

## Landon Mackenzie's Crossing Over, Why Cloud the Whites is spectacular and intimate

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### **Landon Mackenzie: Crossing Over, Why Cloud the Whites At the Richmond Art Gallery until October 30**

Landon Mackenzie's paintings combine abstraction and representation in a manner that is sombre and exuberant, considered and intuitive, microcosmic and macrocosmic—and completely individual to her. The art of this stellar Vancouver artist reverberates with ideas and explorations, with history and science, cartography and neurology, and the worlds revealed by communications technologies and medical imaging devices. What looks at first glance like an abstract-expressionist splatter painting is actually concertedly worked and reworked. It could be an exploding galaxy of stars, planets, and errant moons—or a teeming innerscape of throbbing human cells.

Mackenzie's exhibition at the Richmond Art Gallery includes 13 paintings on linen together with a flurry of watercolour and ink studies on paper, all produced in the last five years. The experience of looking at this work is both spectacular and intimate: the large paintings are very large (2.2 by 3.3 metres) and the small could be held in the hand and read like a book. The show also includes drawings executed during a prolific four-month residency in Paris in 2009, and they and the paintings that derive from them are formal and imaginative variations on city and Metro maps. In Mackenzie's hands, such maps operate as metaphors for the ways we locate ourselves in place and time.

The big painting (*Spin*) *Otis and Ash* is a dazzling dance of lines, dots, and splatters on a chrome-yellow ground, all the lines and forms spiralling away from the black orb at the work's centre. Again, the overall composition suggests a densely occupied metropolis. The thin white cloud that seems to hover over the canvas represents the disruptive layer of ash shot into the sky by an Icelandic volcano in April 2010. It is a measure of Mackenzie's skill that this complex vision of time, place, natural phenomena, and human settlement comes together in a gorgeous and compelling painting.

In *World of Knots and Troubles*, an abstracted riverine landscape with brown water, black stones, and sinuous strands of plant life is overlaid in places with horizontal bands. Each band is composed of wavering parallel lines executed in white and pale pink, and evocative of both river currents and electronic transmissions. Also woven into the image are vertical branching forms that could be vegetation, could be blood vessels, could be nerves running through mind and body. Bright horizontal and diagonal lines interrupted by small bursts of light—what Mackenzie has called in interviews “zips and zaps”—evoke electrical impulses travelling along neural pathways. The black ovoids that read as stones in a landscape could also be human cells.

As with so many of Mackenzie's paintings, *Vancouver as the Centre of the World* looks abstract on first viewing: here, an enormous red oval floats on a strangely striped ground of blue-green and sandy ochre. Again, however, the work is highly representational, its built-up layers of brilliant colour and hectic line creating an unexpected image of the globe. Displaced cities and overlapping continents suggest not only the world turning in space but also the distorting cultural biases of mapmakers past and present. Also represented here are moons, satellites, time zones, Internet cables, shipping lanes, and airline traffic. All contribute to a vision of place that is both physical and metaphysical—and immensely beautiful to look at.

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