

# Restrictions of Routine

## An Exhibition of Paintings

by

Eryn O'Neill

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### **Author's Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners. I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

The exhibition, *Restrictions of Routine*, consists of a series of paintings inspired by a co-dependent relationship I have with running and painting. Through the gestural application of paint combined with clear references to objects and architecture, the work becomes a visual journey through a known and familiar place. The perspective and vantage points vary from piece to piece, ranging from close-cropped compositions to wide-angled landscapes exaggerating the disorientation experienced while running. The images are in direct response to the non-fixed perspective of a runner in a state of heightened awareness; my perspective is not that of a stationary observer. Reactions are amplified when running through a contested space, where uneven footing, intersections and hidden driveways are a persistent hazard. The paintings are the product of months of repetitive outings, in all conditions, to gather enough information, visually and mentally, to create sensorial charged paintings that are suggestive of a figure navigating an unsettled environment. Areas of the paintings dissolve into unapologetically surface-based brushstrokes juxtaposed with careful detail—a constant search for spatial cues.

## **Acknowledgements**

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I would like to acknowledge the entire staff and faculty in the Department of Fine arts. A special thank you to Tara Cooper and Bojana Videkanic for leading seminar and challenging me every week.

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And thank you to Ivan Jurakic for his invaluable input and support with the installation of my thesis show at UWAG.

## **Dedication**

This Exhibition is dedicated in loving memory of my father, Michael.

I couldn't have done this without the incredible strength and encouragement from my Mother, who never doubted my ability to fulfill this goal.

And my incredible community of friends in Waterloo, who helped make it feel like home from day one. And to my MFA Cohort, a group of dedicated and compassionate individuals who I had the honour of sharing a studio with for the past two years.

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## Section 1: Running

I have a complicated relationship with both running and painting. While they are two separate activities within my studio practice, I have found that they are both in a continual dialogue.

Being an artist is interwoven into my daily life. It does not turn off at a set time of day; it does not stay in the studio when I go out. I bring my *artist-self* with me wherever I go. This is also the case when I go running. I do not leave any part of myself behind; I bring the same body and mind with me on a run as I do to the studio. French Philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty maintained that traditional philosophy has misunderstood the body by regarding it as an object among many. The body, however, is *not* an object. It is, as he puts it, our expression in the world. It is that which enables us to understand things we do.<sup>1</sup> Could the way I see and experience the world become the source material, the inspiration, for my paintings? This directly addresses the branch of philosophy known as phenomenology, which deals with *phenomena* – with the way things appear to us in the world. The task of phenomenology is careful description: the aim of the phenomenologist is to capture this *despite* our propensity to oversimplify.<sup>2</sup> As Merleau-Ponty states “When we see things, they acquire significance for us. And the good painter, like a phenomenologist, explores this genesis of meaning.”<sup>3</sup>

Running was initially an escape from the studio, it began as a separate exploration; I did not seek out running as an extension of my artistic practice. That never occurred to

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<sup>1</sup> Wisniewski, J. Jeremy *Running and Philosophy: A Marathon for the Mind*, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, p.36.

<sup>2</sup> Wisniewski, J. Jeremy p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Guentchev, Daniel, *Running and Philosophy*, p.3.



me. It is a tool within my process of image making. While my work is not a comment on the safety of the pedestrian, I am aware that a city under construction monopolizes main areas of passage in the city.

While my work does not situate itself in the field of performance or conceptual art, the action of repetition in nature does bring to mind the land works of artist Richard Long. Evident in many of his works, Long was clearly informed by modern art's long-standing historical interest in compulsion, repetition, and the ritual of emptying out of the repetitive gesture—voiding, avoidance, the void—as the means to an end of art-making. Long's 'absence' of void *produced* by depersonalized repetitive behaviour—and the various circular walks that followed soon after belong to an era in art dominated by the ethos of John Cage and his cohorts, or as Gilles Deleuze states, “to repeat is to behave in a certain manner, but in relation to something unique or singular which has no equal or equivalent.”<sup>4</sup> In the way my paintings are experienced separate from the action of running, Long's piece, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967 (Fig. 1), employs the mundane act of walking, which in itself he did not consider art; however, the decision to photograph the result, to identify the indented grass as the outcome of a bodily action, is the art. While Long's action is focused on a singular gesture in this case, his motivation was not to make a work of art, but to experiment with the process of using your body as a tool to create something. Like Long, I did not begin running with the intention to make paintings; it is a byproduct of my repeated actions over time that creates the series.

