

Art



Less is not more: Kim Dorland's paintings use up hundreds of tubes of paint, can take decades to dry fully, and sell for as much as \$48,000

## THAT'S A BIT EXTREME, ISN'T IT?

*Gobs of paint, clumps of foam—extreme painting is big. Very big.*

WHEN PUTTING TOGETHER a gallery show, Kim Dorland usually spends at least \$10,000 a month on paint. Sitting in his Toronto studio, the artist points at *The Shack*, a new piece slated for a solo exhibition in New York City this November. The painting, a 2.4-metre by three-metre board with several pieces of wood hammered into it, swallowed 80 tubes of silver, 100 tubes of black, and 200 tubes of other colours, including brown and green paint. "I was joking with my assistant," he says, "that I squeezed out \$1,300 worth of silver on this tree."

For Dorland, born in Wainwright, Alta., that's the cost of doing business. And the investment has paid off. The 36-year-old's modern landscapes have sold for as much as \$48,000, and are showcased in galleries and private collections all over the world. And his work, organizers say, sparked this summer's inaugural Extreme Painting Festival, a series of group shows at 16 galleries in Montreal (Dorland's work will be on display at Galerie René Blouin until Aug. 21).

This notion of extreme painting, says Blouin, originated from the "excessive material, the excessive gesture" used by many of the cutting-edge Canadian and international artists fea-

tured in the festival he helped initiate. He compares the aggression found in much of their work to extreme fighting, "where blood is all over the place." In *Canadian Art*, critic John Bentley Mays argues that the festival's painters seem "bent on revenge against a digital culture that is dematerializing everything, vaporizing it into a bright mist of pixels."

Dorland—who, ironically, uses photographs as reference—thinks the "extreme" label is "a lovely bookmark on a certain time." But he doesn't see himself as part of a movement in the traditional sense. "Abstract expressionists were meeting in bars and clubs and talking about the new American art and how to do it," he says. "If I think of my own practice, I don't really talk to anybody [about my work] except for maybe a few artists."

Still, there's no denying that his process and final product are extreme. He coats his pieces in layer upon layer of oil and acrylic paint and incorporates real fur (an assistant discovered a furrier who sells \$5 pelts) and feathers. He riddles his boards with screws to keep the paint attached. And yet, Dorland often arrives at his studio to find that hunks of paint have fallen off overnight. His super-thick paintings need to be left on their backs for a year to cure.

Some, he says, won't fully dry for decades. While showing a visitor around his studio, Dorland stops in front of a portrait of his wife and touches the outer layer, which juts out about 15 cm from the surface. He finished the piece four years ago, but says if he pushed his finger through the surface it would still be wet underneath. "A lot of people think it's just balls-out, shirt-off aggressive painting," says Dorland. "That's not the case at all. It's slow, methodical and considered." It's also about pushing the material to new limits. But he doesn't gob on gallons of paint just for the sake of it. "If everything was as

thick as the thickest part, it would be so uninteresting," he says.

He is not alone in the quest to find new ways to use an old medium. Wil Murray, a Calgary-born abstract artist whose paintings hang alongside Dorland's at Galerie René Blouin, says he works as much off the canvas as on it. "Much of my job," says the 32-year-old, now based in Berlin, "is figuring out how to assemble the painting, both compositionally and structurally." His process, which can take months, often includes layering acrylic paint, insulating spray foam and pages torn out of travel books from the '50s (he used to favour polyurethane and car paint but found them too toxic). "People ask me why I don't make sculptures," says Murray. "What, if I'm building stuff anyway, does painting hold for me?" Painting is still very interesting, he explains, even sexy, and allows him to feel part of a rich tradition.

That connection to the past isn't lost on Dorland, either, who drops bold-face names—Picasso, Rembrandt, Tom Thomson, Gerhard Richter, Dana Schutz—into a short conversation. "There's definitely a lineage to the way that I work," he says. "I'm just carrying the torch a little bit further." **JOHN INTINI**

### Taking art to the street

Using Berlin's Rosenthaler Platz as their canvas, a group of artists turned car tires into paintbrushes in May when they poured 50 litres of paint into the busy intersection.

