

Clay Ellis *Cels* from ‘Amuse-Bouches & Mintz’,

Peter Robertson Gallery
November 15-December 22, 2018

It gives me great pleasure to nominate Clay Ellis for the 2019 Eldon and Anne Foote Edmonton Visual Arts Prize. A highlight of our 2018 exhibition season was Ellis’s show *Amuse-Bouches & Mintz* and within that show the strongest statement was made with the installation of 12 - what Ellis termed - *Cels*. These individual paintings were installed together on a prominent wall of the gallery to form a unified artistic statement.

Although the *Cels* were sold both individually and in series, the installation of *Cels* as one piece illustrated the essence and inspiration behind the exhibition as a whole, and was a critical component in its success.

The show’s title, *Amuse-Bouches & Mintz*, alludes to a small culinary offering which provides a glimpse into a chef’s “style”, while also making associations with Charles Mintz’s animated shorts of the 1930s, (he is best remembered for the *Krazy Cat* series of animated cartoons). Ellis’s use of the term *Cel* references its use as a short form for celluloid, a transparent material that cartoon artists used for hand drawn animation. The scale of the work, twelve 14.5” square paintings, alludes to the chef’s amuse-bouches, a small sample of what the artist creates, since Ellis is best known for large scale painting and sculpture. The *Mintz*, and *Cel* references are reflected simultaneously in the work’s form and presentation.

The plastic layers of cartoon inspired marks as well as the sequential placement of the squares borrow from the language of stop motion animation. Just as one cell in a cartoon or animation may not tell the whole story, each *Cel* in Ellis’s installation reveals one ‘taste’ – as does an amuse-bouche – alluding to what might come next and drawing the viewer forward.

As Ellis explains: “A lot of those drawings were based on that idea of that really simple animated imagery. I always feel there’s a real connection between some of the early animated cartoons, just because of ... that approach to making a splat mark, or making a fast mark— all of those little things that animate cartoons.”¹

Working within Ellis’s construct of pure abstraction, which, in itself, can be an intimidating artistic style for an audience to digest, it was interesting to see the reaction to the installation. It was quite remarkable the number of people who either sensed, or directly realized, the cartoon connection between the inspiration and the finished abstract painting. Cartoon

¹ ‘Edmonton Artist Clay Ellis Showcases a Range of Techniques in *Amuse-Bouches & Mintz*’. Chelsea Novak, *Vue Weekly*, November 18, 2018.

characters jumped to life, 'squished snoopy' was mourned, fights between imagined figures abounded, all unintended, but welcomed by the artist. Narratives were formed between the 12 very independent finished paintings, which made the show particularly engaging and entertaining.

Though Clay Ellis established his reputation in the 1980s and 1990s with large-scale steel sculpture, by 1998 he had traded his primary medium for materials that suited his interest in producing polychromatic sculpture. These explorations into a diverse range of mediums and processes have led to bold and inventive artworks that confound sculptural and illusionistic space. Ellis's unique recurring visual language of visceral protrusions, saturated colour, zany shapes, and dynamic patterning qualities have defined his dynamic painting and sculptural style over the last 20 years.

Amuse-Bouches & Mintz, and in particular the installation of *Cels*, was a wonderful illustration of Clay Ellis's imagination and artistic talent. I feel strongly that this work deserves consideration for the 2019 Eldon and Anne Foot Edmonton Visual Arts Prize.

Yours truly,

Peter Robertson
Owner Peter Robertson Gallery

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Robertson', with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.