



Andrea Kastner *THE WASTE LAND*

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ANDREA KASTNER: CONNECTING THE DOTS

In a recent studio visit, Kastner showed me a photo of a house being pulled by a boat, images of old diapers, city scenes, piles of garbage and a mysterious letter that she found in a neighbour's garbage that she mistook for a connect-the-dots. She described the mournful moment when she attempted to connect the dots, and realized that it was not in fact an image, but was just a random assortment of points on a page. While unable to apprehend the meaning of this document, she held onto the letter and used the nonsensical assortment of lines and dots for a future painting.

At times, Andrea Kastner thinks her brain functions like the action of a garbage truck. In a studio visit she expands on the idea: her brain often mimics the moment when the garbage truck comes and mulches down its collected contents. Kastner's collaged paintings, she notes, come together in a similar way.

As I scavenged through her studio and listened to her stories, I began to piece together the elements of her paintings with the imagery and objects throughout the room. Her entire studio is in fact a collage, like a puzzle that can be solved into not just one fixed image but multiple possible solutions and narratives. In fact, Kastner describes her studio as not just a workspace but also an "other space" full of portals that take us into different times and places. "You become trapped in different portals and shoot forward and backward, or things happen that you have no control over," she says. Fluidity between times and places allow Kastner's paintings to hover in a space between believability and implausibility, between fact and fiction, and between real and imaginary.

Talking to Kastner, it becomes clear that these fantastical portals to imaginary places exist outside her studio as well. As she wanders the city, she finds/discovers these portals everywhere: in an old dumpster, in an abandoned house, in an old shed, an alleyway or a construction site. She is at once a detective, a voyeur, an environmentalist, and a writer of fiction.

As detective, she investigates these sites, looking for clues and trying to piece them together. As voyeur, she delves into the secrets hidden behind the windows and doorways. The environmentalist questions the excess waste piled up in these dumpsites and mourns discarded spaces and objects. Finally, the fiction writer handcrafts tales hidden underneath the clues, and invents stories about the world(s) surrounding her.

Having lived in five different provinces in the past several years, Kastner has lived a nomadic life. Is wandering through a city her way of orienting herself to new environments? Is it a way of connecting with the people and places that surround her in her daily life? If so, the paintings serve as maps – personal mind maps, where she draws out connections between herself and the spaces that surround her. In this sense, the paintings may function similarly to the connect-the-dots experience Kastner once so desperately tried



to piece together into an image. The paintings are the dots and, considered as a group, depict Kastner's connections as she wanders and searches from city to city.

Kastner's vivid analogy of her brain as a garbage truck generates an odd image, an absurd connection between two seemingly unrelated things. The sense of urgency that results is Kastner's necessity to create.

Through her process of scavenging for images and crafting them into alternative spaces, Kastner sorts through her everyday life. Painting is her way of thinking through her experiences in the world and responding to the small and large disasters that occur in our lives. As she draws these images together into real and imagined spaces, the paintings function as collages in a twofold manner. They reveal her own collaging process, the way in which she pieces together diverse elements from her own life in an attempt to make sense of them. Simultaneously, they reveal an absurdity in the everyday, and mirror a world where, if you look hard enough, the collages already exist.

- Alison Shields 2014

Alison Shields is an artist, researcher and educator living in Vancouver, BC. In her painting practice, she explores the infinite potentials of abstraction and has exhibited her work throughout Canada. She is currently pursuing a PhD in art education at the University of British Columbia. Through her doctoral research Shields explores creative processes, studio practices and artistic research and recently completed a cross Canada road trip where she visited 105 artist studios to examine the relationship between thinking and making.

Images: *The one that got away*, 38" x 48", oil on canvas, 2013 (front), *The inventory of dreams*, 60" x 84", oil on canvas, 2014 (above), *Travellers*, 42" x 72", oil on canvas, 2013 (back)



THE WASTE LAND is a body of work that traces the haunting nature of our rejected possessions through a collaged, recycled and surreal world. The imagery for this project was gathered by travelling to landfills, searching through archives, digging through bags of household garbage, and documenting the alleyways of the cities I've lived in. Collages based on this documentation are the inspiration for these paintings: the housing complexes that seem to grow out of mountainous landfills, the skeletal façades and the piles of forgotten things.

At the heart of my work is the concept that our trash is akin to our unconscious mind. When we throw away our rubbish at the end of the week, we seal it into a black bag in an act of forgetting, wishing to never see it again. The very idea of someone else glimpsing the contents of our garbage seems incredibly intimate or invasive. My paintings are something of an act of acknowledgement toward this largely private and unexplored realm of our possessions. Even the landfills are teeming with our stuff, though we choose to disavow it. These mountains of things are a sort of accidental construction of our times, a shadow city built beside the one we live in. I wish to take a symbolic inventory of these things, to claim them as part of our lives.

- Andrea Kastner, 2014

ANDREA KASTNER is a Kamloops-based painter who makes work about the sacred nature of rejected things. Her paintings of basements, alleyways and trash bring to light the hidden underbelly of things we seek to ignore. Raised in Montreal, Quebec, she completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick.

After finishing her MFA at the University of Alberta in 2012, she was included in the inaugural show at the Esker Foundation, *The New Alberta Contemporaries*. That same year, she was selected as a finalist for the RBC Painting Competition. Her work was included in *The Lure of the Local: Women Artists in the Canadian Landscape* at the Vorres Museum in Athens, Greece. Her current painting project called *The Waste Land* tours Kamloops, Montreal, Hamilton, Courtenay and Dawson City in 2014.

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