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visual arts

CULTURE

# On the border of the natural and unnatural worlds

Two views from two artists and exhibitions

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

**A**bstract landscape is back – and with a vengeance. But, then, landscape itself is a kind of abstraction, with no true beginning or end. This essential feature comes across in the paintings and drawings of Montreal artist David Gillanders, whose latest painting and drawings are now on view at the Galerie McClure.

The exhibit is titled *Blind Spot*, as if to indicate that his art is not necessarily an objective documentary of what he has seen, in either the past or the present. As well, the title puts the viewer on edge, suggesting the possibility that there's something important nearby that we simply can't see.

What we do behold in the real landscape of the pictures themselves – on one level

merely finely textured fields of paint or of applied ink – is a never-never land in which we could easily get lost. For example, in an oil on canvas titled *Thoughts of Poland #3*, blurred traces of sombre green suggest foliage but, at the same time, throw our mental compasses completely out of whack. What's close and what's far; what's solid and what's not?

In this intriguing work, the sky is white but so is the shape, or "blind spot," in the lower central part of the painting. The undulating shapes bring to mind hilly terrain, but we perceive them mainly as assembled abstract shapes, alternately soft and puffy-looking but also startlingly hard-edged.

Gillanders picks up on a vision of the land not altogether foreign to that staked out so confidently in the 1970s and '80s by celebrated Canadian abstract landscapists like the late Toni Onley and Kenneth Lockhead. These are among the artists who were not affected by the latest trends, but who kept their faith in the power of traditional painting and print-making techniques.

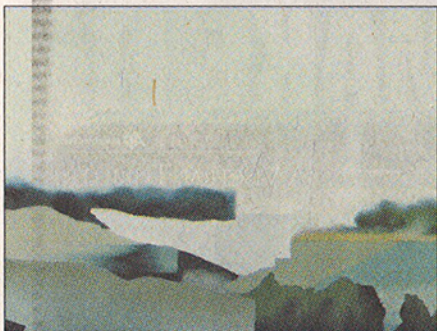
However, what these modern masters also did – and what younger artists like Gillanders continue to do – is forsake hallowed notions of distinctness of specific places for a far less patriotic sense of the actual land. Certainly, in Gillanders's point of view, the

so-called land is nothing more – or, for that matter, nothing less – than our tirelessly unfolding inner experience of time and memory.

Gillanders's own promised land is no doubt a sacrilege to the memory of the Group of Seven, bent on carving out the land as distinctly Canadian and, by definition, imbued with a proud and patriotic nationalist sense of place, something that combined both nature and the unnatural fencing in of nature with geographical and political boundaries. On the other hand, Gillanders's grand tour focuses on another vista, perhaps common to most of us, but buried deep in the mind itself. It's worth noting that

most of Gillanders's work is free of frames, the timeless symbol of containment and control.

David Gillanders's exhibit of oils, *L'angle mort/Blind Spot*, is on view at the Galerie McClure, of the Visual Arts Centre, 350 Victoria Ave. in Westmount, until Jan. 27. Call 514-488-9558 or go to [www.visualartscentre.ca](http://www.visualartscentre.ca).



David Gillanders's intriguing work *Thoughts of Poland #3*.

GALERIE MCCLURE