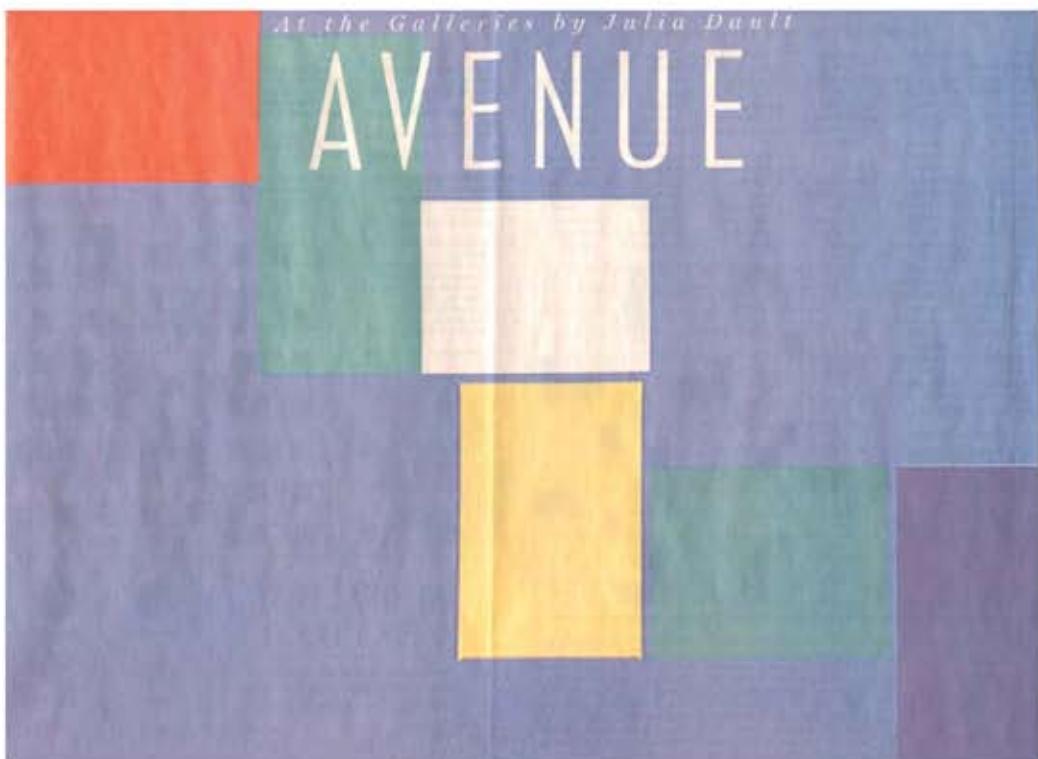


At the Galleries by Julia Dault

# AVENUE



SASKATOON

## PRAIRIE FIELDS OF COLOUR

THREE GENERATIONS

William Perchudoff,  
Robert Christie, Jonathan Forrest  
Kenderline Art Gallery  
April 23 to July 14

If Saskatoon were to suddenly form a school of art — meaning an art movement with a discernable style and not an institution of learning — it would have to include William Perchudoff, Robert Christie and Jonathan Forrest as members.

After all, the three painters share two important points necessary to define an art movement. For one, they're geographically committed, each one having lived and worked in the area for a significant amount of time. Also, they've all long ago rid themselves of the distracting temptation toward the figurative; they're preoccupied with the application of colour, form and its layering, of foreshortened depth of field and whole, single surfaces — the very truisms of post-painterly abstraction.

"All three of us are based in Saskatoon, working abstractly, knowing each other and each other's work and looking at similarities and differences between our work," Forrest explains.

Indeed, a show like this one makes sense. And, while *Three Generations* tracks the individual careers of Perchudoff, Christie and Forrest, and places them in each other's contexts, it also charts the evolution of abstract painting in the Prairies, thanks largely to the voracious career of Perchudoff, who represents the first generation in the show.

Born in 1919 in Langham, Sask., Perchudoff is one of Canada's great colour-field painters. A recipient of the Order of Canada (1998), the Saskatchewan Order of Merit (1994) and an honorary doctorate from the University of Regina (2003), Perchudoff started painting at a time when abstraction, surrealism and expressionism were battling their way through



WILLIAM PERCHUDOFF, 2004

large urban centres like Montreal and Toronto. Because there were significantly fewer people pursuing visual arts in Prairie cities, young artists had more freedom to experiment. Cities like Saskatoon and Regina became hotbeds for experimentation and new forms of art. To add to the growing fervour, in 1955 the Emma Lake Workshops began in earnest.

Sponsored by the University of Saskatchewan, the summer school program invited working artists and major artists to collaborate. Emma Lake brought, among others, Will Barnet (1957), Herman Cherry (1961), Clement Greenberg (1962), Kenneth Noland (1963) and Donald Judd (1968) to the workshops, all of which Perchudoff participated in. These sessions mark a turning point in his approach to painting. He started experimenting with colour and incorporating his

surroundings — the wondrous Prairie light and colour — into his vocabulary of rectangles and their offspring.

The second member of this unofficial group is the well-known abstract-obsessed Robert Christie, who has been painting and exhibiting his work since the 1970s. His *Purposive Series* repeats the same motif — upturned lines of similar size and different colour that fill the canvas — in each work in the show. This use of reoccurring visual phrasing occurs in most of his work, the patterning a focused path into the properties of paint and the possibility of colour.

The third and youngest member of the group is Jonathan Forrest, a former student and now colleague of Christie's (Forrest manages the Art Placement Gallery, which Christie co-owns). Like his associates, Forrest's palette includes strong,



ROBERT CHRISTIE, 2004

assuring colour — something relatively new for the artist who used to favour quiet and more muted tones. "This started as an attempt to shake up my palette and the direction of my work," he says. "The idea is to start off with a bright yellow ground and then react to it. I wanted a starting point that I didn't have a solution for. I forced myself to rethink colour, scale and paint application."

This rethinking has resulted in hugely satisfying works like *Yellow Logic* and *Colour String* (pictured at top), where various shapes step across fields of blue, red and green charting Forrest's application. His reacquaintance with colour has spurred an entirely new approach to structure, scale and the very application of paint.

With Perchudoff, Christie and Forrest coming together under the umbrella of

*Three Generations*, we're given a chance to chart more than 30 years of formal abstraction in three working artists obsessed with the fundamentals of painting. When asked if the three artists considered formalizing their partnership with a school or manifesto, Forrest replies, "Not in any official kind of way. Maybe after another 20 years we'll be looked back on as a movement." What's clear is that, in essence, their manifesto has already been written: It's somewhere between the drive to paint and the insatiable need to conquer colour.

Kenderline Art Gallery is located at 21 Campus Dr., University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon 306-966-2312. For more information, visit [www.usask.ca/kenderline](http://www.usask.ca/kenderline)

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