

# CANADIANART

## David Urban

"David Urban" by Ben Portis, Spring 2008, pp. 104-106

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As its title suggests, [David Urban](#)'s "Actual Fiction" amounts to a one-man status report on the elusive ideals of reality and truth: an ugly-beauty, eat-the-document affair. The exhibition's original works-on-paper premise was put aside to accommodate a late-summer onrush of canvases from Urban. He has produced a tenacious body of work that may require distance, time and context to be construed as coherent. The sole painting on paper, *Encounter with Professor E*, establishes a stern and troubling baseline. Its crude, concentric composition of hachure brushwork and aerosol spray paint seemingly worms its way into the wary, weary and unsettled mind of the artist. Urban, who in recent exhibitions seemed to strive for an inclusive, wide-angle perspective on the world, has returned to life's raw, often unwelcome facts. His vista view has been replaced by tunnel vision.

Having abandoned ambitious linear developments, Urban resurrects motifs associated with his early years: networks of boards, beams and girders. They are appropriately encrusted, crumpled and aged, fusing into ambiguous things rather than elaborating material and technique. Each of four large paintings in the show depicts a single unidentifiable entity on a made-to-measure verging on stuffed-to-capacity basis. The geometric elements with which Urban has typically bordered his recent abstract and representational paintings now clearly bolster the works' deliberate containment of form. In *Innisfree*, dark rectangles bluntly jutting in from each of the canvas's four sides seem like the ends of protruding crossbeams, implying that the pinkish-white, heavily wrapped or bandaged shape at the centre of the canvas was rammed into its yellow box. In *House of Blues*, yellow rectangles and a blue circle are pressed up to the limits of the canvas by a swelling white-and-blue oval that threatens to overspill its red field. If *Encounter with Professor K* and *Idiom of the Hero* do not so push the envelope, it may be because the paintings' geometric contents appear to have been damaged in transit.

Each painting is a messy aggregate of techniques that the "oil and acrylic on canvas" labels do not begin to adequately describe. Urban has deployed the host of incompatible applications at his disposal, plus let loose with spray enamels for the first time (notable because he cannot personally mix their off-the-shelf colours). Urban opts for impure tones that only suggest primary hues. At certain points during their creation, the canvases were so heavy with pigment he had to take them off the walls and continue on the floor. Not framing these works was the right choice: their raw canvas edges bear the marks of each effort.