

AVENUE



A GROUP OF MORE THAN SEVEN

The Carte Blanche series spotlights the diversity of Canadian painting

BY MARK MEDLEY

The second volume of the Carte Blanche series goes a long way to dispelling the notion that Canada's contemporary painters are lagging behind their peers on the world stage; while art hubs such as New York, London and Berlin may hog the spotlight, in Vancouver, in Winnipeg, in Toronto, in Montreal, in Halifax (and the list goes on and on, from small towns to suburbs), important and vibrant work is being created, quietly but surely.

After the first instalment focused on the wealth of talented photographers this country has to offer, *Carte Blanche 2* shifts to painting. Last year, an open call to artists across Canada led to almost 200 painters being selected for this newly released compendium. The book "was envisioned as a way to document the flourishing state of contemporary paintings being made here today," writes gallerist and curator Clint Roenisch in the book's introductory essay.

"When you see a book [like *CB2*] it shows the explosive resurgence and celebration of the fact that painting is thriving," says Greenwich, N.B.'s Alexandra Flood, whose paintings *Octavia* and *Paradise* are included in the collection. "It solidly anchors the validity of the work that's being produced across Canada."

But Canada, as Roenisch writes, seems to present "several disadvantages to being a contemporary painter ... compared to Europe and the United States." At auction, the best-selling work comes from dead artists, as many collectors hedge their bets on "the safer and historically bona fide efforts of the Group of Seven and their colleagues from the 1920s and 1930s." As well, art publishers face their own set of issues, including lack of funding and international distribution.

"It's quite easy to go to other countries and see huge collections of con-

temporary local work, but in Canada it's been a bit more difficult," says Toronto painter Dorian FitzGerald, who contributed a work called *The Beer Hall* to *CB2*. "It's like a truism: you've gotta leave Toronto ... to sort of make a name for yourself before you're welcomed back," though FitzGerald says he doesn't necessarily agree with those sentiments. He has artist friends who have left; he's chosen to remain.

Flood sees Canada as an emerging force, saying "my feeling is that Canadians are pretty well respected worldwide and that we have a good chunk of the attention."

This book may raise their profile even higher. *CB2* takes the pulse of contemporary painting in Canada, distilling the wide breadth of work found in our cities and towns, studios and workshops into a hefty yet manageable 333 pages; it must be a thankless task trying to establish a list of the most important contemporary painters in the country, but this is probably as complete a book as you'll find.

"It's not really biased towards one type of painting or region," says Vancouver's Matthew Brown; his painting *Blonde* appears in the book. "I think it's a good survey of what's going on in Canada."

Roenisch writes that "every generation of artist here has found ongoing currency and continued relevance in the act of painting." FitzGerald, for one, still believes that to be true.

"I think it does still have currency, obviously, otherwise I wouldn't be doing it," he says. "There's just something about paint. When you print something out on a printer, generally, it's always sort of a compromise. But if you go to the actual raw mineral and use that to excite someone's eyeballs, it does it in a different way and a more fulfilling way."

■ *Carte Blanche, Volume 2: Painting* is published by The Magenta Foundation (\$75).



Above: Dorian FitzGerald's *The Beer Hall*, 2005, acrylic and caulking on canvas.
Top: Alexandra Flood's *Octavia*, 2004, acrylic on canvas.

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