

SEASON FOUR

UNIVERSITY OF
WATERLOO

University of Waterloo Art Gallery
East Campus Hall 1239

Hours:
Tuesday to Saturday 12:00–5:00 pm

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HEAVY: Black Paintings

As a painter, Nicole Collins has largely been associated with the use of bold pigments layered in translucent wax. In 2008, she began composing works on a more ambitious scale and experimenting with a somber palette. The five paintings that comprise *HEAVY* represent a culmination of her explorations into monochromatic painting. The paintings themselves are composed of microcrystalline wax, a petroleum byproduct not unlike bitumen that is used primarily in industrial applications. The wax is heated and impregnated with powdered charcoal to render it into a viscous, reusable material that can be melted, poured, trowelled on, scraped away and almost endlessly reconstructed.

There's an elemental quality to the paintings. Each obsidian field greedily absorbs light into itself revealing a pitted, restless surface, all hidden scars and bruising. Each is damaged, yet in a purposeful manner. There is a raw materiality to Collins' process that approaches sculptural relief as much as it does pure painting, a primal sense of material transformation that elicits the proto-science of alchemy. The choice of titles reiterates this interpretation. *Cohobate* refers to an alchemical process of distillation and re-distillation. *Thermonous* pertains to stimulation by heat. Heat and distillation form the basis for chemical transformation, a process the artist parallels with her experiments.

Breaking Black may be Collins' breakthrough work, the moment where all of her experimentation crystallizes. It has a monumental presence. The fusion of jute twine and wax permeates the surface, a third of which has been surgically

Artist Biography

Nicole Collins completed her MVS at the University of Toronto and BA at the University of Guelph. Since 1994 she has shown in numerous solo exhibitions including the Art Gallery of Ontario and The Embassy of Canada in Tokyo; as well as numerous group exhibitions in Toronto, New York, London and Zurich. She recently curated the exhibition *Breaking Black* for the McMaster Museum of Art in Hamilton, which featured her own work along side selected works from the permanent collection including Louis Comtois, Anselm Kiefer, Sigmar Polke and others. Her work has been featured in magazines, newspapers and books including *Time Out* London, *Canadian Art*, Roald Nasgaard's *Abstract Painting in Canada*, *Carte Blanche, Volume 2: Painting*, and *The Donovan Collection Catalogue*. Collins is an award-winning educator at OCADU and lives in Toronto. Nicole Collins is represented by General Hardware Contemporary, Toronto.
www.nicolecollins.com

Images (left and below): *Breaking Black* (detail), 2011; *Cohobate* (detail), 2013. Photos by Jeff Bierk.

List of Works

Black Flag for Painting, 2013, microcrystalline wax, powdered charcoal, 183 x 305 cm

Cohobate, 2013, microcrystalline wax, powdered charcoal, jute twine, 245 x 183 cm

Thermonous Redux, 2012, microcrystalline wax, powdered charcoal, jute twine, 245 x 183 cm

Breaking Black, 2011, microcrystalline wax, powdered charcoal, jute twine, 245 x 183 cm

Idumea, 2008, microcrystalline wax, oil paint, powdered charcoal, 183 x 183 cm

All artworks courtesy of the artist and General Hardware Contemporary, Toronto.

Nicole Collins' Suggested Playlist:

1. Hazel Dickens and Alice Gerrard, *Coal Miner Blues*
2. Fleet Foxes, *Drops in the River*
3. Sacred Harp Singers, *Idumea*
4. Gillian Welch, *Dark Turn of Mind*
5. Thom Yorke, *The Eraser*

rent asunder to reveal the fleshy insides of the painting, leaving the saturated twine to pool like so much viscera on the floor. Echoed by its siblings *Cohobate* and *Thermonous Redux*, the trilogy makes a compelling visual statement.

If the latest work, *Black Flag for Painting*, conjures a melancholy banner evoking mourning and loss it is also so much more. While there is a sense of longing pervading the work it might also be interpreted as a call to action. Painting has been resurrected so many times that perhaps it is time to move on. Collins' monochromes may be painstaking, mysterious and funereal, but they are also appropriately celebratory. They look ahead to a raucous wake.

— Ivan Jurakic



September 12–October 26, 2013

Gallery One

Derrick Piens

When Things Collide

Gallery Two

Nicole Collins

HEAVY: Black Paintings





When Things Collide

Sculpture should be an anomaly in the digital age. And yet, as sounds and images are increasingly rendered virtually and archived as information our hard-edged physical reality comes into sharper focus. Think about the resurgent interest in vinyl LPs that parallels the rise of Mp3s over the last decade. Analog artifacts have a certain grain and texture, a warmth of presence that digital products have yet to effectively replicate or master. There is also a growing awareness of ‘maker’ culture, which has embedded itself firmly in the contemporary discourse. The idea of taking back the means of production and learning how to make things, whether digital or analog, has renewed meaning and relevance.

Derrick Piens is one such maker. He makes sculptures. Plywood and plaster are his primary materials. He also makes use of graphite, charcoal, wax, crayons and spray paint, all of which are standard and readily available materials that he animates into bold and improbably gaudy compositions inspired by geology, science and postwar sculpture.

