

and a true embarrassment of brushwork, opacities, and colour daubs radiates from the confines of their large-scale frames. *Between winter and summer* (2009) is one such piece. A bright, turp-thinned, under-painted orange bleeds though the slim trees that cross the middle left side of the painting. The olive and umber and sap and beige of tree and leaf and rock and sky are backlit by this uncanny glow. Thick, triangular shards of paint punctuate the surface with a gooey, shiny viscosity that breaks the painting's spell of loose verisimilitude. This is the glare of the window, the glare of the screen.

Time and speed are essential themes in Monica Tap's paintings. Her works are testaments to the frailty of a moment, incandescent renderings of a travelling landscape that rushes past in a trace-like convoy. The speed of video. The speed of information. The speed of light that reaches our eyes: a whirlpool of data reaching our brains with ferocious velocity. The speed of a brush, attached to a hand, attached to a body. Ten frames per second. There is a careful urgency to Tap's mark making. She is making these marks as fast as she can, as fast as she can maintain control over her eyes and body and materials. Fat over lean over hardy-even- there. Every once in a while she is able to breathe: masking tape placed on almost wet paint, lifting a little bit but bleeding a little more. These paintings give us the optics of speed. The *plein air* landscapes of Impressionism happened at the speed of real life, but that was the pastoral life of Sunday excursions: day-trippers and faux-bourgeois tourists. Monica Tap's paintings are the speed of commuters, the speed of necessity. Process and exhale.

Time and speed are likewise important themes in the work of Michel Daigneault. In contrast to Tap's turbulence, however, Daigneault's collage-like mash-ups give us a sense of being "out of time." His use of worky, Surrealist compositional conventions immediately signals the roundabout fancy of dreamscapes. For if the legion of André Breton has taught us anything, it is this: we know what our subconscious is supposed to look like. Daigneault wields this trope with inspired virtuosity. His shapes morph unhurriedly into smeary fields of lush, open hues. There is a leisurely narrative in the sky by an airplane. This is slow looking. We feel the deliberateness of our gaze. Moving our eyes alone seems inadequate. We have to move our whole head, our whole body. Stepping in, moving back, we discover more at each interval. At every step, the funny-strangeness of his eccentric plot proverbially thickens.

Memory is likewise an important theme in the work of Monica Tap. Camcorders are a tool meant to enhance personal memory. For people of a certain age, few important moments in our early lives are not contained on some form of magnetic strip. The contemporary task of enhancing memory is, of course, more or less assigned to the realms of the digital. An algorithmic stream of ones and zeros perfectly recreates my son's first birthday, or at least the parts of that event that seemed worthy of having the lens turned in their direction. In this sense, there is something mildly creepy and ultimately tragic about the direction in which Monica Tap points her lens. The "rugged Canadian landscape" that once seemed so eternal to the Group of Seven and their horde appears, in Tap's paintings, to be fleeing and ephemeral, in danger of vanishing. These are not only landscapes passing from our vision: they are also passing from our experience. Monica Tap wants to remember. She wants us to remember too.

Michel Daigneault's paintings are (up)loaded with a vast inventory of visual memory. As if you are referring through a second-hand shop filled with recycled design motifs and hermetic art historical references, these paintings present an immense catalogue of twentieth-century painting and its fallout as twenty-first-century kitsch. In this regard, Daigneault's paintings are particularly lewd. Generally focusing his art historical lens on more peripheral or "marginalized" Modernist moments, Daigneault pulls an assortment of skeletons from the annals of twentieth-century abstraction and mixes these motifs with similarly bluish-inducing moments from popular culture. These works probe and indulge a vast range of our guilty pleasures. *Quand la couleur signifie* (2006) is a particularly intriguing instance. Several flame-coloured flame balls fall through the centre of the canvas into a fleshy heap of misery, over the Post-Painterly background haze. This moment of trompe-l'œil slapstick best encapsulates the encyclopedic humour of Daigneault's work. Monstieur Greenberg, however, would not be laughing.

