

An endless horizon, a rainbow-filled landscape, a tropical paradise—all highly recognizable subject matter and yet nothing is quite as it seems. In *Vanishing Point*, the artist borrows from clichés genres and tropes because of their seductive familiarity. Look closely, something is always not right. Destabilized. Exaggerated. Slightly off. These paintings break rules. As Kristi Ropeleski enjoys pointing out, “resistance does not have to look like the aesthetics of resistance.”

At its core, *Vanishing Point* is about the illusory quality of representational painting and the back-and-forth that happens, as a viewer negotiates between losing themselves in the narrative and the physical act of looking at an art object. The show’s title explicitly celebrates those classical techniques that trick the viewer into believing in illusions. Over the years, Ropeleski has developed a fixation around how the trompe l’oeil effect draws attention to the limits of the body as we perceive the surrounding world. She refers to the surface of the canvas as a “membrane” that mediates the boundaries between actual and perceived space. Through the freehand execution of hyper exaggerated details, impossible angles, overblown proportions and scale—the illusions all begin to fall apart.

While these works are disparate and varied in subject matter, many of them allude to “happy places,” found in the history of painting and pop culture. In *Searching for a Heart of Gold* (2017) a lonely rainbow sits above a quaint home and you can almost hear the Neil Young song playing in the background. This quaint scene is disrupted by a New Age crystal that awkwardly dangles like a decorative talisman, trying to project real rainbows and conjure a happy ending. In *Fata Morgana* (2011-7), an Italian mythological term for a mirage, an

impossible paradise is brought to life from over-elongated palm trees and suspended flower petals. They hover like a hollow apparition that threatens to wilt the moment it touches the sand. Both of these works reflect back a culture obsessed with creating and commodifying unattainable desires.

Although these paintings can be disorienting, they also reveal the artist’s delightfully subversive humor. For instance, *The Soft Edge of Uranus* (2017), is a minimalist depiction of a well-known planet in the solar system. Perhaps it is a nod to Malevich’s iconic work *Black Square* (1915) known as “the zero point in painting,” or maybe it is just a portrait-sized anus hung at eye level, daring the viewer to touch its dark hole. In *Cyclops* (2017) what looks like an abstracted silhouette of a “don’t worry be happy” smiley is defaced by the slapstick presence of a pesky fly. Is it a play on the Vanitas tradition symbolizing mortality, a “fly on the wall” eavesdropping or a harbinger of Satanic evil? These paintings are self-aware of what it means to look like contemporary art and each one carefully upholds the viewer’s expectations as it unravels its own illusion and story.

Christina Bagatavicius is the Principal and Co-Founder of Bespoke Collective (www.bespokecollective.ca), a consultancy committed to re-defining how contemporary culture brings people together. She currently lives in Toronto and before starting her own practice she was the Curator and Head of Interpretation at the Tate in London. As a former “contemporary” art historian, lifelong feminist and occasional writer - she is deeply engaged in all forms of visual culture in terms of how it is evolving and engaging audiences in new ways.

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KRISTI ROPELESKI
(MONTREAL)

VANISHING POINT

September 8th - October 14th, 2017
Painting



As an artist and painter Ropeleski is interested in how we represent our world to ourselves and in how these representations influence us in return. Using classical painting techniques, she deliberately exaggerates the realism of her images. In *Vanishing Point*, she explores the relationships between pictorial space, illusion and desire.

Kristi Ropeleski is a Montreal-based artist. Her paintings have been exhibited internationally over the span of the past 10 years in diverse venues such as The Philoctetes Center for the Study of the Imagination in New York City and at the Museum of Canadian Contemporary Art. She studied at Dawson College, Concordia University and holds a Master's degree in Visual Arts from York University. She is also professionally trained in makeup application, photography and ceramics. As ongoing education, she is self-training in classical painting and drawing techniques. She has received several awards, scholarships and grants, from the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation, The Social sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and the Canada Council for the Arts. She worked for several years in the commercial industry designing prototype paintings for the home décor market under the pseudonym Mia Archer. She is a member at articule and Skol, and sat on the board of directors at articule between 2014 and 2016. Currently, she teaches painting and drawing at Dawson College.

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