

‘Small Works 4 Artists’

Wayne Ryzak, Heather Keenan, Miles Lowry and Vince Klassen

Martin Batchelor Gallery

712 Cormorant Street

Victoria, BC

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November 3rd – 30th, 2016

Review by Yvonne Owens

In his book, *The Limners* (The Pharos Press, 1981), Robin Skelton described how, “Some groups are doctrinaire, exponents of some particular theory... and these tend to issue argumentative manifestos and indulge in propaganda. Some groups are created in order to explore a particular medium, or exploit a given subject matter. Others are simply groups of friends who wish to work together and to bring each other’s work to the public in a more effective manner than is possible for an artist working entirely alone.”

This description perfectly applies to the “4 Artists” group, but the pieces in this group show of small works show a definite coherence; their shared vision – though resisting a formal definition – is in the unity and flow of this diminutively epic show of small works. Common elements lie in the treatment of light and approaches to classic form shared among the sculptor, the photographer, and the two painters included in the exhibit. This might be described as an essentially Romantic approach to light’s interactions with substance and matter. Light is like a subtle, irresistible character in a shared plotline, or filmic ‘universe,’ that variously interpenetrates, transubstantiates, imbues or suffuses form.

For the painters, Heather Keenan and Miles Lowry, the role of light is like a ghost, metaphorical and elusive, implied – even when depicted as a palpable presence. It is the illusion of light we see, not the action of light itself, a representation, not the reality. This paradoxically makes light seem even more substantial in the painted works. In Keenan’s pieces, light is invoked with heavy, impasto and clear painterly marks. The individual figures of men, women and children seem more or less substantial depending on their relationship to the light that pours through, and sometimes inundates, the travel spaces. Her small painting, “Station XXVII,” shows an ephemeral crowd of humanity in constant motion, always on their way to some other temporal destination, or else arriving into this one. Their homely gestures give an eerie recognisability to the figures, an uncanny resemblance to known dear ones, mothers, fathers, aunts or cousins, making them at once familiar and *unheimlich*. We don’t know if they actually belong in this dimension of the visible world, or if they are the ghosts of the legions of travelers who have passed on and through such ephemeral spaces over time. All we can be sure of is their affinities with the light that surrounds them, which is a tactile presence in all of Keenan’s paintings in the ‘Station’ series.



Heather Keenan, "Station XXVII," 20" x 16", oil pigment stick on wood cradle, 2016

Luminescence fluctuates, ebbs and flows, in Lowry's works, like a pulse. The inference is that substance actually IS light, simple illumination by another name, travelling incognito as matter or mass. His painting, 'Moonscribe,' would seem to suggest that somewhere at the substratum of all matter is simply light, pure light. Perhaps involved in an intimate dance with shape, it provides the pulse of the seen world with infinite regressions of fractal arabesques – signs and inscriptions only to be read by means of a complete surrender of formal expectations. Light is mysterious and essentially unknowable in the painting, but is also softly insistent, reaching out from its small frame as if to proclaim its role not merely as the means by which form is defined and revealed, but as the main character. Itself promulgating the visible world and singlehandedly inscribing all known manifestations within the world of form, it waxes effulgent, suffusing the eye and threatening to engulf the viewer, seemingly confident in its reception as a luminal entity of consequence and gentle power.



Miles Lowry, "Moonscribe," 16" x 20", paper pigment wax and wood, 2016

For the glass sculptor, Wayne Ryzak, and the photographer, Vince Klassen, these interactions of substance and light are overt and literal – penetration and translucence for the one, chemistry and photographic alchemy for the other. These glass and photographic media ARE their light message, right down to their molecular make-up. Klassen's works speak to thresholds of experience and other liminal spaces of the heart and mind: "This selection of works incorporates themes through the use of understated contrasts and metaphor: ethereal elements vs. material basics; ageless narratives vs. contemporary ideals; the perceptible vs. the intangible; the line or horizon as an empirical boundary to man's ability to control nature; the circle representing the unity of the inner and outer self, etc.."

Platinum and Palladium are Klassen's media of choice in exploring these ideas, due to their inherent luminosity and subtlety. The silver chemistry of these photographic choices is exceedingly beautiful, and the detail afforded by their classic compositions approached the transcendent. In 'Door #11,' the pictured doorway intimates the possibility of crossing over into a timeless dimension where the past and present become meaningless distinctions, the cobbled sidewalk

recalling the 16th-century origins of the wine cellar or brewery into which it leads. The detail of the stone curb makes it as beguiling as the German signage or the texture of the cracked and peeling walls.



Vince Klassen, Door #11, Mulheim, Germany, Palladium print, multiple hand-coating on Crain's 100% cotton wove, 16 x 16 inches. Edition of 25.

Wayne Ryzak's pieces for this show speak to the igneous conditions of their birth. Like tongues of fire or spirals of smoke, they twist and turn their way skyward. As if reaching for air on which to feed and in the process becoming light, these are aspirational forms and live things – filled with hope and resolute energy to become whatever's next. The myriad forms of oxidation, consuming conflagrations and slow aging, the lightning bolt of illumination and the slow, meandering paths of glaciers, all forms of dynamic transition are suggested by Ryzak's gestural, serpentine glass

pieces. From the austere and minimalist roughly hewn flame with its mount like a stupa, to the brilliantly coloured Modernist blown glass pieces, Ryzak's pieces also seem to be about light passing through an incarnation as matter on its way to another estate—that of sheer energy.



Wayne Ryzak, Glass Sculpture, 2016