

**Chris Cran: *Bright Spiral Standard***

**Clint Roenisch Gallery, [www.clintroenisch.com](http://www.clintroenisch.com), April 18 to May 30, 2009**

Julie Oakes

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TORONTO, ONT.

# CHRIS CRAN

## BRIGHT SPIRAL STANDARD

By Julie Oakes

WATCHING STAR TREK, ONE IS IMPRESSED BY THE TECHNOLOGICAL SPECIAL EFFECTS, THOSE THAT AFFECT PERCEPTION AND CHALLENGE LOGIC BUT THE TRANSFORMATIVE, DIZZING SLIGHT OF HAND IN CHRIS CRAN'S RECENT PAINTINGS IN *BRIGHT SPIRAL FORWARD* AT CLINT ROENISCH GALLERY IN TORONTO BRING LOW-TECH, MERE PAINT-ON-CANVAS IN AS AN IMPRESSIVE CONTENDER. *YELLOW MAN* SO FIRMLY TRICKS A PRACTICED EYE AS TO MAKE ONE BELIEVE THAT THE PURPLE AND GREY DOTS THAT ARE STRIPED WITH THIN YELLOW LINES IS A REALISTIC GOLDEN PORTRAIT.

Not only can a Cran painting change from close range to a distance, but the interpretation of the image can change from positive to negative just by passing in front of the piece as the reflection of light upon paint changes. *Red Photographer and Green Photographer* depict two men, specifically 'photographers' because they work with positives and negatives. The image flips from positive to negative through changing the physical perspective enabling the viewer to control the magic.

Cran had historically painted large-scale, realistic, self portraits that alluded to memories from his childhood at a time when realism was not hip; when pop overtook abstract expressionism and the post-modern steam had not yet blown the whistle on exclusive, stylistic '-isms'. He calls it recycling, saying that realism had been discarded for sufficient time to make it, once again, fresh.

The present work with more conceptual and abstract handling came about through an epiphany. He had an exhibition prepared with a few weeks before the opening and decided to 'play' during the recess. He was going to lay a row of stripes on a background to make patterned wallpaper. He painted the first coat, lay on the masking tape and then went side-

ways - he decided to paint a black and white image overtop of the masked ground. He let it dry and then peeled.

There it was. A new way of seeing.

In the striped paintings with blurred images (*Napoleon's Mirror, House Head, Awake*) the size of the piece dictates the duration of the solid work session. A large piece can mean a seventeen-hour stretch from beginning to the unmasking. But it's worth it, that unmasking... Cran says it's like unwrapping a present each time. A return to the rush of epiphany.

Time travels in *Nice Frame*. Through the colours, as rich and dark as tapestry, Vermeer or Caravaggio is invoked with gold, bronze, lustrous deep vermilion, ochre, phthalo, sienna and viridian forming segues into beauty components. Beauty invades the swirls while attraction and desire pulse towards a higher spiritual plane.

During a Banff School of Fine Arts Photography Residency when Cran was invited not as a photographer but as a painter, he became interested in camera obscura. For the short movie, *Cartoon Globe*, a spinning earth doubles as a grinning cartoon head. The actual performance took place in a dark space, where the lit globe was spinning and projected



*Green Photographer*  
2008, oil on canvas  
24 x 18 inches

through a lens onto a sheet of frosted Mylar (rear screen projection) upon which had been fixed the cartoon face (black tape) which is registered with the image of the spinning globe. Cran took advantage of the darkness with Carl Stalling's Warner Bros. Cartoons' soundtrack playing backwards in order to surprise one of the awestricken with a prankish poke on the cheek.

Play presupposes fun and it feels good to be wonderstruck. The thrill of epiphany when a closer inspection of *Yellow Man* reveals the method used to produce the illusion or the dance from side to side in front of *Red Photographer and Green Photographer* in order to flip the images are positive viewing experiences. Cran's work brings us to the wonder of seeing.

## EXHIBITION

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