



**PAT SERVICE:  
PAINTING THIS PLACE, 3 DECADES**

March 6 - April 17, 2014  
Art Gallery at Evergreen



**Top**

Pat Service, *Across the Water* (1981)  
107cm x 160cm

**Front Cover**

Pat Service, *Rocks and Sky* (1990)  
198cm x 213cm

Consult the genius of the place in all;  
That tells the waters or to rise, or fall;  
Or helps th' ambitious hill the heav'ns to scale,  
Or scoops in circling theatres the vale;  
Calls in the country, catches opening glades,  
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,  
Now breaks, or now directs, th' intending lines;  
Paints as you plant, and, as you work, designs.

Alexander Pope, *Epistle IV*, to Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington (1731)

## Pat Service: *Painting This Place, 3 Decades*

Essay by Gregory Elgstrand

**Through** her impressive output of paintings in landscape painting over the past thirty-plus years, Vancouver artist Pat Service's exhibition *Painting this Place: 3 Decades* provides audiences with a clear picture of her artistic enthusiasms. However, every survey exhibition is a job of editing and this one leaves Service's equally impressive bodies of still life and landscape painting to concentrate only on her work in landscape. That said, even a cursory glance at the lucky thirteen landscape paintings that make up this exhibition reveals the artistic breadth of her engagement with the landscape and her approach to painting that at once flaunts and foils the artistic conventions that have long defined the genre.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to assembling a comprehensive presentation of three decades worth of Service's work is her partiality for working in series. Working in series offers Service an opportunity to explore at greater length a particular subject through a collection of particular artistic means (paint handling, colour, composition, format) over a number of related works. But for every one work in the series that makes it into the exhibition, dozens – if not more – are left out of the picture. Can the specific instance in a single work adequately generalize the specific concerns and explorations collectively embodied in all of the works that comprise the series? Or, more simply, can the one adequately stand

for the many? This selection of works offers a perspective from which Service's artistic concerns can be seen across (and through) the collected works.

Landscape painting starts from the simple convention of orientation. Perhaps the most immediately recognizable way to evoke an image of a landscape is simply to turn a standard sheet of 8 ½" x 11" office paper (in any colour) so that its tall vertical edge becomes its long horizontal edge. With just less than half of the paintings in the exhibition in a square (or very nearly so) format, Service makes it clear that the defining conventions of the genre, such as the use of traditional landscape orientation, are fair game for her artistic manipulation. Another striking feature is the scale at which Service typically chooses to work. These paintings are, in the main, significantly larger than traditional easel-sized landscape painting. Indeed, one of the notable achievements in her work is how she employs the interaction between scale and format to provocative formal and subjective effect.

With the large scale of many of the paintings—for example *Second Growth* (1993), which was remarkably painted outside of the studio while inside the subject, a second growth forest – Service creates the sense that a viewer is not in or in front of the landscape but of the landscape. A faraway look or glance at many of the works may reveal a clear

picture of a landscape but a landscape is always about perspective, and perspective changes by distance. Service's paintings undergo a fascinating transformation through proximity. By moving in close – about half a metre from nose to canvas – to a work such as *Rocks and Sky* (1990), the rocky shore at the bottom of the canvas and ocean in centre and sky completely fills the field of vision with the periphery seemingly wrapping around the viewer. The viewer has the sense of being in the picture and by extension, of the landscape and not in front of a picture. *Second Growth*, *Zinger* (2007) and *Blue Garden* (1992) are equally transformed by looking close-up.

*Across the Water* (1981), the painting that opens the exhibition, serves as a primary inventory of the formal and painterly elements that reappear again and again in different configurations and emphases in the subsequent works on exhibition. This earliest work also exemplifies the economy of artistic means that Service employs to describe the features of the landscape: sky (a bold greenish-gray swath), horizon (a thick variegated slate stroke as the horizon and land mass across the water), water (three thin, deep, dark green lines as water), foliage (a collection of green dabs and dashes as leaves, deep red stabs for flowers and some thin yellow umber up-and-down strokes for grass). While this is perhaps one of the more abstract works in the exhibition, it also provides the most direct description of what goes into the making of a landscape



**Top**

Pat Service, *Second Growth* (1993)

198cm x 279cm

painting. As Karen Wilkin has remarked, Service's "most convincing compositions have firm abstract underpinnings, no matter how much they remind us of familiar settings, while conversely, no matter how audacious her colour or how uninhibited her paint handling, she remains responsive to the specifics of place, of season and time of day."<sup>1</sup>

