

Gwen Hardie A Conversation

with Andy Mackinnon

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What drew you to the skin/body as landscape concept?

Big question! One struggle I had to overcome with figuration in painting was how to free the body image from appearing too literal and 'trapped' by physical reality. I felt the need to do this because it corresponded to my experience of life. Physical reality is but one dimension to our experience and yet we are so defined by the lifespan and condition of our physical selves.

Part of my fascination with the magnification of skin, is that I can achieve ambiguity while remaining faithful to what I observe. I want to acknowledge what's actually here; this body, this earth, the cycles of light from the sun and the moon.

I like the expansive notion of creating a small part of something larger/more complex than what you can see and the possibility of a movement between multiple readings in one image. A great aid to achieving associations between the body and the earth is the exploration of sunlight in these paintings.

What influences your selection of area for compositions?

This is an interesting question because a huge difference of feeling and association comes from just moving an inch to the left or right. Sometimes I want to make the body very ambiguous by closing further in and selecting an area where there are no visible contours.

This approach seems to create the most likelihood of an association to landscape. Other times, I want to depict an area which is more recognizable to suggest an intimate, heightened awareness and sense of proximity to the body, which also is ambiguous; for example; is this a body to relate to or identify with?

How did you start using the tondo format?

I had painted these Body magnifications on squares and almost by accident came across an oval formatting option in ifoto. I set the square body-image into an oval, printed it, stuck it on my fridge and was mesmerized by it!

My first tondos were a revelation spatially; they aren't parallel to anything around them in architecture, so if they were to move it would be a spin or a zoom in and out- this was very exciting to me as it related more to how I saw things. I also liked the circular contour because it seemed to create a complete other world unto itself, (rather than seeming like a portion of one part of the body which you could logically fit together with another part to make a complete figure.)

Format seems apt, reminiscent of magnifying lenses/planet surface – can you expand on that?

Thank you! Indeed the fact that optical devices both natural (the pupil of the eye) and technological (telescope/magnifying lenses as you say) are in the round, adds to an emphasis on the act of perception when looking at these works.

I am glad you mention the planet surface which of course is also rounded and thus reflects a view of earth from a great distance, (the farther away from earth one is the more rounded it appears.

Talk a bit more about the non-dualistic, existential aspect of your inquiry? Body as subject/non subject?

Buddhists, Celtic mystics, and maybe all religions at the mystic end of the spectrum believe that we are a part of and made up of the universe at large, and that the 'self' is an illusion, a construct of the ego. In my work, I can somehow go some of the way to realizing a relationship to these mysterious truths.