AUTHIER, Melanie (b. 1980, Montreal, Quebec / née à Montréal (Québec) en 1980)

Melanie Authier is an established abstract painter currently based in Ottawa, Ontario. Born in Montreal, she holds a BFA from Concordia University, Montreal (2002) and a MFA from the University of Guelph (2006). Most broadly, Authier exploits the medium of painting to explore contrasts and contradictions between the artificial and the organic, the technological and the natural, flatness and deep space, chaos and control. Known for a palette that combines soft pastel hues with flourishes of caustic, synthetic colour, as well as her simultaneous use of masking and expressive sfumato, her work has matured quickly in the past several years, and has gained her national recognition, including being a semi-finalist for the 2007 RBC Painting Competition. Since beginning to show her work within Canada in 2004, Authier has had solo exhibitions across the country, include The Ribbon and the Lightning Rod at Georgia Scherman Projects, Toronto (2010/2011); Nobody's Geometry at the Faculty of Fine Arts (FOFA) Gallery at Concordia University in Montreal (2010) and Warrior Ridge at the Michael Gibson Gallery in London, ON (2010). Her works have been included in many group exhibitions, including Four Ottawa Painters, Carleton University Art Gallery, Ottawa (2010); The Phoenix Art, Galerie Simon Blais, Montreal, PQ (2009) and Young Canada Presents: Barometric Reading Series 1 at LE Gallery, Toronto (2009) as well as two-person exhibitions with Martin Golland, at Michel Guimont Gallery, Quebec, PQ and Polychrome Fine Arts, Victoria, BC in 2010. Her paintings have been collected by BMO Financial Group, Royal Bank of Canada and the TD Bank Financial Group as well as the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Melanie Authier belongs to a younger generation of Canadian artist who are reinvigorating the medium of painting. In a recent review in the Globe and Mail, R.M. Vaughan has described it as being characterized by a turn back towards materialism. “Raised on decades of obscuring art theory and dry conceptualism, the new materialists just want to make their mark. This is not to say that Authier or her generation’s work lacks rigour – rather, that the works place visual pleasure and conceptuality on the same level.” In the Magenta Foundation’s 2008 survey of Canadian Painting Carte Blanche Vol. 2, Clint Roenisch elaborates further:

A younger generation, including Mark Mullin, Matt Crookshank, Wil Murray and Melanie Authier, seems to engage in a manic, know thyself examination of painting’s own innards. They sample from several historically distinct schools of painting – hard-edge, op art, expressionism, the monochrome, neo-geo – and then include it all in one painting. A mash-up, as the kids used to say. In the realm of abstraction, the historical ideal of ‘purity’ is often dismissed in favour of modes that admit more of the world.

In Authier’s works, the real world enters in by way of references to landscape and natural phenomena, but also in her inclusion of contrasting architectonic forms. In her paintings, an army of formal contradictions duke it out on a battleground of brash, bold colours. Her feathered
and teased abstractions recall the picturesque traditions of the past where the veil of beauty has been pulled back to reveal elements of wildness, as she presents to us vertiginous environments that appear be in the process of perpetual motion. As the artist herself describes:

The conventions of beauty and the sublime that have existed since the 18th century can be looked at reflexively within a contemporary context. The artistic movement of the picturesque and the sublime were the early symptoms of a continuing relationship with nature and landscape as something that is romanticized and lost. The concept of Nature is a provisional category that is ideologically determined. My paintings negotiate the idea of “nature” as a mediated social construct.

Please cite in the following manner:

Rhiannon Vogl, Acquisition Proposal for Melanie Authier’s Shelterbelt and Augury, accession #2012.0209.1 and #43455, Curatorial File, National Gallery of Canada.

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i RM Vaughan. “Melanie Authier at Georgia Scherman Projects,” The Globe and Mail, 4 December 2010


iii Artist’s Statement