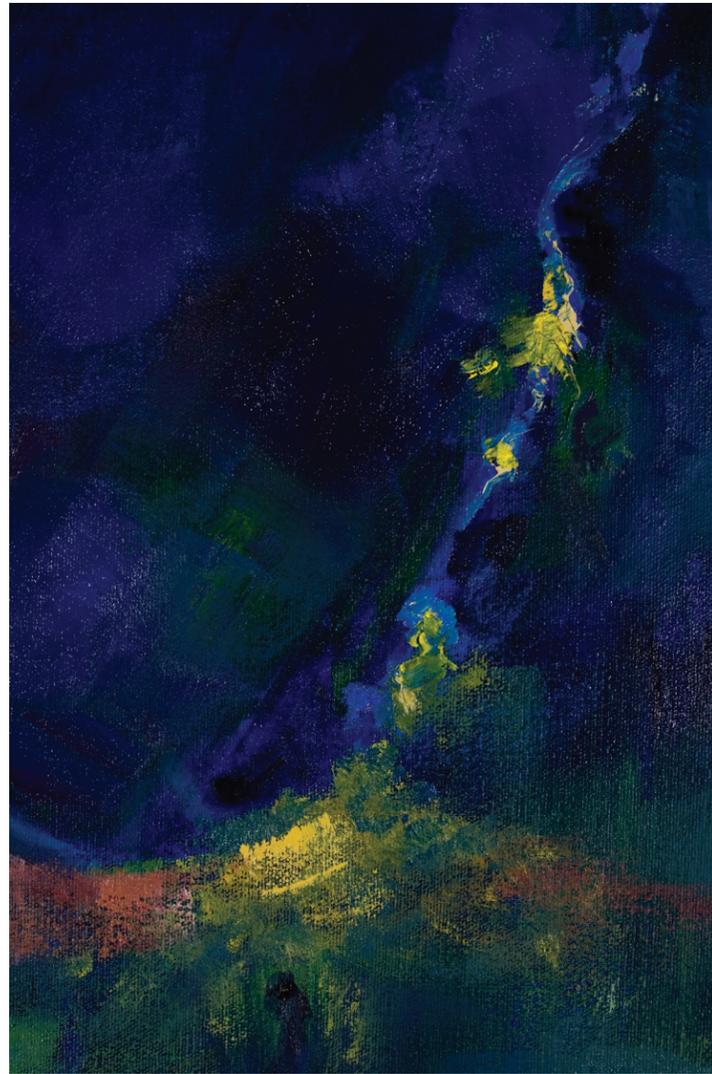




#002.11, 48" X 48", oil on canvas, 2011. Image by Ken Frazer, courtesy of the artist.



#008.11, detail, oil on canvas, 2011. Image by Kevin Bertram, courtesy of the artist.



#004.12, 40" X 54", oil on canvas, 2009. Image by Ken Frazer, courtesy of the artist.



#007.11, 48" X 60", oil on canvas, 2011. Image by Kevin Bertram, courtesy of the artist.



A selection of cut out fragments from past paintings, Fay Jelly's studio. Image by Kevin Bertram, courtesy of the artist.



#004.05, 40" X 72", oil on canvas, 2005. Image by Kevin Bertram, courtesy of the artist.

VISUAL ADAPTATIONS FAY JELLY

CURATED BY NATALIA LEBEDINSKAIA
JUNE 21 – AUGUST 18, 2012

ART GALLERY OF SOUTHWESTERN MANITOBA
710 ROSSER AVENUE, UNIT 2
BRANDON, MANITOBA. R7A 0K9

www.agsm.ca

FAY JELLY

Fay Jelly is a Manitoba painter residing in Brandon, MB. Her long time focus on aspects of domestic life has shaped much of her work. In her most recent series, Jelly took an intimate view of the inner spaces of common fruit and squash. As a result of this intense focus on detail, fragment and passages, the work evolved into abstraction. Experiencing some visual changes from a degenerative eye disease has further inspired her to explore the idea of fragmentation in respect to her art practice. She has participated in numerous mentorships, including with Michael Boss, Wanda Koop, Diane Whitehouse and Lisa Wood. Jelly has exhibited her work in galleries around Manitoba, as well as in Saskatchewan, and internationally in Australia and Tasmania.

Fay Jelly has been painting for over forty years. Initially inspired by Impressionist treatment of colour and light, her previous series explored ordinary domestic objects and their connections to femininity, such as jelly jars, women’s worn out shoes, or antique lamps whose shapes evoke sensual lingerie and bod-ices, complete with lace and an inner glow. Jelly’s interest in these domestic scenes led her into abstraction, beginning with a series of fresh fruit that she cut open and watched dry in her studio in Souris. As they transformed into aesthetically beautiful objects over time, the fruit inspired her to expand details from her studies into paintings on small panels. Through a mentorship with Winnipeg-based artists Diane Whitehouse and Michael Boss, she developed these paintings into more complex works that moved further and further away from representation. Jelly disassembled many of her early abstract works into fragments that were then incorporated into further paintings. This process, which is central to her practice, continually emphasizes a lineage between the works in the exhibition.

