

## The art of nature

By Robert Reid, Record staff  
July 29, 2010

KITCHENER – Two of three summer exhibitions at the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery deal with aspects of the natural world, while the third deals with aspects of art history.

John Kissick investigates the nature of abstract painting, while Gwen MacGregor and Mary Catherine Newcomb investigate the art of nature.

### NERVOUS DECADE

If there is one word that embodies and reflects Kissick's paintings it is dialogue.

*A Nervous Decade* assembles 20 paintings on canvas and panels that constitute a mid-career retrospective of work by the acclaimed artist who is director of the School of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Guelph.

Bold, bright and vibrant in a joyously Pop-ish kind of way, Kissick's paintings engage in dialogue with the history of art, especially abstraction, and pop culture, especially music. Garish, playful, tongue-in-cheek, they wallow in the sensual, tactile pleasure of the physical act of painting.

His large, thickly impasto, collage-like, oil and acrylic works feature frenetic drips, drops and drabs; plush, roller-coaster, tubular waves; erratic curvilinear lines with the wild abandon of childhood finger-painting; and all manner of asymmetrical, amoeba-like shapes in a wide range of intense, undiluted colours including orange, lime green, lemon, purple, lavender, hot pink and black.

The pointillism of neo-impressionist Georges Seurat meets the Ben Day printing dots of American Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein through a hippy dippy, psychedelic, purple haze.

The paintings invite viewer to compare and contrast painting with music and to contemplate how a visual, material artform relates to and complements an auditory artform — where sight and sound clash on a darkling plain.

At its simplest, *A Nervous Decade* is intellectual doodling with paint — and this is meant as a compliment.

### FLOW CHARTS & DATA BANKS

The gallery's laudatory River Grand Chronicles continues with MacGregor's *Research, Flow Charts & Data*



KWAG pics Kissick 002.JPG. John Kissick's Remix No. 1, 2009 Melissa Tait/Record staff Source: Record staff

*Banks*, the eighth installment in the ongoing series.

The Toronto-based artist incorporates research in the field in her artwork, much of which investigates how we relate to, and understand, our place in the natural world.

MacGregor spent the last two years researching the Grand River watershed, both its geography and its history. In the summer of 2009 she canoed the length of historically designated river from its headwaters to its mouth on the north shore of Lake Erie.

Video documentation gathered on the trip forms a part of her multi-media installation which includes a bipolar video, a GPS-inspired, topographical-like animated graphic and a sculptural work spread out on the gallery floor consisting of found objects replicating urban sprawl on the banks of a river — viewers might be inclined to see Waterloo, Kitchener, Cambridge or Brantford in the three-dimensional schematic.

The floor work is made up of all hundreds of disposable bottles, jars, plastic tubs, tin cans and containers used to package “organic” food and beverages. The actual labels remain on one side and on the other side MacGregor has drawn images of native wild flowers that could, at least theoretically, grow along the watershed were it not for urbanization.

#### PRODUCT OF EDEN 2010

Newcomb, who lives and works in Kitchener, looks to the natural world for both inspiration and as a source of discourse. She often uses animal and anthropomorphic imagery to investigate the relationship between humanity and nature.

In *Product of Eden 2010* she has constructed a 400 square-foot garden outside the main entrance of the Centre in the Square, which houses the gallery.

Over the course of the summer she is planting a bed of jumbo pink banana squash plants, the fruit of which she is shaping into strange, infant-shaped creatures through the use of custom moulds.

Viewers are invited to watch and monitor the growth of this new species of vegetable/human hybrids and to contemplate the meaning of Newcomb’s provisional Garden of Eden.

Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery

John Kissick: A Nervous Decade

Gwen MacGregor: Research Flow Charts & Data Banks

On view through Sept. 5

Mary Catherine Newcomb: Product of Eden 2010

On view through Oct. 5

Information and Gallery hours available at 519-579-5860 or online at [ww.kwag.ca](http://ww.kwag.ca)

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