



**Project  
Space**

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*'The object, then, is vision, it is a surface filled with ego eyes. Its constructedness matters less than the way it goes about reconceiving our own willed surfaces.'*

*-Travis Jeppesen*

In the exhibition, *In Between Things*, the role of the support and surface in the works of Sean Stewart and Jason Deary comprises the basis for each artists approach, where the ability of a support to guide, contain, and articulate a gesture seems to be not only the structure upon which these artists lay their marks, but the support on which their practice is built. For Stewart and Deary process is the focus of their approach. Stewart's paintings (whose compositions are done in variations of acrylic, oil, spray paint, and charcoal) are installed alongside Deary's sculptural works with a composition and treatment that stem from his painting practice. The sculptures are composed of foam, wood, wire, string (complete list), and are as much experimentation in the means of creating a surface as Stewart's painterly experimentation.

Their work, by their own testament, is process based, looking more at the gestural responses materials evoke in relationship to each other, then approaching a work with a final composition in mind. These works are a testament to their structures, the interplay and gesture that becomes the visual surface, fully reliant and responsive to the structural framework on which it rests. These works also echo a distinct history of negotiating the act of making with the inherent histories their materials contain.

There is something undoubtedly romantic about paying attention to the inherent power of a surface, about our ability to look into a surface and see it for its potential to hold, to become an aperture for the gaze. As movements such as the Support / Surface artist collective of the late 60's, begin to be recovered once again in our social memory through recent retrospective exhibitions in L.A. and New York. The work of these artists resonates with a contemporary motivation to explore formal approaches to contemporary materials

(think artists like Julia Dault, Hugh Scott Douglas and Dashiel Manley). There seems to be a kindred impulse, at this moment, to deconstruct painting, to herald the material of painting, and to return with new complexities to this moment, concurrent to abstract minimalism, but in its own way attentive and concerned with colour, gesture, and our relationship to touch and material.

As Raphael Rubinstein writes in his recent review of the *Support/Surface* exhibition at Canada Gallery this past summer;

“In combining the language of formalist abstraction with a self-evident procedure, they tell us something new about painting” and in looking upon the current response in contemporary art he writes, “The kindred impulse—to deconstruct painting, to turn to the everyday world for materials, to favor process over image, ... is seen everywhere in current abstraction.”<sup>1</sup>

Stewart responds to these current trends, while also maintaining a commitment to the relationship between canvas and stretcher, never separating one from the other, as many from the *Support/Surface* movement did, but rather delves deeper into the inherent tension between the two material elements. His painterly mark making is guided by the support of the painting itself. The mark making seems guided by the surface's internal structure. Not unlike Harold Town's body of work from the early 1960's, wherein the internal structure of the compositional elements point to the constraints of the painted structure, jutting against the corners of the surface. Town's interest was in tension and discomfort, pointing out the discomfort and limitations, be they political or material. This is perhaps exemplified when two of his works at the Venice Biennale of 1964 where two of his 'enigma' drawings were ordered removed by an Italian cardinal. Tension, even at its subtlest, is a powerful force once given attention. Similarly in Stewart's work the tension that is inherent in the material surface, the warp and weft of the unprimed canvas wrapped over the corner of the paintings support is a moment when structure once again defines the nature of its surface.

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<sup>1</sup> Rubenstein, Raphael. *Theory and Matter*, Art In America. September 2014, <http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/theory-and-matter/>

Stewart's gestures seem responsive to the contained structure he creates, varying from a traditional stretcher to ones hand-built, jutting uncomfortably. The scalloped imagery in, around the edges of the works, specifically distort and amplify the curvature of the canvas, accentuating the tension between the surface and its underlying structure. In *Shapes shift, lines follow*, 2014, gestural marks create a patterned surface in friction with the unprimed, unmarked segments of the canvas, the Matisse-like gesture brings us back to the colour, the sensation of drapery being pushed back. For Stewart, the material speaks to its own condition: canvas becomes adhered to canvas, cut out and applied through impromptu materials such as tape, bookbinding glue, and the adhesive nature of the paint itself. *A Mammoth Boiling House* holds an internal structure that seems to echo a stretched hide, an internal structure that defines tensions within the canvas is drawn in with graphite, becoming a container for the marks and imprints to the surface that seem impromptu but are compositionally articulate and which play with the absorbent, textured surface of the unprimed material. Found materials and objects seem absorbed into the visual field, shaping the compositional structure. A metal bar that the artist found in a creek near a construction site, titled *Jeff Bridges*, seems to pull and respond to the structures in surrounding canvases.

Stewart's approach is based in the surface's response to the structure, while Deary focuses on the process of creating structure, and how arrangement is guided by material choices, and the layering and configuration of materials

Working in a variety of mediums, the sculpture showing at Xpace is a recent endeavor. Having focused on painting previously, the sculptures gesture towards the textures and forms that emerge from his collage-based painting practice, activating their surfaces. Made from combinations of foam, wood, wire, mesh, metal, plaster, drywall compound, stucco mix, Plexiglas, vinyl and spray paint, the internal structures are alluded to in their form and scale.

Extending the gesture beyond the painted surface. The compositional choices, and black and white painted elements derive from a number of sources that seem to resonate at differing degrees in Deary's work. Deary's move to sculpture can easily be traced back to his early collage work, most closely reflected in his painting *Old Haunts*, where he applied

2 dimensional paint 'swatches' on a surface when dried - a form of building a surface which formally, materially and technically, resonates with the additive sculptural process of his current works.

Perhaps most resounding is the visual relationships between Deary's painting, with its black and white textural elements, and the black and white reproductions of artworks and sculptures in the art history textbooks sitting in this studio. References to Henry Moore and primitivist sculpture can be found only pages apart from each other when looking through these texts, and their forms and textures leap from the page into Deary's sculptures and paintings.

The speckled surfaces of Moore's plaster maquettes seem to be particularly poignant given the unfinished appeal of Deary's technique. This tactility (which for Moore was quite constructed, as he would use a domestic kitchen grater to nick the surface of his large bronzes), is clearly also the priority in Deary's final works, which have more of a sense of unfinished maquettes. Yet the potential for recreation on a larger scale does not seem to be the focus of his concerns.

The sculptures themselves echo the textures and forms of his painting, now rendered in 3-D, holding much more trace of the artist's hand than the paint –on paper-on linen ever could. They are rough gestures towards the process of their making, seemingly temporal in their material.

Ideals of materiality cannot be separated from the works that sit within the exhibition. There is something within the ontology of work that holds a gesture, the brush stroke or the artists touch within its surface have a certain historical, elemental sensation. Greenberg's influence on the Prairie artists and Emma Lake school, and Ronald Bloore's monochrome white paintings, where forms are distinguished by their tactile surface presence can also be seen in these works. It is attractive, and it, without pause, reminds us of the value of sensation, of the action, the reaction, and the tension held within these gestures.

- Corrie Jackson