

## CYNTHIA CHAPMAN: FAST RUNNER

In Cynthia Chapman's "Target Practice" painting of 2022, she uses differently-sized strokes of colour which vibrate in their relationship with each other – blue against white, red against blue, and orange against green, ranging from lighter colours at upper left to darker colours at lower right so that the colours resonate and burst in a showery path of surging movement, as Chapman knew when she titled the work. The result is colour magic: the colours seem like chords as though taking part in a thrilling piece of music. But this is not all that is going on in her work. Everywhere in this show, her paintings are dynamic variations on a theme of interwoven colour and vibrancy: look at "Mower" for instance, with its back-and-forth movement. Visually arresting, with its colours of green, yellow, white and red, it commands attention, as all her works do, be they large or small, from their compelling sense of activity, of animation which varies with each of her subjects.

When Chapman paints she works spontaneously. One touch of the canvas leads to another, perpetuating itself. Each colour supports the next. Some of her paintings are a journey to themselves. They are harder to do, yet satisfying when they are finished. She can never tell what the process is going to result in – sometimes, it's the smaller works which are gems in the end. When the process is over, hopefully, she's done a home run. Her intention is to create the pure presence of colour – and of course that is what she does.

Chapman graduated from the Ontario College of Art in 2002 but even before that garnered attention on the Toronto arts scene, receiving her first solo show in 2001 at the Here and Now Gallery, and in 2004, finding a home at the prestigious Moore Gallery at 80 Spadina Avenue, where she first engaged with the paintings of Jean Paul Riopelle on a personal and technical level. Since then, she has had numerous shows at the Moore Gallery until it closed in 2011. Since 2019, she has shown with the 13<sup>th</sup> Street Gallery in St. Catharines.

An important mentor of hers, Ron Martin, for whom she once worked as a studio assistant, wrote of her in 2011 that she might well be what his former dealer Carmen Lamanna described as a "fast runner" among artists, that is, an artist who surmounts the problems of art today and outpaces other contenders. A senior peer of Chapman's, Martin was recognizing with these words the signal importance of her work. He would have responded to its monumental Modernist statement of clarity and sureness as well as its delight in colour, so much a feature of his own paintings. He would have seen her work for what it is and sensed what it would become.

The words of a fellow artist are proof, if any are needed, of the special distinction of the Chapman's work. Artists are not known for complementing the work of others. They only do it when it has taught them something or when they recognize an artist's importance which they, with their knowledge of art, are sure to know.

Chapman's show at the 13<sup>th</sup> Street Gallery is in its own way, daring. It offers a rich moment to indulge in colour and the effect of joy it can have on the viewer, if properly handled. Her work is gaining not only in stature but in size. In the fall of 2021, she completed three huge commissions - one of which was the largest painting she has created to date, eight feet by almost twelve feet – and she has plans to go even bigger. But it is a reflection of her ease with the medium that she can concentrate the brilliance of her larger works into a smaller size, creating canvases with an equally extravagant palette. In the uncertainties of post-pandemic life, she offers certainties, emphasizing intuition over concept to make some of the most riveting paintings of her career.

**Joan Murray, 2022, Art Historian, Author, Curator**