

Revelations in Abstraction: A Contemplation of *Oracular Objects*
By Sabrina Sethi

Sitting with the work in Greg Hanec's solo exhibition at Graffiti Gallery, *Oracular Objects*, a sense of meditative stillness envelops you. Soft lighting and gentle strains of experimental combinations of two versions of Brian Eno's *Ambient 1: Music for Airports* lulls you into peaceful serenity and contemplation of the work before you. In describing his intention behind choosing Eno's music, Hanec says "I feel with music like that, that very contemplative music, that it goes well with detailed abstraction, or even minimalist abstraction or geometric - there's something about it. The music seems to release your mind in a way to absorb the work better."¹ Indeed, *Oracular Objects* succeeds in inviting you in, into a sensory experience, an embodied experience, of Hanec's abstract paintings.

The delicate balance between intentionality and randomness, constructed and natural processes, and the planned and the serendipitous, permeates the experience of *Oracular Objects*. The paintings on view are predominantly new, large-scale works created at Graffiti Gallery in the past few months, mixed with a few older and smaller scale pieces created in the artist's home studio. Shown together, these works exemplify the four techniques of abstraction Hanec has explored throughout his painting career: pouring, scraping, geometric abstraction, and surface material application. Hanec's paintings evoke the Modernist aesthetics of Rationalism, Abstract Expressionism, and *Art Informel*, a seemingly contradictory melee of aesthetic choices if the paintings are viewed independently of one another. However taken together in *Oracular Objects* Hanec's aesthetic choices create a harmony and balance in their juxtaposition that offers both a reprieve from and a representation of the world beyond the gallery walls.

In conversation with the artist about his process and influences; juxtapositions, contrasts, and balance are recurring themes that shine through. In describing the process of creating *Ghosts* (2022) he explains the interplay between intentionality and randomness in creating the final work. Having initially begun with intentionally chosen colours in his pours, he was dissatisfied with the outcomes and repainted it three to four times before opting instead to use randomly selected colours, mixing them, and pouring them in random orders, an act which he says opened his mind to new possibilities for completing the work.² Hanec embraces randomness in his process as a means of expanding his creative explorations, while still maintaining his artistic discretion and intention in the final form of the work. He describes the importance of being "surprised by the work" and his desire to avoid the ego subconsciously falling into repetitive patterns in his creative process, as well as the value of discovery through experimentation.³ In his practice, Hanec prioritizes using found materials and upcycling leftover art supplies, which adds to the experimental nature of his work. He describes his poured work in terms of a collaboration with natural processes; wherein he mixes his paints in different ratios with water and works with gravity to achieve the layers of colour, and the textures of the pools and drips. In conversation he relates his process to a "conversation between the artist and something unknown" ascribing a nearly spiritual element to his painting practice

¹ Hanec, Greg. Interview. Conducted by Sabrina Sethi. 11 May 2022.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

that requires letting go of fixed ideas in a back and forth with the materials.⁴ In *Oracular Objects*, the back and forth between the artist and his materials extends outward to the audience to invite us into a shared contemplation and conversation.

In *Oracular Objects*, Greg Hanec has invited us in to experience his world where the planned and the spontaneous, the constructed and the natural meet in a balanced harmony. The spare curation and the large scale of the formalist explorations spread throughout the former warehouse space invites us to truly sit with the abstractions and contemplate the worlds within the work and the worlds beyond. Oracular objects indeed.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Sabrina Sethi is an art enthusiast and collector of arts related degrees. She is sometimes an arts administrator, and always a navel-gazer who wants to know 'why'. She is probably a ghost. If you look very hard you might find her haunting corners of Winnipeg's galleries.