



Triade, 2014, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 63 x 57 inches



Réflexion #4, 2014, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 51 x 57 inches

JESSICA PETERS

Q AND A WITH VIOLET SHURAKA

Where did you grow up? Did the environment you experienced as a youth influence your decision to become an artist? Or influence your work at all? If so, how?

I grew up in the same town that I live in now. I did not know that I would become an artist. I have no artists in my family and I didn't really know any when I was younger, it was only in my last year of high school that I decided to start taking art classes, instead of dance classes, and my teacher at the time really encouraged me to keep on studying art in college. I really didn't know what I wanted to pursue at the time, so I decided to continue discovering my new passion.

The small town that I am from has always been an inspiration for my work. I was always fascinated with old buildings and barns and the rural style of architecture found in these small

country towns—any building with texture was something I desired to paint.

You live in the Lower Laurentians, outside of Montreal, Quebec. What do you like most about living there? Least? Does being in this location inspire your work?

What I like the most about being in the Laurentians is the calm and beauty of the nature I'm surrounded by. Most of the subjects I have painted over the years are all places from the Laurentians, most specifically my hometown, but even if it is a large and endless source of inspiration, the fact that I'm further from the city makes me an even more solitary artist than I used to be. My studio is in my home so it's difficult to have regular contact with the art world and to engage in discussions or receive feedback from other artists.

Tell me a little about the process of creating a new work. What inspires you to begin a picture?

Every painting usually starts with a photograph that I have taken myself, as a record of a place or just an image of something I find interesting. I've always been very fascinated by architectural structures, there is great history and many stories in a construction, some more interesting and significant than others. Houses, buildings, barns and other structures can also give us lots of information on the way we live and evolve and therefore has become a very relevant subject matter. What I'm looking for in the subject is something ambiguous, whether it is in the physical structure, the history of the place, its evolution, or something more personal to me, what I represent tends to raise questions. This is what brought me to working



Lieu Innocupé, 2013, acrylic and spray paint on wood, 6 x 8 feet



Immaculé-Conception, 2012, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 48 x 60 inches



Réflexion #8, 2016, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 24 x 30 inches

with optical reflections, the complexity of this phenomenon and diversity of images it produces makes it a fascinating subject.

What is a day in your studio like?

A day in the studio for me is never the same. I work in the daytime, evenings, or at night, sometime full days, sometime only a couple of hours. My studio is in my home so I can go in to work easily, whenever I'm inspired and have time. I always work on multiple paintings at a time so the series I work on have something in common, also because it helps to stimulate the work.

Do you begin sketching out your ideas by drawing something first? Do you ever work out a composition as a collage or on a computer before you begin to paint?

I usually sketch a little using the photo or image of the subject. The subjects I paint are simpli-

fied, so I like to sketch to help me organize the compositions, but I like to keep it spontaneous as much as possible. The images I use mostly serve to start, once the composition is set then there are no rules.

Do you paint mainly with acrylics? Do any other materials find their way into your artwork?

My main material is acrylic paint, because it makes it easier to work in layers, but I also use spray paint on some parts of paintings.

Architecture is present throughout your work (for example: *Immaculate Conception* and *Metro*, both from 2012) and in your latest work (such as *Specular Reflection*, 2016) various architectural elements are taken apart, abstracted and then reconstructed, sometimes combining with or reflecting natural elements. Could you talk a bit about this play between the built environment and nature in your

work? Are they getting along harmoniously? Or is there a bit of a struggle between the two?

Like I said earlier I like to represent a subject in an ambiguous way, sometimes it implies putting aside the realistic aspect of my subjects. In 2012, I started working with old pictures of locations in my hometown, which have now been transformed. This work was about the evolution of society and the changes in the way in which we live. Churches becoming condos and sports clubs, a supermarket becoming a daycare center, a train station turned into an office building, etc... I would represent a building from the past in addition to its utility now in one painting. This kind of duality has always been something I liked to play with in my paintings. In my recent work, about optical reflections, natural and architectural elements are confronted in what seems to be an almost abstract composition. These elements are complementary in my work, but there is also a struggle



Altération #3, 2013, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 24 x 24 inches



Réflexion Prismatique, 2016, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 51 x 57 inches

