



REVIEWS

BURNABY
BURNABY ART GALLERY

ELI BORNOWKSY

by Aaron Peck

Eli Bornowsky used to paint in series—for example, his early “dot” canvases, circa 2008–09, the diptychs exhibited at the Western Front in 2010, or the ball-paintings at G Gallery in 2013. The bodies of work were comprised of distinct pieces, variations on a set form with each independent work related. The eye could wander, building connections, reading the paintings as a suite, with each commenting on the next. At first glance, Bornowsky’s latest work, on view at the Burnaby Art Gallery, seems to have abandoned his former concerns. On display were paintings and drawings that present a variety of styles. It appears that Bornowsky’s previous three summers pursuing an MFA



Eli Bornowsky *Flying Machine*
2014 Oil and graphite on canvas
1.52 x 1.21 m PHOTOS BLAINE CAMPBELL

LEFT: Installation view of **Eli Bornowsky's** "All is Unmentionable, Up in the Air" 2014

at Bard have encouraged him to diverge. Stylistically, the paintings vary in ways his work never has. Superficially, the paintings have an affinity to a lot of contemporary painting—the feeling of a cold exercise for the purpose of an experiment. But the more time you give them, the more they warm up. They eschew the nihilism of so-called “Zombie Formalism,” “Crapstraction,” or even “Conceptual Painting” for a far more thorough expansion of his previous work, which explores visual sensation.

One group, titled *Wetness and Light*, and another, *Cold Numbers* (both 2014), see the artist commanding pastel colours and compositional technique. The works in the set titled *Abstraction* (2014) owe a debt to Wols, in their resemblance of the German artist’s scratched vortexes. Wols’s influence on Vancouver art can be seen in the photography of Roy Arden, Stephen Waddell and Jeff Wall. It is fascinating to see it here in a painter, too.

Where in previous exhibitions Bornowsky limited himself to one visual style, and the differences in similar works took on significance, here he explored the differences between styles. His work is about the visual dissonance between

them. The final stand-alone painting, *Flying Machine* (2014), made it evident that he is meditating on how these styles relate (or do not relate). Many of the shapes and gestures of his previous work appear in this canvas, in effect transforming it into a visual index, or gloss, of his paintings to date.

With varying degrees of success, drawing has also been a longstanding concern of Bornowsky’s. *Modern Jester* (2014), a suite of eight drawings in watercolour and gouache on paper towel, displayed a delightful playfulness with colour and form. However, *Grey Point Perspectives* (2014)—24 drawings in graphite, gouache, ink, watercolour and oil, which Bornowsky instructed to be exhibited adjacent to a selection of landscape paintings from the BAC’s collection—rarely transcended a provisional, sketch-like quality. Yet what emerges from “All is Unmentionable, Up in the Air” is, in fact, a developing sensibility. Instead of remaining within a single visual idiom, Bornowsky brings different styles together to explore the harmonic dissonance between them. His work has become more difficult. But it is also more sophisticated and rewarding.