

VISUAL ARTS

Michael Smith uses photographs as a springboard to memory in his painting

By Deborah Dundas Books Editor

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Discovery, distillation, transformation. When we meet or experience something new, it might take us a while to understand it. We know the experience is profound, yet we're not sure what to make of it, what lasting effect it might have on us.

In the 1970s, Montreal artist Michael Smith first visited caves in France, in which he saw ancient paintings. He visited again and has photographs of the entrance to the cave. Experiences such as this, notes the Nicholas Metivier Gallery, host of Smith's current exhibition, "Underland," "ignite his imagination and bring the past into the present."

"It's this notion that the photograph is a moment in time ... it has this ... fiction of being real," Smith says in a video made while creating some of his work. It provides him with a springboard. "I can distress it. I can revamp it. I can do all kinds of things with it to make it more now about this which we call memory, which has taste and smell and physicality."

He builds upon his paintings, perhaps a black painting, then a blue painting on top, then something else on top of that. The painting would not have reached its current form without everything that had gone on the canvas before it. This is true, too, of our own memories. How will we remember the events of today? How will we interpret them in the future?

You can see the exhibition in person at the Nicholas Metivier Gallery, 190 Richmond St. E., Tuesday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., or online at metiviergallery.com.



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