When Things Collide is a rough yet solidly constructed assemblage of plywood. The disjunction between the raw wood panels and the painted surfaces suggests the metaphoric tip of an iceberg. Floating on the floor, the sculpture appears both ominous and strangely compelling. Although its appearance is oddly reminiscent of Caspar David Friedrich’s iconic painting of an arctic catastrophe *Das Eismeer or Wreck of the Hope* (1823-24), in Piens’ work collision serves as a generative act.¹



Still Silent shares a similarly concussive pedigree. A tall linear orange beam bisects a crystalline form, appearing to bend through its unlikely oak veneered surface. None of it makes sense, but the object captures an improbable and yet oddly graceful collision between an architectural and geological form, which might well be interpreted as an allegory for the inevitable and often awkward convergence of built and natural environments.

Epiphonic Tomb is another conundrum. Epiphonic alludes to a state of constant enlightenment, which suggests an interpretation that is at once insightful and absurdist, not unlike the odd nature of the object itself. Evoking a cavern—Plato’s perhaps—or a crude helmet not unlike that worn by mutant activist Magneto in the X-Men movies, it is both too small to climb into and far too large to wear. It invites an awkward intimacy between viewer and object but has little to offer by way of explanation. One can only peer into its core at a remove and in the end it can only offer a grim realization: the finality of the grave.

Nomadic Containment is arguably the most probable of Piens’ objects. At first glance one might well mistake it for a large hunk of red schist, calcite or perhaps haematite, the kinds of rocks and minerals found on display at the county fair or natural history museum. But the scale and gravity are off. The iridescent colours, painstakingly achieved through the intensive application of coloured pencils and wax, are a bit too soft. The longer you look, the more it starts to feel like some weird movie prop of a meteor.

There is an undeniably ersatz blend of geology and physics fueling Piens’ work. *Hollow From The Inside* glows like toxic Kryptonite. *Static Stance* is an angular updating of Stanley Kubrick’s monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. *Once Fluid* offers a truncated form mutating into an arresting magenta organism. *The Offering* tenders a pathetic green flag of surrender. *Slow Battle* could be a bizarre homage to Henry Moore’s *Atom Piece: Working Model for Nuclear Energy* (1964–65), which celebrates physicist Enrico Fermi’s first successful attempt at controlled nuclear fission.²

Slow Battle further cements the link between analog and digital realms. Piens often makes use of angular facets to define surfaces. Facets are flat faces on geometric planes that occur naturally in crystalline forms. Hundreds of triangle-shaped facets are cut into the undulating plywood carapace that characterizes *Slow Battle*. The plywood sheeting of *When Things Collide* and the oak veneer on *Still Silent* mimic a crystal matrix. Although constructed by hand, each also brings to mind the intersecting planes and facets generated using algorithms to render three-dimensional shapes in digital environments. As a maker, Piens’ work eagerly bridges this divide.

— Ivan Jurakic

1. http://www.hamburger-kunsthalle.de/index.php/19th_Century.html.
2. The plaster study can be found on display at the Henry Moore Sculpture Centre at the Art Gallery of Ontario: <http://www.ago.net/henry-moore-sculpture-centre>. *Nuclear Energy* was a large bronze commissioned by the University of Chicago to memorialize the historical event: http://www.uchicago.edu/features/how_the_first_chain_reaction_changed_science.

Artist Biography

Derrick Piens received his MFA from Southern Methodist University in 2007, and BFA from NSCAD University in 2005. He has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions across Canada and the United States, including *Sentinels*, The Dallas Contemporary (Dallas, TX); *trans/FORM: Matter as Subject > New Perspectives*, The Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (Toronto, ON); *Summertime in Paris*, Parisian Laundry (Montreal, QC); and *Skipping*

Stones, General Hardware Contemporary (Toronto, ON). His sculptures are included in numerous private collections in the UK, New York, Montreal and Toronto as well as the permanent collections of Meadows School of the Arts, Southern Methodist University and the Claridge Collection. He is based in Toronto. Derrick Piens is represented by General Hardware Contemporary, Toronto. www.derrickpiens.com

List of Works
Epiphonic Tomb, 2013, polystyrene, plaster, paint, 142 x 84 x 107cm

Hollow From the Inside, 2013, plaster, plywood, veneer, paint, 71 x 76 x 38 cm

Nomadic Containment, 2013, plaster, paint, crayon, wax, 86 x 89 x 79 cm

Static Stance, 2013, plywood, charcoal, graphite, 208 x 114 x 43 cm

The Offering, 2013, wood, plaster, cloth, paint, 69 x 48 x 61 cm

Once Fluid, 2012, plaster, winter stone, paint, 180 x 48 x 38 cm

Images (from left to right): *Nomadic Containment*, 2013; *Once Fluid*, 2012; *Epiphonic Tomb*, 2013.

Slow Battle, 2012, plywood, plaster, paint, 122 x 133 x 102 cm

Still Silent, 2012, oak veneer, paint, 315 x 178 x 112 cm

When Things Collide, 2011, plywood, paint, 185 x 135 x 97 cm

All artworks courtesy of the artist and General Hardware Contemporary, Toronto.

Derrick Piens’ Suggested Playlist:

1. Amon Tobin, *Foley Room*
2. Bjork, *Nattura*
3. June of ‘44, *Modern Hereditary Dance Steps*
4. Secret Chiefs 3, *The End Times*
5. Tortoise, *Djed*

