



Our Cosmic Geometries

Images from the Two Worlds

Leszek Wyczolkowski and Dermot Wilson

cover image: **Wyczolkowski**, etchings (left); **Wilson**, drawings (centre & right)

ISBN: 978-1-926772-21-9

Title: Our Cosmic Geometries – Images from the Two Worlds

Format: Book

Publisher: Visual Arts Centre of Clarington



Clarington
Leading the Way



Essay by
Todd Tremeer
Exhibition Curator

Our Cosmic Geometries

An idea arrives as an impulse in the middle of the night. It might be cultivated in the studio by working on other projects or come in a moment of insight, during life's routines. The creative impulse is born as a fragmented idea. The task of the artist being, to first recognize an idea's potential, then to transcribe it upon canvas, paper, etching plates and other media. The impulse may be to look at the world around them—or it may be more abstract—to balance colour and line against shape, or record the bump and echo of a line as it spirals from its centre. The creative impulse extends the trajectory of the artist's ever expanding field. Creative momentum is important in the studio but there are challenges, evolutions and directional shifts during a work's making that can also affect a project's outcome. Through training and discipline, artists learn to foster their ideas and embrace the unexpected surprises unique to their creative process.

Cosmic Geometries: Images from the Two Worlds showcases the work of two artists, Dermot Wilson and Leszek Wyczolkowski. Both have sustained their creative energies over many years. This is a partnership between two artists who saw in the work of the other, the potential for a shared dialogue. Both men share an affinity for abstraction yet come to it from differing traditions.

Our Cosmic Geometries

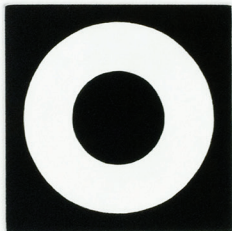
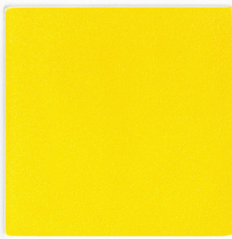
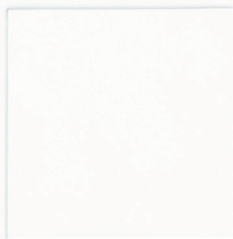
Images from the Two Worlds

Leszek Wyczolkowski and **Dermot Wilson**

Leszek Wyczolkowski has continued his studio practice since immigrating to Canada in 1978. He was born and educated in Poland and today lives in Mississauga. He exhibits nationally and internationally and is represented in numerous public and private collections in North America, Europe, Australia and Asia. Wyczolkowski is a painter in the Modernist tradition. His art demonstrates a focused commitment to abstraction and its formalist elements: line, shape, pattern, balance, rhythm, harmony and colour. His art training is specialized; his exploration of the picture plane systematic and skillful.

Dermot Wilson has taught visual art and media studies at the post-secondary level. He has worked in video production and been an art gallery executive director and curator. In his own art practice, he writes, creates and performs frequently. Dermot Wilson is more the Post-Modernist of this artist pairing. His approach is eclectic and cursory as he samples the world around him. He draws and paints, takes photographs, makes video and sound performances. *Cosmic Geometries* features drawings, videos and mixed media work by Wilson. A sound, video and music performance by him concludes this exhibition at the Visual Arts Centre of Clarington. Dermot Wilson resides in North Bay.

The show's title *Cosmic Geometries* takes thematic inspiration from English astrologer, mathematician, occult philosopher and alchemist, Robert Fludd (1574–1637). Fludd's writings today read as pre-Enlightenment pseudo-science. Yet, his engravings are intriguing—perhaps all the more because they appear so remote, when compared to our current world views. Of particular note, Fludd used a schema of concentric circles and spheres to describe and map both the macrocosm of the heavens and microcosmic constellations within our body.



Through graphic maps, charts and diagrams he ordered the spiritual and actual world around him. His copper-plate engraved illustrations today read as visually complex, beautiful and fantastical.

4 A series of etchings by Wyczolkowski recalls something of the exhibition's title. Here Wyczolkowski brings to the traditional etching process his focused abstract attention. Printing from etched and engraved copper-plates had been one of the predominant ways to publish ideas between the sixteenth to late nineteenth century. Wyczolkowski's "old world" formative training in Poland means he inevitably assimilated many such period engravings by various artists like Fludd. In this series of fourteen large multi-plate etchings, Wyczolkowski has printed cell-like organic images alongside hard-edge Modernist abstractions. Wyczolkowski identifies some of these organic views as closely observed cross-sectioned cabbages and tree rings. We may recall in them, Fludd's circular compositions or microscopic views studied through microscopes. One engraving in Fludd's text shows a nude man with his arms outstretched. He stands superimposed before a sphere or disk labelled with mysterious cosmological words and symbols. Fludd's image derives from Leonardo da Vinci's more famous drawing known as *Vitruvian Man*. Roman philosopher and engineer Vitruvius (first century B.C.) believed the perfect male body could be inscribed within a circle and square. Coincidentally, Wyczolkowski paints idealized spheres, circles and squares and learned to draw by copying from a Leonard da Vinci book in his father's art studio. Wyczolkowski undoubtedly knows Leonardo's famous image well.

