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Organized by KW|AG



river *g*rand chronicles

*(séance)*  
Monica Tap

JANUARY 12 - MARCH 25, 2007  
KITCHENER-WATERLOO ART GALLERY





# RIVER GRAND CHRONICLES

The *River Grand Chronicles* series presents projects with a strong connection to the Grand River and the regions it winds through.

The series frontispiece exhibition, *River: Grand!*, featured contemporary and historical works created from the embrace of the Grand River's past and present influences. Historic paintings, drawings, prints, and photographs were brought together from significant collections and placed in the context of works by contemporary artists.

The *River Grand Chronicles* will focus on contemporary projects that cast the Grand River as either a conceptual or literal figure in visual storytelling. Major themes such as romanticized visions, traditional depictions of the landscape, and the First Nations perspective on the complex and often neglected cultural history of the region, will surface in these important projects.

As with other KW|AG programming series, the *River Grand Chronicles* remind our viewers to consider how stories, be they fictional or true, have resonance beyond geographic boundaries.



...BY REFERENCING MORE THAN JUST ONE VIDEO STILL ON A SINGLE CANVAS, I ATTEMPT TO MAKE PAINTINGS IN WHICH THE IMAGE IS HELD IN FLUX; A MOVING IMAGE MADE STILL AND YET NOT STILL, A HYBRID OF RESOLUTION AND NOT, OF HERE AND NOT HERE. - MONICA TAP



# MEDIUM

## ESSAY BY MATTHEW BROWER

The purpose of a séance is to speak with the dead. It is, in part, an attempt to make the past present, a refusal to accept that the gulf between now and then is unbridgeable. The séance argues that the past is never really gone but is always present with us. In other words, to invoke the space of the séance is to open up a complex relation to history and time. For this reason, it is a fitting title for Monica Tap's series of video-based paintings responding to the life and times of Homer Watson. Tap's work for the show is a complex meditation on the tradition of painting, landscape and Canadian art. It is also an exploration of the extended and multiple temporalities of the contemporary technologically mediated encounter with landscape.

The modern séance emerged with the Spiritualist movement at the middle of the 19th century. The Spiritualists drew on the tropes of modern technology to make contact with the dead. Their séances incorporated the telegraph in the form of spirit rapping and the photograph in spirit photography.<sup>1</sup> Thus the séance is not simply a metaphor for a relation to time but also for a relation to technology. In drawing on the metaphor of the séance, Tap's work aligns with a broader re-engagement by contemporary artists with the tropes of Spiritualism. As the artist and curator Martyn Jolly has described, there are a number of contemporary artists whose work "reinhabit[s] and reinvent[s] the metaphysical, performative, and iconographic legacy of the Spiritualists."<sup>2</sup> Artists have found in Spiritualism tools for addressing the ethical and political engagement with the past.



*Grand River I, 2006*

At the centre of the séance is the medium, the figure, usually female, who brings together the present and the past, the living and the dead, allowing her audience to communicate with the beyond. The medium does this, however, by becoming other than herself, by giving up her own voice to speak with the voice of another. Thus the medium is a figure for a complex relation to authorship outside the masculinist paradigm of the solitary genius. It is this space of the medium that Tap explores in her paintings.