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<sup>4</sup> Roelstraete, Dieter *Richard Long: A Line Made by Walking* Afterall Books, 2010 p.46. (Quote from Deleuze, Gilles *Difference and Repetition* (Columbia University Press, NY 1994) p.1

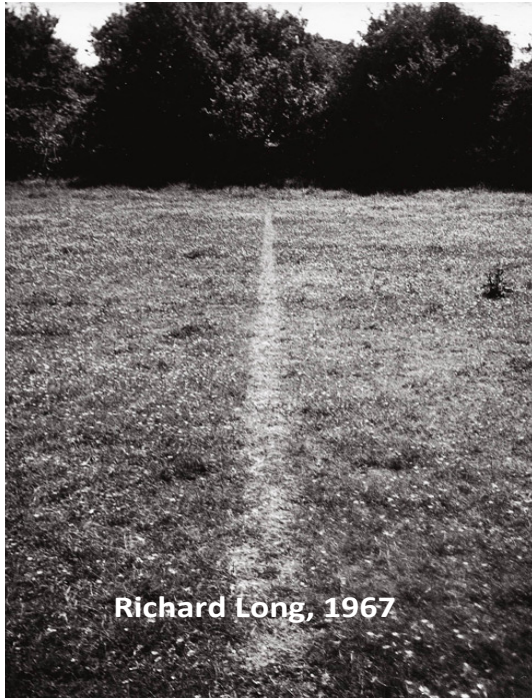


Figure 1. Richard Long *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967 (left) My interpretation in Waterloo Park, October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017 (right)<sup>5</sup>

Previously, my studio work was based on urban environments, where the paintings were developed from photographic references taken on intermittent walks. I rarely revisited any of these areas to carefully *compose* these source photos in a single outing. My goal was to get all of the information needed for my studio production in one photo shoot. The results were translations of urban scenes, positioned from the perspective of the person taking the photo. The process was relatively straightforward with little room for interpretation or surprise. They were based in landscape, but lacked any visceral or haptic connection to the environment that I wanted to portray.

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<sup>5</sup> When researching Long's work, I set out to recreate my own version in the park close to my home. I paced between two trees for over forty minutes, seeing the results of my action after the first twenty-five. I documented the action similarly to Long's. When running through that route over the next few days the grass remained indented. There was something about seeing the physical evidence that was oddly humbling.

Since I moved to Waterloo and I started to explore my new location with more depth and purpose. The outcome, *Restrictions of Routine*, is the visual overlap of my running and my studio practice. I did not become a runner overnight; it has been years of failure, progress, setbacks, and guilt that keep running as a sustained part of my life. It is a physical activity, but it is also a mental workout. I am particularly drawn to marginal, or liminal spaces where construction forces people to change patterns of behaviour, and the dangers encountered:

For runners, nearly all urban road routes contain potentially hazardous and injurious features, such as fast-flowing traffic, major road junctions, roundabouts, and concealed driveways, where hazards from vehicles are considerable, necessitating a high degree of visual (and aural) surveillance as the runner approaches these at relative speed: my momentum - and adrenalin rush – keeps me hurtling forward, I'm already looking ahead to the next section of pavement, scanning for other precipitous exits from the driveway.<sup>6</sup> (Fig.2)



Figure 2. Eryn O'Neill, *Pedestrian safety signs*, King Street, Waterloo, 2017.

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<sup>6</sup> Allen-Collinson, Jacquelyn and John Hockey *From a Certain Point of View: Sensory Phenomenological Envisioning's of Running Space and Place*, Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, University of Lincoln, UK, 2015, Vol. 44 p.71.

This connection requires full engagement, not just visually, but through all sensory elements working together including auditory perception, kinesthetic sense (proprioception), pain (nociception), and balance (equilibrioception) to keep me fully present.

While the paintings for *Restrictions of Routine* are solely completed in a studio without the hazards mentioned above, they seek to capture the sensory disorientation, through the scale, brushstrokes and exaggeration of perspective. I connect the intense focus and routine required to create paintings as no different to maintaining a regular running practice. I am constantly competing against myself, signing up for races and events to set goals. The self-employed artist and the solitary runner overlap in methods to obtain goals in more ways than I realized. Through the field of philosophy, there are direct links made between the two practices - painting and running. In the book, *Running & Philosophy*, author Christopher Martin draws comparisons between philosopher John Dewey's characteristics of an artist's task of creating a work of art, to that of a runner. In the observations of John Dewey:

[The] Perception of [the] relationship between what is done and what is undergone constitutes the works intelligence, and because the artist is controlled by the process of his work his grasp of the connection between what he has done and what he will do next... a painter must consciously undergo the effect of his every brush stroke or he will not be aware of what he is doing or where his work is going.<sup>7</sup>

Martin then draws his own comparison to that of a runner saying that:

As we run, we are controlled, to a degree, by what we undergo. We must attend to the movement of our legs, consciously monitor our speed, and make all sorts of intelligent assessments of our bodily state and surroundings, using the information at hand to guide our actions. Like the artist, our experience of the world can

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<sup>7</sup> Martin, Christopher, *The Philosophy of Running* p.175

proceed at a level that is truly poetic...if we allow ourselves to undergo disruption and equilibrium, if we allow ourselves to be open to the surroundings through which we run, if we undertake the activity of running as an activity itself, if we have an endpoint at which we can say that we have finished running, if we have all these things, we can look back and say that we've had an aesthetic running experience.<sup>8</sup>

In my practice, running and painting require skill sets that while they do not stem from the same field of training, both requires an immediate connection to the task at hand and a trust in oneself and their ability.

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<sup>8</sup> Martin, Christopher, *The Philosophy of Running* p.175

## Section 2: Painting

Paintings are collections of marks on a flat surface. The artist's challenge is to evoke meaning through directional lines, brushstrokes, colour and composition, to name a few methods. I have always been drawn to paintings, they have a life to them, arouse an emotional reaction, or provide a new perspective on something seemingly mundane and every day. There is an unspoken dialogue that occurs when confronting a painting. The "plane of composition" is what Deleuze and Guattari argue is the possible entry into the artwork. Reiterating the common argument that art creates imaginary worlds, alternate universes of the "as if." In another sense, they are emphasizing the hope of art, the promise of something genuinely new, the possibility of escaping the intolerable and living otherwise:

Art's possible worlds are not virtual in the same sense that philosophy's plane of immanence is virtual, but they do not arise from and participate in the virtual. Deleuze says that genuine thought only begins with an external violence to thought, a jolt that forces thought out of its ordinary habits. That jolt is a fundamental encounter, a disequilibrium or deregulation of the senses "that can only be sensed." All thought, then, begins in sense experience, in the becoming-other of the senses. The becoming-other is the sign of the passage of the virtual into the actual. It takes place, one might say in a first approximation, along the surface if the virtual's entry into the actual.<sup>9</sup>

Sensory emotions are imposed onto the work, to fulfill its purpose of being more than marks on a surface. The way I paint leaves a clear suggestion of the artist's hand. I do not cover the process, but rather celebrate it, leaving areas of transparency in the paint, and freely expressing its materiality through the un-stretched canvas, drips of the paint and gestural marks; which are all abundantly clear when confronted with the work.

Working with acrylic paint as opposed to oil, as the primary medium, reinforced my

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<sup>9</sup> Bogue, Ronald, *Deleuze: On Music, Painting, and the Arts*, Routledge, 2003, p.178.

increased working pace. With faster drying time, areas are worked and reworked or removed all in one session of painting.

In the text, *Thinking Through Painting*, the author Isabelle Graw says that:

We conceive of a painting not as a medium, but as a production of signs that is experienced as highly personalized. By focusing on painting's specific indexicality, we will be able to grasp one of its main characteristics: it is able to suggest a strong bond between the product and the (absent) person of its maker.<sup>10</sup>

Indirectly, my work uses photography as an initial reference, but that is abandoned once I start making clear markings and engage with the surface in a less visual and more tactile way; this is something that cannot be captured in photography, as painting brings in another layer of emotion and of the senses. That energy is present and expressed in the work via formal (physical, emotional and sensual elements of my work) reflects the process in the studio in which I re-live the experience of running. This is undeniably an asset to my practice. The photos, for me, do not reflect my struggles enough; the physical and mental strain is re-activated on the canvas. Even though an artist is limited to the materiality of painting, the flatness of its surface, I continually seek to prove that the power of painting lays in pushing through the boundary of the flatness, by working with the tactility, experience and embodiment that ultimately animates an image. The energy they impose on the canvas can move the painting towards a sensory experience. The viewer's agency is not limited to an exact moment, but rather a nostalgic feeling through the lack of complete photographic references. Merleau-Ponty, in reference to Cézanne's work, summarizes this challenge faced by artists, and writers alike:

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<sup>10</sup> Graw, Isabelle, *Thinking Through Paintings: Reflexivity and Agency beyond the Canvas*, Sternberg Press, 2012 p.50

It is not enough for a painter, like Cézanne, an artist, or a philosopher, to create and express an idea; they must also awaken the experiences, which will make their idea take root in the consciousness of others. If a work is successful, it has the strange power of being self-teaching. The reader or spectator, by following the clues of the book or painting, by establishing the concurring points of internal evidence and being brought up short when straying too far to the left or right, guided by the confused clarity of style, will in the end find what was intended to be communicated. The painter can do no more than construct an image; he must wait for this image to come to life for other people. When it does, the work of art will have united these separate lives; it will no longer exist in only one of them like a stubborn dream or a persistent delirium, nor will it exist only in space as a colored piece of canvas. It will dwell undivided in several minds, with a claim on every possible mind like a perennial acquisition.<sup>11</sup>