Wyczolkowski; *Trilogy*, 2004/2013; oil & acrylic on canvas; 153 × 122 cm (left); *Elements*, 2005; oil & acrylic on canvas; 214 × 214 cm (right)





It takes time to experience a drawing or painting. Dermot Wilson takes viewers on a voyage inward through his large circular drawings. From afar these drawings have presence. Up-close they are meticulous (if not fastidious) in their coloured contour line structures. Wilson writes on his website: “In an age of instant gratification, these objects are a gift of the maker’s time.” He compares his drawings to Buddhist mandalas but without the spiritual mission.¹

We recognize time must be committed to listen to music or watch film, yet expect static imagery to reveal itself in an instant. The speed by which a work reveals itself can be influenced by the artist. Detail slows reading; gestural marks are read with fluency and vigour. To thoughtfully read a painting, means at times standing back to see the work overall and looking closely to consume its details. Visual reading means disentanglement and visual wandering. Our eyes navigate lines and textures like mazes. The eye slows to decipher text whenever encountered.

Smooth proficient reading means predicting an upcoming word or phrase. Wilson’s drawings are filled with text but his words are cryptic, singular and embedded within the drawing’s contours. Furthermore, his use of text surprises. In a large drawing in blue, green and black coloured pencil, we encounter what first seem to be the cardinal points on a compass. Perhaps because the drawing is circular and everywhere blue, one predicts the drawing to be a globe or map. Then we read N, E, W then O? Is “OWEN” a name, anagram or signifier of something more allegorical?

Art students often learn that the difference between illustration and contemporary art, lies somewhere between illustration’s clear

intentional message to all, and art's more fluid, nuanced and subjective interpretative potential. Meaning in art can be influenced by contextual factors such as personal state of mind, world events and individual experiences." Thus, in OWEN and others, upon each contour line are written single words like: "*FORNICATE, PRIVILEGED, UNDERWORLD and INSPIRING.*" Against these are more familiar, even cliché phrases like, "*BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF ALL OUR REAL LIFE...*" and "*DOWN THE WEE RABBIT HOLE...*" and, "*UP TO THE HEAVENS...*" Through it all, we glide and meander over the familiar only to stumble in a tangle of words and phrases. Meaning slips between narrative, expectation, representation, surprise and uncertainty. Our failed predictions punctuate the work.

Slippages activate Wilson's drawings in other ways too. His drawings are "almost symmetrical." Like a musical note tuned differently than the rest, contours oscillate between what is and what should be evident. Wilson's hand reveals itself in the colouring too. Common highlighter markers, rulers, drawing pens, pencils and coloured pencils are here his materials of choice. Close-looking reveals the progressive transformation of these tools as they are worked across the page. Pencils dull and are sharpened; markers run dry then get replaced. Everywhere too are the subtle marks of labour: staples, punctures, worn edges, abrasions and erasures. These "artist touches," gleaned through close-looking lend Wilson's work a handmade quality that chafes against their initial mechanical impulse.

Dermot Wilson seems at heart a Pop Artist. Past projects archived on his website, his academic and work history in media studies support this reading. Wilson refers to Buddhist mandalas and Celtic designs when discussing these works. Other works by him in the exhibition suggest the influence of graffiti and record album covers.



Wilson; Installation view:
drawings, 2009–2016;
each 130 × 130 cm



Finally, what if any connections can be made between his drawings and the popularity of adult colouring books being marketed as “therapeutic?”

Leszek Wyczolkowski’s painted canvases populate the third floor of the gallery. Their size and hanging from the building’s heavy horizontal beams lend his paintings a human scale. Only after experiencing the overall impact of this dramatic installation do we encounter each painting individually. These paintings reveal themselves slowly. They have been built up over months and sometimes years as evidenced by the paint’s accumulation, crusts and layers. Multiple dates on some paintings suggest the artist revisits and reworks paintings that he previously declared “complete.”

Traditional mastery of painting and etching technique underpins Wyczolkowski’s formalist abstractions. He retells a story, that as a child in Poland he went with his father who painted outdoors. Young Leszek learned by first watching his father paint, then copying his father’s painting. His father, Witold and great grand-uncle Leon, were both accomplished artists. By age ten, young Leszek too was making a few dollars as a portrait artist in Poland. Ultimately Leszek Wyczolkowski trained as a graphic artist and cartographer in Poland. Drawing maps, he reminisces, was excellent training for printmakers. Smooth lines, restrained precise drawing, hand-lettering, measurement and letter spacing are the skills of mapmakers and graphic designers. More than four decades later, skilled workmanship and control continue to underpin his work. Wyczolkowski fondly recalls sharpening his tools and grinding Chinese ink sticks into a cold tea, to make the most perfect, delicate drawing ink demanded by mapmakers. Today he continues to make his own etching ink and enrich his oil paints with additional pigments.







