

Darby Milbrath, *Although the wind...*, *Projet Pangée*, Montréal

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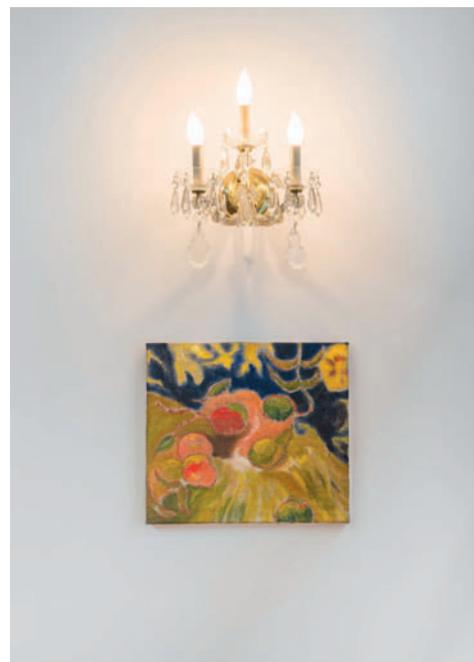
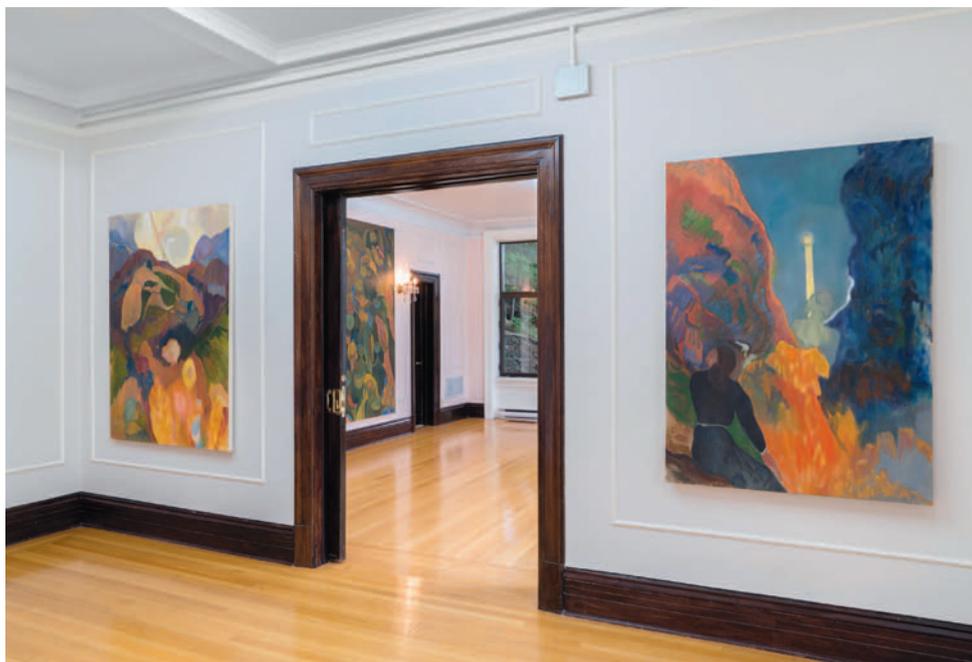
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Darby Milbrath

Although the wind...

Darby Milbrath's *Although the wind...* exhibition at Projet Pangée is an ode to the rural landscape. Birthed during a summer stay at a farm on a small gulf island, Milbrath's towering oil paintings are loaded with luscious colour and pastoral whim, typical of her landscape-meets-dreamscape style, which she is becoming internationally celebrated for.

In one painting titled *Vespertine* (2020), we peer through swampy tree silhouettes onto a faraway shore surrounded by aqua waters and a dazzling purple sky. In *The Fool* (2020) mauve mountains meet a radiant peach and coral sky, with bright blue fields depicted below. Layers of rich colour, sitting like stains atop one another rather than globs of paint on the canvas, make it difficult to discern the difference between foliage, river, or moving body—though it hardly matters. It is the joy of painting, of colour, that resonates through Milbrath's swooping brushstrokes and jewel tones. I keep glancing between Milbrath's work, the autumn scene beyond the gallery windows, and back inside again.

I have seen elements of Milbrath's work elsewhere before: in the bleeding pastoral landscapes of Gauguin and Cézanne or the mysticism and vibrancy of Hilma af Klint. In a time where contemporary paintings seem primarily valued for their brand-newness or their Instagram-able qualities, Milbrath's work resists being first of its kind, and this calms me. She seems defiantly aware of what came before, embracing painting's Symbolist, Post-Impressionist, or Colourist past. Her work is part of a lineage, a discussion spanning centuries, and her paintings carry all the endurance and comfort of an old story, making it utterly refreshing.

This embrace of history makes Milbrath's paintings right at home in the ornate rooms of Montréal's former Czech Republic Consulate, now gallery space. I imagine the regal portraits or military paintings that might have hung atop the marble fireplaces before hers. In both vigour and sheer scale,

Milbrath's large canvases embody a grandeur and majesty that command a presence, and therefore fit in effortlessly as though the consulate was made for her work, and not the other way around.

Although Milbrath's work reads like a hazy *Midsummer Night's Dream*, her brushstrokes do not attempt to depict a complete narrative; they are unbound, unencumbered by sharp lines or over-rendering. Shapes bleed into each other, providing only hints of an event and prioritizing the aura or feeling of the event itself instead. In *Although the Wind* (2020), a cluster of gatherers hold themselves and each other at the base of the canvas. It is sad, moody, moving, and energetic all at once, even without narrative markers. Here and throughout the paintings, Milbrath deftly captures not only a single moment, but also the minutes leading to and the contemplative minutes after. Unlike say, a fast-moving Modernist painting, here, time is slow and ambiguous. Is it dusk? Is it dawn? Who knows? Similar to a dream or nostalgic episode, real-time has no purpose here.

Sarah Amarica

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Darby Milbrath

Although the wind...,
Projet Pangée, Montréal,
2020.

Photo : Jean-Michael
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