The paintings in the exhibition are hung without the aid of a stretcher frame, stapled directly to the wall of the gallery, with the edges left raw. The lack of framing allows one piece to blend one into the next, dependent on each other; they become fragments of an overall image, and immersive environment. Some of the canvases allow one to enter, visually, into the space depicted whereas other paintings keep one at a distance through the representation of barriers and obstacles. An example is the painting *Enclosure* (Fig. 3), a six foot square painting of an exaggerated downward perspective confronting the ground level as the main focus. The gaze follows the curved path through a series of overlapping lines representing yellow metal construction fencing, leading the gaze to the right edge of the painting. No clear exit is visible within the frame, but rather a seemingly endless pattern of fencing dissolves into the distance.

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<sup>11</sup> Merleau-Ponty, Maurice *Cézanne's Doubt (1945)*, (Essay from *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, Galen A. Johnson, Editor, Michael B. Smith, Translation Editor), Northwestern University Press, 1993, p.59.





Figure 3. Eryn O'Neill *Enclosure*, Acrylic on Canvas, 72x72, Fall 2017.

The process, for me, is not about the final outcome, but rather all of the elements that contribute to creating the work, all of which is exposed through the application and display of the paintings with a sense of urgency in the overall aesthetic.

Winnipeg based artist Wanda Koop occupied two rooms at the Winnipeg Art Gallery in 1997; one room was titled *Paintings for a Dimly Lit Room*, and the other *Paintings for a Brightly Lit Room* (Fig. 5).



Figure 4. Eryn O'Neill *Installation Image*, UWAG, University of Waterloo.



Figure 5. Wanda Koop, *Paintings for a Dimly Lit Room & Paintings for a Brightly Lit Room*. Winnipeg Art Gallery, 1997<sup>12</sup>

The pieces were intentionally installed to command the space in two distinctly unique

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<sup>12</sup> Wanda Koop, *Paintings for a Dimly Lit Room*, Acrylic on convertible car top fabric, 210x270cm each, seven canvases, 1997. <http://www.wandakoop.com>

ways, with reference to the nineteenth-century encircling panorama.<sup>13</sup> I was drawn to the observations of the painting technique used by Koop, as well as the installation:

Made abundantly clear is the human construction of the paintings themselves. Koop used her camera as a research tool to create new synthetic totality, a scenic view based on video images. But unlike the nineteenth-century panorama painter, who would have concealed the painting's gestures and created a safe distance between the surrounding painting and the viewer's eye and hands to create an illusion of reality, in *Dimly Lit*, Koop uses the medium of painting to undermine the screen's photographic truth. The viewer on examining the paintings up close notices the handmade quality of this representation. A human hand created these paintings, just as a human hand created the landscape – the parks, arbours and ponds, to which they refer.<sup>14</sup>

In both my work and Koop's paintings for *Dimly Lit*, the lack of a supporting stretcher has the effect of bringing out the materiality, the *cloth* of the paintings, which hang tapestry-like from their own weight. For my work the canvas is not cut, but rather torn to the desired size, and the edges are frayed (Fig.4). As material artifacts, the paintings demonstrate that they are part of the everyday constructed world in which they hang. Closing off the edges with the wrapped canvas, in my opinion, put too strong an emphasis on the paintings as individual objects, not operating as a whole installation or experience.

Within the frame, or canvas, artists have manipulated perspective to represent motion. Paul Cézanne (1839-1906), who was associated with both the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist era, worked to free himself from the Impressionist's methods, which

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<sup>13</sup> Halkes, Petra, *Aspiring to the Landscape: On painting and the subject of Nature*, University of Toronto Press, 2006. p.18 (Panorama: The main goal of the panorama was to immerse the audience to the point where they could not tell the difference between the canvas and reality, in other words, wholeness. To accomplish this, all borders of the canvas had to be concealed. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panorama\\_\(art\)\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Panorama_(art)))

<sup>14</sup> Halkes, p.29

he considered flat, decorative and superficial<sup>15</sup>. In contrast to the Impressionist practice which required the development of a wonderfully dexterous handling in order to record as quickly as possible the appearance of a given motif at one particular moment, Cézanne worked slowly, and often returned to the motif to work on the same painting on successive days, observing the subject for long periods of time. In my practice, I continue to run daily, which directly or indirectly affects the paintings that are in the studio. During the creation of the work for *Restrictions of Routine*, I began to see recurring themes and compositions emerge, and began to return to the same place, to gather more concrete information and observe subtle or in some cases significant changes due to the temporality of an active construction site, the source of many images. The work is the byproduct of perceptions of space through the mode of time that I then, through the cumulative nature of paint, record onto the canvas until I feel the image is complete.