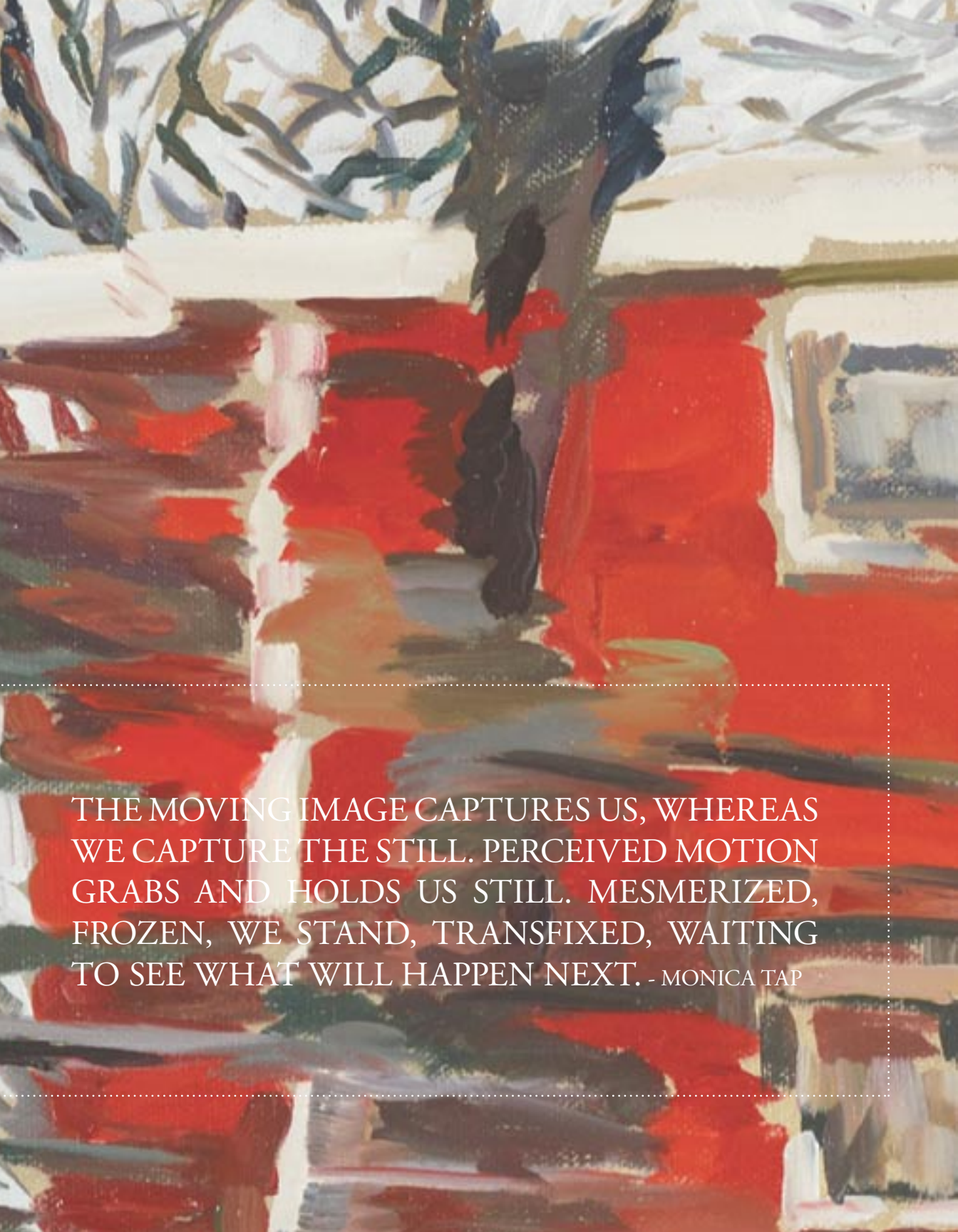
Tap's paintings speak to the life and work of Homer Watson through their reworking of the landscape tradition. The paintings offer a highly mediated encounter with the landscape. The paintings emphasize the process of mediation through their engagement with video source images. The videos document a series of trips following the path of Watson's life. The large canvases in the show are composed from multiple video stills. The landscape is captured with the low-resolution video of a digital camera and distilled into a series of still images, the stills are combined and projected onto the canvas and then the artist responds to the stills in paint. In making the works, Tap inhabits the space between the projector and canvas – the space of the medium. Working in the dark gives Tap's brushstrokes an assurance that is free from a facile or self-indulgent virtuosity. The use of the projector distances her from an overly romantic investment the work.

*The Road to Lily Dale I*, 2006



The Grand River paintings respond to Watson's 1879 trip down the Grand River. Inspired by the probably apocryphal story that Watson's three-month trip down the Grand River in 1879 had culminated in a trip to the Spiritualist camp at Lily Dale (founded 1879), Tap took her own trip down the river accompanied by her digital camera. *Grand River 1* is a dense exploration of the landscape of the river's edge – an ill-defined border space penetrated by tree branches. The painting bears the trace of the digital process; the rusty bar at the bottom of the image could represent an artefact of the compression algorithm or of the video's interlacing. With its cascading paint and complex sense of space, *Grand River 1* speaks to landscape without resolving into the scenic or picturesque.

