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JUNE 2020

"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

Kim Dorland: Nailing Down a Butterfly at Galerie Antoine Ertaskiran



Kim Dorland, Nailing Down a Butterfly, Installation view. All images courtesy Galerie Antoine Ertaskiran.

Kim Dorland (<https://www.kdorland.com/>): Nailing Down a Butterfly

Galerie Antoine Ertaskiran (<http://antoineertaskiran.com/>)

October 17 - November 30, 2019

By **JAMES D. CAMPBELL**, December 2019

“If you go down in the woods today

You're sure of a big surprise

If you go down in the woods today

You'd better go in disguise!”

-- Jimmy Kennedy / John W. Bratton, “Teddy Bear's Picnic” lyrics

That Kim Dorland has left his Fungi from Yuggoth phase – I mean those extravagant pigment-clotted fantasias that exert a somatic force upon us – and moved into a more pared-down but no less exhilarating space is evident from the paintings exhibited here. And it is no less menacing or resonant a space, far from the woodland idylls of early childhood. Our guide Dorland is no stranger to the deep forest, and the darkness that inhabits it, but his painting compass always still points true North.

For those of us who have always identified Dorland with the apotheosis of the thick coat – his lovingly coagulated, clotted surfaces would make both Eugene Leroy and Milton Resnick proud, after all – the paintings exhibited here may be less material entities than embodied epiphanies but, of course, the excrescences still rule.

It is all there, after all, in the strong undertow of the paint – the pungent and supremely sensuous materiality of Dorland's pigment – that he has plumbed the depths of what is still possible for painting. Instead of celebrating nature, it offers us a mirror of its desecration. It's best to take heed of the Teddy's Bear's Picnic lyrics cited above when one explores the works in this exhibition. Bad things can and do happen in the deep forest. And Dorland is an eloquent witness to those happenings.



Kim Dorland, The Green Man, 2019. Huile sur lin / Oil on linen, 61 x 51 cm (24 x 20").

The Green Man (2019) here is particularly instructive. In folklore, the representation of a face with reams of branches and vines sprouting from nostrils, eyes, ears and mouth is interpretable as a forest spirit, guardian of green shoots and arbours. But in Dorland's

work it is no decorative adjunct or ornament, secular or ecclesiastical. The born again pagans among us recognize that Dorland is not about nostalgia but about bearing witness.

The Green Man is an atavism of natural vegetative deities and a symbol of cyclical death and rebirth in nature. It is incorporated into Dorland's lexicon as a phantasmal sign and warning of limit experiences in the context of nature. His hardscrabble upbringing may bear on this, but I prefer to think that he sees the natural world as inherently redemptive, though now very much at risk.



Kim Dorland, Bye Bye, 2019. Peinture à l'huile, encre et gravure sur panneau de bois / oil, ink and woodcut on wood panel, 66 x 91.5 cm (26 x 36").

Similarly, *Bowden* (2019), a painting of an abandoned and graffiti pocked roadside gas station five hundred miles from nowhere is a palpable glyph of the ruination of the built world, and *Bye Bye* (2019), a spooky invocation of the proverbial Cabin in the Woods brings the issue of dilapidation and lurking menace to the fore.

In *The Last Lie* (2019), the figure of the painter with his palette en plein air in the midst of nature is a worthy stand-in for Dorland himself. And more rumours of Canadian history painting and Zombieland abound. He is a gifted paint mechanic, but more than this, he is a painterly ventriloquist with panache.



Kim Dorland, Carry On, 2019. Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas, 122 x 91.5 cm (48 x 36").

His work still reminds me of that of Frank Auerbach whose joyfully profane string-like applications of paint is paid loving homage to here. Consider *Carry On* (2019) with its loping mummified figure festooned with pigment sprung right from the tube. Auerbach's fluid aggregations of paint obviously left a powerful impression on Dorland, just as Philip Guston's work did. His painterliness is always explicit and the subject matter often verges on implicit critique. The criticality here has less to do with the overwhelmingly tactual and visceral nature of his 'technique' than with a critique of *Zombieland* encroaching on Nature with lamentable results.

So, if Dorland is still an inveterate creature of his paint, he is, after all, rather more than that. He is a painter of uncanny rectitude and moral wherewithal poised at the limits of the assimilable, the nameable. If his paint is less visceral now, it is no less vivacious or critical in mien. The reductiveness in the work is a further demonstration of virtuosity and risk-taking.



Kim Dorland, Fog, 2019. Huile sur toile / Oil on canvas, 122 x 152.5 cm (48 x 60").

His paint application has been extreme – but never extraneous and never plangent or gimmicky. Tactuality is still his truth, but not this gifted painter’s strongest suit. Indeed, there is a deep quiet in all his work, despite the superficial impression of mayhem, occult phenomena and hurly burly, that abides. It is this still centre that secures him a place in the first rank of contemporary painters.

This is the last show at Ertaskiran before its merger with Parisian Laundry a little further west in Montreal. The new gallery will bear the name Bradley Ertaskiran and will be situated in the Parisian Laundry building. Their respective stables will be merged. Megan Bradley is the current Director of Parisian Laundry.

Dorland’s exhibition is both triumphant punctuation and bracing farewell. It marks the end of eight years at a gallery that has mounted some of the finest exhibitions seen in Montreal over that period. This bodes well for its imminent amalgamation and for the future of the new gallery. **WM**



JAMES D. CAMPBELL

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