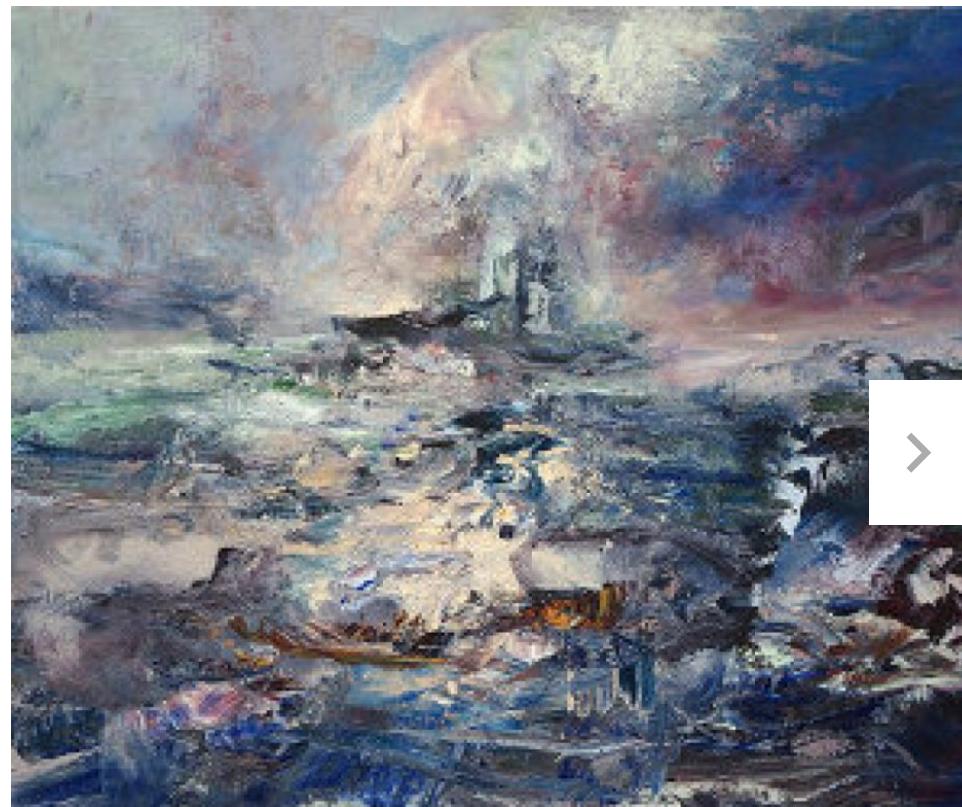


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At the galleries: Three painters reimagine abstraction

John Kissick at Katzman, Patrick Howlett at Susan Hobbs, Michael Smith at Metivier; Daisuke Takeya at Christopher Cutts.



Michael Smith, Off a Coast (After Willem Van de Velde the Younger), 2016

By **MURRAY WHYTE** Visual arts

Wed., Dec. 14, 2016

Ongoing

- **John Kissick, burning the houses of the cool man, yeah:** Kissick, who for years ran the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Guelph — a hothouse for Canadian art talent if there ever was one — is something of a pater familias for latter-day Canadian abstraction, a title for which I’m sure he’d care not at all. Kissick’s devotion not only to the form but the frictions it produces when rubbed up against the movement du jour have given his work a constant currency over the years. His work grapples with the tensions inherent in the genre with an absurdist, self-conscious glee. Case in point: Kissick of late has been preoccupied with [the great British proto-Modernist J.M.W. Turner’s](#) gestural painting [The Burning of the Houses of Parliament](#), from 1834-35. Turner’s preoccupations — with myth, subjectivity, theatricality and the tracks left behind in the paint — sync up with Kissick’s own and the show, like his practice, interrogates itself as much as the history it builds. Until Jan. 7 at [Katzman Contemporary](#), 86 Miller St.

Patrick Howlett, The Personal Atmosphere: Meanwhile, the restrained, deliberate abstraction of Patrick Howlett provides a forward-thinking counterpoint that’s both circumspect about history (you can’t be an abstract painter in the 21st century and not be) and linked to the here and now. Howlett’s work, which often cobbles together fragments and provides glimpses of what could be a larger whole, embodies a collision, however gentle, between the history of abstract painting and the dense image cloud we as a culture now navigate in the online world (Howlett’s been known to borrow texture and colour from a search engine here and there). You won’t find a meme here, but the nagging suggestion of recognition and connection just beyond your grasp will feel familiar all the same, like an itch you can’t scratch, in a good way.

