

Checkout [ART]

<http://www.checkoutart.ca/artists/the-art-of-bradley-harms/>

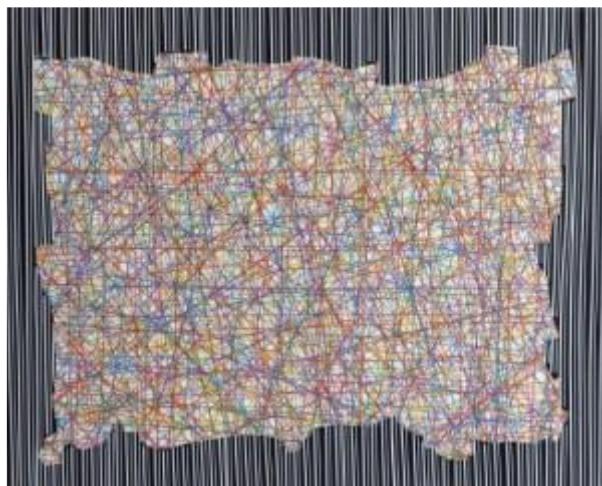
Mutable Meanings: The Art of Bradley Harms

January 9, 2010

I have always had a hard time with pure abstract art, but Bradley Harms' work has given me another perspective.

Entitled New Canadian Fiction, Bradley Harms' latest exhibition at the Angell Gallery (Toronto) continues his exploration of painting as a means of communicating the contemporary experience. This is neither an easy nor straightforward task, especially in our increasingly modern, multi-layered world. Add the word "fiction" and damn! – our understanding of our increasingly multi-layered world just got more complex. After all, nothing like the word "fiction" to undermine the truth of what we experience.

Yet here's the catch: Perhaps no other word summarizes our world's rejection of absolutes and rationality quite so well as the word "fiction". In a society that often appears duplicitous and fragmented, distinguishing between reality and fiction has become our modern day challenge. Technological advances like Photoshop can alter reality with just a few clicks, while You Tube can transform obscurity into overnight sensation and where, exactly, is the reality in the scripted, carefully monitored environment of Reality TV? (Think The Bachelor, the Kardashian's and that Beverly Hills, 90210 left-over Tori Spelling and her no-name brand hubby).



The Lie (Acrylic on Canvas) (Angell Gallery)

The blurred distinction between reality and fiction are immediately apparent in Harms' work. As with his previous work, there is the impression that the vector lines and grids (the mathematic insurers of order and logic) have been digitally executed, but closer inspection reveals the painter's brush is responsible for what is represented. The lines are imperfect... as are the grids... as are the squiggles... their imperfections serving as a visual reminder that we should question what we see. Moreover, Harms' lines expand beyond the canvas, as if to suggest that there is more. In the words of Harms, the paintings, like truth and fiction, "expand beyond visibility".

In his statement, Harms suggests that paintings should have "multiple levels of complexity and simplicity". Harms' paintings do, their abstract surfaces of lines, forms, and color refusing to offer one clear answer. Sort of like life and sort of like fiction which always has an underlying truth hidden amidst its subjectivity and embellishments. If it is anything that Harms' paintings tell us, it is this: Knowledge and truth are never straightforward. They cannot be summarized in one cool phrase or word. They are as contradictory and mutable as our modern experience.