

Jay Gazley Anda Kubis Amanda Reeves Vlad Spicanovic

A group show curated  
by Anda Kubis

October 4 – 31, 2007  
Reception Saturday, October 13  
2:00 – 5:00 pm

Drabinsky Gallery  
122 Scollard Street  
Toronto, Canada M5R 1G2  
tel: 416.324.5766  
fax: 416.324.5770  
drabinskygallery.com  
info@drabinskygallery.com

Superplastic and  
Drabinsky Gallery are thankful for  
the generous support of  
Four L Graphics and Cundari Inc.

Design: Cundari SFP  
Print: Four L Graphics

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## Superplastic

Introduction by Anda Kubis

"Going Superplastic!" is what my 4 year old son exclaims when he wants to go faster. We all need to go faster – there's just not enough time.

At the Ontario College of Art and Design expansive thinking has embraced the community. *Superplastic* reflects this shifting attitude – where dissolving disciplinary boundaries are causing students and faculty to exchange learning and look outward in the advancement cultural understanding. With this exhibition I wish to reveal an existing dialogue between artists that has grown out of a time of change within OCAD's long history. Amanda Reeves and Jay Gazley are former students of Vladimir Spicanovic and mine at OCAD. From the beginning, our conversations always revealed a belief in painting as a platform for worldly investigation and an understanding of painting as a model for contemporary experience.

"Contemporary artists are drawn to this parsimonious medium *now* because they and their viewers are attracted to a virtual world that has material heft. There is something newly magical about a nonelectronic virtuality; it summons both a kinesthetic and an imaginative response."<sup>1</sup>

The work in *Superplastic* exemplifies how painting has moved toward synthesis. These abstract paintings invite the world in. All of us in this exhibition use the painting process as a means of resolving disparate interests in biology, industrial design, architecture, urban planning, and film with the tradition of painting. Modernist history may be the starting point for this work but instead of wanting separation from real life this work is fully integrated into a multi-tasking reality. This fast paced condition results in viewing that does not allow for control through the use of a single perspective. The viewer is made to engage through a desire for coherence that ultimately never comes. Colour relations shift, established space becomes ambiguous and the viewer is forced to embrace uncertainty. The intended visual experience in this work is 'super plastic' – it evokes the state of mind required to navigate the multiple realities encountered everyday.

Speed is exhilarating but its effects are best comprehended when the 'pause' button has been pushed.

Anda Kubis

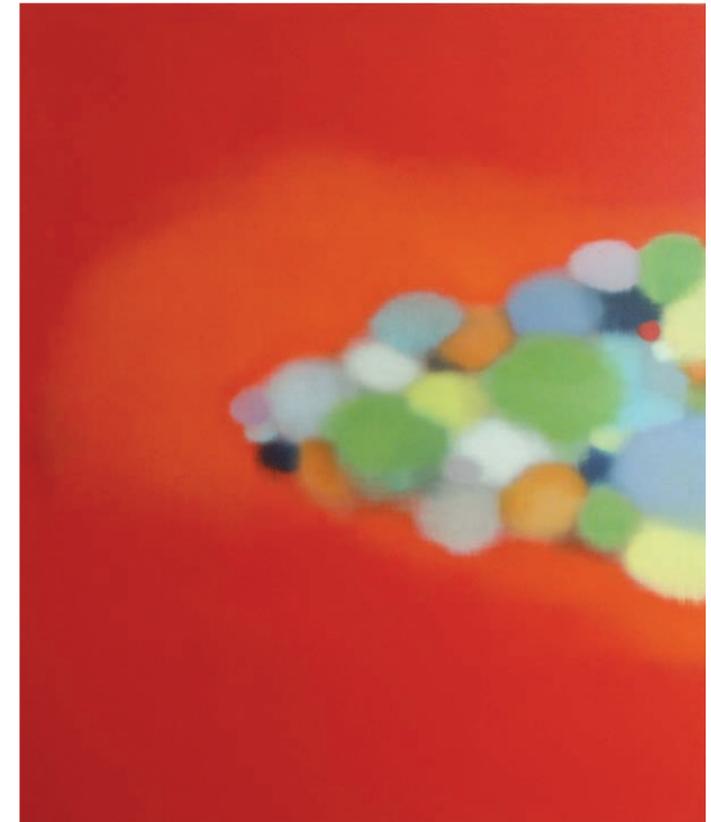
1 Caroline A. Jones, "Fields of Intuition," *Remote Viewing – Invented Worlds in Recent Drawing and Painting*, (Whitney Museum of American Art, June, 2005)

# Superplastic

Superplastic, and certainly uncertain  
Essay by Anete Ivsina

by the discourse of modernism. Current artistic practice confirms the vitality and relevance of the genre, yet the discussion about the well-being of painting seems to be far from over. Moreover, the conventional opposition *abstraction* – *representation* is still upheld, even though not only its historical instances can be questioned, but currently it simply is unnecessary – the due date has passed. Make no mistake, *Superplastic* is not just plastic surgery performed on a dying artistic expression, but, indeed, a highly relevant take on contemporary culture.

