

Painter serves as artistic witness to the wilderness

Intent is to get viewer thinking about environment

Gilbert Bouchard



When painter Arlene Wasylynychuk says she loves the Alberta landscape, she means all of the province's varied vistas and ecosystems.

In her push for diversity, the Edmonton artist has gone so far as to create works that other artists might see as the antitheses of landscape painting, including painting land that's been clear-cut by loggers. A selection of Wasylynychuk's recent work is on display at the Scott Gallery.

"You can think about the landscape in many, many ways, including a clear-cut," she says. "While it certainly isn't a romantic landscape, it's as valid ... as any other and equally resonant on a visual level. I was painting these huge red slashes in the clear-cut that were literally the scar on the land of the intrusion, but they

PREVIEW

Arlene Wasylynychuk's *Mistaya*

Showing at: the Scott Gallery
Until: Feb. 27;
meet the artist at a reception
Saturday, Feb. 10
from 1-3 p.m.



Wasylynychuk

were also very visually compelling."

Wasylynychuk uses her loose, semi-abstract works to move the viewer "beneath and beyond" the "quick, objective flash" of the surface appearance of the beautiful vista into the much harder "prolonged subjective journey" into landscape paintings that reflect the full extent of Alberta's diverse wild places.

"The larger intent of this work is to get people to think about the environment and how we're fragmenting it."

Ironically enough, the way Wasylynychuk fights the artistic fragment of



Arlene Wasylynychuk's *Mistaya* #15 is an oil on canvas painting.

SUPPLIED

the landscape we see in traditionally beautiful and limited-in-subject-matter landscape paintings is to fragment her own colourful, large-scale works.

Going out of her way to create appealing albeit complicated images that mix up perspectives and play with less-than-natural colour choices, the painter hopes these layered landscapes convey the rich reality of the land that viewers have felt in the past when they were directly interacting with the ecosystem.

"I try really hard to not give you just one single viewpoint to look at in a painting."

Her most recent work was inspired by a marathon hike in Alberta's *Mistaya* region.

She wants to position herself as an artistic witness to the wilderness in an emotionally connected but subjective fashion.

"The majority of the population, even

here in Alberta, lives in urban areas and doesn't have a connection to the land even though they see the idea of connection to the land as important.

"For me, this is about bringing a connection with the land to my viewer, but doing so in a way that is active engagement and not just a memory."

Wasylynychuk sees her paintings attempting to connect to a larger "intangible reality" that you get in the wilderness. Her biggest challenge is to somehow convey things like the feeling of the wind and the changes in light and cloud cover you experience minute by minute when outdoors.

"The wind is so important, both to your sense of being in the landscape as well as its role in the formation of the landscape itself. And while you can connect to it on an emotional and physical level, you can't paint it directly."