

from one world to the next. Similarly, Barry Allikas' *Light Trap*, while embracing hard-edge aesthetics, also draws upon genetics and informatics and is not afraid to let one of its pixel-like forms function as a dropped shadow. The perceptual realism of Renée Duval with its nuanced control of light and careful situating of the spectator's point of view recalls the sublime installations of James Turrell and Robert Irwin in its ability to transport us. Jennifer Lefort seems to understand the way paint as *matière* can slither and slide back and forth between object-hood and nothingness, hovering at the threshold, her mark-making too emphatic to ignore, her imagery too elusive to nail down.

In recent years, no Montreal painter has been involved in more open-ended and ambitious explorations of pictorial space than Dil Hildebrand. Blurring the line between landscapes and interiors, actual spaces and psychological states, with great technical panache, he is constantly redefining the nature of a painted surface and what it can import. While Nicolas Grenier's most recent production has focused on architectural renderings, his trademark saturated palette and super-realist technique manage to seep into *Vertically Integrated Socialism*, mutating the scaled diagram into a living cell. Like René Magritte or Michel Gondry, Anthony Burnham is fascinated with the joyous and duplicitous nature of reality, turning the mundane into a matter of great seduction and perplexity.

In drafting this short text, I have to admit that I sometimes feel conflicted. I sense as I write that I am being too pedantic, or worse that I am stating the obvious. What makes me feel better is that, as an artist, I know that any good work of art always defies whatever is said about it. Enjoy the show!



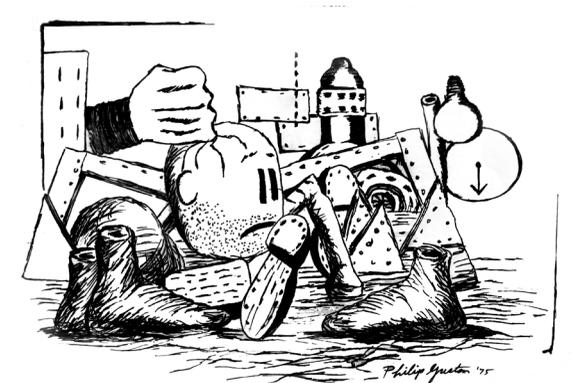
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The exhibition *Between the Cracks (Picturing the Fourth Dimension)* is presented from November 5 to December 17, 2011.

Between the Cracks

(Picturing the Fourth Dimension)

by David Elliott

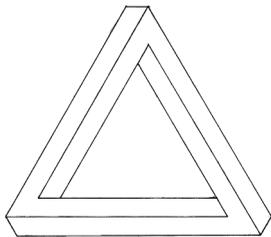


Philip Guston, Untitled (1975), private collection, Montreal

To transform three into two dimensions is for me an experience full of magic in which I glimpse for a moment that fourth dimension which my whole being is seeking. – Max Beckmann

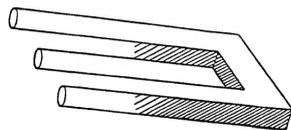
This exhibition explores the idea that paintings, with their intrinsic intermingling of time and space, can serve as vehicles to another dimension. It takes as its point of departure a passage from a 1938 lecture by Max Beckmann in which he suggests that in the irreconcilable task of translating a three-dimensional world onto a two-dimensional plane, artists will, on occasion, unlock the *fourth* dimension. Beckmann's basic premise is that the failures to create a rationally readable pictorial surface provide the ruptures or glitches in the system that can lead us into deeper, transcendent spaces: the cracks.

The mechanics of creating pictorial space are various and well-documented in Rudolf Arnheim's *Art and Visual Perception*. Perspective, depth of field, tonality, chromatics, geometry versus the organic, repetition, isolation, overlapping or butting of forms, the gravity and sequence of brush marks all

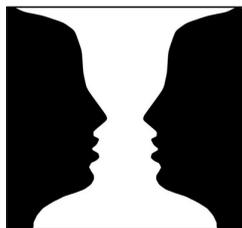


play roles. Calculated effects can be used to create the illusion of deep space, as in a Canaletto seascape, or to compress and flatten the surface, like a Matisse. When they are used at cross-purposes, strange and exciting things happen. The simplest examples of this are visual paradoxes like Penrose's triangle, the Devil's Tuning Fork or the classic figure/ground double profiles that resemble a vase. In all of these, the mind encounters a concomitancy of information, impossible to completely untangle and leading us into fantastic and unknowable space.

More sophisticated than these obvious tricks, post-Cubist Modernists like Beckmann, Giorgio De Chirico and Giorgio Morandi freely mixed one-point and isometric perspective, jamming the picture plane, to create multiple and simultaneous spatial readings, which defy and challenge the complacent eye and mind. In the last decade of his career, Philip Guston employed a similarly complex spatial theatre. The *Untitled* ink drawing, which acts as an introduction to this show, is a blueprint of imagery from this period, the potato-headed artist in the studio surrounded by a conspiracy of conflicting and resonant forms.



