

Gerald Ferguson: Last Landscapes

GALLERY PAGE AND STRANGE, HALIFAX MAR 13 TO APR 2 2010

by GABRIELLE MOSER



Installation view of Gerald Ferguson's "Landscapes 2008–2009" at Gallery Page and Strange
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The late abstract painter and influential [Nova Scotia College of Art and Design](#) instructor [Gerald Ferguson](#) was a figurehead of contemporary Canadian painting, renowned for his rigorous frottage canvases (created with paint rollers rather than brushes) and witty takes on conceptualist sculpture. But Ferguson's practice also explored issues of influence and nostalgia, as evidenced by one of his last series of landscapes, which was inspired by American modernist painter [Marsden Hartley](#). "Landscapes 2008–2009," currently on view at [Gallery Page and Strange](#) in Halifax, offers a posthumous survey of this unique body of work that, as co-directors Victoria Page and Victoria Strange discuss in this email interview, attests to the artist's lasting influence on the landscape of Canadian culture.

Gabrielle Moser: How did this exhibition develop?

Victoria Strange: We've shown Gerald Ferguson's work since Page and Strange opened in 2005. The focus of the exhibition is always left up to the artist during a solo show, and since Ferguson worked in series, this exhibition was the next stage in the progression of his work. In 2009 we exhibited his landscape paintings, and though this exhibition also consists of landscapes, it is unique in the small scale of the paintings, which appear on panel boards as well as canvas. Jerry was always very prepared for his exhibitions, completing the entire body of work up to a year in advance. Hence we have a complete exhibition to show in 2010, even though the artist died in 2009.

Victoria Page: This particular exhibition came out of Ferguson's desire to continue to paint landscapes, but this time from his car. He called this technique "plein air en voiture." He visited locations previously painted by Marsden Hartley, and in some cases would compare the paintings and note the changes in the landscape or buildings. He was keen to show this body of work as a whole, and quite interested in what came out of using a paintbrush again after 40 years of avoiding it.



Gerald Ferguson *Waterfall* 2008-9

GM: How did Ferguson's death last year impact the Halifax arts community? How did it affect you as gallerists?

VP: Jerry's death has had an enormous impact on the Canadian art community, not just Halifax. His role as a teacher and a mentor extended to people who live all over the world, with many of his students going on to practice in New York and Toronto, but who stayed in contact with him and would always visit if they came back to Halifax. Those kinds of studio visits were expected, and were an honour. Many of them talk about his voice still being in their heads and I feel like that too: I feel like I was one of Jerry's last students. You couldn't spend time with a man like that and not be learning all the time.

VS: Ferguson was the second artist for us to lose after David Askevoid's death and that was a shock for us. Losing an artist is in many ways like losing a family member because gallerists and artists are so intertwined. So while we can take a step back and see the loss of such an important Canadian artist and understand the impact he had on the arts community locally, nationally and internationally, we really are just feeling the loss of the person, not the artist.



Gerald Ferguson *Pine Trees and Stump* 2008-9

GM: Why is it important to show Ferguson's work at this time?

VP: This is the artist's last prepared exhibition for Page and Strange and though it's difficult to guess what Jerry would have wanted, the exhibition was complete and waiting in crates in his studio so it seemed like the right thing to do at the right time.

Ferguson himself was very excited about these small works on panel. Jerry would hold up the dirtiest painting in the studio and wait to see your reaction: he loved to see you grapple with it. His enthusiasm was infectious and I found over time becoming more and more attracted to the heavy works in his studio, the dark paintings like *Pine Trees and Stump*. *Large Bush*, *Point Pleasant Park* is a work on canvas that he particularly loved.

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