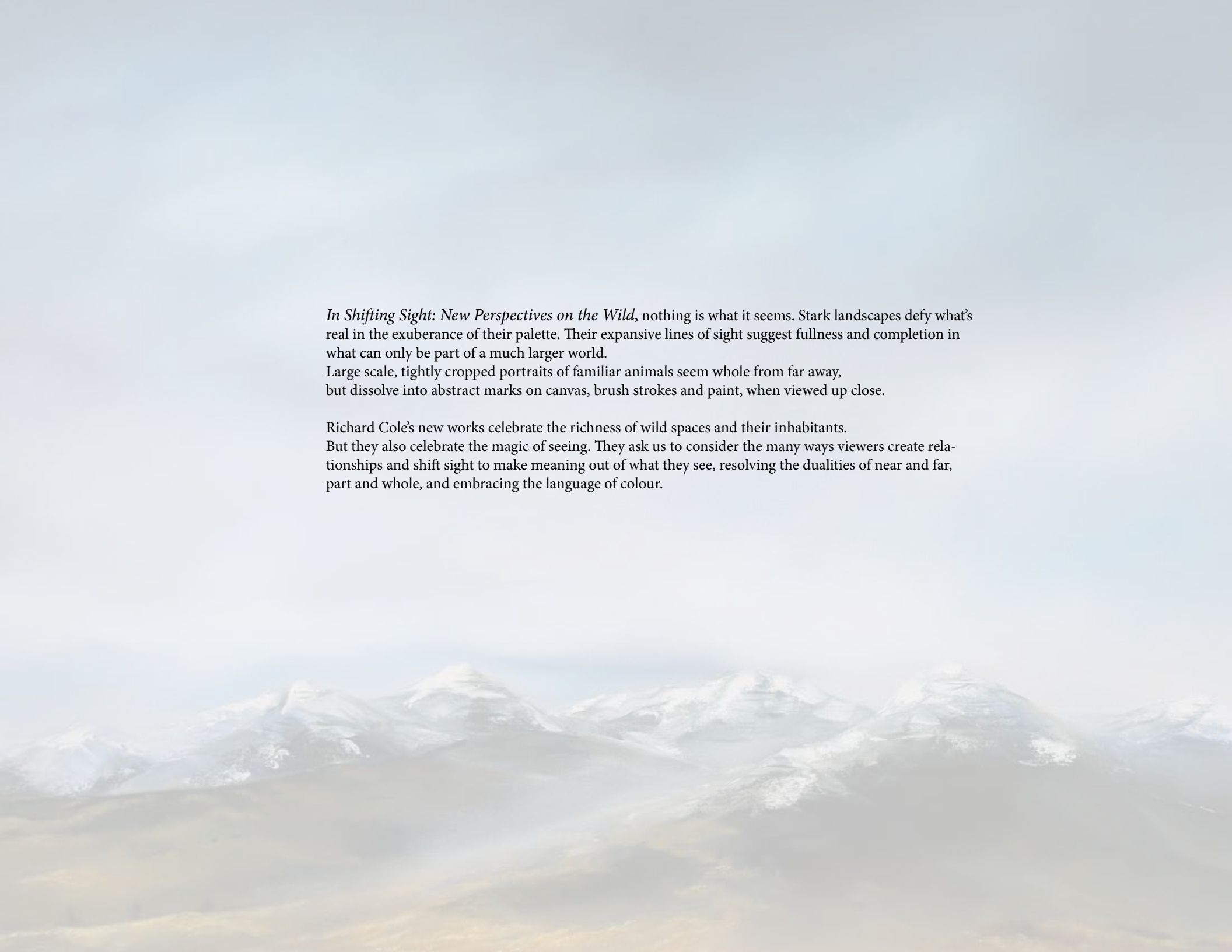




Richard Cole

*Shifting Sight:
New Perspectives on the Wild*

A misty, mountainous landscape with snow-capped peaks and a hazy sky. The foreground shows rolling hills in shades of brown and green, leading up to a range of mountains. The peaks are covered in snow and partially obscured by a thick layer of mist or fog. The sky is a pale, overcast blue-grey.

In Shifting Sight: New Perspectives on the Wild, nothing is what it seems. Stark landscapes defy what's real in the exuberance of their palette. Their expansive lines of sight suggest fullness and completion in what can only be part of a much larger world.

Large scale, tightly cropped portraits of familiar animals seem whole from far away, but dissolve into abstract marks on canvas, brush strokes and paint, when viewed up close.

Richard Cole's new works celebrate the richness of wild spaces and their inhabitants. But they also celebrate the magic of seeing. They ask us to consider the many ways viewers create relationships and shift sight to make meaning out of what they see, resolving the dualities of near and far, part and whole, and embracing the language of colour.

Richard Cole work celebrates the vast spaces of Alberta's prairielands and the unexpected beauty of BC's wild spaces, sometimes across the expanse of a canola field in bloom or down the long view of a reach of the Fraser River framed by trees and sky. But his work also celebrates small moments: bright poppies against dull grasses, the textures of bark, the promise of clouds.

Change and movement are captured by Richard's brush in dramatic ways, including the massing of clouds against rocky peaks, or the trail of a storm in prairie grass. But so too are stillness and hush -- the quiet surface of a river channel that hints at the power below, or the moment of calm just before sunrise.

"I am inspired by the wonders of the changing landscape," Richard says. "And I try to paint the intangible -- the ever-changing light in the sky, the smell of the weather before a storm, or the movement of the air around you."



