Laureen Marchand: Beholder
April 9 to May 12, 2014

Laureen Marchand has been a professional artist in Saskatchewan for over 25 years. Her extensive exhibition record includes more than two dozen solo or two-person exhibitions and 40 group shows. She has been recognized by both the Saskatchewan Arts Board and the Canada Council, and her paintings are included in many public and private collections throughout the country. Laureen currently lives and works in Val Marie, Saskatchewan, Canada.

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Neil Balkwill Civic Arts Centre
2420 Elphinstone Street, PO Box 1790,
Regina, Saskatchewan S4P 3C8

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Exhibition Curator: Karen Schoonover
Essay: Catherine Macaulay
Design: Steve McDonnell: Dalek Design @ www.dalek.ca

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Two Stories - January, oil on panel, 24"x24", 2012

Quieten, oil on panel, 9"x12", 2010

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Cover: Dark Light, oil on panel, 6" x 12", 2011

Art Gallery of Regina
Laureen Marchand offers a gallery full of roses in her exhibition Beholder. They are not the full-bodied, heady-with-scent kind, arranged in lush bouquets bursting with obvious beauty; instead, they appear singly, in twos, threes and small bunches, suspended from somewhere outside of the picture plane, heads down and on the verge of decay and decomposition. At first glance, they appear dispirited and despondent. Closer consideration reveals much more than that.

Marchand’s journey to the rose garden has been less than direct. She has had a long history of working figuratively, with narratives ranging from straightforward to subtle. However, she has also painted inanimate objects in such a way that they take on human characteristics or suggest human emotions. About a decade ago, she discovered the power and persuasiveness of the rose. Aware of the symbolism and multiple meanings attached to what is probably the world’s best known blossom, she explores love, loss and the spirit of survival in these beautifully crafted paintings.

The rose as symbol has a long and rich history, with often contradictory meanings. It is a symbol of both purity and passion, of virginity and fertility, of life and of death. In Marchand’s work, these contradictions are further amplified by her decision to depict roses that are no longer pulsing with life. Her roses have already told their obvious stories, and are now free to take on more elusive meanings. She examines the dead and dried blossoms with an intense gaze, finding the life that is still within them.

Such intense study requires careful consideration when preparing for each new work. Marchand takes a very deliberate approach to composing and arranging her dried roses to achieve a composition that is both visually appealing and suggestive of meaning. She sets them up using multiple light sources, to produce a layering of shadows and an intensity of colour. Her goal is also to create a composition that isn’t just about the roses, but also about the space that they inhabit. She then photographs them, and often manipulates the digital image to achieve the desired range of colour and richness. Despite this thoughtful approach, there is still a certain amount of chance, of serendipity involved at each of these stages. How the shadows overlap and interact, how the individual blossoms relate to each other, how the colours suggest a mood—all of these add to the power of the image.

The image is then worked out on a painting board in what Marchand describes as ‘an elaborate contour drawing’. She then applies a wash in yellow or red to produce a warm underpainting. Colours are mixed in response to the photo image. She begins to paint, and again the choices are deliberate. She aims to clearly develop one area before moving to another, and selects an area that appears to be key to informing the rest of the painting. That area will either be the background shapes and colours or the main object. With the rose paintings, it is the heads of the flowers that are the foundation for the rest of the painting.

It is clear that Marchand takes great delight and satisfaction from the act of painting, and in doing so, imbues the work with a richness and life that are in contrast to a literal view of the images themselves. The blossoms, leaves and stems appear to float above the surface of the board, suggesting an existence and meaning far beyond simple death and decay. This dual concern with both the formal elements of painting and the desire to suggest something beyond the painting provides the opportunity to ask questions about the nature of beauty and the loss of beauty.

The work in Beholder evokes a state of grace and calmness that invites contemplation on beauty, loss and the passage of time, and an acceptance of the challenges of change.

Catherine Macaulay
March, 2014

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The Muse: Late, oil on panel, 20” x 16”, 2013

Golden Girls, oil on panel, 18” x 24”, 2011

Three Sisters, oil on panel, 9” x 12”, 2012

Secrets in Water, oil on panel, 24” x 30”, 2012