



The Miss of Sisyphus

In *Sunburst*, Will Gorlitz offers us the opportunity to contemplate something we see only fleetingly: the radiant explosion that occurs when sunlight bursts from behind a tree. His recent work has involved the apprehension of time, through the perspective of personal reflection and through the more objective frame of observed visual phenomena. "The paintings attempt to fix this fleeting aspect and replace it with some form of certainty and stability. There's a contradiction there, but that's exactly what I recognize in life and what interests me, whether it's the prairie grasses that are fluidly flexing and flowing in the tondo [*Grasses*, 2002], or the unstable vision that blurs the flowers [*March*,

2002]." Gorlitz is referring to a trilogy of flower paintings named after the months of the year that he painted as a tribute to his deceased wife. The rich palette of cobalt, violet and mica-inflected white, along with the careful, virtuoso brushwork, make these paintings an especially poignant elegy. They are a telling example of Gorlitz's sense of the best way to use the autobiographical impulse in art. "Most of my work is based initially on personal experience, but I generalize it as metaphor and place it within a structure having to do with issues that are shared in contemporary critical thought."

Gorlitz, who teaches at the University of Guelph, has been making paintings shaped by intelligence, rigour and beauty for over 20 years. His aesthetic approach is rooted in a conviction that painting matters, and that its practitioners must continue to engage in a dialogue about what makes the art form so necessary. "In the past century, I feel the greatest challenge to painting, especially representational painting, is photography and I feel a

responsibility to address this issue. I dispute the idea that history is purely teleological and progressive.

In fact, I think that everything drags with us all the time. I take pleasure in maintaining a practice which some people describe as archaic and antiquated and which I think is vital and continuous. In a way, there's a Sisyphian aspect to these works. I'm constantly rolling painting up the hill of photography, only to have it roll down the other side. I just keep doing it and I don't think the project is over. What I'm really campaigning for is recognition."

Nor is it exclusive. The recognition campaign doesn't eliminate photography—"I have absolutely no reservations about using it as a source for painting"—but underlines



top left: Will Gorlitz, *January*, 2002, oil on canvas, 22 x 32 1/2"

middle left: Will Gorlitz, *March*, 2002, oil on canvas, 26"

middle right: Will Gorlitz, *Moon/Point*, 2001, oil on canvas, 20 1/2"

lower right: Will Gorlitz, *Moon/Line*, 2001, oil on canvas, 48"



left: Will Gorlitz, *Sunburst*, 1999,
oil on canvas, 41 x 27 1/4"



right: Will Gorlitz, *Day*, 2002,
oil on canvas, 52 x 36"

the differences between the two forms of image-making. "For me, it's a fundamentally different engagement in terms of material. I don't linger over a photograph, although I do linger over every little speck of a painting. That puts the viewer in a very different frame of mind, in which case

moons, flowers, sunbursts and highway landscapes have a lingering visceral presence. Except for their representational nature, they are the closest thing we have in this country to the craggy, wondrously difficult works of Clyfford Still. ■

I don't have to hurry with what I'm representing." The proof of Gorlitz's painterly self-analysis is in the works themselves: it's impossible to hurry through an exhibition of his paintings. His

middle right: Amy Cutler,
Sweepers, 2002, gouache
on paper, 33 1/2 x 48"

All photographs courtesy
Leslie Tonkonow Artworks +
Projects, New York.

lower right: Amy Cutler,
Dinner Party, 2002, gouache
on paper, 44 x 50"

lower left: Amy Cutler, *Octopi*,
2002, gouache on paper,
30 x 22 7/8"