The Road to Lily Dale paintings come from footage of the drive to the famous Spiritualist centre in upstate New York.<sup>3</sup> Watson visited Lily Dale and consulted with the mediums later in his life. He experimented with spiritualism and spirit photography after the death of his wife. The paintings in the series are marked by the mediation of the car window. The highway is a modern mode of movement. The car offers a very different experience of landscape from the canoe; the roadside presents a nature that has been maintained at a proper viewing distance in contrast to the riverbank's arbitrary distance. In *The Road to Lily Dale I*, the reflections off the glass produce light effects in the video reminiscent of spots in spirit photography – the double

An abstract painting featuring bold, expressive brushstrokes. The composition is dominated by large areas of vibrant red, which are interspersed with white and dark, charcoal-like tones. The texture is visible, suggesting the use of thick paint. The overall effect is one of dynamic movement and emotional intensity.

THE MOVING IMAGE CAPTURES US, WHEREAS  
WE CAPTURE THE STILL. PERCEIVED MOTION  
GRABS AND HOLDS US STILL. MESMERIZED,  
FROZEN, WE STAND, TRANSFIXED, WAITING  
TO SEE WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT. - MONICA TAP



mediation of lens and window echoing spirit photography's double exposures. The car window flattens the landscape and functions as a screen. It unifies the landscape but also throws up interference patterns that distance us from the scene. The other Lily Dale painting opens up the question of speed in its incorporation of motion blur. In this, they share visual characteristics with the smaller canvases of the Homer Watson Boulevard series.

The smaller paintings of the boulevard series are based on single video stills. The series is characterized by the strong presence of motion blur brought about by the use of a highly compressed video format on a digital camera. The footage for the smaller canvases comes from two trips tracing the length of Homer Watson Boulevard in Kitchener. The paintings offer fleeting images of the passing landscape. From a distance the paintings appear highly realistic representations of the passing landscape however, the images breakdown into paint as we approach. Their realism is that of the half-glimpsed landscape. The paintings draw our attention to the landscape but don't fully bring it into focus. The boulevard paintings work with Watson's social and cultural position as a celebrated artist and promoter of Canadian art. Their non-descript landscapes reflect on the process of commemoration and comment on the cultural position of the arts. By focussing attention on the commemoration of Watson, the paintings open up the question of Tap's relation to Canadian art and the history of landscape painting.

The paintings in the show present mobile landscapes. They are less of depictions of place than of passing through. The landscapes they offer occupy a middle ground between space and place.<sup>4</sup> They present spaces of passage to reflect on the movement between past and present. Tap's *séance* is about mediation rather than contact; we are always still on the road to Lily Dale. The paintings suggest that while the medium of paint is haunted by its history, engaging with that history provides a place for reviewing our occupation of the landscape.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Tom Gunning, "Haunting Images: Ghosts, Photography and the Modern Body," *The Disembodied Spirit*, Allison Ferris ed. (Brunswick, Maine: Bowdoin College, 2003). Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