If the surface of a painting by Cézanne is the record of cumulative visual experiences recorded at successive but different moment of periods in time, it follows that these experiences need not all have occurred from the one and the same physical position in space. Cézanne, in his own words writes [translated]:

In painting what had never yet been painted, and turns it into painting once and for all. We, forgetting the visual, equivocal appearances, go through them straight to the things they present. The painter recaptures and converts into visible objects what would, without him, remain walled up in the separate life of each consciousness: the vibration of appearances, which is the cradle of things. Only one emotion is possible for this painter—the feeling of strangeness— and only one lyricism—that of the continual rebirth of existence.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Hamilton, George Heard, *Cézanne, Bergson and the Image of Time*, College Art Journal, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Autumn 1956) pp.2-12, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Cézanne's Doubt*.

Cezanne’s “so called distortions,”<sup>17</sup> have often been explained as the consequences of his attempt to recreate his sensations of deep, three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. In the painting by Cézanne, *Montagne Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine*, 1887 (Fig. 6), the placement of the tree, in my view, signifies both an entry point into the composition, with a use of scale and figurative placement, as well as a barrier to keep the viewer firmly placed within the image; much in the same way I use objects and barriers to frame the space in my paintings, such as *Obstructed Path* (Fig. 7).



Figure 6. Paul Cézanne, *Montagne Sainte-Victoire with Large Pine*, 1887.

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<sup>17</sup> Hamilton, *Cézanne, Bergson and the Image of Time*, p.7.



Figure 7. Eryn O'Neill *Obstructed Path* Acrylic on Canvas, 72x96 2018.

I do not paint or sketch outside, but rather use the plethora of photos collected on site, many of which are discarded, while a few resonate and are set aside for future use. What differentiates a working image from one that is deleted is often resolved through sketches or collaging together multiple images to form something akin to a comprehensive composition, and that often becomes the reference for the painting (Fig. 8). I find that the more I develop the body of work, the quicker I am able to pick out a workable photograph. While I still rely on instinct and memory, I am more cognizant of what objects to include and what compositional features will make an interesting painting. Elements such as lighting and details are less relevant in this initial stage, since those items can be exaggerated or removed entirely. The landscape is never apprehended

all at once but rather through compilation and familiarity.



Figure 8. Eryn O'Neill, Source Images (left) Studio Image (Right) 20x48, Fall 2016.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> These images represent the initial exploration of combining running and painting. I began by removing any references to place or scale, but rather a stronger emphasis on representing motion. Acrylic on Paper, Fall 2016.

### Section 3: Strangely Familiar

Urban spaces are in a continuous state of flux, constantly constructed and re-constructed in response to wear, increased population, and accessibility. During these temporary, often disruptive periods, it becomes increasingly difficult to navigate the once familiar streets, both for pedestrians and traffic. Architect Graham Livesey observes that:

An artifact or landscape is transformed, often subtly, by the passage of time. The ephemeral actions of the inhabitants are etched into the walls, ground and paraphernalia that make up the material of the city. The evolution of a city, through development, demolition, and disaster, provides material to be deciphered. This reminds us that the constructed city is susceptible to the ravages of time, and like the body, it ages, given enough time, can virtually disappear.<sup>19</sup>

As a relatively new resident of Waterloo I do not have the history and memories associated with the city, and I arrived during a time of extensive re-construction and change. The first objects that caught my attention were the newly implemented rail-crossing lights (Fig. 9, 10) that were under construction at the time, I found myself encountering these forms at several junctions and intersections along my running route. While the objects themselves were not unfamiliar, they previously did not feature as dominantly in my daily routine. They became the launching point for the exploration of the city of Waterloo, while those particular paintings are a more careful exploration of the functional details; they are in a way what grounded me to the city. My search for those sources lead me directly into the construction sites which became the main subject going forward.

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<sup>19</sup> Livesey, Graham *Passages: Explorations of the Contemporary City*, University of Calgary Press, 2004, p.123.





Figure 9. Eryn O'Neill, *Train Crossing Lights I* Acrylic on Canvas, 72x72, Fall 2016.

