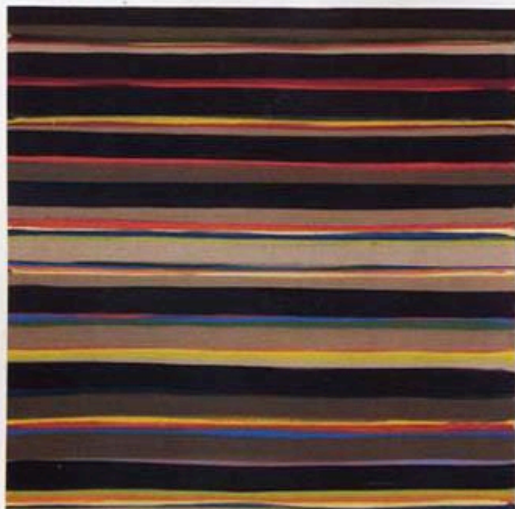


ARTIST FILE



WITH THEIR MASTERFUL STROKES AND CREAMY SURFACES, THE PAINTINGS OF TORONTO ARTIST **NICOLE COLLINS** APPEAL TO ART LOVERS OF ALL STRIPES. TEXT BY BETTY ANN JORDAN



TOP LEFT: *Shifting Loci* (2006), 36" x 36", encaustic on canvas, \$3,800.

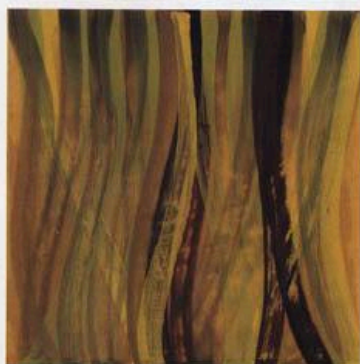
TOP RIGHT: *Elision Reprise* (2005), 12" x 12", encaustic on canvas, \$1,400.

"My paintings come out of a place of joy," says Toronto painter Nicole Collins. "While the experience of making them is sometimes a challenge, they are artifacts of my life, evidence of something good going out into the world." Exuberantly patterned in a wide range of colours, the luminous surfaces of her frequently square-shaped abstract works have the gloss and texture of icing-topped petits fours. In fact, one of Collins' students at the Ontario College of Art & Design, where she currently teaches, went so far as to lick one of her canvases, commenting that its rich swirls and inviting colours made it appetizing enough to eat.

TECHNIQUE: For some artists, technique is a means to an end, but it typically is the end for Collins. "I strive to apply a benevolent control over colour," she says. "Ultimately, though, I tend to collaborate with the paint." As a rule, she produces encaustic paintings, which are created using an ancient technique by which pigment is mixed with hot wax. Not for the indecisive, this method requires the artist to work very fast because the wax and pigment mixture solidifies almost instantly upon contact with the canvas. While Collins sometimes re-melts sections or scrapes and gouges into the surface, it's "the immediacy of the mark" that she ultimately finds most compelling. "Encaustic is assertive, powerful," she says of her chosen medium. "It is colour under control, while the marks are crisp, cool and delineated."

BACKGROUND: "I want to paint until I'm 97," Collins says, citing the nonagenarian Toronto artist Doris McCarthy as one of her role models. Visual art, however, wasn't the painter's first creative outlet. During her high school years in Sarnia, Ont., she was a singer and musical theatre performer active in

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TOP TO BOTTOM: *Charm* (2003), 72" x 12", \$4,200; *System Asserts I (parse)* (2003), 12" x 12", \$1,400; *To Shinjuku Gate* (2003), 12" x 72", \$3,400; *System Asserts I (charm)* (2003), 12" x 12", \$1,400, all encaustic on canvas.

summer stock. Eventually, though, she came to realize that actors are largely dependent on others to present their work. “As a visual artist, I am in control of when and how I make my art,” she says. Autonomy and living life to the fullest are understandable concerns for Collins, whose early years were marked by the premature deaths of her father and two brothers, each under different circumstances, as well as her mother’s inspiring fortitude. “She’s an incredible survivor — and has been a model of persistence and a huge support for me,” she says.

Today, the artist lives in Toronto with her husband, abstract painter Michael Davidson, and their 12-year-old daughter, Matilda. As students in other disciplines at the University of Guelph in the 1980s, the young couple switched to the Bachelor of Fine Arts program after getting hooked by the energy they experienced in a foundation art course, which taught the basics of drawing, painting and terminology. Now in its 25th year, their relationship is an exceptionally supportive one. Recently, Collins contributed a thoughtful essay to a new hardcover book about Davidson’s art, while Davidson included his wife’s work in “Translinear,” the wide-touring exhibition of contemporary painting he co-curated with art critic Ihor Holubizky. While their paintings look nothing alike, their work was also jointly featured in a two-person show at the Platform Gallery in London in 2001. Currently, the couple maintains studios on separate floors in their art-filled Victorian semi in Toronto’s west end. After a decade and a half in the artists’ materials business followed by ongoing teaching at the Ontario College of Art & Design and the Toronto School of Art, Collins now intends to explore the relationship between her two favoured modes of expression: painting and music. In 2007, she began a master’s degree in visual studies at the University of Toronto. In particular, she plans to investigate the connection between colour and the organization of sound.

BIG BREAKS: Collins’ artistic turning point took place when she came under the tutelage of Tony Scherman and Margaret

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Priest, a powerhouse artistic couple who jointly taught at the University of Guelph in the 1980s. While Scherman didn't directly tutor Collins in encaustic painting (for which he is internationally renowned as a master), his passionate approach to bravura oil picture-making and Priest's emphasis on concise mark-making and the underlying grids in abstraction made a deep impression on the artist. "I am the bastard child," she jokes, "of these two very distinct personalities."

Collins' big professional break occurred in 1998 when she joined the Wynick/Tuck Gallery in Toronto. The dialogue between Collins and the respected dealers Lynne Wynick and David Tuck (professional partners of 39 years) has been invaluable, as has the chance to be shown alongside such other Wynick/Tuck luminaries as Kim Adams, Gerald Ferguson and the late Greg Curnoe.

WHY IT'S HOT: The sense of joy that Collins cites as a driving artistic force is evident in her work, which reflects her embrace of the pleasure principle and proves extremely attractive. In little more than a decade, her paintings have been the subjects of nine solo exhibitions across the continent as well as a recent commercial show in Switzerland. She belongs to that relatively small group of Canadian artists who have garnered the respect of critics, curators and peers alike.

BUDGET: \$1,100 to \$5,500 for canvases, ranging from eight to 54 inches.

WHERE TO GET IT: Ongoing selections of Collins' work are on view at the Wynick/Tuck Gallery, www.wynicktuckgallery.ca. Her paintings will be at the gallery's booth at the Toronto International Art Fair from October 25 to 29. She is also represented by the Halde Galerie in Widen, Switzerland. Visit Collins' Web site, www.nicolecollins.com, to view her works. **H&H**

Betty Ann Jordan is a Toronto-based writer and the owner of Art InSite tours.