Exhibition at Canada House Gallery in Banff, Alberta, Canada, March 28th, 2015



Barley field
54" x 84"
oil on canvas

I have not painted animals since I was first learning to paint thirty years ago. But over the last few years, my landscape paintings have been asking me who lives in the environments I paint. My journey started with this owl and an attempt to get beyond the symbolism it represents to many of us. I wanted to portray the owl as an interesting individual, a character in its own right.

This tree diptych was created by imagining my great horned owl perched on a branch. The red dogwood branches and dried grasses compliment the palette used on the owl.



Tree
Oil on canvases
36" x 24" each



Great Horned Owl
Oil on canvas
36" x 54"

Colour. I love working with colour.

I like to look at its subtleties rather than its bold statements. I am intrigued by pairings and by the emergence of the unexpected through colour. The animals in this series are built by challenging the logic of colour and our perceptions of what is appropriate.

This snowy owl was created from a children's paint colour I fell in love with. I painted the canvas this blue-green first, and sculpted the owl with light. The clouds in the landscape are done the same way, by recognizing the light within, and making a physical space for it to emerge.



Snowy Owl
Oil on canvas
36" x 36"



Tundra
Oil on canvas
36" x 54"

The hawk is such a powerful, awe-inspiring image that I wondered if I could paint it without its loaded references. I wondered if I could create an individual.

I began with an honest approach, concentrating on his eye. I hoped that if I could create an eye that has life in it, that catches the light just right, the painting would come alive, speak for itself.



Hawk
Oil and silver leaf on canvas
36" x 36"

I have worked on the foothills of Alberta as a theme for many years, always reaching for something not seen before, not noticed.

In this painting, I didn't use reference material, just depended on layerings of brush strokes, careful glazing, and detail work. Some paintings emerge quickly with confidence and clear direction.

"Foothills" is one such painting.



The Foothills
Oil on canvas
36" x 36"



Spotted Owl
Oil on canvas
48" x 54"

The spotted owl is a small tree owl that lives in old-growth forests. When painting this little guy, my challenge was scale. He is only 17 inches tall in real life. I wondered what I could do if I put him on a 48 inch canvas.

Suddenly his eyes were big enough to create detail within the orb of their reflection. At this scale, brush strokes become calculated relationships with colour.

Forest
Oil on canvas
48"x 36"



I have painted the Three Sisters mountains a number of times over the years. It is another iconic subject matter captured by artists and photographers thousands of times over the last century.

My challenge is to render the view with fresh perspective, to bring something new to the already seen. Mountains are still, and massive, so I try describe them in detail, and then bring the presence of changing weather to their mass, adding life and atmosphere to their brooding stillness.



Three Sisters
Oil on canvas
40" x 28"

The careful balance between the labour of technique and the forgiving nature of paint is always a challenge.

I tried to play with the margins of this balancing act in "Great Horned Sheep". I worked his horns with thick paint, my palette knife, various washes, and small detail brushes. I worked and reworked this area many times, gradually building it up, gradually describing its detail.

To create his fur, I did the opposite. I worked freely, letting the paint drip and splatter. The contrast between free and restrained expression gives, I hope, interest and depth to the experience of viewing "Great Horned Sheep."



Great Horned Sheep
Oil on canvas
40" x 40"



“Fox” and “Sky” are both created with the same inspirational palette that challenges conventions of wild spaces and animals.

Reds, oranges and yellows stand forward while purples, blues, and grays drop in space.

Sky
Oil on canvas
36” x 36”



Red Fox
Oil on canvas
36" x 42"

I started this painting by working the layers of colour that make up the background as an investigation of the colour of the jackrabbit's fur.

With the background out of the way, my next job was to invent a rabbit. I chose blue as my highlight colour and poppy red for the ear. I love how the colours play in this painting and in the associated landscape created from the same palette.



Hare
Oil on canvas
36" x 36"



Poppies
Oil on canvas
36" x 36"

Cattails, weeds, marsh grasses. I am inspired by these simple plants. I think I like them because they are everywhere and are never really noticed. By drawing attention to them, I can see how they interact with their context. They are a good way to describe wind, weather and atmosphere.



Cattails
Oil on canvas
48" x 32"

“Bison” is painted with dioxide purple and cadmium orange. Up close, these two colours stand apart from each other, but far away, the viewer’s eyes blend them together, creating brown.

As I worked this celebration of colour, I was pleased how naturally the bison’s personality came to life.



Bison
Oil on canvas
48" x 48"

Fictional compositions vs. photo reference. I take hundreds of photographs. When I hike, walk with my kids, or go on holiday my camera is always clicking. When these photos come into the studio, I never copy them, not matter how good they are. Instead, I find using bits of them in a total composition works better. Creating my own compositions somehow gives a more honest approach.



Meadow
Oil on canvas
36" x 24"



Spirit Bear
Oil on canvas
36" x 36"



Canola
Oil on canvas
24" x 36" each



The vast spaces of Alberta's prairielands are something to celebrate. They are a theme I return to often, sometimes in memory, and sometimes with my camera. Paintings such as this canola field are a homecoming for me.

Canola
Oil on canvas
32" x 63"

I love large scale. To work on canvases that are bigger than me just feels right. With large paintings, my work becomes gestural as I am able to use big brushes and my whole arm to paint. They are freer and carry their own kind of atmosphere.

This river painting is inspired by my home. I live near the Fraser River, and walk by it daily. Observing the change of seasons is a source of ongoing inspiration.



River
Oil on canvas
54" x 84"



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