

Galleries

Paintings the size of a file card

Art By Numbers

PETER GODDARD

BP 30 (2003), by Cliff Eyland

Cliff Eyland thinks small. In our emerging nano-culture, the Winnipeg-based painter's show of chunky miniatures in "The Brick Paintings," at the Leo Kamen Gallery, might be the wave — okay, the ripple — of the future.

Eyland, a 46-year-old teacher, writer and curator at Gallery One One One at the University of Manitoba School of Art, claims a wide range of historical precedence for what's in "The Brick Paintings."

His influences range from Renaissance and Cubist painting to Dadaist subversion. But his interests aren't bordered strictly by art. In his review of photographer William Eakin's "Ordinary Objects" (2002), Eyland quotes equally from the Jorge Luis Borges story "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote" and David Craft's *Baseball Cards, The Beginning Collector*.

An equally important factor is the 3-by-5-inch dimensions of the standard-sized file card, a shape that Eyland has confined himself to since 1981. Although the base of *BP 30* is wood, the base is file-card size. "Work on any one painting is so absorbing that I quickly forget that my 3-inch by 5-inch format never changes," he says.

1 File-card size: "It has to do with libraries. I started doing these paintings in libraries in 1981, when the library card was about to be phased out. Over the years, I had found things hidden in books, so I would hide drawings in books. I have often thought of the library as my own kind of secret museum.

"Starting in 1981, some of my installations have been put into library file drawers. Since 1997, I have had an ongoing installation of my work in New York at the New School (University's

Raymond Fogelman Library). Some of my drawings are going to be there forever. The (paintings) have gotten thicker but my rule is that they never exceed the dimension of the file card."

2 Thickness: "For me, the thickness of the paint and the layering is a metaphor for snow. Sometimes I just want to make the painting heavy enough to throw through a window, maybe with a note attached. (Hence the name of the show, "The Brick Paintings.") Some of the paintings have even been modelled on cellphones. With some, they've taken a couple of years to finish. But most of them are made with acrylic that dries almost instantly. The finishing of a work is determined by the deadline for an exhibition."

3 Colour: "Like every young artist, I was fascinated with Van Gogh and the notion of making intense colour. Another reason is: I was in Halifax until '92, when I moved out west. On the prairies the sun is very intense, so I'm always thinking of yellow on a blue

background.

"Recently I've gotten into the fried egg metaphor. One of my paintings has a plastic fried egg attached to it. Maybe it's because of the sun. The sun is as intense on the prairies as anywhere I've lived, and I've lived in Jamaica."

Cliff Eyland's "The Brick Paintings" is at The Leo Kamen Gallery, 80 Spadina Ave., Suite 406, Gallery 2, to April 26.

pgoddard@thestar.ca

