

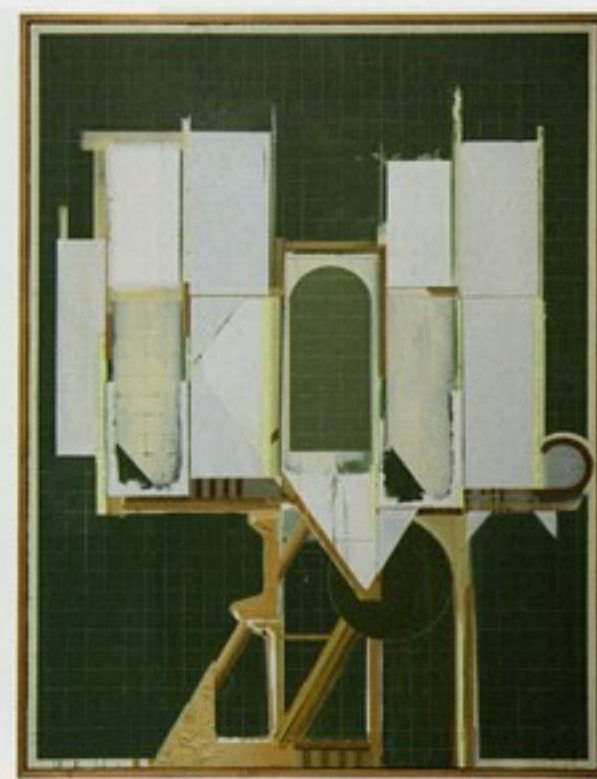
A Stage of a Different Sort



1



2



3



4

For the last six years the photograph has been one of the main inspirations behind the paintings of Montreal's **Dil Hildebrand**. They displayed a distinct sense of theatricality; at times they seemed like film sets waiting to be activated by some unannounced presence. But in his newest body of work, called "Back to the Drawing Board" (on exhibition at YYZ in Toronto from September 10 to December 10, 2011), he has left his photographic inclinations behind and has focused on what he calls a "chalk board, cutting-board palette; it's a place of learning where you're trying to figure things out." The metaphor is an apposite one because it functions in an opposite way as well. Not only is the chalkboard a surface on which marks can be made, it is also a surface from which they can be erased. "The washes are sometimes erasures," he says, "I use them to get rid of something. And there is also the cutting board with the grids on it; that's a place of combining, a collage space that I find very fitting for the work."

Letting go of the theatrical space he was making through a scrupulous reliance on photography (he refers to it as being caught in "a rendering prison") has allowed him a sense of freedom and a licence to concentrate on the surface in a new way. In *Treehouse* Hildebrand uses thick green paint that in some areas of the composition is half a centimetre deep. "It ends up looking sculptural. You throw in a few shadows and all of a sudden it pops. *Treehouse* is a synthesis of what I did in the YYZ work and the previous work. I'm trying to figure out how I can bring these two together, leave the photograph behind and really embrace drawing, which I miss. I did make charcoal drawings over the years, but they were still painterly compositions. There wasn't much line work in them.

This body of work has more of a drawing aspect. Now the paintings are a diagram of how to make a painting rather than a model of what a painting should be."

The result of this shift of representation from the model to the diagram has opened up a whole set of new recognitions and possibilities. A work like *Climbing* has a constructivist look about it, with a hint of lapidary Cubism. *Scope* is a hybrid of the built sense of Russian Constructivism, the pulled-back palette of Kurt Schwitters, and the suggestive tubularity of Fernand Léger. Hildebrand's dot paintings, like two versions of *The Plot Thickens*, articulate the range of his painterly migration. He took these works from an earlier series and covered them with green paint, then sanded down the surface so that all the raised areas were reduced to small flecks of colour. "I just put a dot on each one of those as a marker. In that sense it stands for the figure on the ground, too. You know, the idea that the x marks the spot. It was sort of like dancing on the grave of my previous paintings. But I find it a versatile motif, particularly in these works I'm creating where the green space is a kind of blank slate. It's a stage of a different sort." ■

1. Dil Hildebrand, *Masking*, 2011, oil on canvas, 25.5 x 30.5 cm. Photograph: Toni Hafkenscheid. All images courtesy the artist and Pierre-François Ouellette art contemporain.

2. Dil Hildebrand, *Climbing*, 2011, oil on canvas, 91.5 x 61 cm. Photograph: Toni Hafkenscheid.

3. Dil Hildebrand, *Treehouse*, 2011, oil on canvas, 193 x 148 cm. Photograph: the artist.

4. Installation view of Dil Hildebrand's "Back to the Drawing Board" at YYZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto, exhibited from September 6 to December 10, 2011. Photograph: Toni Hafkenscheid.