

Inspiration BY MONICA TAP

Lifetime brush-marked by child's-eye view

An ominous, dark cloud, an intense, golden light, and horses too!

The *Approaching Storm*, painted in 1869 by Adolphe Vogt, is hackneyed, derivative, and old-fashioned. It's a formulaic academic painting by a German-born artist hanging in a Canadian public gallery on the frosty fifty-third parallel. And when I was 12 years old I knew that it was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen.

I was taking drawing lessons at the Edmonton Art Gallery when I first encountered *The Approaching Storm*. The ominously dark, purple-black cloud made the pale yellow hay glow; the strong diagonals — the road, the shadows, the driver's whip, and the running boy — gave everything a hurried feeling. The intense golden raking light was just like what I saw on the prairies. All that, and horses too! I remember standing as

close to the painting as the guard would allow, so I could clearly see the brush marks and figure out how to do them myself.

I hadn't thought of this painting for years, not until I was asked to write about a work of art in a Canadian collection that had inspired me. My own paintings refer to old landscape drawings, but many of those inspirations are tucked away in European collections. And the works that seduced me as an art student, and to which I still make regular pilgrimages — Cézanne, Manet, and Pollock spring to mind — well, most of my favourites are in American museums.

When I think of Vogt's painting today, I see a good example of some of the more melodramatic tendencies in Romantic landscape painting. Al-

so, his figures are recognizably stock characters who can be found ambling through countless landscapes since the mid-1600s. (I know this because these same charming figures lurk in the dense layers that make up my own work.) And it's hard to look at his painting without remembering that decades earlier, both John Constable and Thomas Cole produced superior pictures on a similar theme. Vogt surely was in their debt.

But I owe a debt to Vogt's landscape. It stopped a 12-year-old in her tracks and revealed to her the magic of painting.

Monica Tap is a Halifax-based painter, currently showing at the Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph. Her work is represented by the Wynick/Tuck Gallery in Toronto and the Douglas Udell gallery in Edmonton and Vancouver.



H. KOROL/THE EDMONTON ART GALLERY

Adolphe Vogt's *The Approaching Storm*, 1869



COURTESY OF WYNNICK/TUCK GALLERY

Monica Tap's *Journey (green)*, 1998, oil on canvas