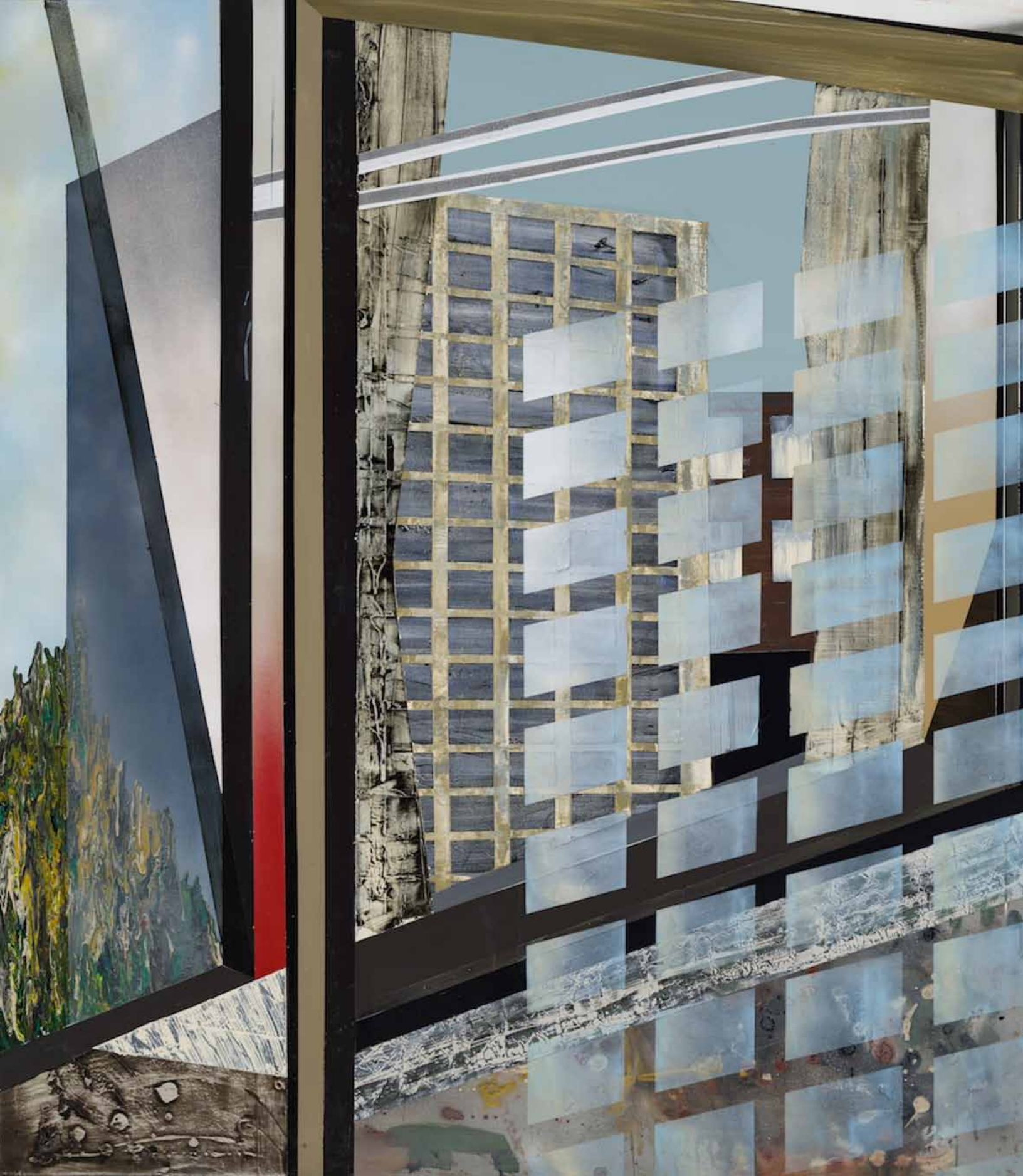
between them that is more and more present because I am now working with both interior and exterior spaces in my recent work. This confrontation is more about not knowing where we stand regarding the subject.

In certain works (such as *Place 2 Innocupé* and *Lieu Innocupé*, both from 2013) you present a complete environment, such as a village scene—which might include some buildings, a bridge, a landscaped area—but in your newer work you hone in and paint a part of the scene in a very detailed manner (in works such as *Untitled*, 2016), reconfiguring the architectural elements into more abstract constructions. You seem to be exploring the surface more in the newer work as well. What led to this shift in your subject matter—from a recognizable landscape to an emphasis on the fragments that make up the scene?

It's true that over the years my work has become less about the significance of the building itself and that building's story and more about a conceptual idea referencing architecture. Working with different reflections has made my work more and more abstract because the reflection represents a fragmented reality. I am now exploring different aspects of this subject, because it makes us see reality differently. It often feels like there is another dimension we can access through observing reflections. New spaces appear and disappear, transforming themselves throughout the day. I like to address this transformation in my newer work. In my past work I didn't use fragments of a landscape to rebuild a composition, now the subjects I paint are already deconstructed by the visual effects of reflection. I work with the juxtaposition of the planes, I find there is a lot more depth than there used to be, even if it's now a more realistic representation.

