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## Northern Exposure: 3 Game-Changing Canadian Painters You Need to Know

By Artspace Editors

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**ELIZABETH MCINTOSH**

Born 1967, Simcoe, ON, Canada.



Batts Rock, 2015

Using repetition of basic forms and pure saturated color, Elizabeth McIntosh has been exploring abstraction for over twenty years. Moving beyond the conventions established by modernist abstract painting, she is seemingly unconcerned with trying to “resolve” the image. Instead, she provides an open-ended response to traditional hard-edged abstraction. Teetering between finished and unfinished, figurative and abstract, raw and refined, there is something tangible about McIntosh’s paintings despite

the fact that shapes linger without resolution. Take, for instance, *With the Moon Under My Arm* (2015), where the breast of the reclining blue figure in the foreground reappears as the yellow moon above. For McIntosh, painting is a deliberately undefined journey. She works in a spirit of play where aesthetic development is not contingent on beginnings or ends, but is continually renewing itself. The decisions she makes are formed through an instinctive process that varies from painting to painting. McIntosh often begins by priming the canvas with either white base coat or occasionally black gesso, progressively filling the surface with colored shapes until it is enveloped in pigment. From this starting point, she goes on to apply numerous subsequent layers and over-painted forms. For example, in *Batts Rock* (2015), blocks of bold orange and yellow sit underneath a semi-translucent female figure, reclining on a sofa. The colors seem to warm each other up or cool each other down, and there is no clear, balanced composition but a symbiosis between the parts. McIntosh's rigorous compositional use of color has become the linchpin to her paintings. For example, in *Tequila Sunrise* (2015), the application of warm, opaque, purples and browns, nestled against the sketchy pinks and yellows, set against the more graphic blue and red lines, harnesses the whole composition and carries the viewer through the picture. The shards of color waver and feel impermanent, giving the work an improvisational feel. Looking at McIntosh's paintings one might think of the early Cubists (Braque and Picasso) but the artist re-appropriates these reference points to create a new, twenty-first-century Cubism. Through soft edges, awkward shapes and intriguing underpaintings, her finished paintings resist the finality of rationalized abstraction.



With the Moon Under My Arm, 2015

Collage is also an important influence on McIntosh's painting and in her sketchbooks she creates collaged drawings of different patterns that often end up as one of her large-scale paintings. On a few occasions, McIntosh has also created collaged installations. In an exhibition in 2011, "Violet's Hair," at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver, she covered a room from floor to ceiling in sheets of colored paper, tacked to the wall in patterns. As with some of her paintings, McIntosh worked in a shallow pictorial space, decisively arranging and re-arranging forms over the colored sheets. The resulting holes or "cut-outs"—a nod to the late work of Henri Matisse (1869–1954)—allowed flashes of color to peek through at various intersections, paralleling McIntosh's painting process.

– Leila Hasham