

Interview: Kim Dorland



"Super! Natural!"

Kim Dorland is a Toronto based painter who examines the psychic, nostalgic spaces of his upbringing in Canada through sumptuous impasto layers. At once playfully calling attention to their own physicality, as well as the nostalgia of Dorland's personal narratives, the paintings are at once visceral and expansive. Beautiful/Decay recently interviewed Kim about his artistic inspirations, painting technique and more. Full interview and images after the jump!

Your use of paint is so tactile and sumptuous, though it sort of plays of the trope of impasto in a fresh way- how did you begin working with the material in this fashion, and what are you attempting to convey with its handling?

My use of impasto has evolved quite naturally. I've always used paint quite liberally but a few years ago I started to use thickness in a more deliberate way. I wanted to highlight the fact that what the viewer was looking at was painted - I know that seems like a simplistic goal but I was seeing so much painting that spoke directly to photography - it was rubbing me the wrong way or something. The thickness is one of many approaches I use all highlighting the fact that my paintings are painted. In the super-thick portraits the thickness works differently in that the paint actually becomes a kind of flesh of its own. Paint this thick, in a fleshy tone, seems to have a visceral effect. I consider them representational portraits - they aren't finished until they represent who I am painting (most often my wife, Lori), so the paint carries a certain psychological weight. In Canada there is a rich history of thick painting, I wanted to speak to that as well.

Within your portraiture, the faces are obliterated, in an almost violent, grotesque fashion- what do you think about the human image and why do you choose to present it in this fashion?

They look more violent to others than they do to me. I have always intended these portraits to be very old-school in their attempt to resemble the person I am painting - again, most often my wife. I actually consider them to be very loving portraits of her.

Many of your works seem to evoke a very Americana, campground lifestyle where automobile, nature, RV, animal and man seem to have odd interactions. Where do you draw your subject matter from?

I am Canadian - but I think my work speaks to Americans as well because we do share so much culturally. I draw my subject from the experiences I have lived through and my impoverished upbringing. I paint trailers and low-income housing because that's where I grew up. The bush parties and fist fights are from first hand experience. And, while growing up in small-town Alberta (in Western Canada), there would be these weird times when you would be walking somewhere and suddenly be face to face with a moose or deer. It's just the way things were where I grew up. Whenever I visit family back home I take hundreds of photos to work with. Even though I live in Toronto now my work is very tied to the specific space I grew up in.

I love the paintings of tree stumps with graffiti- are these self invented? Or what's your thinking behind these images?

These came from seeing nature marked with graffiti and carvings. I also wanted to somehow show a trace of activity in nature or the woods without having to have a figure literally depicted in it.

You were born in Wanwright, Canada- apart from occasional iconic symbols included within your work (like the Canadian flag in "Curtain") how does your upbringing and place of birth inform your work?

My upbringing in Wainwright, and other towns like Red Deer, Alberta are a crucial element informing the narrative and physical space depicted in my work. I will probably work with that specific space for the rest of my life.

Who are some of your other favorite artists and what elements do you admire about their work?

I have a long list of artists whom I admire - mostly painters. Tom Thomson - who might be every Canadian's favorite painter - a hero of mine. Guston. Picasso - especially the late works. Dekooning. Frank Auerbach. Lucien Freud. Edvard Munch. I like David Altmedj a lot. Diane Arbus. Baselitz. Anselm Keifer. Daniel Richter. Van Gogh. Alex Coleville. Helmut Newton. Warhol. I think Jeff Wall is amazing. Edward Hopper. Alex Katz. Peter Doig. Karen Kilimnick. I like some of these artists for the tone or mood of their works and some for more formal reasons.

Why do you create artwork?

Because I love making paintings. I love the material, the process, the challenge. Also, I'm unemployed, so I don't know what else I could do.

What's the significance of the Northern Lights to you?

There is a lake in Northern Saskatchewan called Waskesiu Lake. My wife, when we first got together when we were teenagers, took me there to her family's cabin. We used to go down to the beach late at night to look at the stars together and sometimes there would be Northern Lights as well. They are very awe-inspiring to see first hand. Beyond that they remind me of a time before life became adult with art career, mortgage, kids etc. I'm nostalgic for that time in my life. We try to go back as often as we can. My son really likes it there.

What projects are you currently working on?

My wife is going to give birth to our second child any day now so that's the biggest project at the moment. I'm actually taking a couple of months off of painting to give myself a break - I have had a few years of non-stop shows. I have a show up in New York right now as well as Mantova, Italy. There is a book coming out via my Italian gallery. I'm also leading the Emma Lake Workshop (in Northern Saskatchewan) in July - I'm going to try to conjure the ghosts of Clement Greenberg and Barnett Newman. I'll start working again in the Fall.

For more images & information on Kim Dorland, visit Kimdorland.com

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