



Skids, Skips and Prints Lowell Bradshaw



Pinwheel Catastrophe, oil on canvas, 54" x 68", 2017

Skids, Skips and Prints: Olympia xx Redux

Lowell Bradshaw returns to Chatham with a new body of paintings and prints, *Skids, Skips and Prints*, inspired by and sourced from video art exhibited at the Thames Gallery in 2014–2015. The artist engages with digital culture to create and make forms that participate with the current technological landscape and the syntax of abstract painting. His use of unusual colour chords—layered hues of light and dark magenta, royal and aquamarine blue, orange, lemon yellow, green, red, and brown—and varied scale, from letter-sized prints to six - by seven - foot paintings, are quick to draw our notice and call for close examination.

The viewer is first drawn in by Bradshaw's polychromatic palette, then by the layered, non-representational forms within; the play between surface and depth. Oil colours and overlapping shapes—a combination of asymmetrical curves, bends, and edges, as well as irregular rectangles, rhomboids, squares, oblongs, waves, straight, and torqued bands—challenge our perception of what can be seen and not seen, what is in the foreground and what is in the background, and where one plane or border ends and another begins. Looking more intently, the viewer discerns “noise” in the form of broken-up, elongated black marks of random width and length, crossing under and over planes, across sections, and into borders. The colours, patterns, and factures appear in pointed opposition to one another. For example, in *Untitled 1* (2023), the overall colour scheme flows in reverse order of the visible light spectrum, ranging from violet and blue tones to yellow and orange, into which, draped across

the centre, are irregular quadrilateral shapes of varying sizes, floating above rectangular planes. Oblongs project into waves of black and white, anchoring the canvas, while bands of green border and fade at the top and in the centre. Black noise peppers the painting in varying frequency and patterns. The noise in Bradshaw's other paintings is supplemented by chance drips and smears, and by intuitive decisions, such as densely painted, squarish objects, or white squiggles running across the face of the painting, best exemplified in the artist's atypically dark-hued *Untitled 4* (2020).

The surfaces of some canvases are smooth, while others feature an interplay of various areas of flatness, devoid of texture, and areas of thickly applied brushstrokes, where hard-edged and expressionist forms laminate over each other, such as in *Untitled 3* (2018/2019). Elsewhere, Bradshaw covers kaleidoscopic canvases with an overcoat of opaque paint, most dramatically in *Pinwheel Catastrophe* (2017), where a large, white rectangle interferes in our relationship with what lies beneath. The mixture of colours, forms, textures, laminated planes, and brushstrokes combine to disorient us from focusing on any one part of a painting. However the viewer wishes to interpret the works, to project any figurative or compositional meaning on them is futile.

But to overly focus on the disparate elements of Lowell Bradshaw's individual paintings takes away from their wholeness and how the artist arrived at the end state. There is a push and pull in his paintings between, for instance, Jonathan Lasker's interest in the literalness of "the things in a painting being things unto themselves," (e.g., "things of paint") and Donald Judd's reasoning for the unnecessary "for a work to have a lot of things to look at, to compare, to analyze one by one, to contemplate," when the quality of a painting as a whole is what is interesting.¹ To better understand how Bradshaw arrives at his complex compositions, let us look to his process.

Lowell Bradshaw's art is a thought-based practice that draws from the digital economy. His previous body of work, *No Signal* (Thames Gallery, 2014), emerged from his engagement with the JPEG of a single functional MRI used to measure and map brain activity. The new series, *Skids, Skips and Prints*, begins where *No Signal* ended, with the video art entitled *Olympia xx* (2014) by Miles Forrester, a Toronto-based artist and poet. The source for the project was a corrupted adult video that Bradshaw found on the internet—the human form reduced to nonrepresentational flickering bits and bytes. Given the centrality of screens in our lives, and the immediacy the internet and Big Tech promises for our informational, entertainment, consumer, and social needs, Bradshaw was intrigued by digital detritus left online. He downloaded the corrupted video, invited Forrester to remake it into video art, and titled it *Olympia xx*, a tongue-in-cheek reference to Manet's 1865 boundary-breaking work and how the artist met the contemporary art movement and socio-cultural mores of his time head-on.

The video projection runs eighty minutes, with moving pictures alternating mirroring and contrasting images at the same or fluctuating speeds. Captivated by what he saw, Bradshaw captured stills from the video art and redesigned them by cropping or rotating them for printing. These images were then manipulated during the printing process using technological, material, and human intervention: the overlay of multiple images, the use of Slickrock Metallic photo paper undercoated with a GOLDEN digital-ground medium, and the dragging of the paper from the printer before the completion of the print job. All of the prints are unique and cannot be replicated, and serve as an indirect source for Bradshaw's paintings. He creates his canvases without a projected template. Bradshaw translates the images from the prints freely, sometimes matching the colours and forms closely, other times introducing painterly "corruptions," unconstrained by the prints. Some of the paintings even bear compositional similarity to Manet's *Olympia*, such as their horizontal and vertical play and high-contrasting colors, as well as the structural vertical dividing line separating two halves of a painting, as in *Little Triggers* (2019). The whole process from video to painting is iterative. Bradshaw introduces, re-introduces, and re-uses images; yet each time they are incrementally changed as they move away from their digitized form to a strictly human-made material form. Throughout this process the painter's hand is present, from guiding the screen-capture tool to manipulating the work of the printer, to painting brushstrokes on to his canvases.

