



## In the Studio : Luke Painter

We had the opportunity to visit visual artist Luke Painter in Toronto and garner some insight on the current exhibition, his artistic process, and inspirations. *Roll Up That Tender Air and the Plant Dies, the Colour Fades* runs until June 13 at Narwhal.

In the exhibition *Roll Up that Tender Air and the Plant Dies, the Colour Fades* there are references to domestic living such as rugs, plants, and ceramics throughout the show. What role does domesticity play in your work?

Domestic spaces are important to the types of images I look at and what I research. In the drawing *Self Aware Plant and Art Deco inspired 1980's Furniture* I was looking at the interior design trends in the 1980's and how they would often depict a space with a single plant in the corner of the room or on a table. This trend was influenced by the interior decorating of the Art Deco era (which was influenced by Egyptomania at the time) where plants were displayed in a space or plant motifs in patterns were used. At the core of my work is an exploration of the lineage of these trends, where they come from and how they have become translated and changed over time. In my drawing the plant becomes self-aware of aesthetic trends and in some ways is trying to figure out its own identity.



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*Self Aware Plant and Art Deco inspired 1980's Furniture, 2013*  
12 x 12 in. Ink on paper.

environment, however, all the plants have a manicured air as to suggest they've been raised and kept in domestic spaces – a tension between the natural world and our ongoing attempt to tame it. Why do you think we are compelled to bring nature indoors?

I think it is a basic instinct. I think about people wanting to replicate or translate nature and going to great lengths to do it. Landscape painters going out with their canvases to capture some quality about nature and hanging the canvas indoors. Tiffany lamps in the shape of Wysteria plants with bases that look like tree trunks. Of course the representation of it can be critical, metaphorical, allegorical or work within abstraction but in a very simple way people are looking for a way to connect with it.

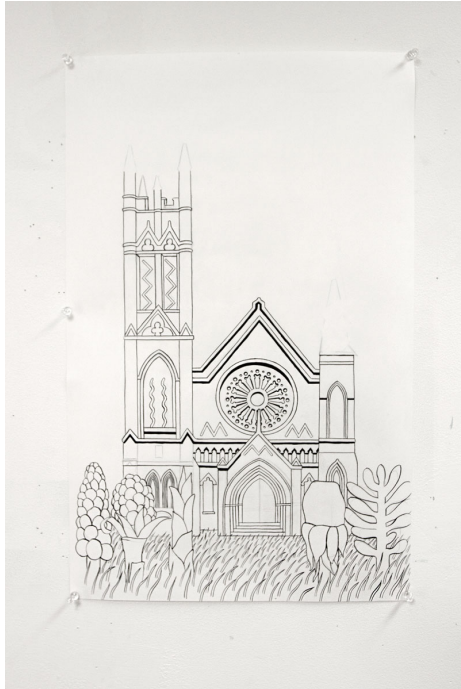
*At the core of my work is an exploration of the lineage of these trends, where they come from and how they have become translated and changed over time.*

There have been theories about plants having intuitive feelings or reactions to their environments and just as sunlight and water affect them, music or conversation could also play a role in their well being. What do you do to stay connected to your plants? Do you have any special care tips to share?

This is a funny question for me because my partner and I don't have many plants in our house. Our cats like to eat them. They reside high up on shelves out of their reach. We are devising some plans with hanging plants to have more in our house though.



I would like to believe in alternate realities. I am not completely sure if I know what an alternative reality really is. Of course there are different worlds that we have never seen but as far as an alternative reality I am not sure. When I was young I wanted to be able to project myself on what some people believe is the astral plane. My hope is that I am able to create my own worlds or realities in my work. I have a job that is very practical in many ways and can be tedious so my practice is a place where I am able to have a different sort of agency.



**What environment were you working in when you created the pieces for our show?  
How did that affect the direction?**

I was in my studio. I am not sure if it had an effect but having a private place to work definitely helps me organize my thoughts and explore my creative instincts.

**How do your surroundings affect you? Are you more affected by your exterior or interior environment?**

Surroundings are very important. I have a nice studio that is really organized now. It gives me a lot of satisfaction to work in it. When I am writing, planning or brainstorming I usually need to go to a different environment. I can spend a lot of time on my own working but I also like to be around people in a more public space. I often go to Café Neon in my neighbourhood and sit in the back with my computer. It is a different headspace that I need to be in. I also go to the Reference library to do research.



### What's your studio time like? Do you have a routine or schedule?

I have never had much of a schedule but I am working towards it. I fantasize about getting up, having breakfast, going for an hour walk and then getting into the studio until 12pm, have lunch, back to the studio and then relax in the evening. I also like what Olaf Breuning does. He starts his day at a café, thinking and writing down his ideas.

## Are there certain elements or ideal circumstances for you to make art within? What's important to you when creating?

I usually need to do research to start. This could be going to a library and taking random books off the shelf, skimming through them and reading deeper in some areas. I have always done this and I find it is the best way for me to make connections between ideas and images. I will start making work in the studio from the research, reflect on what I have made, write about it a bit and start the process of researching over again. It has been important for me to write about what I am doing while I am making. It helps me to understand some of my own instincts for creating.

## What's your favourite studio snack?

Vanilla Coke



## What's inspiring you right now?

I saw Hito Steyerl's work at the Montreal Biennale and it blew me away. It is serious and funny and weird. It makes thoughtful and poetic connections between commerce, pop culture, politics and identity. It is highly aesthetic but also layered in the most sophisticated ways. It definitely gave me good art feelings.

## Can you share a recent studio playlist, track or video?

I recently listened to an audiobook *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* by Susanna Clarke. It is an alternative history of England during the Napoleonic Wars where magic was thought to have existed in the past and is returning to the world. The story centers on a master and an apprentice who are close but come into conflict over ideological differences. It is considered a work of fantasy but draws on certain Romantic literary traditions including the Gothic tale and the Byronic hero.

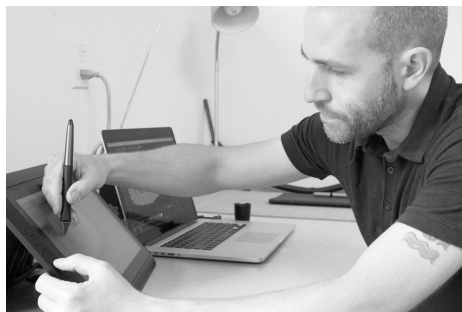
## Can you share a photo from a favourite interior environment?



## Is there a place in Toronto that inspires you?

The Reference Library. I really enjoy the interior architecture. I love that you can feel private and alone but also have so much space around and above you when you are seated and looking at all of the levels. It is a place that I have normally gone to sit and research but also a place that I find really comforting.

When I was in my early 20's I went there and would look at the image collections. They were just filing cabinets with alphabetical folders that had all sorts of images from magazines with categories like "trees", "mountains" or "hands". Someone at some point had started to cut single pages out of books and magazines and put them into folders and categorize them. It had a profound effect on me to be able to look through these images, pull out the ones that appealed to me and lay them all out on the table in front of me. I started to make connections between images. Now we look at images on Tumblr which is ok too but not the same thing to me really.



## Can you tell us about what's next?

I am in a drawing based show curated by Jon Davies, titled **Out of Line** at Oakville galleries from June 21st – September 5th. I am also going to the Banff Centre for the Banff Artist in Residency program for July and August where I am going to be working on some animation-based works.



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