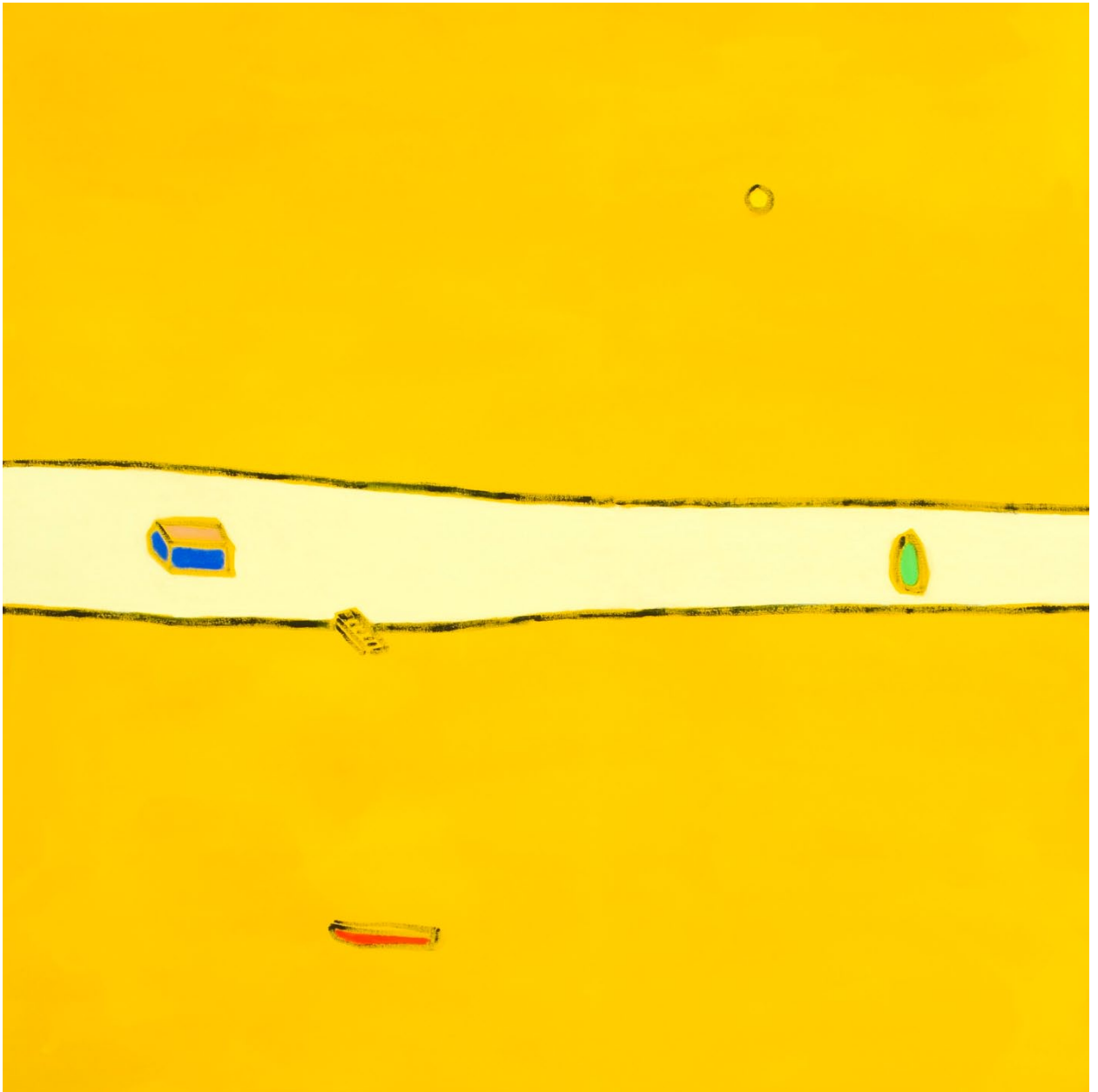
For Service, the landscape of a place is a subject upon which to improvise. The look of a place is a starting point in her attempt to get a picture that is more accurately evocative of the sense or "feeling" of place. In this, she shares a close affinity with the work of Canadian artist David Milne (1882-1953). Milne was fond of incorporating something that he called a "dazzle spot", a shape or space or place on the canvas that is the first thing to catch a viewer's attention. From this spot, the viewer would then follow the compositional, colourful and textural rhythms to move around the rest of the picture, finding spots to rest and then again to accelerate. Like Milne, Service is attracted to the compositional possibilities that bodies of water, and the edges that describe them, provide as abstract expanses and places of rest. Of the thirteen paintings included in the exhibition, only two do not include water.

The dazzle spot is, in effect, a compositional element around which the rest of the work is assembled and improvised. In Service's work this dazzle spot can be seen in the bright

pink bush in *Triptych L* (1988) and yellow raft in *Lake Timeout* (2006). With *Zinger*, Service has coordinated four elements in the red boat, green tree, blue cabin and bright yellow sun as a series of dazzle spots set against deep yellow expanses of water and sky on either side of a light yellow band of land. The vast expanses of yellow provide a vast space for the viewer to rest. The disarmingly simple collection of elements are set in a remarkable complex arrangement that points to the range of application of the dazzle spot concept.

It is fitting that the exhibition concludes with the painting *After Picasso* (2011). Picasso once remarked that to search means nothing, to find is the thing. After looking at all of the work in *Painting this Place: 3 Decades*, it is easy to conclude that Picasso was perhaps only half right, many finds can only be discovered through the search. While only the top of a mountain of excellent paintings, this compact survey of Pat Service's unique and ongoing engagement with making landscape painting inspires the hope that a future survey that brings together Service's still life and portraiture is forthcoming.

<sup>1</sup> Wilkin, Karen (Karen Wilkin, "Bolder, Broader, More Urgent," Pat Service: Landscapes, (Vancouver: Buschlen Mowatt, 1998) unpaginated.



**Top**

Pat Service, Zinger (2007)  
178cm x 168cm

## ART GALLERY AT EVERGREEN

1205 Pinetree Way, Coquitlam, BC V3B 7Y3

### Curator

Gregory Elgstrand

### Gallery Hours

12-5pm, Monday-Saturday

Free Tours: Saturdays, 2pm

### Website

[evergreenculturalcentre.ca](http://evergreenculturalcentre.ca)

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