

The Theatre of Painting

In a short but already distinguished career (he won the RBC Canadian Painting Competition in 2006), **Dil Hildebrand** spent a number of years working in the film industry as a scenic painter. “It isn’t just painting, it’s building up surfaces. You need to make Styrofoam look like granite. That was the surreal part of my job that I really enjoyed, like sculpting a storey-tall strawberry for a strawberry shortcake commercial.” Hildebrand no longer does filmwork—“the culture is very hierarchical and superficial”—but it gave him the opportunity to work with a wide range of materials. It also allowed him to construct painted worlds that were environments *in space* as much as





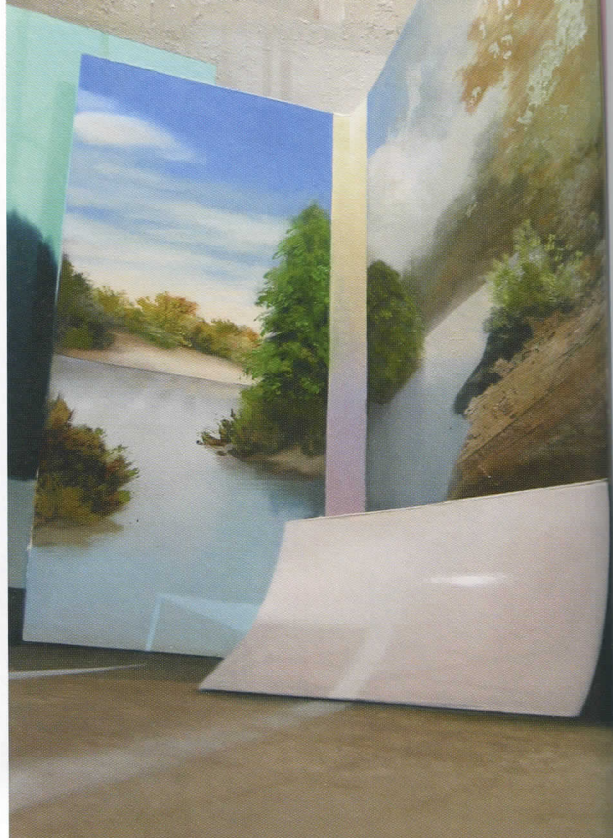
top left: Dil Hildebrand, *Blast*, 2006, oil on canvas, 48 x 42"

top right: Dil Hildebrand, *Dead End*, 2006, oil on canvas, 48 x 36"

lower left: Dil Hildebrand, *Camping, Fishing*, 2006, oil on canvas, 45 x 48"

depictions of space. Landscape painting became an immersive experience. In works like *Haunted House*, 2006, and *Possible Woods*, 2007, he actually made palpable grounds on the bottom, which served as a step into the painting. "I wanted to create a physical environment where I had this welcome mat out and invited people to view the painting in that way."

In *Blast*, 2006, he wanted to show what happens when a rainbow touches down. "There is an explosion and then there are reflections coming off, as though it's in a vitrine. The painting is like a mini-theatrical stage, with this pinkish romantic colour." The landscape behind is Hildebrand's version of an Edwin Church painting. "Recently I've been using



the Hudson River School for backdrops. They were a group of painters who didn't let the truth get in the way of a good painting. They would embellish and construct in the studio. They weren't like Corot, going out into Italy and trying to copy verbatim God's wonderful creation."

Hildebrand studied at both the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg and Concordia in Montreal, where he now lives. As a result, his creations combine a fascination with textures and materials and an impulse to use art history as a point of departure in making a painting. *Swamp*, 2007, is his version of Caspar David Friedrich's *The Sea of Ice*, 1823, where the frozen slabs have been replaced by shards of trees and light that push up into space. Hildebrand admits to playing inside a sensibility that has Romantic overtones. "Not just utopian romanticism but in abjection and the full scope of living passionately. A construction in one's own mind, that kind of romance." His approach to painting is consistent with that intensity. "For a long time, I had this idea of painting on the edge. It's a high-wire trapeze act, taking chances all the time, and it can be quite awful. Sometimes they spiral right out of control and they're irretrievable. Right now I'm trying to find a way to make a painting that isn't such an all-or-nothing proposition." ■

