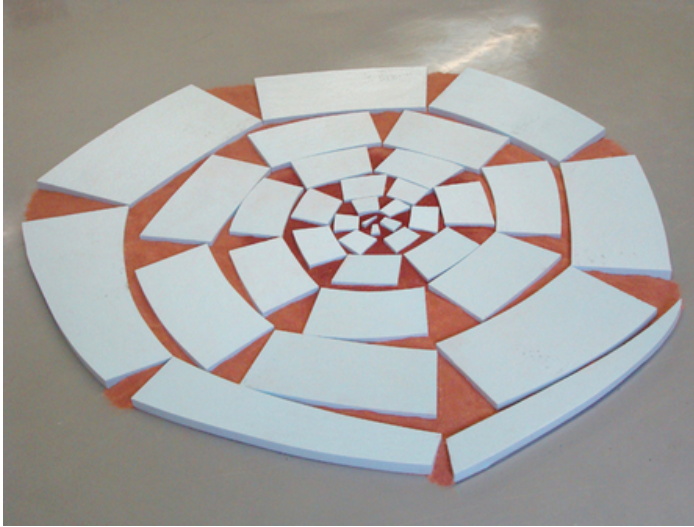


The Anglers: Regional Revelations

72 ST LEGER ST, KITCHENER JUN 25 TO 27 2010

by ROBERT LINSLEY



Lauren Hall *Summering Wintering on Shell Patio* 2010 Courtesy the artist
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During my short tenure as a professor at the University of Waterloo, the school was a site for a lot of thought about abstraction and the limits of painting. Undergraduates such as [Ricki Oltean-Lepp](#) and graduate students like [Mike Murphy](#) sustained a discussion that I felt privileged to be part of. They were the teachers and I was the student, which is how art education should work. Ideas were in the air about how the pictorial support could be bent, cut and folded; about how pictures could become objects and objects, illusions; about the expressiveness of reduction and the emotions released through analytical rigour. None of these directions were absolutely new, but six or seven years ago, in the context of the more visible art of that time, they seemed fresh.

A recent show in a small warehouse space in Kitchener that exhibited [Barb Hobot](#), [Lauren Hall](#) and [Patrick Cull](#)—younger UW graduates not part of that earlier discussion—holds out the possibility that interesting abstraction might have some momentum in this region, that creative ideas about the elements of art might continue to emerge. Another indicator is the presence in Kitchener of an artist as ambitious and original as [Gareth Lichty](#), someone who has never had any connection with the university. Is it possible that Kitchener-Waterloo might become a centre for experimental abstraction?



Barbara Hobot *Whip* 2010 Courtesy the artist

It's important to recognize and embrace the fact that today geographical location is no impediment to greatness in art. It should be very encouraging to any artist to realize that they can live anywhere and make their work count. Artists in Kitchener have as much chance as anyone anywhere to make art that really matters, yet they all seem to have a kind of involuntary belatedness. But then what counts should be the potential that they exhibit, and each of the three here have made a step forward in this show.

Barb Hobot first emerged as a maker of strange semi-abstract creatures composed of diverse materials and fabrics. Stitching and tying were two of her techniques. Her works were funny, striking and quite professional. However, whatever pleasures they gave seemed to fade on reflection; no matter how unique they may have been in their particulars, they still resembled other things. From [Berlinde de Bruyckere](#) in Europe to [Luanne Martineau](#) in Canada, the large-scale macramé abstract figure just seems generic—by which I mean that if these artists hadn't done it, someone else would have. The idea succeeds by virtue of its utter obviousness, and for every single recognized practitioner, there must be a hundred more in the provinces, equally good but unknown. This is a trap that I'm glad Hobot has escaped. Her recent work takes on much more interesting material, namely the boundary between nature and art. She wraps found branches, sticks and rocks with papier maché and then rubs them with charcoal. The results look anthropomorphic, but that's less important than the way that they foreground the physical boundary between the natural ready-made and the artist's gesture, which is satisfyingly restrained. The important precursors here are Arte Povera figures such as [Giuseppe Penone](#), and that will have to be dealt with, but the nature/art dialectic is intrinsically more productive than invented animals made of fabric.



Barbara Hobot *Whip* 2010 Detail Courtesy the artist

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