

UNEMBARRASSED BEAUTY

By Gary Michael Dault

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Painting has been in crisis for four decades now. The worst years were during the 1970s, when people who loved painting kept it to themselves like a guilty secret. In the 1980s, painting came back, but it came back stricken with self-consciousness or puffing with bravado and winking at its own despair.

And now, suddenly, there is painting everywhere -- pure, irony-free painting, painting that revels in unembarrassed beauty.

John Kissick's paintings at the Leo Kamen Gallery are so delicious they're almost obscene. Kissick, who teaches at the University of Pennsylvania, paints with oils, alkyd resin and varnish on 30-centimetre squares of sheet copper. He often distresses his paintings in the process, roughing them up with steel wool, scraping pigment away and cracking their surfaces (some look like Albert P. Ryder's scuffy little seascapes from the 1890s). It is this robust physicality that keeps the paintings from getting precious.

If you squint at them from across the gallery, they look a little like classic abstract expressionist pictures -- De Koonings, Motherwells, early Gustons -- viewed through the wrong end of a telescope. But, unlike big, macho Ab Ex paintings, these are about intimacy and depth, not speed and expansiveness. These are paintings you look into rather than at, your entry facilitated by the almost unavoidable landscape associations Kissick allows. His horizontals read easily as horizons, his fervid scumbles of lush pigment bloom into copses and thickets, his looming blacks double as storm clouds. But, if you give in to reverie, you get even further. You get to the romance with colour that lies at their very heart. *\$1,800 each. Until Oct. 24, 80 Spadina Ave., Suite 406. 416-504-9515.*

The paintings of Halifax-based Monica Tap are equally splendid -- and also markedly landscape-derived. Open and airy where Kissick is dense and gnarled, Tap's pictures are made up of rapid, directional strokes of paint, feathery, delicate. Building directly upon painting of the past, Tap progressively abstracts herself away from her models, claiming the basic composition of a Renaissance genre picture or an 18th-century landscape, for example, and then immersing the idea of it in a maelstrom of her own calligraphic painting. Full of vivacity and pigment joy, Tap's hectic musters of red-grey and orange-pink, of autumnal green-brown and plummy rose (*Journey-Red* is a masterly confection of cream and plummy rose), are sensuous and satisfying.

In the project room, adjacent to Monica Tap's, is a small, delectable show by Kelly Mark. Wittily called *Drawings*, the exhibition is, in fact, a collection of highly generalized wooden objects -- a baseball bat, rolling pins, a cane, a hockey stick -- covered smoothly in velvety-black graphite. Each drawing/object simply announces, in Mark's deadpan way, that it is the product of "graphite on wood." Does this sound cute? It's not. It's

severe, mordant, darkly playful. I suppose you could even call it black humour. *Monica Tap's works are \$1,200 to \$5,500. Kelly Mark's works are \$1,100 to \$1,800. Until Oct. 24. 80 Spadina Ave. 416-504-8716.*

Andreas Hintermaier at Paul Petro Contemporary Art

Paul Petro Contemporary Art plays host this month to a highly absorbing video installation, *Traces and Murmurs*, by Munich-based media artist Andreas Hintermaier. Responding to the accumulated use and memory embodied in the three-storey Victorian building housing the gallery, Hintermaier built a model on the third floor of the gallery's white interior, upon which he trained two miniature video projectors. The projectors, which hang almost invisibly from the ceiling, cast eerie images onto the tiny walls -- shadowy figures passing in and out of rooms, someone climbing the stairs, someone writing on the gallery wall -- all images shot in the main-floor gallery proper. The six-minute videotape loop is accompanied by a sound track, heard throughout the building, of a collage of voices, a muffled chorus of recollections and recountings of the speakers' experiences of interior spaces. *Until Oct. 31, 265A Queen St. W. 416-979-7874.*

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