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Wylie: Illusion through addition, subtraction

By Liz Wylie - Kelowna Capital News

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Jordan Broadworth, *outside script*, 2012, oil on Mylar, 14 x 17 in.

The current installation of work in our smaller exhibition space, the Mardell G. Reynolds Gallery at the Kelowna Art Gallery, is brimming with visual richness. Twenty-five paintings by New York-based artist Jordan Broadworth are squeezed into the room, each one packing an aesthetic kick that will unpack with some force once a viewer begins looking at the work.

Broadworth achieves an incredible variety in these works, each measuring only 14 by 17 inches, especially considering his working method is the same for each. Basically, the illusion he achieves of both tactility and luminescence, is accomplished by an additive and then subtractive process. Paint is layered on, then methodically scraped away, and the works are left to dry. The rich black in each piece is the last layer to go on, and the surfaces of each work, while looking heavily textured, are actually completely flat.

This weird contradiction and surprise is one of the binaries referred to in the exhibition's title.

Others include such opposites as linear vs painterly, gesture vs a geometric structure, and light vs dark. Each of these binaries is brought into a hard-won harmony in the pieces.

The small works are dense and active, as one might expect from an artist living in New York City. Broadworth relocated there from his native Ontario about nine years ago and has thrived in its richness of cultural offerings. He has been exhibiting professionally for about 20 years, and is a seasoned practitioner of abstraction. Viewers might pick up on allusions or nods to previous artists' work, for example, that of the Abstract Expressionists of the mid-20th century.

There are no direct references to real life in the pieces in a visual/representational sense, but the artist's intellect, psychology and emotions are all strongly present. His intriguing titles (for example, wolfer, implant copy, papered saw and wrecked substitute) are plucked from a variety of random sources, and are not clues to meaning per se. The meaning of Broadworth's art lies in its process and in his thinking and stance during its creation. He also works in large scale on canvas, and the two areas of his practice—the small Mylar works and larger canvases—feed back and forth into each other.

Ultimately there is great visual and mental pleasure to be had in looking at this exhibition, especially to those visitors willing to wade into Broadworth's world and vicariously participate in the making of these thrilling gems of colour, shape, line, and light.

Jordan Broadworth: Vital Binaries: Recent Works on Mylar runs at the Kelowna Art Gallery until June 16.