



Janet Werner
Untitled 1996
Oil on canvas 35.6 x 40.6 cm
Photo: Judy Bowyer
Courtesy: artist

Each day it gets harder to reconcile the methods and materials used by contemporary artists with what once was known as the painter's craft. But if "painting" can be taken to mean a surface upon which signifying actions have left their trace, then, without question, Janet Werner and Angela Inglis are both painters.

Inglis, a gifted young artist from Calgary not long out of art school, makes unique work on wooden surfaces built up with paper. Not just any paper, it comes from phone books, newspapers, junk mail, private letters, shredded folding money and novels. The paper Inglis chooses already has a function and a story to tell, but she busies herself obscuring them, returning this culturally inscribed material to a more organic state, one in which texts in printer's ink are reduced to rendering a range of tonalities.

Werner, a painter from Saskatoon, who has been showing for ten years, works on canvas with paint and brushes or on paper with brushes and gouache. Where Inglis counters such an apparently traditional approach, Werner works within the conventions of painting and the formal elements of modernism to challenge them and to declare her difference from them. Drawing, often pictographic, is her métier. One of the strategies that she uses in extending the scope of her work is to hang many paintings, both large and small, together as an installation. In another exhibition some of the same work might reappear, a different meaning in the context of the various new configurations.

Ultimately, Werner aims at finding a more fluid form for painting than as a single object hung on a wall. She turns painting into a series of idiosyncratic objects.

So why even compare the two artists? The inspired pairing of their side-by-side solo exhibitions at the Southern Alberta Art Gallery made the answer to this question seem obvious. They both share a fascination with language and the way it gives shape to the world. Looking at Inglis's odd, beautiful, tactile paper objects, language is a constant murmur, a force akin to wave action, a quantity or a topography. Werner's weightless, crudely eloquent line drawings, adrift on thin, scrubby colour, remind us that images were the *first* language.

For both artists, language is the stuff of every day with which we broach the uncertainties of the universe. It is a medium to negotiate and one to be negotiated with. ■

by NANCY TOUSLEY



Angela Inglis
untitled (titled) 1996
Advertising flyers on wood 30.5 x 30.5 cm
Photo: Brad Uphill
Courtesy: artist

First Language