



Disordered Epiphany: Sylvain Bouthillette at Clint Roenisch Gallery
By Emily Elsa Hamilton

"Santo Subito", the title of Sylvain Bouthillette's new exhibition of painting and photography at Clint Roenisch Gallery, refers to banners displayed immediately after Pope John Paul II's death, calling for his immediate sanctification. The work in Bouthillette's show also responds to a call for action. It's in a constant flurry of continuous movement, reflecting Bouthillette's fascination with chaos as well as his sense of the absurd.

Bouthillette believes that altruism is the ultimate revolutionary action- that spirituality must continue where politics and government failed in creating a happy environment for humanity.

His paintings encourage people to connect to themselves, to get to know themselves and dismantle who they think they are. Texts based on Tibetan Buddhist meditations are stenciled across the artwork. The verse covering the outer surface of 'Monks', a seven-feet-in-diameter circular painting, reads, "The monks will inherit the earth except for a very thin layer at the surface".



It's an invitation to spiritual reflection, countered by the demonic looking winged-skull, wearing a child's party hat, at the centre of the piece. The slightly distorted, black and white skull almost jumps out of the work or is at least gliding towards the edge of the picture plane. Randomly scattered blotches of colour and grid-like patterns surround it and disguise parts of the text, contributing to the overall sensation of an almost sinister disorder and activity. This image, along with the others in the exhibition, do not evoke the serene, floating-on-clouds kind of spirituality, but instead, the sharp, cutting, passionate and chaotic aspects.

The large scale of the work engulfs the viewer and the striking designs in complementary colours seduce them in while also shoving them out. Animals depicted in most paintings provide an element of humour, but also discourage narrative readings of the work. Instead viewers are encouraged to connect with the more abstract concepts and ideas presented. This emphasis is a reflection of Bouthillette's desire for his work to be closer to music than to art.

He loves music's ability to transmit through the entire body and like an improvised tune; his artwork shoots in many different directions at once. "The work is ridiculous and sublime, like people", Bouthillette says, and adds that it is "borderline bad taste". Not bad taste but a unique combination of the absurd and the spiritual that is constantly evoking new emotions and thoughts.

Sylvain Bouthillette, 'Santo Subito', Clint Roenisch Gallery, 944 Queen Street West Toronto ON, 416-516-8593, www.clintroenisch.com

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Courtesy of Clint Roenisch Gallery

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