* (2010) where the melding and melting forms take on a fetid and apocalyptic air. Membranes encircle boil-like densities of paint that hover over glimpses of a modern suburb on one side and a wooded area on the other, colonizing and obliterating the landscape. It is all at once, both the best of dreams and the worst of nightmares. As in the myth of Pandora, it appears as if these oozy but luscious pustules are being let loose on the world from a box; in this case one that appears to be resting on a concrete platform suspended over uncertain terrain.

Red marks, free from attachments, lead us up and down a plane of reflection that lies just off to the right of the centre. Evans makes frequent use of this sort of mirroring in his compositions, creating slightly off-kilter symmetries where one side reflects the other, often in complementary and contradictory ways. In this case, a suggestion of a path in the woods reflects a manicured suburban trail and a bushy tree full of foliage mirrors a tree stuck in a concrete planter. Are we seeing two sides of the same coin; or perhaps facing sides of a page that was folding and pressed together when the pages were still wet with paint? The shape of one side echoes the other, often in reverse as if at one point they fit together and then were ripped apart—leaving divots and negative space from where the protruding form has been excavated.



Gathered Landscape
2006
oil on canvas
183 x 244 cm

This reflection of opposites and missing halves is found in *Gathered Landscape* (2006) where amoebic shapes made of concentric layers of complementary colour harmonies take over a luxury modernist mansion—disgorging the accumulated histories of its inhabitants. It makes sense that as a teenager, Evans favoured the films of Lynch over Spielberg: drawn to the undercurrent that cannot be contained, the terrible enigma at the core, the algal bloom that exudes from the fecund underbelly that lies beneath normalcy—and never giving it all away just like that.

Even in the most Arcadian of Evans' pictures some kind of disruptive element surfaces or threatens to rupture through the surface. Evans says that he is trying to “explain mysterious forces and give them structure.” He says that in painting he is, “speaking in code” for something “fundamental that is just outside of (one’s) grasp.” The philosopher Elizabeth Grosz expresses this concept in another way, writing that, “painting is about rendering the invisible in visible form.”⁵ In her book, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, she elaborates: “the visual and sonorous arts capture something of the vibratory structure of matter itself; they extract color, rhythm, movement from chaos in order to slow down and delimit within it a territory.”⁶ Within this territory that art demarcates, sensations are intensified and new perceptions are made possible. These, in turn, connect the body to chaos and cosmological forces that cannot be experienced directly.

There is a flipside to this concept of art from which *Florida (Piper)* and *Gathered Landscape*, in all their oozy wildness, can be viewed. Grosz explains that art is also the “converse movement”, a way to dismantle systems, territories and enclosures thereby “enabling something mad, asystematic, something of the chaotic outside to reassert and restore itself in and through the body.”⁷

One of the most powerful means by which art reaches the body is through rhythm—and it impacts and unifies all of our senses. Rhythm, the philosopher Gilles Deleuze explains, “appears as music when it invests the auditory level, and as painting when it invests the visual level. This is the ‘logic of the senses’, as Cézanne said, which is neither rational nor cerebral... It is diastole-systole: the world that seizes me by closing in around me, the self that opens up to the world and opens the world itself.”⁸ Rhythm beats from Evans' paintings and collages in ways that have been described already—through the expansion and contraction of the shapes, forms and lines; through the reflecting and flipping of shape and form; through the tactility of the lines and rhythmic brush strokes—and most profoundly through his use of colour.

Colour has powerful rhythmic potential when used in a way that links touch with vision by exploiting the vibrational energy of colour harmonies. In *Four in One* (2016), complementary hues of red and green, orange and blue and yellow and purple juxtaposed in graduations and modulations of warm and cool tones harness these energies. They vibrate in rhythmic frequencies that we “feel” with our eyes. This is the haptic function of colour.⁹



Switchblade
2016
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm



Gary Evans: *Farther Afield*, installation view, MacLaren Art Centre, 2016

Evans also uses colour rhythmically in ways that harken back to techniques developed by the Flemish Baroque master Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). Evans makes clear his admiration for and debt to Rubens in conversation. He shares with Rubens both exuberance and vitality, and a way of using a continuous play of curves to connect one form to the other and colour placement to link these forms together—often in counter point to the flow of the lines—which creates both dynamic movement and unity at the same time. In *Plane (After Rubens)*, the expansive sense of movement is slowed down here and there by an accumulation of paint, a small focused spiral, an opening, a distant view or a telling detail. It is lush and sensual.

