



FRANCES COCKBURN  
RECENT PAINTINGS

## LONGING FOR THE MOMENT: AN APPRECIATION OF THE PAINTINGS OF FRANCES COCKBURN by Stuart Reid

*"Some of the pictures are truly mysterious to me... which is why I so often say publicly that I don't know or don't care what they're really about. And yet I can also say that the paintings are prayers... that they have to do with whatever it is that makes you want more than what daily life affords." - Susan Rothenberg*

Once acquainted with them, Frances Cockburn's paintings are immediately identifiable. Her brushwork is as distinctive as handwriting. In her active script, emotion courses through the quick marks – the tempestuous hand of the artist lays down aggressive strokes, raw and forceful, unconcerned about being "pretty".

In some instances, she uses a brush that is fully loaded, making strokes that are indelicate, broad and wet. The thick pushing strokes once laid are not precious, either. They are incised with *sgraffito* – drawing made with the wooden end of the brush. Tiny scored lines articulate highlights deep in the painting surface, pushing our understanding of the image back into illusionistic space.

As much as there is spontaneity in the application there is unabashed honesty in the subject matter. Cockburn's paintings emanate from what she observes in her everyday life. A journal, of sorts, her body of work takes imagery from her life in the city, at the cottage, or traveling the rolling Ontario countryside that sprawls between these destinations. Trips farther afield to Cameroon, the English countryside, or Newfoundland provide further diversity of subject matter. As much as the location is not the essential thing (Cockburn paints wherever she is), collectively the paintings provide a road map of her life over the past number of years. Unsettled and nomadic, the painter's eye constantly seeks out opportunities for a dynamic subject – always on the look for the next painting.

While all of Cockburn's paintings are loosely hinged to their representational intent, they take the viewer far beyond an image of a bucolic country field or a slick city street at night. They are shifting, unsettled, flickering images – Cockburn's painting style hints at the reckless smack of beauty that pushes one off-kilter, infusing the heart with an energy that is palpable. Cockburn's work is a forgiving interpretation of such beauty, allowing our own memories and experiences to infuse the scene upon which her eye has chosen to linger.

The artist often works *en plein air*, drawing inspiration from being out in the elements rather than interpreting a mediated experience of them. She captures the fleeting beauty of fast moving clouds, shifting shadows, the wind or the movement of people or traffic in the city. Her sense of place is tied to an appreciation of the ephemeral; her painting is dedicated to capturing the momentary convergence of perfect light, intriguing composition or dramatic colour. Through capturing it in paint, the artist is able to make that momentary convergence last.

Perhaps the impulse to get the imagery down quickly affects the work. One can read the immediacy of Cockburn's application in the layering of marks – it is quick and expressive. Yet the speed is tempered with frequent removal and reworking, leaving a ghostly *pentimento*, evidence of colour's retreat. Other marks that track across the surface are applied with a dry brush leaving the underpainting naked and exposed. The paintings never feel overworked or embellished – her art seems to be in stopping at the moment of clarification of the subject without overstating it with superfluous detail. Once it *is*, she leaves it alone.

Cockburn has adopted an interesting stylistic trope, where she lets the bottom of many of her paintings fall away, disintegrate into spare marks that show the skeletal underpinnings of how she has built the work. This foreground treatment denies the viewer a metaphoric threshold into the painting. Instead, the viewer is held back, forced to focus on detail that is in the distance. We are held back from being subsumed by the scene, but are conscious of the materiality and surface of the painting as an object. These paintings are emblematic of what Rothenberg says about making you "want more than what daily life affords." They show us what is beyond our grasp, what is beckoning in the distance. Cockburn's paintings call to the restless urges in all of us. They reflect our longing to seek out beauty if only to revel in its momentary passing.

Stuart Reid is currently the Executive Director of the MacKenzie Art Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Front Cover: Elm Street (detail)

Sidestreet, Hamilton  
oil on panel, 41 x 48 in.



West Off Avenue Road (Tranby)  
oil on panel, 41 x 48 in.







Nuit Blanche  
oil on panel, 41 x 48 in.



Ntembessi Junction  
oil on panel, 41 x 48 in.



Broadview Grocer  
oil on panel, 41 x 48 in.



Elm Street  
oil on panel, 41 x 48 in.



Smooth Rock  
oil on panel, 24 x 30 in.



Cotswolds Lookout  
oil on panel, 16 x 20 in.



Four Chairs  
oil on panel, 24 x 30 in.





Osprey Swamp  
oil on panel, 24 x 30 in.



Swamp Interior  
oil on panel, 24 x 30 in.



View Into Bay  
oil on panel, 24 x 30 in.



top: Highway, oil on panel, 8 x 10 in.  
middle left: South From Davenport, oil on panel, 8 x 10 in.  
middle right: Toronto Night, oil on panel, 8 x 10 in.  
bottom: Gerrard Street II, oil on panel, 8 x 10 in.





top: Hansfield, oil on panel, 8 x 10 in.  
middle left: Kelly's Lane II, oil on canvas, 8 x 10 in.  
middle right: Banso, From Dr. B's House, oil on panel, 8 x 10 in.  
bottom: Near Stow, oil on panel, 8 x 10 in.



