

Biographies:

Mariko Patterson includes the ceramic arts amongst her list of known talents. She recently returned from the United States to satisfy her creative wants and needs in a gentler fashion.

Anne McKenzie's devotion to the discipline of painting, as well as her volunteer contributions to the organization of events such as ArtCity, have made her one the Calgary art community's most respected members. Born in Toronto, Ontario a long time ago, she now lives and works in Calgary, Alberta.

Design and photography: M.N. Hutchinson
All Images: Anne MacKenzie, Untitled, Oil on canvas, ND



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This is a Stride Gallery brochure written by Mariko Patterson who has been chosen by the artists because of her particular interest in the project. These publications provide regular opportunities for diverse writers to publish work that furthers critical discourse about contemporary art.

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Louise
Anne McKenzie

**Exhibition: September 7
to October 6, 2007**
Reception: Friday, September 7, at 8 PM



the Stride Gallery



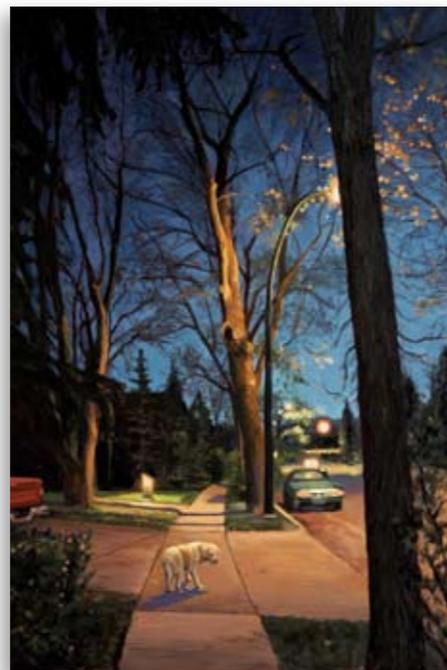
Louise

This predictable life we lead, with its seemingly linear tendencies and straight pathways, is often diverted or interrupted by changes unforeseen. Change can present itself as a life-altering moment, but perhaps more often, change comes to us as an apparition, disguised so cleverly that it permeates our individual lives in the most subtle and unexpected ways. Thoughts such as these come to mind when one views Anne McKenzie's latest works, the subject of Stride Gallery's latest exhibition, simply entitled *Louise*.

McKenzie's devotion to the discipline of painting, as well as her volunteer contributions to the organization of events such as Art City, have made her one of the Calgary art community's most respected members. In addition to producing commissioned portraits, she integrates locally-inspired subject matter of a socio-political nature into a prolific repertoire. However, it is her other, more intimate subject matter, that demands repeated viewing in order for us to gain more insight into the workings of the artist's mind, as well as our own.

Based on daily walks that the artist and her aging Yellow Lab, Louise, (with the occasional accompaniment of Frank the cat) would take around her neighborhood, the *Louise* paintings portray a credible cast of characters and local scenery that ground the work in immediate accessibility. Carefully composed of mature trees, rich skies, winding sidewalks and, of course, Louise, McKenzie's paintings read as physical memories of her beloved pet. Every detail in these works is imbued with an immense depth of intimacy. The combination of McKenzie's love for, and dedication to, both Louise and the medium of paint, results in a beautiful characterization of her trusted friend.

The process of discovering meaning in the *Louise* paintings is not unlike taking a meandering stroll with Louise herself. Now at the end of



her life, she has gone from romping in open parks as a pup, to the compromised enjoyment of knowing every flower, bush, and crack in the sidewalk of the shrunken world her tired limbs can afford her. Through it all, the *Louise* paintings chronicle her journey. Some of the paintings feature a more lucid Louise, pictured front and center, basking squinty-eyed and almost smiling in a shimmering, ephemeral light. Others place Louise in the shade, wandering off to one side – a little lonesome and wistful, as dogs in their final and forgetful stages can sometimes be. Sniffing her way around the neighborhood and revisiting rock and tree time and time again, she takes stock of her life in a silent, "matter-of-fact" canine way. Unhappy Louise is not in these paintings, yet there is sense of tiredness in her lumbering step that reveals the effects of time.

Acting as a foil to Louise herself are the captivating skies in McKenzie's paintings. As dramatic as weather changes rolling in over the prairies can be, so too can be the near stillness of a sky's change from day to night. For example, the lingering dusk seems to stretch out that much longer on the prairie's open-ended skyline. It

is that time of day, straddling the moments between dusk and twilight, that McKenzie has sought to capture. More than a superficial backdrop, the fading skies set a somber tone for Louise's last walks. As the diminishing lights and colours extinguish themselves on the horizon of trees and rooftops, they seem to coax Louise into the darkness that is soon to befall her.

Setting a distinctively contemplative mood for the last remaining scene of a long play are the colours that comprise McKenzie's paintings. The arrangement of high-keyed purples and subdued blues illuminates and envelops Louise, who is like an actor offering up her final soliloquy. Soon the lights will fade and all that will be left are the artificial beacons that led her



along her way. The telling fluorescent green of the character lamps of Mount Royal, the acidic lemon yellows of car headlights and their random glints and gleams reflected in windows, will continue to show the way for others long after the daylight has died. Perhaps it is the surreal interchange between restraint and intensity of colour and light that gives the *Louise* paintings a sense of timelessness. For even the hint of light in the single painting that does not contain Louise still gives way to a feeling of hope.

In a recent studio visit with McKenzie much of our talk centered on the subject of change. While we spoke about the colours and light that permeate her canvases, it was the topic of change and its cyclical relationship with life that saturated our conversation. McKenzie summarized it in one simple thought. "Life changes. Everything changes," she said, of all things obviously animate as well as those more stoically silent. All of her paintings, in one way or another, comment on the ebb and flow of life's inevitabilities. In observing and painting Louise, McKenzie's reflections on life and death, the passing of time, and the changing of seasons are captured all at once.

The toll that time and age take upon our bodies and minds, the concept of soul and the notion of 'next' all find their way into her work.

As I shifted my gaze from the artist to her paintings one last time, what fascinated me most was her ability to transpose upon them a calming sense of tranquility. The "stillness of paint," with its "transportive qualities" to which McKenzie is so attracted, seems to envelop her subject matter like a blanket she passes on to us for careful unfurling and contemplation. Still caught up in thoughts of Louise and the latest round of tests that life has to offer, McKenzie knows not exactly what will present itself to be painted next. What she does know is that it will come to her, as all things do, with time.

Mariko Patterson

