



## *Protection Spells*

A solo exhibition by **Malcolm McCormick**

Doubt is a productive force in Montréal-based artist Malcolm McCormick's practice, moving the process forward rather than halting it. One step forward, two steps forward, in built-up layers of abandoned iterations. The final simplicity of each painting is underlined by a history of marks and colours, sometimes visible through a fog of glazed-on paint, at other times invisibly informing the successive layers. As McCormick often builds his painting stretchers in separate interlocking 'panels', the layered surfaces are disrupted by constructed marks like hairlines, scarring and dividing the image plane. Visual space in the works is implied through these diagonals and arching curves, rather than through their painted surfaces; a paradox that further complicates painting's status as both image and object. The permanent compositional lines serve as a guardrail against the artist's desire to endlessly rework the surface, a countermeasure for the consuming doubt that drives the work. This process results in the storied, sculptural paintings present in 'Protection Spells.'

Individually, the paintings are quite simple, but taken together, they relate to each other and to the history of painting through a web of complex conversations. References to other paintings, both present and not (both the artist's and not), are visible in their layered surfaces and constructed lines: one painting's colour is chosen for that of its neighbour, an Impressionist painting's composition is used as a template for a constructed painting, or an excerpt from another painting is abandoned and painted over.

Within the exhibition, the works speak in unexpected moments of harmony, like the clamour of a public space rather than the singing of a choir. The off-kilter resonance of the body of work is a salve for the predictability of images. Nonetheless, there are formal commonalities that establish a visual substructure for the group. Above that ground is a convergence of good and bad taste, cynicism and sincerity, doubt and certainty: a structure on stilts built above a concrete foundation. Protection spells cast in formal obliqueness, machined to perfection, soaked in doubt, cut through by an absolute mark. The inner space is a protected sanctum, the spell is an anticlimax.

**Frances Williams**

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