The exhibition title alludes to two meanings of *plastic*, one of them half-forgotten, one current. The more obvious one, referring to ubiquitous synthetic material, reminds us that art is always rooted in its immediate environment, simultaneously



Clockwise from upper left

Untitled 2, 2007  
Amanda Reeves  
Acrylic on panel, 36 x 36 inches

Intervention, 2007  
Anda Kubis  
Oil on canvas, 60 x 72 inches

Seven, 2007  
Jay Gazley  
Acrylic on wood panel,  
60 x 60 inches

Castel Novo, 2007  
Vlad Spicanovic  
acrylic, water mixable oil,  
electrical tape on raw linen  
and canvas,  
84 x 12 inches

Apparently it takes a great deal of courage to embrace uncertainty. It may seem easier to believe in one absolutely perfect and right perspective from which to evaluate everything and then categorize into a neat grid. Reality, however, is always much more messy – we put in place various structures and regulations, but the resulting boundaries will always, inevitably, be crossed. The price of accepting ambiguity is the loss of security – yet by now we should have learned that the shelter has been a mirage. To borrow Richard Sennett's metaphor (from *The Uses of Disorder*, 1970) – if a need for purity and control is adolescent, whereas ability to accept and embrace disorder is a sign of adulthood, then clearly Jay Gazley, Anda Kubis, Amanda Reeves, and Vladimir Spicanovic are mature artists. They seek to create visual models for understanding the world around them, and yet they do not expect these models to become universal formulae. They force us to face our fear and anxiety, encouraging us to enjoy the ever-changing world around us.

Surprisingly, it seems that it also still takes courage to see painting, and abstraction in particular, beyond the strictures imposed

taking from it and giving back, images and ideas. The other reference is to a specific capacity of painting, as well as its history. When Mark Akenside wrote in 1744 in *The Pleasures of Imagination* that God *rais'd his plastic arm, / And sounded through the hollow depths of space / The strong, creative mandate*, obviously the poet did not refer to the deity's artificial limb – what he meant by *plastic* was *giving form*. True to the tradition, the flat picture planes of these artworks open up living, breathing, 3-D worlds in exciting plasticity. We can't nail them down as either representational or abstract though, they are intermediate, a little bit of both.

Anda Kubis has always joyfully explored this liminal space, refusing to succumb to the burden of abstraction's history, even at the time when *painting* was a bad word. The fuzzy biomorphic forms that invade her paintings seem to gravitate to each other to create new worlds, like the *heavenly orbs* and the *glad adobes of life* from Akenside's poem, destroying in the process the purity of the colour field. Slightly out of focus, Kubis work makes the eye concentrate harder in an attempt to get the image *right*. Such satisfaction never comes

though, thus leaving us with conflicting senses of anxiety and wonder.

The queen of uncertainty in this show, however, is Amanda Reeves, even though making her work demands meticulous precision. Bright and yet subtle dots bump into each other, and just when you think, you can make out a pattern, it dissipates, only to begin to rearrange into the next one. These paintings thus invite us to contemplate on seeing and perception, and therein lies their *raison d'être* – in the active dialogue they have provoked with a spectator.

Don't look for clarity in Jay Gazley's work either – paradoxically, it is both very structured and completely disorienting. Do we see abstract social, economic, biological, or other systems made visible by the artist as architectural forms? Or does Gazley paint urban environments inviting to reflect on communication networks that are behind them? The gaze travels through rigid structures at a dizzying speed, only to be brought to an abrupt stop and sudden change of direction, caused by unexpected change of perspective, again and again. Are the various perspectives conflicting or complementing?

Movement is important in Vladimir Spicanovic's cinematic paintings as well. Each painting is like a fragment of a film that has captured shreds of memory. No doubt, there is a story in this abstract movie, but highly personal, and casting is left to each viewer's individual imagination. The eye catches a glimpse of an object (a jug, a body-part), but the image immediately overlaps with a fragmented image of yet another object, creating a collage of memories. The viewer is left with a subtly melancholic aftertaste (or aftersmell – I detect June in Riga with blooming lime-trees, but in Kraljevo or Belgrade they may open earlier).

This year's documenta XII posed a question: is modernity our antiquity? Is it now simply a database of images which we can rearrange and use in new contexts? Are we already out of modernity, or are we still very much inside it? Both the question and the possible answers are complex. *Superplastic* provides some perspectives from which to look at this complexity and, hopefully, meander our way through it.

Anete Ivsina

