One New Work
Ron Moppett: Do You Remember/Snow & Stars
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How to Read a Wrap-around Painting

by Nancy Tousley

Ron Moppett: Do You Remember/Snow & Stars presents a painting installation that begins with a new work of the same title and stretches out to circumnavigate the One New Work gallery. The long painting made up of discrete panels of different dates and sizes charts the senior Canadian artist’s journeys in space and time; from England, where he was born, to Canada; from 1981, the date of the earliest painting in the installation, to the present day. Although Moppett, who is based in Calgary, does not habitually work this way, he accepted our invitation to make a wrap-around painting that viewers can walk into. At its centre, under a lightbulb covered by a green metal shade, stands the assemblage sculpture Ghost/Flow (2017); its chair, usually a symbol of the artist in his studio, is seen here floating metaphorically on a chunk of ice, moving through the metaphysical sea of spacetime, the vast continuum we inhabit.

As if a painting might hold space, time and memory, Moppett attends to the microcosm of daily events in Do You Remember: Snow & Stars (2019) and locates it within the macrocosm of the cosmos. He contemplates the complexities of near and far, as well as the pictorial space of painting. He measures the passage and deepening of time, as well as time as it is represented by a collage of images painted on discrete panels arranged in a montage. He visualizes the operations of memory as fragments of images held in the mind, as well as the vivid “memory glimpses” or highly coloured visual fragments he paints.

Do You Remember: Snow & Stars (2019) is constructed as an allegory, in which Moppett looks back on his life and career. The light of a burning match in the left-hand panel signifies inspiration and the influences of the painters Francis Bacon and Vincent van Gogh. At art college Moppett had learned the rhetoric of images in classes on graphic art for advertising and absorbed the history of art, whether it was old master, modern or contemporary, from illustrations in books. A spur-of-the moment trip to London led him to the Tate, where he was knocked out by a Bacon painting, Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne (1966), because it was, first of all, “real” art, i.e. not a reproduction but an image made with paint on canvas. Van Gogh becomes important when, during an early phase of his career (1976-79), Moppett assumed the Dutch artist’s persona in a series of works in which he explored the myth of the artist and established a series of signs, such as a chair and a candle, to represent him.

In close proximity to the Bacon and van Gogh references, a postcard of New York City, (an object collaged to the surface of the panel), connotes the importance of travelling to see art. There are references to his two wives, to his English school-boy fantasy that western Canada was the land of “cowboys and Indians” (he immigrated at age 12), and to the meditative space of the studio at night, among other things. A small panel painted with a schematic sign for a house with a lighted window at the far right indicates the place the artist occupies now, a space from which to acknowledge his working-class roots and to locate his place in the universe. A point on a spinning globe, he is an artist who creates a poetic private world from the ever-changing, kaleidoscopic visual stuff of the world that surrounds us with images.

For Moppett painting is also always about painting and self-reflexive in declaring its nature as artifice. He works with a collage esthetic and sees his paintings as objects, even as wall sculptures. He develops them as montage by adding panels of the same or different sizes that
are largely appropriated, are taken for
However, Moppett’s source images, which
the one he greatly admires.
Guston, have done. All of them have been
symbols, as other modernist artists such as
of a vivid figurative language of signs and
employed here more than once, as well
were cut-outs, become fragments of
attached. Deprived of context by these
image fragment becomes a floating signifier awaiting reassignment; when placed next to another image of Moppett’s choosing the original connotations of both begin to shift.

The fragment, around which there is a philosophical postmodern discourse, is the elemental unit of Moppett’s compositions. Thus the poetics of a painting of images whose relationships operate like those gathered into a collage begins when an image fragment is juxtaposed to another fragment, and another, and the result is a revitalization of each of them. Reassembling panels from other paintings into a painting installation in the form of a montage operates in a similar way. Each of these panels is a fragment of a larger work made at a different time. When the exhibition is over, each will be reunited with the work from which it was taken. Thus the installation structure and the structure of an individual work made of panels contain within them the theoretical potential for dispersal and rearrangement. This is not something Moppett would
condone happening to a finished painting outside the confines of this installation. It is, however, a reflection of the instability of the sign and the logic of the fragment, both constituents of collage, as well as their lack of spatial and temporal continuity and their resistance to fixity.

