

VISUAL ART

Daniel Hutchinson

by Ben Portis



1. Marie Lannoo, *In the Dirt*, 2012, acrylic on folded powder paper, 28 x 19.5 inches.

enabled Lannoo to advance the aesthetic parameters of her paintings from those she'd previously done on Masonite panels. In that work the opulence of colour, the geometric play and the deep absorption of light were the significant actions. In this new body of work, each painting is composed of an individual network of folded lines protruding from and scored into the surface. The surfaces are richly saturated with flowing layers of paint, lyrically resonant and brashly flaring. The colours generally stay in the secondary range rather than veering into the high-impact registers of very artificial neon tones. The figurative play of light and colour thus connotes the natural, "the stars." Material revelation minus religion. This manual act of folding enables the surface to project more dimensionality—physically and conceptually, and this amplification augments the interaction with the viewer. As you move laterally the impressions of light and colour change. The folds act like the tesserae in a Byzantine mosaic, where there is no fixed point of perspective and the emanation of light

itself is the subject. Here, human interaction with light, not divine intercession or metaphysics, is what is possible. The refractions mirror the angle of the viewer's gaze. Shifting gains different views with changing intensities—blues turning turquoise turning green for example. In the monochromatic, primary colour pieces, the experience moves from depth to sheer deflection. You try to find the best vantage point and then realize it is all one: yours.

The work doesn't decide on a particular outcome; it searches and playfully makes many aesthetic references: utopian Modernism, colour field and gestural painting, minimalism, commodification. The larger aesthetic import is, perhaps of necessity, inchoate but the ground on which to ask, the folded-ground, is solidly established. The folds function as the decentering act of the show and are more utilitarian than idealistic, positive in their commitment to communicate. The act of looking is progressive, especially so when the viewer's awareness that the visual roams uncontrollably is inbuilt. The upshot of the praxis is self-reliance, the personal demonstration of light wandering over surface, seen to another place, shared in the stars. ■

"Marie Lannoo: *In the Dirt with Eyes on the Stars*" was exhibited at Newzones gallery, Calgary, from May 11 to June 29, 2013.

T. Hardy is a freelance writer living in Nelson BC.

Daniel Hutchinson paints as if the sense of sight could be banished from the artist's faculties. This is not to say that his works are not highly, even intriguingly, visual. However, Hutchinson turns to image schemes, analogues and aptitudes that surpass observation or imaginal departures therefrom. The title of the exhibition, "Almanac," alluded to weather events yet to occur when they were portrayed by Hutchinson, events that might never occur as forecast, that even, should they occur, would do so according to natural laws that assume countless determined variations but ultimately irreducible patterns.

Hutchinson depicts atmospheres as being contiguous with their contents and residue—for instance, water's potentially simultaneous occurrence as vapour, rain and ice. His paintings are not merely dark or black, they are truly opaque. However, opacity, while shutting out the light, has its own capacity for traversable, navigable and mappable space; how does a fog or a storm cell occupy and transform space? Consider it as a churning, engulfing mass of substance, rather than a passing phenomenon. Consider, similarly, air molecules, energy particles, photons. Hutchinson's paintings assume such landmarks of nontangible navigation. They are fanciful projections of the mind, yet in order to be envisioned they require not just the relegation of sight, but its exclusion.

As the title implies, "Almanac," which is multi-part, is a beautifully measured and cadenced exhibition, strung from the entry and intermittently through the gallery space. Painted on 31 eight-by-ten-inch panels variously in portrait

1. Marie Lannoo, *In the Dirt*, 2012, acrylic on folded powder paper, 28 x 19.5 inches.

2. Daniel Hutchinson, *Painting for Coloured Light (Analogous Colour)*, 2012–13, oil on canvas with fluorescent light and wood, 77 x 96 inches. Photograph: Allan Kosmajac.

3. Daniel Hutchinson, *Painting for Coloured Light (Cyan and Magenta)*, 2012–13, oil on canvas with fluorescent light and wood, 77 x 96 inches. Photograph: Allan Kosmajac.



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or landscape orientation, one for each day of March 2013, it was inspired by the weather forecasts of the 196th edition of the *Farmers' Almanac*. (Both predictions and paintings obviously realized well in advance: the exhibition opened on March 2.) The published almanac does not necessarily isolate and individuate day-by-day events. Rather, it clusters trends over a period. Hutchinson accordingly grouped his paintings, prognosticating from the vantage of Toronto, where he lives, works and has a vested interest in the weather. For example, a group of three, titled respectively *Freezing Fog, Mixing and Black Ice*, were collectively subtitled (2013/03/03-05: *Rain and snow then sunny, cold*) after the entry that they purport to portray.

Hutchinson's oil paintings are near-monochrome blacks, each one specially prepared, sometimes mixed and modulated with a generous quotient of a deep chromatic hue, perhaps violet or blue. His application of paint is intimidatingly decisive, planned and controlled. His brush strokes are directionally sequenced, evenly spreading the viscous mixture, stiff enough to retain the striations of the bristles. He modifies and harnesses his brushes to achieve

specific textures. The resulting images are patterns, often quite rational, but usually suggesting change and interference. And while resolutely handmade, these images have affinities to technological translations of the supravisible, such as genome mapping, crystallography, integrated circuit architecture, deep-space telescoping. Infrared, ultraviolet; is it even possible to expel the optical matrix from visual art?

