

# Stevenson and Barkley: Fragility and strength

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This month, Sarah Stevenson's delicate sculptures at the McClure Gallery, and John Barkley's landscapes and abstract oil paintings at Galerie de Bellefeuille create waves. Fragile, cage-like structures and strong colours project an ambiguity that both tantalizes and teases.

## *Suspended animation*

For Stevenson's exhibition *Fragile*, 15 wire-and-thread sculptures hang from the ceiling. Lit from above and displayed at various heights, thread and wire resemble gossamer webs. Some, frosty white in colour, evoke the supernatural, while others, in metallic green or gold, suggest coiled slinkies or bird cages. Almost transparent like holograms, sculptures shimmer and spin as viewers walk through the exhibition.

For the grouped trio 'Three Ghosts', the painted white delicacy of the thread, offset by rhythmically placed, small beads, evokes nature and illusion. For

'Janus', a human profile, repeated within a 360-degree circular shape, suggests multiple identities as well as duplicity. The ambiguity of the man-made, cage-like structure references those trapped within society or within the rigid constructs of their own mind.

*Fragile* also includes Stevenson's working drawings for two, elegant cylinder forms. Illustrative of Stevenson's skill of both representation and assembly, the wired delicacy- and fragility- of her work is in sharp contrast to the cabled sculptures of Peter von Tiesenhausen. This unique and intersecting exhibition continues until Saturday, March 25 at the Visual Art Centre.

## *Sound of nature*

Barkley's exhibition of forest scenes and nature-derived abstract paintings are vibrant and bold. A colourist, Barkley recreates nature in flamboyant yellow, red and blue compositions. Deft brushstrokes,

heavy with paint, evoke fluttering foliage or fallen leaves glistening in water.

The colour dynamic of orange against blue in 'Sunlit Trace' evokes autumn foliage overhanging a stream. Patterned brush strokes recall Riopelle's mosaic style, yet Barkley's thick impasto technique is more spontaneous. The fluid washes of 'Advent of the Fourth' evokes Gerhard Eichter's abstract paintings, yet Barkley's colour palette is more extroverted. In this work, the rhythm of red, blue and green combine with pastel pink to recreate and evoke the sound of cascading falls.

In contrast, Barkley's representational forest scenes are painted with loose but refined brushstrokes. Colourful dabs of red and yellow against dark tree bark evoke leaves fluttering in the wind. Yet in 'Outskirts', menacing grey forms suggest a city skyline and human encroachment on nature.

Evocative and expressive, Barkley's exhibition continues until Tuesday, March 28 at Galerie de Bellefeuille.

## *Suggestive ambiguity*

In these exhibitions both Stevenson and Barkley rely on beauty to attract attention. Yet the appeal of Stevenson's streamline sculptures or Barkley's patterned brushstrokes lies in the ambiguity of both form and meaning. Suggestive of nature and the man-made, and of the personal as well as collective experience, these works encourage viewers to create their own interpretations, ideas and values.