

Monica Tap: Split Seconds

No one can deny the Dutch connection to landscape painting. Even the word “landscape” is derived from the Dutch “landschap.” By the 17th century in Holland, landscape was no longer merely a backdrop for an allegorical or religious theme; it had developed into a subject in its own right. This was largely the result of new attitudes towards private ownership of property and colonial expansion. And if anyone understood the value of land, it was the Dutch.

A Canadian artist of Dutch heritage, Tap has carefully studied the landscape traditions of both countries. Her investigation into contemporary and historical landscape is interlaced with new technologies and questions of perception.

According to Tap:

The original moving pictures – and from which movies get their name were panoramic landscape paintings so wide they had to be wound onto spools. Unfurled slowly before a rapt audience, these paintings evoked the then-novel experience of train travel, mimicking the landscape sliding past the window.

My paintings begin with Quicktime movies captured with a digital still camera through the window of a moving vehicle. I then extract multiple frames of these speeding landscapes. Using a data projector, I paint these video stills onto canvas; often a single frame, sometimes multiple frames overlaid. While the landscapes that I record are apparently unremarkable (they’re the spaces in between one place and another), they echo sites historically sought out by landscape painters.

I’m interested in the space between perception and recognition.

In the Split Second series, each pair of images documents two consecutive frames in a video sequence. By splitting the second so finely, Tap effectively splits our perception into two. Our gaze flits restlessly back and forth.

The Road to Lilydale paintings are based in her research into the 19th century pastoral painter, Homer Watson, whose steps she retraced to the Spiritualist community of Lilydale, in upstate New York.

Tap's conceptual and systematic investigations into the codes of pictorial illusionism and perception bring together past and present, raising questions of place, time and authorship. Working in the dark, using video images as source material, Tap reminds us that the medium of paint is haunted by its history, informed by personal memory and, more and more frequently, mediated by new technologies.

About the Artist

Originally from Alberta, Monica Tap lives in Toronto. A graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design's MFA program, she currently teaches painting at the University of Guelph.

Over the past ten years, her systematic and conceptual approach to painting has allowed her to explore the conventions of pictorial illusionism and perception. Tap has exhibited throughout Canada and the United States, including recent her most recent projects: *One-second Hudson* (MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie) and *Séance* (Thatcher Projects, New York).

In 2005 Tap received a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Foundation (SSHRC) research and creation grant for her project, "Translation as a Strategy of Renewal in Painting." The paintings in *Split Seconds* are a result of this research. The artist gratefully acknowledges SSHRC for their financial support.