

Plate Tectonics

As described by the 19th century British art critic John Ruskin, THE LANDSCAPE was the chief artistic creation of the nineteenth century, and from the late 1800s to the mid 20th century 'the landscape' proved to be the dominant artistic genre throughout Canada and in what is now the province of Alberta. In the annals of art history, however, the only constant is that artistic genre and styles change in both importance and approach and over the past fifty years the landscape genre has come to be viewed, on the national and international art stages, as a passive art form and *...an irrelevant purely descriptive activity with... overtones of conventionalism and nostalgia* (Mary-Beth Laviolette, *An Alberta Art Chronicle*, pg. 20). Despite this perception, however, the landscape as a subject worthy of consideration continues to be of import to many artists in Alberta.

There is a tendency when speaking of landscape paintings and drawings to state the obvious: that such art work is about the land. Such a generalization, however, ignores the nuances expressed within this practice. First, 'the land' is not a static entity. Rather, and as the topography of Alberta attests, it moves from terrain to terrain with each geographical region having its own unique character and demonstrating a great deal of diversity within itself.

Secondly, as the land alters in appearance, so too have artistic expressions of this subject changed through time, from artist to artist, and within individual art practices themselves. Rather than being engaged in a *purely descriptive* activity, landscape artists approach their subject in a diverse range of styles; through an array of media; and are engaged with the land for a variety of reasons that go beyond basic representation.

The term 'plate tectonics' refers to movements in the earth's crust. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition **Plate Tectonics** recognizes this process by exploring the enduring legacy of the landscape genre in Alberta and some of the ways and reasons why this subject continues to be rendered by artists in the province. Featuring the art work of Jennifer Annesley, Jim Davies, Les Graff, David Shkolny and Pam Wilman, this exhibition investigates both the physical topography of Alberta as well as the shifting stylistic approaches and intents expressed by these artists. Through this examination the exhibition **Plate Tectonics** expresses the beautiful diversity of Alberta's landscape as well as the continued vitality of the landscape genre in the visual art produced in the province.

*The exhibition **Plate Tectonics** was curated by Shane Golby and organized by the Art Gallery of Alberta for the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program. The AFA TREX program is financially supported by the Alberta Foundation for the Arts.*

FRONT COVER IMAGES:
Top: Jennifer Annesley, *Paintearth Spring*, 2017, Watercolour, Collection of the artist
Bottom Left: Jim Davies, *Aerie (Osprey Nest - Grassi Lakes)*, 2017, Oil on masonite, Private Collection
Bottom Right: Les Graff, *Lake Road Study #3*, 2001, Oil on masonite, Collection of the artist



The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program

The Art Gallery of Alberta is pleased to present this travelling exhibition to venues throughout Alberta. Currently the Art Gallery of Alberta serves over 60 venues in approximately 35 communities. Exhibitions on tour from the Art Gallery of Alberta easily adapt to space requirements of smaller venues: schools, libraries, museums, health care centres and other community facilities. The exhibitions are organized in such a manner as to make unpacking, packing, hanging and shipping as easy as possible. Along with the exhibition, each venue receives an Educational Interpretive Guide. These materials enable teachers to use the exhibition within the school curriculum.

The Alberta Foundation for the Arts Collection is the primary source of works featured in the travelling exhibitions. Other sources for exhibitions may include community partners, archives, private collections and loans from artists. Each year we welcome new venues to enrich their community art through the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program.

Our Thanks

The artists
The Alberta Foundation for the Arts

and to the many individuals, organizations and communities who contribute to the success of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Travelling Exhibition Program each year.

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A landscape painting is essentially emotional in origin. It exists as a record of an effect in nature whose splendour has moved a human heart and according as it is well or ill done it moves the heart of others.

Walter J. Phillips
Canadian artist (1884-1963)

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Jennifer Annesley
Precipice, 2017
Watercolour on paper
Collection of the artist

Born and raised in Edmonton, **Jennifer Annesley** has been painting since she was in grade 11. Encouraged to attend the Fine Arts program at the University of Alberta, Annesley graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1989.

At University Annesley majored in painting and visual communication design. While she learned a lot from all her instructors, she also learned what she was not interested in. At the time the Fine Arts program concentrated on formalist abstraction. Through her art history classes, however, Annesley developed a love of the old masters such as Rembrandt and Carravagio and more realistic treatments in painting and drawing. These interests have informed her art practice ever since.