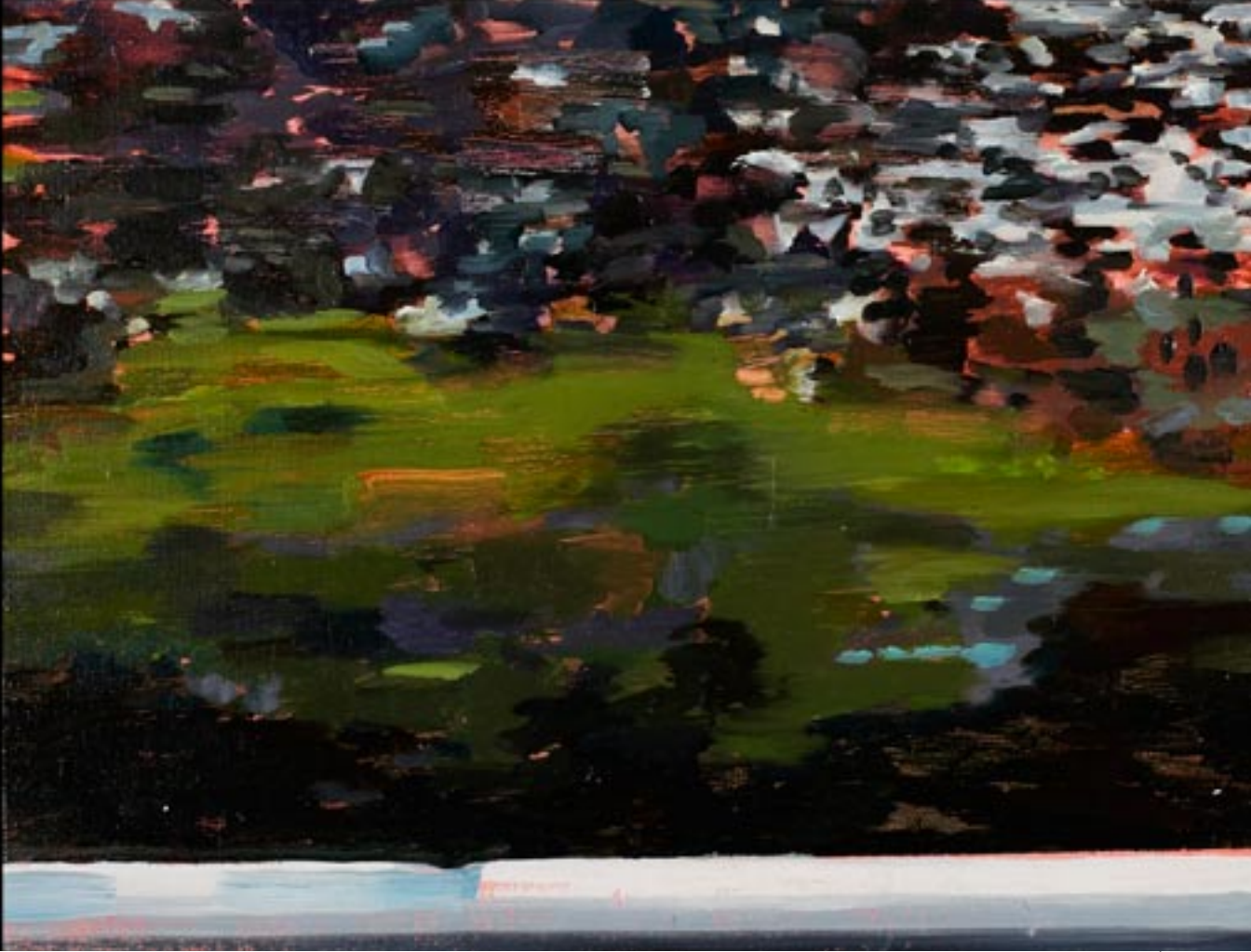
<sup>2</sup> Martyn Jolly, "Spectres from the Archive," *Image and Imagination*, Martha Langford ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queens University Press, 2005): 173-184, 177.

<sup>3</sup> By the end of the 19th century the centre of the Spiritualist movement had settled in Lily Dale, New York. [www.lilydaleassembly.com](http://www.lilydaleassembly.com)

<sup>4</sup> Cultural geographers contrast space and place to distinguish between the bare physical facts of space and the meaningful landscape of place.



^Installation views, KW|AG. (Right) *The Road to Lily Dale I*, 2006



*Homer Watson Boulevard, September 2005* (one of eleven canvases), 2006



# LIST OF WORKS

*From the train I*, 2005

Oil on canvas

58" x 73"

*Grand River I*, 2006

Oil on canvas

80" x 90"

*The Road to Lily Dale I*, 2006

Oil on canvas

80" x 99"

*The Road to Lily Dale II*, 2006

Oil on canvas

80" x 99"

*Past Cressman's Woods*, 2006

Oil on canvas

80" x 70"

*Homer Watson Boulevard, September 2005*, 2006

Oil on canvas

eleven canvases, 9" x 12" to 12" x 16"

*Homer Watson Boulevard, December 2006*, 2006

Oil on canvas

twelve canvases, 8" x 10" to 12" x 16"

Photo credits: Page 4, *Grand River I*; and Page 6, *Homer Watson Boulevard, September 2005*; and Page 16 by Rick Johnston Photography. Page 8, 11, 12, 15, 23 by Monica Tap. All installation images by K. Jennifer Bedford, KW|AG. All images are courtesy of the artist.

