

BORDERCROSSINGS

An abstract painting on a light green background. The central focus is a large, dark, swirling shape composed of thick black and dark purple brushstrokes. This central form is surrounded by a soft, diffused wash of pink and magenta. The overall texture is visible, suggesting a canvas or paper surface.

PAINTING

Marlene Dumas

David Lynch

Sky Glabush

Laura Owens

Holger Kalberg

Laure Prouvost

Oscar Cahén

Beth Letain

Benjamin Klein

Dan Brault

Brian Hunter

Kristine Moran

Joan Mitchell

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Tim Zuck

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VISUAL ART

Tim Zuck

by Dan Adler

dimensions of their work. As our real-world situation devolves into even more geopolitical chaos and moral murk, technology often seems to hold out the possibility of control and clarity. “What Flies Above” is frank about the sleek, seductive power of this lure, in order to expose how dangerous it can be. ■

“What Flies Above” was exhibited at Gallery 1CO3 in Winnipeg, January 11 to February 17, 2018.

Alison Gillmor is the pop culture columnist for the Winnipeg Free Press and writes regularly on visual arts and film.

Offering a small selection of drawings, etchings and paintings from the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, Tim Zuck’s recent retrospective show at Barbara Edwards Contemporary was striking and salient. The titles of works on hand included numbers signalling the sheer size of the various series from which the exhibition drew. Given the high quality and wide thematic range of Zuck’s ample oeuvre—as manifested here in many media and genres—this show underlined the need for museum surveys that more exhaustively explore and express the artist’s remarkable rigour, formal refinement and complicated concerns with traditions of abstraction, still life and landscape.

The show started with a nude drawing, #237 *Figure*, 2000, focused on a female’s mid- and lower physique. With the figure lying languid on her side, considerable care is dedicated by the artist to capturing the sinuous curves, along with straighter lines formed where the inner thighs meet. While pubic and navel areas are rendered with shadowy smudges, a single hand, resting upon the hip, reflects a character that is assured, elegant and relaxed. The titular number (237) provides a semantic subsidy, suggesting that this is one in a substantial series, a part of a project potentially meant to yield insights about how, and why, bodies signify, a knowing that develops only through a thoroughly repeated process of regarding and rendering.

Nearby, the painting *Pole, Shadow, and Landscape*, 1980, initially comes across as an absurdist statement. The presumed “pole” is represented with a single red line, with striped shading supplied in response to a light source, while a light yellow



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sky is delimited by one undulating horizon line. Such a work exemplifies Zuck’s long-standing penchant for providing simple, but never simplistic, compositions that are reductive to a provocative extent. As with the nude, one speculates in locating a context for this imagery—some connection to a particular place or perhaps a person. Zuck’s abstracted formal language is freed from landscape conventions tied to ideologies of nationalism, allowing for an existential experience that can be, at turns, serious and silly. The pole, for instance, may be perceived as a kind of anti-monument, recalling—and to some extent mocking—modernist and phallic vertical sculptures from the 1950s and ’60s, such as Barnett Newman’s. But the work has a stronger affinity with Ed Ruscha’s pencil and acrylic drawings of blank billboards or wired telephone poles from the 1980s, works that are similarly lacking in specificity, combining a central concern with material process and an emphasis on responding to an everyday encounter with something seen randomly. Comparing this painting with a drawn version of the subject

1. Tim Zuck, #118 *Pole Shadow Landscape*, 1980, oil on canvas, 18 x 18 inches. Images courtesy Barbara Edwards Contemporary, Toronto.
2. #163 *Bananas*, 1986, oil on canvas, 18 x 18 inches.



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of the same date (not included in the exhibition), Zuck's lyrical, and whimsical, sensitivity of touch is all the more evident. This artist does not produce mere smug one-liners.

Indeed, while pop artists tended to adopt a relatively detached point of view, often effectively eliminating signs of the artist's hand, Zuck's work, though often sharing in pop's depictive literalness, is also always about subtle manipulations of material, frequently treating the same subject in two separate, successive pictures with paint and with charcoal and graphite—allowing for comparative inquiry into how these media relate to the perception of the objects portrayed. Featured in the show, the painted version of *#163 Bananas*, 1986, is just that: a trio of fruit is depicted, still attached at the top and placed upon a plinth. Somewhat suggestive, in the wake of the nude seen at the onset, these members appear ripe, with crusty ends the colour of charcoal, providing a blurry material correspondence with the drawn version of the work, not on display. The ridges along the bananas' sides are rendered light and dark in response to an unseen light source

that may or may not reflect a studio setting. The picture, in this case, may be read in dialogue with historical tendencies to portray perishable items as symbols that are meant, as are *memento mori*, to morally instruct. But it is tempting to think of Zuck's choice and treatment of this slippery subject as somehow set apart from other edibles with heavier iconographical baggage such as apples or lemons, as treated by, say, Cézanne or by myriad others for centuries. Closer in spirit to Manet's singular stalk of *Asparagus*, 1880, Zuck's work may be taken as an effort to appreciate and elevate the under-recognized. The setting for *Bananas* may signify nowhere or everywhere, as it is utterly empty save for the grey pedestal, recalling minimal sculptures from the 1960s by Robert Morris, who preferred painted plywood structures to the preciousness of marble or permanence of steel. Indeed, Zuck's interest in pictorially expressing sculptural experience—and referring to more than one medium—provides a conceptualist dimension to his practice that is subtle but significant.

But unlike the conceptualists—normally understood as abandoning medium-specific artistic skills in the conventional sense—Zuck displays a remarkable and gifted facility with the brush, the pencil and the needle. From the viewpoint of a window seat, the etching *#228 Wing*, 1997, is delicately detailed in ways that allow for a piece of a plane to provide a profound presence as a single outstretched limb. This fragment, combined with a shadowy expanse of sky, serves the role of *aide memoire*, triggering recollections of flights at dusk or dawn. The wing's tip shines and shimmers as it cuts through the thinner atmosphere, well above the clouds. Hanging on an opposite wall, *#200 Blue Black*,

1991, is a tiny and quiet composition (8 x 5.5 inches, framed), painted upon on a panel made of poplar. But the divine may be found in the details: a deep blue rectangle is bordered by black stripes, extending to the sides of the wooden support. The work demonstrates, definitively, that Zuck is not in the business of just making jokes—that at the forefront of his investigation is a concern with finding meaning in improbable places, such as a modest little icon. *Blue Black* is undoubtedly an object—not an immaterial, digital image—that is made to be lived with and admired for a long time, freed from the obligation to educate or even to communicate verbally, particularly in the face of the adversity and the “BS” that life can throw at us. ■

“Tim Zuck” was exhibited at Barbara Edwards Contemporary, Toronto, from May 4 to June 16, 2018.

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