

## Lelde Muehlenbachs – JOHN KING: NEW PAINTINGS, 2013

The following essay was written by Lelde Muehlenbachs regarding the exhibition '*Masculine Intuition: Morley Myers & John King*' at the Bugera Matheson Gallery in Edmonton, Alberta (Sept 26 - Oct 10, 2013). Reprinted with permission.

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For painters, it's all about the picture plane. The artist creates an illusion of reality or invents a new one by exploiting the inherent flatness of the plane. Over several decades, John King has used the flat surface for a contentious dialogue between hard-edged geometry and the opposite—loose, calligraphic brushwork. Complex spatial relationships and dynamic, vibrant colour resulted in paintings both questioning and elegant. It's hard to believe he could sleep at night after the pictorial problems of his own devising but he is singularly tenacious and prolific.

Recent paintings diverge from this ying and yang boxing match. Painterly intimacy merges with milder colour contrasts while the brush itself has been abandoned for unorthodox mark-making. Previous stern geometries and delineations now flop and melt. Behind this turn of pictorial events is a biographical impetus that surprised even King.

After several decades of living on the Canadian prairies including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, King recently visited Vancouver Island where he grew up. The re-acquaintance with landscape, weather, textures and numerous lost west coast sensations was pleasantly and productively jarring. Old growth forest lured him in and detritus-scattered beaches vied for attention to challenge the predominant influence of open sky spaces under which he has been living. In the new paintings the picture plane has become a scrim and a scaffolding for an abstract narrative that has roots in landscape. The scrim hangs as a transparent background like sky or water or a density suggestive of dirt or shadow which releases marks devised with the help of whatever tool was intuitive.

In **Midnight Bay** and **Ocean Deep** marks accrue to become moss-like jumbles or scattering sea foam. Might the two larger yellow ovals in **Beach Life** be cartoon goggles zeroing in on some memory? The collaboration between background and surface interruptions is happily organic.

King's previous paintings were fecund puzzles engaging the viewer to relish their achieved harmonies. The recent works have exchanged the cerebral for the tactile passion of being in the present, in nature and in one's place in the world. Primary allusion to landscape inflected with experimental often humorous drawing alludes to the richness and fortuitousness of existence. Unflinching, the liberated artist reveals himself as a seeker of universal meaning just as surely as we stand before his revelations when viewing the work.

- Lelde Muehlenbachs, 2013