

Water Series

Darlene Burningham

How could drops of water know themselves to be a river? Yet the river flows on...

Antoine de St. Exupéry

This series was created for a show called “Water,” the invitation for which came roughly around the same time that I heard about Garbage Island, a place in the North Pacific “where currents spin and cycle, churning up tons of plastic into a giant pool of chemical soup, flecked with bits and whole chunks of refuse that cannot biodegrade” (Vice, 2008). I was amazed to learn that the particles of plastic primarily composing this human-made island now outweigh the plankton. The few fish in this area are actually feeding on the bits of plastic that monopolize the waters. Isn’t it ironic that through these fish the plastic travels up the food chain? Humans end up eating the bigger fish that eat the fish that eat our garbage.

The imagery I’ve chosen relates not only to Garbage Island, but can also be looked at from other perspectives — our commodification of water, for example. The ubiquitous water bottle, once a symbol of health and vitality, has now become the opposite in the minds of many. It is a symbol of waste — it takes more water to make a small bottle than that bottle can hold. Again, I see irony; the bottles we create to hold the water we sell are the largest pollutants of the very water we need to survive.

In spite of the “ugliness” of the concepts behind this work, I’ve tried to make these paintings seductive through movement and colour, blending and varnish. I want to draw the viewer in and get them involved with the surface and with what is under the surface.









Works Cited

de Saint-Exupéry, A. (2000). *The River Flows On*. In L. Germany, Harwell Hamilton Harris (p. 189). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Vice. (2008, April 6). TOXIC: Garbage Island. Retrieved from Vice: https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/5gdwax/toxic-garbage-island-3-of-3.

Darlene Burningham grew up on the South Shore of Montreal. She completed her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at Concordia University and began teaching in 1998. She currently teaches high school in Eastern Ontario and is about to begin the capstone course for the MAIS program.
