

Sylvain Louis-Seize : Irresponsable Beauty

Sylvain Louis-Seize's mixed media paintings reveal as much about the passage of time and the way memory wears experience as readily as the environment wears the physical world around us. There are traces of the industrial, almost a nostalgia for the sublime beauty of the industrial aesthetic and the scale and scope of old sites in a city. But all this is transformed into something else. There are traces of nature, something that offer us a hope, amid the toxic, transformed world of urban life

The urban phenomenon, and the environments of old city industrial sites or factory areas, and port areas are alluded to, but we never have a clear picture of what we are looking at. There are hazy images of nature and there is a beauty to the atmosphere Louis-Seize conjures up. The industrial or natural, or both juxtaposed on the painterly surface, not intentional, nor designed. The surfaces are covered with linear rectangular shadowy forms, that allude to the codification of art, of life, of all aspects of human behaviour. They may also reference the way we ourselves perceive beauty and environment with a measured distance and rationality. And then there are the markings, elements that testify to the wear and tear of time on life. The atmosphere of urbanity affects all number of things, even us, and the buildings, the places and the objects that we may not notice but are part of unrecorded history. It is the unrecorded aspect of the markings and words, the sense that these are a part of an atmosphere of life we are accustomed to, moreso than we are accustomed to nature.

Nature exists in transformed ways, and acts on the human built environment, and these curious enigmatic details pop up all over in our city centres as we traverse these environments. We sense that Louis-Seize captures all this because of a sentient desire to humanize experience, to bring some testament to past lives, to the anonymity of history and an unofficial aspect that accompaies life and progress.

Louis-Seize's mixed media works are tangible manifestations of the iconography of the industrial complete with its own symbology and hierarchy of meaning. The nature referenced is distant, unreal, almost a sublime afterthought, a manufactured field of desire. It could even be mediatic, induced cue. Unreachable or tentative, nature becomes a place that reason cannot capture. Reason could be those marking, and rectangles, the word fragment, or actual words – stencil-like or stolid these words arrive into our perception occupying space and obstructing what we want to see – the distant suggestions of meaning, of place, of something familiar from an historic past – a common past – a past where nature was a place we lived in tandem with.

These paintings conjure up a sense of how we identify places, and scenes, and build or construct our memories of place just as in reality most urban scenarios, whether historic or contemporary, are artificial, not at all natural. This is an irresponsible beauty because it is less about selection, or the editing of reality than the more mercurial beauty, something that escapes like quicksilver, that can never be captured, that we are always aware of. It could exist in an industrial or construction site, in a park, or one of those unclaimed neglected zones of human activity, transitional and ephemeral. Louis-Seize's art involves traces, partial clues to past and present, beauty can never be controlled or captured. This nature - both intuitive and inner and outer and actual - is wild and expressive, exists on its own terms in

Sylvain Louis-Seize's art. As he comments: "The urban and industrial landscape is something that has been created over time without being noticeable. It took years to make these places beautiful. It is a kind of irresponsible beauty, something that has occurred by chance and not intention."...

Using a great range of tools from paintbrush to spatula, to human hand to plastic bag, Louis-Seize applies a range of materials in an effort to engender an atmosphere of texture on the surface of each piece. The materials may include oil, acrylic, tar, and even liquid metal. Oxidizing affects are achieved using applied acids. The entire surface is then unified, given continuity with the addition of polyester resin.

The hazy photograph-like painted imagery recalls expressionist photography from the 1920s, with its theatrical sense of the absurdity of presenting reality as a clear and measurable fact. Against realism becomes illusion and surface appearance. What we cannot clearly see is precisely what allows our imagination and mind to construct and build a sentiment of place or memory, even if it is an urban and admittedly PostModern one. This quasi-Romanticism, and the nostalgia for what has been lived in, for what has a common unrecorded history is what make these paintings interesting.

It is precisely the disjunction, and the disconnect from the industrial or urban scenario that acts as source for these paintings that elevates this work to more than mere decor. Yves Louis-Seize is achieving a sort of poetic synthesis, and is able to conjure up an almost surreal sense of reverie, with the out of focus hazy effect, the out of frame open approach that suggests these subjects might be part of an ongoing continuity of sensation and impression.

We search in these paintings for the fine line between surface effect and the matter itself (whether represented by the artist or actually the surface physics of mixed media we encounter as direct experience. The uncomfortable character of these seeming chance sensations, Precisely because these works are formative, and the experiments of a young and challenging artist, one who questions the state of culture, the dialogic tensions that exist between history and surface change.

The unrecorded history, and the element of change, how these affect our perception of place, particularly in a world where media dislocates and establishes hierarchies of meaning as these pertain to the visual. And so reality, and the physics of place are the starting point for these works, but they move beyond subliminal effect, or sentiment.

The struggle in Louis-Seize's visual language is in reworking the sensation of the urban experience, to bring it to life as art, mixing the media into a painterly assemblage of light, colour and more particularly surface texture.

Contrasts involve reworking the appearance of things, and this acts as a trigger to memory – collective and individual.

- John K. Grande

John K. Grande's Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists was recently published by SUNY Press, New York (www.sunypress.edu)