- Until Jan. 28 at [Susan Hobbs Gallery](#), 137 Tecumseth St.

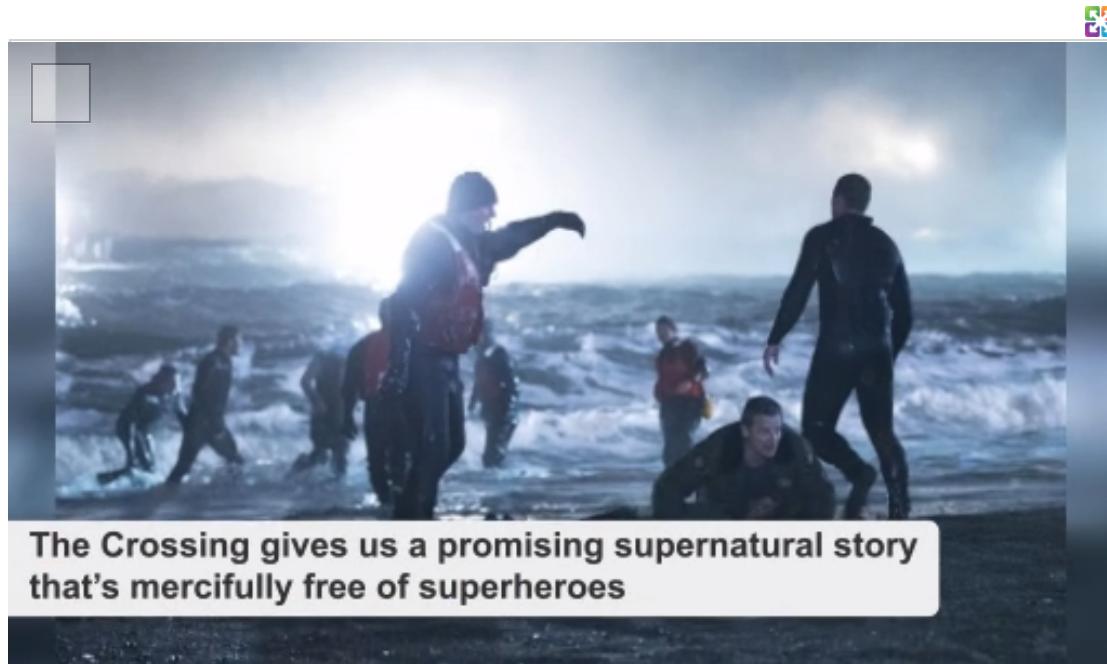
Michael Smith, Memory Current: Speaking of Turner, whose fondness for the menacing of the indistinct in his scenes of battles, catastrophes, seascapes and landscapes all, Michael Smith has similar predilections. His landscapes, all rough and thick, wade into the muddiness of gestural abstraction but not entirely. Looking at pieces like *Off A Coast (after Willem Van de Velde the Younger)*, in which a likely ill-fated vessel appears all but swallowed by the sea and Smith’s gestures both, you can’t help but think of Turner paintings like *Snow Storm — Steam-Boat off a Harbour’s Mouth*, a dense kaleidoscope of darkness from which the ship seems fated not to emerge. Smith, in other words, isn’t reinventing the wheel here — Turner aside, the push-pull between representation and abstraction has been a feature of painting since de Kooning at least — but the genuine unease brimming from these dynamic works is entirely his own.

- Until Dec. 22 at [Nicholas Metivier Gallery](#), 451 King St. W.

Daisuke Takeya, Breaking the Waves: If you saw the movie, even way back in 1996 when it came out, there’s probably still a small part of you that’s crushed so completely that it can’t be rebuilt (Lars von Trier has that effect). If you’re looking for solace, Takeya’s show of the same name will do you no good. In the aftermath of the 2011 tsunami in Japan that killed almost 16,000 people, the artist, who is Japanese Canadian, embarked on a project to aid survivors but saw his work transformed, from solitary to socially aware. Takeya, who to that point had painted

contemporary versions of traditional Japanese Kara-e paintings (minimized landscapes beneath towering skies) moved into the more expressive realms of abstraction and figure painting, coupled often with debris salvaged from shores devastated by the wave. To put a fine point on it: Takeya embraces his Kara-e works with powerful purpose here, painting Okawa Elementary School, which lost 70 of its 108 students to the disaster, under a broad expanse of crystal blue sky.

- Until Jan. 7 at [Christopher Cutts Gallery](#), 21 Morrow Ave.



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