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MAGGEE DAY: CRISS-CROSSING

April 25th to May 25th, 2024

Reception for the artist: Thursday, April 25th, 6 to 8pm

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I don't think we fully know what the world looks like, because I think you begin to realize that whatever you're looking at, what you experience is, after all, through your own consciousness. So you realize it's not possible to separate what you're looking at from yourself; at some point it's connected with whether you're looking at it.

- David Hockney

Maggee Day's works are notable for a sense of freedom, cultivated by the space outside of the canvas as much as what is in and on the paintings' surfaces. She is compelled by the architecture, streetscape, and views observed from her studio and home where she begins an extended and repeated process of observation. Educated at the Ontario College of Art, and Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Day's paintings explore the ways that abstraction can be used to reconsider familiar views.

The ingresses to Day's spaces—windows and doorways—are the foundation of her recent bodies of work. Her choice of the familiar as the site of her study allows for a more experimental yet detailed exploration of materials and processes, and while her paintings appear as abstractions, they are in fact drawn from her surroundings. She explains: "Placing parameters on my work has been the opposite of restricting, it has encouraged new ways of thinking or creating. After two years of painting from one location, I realized two things about my practice: firstly, that my paintings were becoming more about abstraction than representation; and secondly, after making paintings about sidewalks and detritus, I knew that a painting could be started from anywhere." Each painting references different objects that have been broken down and reassociated through the process of painting, and it is important to Day that the objects depicted in the final paintings remain ambiguous. This uncertainty reveals the space between seeing and abstraction, between perception and representation, and it is in this space that the viewer's and the painter's visual experiences are rethought and renegotiated.

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Educated by influential Canadian painters Elizabeth McIntosh, Damian Moppett, and Ben Reeves, Day's work also acknowledges artists such as Willem de Kooning, David Hockney, even Philip Guston as defining influences. She glances back at painting's history, especially prominent figures of American abstract expressionism, but is equally keen to be in dialogue with the works of contemporary painters such as Cecily Brown and Amy Sillman. As painter Damian Moppett has written, Day's activity of extending a sketch into an abstraction serves "to expose a more personal and observational lexicon of painted forms and spaces."

Day's paintings are dense with colours and gestures. She interacts with materials in a generative manner where previous marks influence and determine the ones that follow. Indeed, each work is the direct result of the process of its own making. With this method, her use of oil paint (rather than acrylic for example) is intentional: "I am seduced by the versatility of oil paint. It can be a luscious, creamy icing, or a muddy, unpleasant sludge. It is incredibly reflexive as it follows my body's movement and reacts against the slight bit of pressure. Its long drying time allows me to rework the painting and lose control over the process—areas of wet paint get pushed around and blend with colours beside or underneath the brushstroke. The painting almost becomes alive and pushes back against my decisions."

Maggee Day's work serves as a type of visual archive, responding to changes in the city, its seasons, and environments, with each painting beginning anew in response to ever-changing external stimulus. Her attentiveness to the history of painting and the way that painting can be used to investigate surroundings and built environments pushes her work into unconventional and experimental territory. From the home to the studio, her process of looking begins literally, through a window, and ends figuratively abstractly through the act of painting.