

# Edmonton's Nathan Birch a master of triple views

Janice Ryan



## VISUAL ARTS PREVIEW

Nathan Birch, an exhibition of new work

**Where:** Douglas Udell Gallery, 10332 124th St.

**When:** Until Nov. 14, Tuesday through Saturday 9:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.

In 2000, Nathan Birch, freshly graduated from the Alberta College of Art and Design in Calgary, took an unconventional approach when presenting his portfolio to the prestigious Douglas Udell Gallery in Edmonton, a gallery Birch considered one of the best in Western Canada.

With youth and naivety on his side, Birch walked in the back entrance and was in the process of lining up his canvases on the floor when Doug Udell walked in. Udell's initial surprise turned to interest, as he absorbed the quality and uniqueness of the work. Udell chose several paintings on the spot and has represented Birch ever since. "Few 22-year-olds have the ingenuity he exhibited that day," reflects Udell. Birch's resourcefulness did not stop there: in need of studio space, he mentored student artists at Jasper Place High School for three years in exchange for work space.

Raised in Edmonton, Birch remembers drawing since he could hold a pencil. "I started to paint when I was 13 and painted landscapes from the start."

A move to Victoria in 2004 shifted his focus from Alberta prairie and Rocky Mountain landscapes to West Coast scenery. Now living in Fernie, he says "a lot of the material in this show is from camping, hiking, driving and exploring around B.C. I love nature and being outside."

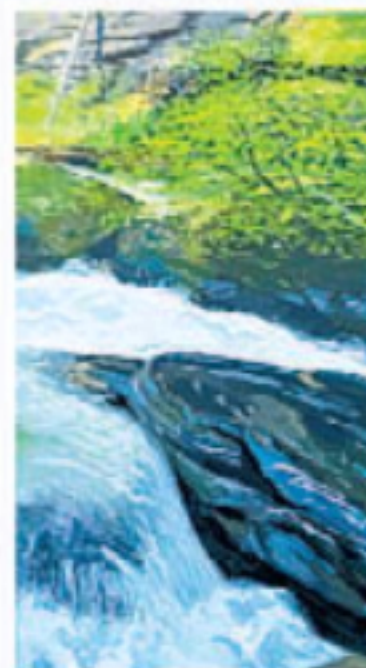
Drawn to realism, Birch delivers his paintings with a twist. "When you first look at Nathan's work, you might feel like you have seen this painting before," says Udell. "But you soon start to realize that he is playing with other ideas — shapes of canvases, scale, depth, a separation of the image into diptychs and triptychs. It is very engaging and quite unorthodox."

Birch paints the edges of the canvas, allowing the eye to glide seamlessly across the gap separating one panel from the next. While some paintings are wedge-shaped, others bend toward the viewer on a folded surface. The effect warps the viewer's perception and alters the way the work is experienced.

"I'm trying to vary anything physical about the painting without detracting from the image. I hope this is a little more honest than typical photorealism. I am reminding you all the time that it's fiction."

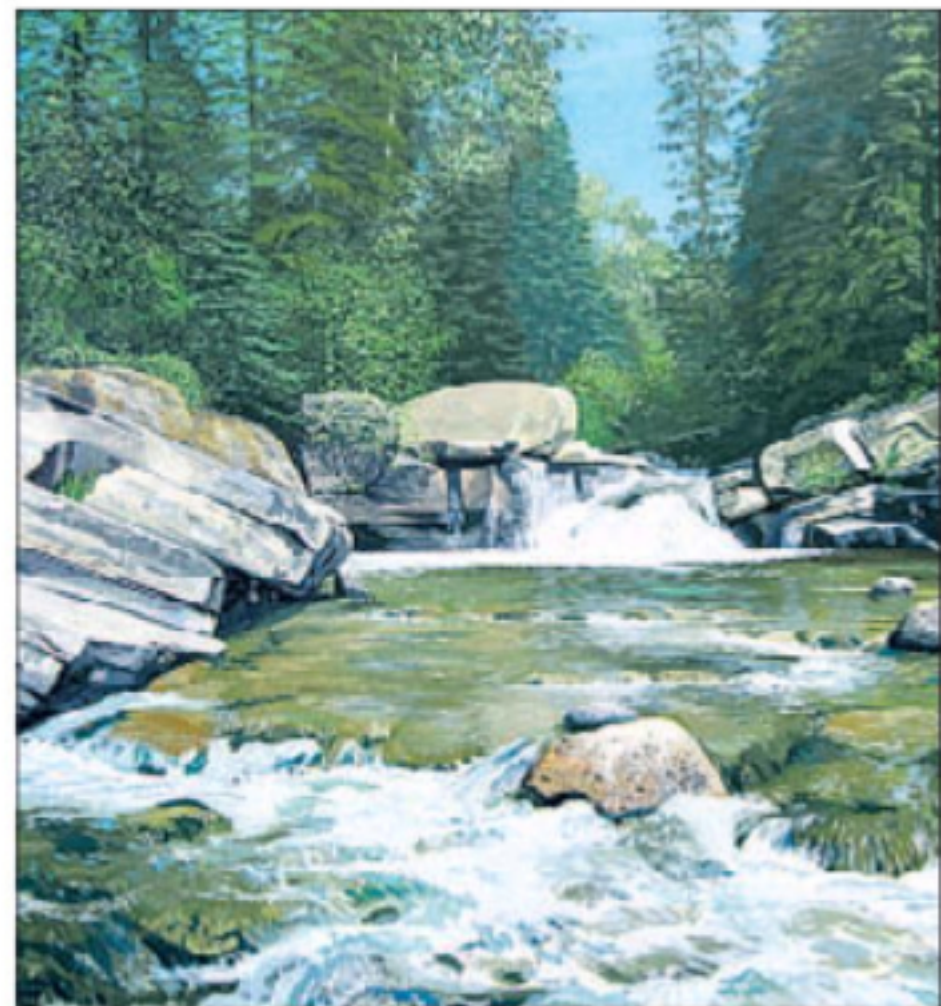
Birch photographed Sutherland Falls near Revelstoke this summer. The sight was dramatic. "My heartrate was going, excited about what I was looking at and really wanting to share that." He liked how the waterfall lent itself to a triptych, done in a falling format down the wall.

What started as an element of practicality — his car couldn't handle a large painting but two smaller diptychs were no problem — evolved into a signature statement.



SUPPLIED

Nathan Birch's triptych of Sutherland Falls cascades down the gallery wall. He plays with the viewer's perception by altering the size and depth of each panel.



SUPPLIED

Birch's acrylic of Coal Creek, a swimming hole outside Fernie, B.C. is painted on a wedge-shaped canvas 1/2 inch on one side and 2 inches on the other, for a unique look.

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