VISUAL ARTS » REVIEW

Through a train window and onto a canvas

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GALLERY GOING

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MONICA TAP
AT WYNICK/TUCK GALLERY
$950 – $12,500. Until Jan. 12.
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In addition to its being arresting, the title of Monica Tap's new exhibition of paintings – One-second Hudson – goes some distance, as well, toward an understanding of why her paintings look the way they do (their apparent blurriness, for example), and how they came to be made.

For a couple of years now, Tap has been producing paintings based on stills extracted from the brief, low-res videos she makes with her digital still camera. This new sequence of paintings, now at Toronto's Wynick/Tuck Gallery, is, in general, the result of that method as well, but with important and, I would say, gratifying differences.

From December of 2005 until July, 2006, Tap, who teaches at the University of Guelph, used her sabbatical time to be part of the New York-based studio-residency program in painting. It was in the course of this sojourn that Tap took the train one day from Grand Central Station, journeying along the Hudson River to the Dia Art Foundation, Beacon, New York. Sometimes she gazed out the window, and sometimes (as is her wont) she videotaped the landscape passing by.

All in all, she videotaped about 15 minutes of the trip. When she monitored the footage later in her studio, she found herself searching, she told me in a recent phone conversation, for "the parts of the video where there was a lot of change happening" (towns, houses, the river). Why? Be-

Monica Tap's One-second Hudson No. 15, 2007:
Each painting in this series depicts 1/15th
of a second of her trip along the Hudson River.

cause, in the face of visual complexity, Tap explained, the rather primitive nature of the video function of her digital camera inevitably resulted in what was "almost a kind of technical failure," which, she assured me, provided the most interesting material for the making of paintings. "I had to choose a sequence", she told me, "that would be interesting enough to work on [that is, to make paintings out of] all through last summer."

Tap says she learned how to "export still images from her video passages." Now, she subsequently winnowed down the footage of her Hudson River trip into 10 seconds worth of material. But even this wasn't a stringent enough harvest, apparently, for Tap then proceeded to select only one second's worth of the voyage – which, because the camera's mpeg

format captures 15 frames per second, she could then further subdivide into 15 video "frames," each 1/15 of a second long. Each of these hectic, headlong "views" would then, she decided, become a painting. And so the 15 paintings making up One-second Hudson are each paintings depicting 1/15th of a second of her trip along the Hudson River.

So how do these visual snippets of time, these slivers of passing space, actually become paintings? Well, at this point, Tap's procedure gets almost endearingly perverse. What she does is to meld her hi-tech videotape practice (which is fast) with her traditional, fundamental love of painting with oils on canvas (which is slow). She projects her video stills onto the linen canvases waiting on her studio walls and then, with the studio lights off and

by working very close to the canvas surface, proceeds to paint – like any conventional painter.

The resulting One-second Hudson paintings are perhaps Tap's best to date. They are sumptuous things which somehow manage both to capture the hurtling energies of speed and, at the same time, the deep, contemplative, hedonistic richness of oil paint manifesting itself as pleasure made palpable. Her palette, Tap says, is from Monet: his five colours – Cobalt Blue, Cadmium Yellow, Chrome Oxide Green, Rose Madder and Vermillion. As a result, the paintings possess a soft pastel glow, like the outside world viewed through steam or frost – if the outside world were tumbling by at 100 kilometres an hour.