## HOW MUCH MEMORY DO I HAVE?

The epigraph is from John Stuart Mill's essay "The Spirit of Poetry and Prose," ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), pg. 508. The fig. 1, which appeared in the *Examiner* on January 9, 1851. Deproduced in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 22, *Newspaper Writings December 1822–July 1831*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pg. 92. Part 1, ed. Anne P. Robson and John M. Robson. (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), pg. 62. "Howard E. Hugo, "An Examination of Friedrich Schlegel's "Gespräch über die Poesie," *Monatshefte* (University of Wisconsin) 40, no. 4 (April, 1948), pg. 230.

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"I want to be a machine" is one of the more famous Andy Warholisms in circulation. In contemporary art, however, artists have extended and refined this notion. Monica Tap wants to be a camcorder. Michel Daigneault "wants to be" Photoshop. The obvious difference between their methodologies, however, is that where Warhol sought a more "mechanical" means of production (through silkscreen), Daigneault and Tap deliberately court the individual machinations of their own bodies and imaginations. In so doing, their work captures a splinter of precision about what it is to be, here and now. Of course, some would argue that the medium of paint is itself an anachronism and that more "contemporary materials" offer a more "honest" reflection of our current moment (the art world's peculiar brand of *contemporary* gives us context. For painters, the history of painting is the common denominator through which we can compare the nebulous scope of our collective experience. Through it, we gain a more thorough understanding of where we've been and where we sit. The paintings of Monica Tap and Michel Daigneault offer us this.

## HOW MUCH STORAGE CAPACITY DO I HAVE?

## OPERATING SYSTEMS

By Pete Smith

Whatever we may think or affect to think of the present age, we cannot get out of it; we must suffer the sufferings, and enjoy the enjoyments; we must share in its lot, and, to be either useful or at ease, we must even partake its character.

— John Stuart Mill

Although it could be successfully argued that Baudelaire's "The Painter of Modern Life" is the prototypical manifesto for the entirety of Modernist painting, many of its underlying treatises had been lingering in the cultural atmosphere for quite some time. The idea that the function of artist-intellectuals in a society is to form and to express an intensely insightful understanding of the character of their age was inherited from Romanticism generally and German Romanticism specifically. The notion of *Zeitgeist* as "the collective individuality of a society"<sup>1</sup> and the view that high art should aspire to a sense of "fidelity to the spirit of the age"<sup>2</sup> were central ideologies that underscored the potency of the movement. Thus Shelley's famous English-language decree that artists are "mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present"<sup>3</sup> had its intellectual roots in the movement's original, continental branch.

The true stroke of Baudelaire's genius, however, is found less in his framing of the artist as the inspired revealer of hidden truths than in his specific understanding of where these truths were to be found in modernity: in "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent."<sup>4</sup> Thus, if we squint past the opulent glare of Baudelaire's romantic hyperbole, we uncover fragments of lucidity that bear consideration for the present moment as well. If the invention of photography had any more resounding impact on the development of Modernist painting, on Manet and his followers, it was this: that faithfully representing these newly uncovered truths was no longer enough. Rather, the painterly processes that created these representations had to further encapsulate modernity's perpetually shifting character. Paintings could no longer merely describe the present; they had to *embody* it. This thesis is thoughtfully and passionately argued throughout modernity. In countless manifestos, criticisms, and *paintings*, the familiar refrain is this: different forms of experience necessitate different forms of expression.