My initial first-hand experience of a deeper dimension in a painting dates to my adolescence in London (Ontario), when I happened upon Jack Chambers' *Olga and Mary Visiting* (1964) at the local library, a marvellous domestic scene that warps into a dreamy netherworld. The tripped-out quotidian vision of Chambers fit neatly into a teenage imagination already attuned to the neo-surrealist collage aesthetics of *Blonde on Blonde* and *Sergeant Pepper*. *Olga and Mary Visiting* remains a yardstick for me in my own painterly pursuits. I am sorry it could not be borrowed for this show, except as a reproduction.



Introduced by the Philip Guston drawing, this exhibition brings together the works of 14 contemporary painters who to my mind, each in their own way, follow Max Beckmann's dictum of transcending space and time, by offering us fascinating and insoluble imagery

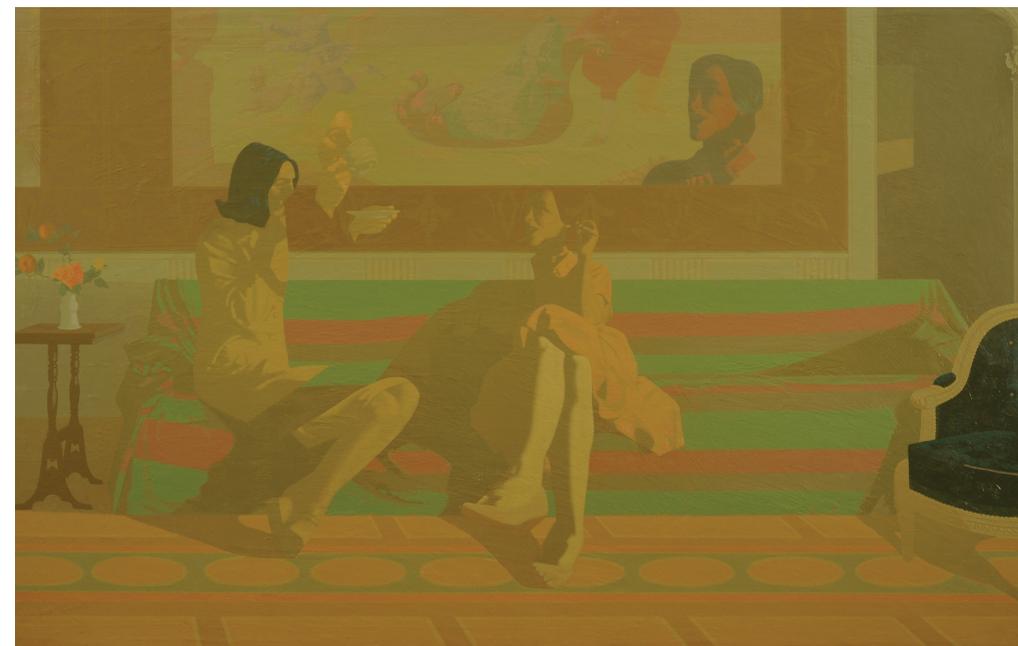
Along with Jack Chambers, John Boyle, another early inspirations from London, superimposes a delicious portrait of youth on a vintage image of St. Catharines, Ontario. In Michael Merrill's most recent *Paintings about Art*, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts is seen through a wet and wild watercolour prism, with the viewer is swimming in space struggling for perspective. Leopold Plotek has been engaged in a sophisticated and idiosyncratic modelling of pictorial space for decades, drawing on a rich study of Cinquecento and Seicento Italian painting and classical letters.

Penrose's triangle, Devil's Tuning Fork & double profiles

One senses a similar attraction to mythology and to Mannerist and Baroque pictorial spectacle in Melanie Authier's *Leviathan's Coat*, where waves and vortexes of paint are channeled through hard geometric edges that resemble Robert Smithson's mirror displacements.

Systems in general—and perspectival systems in particular—are at the heart of Etienne's Zack's enterprise. Using metaphors that mingle the artist's studio with the industrial world at large, mechanisms appear to collapse and implode under their own weight in Doom. In many ways, Carol Wainio and Cynthia Girard seem to carry on the tradition of metaphysical art with theatrical spaces, sly humour and perhaps a nod to the ghost of Philip Guston. For thirty years now, Carol has been inventing worlds that astutely balance wisdom and whimsy, poetry and politics, child's play with the epics of history. In a recent interview, Cynthia Girard speaks of breaking down the hierarchies associated with easel painting, likening her off-hand mixing of various styles in a single painting to "baking muffins."

One of my interests in conceiving this show was to cross over normal stylistic boundaries, revealing how realism and abstraction can deliver similar kinds of suspended states. The work of Pierre Dorion moves freely between the two poles, their high formalism and carefully modulated elements offering easy slippage



Jack Chambers, *Olga and Mary Visiting* (1964), courtesy of the Chambers' Estate and Loch Gallery.