

John Barkley: World Within,  
World Without  
Galerie de Bellefeuille  
June 2006

Living in close proximity to nature, in the Gatineau region of Quebec, John Barkley is a painter whose works reflect that direct relation. In Barkley's own words "I paint in order to reflect upon existence itself, and (...) my work functions as a visual record of my thoughts, concerns and bodily responses to being itself...what Paul Tillich has called, 'that which is of ultimate concern.'" To witness a Barkley painting is to experience something of the chaos inherent to nature, but there is always an order implicit to this chaos. Visual rhythms establish a harmony out of mosaic-like conjunctions of colour and light.

The details capture our eye. The unifying energy behind John Barkley's abstracts and landscapes conjure up an atmosphere like those we find in nature. Colour and motion thus embody a mysterious and universal energy. This intensity can be seen in his abstracts. They could even be called "environments of composition", suggestive of visual and experiential states at the point of evolving, never complete. The landscapes continue a tradition that began with Canada's Tom Thomson and

the Group of Seven. While these artists had a graphic sense, the perspectives they offered on nature involved multiple depths, and a relative reading of one's place in nature. John Barkley's paintings capture that sense of being in nature. They are likewise meditative, synthetic constructions, all about our connectedness to, and intense relation with nature.

Nature for John Barkley is not just a subject to be represented, more a distillation of a very human sensibility, of our experience of being in a direct dialogue with nature. In the abstracts, there is again this universal, even sublime sense that painting is an act of projection. Both the landscapes and the abstracts allude to the contrast between organic and geometric models for imaging. Whether the abstract painterly works or the more figurative landscape paintings, these paintings evoke this relation to nature than to develop an inner dialogue that expands visually on this great theme. Barkley's paintings can even unleash a potential Impressionist effect with their dapples of paint, sensitive to light, and suggestive motion within a given composition... The titles of the more

abstract paintings display a versatility that is analogous to their compositional effect. Shift 2, for instance, or Mapping Within, or Looking Within conjure up the sense that these paintings are the result of deep meditations, or considerations of, our relatedness to nature. There is even something primordial, instinctive in the way these compositions seem to hang suspended on the painting's surface.

Barkley interprets with great illusionistic effect. His paintings are like experiential windows we look into to discover a world within that reflects the phenomena of the outer world. The same goes for his landscapes, which are referential, and highly representational, but still adhere to a matrix of painterly cues and codes. We sense a certain synthetic and re-creative reworking of the nature theme, in a wholly contemporary way. The landscape stands as an environment conceived and created for an audience who perceives these effects entirely firsthand as environments distinct from the nature represented within each painting.

– John K. Grande