

## artist statement

### ADAPTATION 2019, WATERSHED 2017 and THE MEANING OF THINGS 2015

*Adaptation* is the 3<sup>rd</sup> series in a trilogy of work (with *Watershed 2017* and *The Meaning of Things 2015*) that map the trajectory of my process as it has moved from representation into abstraction. My practice investigates human geography and this recent work continues to navigate within the context of landscape.

This trilogy was produced during the period surrounding the death of my son and I consider it to be a kind of requiem.

## HISTORY



*What do you think this is, a hotel?* [I Huck], 2012, oil on wood, 30" x 30"

My son, Gabe, had a way of emanating peace from his skin, like steam. He was an evolved person, in that he was pure in thought and heart. He was vulnerable and his daily survival required a lot of support, so he was often viewed through the lens of disability. *He* cannot be said to have lived with disability because he had no measurement of normalcy. Gabe lived with restricted access, and so did I by association with him.

The lived experience of systemic barriers shaped my painting practice. It is a particular vantage point that reveals the underlying institutions that control social behavior. I used this awareness, of that which is 'hidden in plain view', as a tool for bringing forward the significant issues affecting the landscape.



*WINNER* and *M*, [Necessities of Life], 2010. oil on wood, 16" x 16"

The experience of penetrating space, is the main motivation for my painting practice. My methodology is not technical and I know of no formulas for painting an *experience* of space. The investigative process depends on not knowing how it's done and the way of entry must be invented every time. The surface of the canvas becomes a membrane between dimensions.



*Tough Luck, Sink, Do you adore CBC?* [**I Huck**], 2012. oil on wood, 30" x 30"

As Gabe's condition was changing and his needs were increasing, I decided to paint his personal landscape (*I Huck*, 2012) for the purpose of being available to the political process to get support funding that does not exist, and to come at this task simultaneously with my creative process. After completing this series, I continued to combine the daily advocacy with the production of a new body of work, *My Space*, 2012, which investigated my personal landscape. On the day of the opening of this exhibition I received word that the support funding lobby was successful.



*Felt #1, Untitled, Felt #2*, [**My Space**], 2014. oil on wood, 30" x 30"

## THE MEANING OF THINGS 2015



*The Meaning of Things* 2015, oil on wood, 20" x 20"

Around this time, I read a book called *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience*, by the geographer, Yi Fu Tuan. He contends that space requires a movement across a place in order to exist, that the two concepts are co-dependent. My immediate reaction to this theory was *I must challenge this by painting space without a place*. I chose to observe a cardboard box, as a structure with little inherent meaning (unlike a room or a building which is similar physically to a box, but always has some kind of social significance). I began to look for ways to isolate space from place in order to understand the difference.



*The Meaning of Things* 2015, oil on wood, 20" x 20"



## WATERSHED, 2017



*Watershed* 2017, oil on wood, 48" x 48"

I began *Watershed* on the day after my son's funeral, the first time I was alone in weeks, looking back at where I'd been and forward to my unknown future. This time I was determined to remove 'place' altogether and make space without place or any subject matter. I began by jumping off from the compositional components exterior to the box and kept reworking them until the box references disappeared. I tried a lot of things that didn't work. By now failure became more exciting, as it led to taking new risks and outcomes that I couldn't foresee. I attempted to create dimension with no subject matter, with meaning only.

## ADAPTATION, 2019

*Adaptation* began with a painting I made on a wheelchair ramp for the Stopgap Foundation fundraiser. To make the task easy, I used a part of a composition from *Watershed*, which has the effect of shaping or bending the surface into a ramp like shape.



Stopgap ramp, 2018, oil on wood 22" x 30"

This was too easy so I decided to restrict perspective and to find other means of creating space. For composition I mapped my home and studio and the space in between, which is Gabe's ramp. At this time the working title was *I'm right here*, and the compositions which began as a kind of layout plan of the rooms and spaces, quickly shifted into a new experience where the flattened shapes of doors, windows, corners, floors and walls became dimensional instead of structural. I changed the title of this series to *Love is a Place*.



*Love is a place* 2019, oil on wood, 24" x 24"

Then my mother died and great loss continued to propel me into new awareness. I was no longer satisfied with the work, so I began painting over the canvases. Also, for the first time it occurred to me to question why I had put so much effort into trying to create space without place after it had been proven scientifically impossible! It was a deep cold winter and my studio days followed a pattern of a morning walk down to the Don River, lighting the fire in the studio, and obsessively painting and scraping off what I had done. I tried so many things that didn't work, but very slowly and gradually something new began to emerge. The title changed to *Adaptation*. I realized that what I had been painting was the sensations of walking repeatedly over Gabe's ramp, past the shifting light between the boards.



*Adaptation*, 2019. oil on wood, 24" x 30"

For more information and to view these paintings: [www.marthaeleen.com](http://www.marthaeleen.com)