In fact, Hutchinson's allusion is something of an illusion, a ruse. Despite the implied specificity of their titles, not only in place but time, the small "Almanac" panels were in fact replicated details taken from the artist's larger and earlier works, presumably where the unintended effects could have resulted. For some time, Hutchinson's broader subject has been atmospherics, including sunspots, icebergs, waves, clouds and aurora borealis, to which the "Almanac" series offered a culmination. The phased calendar string of panels was punctuated by much larger tondo panels and rectangular canvases that are far less incidental, accidental and impressionistic. Instead, they appear declarative and, indeed, visionary. *Xerographic Hexakaidecagon* (150 cm in diameter) presumably conforms to its

mechanically geometric (16-sided) title. Its surface was a regularly applied grid—horizontal rows of mosaic-like brush strokes. It was paired, with generous spacing, by the like-sized, circular *Sunspots*, a more fractal pattern of dark, dull blues, as if the results of corneal injury from staring into the sun. These paintings, like so many of Hutchinson's works from the past five years, induce a curious mirror effect, as the striated brush strokes of lushly oiled pigments reflectively glint the local illumination, shimmering and reconfiguring according to the angle of observation and movement of the viewer. It is only possible to locate and see oneself in opacity. Conventional mirrors are, after all, hyper-opaque.

This, clearly, has stimulated Hutchinson too. The project room at Angell Gallery was devoted to three works hung in an unlit space, the paintings activated by a dedicated, integral fluorescent fixture. *Aurora Seen in Greenland, c. 1874* alluded to the mystic encounters with Arctic light as recorded by early European explorers of the Far North. The six-foot panel had a radiant, moiré blackness, its surface erupting with frigid spikes. In his second Toronto exhibition of the spring, "Paintings for

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"The News From Here: 2013 Alberta Biennial"

By Diana Sherlock

Electric Light," at YYZ Artists' Outlet, Hutchinson pushed this line of exploration further and exclusively. Works with clinically descriptive titles, such as *Painting for Coloured Light (Cyan and Magenta)* were reductively gridded with overall patterns of black paint strokes. Above or below or both, mounted on the wall or the floor, Hutchinson placed trim, custom-made fluorescent light fixtures. He has banded these bulbs with various gel filters, and with such regularity that what is obviously called to mind are the light works of Dan Flavin. These works were fully and intentionally optical, inducing wave patterns that are oblivious to the joy of the aesthetic eye, like obsidian. ■

"Daniel Hutchinson: Almanac" was exhibited at Angell Gallery, Toronto, from March 2 to April 13, 2013. *"Paintings for Electric Light"* was exhibited at YYZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto, from May 11 to August 10, 2013.

Ben Portis is the curator of the MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, Ontario.



Governor General Award-winning critic and Calgary-based independent curator Nancy Tousley delivered "The News From Here: 2013 Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art" to the Art Gallery of Alberta in Edmonton this spring. This is the eighth version of the Alberta Biennial, which began in 1996. Since 1998, it has been directed by AGA's Director/Chief Curator Catherine Crowston. An exhibition of Alberta artists selected by Alberta curators (Richard Rhodes has been the only exception to date), the Biennial's purpose has always been to raise the profile of contemporary art provincially and nationally—to cultivate a critical dialogue about art among artists from far-flung communities, to develop a more adventuresome audience and to frame a snapshot of the province's contemporary art history. Arguably, the Art Gallery of Alberta's commitment to the Biennial has contributed to its status as the provincial institution for contemporary art, this title sealed by a name change in 2005, prior to the launch of architect Randall Stout's new building in 2010 and ongoing program

partnerships with the National Gallery of Canada.

Although there seems to be a commitment to maintaining a strong regional identity for the Biennial, Tousley writes in her catalogue essay that this exhibition starts with an examination of the idea of "post-regionalism, in order to point to a new frontier of geographical context, whose reach moves beyond traditional notions of regionalism." Since the late '50s and '60s, Canadian regionalism in art has been superseded by post-modern relativism and almost made redundant by contemporary global art trends. Regionalist ideas of the centre and the periphery or even colonial power plays between the East and the West seem to be increasingly less relevant to a global, cosmopolitan art world. Yet, counter-intuitively, globalism's relocalization as evidenced by the Berlin Biennale, the Québec Triennial or even the itinerant Manifesta, to name a few, encouraged direct critical reflection about the place in which the art is made and shown, and in the process perhaps reoriented global issues relative to local ideas and art

1. "The News from Here: The 2013 Alberta Biennial of Contemporary Art," installation view. Foreground: DaveandJenn, *-TheBindingLine-*, 2013, resin, acrylic, oil, bronze and mixed media, 165 x 145 x 60 cm. Courtesy the TrépanierBaer Gallery, Calgary. Photograph: MN Hutchinson. Images courtesy the Art Gallery of Alberta.

2. Alysya Creighton, *Ascension*, 2011, production still, courtesy the artist.

3. Kristopher Karklin, *Jack & Jill Room (morning)*, 2011, from the series "camp life." Inkjet print, courtesy Skew Gallery, Calgary.