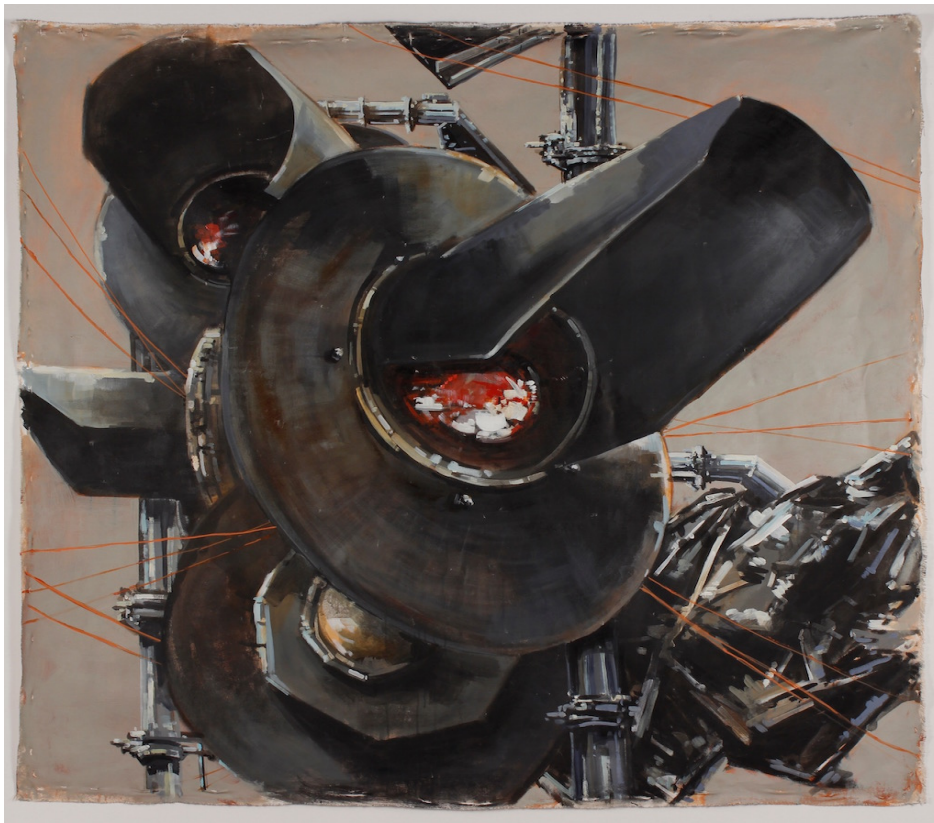


Figure 10. Eryn O'Neill, *Train Crossing Lights II*, Acrylic on Canvas, 72x72 Fall 2016.

For me, running is a combination of sensory elements, which are experienced in isolation from the action of painting, however, through the writing of Daniel Guentchev on

Merleau-Ponty's interest in painting's abilities to bring forth certain sensory triggers:

Painting is an example of the achieving of a primitive contact with the world that phenomenology promotes. It is an exploration of visibility that does not depend on language. In fact, the creation and experiencing of paintings is a type of making sense of the world that linguistic description and analysis do not capture fully. Merleau-Ponty's writings cultivate an appreciation of this art and show that it shares some of the pursuits and outcomes of phenomenology. Painting engages in a phenomenologically minded project in a way that phenomenology as a species of philosophy cannot quite do. Philosophy relies on verbal concept in order to talk about experience, while painting remains closer to the pre-reflective contact with the world. Painting points out aspects of visual experience to the viewer without necessarily conceptualizing it. Thus, painting is an important supplement to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological project.<sup>20</sup>

Guentchev discusses painting's ability to demonstrate the artist's unique interpretation of the world, and what is considered relevant to depict on the canvas:

Painting is the exploration of the enigma of visibility. Vision is a field in which a primitive contact with the world is made, inextricably bound to movement. To see is to place something within our reach, to establish how we are to move toward or around the thing seen. In doing so, vision brings what we see closer to us. Far from being the function of the eyes only, vision is an overall orientation of the entire body toward what we see.<sup>21</sup>

The uncelebrated anomalies are as much a part of the urban landscape as the line of trees and the architecture, but even more closely connected to our bodies through direct contact underfoot. Comparisons are often made with the human body and landscape in relationship to evidence of memory and time. From the perspective of architect Graham Livesey, the human body, memory and personal imprints we impose on urban

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<sup>20</sup> Guentchev, Daniel, *The Role of Painting in the Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, American Society for Aesthetics Graduate E-journal, 2010 p.1.

