

Couture Galleri
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"The Canadians of those days, at least, possessed a roving spirit of adventure which carried them further, in exposure to hardship and danger ... and led them, though not to clear and colonize the wilderness, yet to range over it as *coureurs de bois*, or runners of the woods, or, as Hontan prefers to call them, *coureurs de risques*, runners of risks. – Henry David Thoreau

"It is wonderful to feel the grandness of Canada in the raw."
– Emily Carr

A CLEARING GIVES THE VIEWER a reprieve from the thick bush while the sparkling stream promises to quench his thirst. Alongside him, pine trees cling to the rocks through which, it seems, they have forced their entrance. A flicker of light pierces the darker swirls that surround it as the colours which emanate from that same point hearken back to their point of origin.

Be they representational, teleological, or spiritual, John Barkley's landscapes and abstracts alike invite the viewer to contemplate – or confront – the vastness of being.

This sense of immensity is ever present in the Gatineau Hills of Quebec, where Barkley lives and works.

The journey of the viewer, or even the ray of light, is not unlike the journey of the artist. The goal may seem simple – the quest to hill top, the relief of desire, the expression of oneself – but process is complicated. The path is often obstructed, and much energy is expended in order to negotiate the twists and turns which present themselves along the way. The maple is its most beautiful just before it sheds its crimson leaves. For the traveller, the very turn which lengthens the journey also presents the stream. For the ray of light, it is the turn that makes colour possible. The supposed struggle or obstruction has created a place where we might breathe or drink, see or dream.

Whether it be the more representative scenes from nature, or the more cosmological abstracts, Barkley's paintings are a conversation about existence in all its complexity and simplicity. Yet, while we often feel that discussions about the reason for being slip through our grasp, these works are highly tactile, in part because of their scale – always because of the generous application of paint and the strokes that are anything but demure. The artist's energy is seen in the marks – sometimes made by brush, often by palette knife – that have created the work and viewing them is as much a physical experience as it is visual. On his canvas, the mystifying dialogue approaches a conclusion – that perhaps it is in balance of the opposites where we make the important discoveries about who we are.

–Margaret McDougall