Wyczolkowski;
zinc etching plates

Wyczolkowski conceives of painting in terms of internal opposing forces: structure versus organic, squares against circles, fast then slow. The initial lay-in of paint is fast, gestural and applied in an all over fashion. He works to capture the initial impulse that inspired the work's beginnings. As the painting develops the process becomes more refined and considered. Surfaces are pulled forward, others pushed aside or made background. Paint is brushed, scumbled and glazed; patterns are formed with a calligraphic touch. Pigments are chosen for their opacity, transparency and colour temperature.

13

Wyczolkowski believes he is less impulsive, more measured, calculated and nuanced as he ages. "Etching is a good time to think about painting," says Wyczolkowski. An idea arrived at through etching may be explored later as painting. One makes a decision in etching and can spend hours executing the thought. Etching can be slow, at times even mechanical. Respect for process affects a project's success. With etching there is time to think, plan and develop an idea in black and white. Etching plates serve Wyczolkowski like musical notes. Printing plates are small and so can be arranged together on the press bed differently to make new compositions. A theme with variations, like the musical étude, his prints repeat and vary themselves in different combinations. Paper size and the grid remain constant, placement within the grid, spacing and colour accents vary the work's pitch, volume and tempo.

Ultimately, *Cosmic Geometries: Images from the Two Worlds* is a multi-layered dialogue about time and space that takes from history, European traditions, Canada and elsewhere. On another level, there is also the picture plane and the time taken to traverse an artwork with a brush or eye. Robert Fludd's world at the end of the sixteenth

century was expanding rapidly with exploration and new technologies. New ideas clashed with old ones. Wars were fought over faith and ideology. Period etchings and engravings by Fludd and his contemporaries provide insight into the pulse of his age. Today, exploration, technology, war and ideological clashes continue. What insight do the geometries of Dermot Wilson and Leszek Wyczolkowski show our future?

14

Endnotes

- 1 <http://www.variflux.tv/drawings>



15

Leszek Wyczolkowski

Leszek Wyczolkowski was born into a family of artists in Poland. He received his first artistic training at an early age from his father. His formal education was obtained at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw - Poland (1975-1977). After immigrating to Canada in 1978 Leszek Wyczolkowski continued his education at the Ontario College of Art (1980-1982 and graduated with honours). In 2005 and 2007 Wyczolkowski attended self-directed residencies at The Banff Centre, Banff Alberta. He has travelled through Asia and Europe and has exhibited in over one hundred and eighty solo and group shows in Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and the United States. Leszek Wyczolkowski's works appear in museums, corporate, public and private collections around the world.



Dermot Wilson

Dermot Wilson was born in Dublin, Eire and lives in northern Ontario. He works in various media including video, installation, digital imaging, computer animation and performance to create works that include meditations upon his relationships with the community and the environment. He has lived and worked in Victoria, B.C., Stratford, ON, Calgary, AB, Saskatoon, SK, Hamilton, ON and St. Catharines, ON. He has shown his artworks across the country. Also a writer and curator, Wilson's fiction has appeared in various Canadian literary and arts magazines. He has curated international and national group and solo exhibitions for the past ten years as the Director of the WKP Kennedy Gallery in North Bay, Ontario. Wilson has also worked for several Media Arts collectives and organizations across Canada. He was the first Director of Paved Arts in Saskatoon, founder of N2M2L in North Bay, first curator for the Ice Follies Biennial and recently left the Board of the Media Arts Network of Ontario. He is currently a member of the Nipissing Region Curatorial Collective and of the Hyperboreal performance group. He is an administrator for the Northern Arts and Crafts Movement in North Bay.

Publication to
accompany the
exhibition *Our Cosmic
Geometries - Images
from the Two Worlds* at
the Visual Arts Centre of
Clarington, from March
12 to April 9, 2017.
The Visual Arts Centre of
Clarington is supported
by its Members and
Donors, the Municipality
of Clarington, the Ontario
Trillium Foundation and
the Ontario Arts Council.

Photographer:
Jean Michel Komarnicki

Photographer,
pages 3&12:

Lynn Wyczolkowski

Interim Executive
Director/Curator:

Sherri Helwig

Exhibition Curator:

Todd Tremeer

Editor:

Olexander Wlasenko

Catalogue Designer:

Karen Henricks

Printer:

Moveable Inc.



The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington
P.O. Box 52, 143 Simpson Avenue
Bowmanville, Ontario Canada L1C 3K8
(905) 623.5831 fax (905) 623.0276
website: www.vac.ca

