

# A&E

Jeff Day, editor, [jday@thespec.com](mailto:jday@thespec.com) or 905-526-2415

## Two into three will go



REGINA HAGGO

Painting is a true hands-on experience for John Kennedy. A brush, a piece of cardboard, his hand — all of these are suitable tools for applying paint to canvas, as far as he's concerned.

About a dozen recent abstract paintings by Kennedy are on show in *Surface Issues*, an exhibition at the Transit Gallery this month.

Kennedy says he is out "to challenge the notion of two-dimensional painting." He does this by building up layers of paint, as many artists have done to add texture and depth.

But he also builds up his compositions in a less traditional way. First he paints many irregular shapes onto a canvas or panel. Then he pours a clear acrylic resin all over it. When the resin hardens, the surface is luminous and transparent.

He's not finished yet, though. Kennedy creates a second painting on top of the first, covering some

of the earlier shapes, and leaving others. So some of the paint lies under the resin, some lies on top.

Such layering imparts a three-dimensional quality. And the layers are easy to distinguish, enabling the viewer to follow the path taken by the artist in the creation and completion of his work.

There's also a certain hardness in the glasslike surface, and a brashness that evokes the glistening surfaces of modern machinery.

Kennedy's abstracts are not grounded in industry, however, but in landscape. Even his titles remind us of this.

*Lovers on the Grass*, for instance, evokes pleasantly romantic experiences.

In this acrylic painting, Kennedy fills up on green and yellow shapes in the lower part of the composition and lighter blue and pink tones higher up, calling up the memory of a landscape.

Kennedy's surface issues are not confined to layering paint beneath and above the resin covering. He's also playing with artistic conventions. Contrasting light with dark areas, for instance, permits the paler shapes to leap out and the darker ones to recede, creating a sense of depth.

Colour, shape and brush strokes add up-and-down, push-and-pull tensions. The darker greens in the lower part tend to weigh the



John Kennedy, *Lovers on the Grass*, 2008, acrylic on canvas on panel.

composition down. Above them, two overlapping arches, thin and tipsy, pull the composition upward, as do a few well-placed dots floating nearby. And horizontal brush strokes next to vertical ones add even more movement.

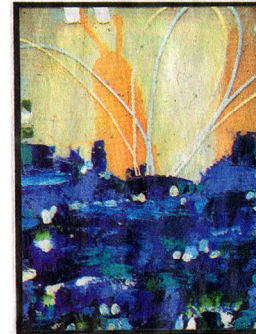
But the composition does not fall apart. Kennedy adds small patches of colour to the sides and the bot-

tom of the painting to contain and ground all the activity within.

Dabs and dots of blue and an occasional green gather at the bottom of *Landscape in Blue*. Their mostly horizontal application contrasts with the vertical motifs in the upper part of the painting, especially the highly animated loops and lines which direct our

### Showtime

**Who:** John Kennedy  
**What:** *Surface Issues*  
**Where:** Transit Gallery,  
230 Locke St. S.  
**When:** Until June 1  
**Phone:** 905-522-1299



John Kennedy, *Landscape in Blue*, 2008, acrylic on wood panel.

attention sky high.

Kennedy says he paints "until a composition is revealed." The results are worth waiting for.

*Regina Haggo, a former professor of art history at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, teaches at the Dundas Valley School of Art. [dhaggo@thespec.com](mailto:dhaggo@thespec.com)*