

The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford January 21–March 6, 2016

The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford
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Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Schneider, Laura, 1978-, author
Ross Bollerup : hidden harmonies, Januray 21-March 6, 2016.

Catalogue of an exhibition held at the Reach Gallery Museum,
Abbotsford from January 21 to March 6, 2016.
Curatorial essay Laura Schneider.
ISBN 978-0-9879661-8-6

1. Bollerup, Ross, 1942- --Exhibitions. I. Schneider, Laura, 1978- .
Paintings .. Selections II. Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford, issuing
body, host institution III. Title. IV. Title: Hidden harmonies.

ND249 B557565 A4 2016

759.11

C2016-900026-5

Produced by The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford
Curatorial Essay: Laura Schneider
Graphic Design: Shaun Carrigg
Printed by Globe Printers, Abbotsford, BC
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Front: Ross Bollerup. *Blue Origin* (detail), 2012, acrylic on canvas, 36" x 46".
Inside left: Ross Bollerup. *Blue Blossoms with Bees* (detail), 2012, acrylic on canvas, 29" x 75.5".





Nestled at the foot of the pyramidal Cheam Peak, Ross Bollerup's studio offers no shortage of scenic allure. It would be easy for an artist like Bollerup, whose artistic history evinces his environmental interests, to defer to the archetypal British Columbian vistas available from many of the windows in the ample workspace. The staggering views of vast stands of conifers and the imposing mountain face are difficult to ignore. However, the works in this exhibition take a much more domesticated scene as their starting point. At the back of the studio, two large picture windows frame the dense, lush gardens of the artist's backyard. A clandestine, bustling world of activity resides there and has captured the artist's imagination.

In *Hidden Harmonies*, Bollerup pays homage to the humble life forms that inhabit the cracks and crevices of our lives. Rabbits, moles, starlings, squirrels, and bees—all represented here—are often reliant on the presence of humans and benefit from finding homes near ours. The tenacity of these little creatures has established their status as nuisance species for many homeowners, but the time that the artist has spent working in his gardens has shaped a different perspective. Bollerup is concerned with the unassuming yet necessary place of these species in the ecosystem, and the patterns in their seemingly disordered existence that refute the rectilinear logic of human encroachment.

These patterns, emerging duly from order and fluidity, are reflected in Bollerup's process. The artist has developed a unique hybrid of printmaking, collage, and painting based on stenciled forms that he has refined over nearly forty years. The stencils are transferred in flat, bright colours onto various materials through direct painting and printmaking processes, and also through the application of delicate, flexible positives made from acrylic medium. The stencils provide a recurring compositional motif, a kind

of structure within which the artist tests formal possibilities. Using rationale akin to symphonic structure, each series begins with a stenciled composition that sets out a theme: a bee, a petal, a mole, a leaf. The component parts from each theme are then liberated from their original order, giving rise to complex patterns, screens of layered imagery, syncopated rhythms of colour and shape.

The recapitulations of these shapes push against the edges of the canvas, tumble through negative space, and in some cases defy the flat surfaces and frames that contain them. Like the rectangular casements that frame his garden view, the strict geometry of the canvas provides a productive constraint for the artist to build within or break from. He concedes "I've been fighting with the rectangle since day one." In *Garden Animals* stacks of colourful animals, made from cut-out stencil shapes and built up with paint and acrylic medium, cling to a central vertical axis. The tools of paint and print create a fanciful tower of backyard creatures. In the ambitious *Flight of the Bee*, the artist's desire to translate the flat form into sculptural space is taken one step further. Empty frames, stenciled panes of plexiglass, and floating bee forms are suspended before the white surface of the gallery wall, exploding the constituent parts of the two dimensional work of art into an unbounded, conjectural composition.

In Bollerup's work, backyard interlopers that so often go unnoticed take centre stage. As we organize our lives around the geometry of urbanization, these modest creatures respond to our ordered intrusion with their own motley patterns. Drawing on these contrasting formal strategies, Bollerup's work revels equally in obligatory constraint and pure compositional freedom.

Laura Schneider, Curator

Ross Bollerup: Hidden Harmonies
JANUARY 21–MARCH 6, 2016