Honeywood Hill  
oil on panel, 10 x 12 in.



From the Island  
oil on panel, 10 x 12 in.

## BIOGRAPHY

Frances Cockburn was born in Preston, Ontario in 1961. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art and Computer Science from the University of Guelph in 1986. She currently lives in Hamilton with her husband and daughter.

## ARTIST STATEMENT

I paint as I live, present in the places of my life. I locate myself in my world, painting what I see in its simple majesty. In the late 1990s I was drawn to Grey County, with its rolling hills, swamps and rivers. It was the place I lived and worked for over 10 years. A few years ago I became captivated by urban scenes and streetscapes. This subject insinuated itself into my painting, and from there into my life. I felt compelled to move to an urban environment. The landscapes of Hamilton and Toronto offer urban streetscapes and surprising natural vistas that fascinate me. The work inspires my place. The place inspires my work.

## AWARDS/ARTIST RESIDENCY

- 2010 Ontario Arts Council Mid-Career Visual Artist Grant
- 2006 Ontario Arts Council Emerging Visual Artist Grant
- 2003 Canada Council for the Arts, Travel Grant for Professional Artists
- 2003 Pouch Cove Foundation Visual Artist Residency Program, Pouch Cove, Newfoundland

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *Recent Paintings*, Odon Wagner Contemporary, Toronto, ON; Solo Exhibition
- 2008 *Recent Paintings*, Flesherton Art Gallery, Flesherton, ON; Two Person Exhibition
- 2008 *Wetlands*, Gallery 533, Toronto, ON; Solo exhibition
- 2007 *Home Town*, Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, ON; Group Exhibition
- 2007 *City at Night: A Tribute to Brian Kipping*, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, ON; Group Exhibition
- 2007 Flesherton Art Gallery, Flesherton, ON; Two-Person Exhibition
- 2007 *Fresh Grounds*, Bean Cellar, Owen Sound, ON; Solo Exhibition
- 2007 *Convergence*, Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, ON; Juried Group Exhibition
- 2006 *Looking at Earth*, Canadiana Gallery, Creemore, ON; Solo Exhibition
- 2006 *Looking at Earth*, Sarah Beveridge Contemporary Art, Barrie, ON; Solo Exhibition
- 2006 *Recent Paintings*, Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Toronto, ON; Juried Exhibition
- 2005 *Nöel, 27 on Fourth*, Collingwood, ON; Group Exhibition
- 2005 *Swamp*, Double Door Gallery, Anten Mills, ON; Group exhibition with the Boxcar Collective
- 2005 *Solid Ground*, Sarah Beveridge Contemporary Art, Barrie, ON; Group exhibition with 3 others
- 2005 *Double Take: Paintings by Frances Cockburn and Charles Meanwell*, MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, ON
- 2004 *Looking for Lucius*, MacLaren Art Centre, Barrie, ON; Group exhibition with the Boxcar Collective
- 2004 *Double Take: Paintings by Frances Cockburn and Charles Meanwell*, Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, ON
- 2003 *New Work*, Flesherton Art Gallery, Flesherton, ON; Two-Person Exhibition
- 2003 Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Toronto, ON; Juried Solo Exhibition
- 2003 *Portraits, Roomscales and Landscapes, 27 on Fourth*, Collingwood, ON; Two-Person Exhibition
- 2003 *Convergence*, Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, ON; Juried Group Exhibition
- 2002 *Recent Paintings*, Swedish Motors, Toronto, ON; Solo Exhibition
- 2001 *Convergence*, Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, ON; Juried Group Exhibition
- 2000 Blue Mountain Foundation for the Arts Juried Art Exhibition, Collingwood, ON
- 2000 *Insights: A Juried Competition*, Wellington County Museum (with the Elora Arts Council), Fergus, ON

## CREDITS

- CURATORS Odon, Rafael and Nicholas Wagner
- INTRODUCTION Stuart Reid
- GRAPHIC DESIGN Angela Wagner, iD Inspired Design, [www.inspireddesign.ca](http://www.inspireddesign.ca)
- PRINTING Solisco Caractera, Quebec, [www.solisco.com](http://www.solisco.com)

ISBN: 978-0-9811390-7-4 National Library of Canada "Frances Cockburn: Recent Paintings" Copyright: Odon Wagner Gallery, 2010

Back Cover: Concession 6 East, oil on panel, 10 x 12 in.





**ODON  
WAGNER**  
CONTEMPORARY

198 Davenport Road, Toronto, ON M5R 1J2 Canada  
416.962.0438 800.551.2465 info@odonwagnergallery.com www.odonwagnergallery.com