



**CORINNE DUCHESNE:
OF DEMONS AND ANGELS**

May 2 - June 21, 2009
Burlington Art Centre



Blazing Cherry

The Burlington Art Centre is very pleased to present these dynamic contemporary works by Burlington mid-career artist, Corinne Duchesne. She creates powerful images that engage our intellects and emotions, that draw us into the picture plane and the worlds within. Her works embody the Burlington Art Centre's purpose... they inspire our imaginations and enrich our lives.

-George Wale



Tether



Waiting



Grief touches all of our lives, but most are too inarticulate to give full expression to the pain. For the last year or so, Corinne Duchesne has been constructing a body of work that examines grief, using her artistic skills to bring to light what lies below the surface. On huge sheets of Mylar, she builds, dissects and probes the mind's attempts – through encrypted visual metaphors – to understand the reality of loss. The large drawings in mixed media create

a place for memory, a site as fantastical or as practical as the mourner requires.

Duchesne's process is both painstaking and spontaneous. She begins, usually, with a line drawing for composition. Over days and weeks the initial drawing is imbued with life through gestural strokes of charcoal or conte – sometimes smeared or smudged, sometimes brushed out. The composition is then enriched and given depth and breadth. At some points it

may be enlivened with acrylic paint, at other times collaged with images spliced from earlier paintings.

The artist first used Mylar in 2005 after a stint of working in encaustic, a technique in which pigments are mixed with hot liquid wax. The encaustic surface, like the Mylar, is transparent, and so it is possible to achieve a sense of depth with both materials. The Mylar became the support of choice because Duchesne wanted to be able to splice the material with



Ascension

a knife and thereby create sharp edges and lines. Moreover, with painted Mylar it is possible to achieve very bright rich colours. (Notice the fiery red-orange in *Blazing Cherry* on the previous page, for instance) Duchesne compares the effect to that of glazing with oil paint – yet acrylic on Mylar doesn't take the months of drying that are required with oil. The plasticized surface of the Mylar makes for a sometimes transparent, sometimes translucent and sometimes opaque support. The compositions are layered and fragmented and stand as metaphors for the clouded, irrational world of the subconscious.

In a 2008 exhibition at the Hamilton Artists' Inc., Duchesne's first works on Mylar were shown - enormous horizontal compositions eight feet in width. The horizontal format imposes a narrative reading of the images and that show was called "Stories to Myself." In this current exhibition, while several of the horizontal works are on display, Duchesne has created new drawings in a vertical format. The vertical form lends a more sliced and compressed quality to the drawings and they become representations of phantoms barely glimpsed at the corners of our eyes, ghostly presences moving through a sort of luminous void. The elongated vertical shapes also provide a suitable backdrop for ascending or descending motion, a space in which the helpless and hapless figures are pulled or directed toward heaven or hell. Strong

gestural lines, sometimes thin, sometimes thick, sometimes smudged, sometimes hatched, proclaim the intimacy of the images and the passionate emotion involved in the artist's mark making.

The imagery is alive with energy, and spirals and spins in motion. Occasionally, curving, swooping lines seem to emulate the contours of budding nature in springtime. At other times, stark and brittle striations resonate with bleak hints of dormant winter. Nothing stands still here, and dynamic diagonal lines direct the eye up and down and beyond the plane. This is a world of the imagination in which attenuated, animal-headed humans are borne upward by ravens or crows, body parts struggle and strain, vessels break open to expel monstrous embryonic creatures and flames may burn or cleanse. It is a discordant and divided space in which dog-headed figures howl with soundless voices. It is an elemental and turbulent world, an unstable, fluid universe where transformation and metamorphosis belie any ideas of logic and classification. By aligning edges and colors of some objects with the overlap and disjunction of others, Duchesne directs the materialization of what seems to be a dream or a nightmare. She disdains facile solutions and feels strongly about avoiding rigidity and simplistic explanations. For her, Duchesne says, there were no neatly delineated "seven stages of grief." Rather one moves back and forth, relinquishing and then re-experiencing pain.



Shadow

Despite the recognizable depictions of objects in the drawings, any distinctive meaning remains elusive. Often dark and frightening, occasionally joyous and uplifting, the imagery is complex, enigmatic and laden with ambiguities. Certain objects are repeated often enough to be read clearly as symbols: birds, animals, wings, feathers, human limbs, bowls and vessels. But the imagery, Duchesne insists,

is a very personal cosmology, from rabbits that play in her own backyard to a favourite cherry tree. Her hope is that viewers will apply their own interpretations to the content.

Duchesne has been a working artist for 25 years and teaches art fundamentals at Sheridan College. She is a pro, an award-winning artist at the top of her game. As long time influences, she cites the work of Anselm Kiefer and

Matthew Barney and there is a powerful sense of anguish and foreboding in some of the drawings that recalls the emotional intensity of these two contemporaries. Yet there is also a sense of grace in Duchesne's drawing, a line of beauty and a lack of confined space that is absent in the heaviness and physicality of the two more famous artists. Notice the judicious use of white space that adds an



Collide

ethereal quality to works such as *Lading*. Limbs and soft feathery wings are delineated with delicacy and refinement in works such as *Ascension*. *Howlers* presents us with a terrifying image of undiluted horror – but Duchesne can't resist the delightful arabesque of a wisp of drapery attached to the shoulder of the shrieking figure. It's almost as if the artist is incapable of conceiving or accepting an eternity of

suffering or emptiness.

In their combination of horror and beauty, Duchesne's drawings bring to mind a literary association with Milan Kundera's 1985 novel "The Unbearable Lightness of Being." In that well-known work, Kundera is saddened by the lightness and fragility of human mortality, feeling that this lightness brings with it a suggestion that human life is essentially insignificant. Most

people yearn for meaning and find the acceptance of this insignificance to be an unbearable concept. In these drawings, Duchesne seems to mourn this truth, the painful conundrum that stands at the centre of all human loss.

- Elaine Hujer



Angel



Mission: The Burlington Art Centre is a champion of visual art and fine craft in Burlington. We engage the community in the appreciation and creation of visual arts and are home to our art and fine craft guilds. We provide opportunities for discovery and 'hands-on' learning, as well as mentoring and showcasing visual artists at all skill levels. BAC is dedicated to building and promoting its collection of Canadian contemporary ceramics.

Vision: The BAC is Canada's best, interactive, visual arts centre for artists, students and our communities and is recognized as such.

Inspiring imagination,
enriching lives

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Curator: George Wale
Writer: Elaine Hujer
Design: Chris Howard
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