Exhibition Review: Tim Schouten Gallery 1C03 U of W

Tim Schouten's recent collection of work *More RAM* runs the gamut of late modernist painterly abstractions, demonstrating an arsenal of techniques which invite the viewer to lose himself in the sensuousness of the paint. The image of the personal computer terminal appears in each of these oil paintings, rendered in a variety of manners. Sometimes it is the determining element of a particular painting. Other times it is freely sketched and situated to one side or in a corner, or integrated in a dialogic with another element of particular work. The computer appears variously as an object, a logo or icon, figure or as architecture, while the painted ground is presented as landscape or as colour field (though there is abundant diversity within this latter designation). Various issues are at stake in this exhibition. These range from painterly concerns and the exhilaration conveyed by Schouten's handling of the material, to considerations of technology and it affects, and also queries of philosophical sorts. In the painting "Workstation", against a knifey impasto ground of deep reds and blues and umber, a volumetric depiction of a computer terminal is fairly clearly delineated though its surface in rendered in dribbly washes. At first glance the computer resembles a building of some sort, possibly a factory. This painting evokes not so much a sense of place but a question thereof, turning over various societal notions and questions of painting in so doing. "Binary Splash" is a lyric excursion presenting the viewer with a series of dualities: the application of paint -- from a thin wash that barely stains the canvas to a luscious spreading that the viewer can all but taste; the use of colour to suggest land and water; the division of the field compositionally suggesting a surface halved vertically but moving towards a diagonal division; and the title itself suggests the either, or and either/or of existence. The titles of the works are notable. Some are descriptive. Others play with the verbiage of computer use. Finally, some pose questions with an astute economy. Such is the case in the case of "There's a machine in the garden" which appropriates a modernist commonplace and effects an interesting transformation. The modernist tradition which initially regarded itself as mechanistic is made here into the garden: the painterly tradition which Schouten draws upon. It is replaced by the computer (electronic device, hence modernistic or high-modern, post-modern, hi-tek, or...?). What the viewer is alerted to is the difficulty of finding ways of making theoretical and technical categories coalesce and the elegance with which Schouten manages this.

Reviewed by JPL