



EDIE MARSHALL : Terrain

Art Gallery of Regina



Above
Terrain Series
 (painting detail)
 oil on paper
 10 x 10"
 2013–2015



Top Row
Terrain Series
 (installation details, panels)
 oil on paper, mounted on foam core
 each panel 60 x 40"
 2013–2015



Terrain Series
 (installation detail, panel)
 oil on paper, mounted on foam core
 60 x 40"
 2013–2015

EDIE MARSHALL: Terrain

In the spring of 2013, artist Edie Marshall made a month long road trip through the Great Plains of North America. Randomly shooting images on impulse from her iPhone, Marshall took more than 1,500 photos over the duration of the journey. The majority of photos, taken from the passenger seat of the moving car, depict the passing countryside, although shots also include excursions into towns, cities, historic sites, an aquarium, hiking trails, parks, and roadside vistas. Upon returning home Marshall took on the challenge of translating the digital images into paintings, *Terrain*, an installation composed of 1,000 lushly rendered oil paintings is the resulting creation.

Rather than eliminating photos down to a few of the best composed scenes, or constructing photo composites to create the paintings, Marshall utilized the spontaneity with which the images were taken and proposed a project to use the photos without expurgation, and with little editing. Subsequently, *Terrain* became the sizable undertaking of creating 1,000 paintings from the 1,500 digital images that were now transferred to her computer.

The question naturally comes to mind — why do this? Why paint each image? To take 1,000 digital photos is not an arduous task, painting 1,000 paintings is, however, considerably more demanding.

Ultimately, Edie Marshall is asking us to consider what the painted image can offer in today's digital image immersed culture.

Digital photos have markedly changed our relationship to the photographic image. Compared to photographic film, digital images are relatively easy to take, share, and edit. Taking a photograph once signified a special gathering or occasion. Subject matter was carefully selected for each of the 24 or 36 shots achievable on the roll of film. Today the ever-present, ever-ready camera phone documents all aspects of our lives. Shooting one hundred digital photos costs no more than shooting just one. High-resolution pictures are a convenient point and snap. Consequently, we have little need to monitor what is shot, as no hierarchical selecting of the subject is required. The coffee you order is as worthy a subject as a family member. Before we could load, share and edit so easily, a photograph was a much "weightier" document. Considering the idiom, "a picture is worth a thousand words" — as we now scroll through potentially thousands of photographs, how many of those words do we actually pay attention to?

In pronounced contrast to snapping a digital image, producing an oil painting is slow and labour-intensive. Preparing paper or canvas supports, considering compositional elements, analyzing colour mixes, layering and building up paint is time-intensive. Though, it is precisely this slow process that attracted Marshall to the project, and held her interest over the completion of 1000 paintings. The formal considerations such as colour, light, and texture, along with the physical manipulation of paint, engage Marshall as a painter. Moreover, slowing allows for looking and thinking. This deceleration initiated through painting enabled Marshall to recall the landscapes she traveled through, remember the area, and "give it more attention."¹ Each image, representative of a place or event, is considered more deeply. The time spent building the paintings precipitates a more contemplative experience of place. Marshall works in a painterly, gestural style, indicative of an *alla prima* method. Texture is paramount in the work — each unique painting displays a tactile presence that discloses the hand of the artist. Landscapes are formed with skillful brushwork. Colour is expertly interpreted and employed as a marker of weather and time through the series. An image, which was the product of a split second drive by photo, now takes on substance and weight through both the physicality of the paint, and through the contemplation of place and time. In this, the paintings come to represent more of a testament to Marshall's experience than the photographs.

Noted art critic, Barry Schwabsky, addresses photography's impact on our understanding of the image and its further impact on painting in his essay *An Art That Eats Its Own Head – Painting in the Age of Images*, stating many contemporary painters have a ". . . more fundamental concern with a physical involvement in the image. For although it was photography that taught us the modern idea of the image, it is painting that allows us to internalize it. It's a question of [touch.] . . . The photograph may have been touched by the light of its object, but the sense of contact is entirely subsumed in the seamless surface of the photograph's surface."²

Describing her work Marshall stated, "I am documenting a personal history of that place in time."³ For Marshall the photographs are an essential part of documenting the time and place. However, as the paintings require more investment of perceptual energy, painting, consequently, results in a more internalized personal history and experience of place. Questioned on the necessity to translate the photos into paintings, Marshall offered a concise and understated answer, "I am a painter."⁴

Holly Fay

1 From an interview with the artist, 11 Sept. 2015.

2 Schwabsky, Barry. "An Art that Eats Its Own Head". *The Triumph of Painting*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2005, 8-9. Print.

3 From an interview with the artist, 11 Sept. 2015.

4 Ibid.

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