# MONICA TAP

Born Edmonton, 1962

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2005 *Travelling Show*, Wynick Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
*Over here / over there*, Open Studio Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
- 2004 *Paintings*, Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, Alberta  
*New Work*, Studio 21 Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 2003 *Echo*, Wynick Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
- 2002 *Further*, Tom Thompson Memorial Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ontario  
*Groundwork*, Douglas Udell Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia
- 2000 *Field work*, The Painting Center, New York, New York  
*New Paintings*, Wynick Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
*New Work*, Douglas Udell Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
- 1999 *Fields*, Gallery 1.1.1, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba  
*Landscapes*, St. Norbert's Arts and Cultural Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 1998 *Landscapes*, Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
- 1997 *Arrangements*, Douglas Udell Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta  
*New Works*, Douglas Udell Gallery, Vancouver, British Columbia
- 1996 *Reprise*, Dalhousie University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2006 *Pulse: Abstract Painting and Film*, Mount St. Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
*Invitational benefit auction*, Dieudonne, New York, NY  
*ISCP (International Studio and Curatorial Program) Open Weekend*, NY, NY  
*Under Five*, EFA Gallery (curated video screening)  
*Armoury Afterhours*, SuperTrader Gallery, Brooklyn, NY (curated video screening)  
*Fabulous*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 2005 *Abstraction Attraction*, Studio 21 Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 2003 *The Big Abstract Show*, The Painting Center, New York, NY  
*Painting!*, University Art Gallery, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan  
*The Boat Show*, Wynick Tuck, Toronto, Ontario
- 2002 *The Free Biennial*, New York, NY

- 2001 *The Brittle Landscape*, Buckham Gallery, Flint, Michigan  
*New Work: Monica Tap and Alex Livingston*, Studio 21 Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 2000 *The Single Tree*, London Regional Art and Historical Museum, London, Ontario  
*Wet Paint*, Wynick/Tuck Gallery, Toronto, Ontario  
*Wallpapers*, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Halifax, N.S. and Art Metropole, Toronto, Ontario
- 1999 *Contingency and Continuity: Negotiating New Abstraction*. MacDonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario  
*Copy Cat*, Kenderdine Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
*Style Council*, Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
*Landscape, Process and Perception*. Muttart Art Gallery, Calgary, Alberta
- 1998 *Questions of Landscape*, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
*Theatrum Mundi: Marion McCain Atlantic Art Exhibition*, Canadian Embassy, Washington, D.C.  
*Summer group*, Margaret Thatcher Projects, New York, New York  
*Six Degrees of Separation*, Prairie Art Gallery, Grande Prairie, Alberta  
*Foundlings*, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta
- 1997 *Theatrum Mundi: Marion McCain Atlantic Art Exhibition*, Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick  
*Royal Over-Seas League 14th Annual Open Exhibition*, London, UK and Edinburgh, Scotland  
*Disrepresentations: New Abstract Painting*, Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta

#### SELECTED GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2005 Research-Creation Grant: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
- 2005, 2003, 1998 Banff Centre for the Arts, Residency Grant
- 2003, 1998 Canada Council Creation/Production Grant (mid-career)
- 1999, 1997, 1996 Nova Scotia Arts Council
- 1994 Visual Arts Project Grant, Alberta Foundation for the Arts

