

EXHIBIT A RIGHT BACK AT YOU

**Aftertime by
Anders Oinonen
Reviewed by
Gary Michael Dault**

To July 14 at Greener Pastures
Contemporary Art,
1188 Queen St. W., 416-535-7100.

You look at Anders Oinonen's painting *Aftertime*, and the first thing you see — well, the first thing I saw — is simply a collection of richly coloured planes arranged in a heap, occupying the foreground of the picture, and spread out under the grey-blue sky of what seems to be an empty and perhaps wintry landscape. Then you notice the eyes. Or what might be construed as eyes.

And once you notice the eyes, you can then read that mighty bar of green (with the grey upper side) that rises slightly from the bottom of the picture as a huge, slabby nose. And then the other, thinner green bar leaning over toward the right becomes a mouth. And suddenly you have a whole head, lying heavily on its side on the ground.

All of the paintings in Oinonen's exhibition, which is called *its.whats.its* and is at Greener Pastures Contemporary Art, are made this way: Each is a rather architectural-looking assemblage of painted planes, which, upon closer inspection, resolves itself into a big, blocky face and head.



Anders Oinonen's *Aftertime*: gloriously intense, saturated, chromatic purity.

“While the structures do appear to gaze, that gaze is never concentrated on the viewer. It is always directed somewhere, but not at you.”

Artist Anders Oinonen

This is a curious way to make a painting, and so Oinonen and I agree to get together for a beer at Toronto's Gladstone Hotel, right next to Greener Pastures, to talk it over. Given the assuredness with which he paints, I'm surprised to learn that this is his very first exhibition.

"There is an architecture of a kind in the paintings," Oinonen acknowledges, "but it's not really about buildings. It's about spaces."

This strikes me as an intriguing idea, because it locates the paintings in such a way that they can be seen to portray either structure that is somehow becoming sentient, or, contrariwise, as personal

energy that has somehow infused and animated base structure. Either way, you look at Oinonen's paintings and they look back.

Well, that's not actually quite true. They look, yes. They gaze. But they do not actually look back at you directly. "For while the structures do appear to gaze," Oinonen notes, "that gaze is never concentrated on the viewer. It is always directed somewhere, but not at you."

In *Aftertime*, for example, the structure's gaze seems focusless, inward — if structures can have an inwardness. This means that the painting looks, but does not observe. Which leaves the observing

to us, thus rather elegantly underscoring the slight sense of voyeurism everyone experiences while looking at pictures.

"Where do these isolated, poignant, sometimes eloquent heads come from, anyhow?" I ask him.

"Well, there's an Easter Island, totemic quality to them, I suppose," he replies. "And I was thinking of the iconic simplicity of those ancient Norse helmets. . . . the ones with the cut-out, protruding nose-guards?"

For me, the big beige and brick-red head (with the huge green nose) reclining on its side in *Aftertime* evokes the head of Egyptian pharaoh Ozymandias, lying forgotten on the desert sands in Shelley's famous poem (*Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair . . .*).

In many of the paintings in Oinonen's exhibition, however, the staring faces are placed at the top of vertical, body-like structures (like buildings with two searchlights on the roof), where you'd expect them to be (as in *Sundowner* or *Helmet*). So how come the face-building in *Aftertime* is lying on its side? "I painted it with a kink in my neck!" Oinonen says cheerfully. Ask a silly question. "No, really," he says.

"Of course when you get right down to it," he continues, "the faces are made up of brushstrokes."

Yeah, let's not get too carried away about inwardness and desert sands.

"I never thought of myself as a colorist," Oinonen tells me. "I assumed I didn't know colour," he says. "And I wanted to know it." And he does. That's what these new paintings of Oinonen's really come down to — gaze or no gaze: Each of them is a space-generating arrangement of gloriously intense, saturated, chromatic purity. That's what you really notice first: fresh, surprising colour, authoritatively applied.