Are the scenes depicted in your paintings actual places/buildings that you have observed around you or are your compositions constructed from many different parts of multiple places, real and imagined?

Like I said earlier, the majority of my paintings represent places from my home town, this is especially true when I worked with a larger environment or a particular building and its surrounding. My recent work is more abstract as the subject matter is built up of reconstructed vantage points and reflections—however, even if a particular building is not recognizable in these newer paintings they still do represent my daily environment. It's become even more intimate over the years, representing my own home, both as I remember it in the past and as it changes over time.



Réflexion Speculaire, 2016, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 63 x 57 inches



Left: *Lieu Innocupé*, 2013, acrylic and spray paint on wood, 6 x 8 feet;
Above: *Métro*, 2012, acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 48 x 72 inches

Are the structures in your work abandoned or are they new constructions popping up in the rural, wooded landscapes of the Lower Laurentians? Or a combination of both scenarios? Is the landscape of this area currently undergoing a change and becoming more developed?

When I started painting I was really into finding old buildings with lots of texture—the paint itself was always, and still is, as much of the subject than what is represented.

Over the past few years there have been lots of changes in the part of the Lower Laurentians where I live and these changes have definitely influenced my work a lot. Lots of business have closed down, lots of jobs have been lost, the economy was not doing well and as a result there were all these empty commercial spaces, churches closing one after the other, and many houses for sale throughout town. However, even with all of this evidence of an economic downturn there were still multiple new construction projects underway, with many new homes being built. It made me question the way we live and it became a subject of my paintings over the years.

Geometric lines and patterns often repeat from one canvas to another, utilizing various painterly techniques. The surface of the painting is sometimes flat, sometimes rough and scraped, and sometimes overpainted with thin washes, revealing multiple layers underneath. Have you always painted in this manner, mixing various textures and techniques within one canvas?

I have always worked this way. The main reason I work with architecture as my subject matter is because I like the contrast of the geometric lines and the possibility to create many effects with the application of paint. I have experimented with a large variety of techniques and

effects since I started painting, and its been very relevant in the progression of my work. Some techniques are used to represent more organic subjects and others to emphasize the roughness of the concrete, and others for the blurriness and the transparency found in the reflections. Mixing all these different textures in one painting brings about a very interesting contrast and without the layers I feel the paintings might feel incomplete.

Do you utilize the geometric grid to structure the work?

I like to keep it very intuitive. I rarely calculate anything in my painting, except for with one or two works that really had to be symmetrical, and even then I would permit myself to cheat. It's very interesting, because I was often asked if I had any architectural background, but actually all of my perspectives and constructions are truly unrealistic.

There are rarely humans depicted in your paintings (at least in the ones that I have seen). Have figures ever appeared in your work? Is there a reason why your pictures are void of people?

The only human figures I have used in my work so far were used in my series about the past and present, from 2012. I only painted silhouettes, these figures were included to be a reminder of the foot traffic that used to be present in these places, places which are virtually empty now. In general with my work, I find that the structures have so many details themselves that humans would only bring in an additional narrative that is not significant in my work.

How do you personally know when a painting is finished?

To be honest, its very hard for me to decide when a painting is finished, there is always something I could change or modify. The fact

that I work in layers makes it hard to stop because I can always come back to almost any part of the painting and add. I guess in order to stop I need to ask myself if the intention of the painting is well defined.

Which artists inspire you? Which artists would you cite as influences?

There are so many artists that I like and/or have been inspired by such as Peter Doig, Trevor Kiermander, David Hockney, Matthias Weischer and so many other younger artists. I also had a strong cubist influence in many of my paintings from 2010-2011.

What projects are you working on currently?

At the moment I am working on a series of paintings of windows which reflect the inside of my home. I've only just started, but its more of an in-situ painting project. When this body of work is exhibited in a gallery there will be paintings hung on the walls, as well as elements traced directly onto the floor, referring to shadows and room delimitations, like you see on an architectural plan. The idea is that as soon as you enter the exhibition space, you enter a reproduction of my personal home, but with only information selected for the spectator by me. There will be more information and pictures on my website, www.jessicapeters.net, coming soon.

What could you imagine doing if you did not create art?

I think creating art is part of who I am. I never really wanted to be anything in particular. Being an artist is not something you decide to do its something you are.