

MAGICAL THINKING

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Graduate Studies Visual Arts University of Ottawa

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ABSTRACT

In *Magical Thinking*, Heidi Conrod explores through the act of painting, the depiction of mental states through the cautious release and withholding of visual, conceptual, and autobiographical cues. Reflecting on the nature of memory and time and the fluid ways in which these seemingly immaterial phenomena interact, the paintings represent multiple visions within one viewing experience; commenting not only on the surface of things, but also on what may lie hidden beneath. The works are best understood through introspection rather than a forced rationale.

These paintings are intended to read like a stream, or perhaps a pool of consciousness, where the unconscious is expressed through swirls of imagery with surrealist undertones alluding to the seemingly contradictory conditions of dream and reality. Here fact, fiction, memory and imagination, are intertwined in a non-linear style through a multitude of painterly applications.

INSTALLATION PHOTOGRAPHS



Magical Thinking, Installation View, Karsh-Masson Gallery, Ottawa, August 2016.



Magical Thinking, Installation View, Karsh-Masson Gallery, Ottawa, August 2016.



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INDIVIDUAL WORKS



Bearing Witness, 2016, oil and wax on board, 8X10" (right) *Magical Thinking*, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 11X14"



Blessing Hands, 2016, oil and wax on board, 10X12" (right) *Sunday Best*, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 10X12"



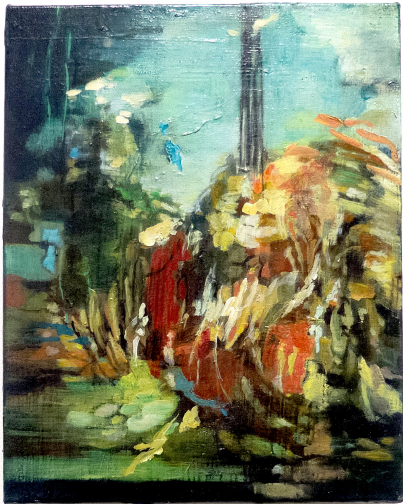
Far From Knowing, 2016, Oil and wax on canvas, 48X48”



Madhouse, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 10X8” (middle) *Pars Pro Toto*, 2016, oil on metal, 8X10” (right) *Schaulust*, 2016, oil and wax on board, 16X20”



Devoted, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 11X14" (right) *Divining*, 2016, oil and wax on canvas 11X14"



Sacred Place, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 8X10"

LIST OF WORKS

1. ***Ritual Space***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 48X48”
2. ***Permeable Body***, 2016, oil on metal, 10X12”
3. ***Rites of Passage***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 8X10”
4. ***Far From Knowing***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 48X48”
5. ***Madhouse***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 10X8”
6. ***Pars pro toto***, 2016, oil on metal, 8X10”
7. ***Schaulust***, 2016, oil and wax on board, 16X20”
8. ***Bearing Witness***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 8X10”
9. ***Magical Thinking***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 11X14”
10. ***Devotion***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 11X14”
11. ***Divining***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 10X12”
12. ***War Child***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 8X10”
13. ***Lost Battles***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 56X56”
14. ***Sacred Place***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 8X10”
15. ***Rituals of Dinner***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 72X48”
16. ***Blessing Hands***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 10X12”
17. ***Sunday Best***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 10X12”
18. ***Sister’s Keeper***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 8X10”
19. ***Martyr’s Dream***, 2016, oil and wax on canvas, 8X10”
20. ***The Gift***, 2016, oil on metal, 11X14”

ARTIST STATEMENT

I consider the practice of painting to be neurotic, obsessive and seductive. It keeps me permanently searching, and so it is also addictively in its elusiveness. The physical engagement with paint, its rich history, and the constant risk of failure are what keep me coming back.

In me, the urge to paint begins with a strong compulsion to internalize and organize what I see, and then communicate this seeing. It is a way to order the phantasmagoria of life and the randomness of being, and stimulates a form of magical thinking.

The meditative and slow act of painting provides me with a means to mirror forms of mental activity, to express desires, anxieties, intentions, and everything else that is inexpressible or ineffable.

My final thesis exhibition includes a group of new paintings that explores the depiction of mental states through the cautious release and withholding of visual, conceptual, and autobiographical cues. Reflecting on the nature of memory and time and the fluid ways in which these seemingly immaterial phenomena interact, the works represent multiple visions within one viewing experience; commenting not only on the surface of things, but also on what may lie hidden beneath. The works are best understood through introspection rather than a forced rationale.

These paintings are intended to read like a stream, or perhaps a pool of consciousness, where the unconscious is expressed through swirls of imagery with surrealist undertones alluding to the seemingly contradictory conditions of dream and reality. Here fact, fiction, memory and imagination, are intertwined in a non-linear style through a multitude of painterly applications.

