

Arts & Culture

Sheila Kernan's Work Bold, Vivid, Boundless

ALEX J MACPHERSON

REGINA, SK — Sheila Kernan finds inspiration everywhere.

Camera in hand, she wends her way across the continent in search of material. Transfixed by the rough beauty of the Canadian landscape

"I just love the energies of the two different subjects."

—Sheila Kernan

and captivated by the rhythmic pulse of the largest cities, she weaves her travel experience into her work. And while her paintings are about places real and imaginary, they also capture the energy of our relationship with our surroundings.

"I do a lot of hiking as well as



Photo courtesy of the Assiniboia Gallery

visiting the big urban centres," Kernan says. "I just love the energies of the two different subjects: the more chaotic business of the

city versus the more serene, calm nature."

Kernan, who is 29, is an accomplished painter. She began as a photorealist before developing her own form of postmodern expressionism. Her latest works have been collected into *Boundless*, a new exhibition at the Assiniboia Gallery.

Although at close range Kernan's paintings are a riot of meaningless dots and lines and splashes of colour, from further away the shapes and colours resolve into images. These images are dominated by patterns levered into spaces normally reserved for advertising. Created using hand-cut stencils, Kernan's works evoke wallpapers and fabrics, human debris scattered throughout unpeopled vistas.

"I try to avoid, in my cities, putting identifiers like McDonald's signs," she explains. "Instead, I started doing the pattern work within the advertisement slots, so it creates another point of excitement."

Kernan's urban scenes are more familiar than recognizable. She admits to drawing on different resources — buildings from New York, say, and storefronts from San Francisco — meaning her paintings evoke the energy and dynamism of a buzzing city without providing a concrete location. She isn't painting New York, San Francisco, or Toronto; she's painting the feeling we get from light reflecting off the buildings, the steady vibration of nighttime in the city.

"Every place has a different feeling and a different vibe," she muses. "That reflects into the paint. What I think is really awesome [is] that, especially in cities, it's so universal. When you go at night and you take away the sign identifiers and it's just light and reflection, every city is very similar."

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