

Portfolio: Kristine Moran



Airport, 2011, Kristine Moran (Daniel Faria Gallery)

Now showing at Daniel Faria Gallery, and featured in an upcoming Phaidon collection of contemporary painters, Toronto Standard talked to the Montreal-born Moran about abstraction, nudity, and the best cities for art-making.

Some things get better with time. As I'm gazing over Kristine Moran's abstract paintings, the heavy-hearted, gestural brushstrokes that first seemed chaotic slowly start to whisper traces of representational familiarity while pushing your imagination to its fullest extent. You can see for yourself at Daniel Faria's new Bloor and Lansdowne gallery, where Moran's work is one-third of his inaugural show, or in the upcoming Phaidon publication *Vitamin P2*, a book featuring 115 new-ish international artists who've made an innovative contribution to contemporary painting—including Moran.

That's no surprise, considering her resumé's stacked with over a dozen awards, including The Lotus Club Foundation excellence in the arts and Hunter College's Virginia Adams award. The *Toronto Standard* sat down with the Montreal-born artist to talk about abstraction, nudity, and the best cities for art-making.

Was there a particular reason for painting female figures in the nude?

Yeah, nudity seems to be prominent. There is something about the nude in painting, historically, that interests me. This is from a female painter's perspective. The female nude has always been rendered from the male history, but here is my own perspective.

You've mentioned literature—like Margaret Atwoods'—as a significant source of inspiration. How direct is that influence and did it play any role in your work for this exhibit?

Literature definitely has an influence on the work I do. I see my work as a narrative in which each painting forms its own micro-narrative. The last solo show I had, where I was talking about Margaret Atwood, formed a meta-narrative. Each painting informed the next, like a story, but very loosely.

I just started reading this book called *Stone Arabia* by Dana Spiotta. It's about a guy who was a musician when he was a

teenager, and when he grew up, he became a failed musician. But to make up for that, he has this entire fantasy life in which his music has taken off, and he's done these big shows, and it's all made-up. I loved this idea of a person who is not satisfied with their own life, and so creates an alter ego. For the next show I want to create a character who has a mundane, everyday life in pencil, and then the paintings are going to represent their fantasy life.

Why'd you go to New York after OCAD?

I applied for my MFA at Hunter College. That was my initial reason for moving to New York. But once I moved there, I kinda wanted to stay. Another thing about New York—I mean, I love the Toronto art scene and I'm sure it's the same way—but New York is so big that there's not one ideology in art. There's a million different ways of doing it, showing it. You don't have to feel like there's one tiny clique, ruling the roost.

What makes a city a good breeding ground for artists?

The best location has affordable studio space. I think in Brooklyn right now, things are getting more gentrified. As soon as a bunch of artists move in, the real estate goes up.

As we've seen in Toronto...

Yeah! In Toronto, it's the same thing...When there's cheap studio space, and a lot of industrial warehouse space, artists congregate. And as soon as there's a bit of financial freedom, there's all the creative freedom too. It's amazing. There's apartment galleries and collectives left, right and center. People are just renting a room somewhere and putting up an art show. There's a lot of that going on right now. And it's good. It's nice for experimentation. It gets things flowing somehow.

Let's talk about the new exhibition Daniel Faria's gallery. From my understanding, the theme is creating balance between abstraction and representation. How do you achieve this balance in your work?

I think I'm always working towards this idea that a person doesn't have a fixed idea of self; that your idea of who you are is constantly transforming and going through some sort of metamorphosis. And so with that in mind, I tackle my paintings in a way that will kind of reveal that somehow. There's some psychological element, where a person is revealing another side of themselves, or something that is not concrete, therefore abstract.

I read in a previous interview that you were especially interested in how abstraction can be used to transform concrete ideas of place and self into open-ended forms that lend insight into human nature. Can you tell me more about how abstraction and rather, post-modernism can further our insight into human nature?

It's just the way I see us reading a painting. When it's really representational, I feel like there is more of a direction for the viewer and then you get boxed in. As soon as you start to push it in a way that's abstract, it becomes open ended in terms of what's happening with the painting but also what's happening with the viewer and their reading of that painting. The viewer can take it in any direction they want. The more abstract the painting, the more that that's apt to happen. The more open ended, the more the viewer can bring in their own experiences and their own relationship to what they are seeing.

If abstract art remains mostly subjective, can there be some sort of criteria that is used for distinguishing 'good' abstract art and if so, what?

Oh, no...

You're like, don't open that can of worms...

Yeah, that's a tough question. Your speculation is as good as mine.