

Wylie: John Kissick's 'seething compositions'



John Kissick, Re-mix No. 3, 2009, acrylic and oil on canvas, 167.6 x 167.6 cm, courtesy of Leo Kamen Gallery.

By [Liz Wylie - Kelowna Capital News](#)

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At 3000 square feet, the Treadgold/Bullock exhibition gallery at the Kelowna Art Gallery would normally be considered a fairly large space.

In order to make it seem instantly much smaller it took only the installing of 19 paintings by Ontario-based painter John Kissick. It's not only the large size of Kissick's works, but their raucous and wild shapes and colours, that cause this strange phenomenon of shrinking the space, such that a visitor might actually feel a bit choked and claustrophobic.

These zany paintings push hard on the limits of taste and decorum of what a painting ought to look like. Visitors can see the artist's path over the last 10 years, starting with the more muted, abstract works on wood from the early 2000s.

Much of Kissick's work from the mid years of the first decade of this century and millennium do not exist anymore, as he has reworked them more recently into his so-

called Re-mix series. The Re-mixes then grow in size from five-and-a-half foot squares to seven-foot-square canvases that are untitled.

After these come the most recent works in the show, three seven-foot-high whoppers called Groovefucker. Apologies for the profanity of the series' title, which is a real term referring to the mash-up phenomenon of the DJ music scene in dance clubs.

The title is also a reference to Kissick's assemblage method of working, in which he makes like a magpie, picking up bits and pieces of visual information (from components of nasty 1970s super-graphics and bathtub stickers to colour-test patterns), shoving them all together in single seething compositions.

Kissick is concerned a lot with language, both verbal and visual. He cut his academic teeth on critical theory, back in the 1980s, and still views his practice through this lens in certain ways.

There is a challenging rigour to his madness, and nothing slapdash about his method of working. In fact, the nervousness of the show's title (*A Nervous Decade*) refers to the artist's wrangling with the problem of painting itself in the contemporary period, how to make it alive, valid and current, without jettisoning its relationship to its own history and traditions.

The accompanying exhibition catalogue is a wonderfully colourful product with excellent production values, its design reflecting the whacky and punchy quality to Kissick's paintings.

Both the show and this catalogue are the results of a collaboration between the Kelowna Art Gallery and the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery. That community is the next town over from Guelph, Ont., where Kissick is the director of the School of Fine Art and Music at the University of Guelph, although he lives in a tiny village by the name of Elora.

Kelowna is the first stop for the show after its opening in Kitchener last summer, and from here it goes on a national tour.

In the meantime, visitors to the Kelowna Art Gallery can enjoy these intriguing paintings until May 8.

Liz Wylie is the curator at the Kelowna Art Gallery.