Plane (After Rubens) isn't the only painting in whose title homage to Rubens is made directly. Evans may have removed the actual bodies in *Plane* but he has retained the animated quality of the fleshy intertwined forms. Shapes with, as Evans calls them, “fuzzy edges” emerge out of paint and interact with and twist around each other. Limb-like branches, pushing up and back intrude on the more thinly painted supportive space around them and are reflected in the shimmering surface below. The surrounding greens fluctuate in temperature and hue, from the yellow/greens of spring to delicate blues. They ripple next to each other as if the surface of a still lake oscillated under a sudden breeze.

Equally sudden in breaking the reverie of the shimmering and shifting tones of green is a broken circle of red, warmer and bright next to its complement of green; the only red around. It surrounds another dense, layered and intense painting incident. The whole form alternately emanates from the surface and opens into a wormhole leading to deep space. The red could be the edge of many things. As a bubble, the whole world around it is reflected in the convex surface. As a minute microcosm discovered on a half-submerged log by the shore of the lake, it is a world unto itself. Glimpses of tantalizing landscapes reside within. Euphoric, it can feel as if you have discovered some sort of paradise. Then some of the exterior forms seem to spread and loom over like mould on rotting wood or fungus on damp basement walls. Mood shifts and all is not what it seems. The tree limbs, if that is even what they are, look strangely deformed and animated. There's something of the Bosch in the Rubens.

Shapes with even more animation are the central characters in the collages or “patchwork constructions” that Evans cuts from fashion magazines. The shapes bear little allegiance to the integrity of the original forms, but traces and textures of the source remain: a draped elbow here, a section of a flowing skirt there and other lush pieces of fabrics that had ostensibly been draped around a human form. Evans uses the patterns of light and shadow falling on the original forms as a guide for the placement of the separate pieces in the construction of the overall shape. After keying for colour he lines up the highlighted areas so there appears to be continuity in whatever light source could be hitting the strange, cartoony forms that he assembles. This coherence and accompanying sense of movement adds to the idealization of the shapes. We are, as Evans puts it, “entering science fiction... toy territory that can become ridiculous.”

This mischievousness is but one way the collages act as complementary foils to their more tumultuous and (sometimes) more serious companion paintings, holding their own in spite of their relatively small size. They are, according to Evans, “purely optical”, playing off the manual tactility of the paintings. The strict white surfaces upon which the shapes are glued impose a sharp boundary to the edge of the cutouts, contrasting with the loose and changing contours created on the surface of the paintings. The forces acting on the painted canvas seem more tenuously centrifugal—as if the composition could blow apart with any movement. The collaged structures could drift apart but they seem more threatened by an internal force of gravity. They float in space, perfectly poised at the moment before all the fragments collapse in on each other, rotating and condensing into a denser ball of matter. The collages capture a suspended moment in time, while the paintings illuminate a passage, an accumulation of time.

Evans sees things through “an organic lens”, using the immersive and sensuous world as a way to get to the fundamental something that he is working to articulate. Because of this organic-ness and a foundation in the natural world he is often categorized as a landscape painter—a designation that isn't precisely accurate and one that Evans doesn't quite accept.

“Landscape”, Evans comments, “is easy to elucidate feelings from because everyone has a relationship of some sort with it.” However, he “never set out to be a landscape painter.” His primary objective is not to reproduce the things of the outer world. Certainly, sometimes recognizable things make their appearance—but briefly. Instead he conveys through “shapes, marks and densities” what “we are feeling when we look at”... landscape and then conversely, what we feel when we look at the works themselves, blurring boundaries between interiority and exteriority. In the end, his works act as parabolic devices, gathering and intensifying feeling as emotion, feeling as sensitivity, and feeling as sensation. He is projecting the vitality of the outer world, its rhythms, impulses and fields outward onto his canvases and collages. Through them we have access to a glimpse of nature's profusion.

¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the framing of the earth*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 10.

² All quotes unless stated otherwise are from an interview with Gary Evans conducted at his studio.

³ Frank Wilczek, *A Beautiful Question: Finding Nature's Deep Design*. (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 324.

⁴ As the philosopher Elizabeth Grosz tells us, “Where science seeks the regularities, predictabilities and consistencies – the patterns of this chaos, art seeks its force, its impact.” Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the framing of the earth*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 61.

⁵ Grosz, 82.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁸ Gilles Deleuze. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Daniel W. Smith tr. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003. French edition 1984/2002), 30-31.

⁹ The haptic function of colour is an analysis developed by Gilles Deleuze in *The Logic of Sensation*.



Untitled (all)
2015
printed paper collages
18 x 14 cm each
Collection of Herbert Bunt, Toronto



Gary Evans: *Farther Afield*, installation view, MacLaren Art Centre, 2016

Works in Exhibition – Paintings

Column #2, 2005

oil on canvas

183 x 122 cm

Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto

Gathered Landscape, 2006

oil on canvas

183 x 244 cm

Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto

Florida (Piper), 2010

oil on canvas

183 x 244 cm

Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto

Plane, 2013

oil on canvas

152 x 163 cm

The Donovan Collection,
St. Michael's College, University of Toronto

At the Mouth of the Woods, 2014

oil on canvas

183 x 244 cm

Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto

Two, 2015

oil on canvas

107 x 137 cm

Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto

Four in One, 2016

oil on canvas

152 x 163 cm

Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art, Toronto

Works in Exhibition – Collages

Camp, 2015
printed paper collage
56 x 76 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Coast, 2015
printed paper collage
48 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Growth Chart, 2015
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Here, 2015
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

The Reign, 2015
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Aquarium, 2016
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Black, 2016
printed paper collage
102 x 82 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Grey, 2016
printed paper collage
102 x 82 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Grey Tongue, 2016
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Lozenge, 2016
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Stabile, 2016
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Switchblade, 2016
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Untitled (group of four), 2015
printed paper collages
18 x 14 cm each
Collection of Herbert Bunt, Toronto

Untitled (group of three), 2013
printed paper collages
28 x 19 cm each
Collection of Herbert Bunt, Toronto

Untitled (group of three), 2015
printed paper collages
48 x 33 cm each
Collection of Gilles Latour and Richard Mortimer

Vespra, 2016
printed paper collage
76 x 56 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

White, 2016
printed paper collage
102 x 82 cm
Courtesy of Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Contributors' Biographies

Gary Evans was born in Weston Super Mare, England and lives in Alliston, Ontario. With a career spanning more than two decades, his numerous solo exhibitions include *Seeing Things: The Paintings of Gary Evans*, which toured across Canada, as well as *Station*, a survey of paintings presented at the Art Gallery of Windsor. He has participated in group exhibitions across Canada and internationally at venues including Humber Arts and Media Studios in Etobicoke, ON; Deluge Contemporary, Victoria, BC; the Tina B. Biennial, Prague, Czech Republic; and the Kaoshung Museum of Fine Arts, Taiwan. Evans is a graduate of the Ontario College of Art and Design and is the Coordinator at the School of Design And Visual Art, Georgian College, Barrie. He is represented by Paul Petro Contemporary Art in Toronto.

Pearl Van Geest is a Guelph artist, writer and educator. She is the 2015 recipient of the Canadian Art Foundation's Art Writing Prize.

Stuart Reid is the Executive Director of the Community Foundation Grey Bruce in Owen Sound. He is the former Director/Curator of Rodman Hall Art Centre, Brock University, St. Catharines.

Renée van der Avoird is the Associate Curator/Registrar at the MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie.

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Back page: *Column #2*, 2005, oil on canvas, 183 x 122 cm.

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MACLARENARTCENTRE

37 Mulcaster Street
Barrie, ON L4M 3M2
www.maclarenart.com