<sup>21</sup> Guentchev, Daniel, *The Role of Painting in the Phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty*, p.1

environment:

During our lives memories are intimately related to space; in fact they make space intimate through reciprocity. We associate events in our past with the places in which they occurred. When we revisit those locations our past and present are remarkably fused. We have marked the city with our memories; it provides us with landmarks and provides orientation. When we visit a new city, previous cities we have inhabited or visited crowd our experience.<sup>22</sup>

Given the scale of the Kitchener-Waterloo area, I was able to establish a few reliable routes, which I still use. While I have fond memories of other places I have lived in the past, as the author Christopher Martin notes, “We experience our lives from a particular location in time. Where we chose to live shapes our experience in a certain sense, precluding us from being in other locations at the same time with the same experience.”<sup>23</sup> The paintings are a direct reference to where I live and respond to on a daily basis. They reference the signs, landmarks, and rail-crossings taking the viewer on a journey to form a coherent scene. My work in a way creates an arbitrary map, no obvious start and finish, but clearly indicates forward directional momentum. Urban theorist Kevin Lynch breaks down the city into legible elements, which directly relates to how I interact with the city, as opposed to a literal map. The five elements Lynch uses are *paths, edges, districts, nodes* and *landmarks* (Fig. 11). These elements, according to Lynch, are part of a whole, similar to the co-dependency of my paintings, they become a “total orchestration of these units which would knit together a dense and vivid image, and sustain it over areas of metropolitan scale.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Livesey, p.106.

<sup>23</sup> Hochstetler, Douglas R. *Running and Philosophy* p.140-41.

<sup>24</sup> Lynch, Kevin *The Image of the City*. MIT Press, 1960, p.108.

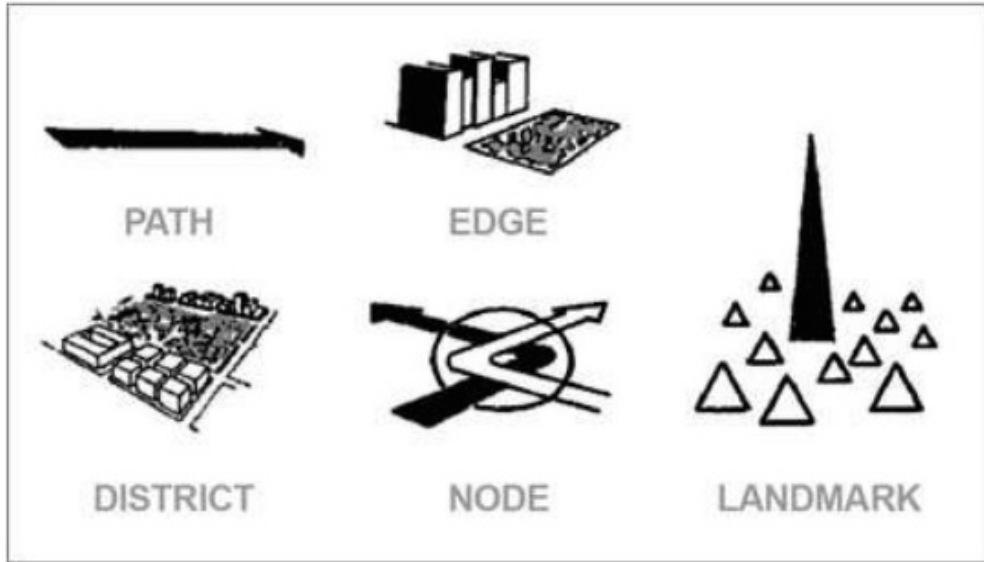


Figure 11. Kevin Lynch *Illustrations for Five Elements of the City*, *Image of the City*, 1960<sup>25</sup>

Lynch's description of *paths* and their “kinesthetic” quality and the sense of motion along it: turning, rising and falling. He goes on to explain that, “Objects along the path can be arranged to sharpen the effect of motion parallax or perspective, or the course of the path ahead may be made visible. The dynamic shaping of the movement line will give it identity and will produce a continuous experience over time. Any visual exposure of the path, or its goal, heightens its image.”<sup>26</sup> In the painting, *No-Access*, some of Lynch's theories are directly addressed. The main focus of the piece is the interruption of a pathway, and how the focus is divided between what is beyond the path and what is immediately blocking it. *No-Access* (Fig. 12) represents two visible traffic drums situated in the foreground, tethered together by yellow caution tape, creating a clear barricade to the pathway in the background, while areas are less resolved, keeping the eye keenly

<sup>25</sup> This illustration demonstrates how Lynch visually marked sidewalks, intersections and other methods of travel for pedestrians in an urban setting.

<sup>26</sup> Lynch, p. 97-98.

focused on the objects in the foreground.



Figure 12. Eryn O'Neill, *No-Access*, Acrylic on Canvas, 72x72 Winter 2018.

