

CANADIANART

Kristine Moran: The Marsh, The Maze

Carol-Ann M. Ryan, Jan 7, 2010

In "Hidden in the Shore Maze," her first solo show in Toronto since completing an MFA at Hunter College, Kristine Moran tackles literary depictions of the Canadian wilderness and its symbolic relationship to woman in a bold new series of paintings.

Displaying a confidence that comes with a painter's experience, she visually captures the allure, sensuality and looming danger associated with a woman in the woods. Semi-abstract, these paintings are robust in application and rich in colour. Both large and small are equally captivating; each piece packs a punch.

Thick paint sits upon thinly applied veils. Moran's marks are quick and gestural; they envelop hints of representational elements, sometimes masking and sometimes highlighting images beneath. Loaded with contradiction, these paintings are composed of wild brushwork that is loose and energetic, yet controlled enough to project a sense of purpose and intention.

Each painting captures a small world, a peek into a secluded cabin, marsh or forest interior. At times the view is too close to truly determine a subject, as in *Immersed*, an intimate painting that lives up to its promise, literally bringing the viewer into a sumptuous abstract abyss. *Woven Lair*, on the other hand, is a mysterious scene that hints at vegetation and evidence

of human habitation.

Above the others, *Woven Lair* flaunts Moran's ability to marry both dense and thinned paint in a composition that reveals as much as it conceals. Quick vertical licks of pigment suggest bulrushes in a marsh rising out of a vibrant blue-green pond.

A large gauze-like white form twists and curves across the surface and floats above all other elements. There is a hint of a woman's leg peeking out from behind the froth. Centrally concentrated, the composition is framed by sharp diagonals in hyperreal colours that traverse the canvas. The tension created by the opposing forms and dramatic light effects is palpable. Is there a woman beneath the paint? If so, what is she doing there? The large scale of the painting begs you to enter into the scene, if only to pull aside the gauze, flora and fauna to satisfy your curiosity.

Like stories of the far north told by explorers drawn by its danger and opportunity for conquest, Moran's paintings entice the viewer in ways that cannot be denied. Such well-balanced use of technique and the potential for narrative is rarely achieved, but this series effectively offers both. (55 Mill St Bldg 2, Toronto ON)

-Ryan, Carol-Ann. "The Marsh, The Maze," *Canadian Art*, Winter, 2010.