#### SELECTED CATALOGUES

- 2003 Reid, Stuart and Nancy Tousey. Monica Tap: Paintings. Tom Thompson Memorial Art Gallery, Owen Sound, ON and Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge, AB.
- 2003 Spector, Buzz and Julia Morrisroe. Painting! Central Michigan University Art Gallery. Mount Pleasant, Michigan.
- 2000 Millard, Laura. The Single Tree. London Regional Art and Historical Museums. London, Ontario
- 1999 Shuebrook, Ron. "Contingency and Continuity: Negotiating New Abstraction" MacDonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario
- 1999 Burns, Katherine. "Landscape: Process and Perception" Muttart Public Art Gallery, Calgary, Alberta
- 1999 Jenkner, Ingrid. Style Council. Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, N.S.
- 1998 Gibson-Garvey, Susan. Questions of Landscape, Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, N.S.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 2005 Bethune-Leaman. "Mash-Ups: A Paradigm of Intertextuality, Monica Tap's Reiterations of Van Gogh's Drawings, and some Sol LeWitt for good measure." Open Studio (exhibition brochure).
- 2005 Canadian Art, .Fall, 2005, Webb, Marshall. p. 141 (review)
- 2005 *The Globe and Mail*, Dault, Gary Michael. "Motion Pictures. Section 7, p. R29, June 20 (article/ review),
- 2004 *The Daily News*, Smulders, Marilyn. "Lovely on their own, but look closer...", Halifax, NS p.25 (review)
- 2003 BorderCrossings Issue No.88, Enright, Robert. "Hover Crafting: the art of Monica Tap." p. 64-71 (interview)
- 2003 Canadian Art, Fall 2003, Fullerton, Kim. 'Monica Tap', p. 148 (review).
- 2003 *The Globe and Mail*, Dault, Gary Michael. 'Monica Tap at Wynick Tuck' March 1, p. R11 (review)
- 2001 Arts Atlantic, Summer 2001, Eyland, Cliff. "Monica Tap", #68. Pp 16-20 (feature).,
- 2000 Canadian Art, Spring, 2000, Dault, Gary Michael. "Don't Look at Me Like That and other Imperatives of Recent Abstract Painting", (feature)
- 2000 *The National Post*. Hart, Matthew. "There's something about Monica", January 22 (article)
- 2000 *Abstract Art on Line*. Walentini, Joseph. Review of exhibition at the Painting Center. January 18. (review)
- 1998 Canadian Art, Spring 1998. Laurence, Robin. "Code Work", p.96 (review)
- 1997 Maclean, July 1, 1997 "100 Canadians to Watch", (article)
- 1997 ARTSATlantic, Sprin, 1997. Metcalfe, Robin. "Monica Tap: The Pleasure of Paint"..
- 1996 Gibson-Garvey, Sue. Reprise exhibition folio, Dalhousie Art Gallery. Selected



## COLLECTIONS

Tom Thompson Memorial Art Gallery, Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Edmonton Art Gallery, Dalhousie Art Gallery, The University of Toronto, Athabasca University, MacDonald Stewart Art Centre, City of St. Albert, Corporate collections including: Morrison Petroleums, Pan-Canadian Corporation, Four Seasons Hotel, Esso Imperial Oil Canada

## PROFESSIONAL TRAINING

- 1996 Master of Fine Arts, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD)
- 1990 Bachelor of Fine Arts, NSCAD
- 1986 Alberta College of Art, University of Alberta

## RESIDENCY AWARDS

- 2005-06 International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York, NY
- 2005 The Optic Nerve, Thematic Residency, The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta
- 2005 Open Studio Visiting Artist Residency. Open Studio Printmakers workshop, Toronto
- 2004 Kunst & Complex Residency. Rotterdam, the Netherlands
- 2002 New Works Residency, Juried. The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta
- 1999 St. Norbert's Arts and Cultural Centre, invitational residency, St. Norbert's, Manitoba
- 1997 Women and Paint Thematic Residency, The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta

## SELECTED OTHER ACTIVITIES: INVITED LECTURES, PANELS, CONFERENCES

- 2005 University of Guelph Print Portfolio (production of editioned print for first annual print portfolio, together with David Urban and Tony Scherman)  
"Walk Here". Public art installation, Wallace Emerson Park, Toronto, Ontario
- 2004 "Open Season: Abstraction." Painting Symposium, MacDonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario
- 2002 Hungry Eyes, Guest curator of exhibition of contemporary abstract painting in New York and Toronto. (catalogue, symposium) Dalhousie Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 2001 "Painting, Pedagogy and the Present Tense." Chair. University Art Association of Canada, Montreal, Quebec
- 1999 "Minus forty: Abstraction by Canadian artists under forty." University Art Associations of Canada, Toronto, Ontario
- 1998 "Women and Paint." Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- 1998 "Quotation, Reference, and Replication." panel, Dalhousie University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia

## WRITER'S BIO

Matthew Brower is an historian of visual culture who works on the representation of landscape and animals. He has published on the Group of Seven and early Wildlife photography. Currently he is working on a cultural history of butterflies. He teaches art history at York University.

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(*séance*)  
Monica Tap

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*Homer Watson Boulevard, December 2006* (one of twelve canvases), 2006