*Imageability* (a term frequently used in Lynch's writing) is defined as "that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, colour, or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly

identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment.”<sup>27</sup>

That reinforces the idea that simply relying on the functionality of a city is not fully experiencing it, but where my work forces a pause to celebrate those less pre-supposed aesthetic elements of city, is where Lynch’s *imageability* comes to mind. To describe how the city is tied together, and those nuances that create a visual record of a very specific time and place, Lynch uses the basic principles that we cannot experience an urban environment all at once, our senses and motion work to create a constant changing and reorientation within the complex system of the city, but it is our visual connection that resonates. Senses and reactions are heightened when the body is feeling anxious or exposed, which is why construction sites provide an ideal metaphor for my work. They induce anxiety within the gridded pens of metal fencing, unexpected sounds, and uneven terrain. I have come to pause in the chaos and let it happen around me, and it is at that moment that I chose to stop and photograph what I can see. What happens is that the environment changes, my place within it changes, that fencing that was at first disorienting suddenly becomes a safe space of protection, no longer an obstacle (Fig. 13). Being present and asking yourself what you see around you, what is underfoot and what is in your peripheral vision allows the scene to unfold slightly, while still leaving areas unresolved. I re-live and re-visit that chaos, until it becomes *strangely familiar* and part of my experience.

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<sup>27</sup> Lynch, p.9.



Figure 13. Eryn O'Neill *Restrictions of Routine*, Acrylic on Canvas, 72x144, 2018.

I have asked myself, is it important that an impartial viewer have the tools to understand the process of how or why a work is created? What gets lost in translation between the action and that which can be recovered, or re-discovered in painting? Much like talking about running to a non-runner there lacks a certain impact and relevance. The same applies to a non-painter, but that does not, in my opinion, devalue their reaction to the work; they just may not come to the same conclusions that I did.

Running and painting are accumulative processes. They both benefit from time and energy into the task, often without immediate results. Writer Jeff Edmonds poses the question: “What justification is there for so much aimless trotting, such luxurious waste of energy, so many hours spent out on the road carving circles across town? While runners might say they are practicing discipline, which might bleed over into all aspects of life, the truth that for natural runners, running takes no discipline at all...old rhythms

come back and simply pull the runner along into familiar and practiced pleasures.”<sup>28</sup> I maintain that with painting, there is a natural comfort with the work, the way I handle the paint, use the brush as an extension of myself, and there is muscle memory built into both practices, which is the result of repetitive training. Art has the ability to both clarify and confuse. Edmonds observes:

Art demonstrates this tension best: beauty, and art and the artist seem something impractical and perhaps less than necessary while simultaneously coming off as the highest form of human activity. Art doesn’t solve any problems – more often it poses them. But, on the other hand, a world without art, without beauty for its own sake, seems like a world without purpose. Art seems, strangely, both a distraction for life and central to it.<sup>29</sup>

When describing the work, I start by saying they are paintings of construction sites.

While it has become the dominant theme tying the work together, in my mind that provides the analogy for the struggle of both internal and external obstacles and challenges and how we are forced to readjust our path. How the convenience of a once familiar route is taken for granted and when that’s disrupted how we chose to adjust to the confusion whether you are indifferent and ignore it, take an alternate route, or get right into it and assess it from within the chaos. The work stems from that place of discomfort.

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<sup>28</sup> Edmonds, Jeff, *Running as Art: Tolerance, Temperament, and the Ineffable*, The Journal of Speculative Philosophy, Penn State University Press, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2015, pp.165-179, p.168.

<sup>29</sup> Edmonds, p.178.



## Conclusion:

A landscape whose every rock tells a story may make difficult the creation of fresh stories. Although this may not seem to be a critical issue in our present urban chaos, yet it indicates that what we seek is not a final but an open-ended order, capable of continuous further development.<sup>30</sup>

The challenge articulated by Lynch is how to develop an altered viewpoint of something everyday and obviously familiar. I see the work as an ongoing exploration of how I encounter and interact with my environment and how through mimesis, paintings can act out an experience of being in the world. The paintings move between areas of frustration to areas of visual reprieve and calm, creating a visual map constrained within the repeated route, an exhaustion of the space, almost to the point of monotony. In a growing city we often dwell on the interim period; and forget to appreciate the ease of travel in a city that comes as a result of the work and effort to get us there. The paintings are very much about the present state of development, the temporality of situations both on the cusp of completion and the past imagery that is uncovered, cleaned up or destroyed, and what is to come when the construction ends. The research and creation of this body of work gives agency to my combined practice of running and painting; making it part of a larger narrative that extends beyond the walls of this exhibition.

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<sup>30</sup> Lynch, p.6.



Figure 14.



Figure 15.

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