

MARK STEBBINS : The Fragile Beauty of Memory

By Marie-Anne Letarte

Mark Stebbins' works contain wonderful treasures that the viewer discovers point by point, as in a mosaic where the enigmatic representation is sometimes figurative, sometimes abstract.

The themes of memory and time are at the heart of his approach. Using photos taken in everyday life as raw material, he reduces the number of their pixels with the help of software: the images thus degraded testify to the process of decomposition of memory, of its fundamental impermanence.



Using a fine pen, Stebbins then reproduces these images on canvas, dividing them into a multitude of small squares that evoke the division of time into days, hours, minutes and seconds. Through this meticulous work, the artist reinvents the visual codes of digital language and craft while summoning the qualities of abstract painting.

Several works are partially painted (one pixel out of two) in order to illustrate the feeling of loss, but also the will to fight against the erasure of time by clinging to the materiality of memory. These "perforated" images incite the brain to recreate an overall image by filling in the holes that the eye does not see. The work of gestalt or mental totalization seeks, in so doing, to reverse the process of fragmentation of the material. While memory, as an ideal representation, is usually perceived in its immaterial dimension, Stebbins' works invite us instead to explore the "materiality" of memory.

Illustration : *Sight*, 2019, acrylic on wood, 11 x 11 in

The artist's paintings also honour the memory of several artistic movements. Like the pointillists, Stebbins creates luminous vibrations by juxtaposing dots of colour that challenge our synthesizing faculties. His use of vertical stripes and geometric patterns can also be understood through the filter of the hard-edge: the multitude of small squares that make up his work all have defined contours. His works also recall the geometric abstraction movement by their composition, the play of colours, the gradations and the spirals; or Op Art by the optical illusions of his radial matrices. The current of visual artists also feeds Stebbins' work; a work by Claude Tousignant was the source of inspiration for one of his paintings.

His recent work is inspired by tapestries and quilts made in Canada in the 19th century. In a patient process of execution that echoes the labour of artisans of centuries past, Stebbins brings to life on canvas the textures, colours and intricacies of these compositions originally created with textiles.

Stebbins also creates digital works through the careful collage of fabric photographs from his family's heritage. Using Photoshop software, he weaves virtual quilts that he then prints on paper. With these works, Stebbins takes the unexpected interweaving of craft and technology to the next level. In these paradoxical compositions, past and present, ancient craft techniques and contemporary imaging processes intersect.

Situated at the intersection of matter and time, Stebbins' works allow us to experience the fleeting nature of memory (emotional, familial, computational, historical) - fleeting, yet undeniable, like the fragile beauties of life.

(biographical notes on verso)

Biographical Notes



Mark Stebbins is a visual artist based in London, Ontario, Canada. Working primarily with acrylic he paints dense, abstract compositions that combine references to the domains of craft, fine art and digital imaging. Areas of interest include data remanence, translation, corruption and glitch.

His work has been exhibited in public, commercial and artist-run galleries across Canada and internationally. Recent solo exhibitions include *Oblivion Souvenirs* (2019) and *As Raindrops Become The Rain* (2017) at Galerie Simon Blais; *Among the Jaggies, Along the Seams* at Wil Kucey Gallery, Toronto (2016); *Picture Elements* at the Latcham Gallery, Stouffville (2014); and *Geullich* at Galerie PICI, Seoul, co-hosted by the Embassy of Canada to Korea (2013). A large three-person exhibition, *Making Methods*, was organized by The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa (2013) and toured to the Judith & Norman Alix Art Gallery, Sarnia (2014).

Awards include Honourable Mention in the RBC Canadian Painting Competition (2010), Best in Exhibition and Best in Drawing at the Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition (2010), Halifax Mayor's Award of Distinction in Contemporary Visual Arts (2009) and Visual Arts Nova Scotia's Emerging Artist of the Year (2009). He has been awarded grants by the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council. Stebbins' work is featured in Canadian and international collections, including the Canada Council Art Bank, RBC Royal Bank of Canada and the Halifax Regional Municipality. He holds a BFA from Western University and an LL.B. from Schulich School of Law at Dalhousie University.