In the article “Materials Against Materiality” in *Archaeological Dialogues*, Tim Ingold argues for moving away from contemporary studies on materiality in favour of observational practice and engagement with the physical world.ⁱ Jelly’s approach to abstract painting has a similar goal in drawing closer attention to the processes that shape our vision, as well as the complexities that emerge within ordinary objects through attentive looking. The material quality of Jelly’s work, originating in her interest in domesticity, shifts into abstraction without letting go of the sensibility that characterized her still life paintings. Even as her work abandons representation, it is still rooted in the material and just as Ingold proposes, its materiality is defined by the complexities that characterize its flow. Ingold’s concern with contemporary academic focus on ‘material culture’ lies in the scholars’ seeming inability to define what materiality actually is. He interprets their focus on such abstract concepts as ‘agency’ or ‘embodiment’ as continuing the logical fallacy of placing human separations between ‘material’, ‘immaterial’ or ‘social’ at the top, thus skipping over the complexity of the structures that arise when one looks at the flow of materials. By removing this hierarchy, a structure emerges that he likens to a mesh, in which there is no interface between material and immaterial, but between different surfaces that are constantly involved in generation and regeneration. ‘Agency,’ as capacity for action, is not something that is added to materiality, but something that resides in the sheer material quality of everything.ⁱⁱ The variety of recurring elements and patterns in *Visual Adaptations* flows through the series, crystallizing in distinctly repeating shapes, colours, particular brush strokes or blending techniques, or the use of physical fragments cut out from earlier paintings.

As Jelly develops these devices in one painting, they emerge in consequent ones without necessarily being replicated. Her pieces are nodes of reconstituted shapes and colour on the verge of becoming something else, shifting into new forms within the series. Jelly suggests that human vision, as it moves through the paintings, plays an important role in the way they take shape. In that, the works dispel the myth of direct, singular, and objective perception, insisting that looking and materiality are closely linked; the subjectivity of perception is tied into the material act of making. The flow between the pieces within

the series suggests continuity that builds their logic, never becoming figurative, except fleetingly in two paintings where the shape of an eyeball emerges.

Because of the series’ origin in Jelly’s continual interest in domesticity, paintings in *Visual Adaptations* refute the idea of modernism and its project of achieving completely autonomous painting. Instead, Jelly’s works are connected to their environment, even if they create their own internal logic that insists on its own continuity. While they reference themselves, they always also point outwards. The shapes and colours suggest representation, albeit incompletely and always fleetingly. Sometimes they evoke decay and the body; other times architectural structures and fantastical worlds which are never quite solid, always in the state of almost materializing. Jelly’s interest in the beauty of one’s environment can further be seen as a statement in opposition to classical painting, where the sublime could only be accessed by leaving one’s direct environment. Instead, she suggests the act of looking very attentively as an alternative to refuting representation.

Further relating to the Impressionist movement’s roots in scientific explorations of optics and human perception, *Visual Adaptations* was originally an autobiographical exploration of the subjectivity of looking, while moving even further away from the mythology of autonomous post-Impressionist abstract painting. Until a recent eye operation, fragmentation corresponded to an exploration of Jelly’s subtly changing vision due to a degenerative eye disease; areas of distortion, broken lines, and structural elements reflected the way that her vision slightly shifted over time. Instead of seeing these changes as interference in her ‘normal’ vision, Jelly chose to pay closer attention to them, pulling them into the shapes and patterns that were already part of the series.

The series is further tied through its numbering structure, which lists the year and the number of the painting within that year, so 004.11 is the fourth painting done in 2011. Therefore, each title of the painting suggests the existence of the ones before it and the possibility of continuity beyond it. Originally it was just Jelly’s way of keeping track of her work, but as titles these numbers acquire meaning and further establish a sense of flow within the works. If seen through Ingold’s analogy of the flow of materials along the mesh, Jelly’s layered brush strokes and her use of complex vibrant colours in the recurring shapes throughout the series enact the initial process of watching the drying fruit on her studio table. They reference each other, echoing how the original fragments of squashes and pomegranates struck her with their formal richness. Through this process, they draw attention to moments when one is transfixed by the formal beauty of the ordinary. The exhibition invites us to follow Jelly’s lead and to engage in the aesthetic experience of moving through her works, seeking out recurring patterns and elements that establish the logic within the exhibition. This flow between the pieces acts as an invitation to pay closer attention to the process and pleasure of looking.

-
Natalia Lebedinskaia
Curator, Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba

LIST OF WORKS

FAY JELLY

#004.12, Oil on canvas, 2012

#002.11, Oil on canvas, 2011, Collection of Maureen and Shane Hunter

#003.11, Oil on canvas, 2011

#004.11, Oil on canvas, 2011

#005.11, Oil on canvas, 2011

#006.11, Oil on canvas, 2011

#007.11, Oil on canvas, 2011

#008.11, Oil on canvas, 2011

#0012.10 & #0013.10, Oil on canvas, 2010, Collection of Dr. Charles and Ruth Penner

#005.10, Oil on canvas, 2010

#008.10, Oil on canvas, 2010, Collection of Greg and Nellie Fotheringham

#0015.10, Oil on canvas, 2010

#016.10, Oil on canvas, 2010, Collection of Maureen and Shane Hunter

#004.09, Oil on canvas, 2009, Collection of Shari Dechter-Hirst

#008.09, Oil on canvas, 2009

#009.09, Oil on canvas, 2009, Collection of Ken and Pam White

#004.05, Oil on canvas, 2005

#005.05, Oil on canvas, 2005

#0014.05, Oil on canvas, 2005

Pomegranates, Oil on canvas, 2003

#46, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#39, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#37, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#36, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#26, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#25, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#14, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#13, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#11, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

#3, Oil on plywood panel, 2004

-

ISBN 978-1-927076-04-0



ⁱ Tim Ingold, “Materials Against Materiality,” *Archaeological Dialogues* 14:1 (2007), 11.

ⁱⁱ Ingold, 13.