Each painting is put through a tangible and intangible process of creating, disrupting, and reforming. The layering process extends the compositions, and builds a sense of time into the work. My own personal memories combined with those of others reflect the past, or the idea of remembered time, becoming substance within the layers of paint, engaging and yet distancing the viewer from the original subject matter. Infused with ambiguity, the works operate in the areas between inverse concepts: history and imagination, abstraction and representation, past and present, the intimate and the social, male and female, and the psychological and the corporeal.

This body of work represents a shift in palette away from opaque earth colours to a softer, brighter and more transparent palette; phthalocyanine blues and greens, violet and red quinacridones, and hansa yellows. In painting, I was paying particular attention to subtle tonal shifts within the works, choosing to keep my palette muted and monochromatic in an effort to suggest echoes of the past while alluding to a present day consciousness. Of inspiration are the chromatically complex interiors of Velazquez out of which social situations, or the aftermath of them, extend like connective tissues. Special attention has been given to the subtleness of hues; violets, blues, pinks and greens are

meant to look as if they have been filtered through a prism of light, softening their intensity and evoking a sense of the past, one slightly out of focus.

I rely on the traditional styles and genres of painting: Baroque pastoral landscapes, Dutch portraiture and still lives, intending to play on their inherent associations with time and memory as a means to trigger the familiar and provide entry points into the work. The initial recognition may be distanced after prolonged viewing and consideration of titles.

Anonymous photographs from the Internet are used as a departure point. Imagery is chosen based on connections to my own personal experience and a desire is to capture a larger human experience by addressing the ephemeral nature of time, nostalgia, loss, passion, longing and obsession. The images are transformed through the fluid materiality of paint; I am using the medium as a means to explore and dissect specific qualities within the chosen images. The flowing physicality of paint reveals a mood and charts personal echoes (resonances) that are cast within the images, burrowing under the psychological soil/dust/matter that accumulates beneath the photographs

These works range from lighter moments - portraits of children, flowing dresses - to darker subject matter referencing depression, madness, paranoia, fear, betrayal and the human propensity to mask lies. I illustrate the trials of those struggling to find their voice

The painting *Schaulust*, 2016 was based on a photo found online of a woman with a men's tie around her eyes. I chose this image for its emotional impact and its potential for multiple interpretations. I painted the image in muted tones, blurred details, and removed background information. The overlaid abstract painterly marks function as an intermediary step, a means to slow down (or delay) the act of viewing and perhaps to obscure and redirect meaning. The term "Schaulust" was coined by Freud to describe the pleasure of viewing. The word is translated from the Greek word scopophilia. It was thought that an inhibition of scopophilia might lead to a retreat from concrete objects into a world of abstractions. In *Schaulust*, 2016 the willingly bound woman is blocking others from viewing her gaze while obstructing her own vision of the external world, and retreating into an inner world.

The shift from abstract to figurative languages in these works allows for a multitude of possibilities within the painterly language, reflecting different states of consciousness, multiple voices, or ways of thinking, and refers to the complex balancing act of remembering and forgetting.

Always starting from a photograph, at times the hand of the painter takes over, obscuring the image, allowing the materiality of paint to replace the subject; representation transforms into abstraction. The overlapping layers lead to a loss in clarity suggesting the ways in which memory functions in fragments, in half tones, with faded peripheral elements.

I relate these different forms of expressions within the work to the polyphonic device used as a feature of narrative in literature that allows for a diversity of points of views

and voices. The polyphonic mode avoids a single vision, going beyond simply describing situations from various angles; rather it is aimed to allow conflicting views and characters to develop unevenly. The viewer is invited to explore multiple, co-existing meanings, rather than a single finalized, or fixed meaning. I chose this method as it suggests the multiple and changing realities experienced in life.

I am inspired by the stream of consciousness mode used by James Joyce in his modernist novel *Ulysses*, and in particular the final chapter “Penelope” or “Molly’s Soliloquy.” Joyce ends his novel with the female voice of Molly, representing a shift in thought for Joyce along with multiple shifts in psychology, emotion and experience. Joyce’s method of writing draws attention to the nature of consciousness, as a stream of thoughts that are not uniform and durable but evanescent. Ever changing, they slip-slide into one another. Through his words Joyce positions the reader within the mind of another human, we are eavesdropping on someone’s thoughts as though they are transmitted telepathically into our minds. As you read you become more aware of your awareness. The mirror Joyce holds up to the world is distorted, blurred, cracked as all representations are, whether fictional or factual.

The title of this exhibition, *Magical Thinking*, reflects the charm and mystery of the human psyche that allows us to invent new worlds and meanings, to push against the boundaries of our reality and escape the monotony and darker sides of everyday life. The term also refers to the creative process as a means to internalize and communicate, to organize our perception.