



GALLERIES



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Mike Bayne Days Road, February 2008

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BY DAVID BALZER April 01, 2009 21:04

EDITORIAL RATING:

To Apr 18, Thu-Fri noon-7pm; Sat noon-6pm; Sun 1-5pm. Katharine Mulherin Contemporary, 1082 Queen W. 416-993-6510. www.katharinemulherin.com.

While contemporary art often does its best to ignore critics, it has hardly erased them. Artists now largely take up that role (in a manner that has little to do with Oscar Wilde's complex and even moral conception of it in "The Critic As Artist"), writing statements and laying bare their own biographies so that, in many cases, it is quite impossible to find meaning in their work without their own overt, and frequently dubious, guidance. Critics proper are thus used to having their hands held, and this is why, in part, representational painting has had such a hard time of things — especially the non-narrative sort like Mike Bayne's, which is concerned with precise rendering. Bayne is a photo-realist but I imagine he does not fully ally himself with Gerhard Richter, whose photo-realism always courts the speculation of critics, loudly declaring itself theoretical. Pair Bayne instead with fellow Canadians like the Pratts or Ken Danby, or with California photo-realists like Robert Bechtle, all of whom have taken drubbings by critics who can't understand why a contemporary artist would choose as her or his goal to paint from life really, really well.

That goal is, of course, far from simple and is certainly not easy. Indeed, it is all too rare for a young artist to have it these days, for it requires, above all, patience. So when you go to Bayne's new show at Katharine Mulherin's — and you must, for you won't see a better one this year — try to curb your compulsion to see beyond the work into some kind of chattering, ideological framework. The 10 paintings are each only four by six inches, even from a near distance resembling photographs, and depict in great detail suburban and small-town architecture. Like all good landscapes, their philosophy comes directly from the technique that goes into them; as a viewer, one is asked to see as the artist has, and to appreciate the timeless bounty of that act. Anything that's painted as religiously as these scenes is instantly beautiful — if you believe beauty to be born of labour, intricacy and sensitivity of presentation.

But isn't Bayne being a show-off, painting for the sheer sake of proving to us how accurate he can be? If you choose to believe this, you may even look for mistakes and (occasionally) find them, but you will be missing out. What Bayne gives us is incredibly generous, and it would be foolish to take it suspiciously, or not at all. It says so much, in fact, that it leaves this critic rather pleasantly dumbfounded.

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