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VISUAL ARTS

Minimalism in reverse

Pausing is the key to the big picture in Travellings
Published April 12, 2012 by [Tanya Hagen](#) in [Visual Arts](#)

What is our relationship to landscape in the age of the highway and its machines? Technology hurtles the body from place to place, merging broken white lines into one, rendering nuances of mountain and field as abstractions of colour. That blur of speed provides the inspiration for Montreal artist Bertrand R. Pitt's *Travellings* — a multimedia project featuring an interactive video installation of filmed landscapes accelerated into horizontal swathes of colour, accompanied by digital prints of stills from the videos.

The stills mark the audience's first point of contact with Pitt's installation: five large-format prints on matte paper, unframed and unassumingly mounted (with tiny steel magnets), stacking bold stripes of heavily saturated colour against the stark white of the gallery walls. If the images represent frozen time, their effect is not static: the luminosity of the colours — enhanced by the matte quality of the paper — plays tricks on the eye, shimmering and moving within the frame. With a casual glance, these might be abstract paintings, but the digitally rendered colour is too perfectly laid: Pitt is foremost a video artist, and his primary medium — as the main part of the installation makes clear — is electronic.

Low ambient noise (music, but not music) lures us into the next room, where a bench faces a screen animated by the now familiar bands of colour. The sound is computer-generated, born of a collaborative effort with the artist's programmer brother, Sebastián Rainville-Pitt, whose custom-designed software analyzes the colours in the image: red produces high-frequency sound, green furnishes the mid-ranges, and blue controls the bass. The full effect of the work is audience-generated: remain standing, and the landscape continues to speed by; sit down, and the details of the images begin to unfold, as the video slows and the sound compresses and draws out. We are rewarded by our momentary stillness with the spectacle of an unfolding landscape, by the miraculous transformation of the abstract into the real.

"It's kind of a reversal of the historical process of abstract painting," says Pitt, "because an abstract painter — for example, Mondrian — often works by observation. He produces a system while observing trees, architecture: the images are simplified into vertical and horizontal planes [and] into a few colours. Now with video and electronics, I am inviting the spectator to invert that process. First it's abstract, and then you take the time to sit down and the landscape is revealed to you."

Notably, the Truck exhibition marks Pitt's first opportunity to mount *Travellings* in two rooms, to offer the painterly stills as a preliminary to the video installation.

"What I'm looking for is that the viewer will look first at the prints, and see them for all of their references to painting, and then will go into the next room, and have a new perspective on the work," he explains.

Part of that perspective is the recognition that technology, much as it forms the work's implicit subject, is also fundamental to its creation.

"I'm not thinking as a painter," says Pitt. "The work relies on video processing. It requires all



DETAILS

Travellings by Bertrand R. Pitt

Truck

Friday, March 23 - Thursday, April 19

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the technology of video.”

Technology also informs the growth of the project: in this case, the machinery of speed that propels the artist from site to site, accumulating site-specific material for each successive installation. In its present form, *Travellings* consists of eight videos from Pitt’s first exhibition at La Bande Vidéo, Quebec (November 2010), five from a subsequent residency at SESC Pinheiros, São Paulo, Brazil (April- May 2011), and 17 shot during his recent stay in Calgary.

“As long as I can travel,” says Pitt, “I can add new landscapes.”

It’s crucial to Pitt that his audience recognize the installation incorporates local footage: part of the project’s objective is to offer new ways of seeing the familiar (but also to create visual analogies between close and distant landscapes). Calgary is compelling to the artist for its sharp contrasts of field and mountain, for a majestic beauty that too often blurs into background as we shuttle interminably from home to mall, and back again.

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