# Monica Tap and Michel Daigneault UNNATURAL

Unnatural  
Monica Tap and Michel Daigneault  
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Monica Tap, *Between winter and summer*, 2009, oil on canvas, 60 x 80 inches.  
Front: Michel Daigneault, *Open sky*, 2006-07, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 74 inches.  
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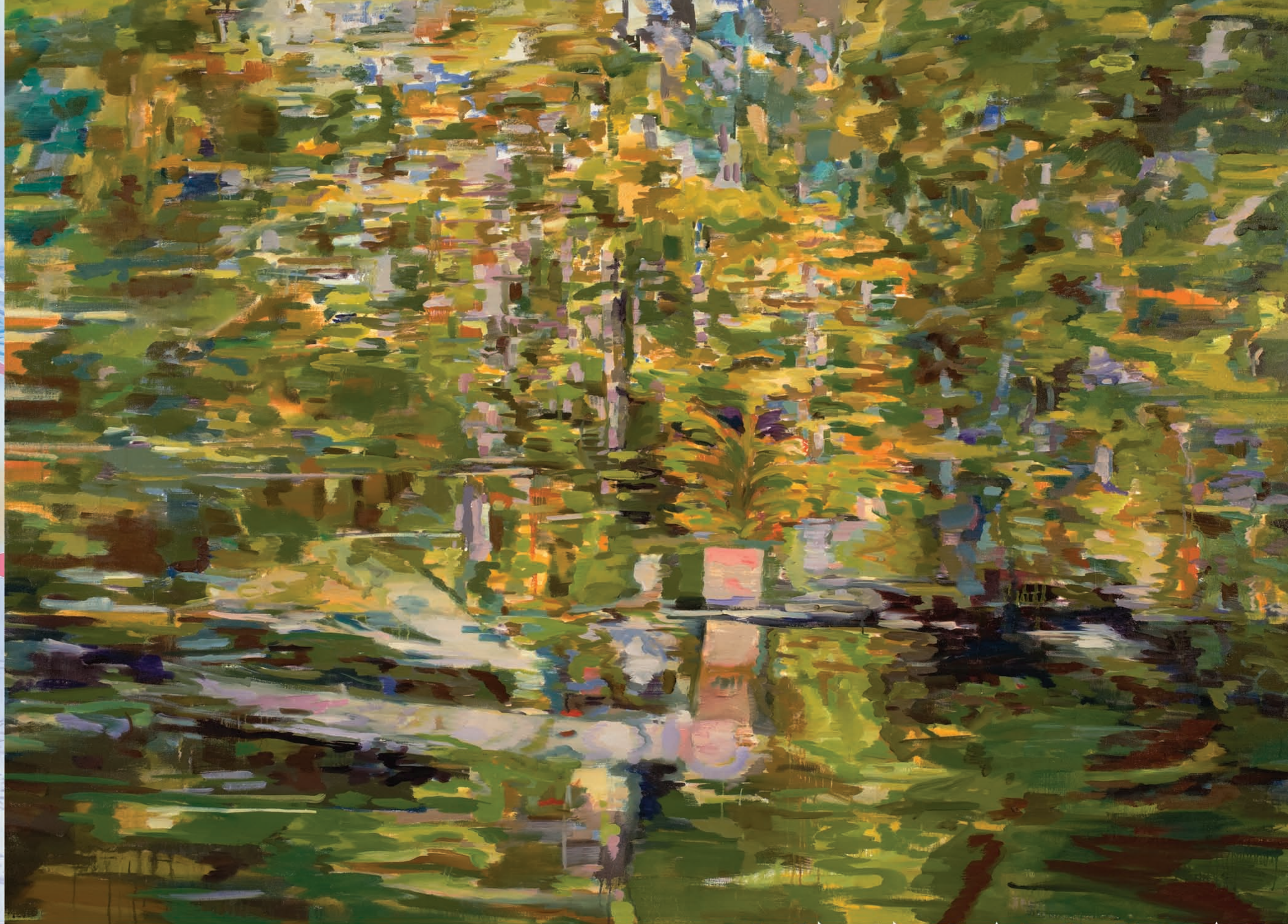
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"Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," in Shelley's the fig. 1, which appeared in the *Examiner* on January 9, 1851. Deproduced in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, vol. 22, *Newspaper Writings December 1822–July 1831*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), pg. 92. Part 1, ed. Anne P. Robson and John M. Robson. (New York: St. Martin's, 1999), pg. 62. "Howard E. Hugo, "An Examination of Friedrich Schlegel's "Gespräch über die Poesie," *Monatshefte* (University of Wisconsin) 40, no. 4 (April, 1948), pg. 230.

"By which I mean that the painting is entirely "completed" before his wet-on-wet blurring occurs.  
"As in "You know, I actually really like YES album covers."





Monica Tap and Michel Daigneault

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