

GILLIAN WILLANS

Title: Entrance to Delphi, 2017
Medium: Acrylic and oil on canvas
Dimensions: 30 x 30 inches / 76.20 x 76.20 cm

Description:

Entrance to Delphi is an acrylic and oil on canvas painting at 30 x 30 inches / 76.20 x 76.20 cm. The artwork was one of a series of paintings installed for the exhibition, “and light she lingers as your hostess”, September 16 – October 7, 2017. The predominant subject of the paintings is the domestic interior; the scenes are of rooms – corners in living rooms, a table arrangement in a dining room, empty bedrooms. There is no sign of immediate, human presence, although the composition and use of light in the paintings anticipates a setting for some human drama that has either ended or is about to begin. The style of these works, including *Entrance to Delphi*, is painterly with rich and luminous surface qualities and carefully calibrated colour and lighting. The original source material for this body of work includes old decorator magazines, historical archives (The City of Edmonton Archives and the Provincial Archives of Alberta) and other photographic sources collected by the artist. The source imagery for this painting is a photocopy of an old photograph from the Provincial Archives of Alberta; all colour and lighting sources within the painting/s are reconstructed by the artist, often with references to art historical works.

Entrance to Delphi, 2017 is a view of an elaborate table setting in the corner of a room. The room is empty of people and still, but claustrophobic. This impression is established by the tight corner; a laden table set for some celebration; and, the viewers’ proximity to the entire scene – a few steps and the chairs can be pulled out from the table. Light is cast from the chandelier and possibly from a source beyond the painting and adjacent the viewer perspective. Windows and transparency, or the opacity of windows, is a recurring motif of the interior paintings; in *Entrance to Delphi*, the weight of the patterned curtains reinforces the reference in the title to a closed, cave-like setting for some private ritual. The table setting and the tassels of the chandelier carry the colour and energy in the composition and the viewer’s gaze is

enmeshed in the elaborate display. The painting is still, but slowly, visual tension builds – and psychological tension. The table is set for something, but where is there room for the celebrants?

Justification:

These new paintings are informed by my deep relationship with art history, my love of storytelling, and an ongoing struggle to find a balance between what is described and implied in the painted medium.

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The body of work for the exhibition, “and light she lingers as your hostess” is a continuation of Gillian Willans’ research into the development of genre scenes throughout the history of painting and her development of a simultaneous, nostalgic and critical visual vocabulary of the domestic interior. She is invested in the emotive potential of light and colour and the paintings developed for the show, including, *Entrance to Delphi* reflect her multifold intentions. Willans is concerned with both the conceptual language of the domestic interior and she builds on its history within painting – the occupied interiors of Jean-Édouard Vuillard (19th French Post-Impressionism /the Nabis movement) are an important touchstone for the studied absence in her interior scenes so germane to our memories and time.

Entrance to Delphi was noted by Gillian Willans in our preparations for her exhibition at Scott Gallery as an important shift: notably the larger scale of the painting and the compounding of elements such as the objects on the hutch and the extravagant table setting. She is keen through the paintings to upend expectations a viewer might bring to the subject of domestic interiors – deliberate choices and alterations from the original source material exaggerate her initial impression of a particular scene and drive possible readings of the paintings. How large to paint *Entrance to Delphi* was of concern so as to heighten narrative and psychological impact, and to disturb a tendency to be charmed by interior scenes. The cinematic quality of the painting has been noted by viewers and Gillian Willans has cited film director Alfred Hitchcock’s approach to set design and lighting to introduce action as an influence.

Mainly sourced from found photographs, the paintings of interiors for the exhibition touch upon her family history (and for many viewers, their personal histories too) in a young city in western Canada: the rooms from past decades carry our adjacent histories; reflect value systems; and, imply (not without

irony) social hierarchies. Our audience recognized in these paintings a shared history and something more – not yearning, but an enticement to dynamic remembering. These paintings of carefully considered interiors by Gillian Willans, settle into a trajectory of the history of painting and its renewal by her, as a contemporary artist.