

DEREK LIDDINGTON

The trees weep, the mountain still, the bodies rust

The trees weep, the mountain still, the bodies rust features a new body of work by Derek Liddington in which the genre of landscape is the central focus. Having turned away from performance and drawing in recent years to explore the medium of painting, Liddington examines how we experience the landscape rather than how we see it. He challenges the material limitations of the canvas with strategies that seek to capture transformation and movement. By doing so, he confronts the historical canon of painting as a way to reconsider its legacy.

Liddington's dense canvases visually translate the idea of immersion in a forest so dense our sense of orientation is hindered. Forests are worlds formed of multiple layers, not unlike the artist's painting process. In his compositions, there are no visual clues to prioritize important elements; the rules of perspective that usually guide our gaze are discarded in favour of emphasizing the surface. As such, the essential character of each part of the composition is emphasized, from the most imposing to the most humble. In nature, a forest's height and depth are organized according to an invisible logic: the ground's humus contains complex life forms that are essential to the regeneration of an ecosystem that is also built up in layers, with old growth forests literally growing on the edge of one another. It's difficult to locate oneself spatially and temporally in this type of environment because the logic that governs it is beyond our comprehension. Imagining ourselves in the forest involves the question of scale: the body and the temporality of human life become standards of measurement that allow us to put this world into perspective in order to better understand it and our relationship to it. But *perspective*—something these paintings don't rely on in a traditional way—requires stepping back to visually embrace the scene as a whole and capture its spirit. The experience of a forest hampers this reflex, or at least complicates it by reminding us that we live in an all-encompassing and interconnected world in which self-abstraction is impossible, other than to delude ourselves.

As a representation, the forest translates a relationship to the world that is the opposite of gazing out from the shoreline to the infinite horizon of the sea. Although the sight of such vastness might feel vertiginous, a certain sense of authority comes from having one's feet firmly planted on the ground. But at the heart of a forest, reference points become blurred, perceptions are confused, fears are awakened. What's that shape over there? Is it an animal or just the shadow from the canopy of trees? And is that a foot I see between the leaves, or just the outline of hills in the distance? Liddington plays with these illusions by revealing the artifice behind his paintings' construction, the way they assert their flatness and bring us back to their material nature. By imagining ourselves outside of the forest, separate from the ecosystem that supports us, we adopt the viewpoint of someone who asserts their independence at a remove from their surroundings. It means that we avoid questioning the logic of extraction that has guided us until now and that has caused environmental consequences we've only just begun to understand. By systematically bringing us back to the surface, to what is closest to us, under our nose, Liddington shows that proximity isn't always synonymous with clarity; it can often lead to disintegration and abstraction. Perhaps this is a comment on our current times, where decisions are often seemingly made with only short-term effects in mind because considering the bigger picture is so complex that it feels paralyzing.

The trees weep. The bodies rust. The mountain, still, seems imperturbable. And yet, what is this camouflaged giant if not a sign of imminent danger, of the insatiable appetite of the capitalist system we have created? Like a fable, this exhibition weaves a narrative whose uncertain outcome hints at the chaos of moral disorder. We've been warned.

Anne-Marie St-Jean-Aubre, Curator of Contemporary Art

Translation: Jo-Anne Balcaen

DEREK LIDDINGTON

Mississauga, Ontario, 1981

1. *From all around, east to west, north to south, up and down, left and right, they were there, and I was here.*

2022

Mural, latex paint

Variable dimensions

The artists thanks the Canada Council for the Arts, Corrie Jackson, Cash Brown-Liddington, Abby McGuane, Jamie McMillan, and Michael Simon for their support.

2. *It was a foot. It was a flower. It was rust. It is movement. It is still. It was dirt. It was movement. It was still.*

2021

Oil on canvas

157.5 x 127 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

3. *all at once. our lamented flesh, your porous stone, my watery eyes, your bubbling rust.*

2021

Oil on unstretched canvas

333 x 244 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

4. through the glass, past the shadow, beneath the rust, compressed flesh, shortened breath, the ground and us.

2021

Oil on canvas

157.5 x 127 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

A few paintings in this exhibition, including this one, make references to the fruit in a still life by Cézanne and feature human silhouettes inspired by a watercolour and sculptures by Rodin. As if drawn from the depths of Derek Liddington's memories, these motifs seem to emerge on the surface of his paintings. In some works they accumulate and appear to tremble, like sun-dappled leaves about to be carried away by the wind. Elsewhere, shapes have the density of shadows; although evanescent, flickering, and intangible, they are also visible. These effects attempt to represent time and movement, that is, the idea of transformation, through paint, within an object—a painting—that is by definition static. Cross-hatched, gleaming, composed of successive layers that meld into each other, these paintings celebrate their materiality by revealing that they are merely illusions. As thin, floating canvases, they are, ultimately, simply flat planes.

5. A vine molded in clay and cast in bronze from a memory experienced when I was 12 and forgotten when I was 36

2018

Bronze

81.3 x 20.3 x 17.8 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

6. the flowers billowed with each step. our bodies still in the dust.

2021

Oil on unstretched canvas

323 x 244 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

7. they reached out to hold the frame as if they were holding the moon, as if they were holding the sun, as they hold my hand, as we look at the painting.

2022

15 paintings, oil on canvas, custom-made stretchers

Variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

8. locked together, I blinked. you were there, they blinked. you were gone. they were closer. you were here. I was there. you were gone. leaves gather, arms outstretched.

2021

Oil on canvas

127 x 157.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

9. it was night. It was rust. It was you. It was me. It was skin. It was day.

2021

Oil on canvas

45.7 x 55.9 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

10. concealed by night they lay strewn across the earth's surface for all to see

2021

Oil on unstretched canvas

182.9 x 813 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

Giants, witches, elves, dwarves, fairies: Western civilisations have long imagined the forest as being charged with a strange and instinctive energy, sometimes personified, sometimes not. Derek Liddington's giant echoes traditions that consider the forest as a place that is inhabited by the Other, an antagonistic, external presence that we define ourselves against. But by rendering the foliage and human hands and feet in similar ways—as extensions of the landscape—he suggests they share a common origin. His colour palette of ochre, rust, and green tones evokes nature's transitional states: the humus that results from rotting leaves, the moss-covered tree trunks, the dark blotches that signal aging and putrefaction. These processes affect all forms of life, both in nature and in the human body. Although interpretations of his work can lead to deeper reflection, Liddington refuses to subscribe to painting's generally serious reputation. With his unusually shaped canvases, he uses humour as a vehicle to question a noble and traditional medium, which throughout history has been used for religious, political, social and esthetic purposes.

11. A vine molded in clay and cast in bronze from a memory experienced when I was 12 and forgotten when I was 36

2018

Bronze

61 x 35.6 x 16.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Daniel Faria Gallery

FLOOR PLAN

1st floor

Salle EBI