New platforms and technologies constantly compete for our fleeting attention. Most of us move on to the next click, like, or swipe, giving little thought to digital media of yesterday. There are 750 billion images across internet platforms, including an estimated 800 million videos on YouTube alone, and viewers can now generate digital images using the text-to-image artificial intelligence (AI) system DALL-E, trained on human-made art scraped from the web. Instant access to a vast deluge of information (and dis-, mis-, and un-information) make things discoverable and knowable for a moment before they are forgotten in our peek-a-boo world, "... where now this event, now that, pops into view for a moment, then vanishes again."ⁱⁱ Guy Debord has written about the dangers inherent in the hypnotic effect of a real world transformed into "mere images," when the images delivered on our screens replace reality and we demand and devour their creation with an ever more rapacious appetite.ⁱⁱⁱ

Bradshaw is among a circle of artists working independently of one another who refresh the practice of abstract painting by drawing from this digital language of images. Others who come to mind include Jacqueline Humphries, who creates works using computer-generated laser-cut stencils, outmoded emoticons, and ASCII and CAPTCHA codes; Laura Owens, who, using a Photoshop painting program, draws and erases with a computer mouse to create curved forms for her *Pavement Karaoke* series; and

Wade Guyton, who paints by running canvases through a commercial inkjet printer beyond the capacity of its design specifications. These artists are working at a moment described by Mark Godfrey as a time when "technological changes are dramatically reconfiguring and arguably devastating the subject." Technological shifts in our lives "alter our sense of space and scale, our capacity for attention, our anxiety level," as we remain captured by our screens.^{iv} Lowell Bradshaw's paintings and prints deserve to be looked at carefully and slowly, until viewers can see his work's compositional and non-compositional qualities unfold before their eyes; to observe the surface of the canvas and its textures; to notice its shapes, planes, and noise; to enjoy the artwork for aesthetic, conceptual, or personal reasons; and to be free to experience them physically, at a subjective human level, in a real, not virtual, space. - Ksenya Kiebuszinski



Little Triggers, oil on canvas, 40" x 48", 2019

ⁱ Amy Bernstein, *Jonathan Lasker: Recent Paintings* (Los Angeles, CA: LA Louver, 2010), 9; Donald Judd, *Donald Judd: Early Work, 1955-1968*, ed. Thomas Kellein (New York, NY: D.A.P., 2002), 184.

ⁱⁱ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006), 70

ⁱⁱⁱ Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. by Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014), 6.

^{iv} Mark Godfrey, "Statements of Intent: The Art of Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, Amy Sillman, and Charlene Von Heyl," *Artforum International* 52.9 (May 2014), 298, 301.



Untitled 1, oil on canvas, 70.25" x 86.25", 2023

Ksenya Kiebusinski Bio:

Ksenya Kiebusinski is a librarian at the University of Toronto. She holds a Ph.D. in literary studies from Brandeis University and master's degrees in information sciences and French and Women's Studies. Kiebusinski has worked in academic libraries, archives, and museums for over thirty years. Her research interests include nineteenth-century French cultural history, Slavic studies, and the history of the book, particularly the social, economic, and cultural

history of authorship, editing, and printing, as well as libraries, literary criticism, and reader response. She has published articles in *Austrian History Yearbook*, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, *Slavic & East European Information Resources*, and *Canadian Slavonic Papers*. Kiebusinski has curated several rare book exhibitions, including *Maximum Imaginativeness: An Exhibition on Modern Czech Book Design, 1900–1950* (Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, 2015).



Untitled 4, oil on canvas, 68" x 54", 2019

Skids, Skips and Prints Lowell Bradshaw

November 3, 2023 - January 14, 2024

Opening Reception: November 3, 2023 | 7-9PM

Curator: Phil Vanderwall

Assistant Curator: Michaela Lucio

Program Coordinator: Irene MacCreadie

Essay: Ksenya Kiebusinski

Design: Donna Nolan

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List of works

Untitled 1, oil on canvas, 70.25" x 86.25", 2023

Untitled 2, oil on canvas, 86.25" x 70.25", 2023

Untitled 3, oil on canvas, 68" x 54", 2018/2019

Untitled 4, oil on canvas, 68" x 54", 2019

Untitled 5, oil on canvas, 46.25" x 32", 2020

Untitled 6, oil on canvas, 26" x 22", 2019

Untitled 7, oil on canvas, 22" x 26", 2023

Untitled 8, oil on canvas, 54" x 68", 2020

Little Triggers, oil on canvas, 40" x 48", 2019

Pinwheel Catastrophe, oil on canvas, 54" x 68", 2017

Untitled 11, oil on canvas, 44" x 44", 2022/2023

Untitled 13, oil on canvas, 22" x 26", 2023

Untitled 14, oil on canvas, 22" x 26", 2018

Untitled 15, oil on canvas, 26" x 22", 2023

Untitled, framed prints on Slickrock Metallic photo paper undercoated with GOLDEN digital-ground medium, 8.5" x 11" each

Untitled, framed prints on Slickrock Metallic photo paper undercoated with GOLDEN digital-ground medium, 11" x 8.5" each

Untitled, prints on Slickrock Metallic photo paper undercoated with GOLDEN digital-ground medium, 8 1/2" x 11" each, 2016-2019

Cover image: Untitled 3, oil on canvas, 68" x 54", 2018/2019



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