Moppett’s assemblies of signifying fragments are emblematic of a state of continual becoming as if the fractured structures of his painting hold together pictorial signs as an elusive instance in the cyclical time of memory, diurnal events or recurring thoughts. It is the nature of painting to manifest such ephemeral moments in material objects, but the divisions between the panels rupture conventional painting’s unified time, organic composition and indivisible surface. In like manner, given their biographical content, they shatter the idea of a stable self and point to subjectivity as a construction that is continually in process.

The painting installation Do You Remember/Snow & Stars (2019) reiterates his working methods. It extends the new painting into an installation by including panels borrowed from earlier works that were selected by looking through his photographic documentations and arranging them together side by side. When he needs an image refreshment, he makes a trip to the mall.

The artist, age 12, two months after arriving in Canada from England in 1957. Photo courtesy Ron Moppett.
chair painted two colours and sinking like an empty floating signifier. Is it outside or inside?
Images of boats shift their connotations from galleon to sailboat to ship towing sparkling treasure to an object, a toy, a Playmobil pirates patrol, to a ship moving a sparkling treasure to an abstractly shaped fragment of this fabric. The cycles of life and work in the studio, and over the years, gives it meaning shifts with the interface between method, medium, form and content to his work, and the ways in which they pertain to his larger influences.
Moppett employs the image fragment as a new direction in an artist’s practice. The genius of his method lies in the cycles of life and work in the studio, and over the years, gives it meaning shifts with the interface between method, medium, form and content to his work, and the ways in which they pertain to his larger influences.
Moppett is married to writer and filmmaker, Carroll Taylor-Lindoe, is the mother of their son, the artist Damian Moppett.

List of Works

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<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
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| 91.4 X 91.4 X 99 cm | mixed media sculpture | Shown at the Walter Phillips Gallery, the Banff Centre, 1982; the Phillips Gallery, the Banff Centre, 1986; Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
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| 238.7 cm X 142.2 cm | oil, alkyd and fabric on canvas | Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
| 137.7 cm X 274.3 cm | oil on canvas | Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
| 195.5 cm X 94 cm | oil on canvas | Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
| 162.56 cm X 81.3 cm | acrylic, oil, alkyd and mirror on canvas | Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
| 160 cm X 121.9 cm | oil on canvas | Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
| 200 cm X 121.9 cm | acrylic, oil, alkyd and fabric on canvas | Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
| 274.3 cm X 137.7 cm | oil on canvas | Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
| 142.2 cm X 238.7 cm | oil, alkyd and fabric on canvas | Made in Calgary: The 1970s, and in more than 40 public art projects.
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Bios

Ron Moppett, one of Canada’s leading contemporary artists, lives and works in Calgary. Born in England in 1945, he immigrated to Canada in 1977. He studied the Albuquerque College of Art (now the University of the Arts) from 1973 to 1975, and the Instituto de Ahumada in Mexico in 1982. His career has garnered many honours, including the Gershon Iskowitz Prize (1997), the Alberta Centennial Medal (2001), and the Albuquerque College of Art Design Board of Governors Alberta Award of Excellence (2015). Survivors of his work have been shown at the Walker Phillips Gallery, the Banff Centre, the 1986 Parliament of Contemporary Art, New York, 1988, the Glasgow Museum, Callicoon (1997), the Nickle Galleries, University of Calgary (2001), and in more than 40 public art projects. He has been curatorial consultant at the Brooklyn Museum, New York, and continued it at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. His curatorial work has appeared in art magazines in Canada, the United States since the early 1980s, and in more than 40 public art projects. In 2020, his book, Moppett: Do You Remember/Snow & Stars is on view in the One New Work gallery and museum catalogues and exhibitions. Ron Moppett: Do You Remember/Snow & Stars is on view in the One New Work gallery and museum catalogues and exhibitions. Ron Moppett: Do You Remember/Snow & Stars is on view in the One New Work gallery and museum catalogues and exhibitions. Ron Moppett: Do You Remember/Snow & Stars is on view in the One New Work gallery and museum catalogues and exhibitions.