In her work Annesley focuses on landscape, architectural and still-life subjects and her tastes, life interests and her art historical knowledge all influence her aesthetic. Enjoying a number of outdoor pursuits as well as having a love of historical architecture, she is fascinated by the structure and contrasts expressed in objects. As she has described it, whether she is drawing a mountain or a coffee cup, she is figuring out how things are built:

I create (my images) because I love to look at (my subjects) that way and I want to understand the structure of what I draw and paint. There's a love and honouring of the subject matter in my approach to it.

Annesley has described herself as a 'contemporary realist' and for the most part she is trying to portray reality. At the same time, however, the subjects are slightly idealized, romanticized and are often re-arranged to create an image. As articulated by the artist:

There's a little bit of exaggeration to get the point across. I'll exaggerate the light, for example, to really get the quality of the light that I experienced. While I still remain in reality and 'keep my feet on the ground', I do want to get my feel for the scene across.

In creating her work Jennifer Annesley hopes that viewers sense something of her experience and that they can relate to it and are moved somehow. As she states:

I believe in beauty and I'm thrilled when I can make something I feel is beautiful and the viewer can see it as well.



Pam Wilman
Monument Hill View, 2014
Oil on canvas
Collection of the artist

Born in Montreal, **Pam Wilman** moved to Edmonton in 1970 and graduated from the University of Alberta with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1984. This was followed by a teaching certificate from Cal-State in California and then teaching certification from the University of Alberta.

Following her university studies, Wilman began attending the Emma Lake artist workshops held at Emma Lake, Saskatchewan. Willman's studies at Emma Lake had a tremendous impact on her artistic style. Influenced by artists such as Dorothy Knowles, Greg Hardy and David Alexander, her painting style became a bit looser and more expressive. These artists were also creating huge plein air paintings and this very direct and immediate approach to working has inspired Wilman to the present day.

Wilman works in both oil paints and watercolours. As articulated by the artist, her style is

...not realism and not expressionism, but somewhere in between.

In her oil landscape paintings she aims for a visceral, immediate reaction to what she sees. Constantly visually editing the environment – both inventing and responding to it – she seeks to express

...my feeling about how I am when I'm there and what I'm seeing.

She describes her work in oils as loose, spontaneous and intuitive with her focus being on light and the colours and shapes she sees. Her approach to working in watercolours is rather different. While still editing the landscape on site, picking and choosing what to paint, she is more concerned with the actual structure of what she sees and is more concerned about observation and representation than in her oils.

Pam Wilman loves the experience of being out on the land and whether using oils or watercolours, wishes to share her experiences and enable viewers to understand how she sees the world and interprets space. As she states:

...what you see is what you get. What is portrayed is very authentic: that's my response while sitting on a hill.



David Shkolny
Pond Life, 2014
Pastel on paper
Private Collection

For Edmonton artist **David Shkolny**, art making involves a sense of discovery. While he has been a professional artist since 1992, he approaches each work anew and with a sense of freshness.

Born in Manitoba, Shkolny was raised in Fort Saskatchewan, Alberta. Like many western Canadian artists his first exposure to art was through landscape paintings and this genre has been his own focus throughout his art career. Shkolny often works in a representational style, loosely 'categorized as 'impressionistic' and based on plein air work and/or photographs. Despite this attention to a 'scene', however, Shkolny is not bound by strict representation. As he states

I'm along for the ride. I'm very process orientated. I put something down – a mark or colour – then respond to it. Things might start with a plan but that can change and I might 'destroy' the representational aspect for the sake of seeing what happens.

Shkolny received a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in 1992. He first attended Red Deer College where he majored in painting and printmaking and finished his degree at NSCAD (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design) where he finished his degree. While in Red Deer he began working with pastels and has concentrated on this medium for the past sixteen years.

Shkolny is quite experimental in his approach, utilizing materials such as compressed air and 'splashes' of water to create interesting effects. As expressed by Shkolny

...if the process becomes too rote you throw things into it which challenge you to approach the work in a different way and leaves you open to 'the happy accident.'

Although much of his work appears representational – *I want it to appear like something* – Shkolny also wants to intrigue the viewer by the process. For this artist, the important aspect of art making is the process of making a work itself and it is the building blocks of a painting – the marks, lines, colours, composition and shapes – which fascinate him. It is within this 'formal' dialogue and total immersion in the process that Shkolny finds enjoyment and he hopes that this comes across to the viewer and they will find their own engagement with a work.