

# Martha Eleen / INTO THE 905: THE VIEW FROM THE CAR

## ARTIST'S STATEMENT

The 905 in the title refers to the telephone area code of the suburbs surrounding Toronto. My relationship to the suburbs has always been one of a passer-by in a car, looking over the highway barricades as the modern buildings rearrange themselves under the vast sky. The familiar landmarks, so ordinary and impersonal that we hardly notice them, become through repetition the significant symbols of our time: the ever present Canadian flags, big box malls with big parking lots, modern churches, barns, and subdivisions. The car is the connector between the domestic, commercial, and industrial zones.

The next stage of this project concerns the domestic realm. Initially I was interested in the shock of the large subdivisions as seen from the road: the geometric patterns of rooftops circling cul de sacs, the impersonal facades composed of garages, and the wasteland of treeless construction sites. But it is impossible to ignore the cultural diversity of the new neighbourhoods growing on the outskirts of Toronto. North of "Canada's Wonderland" there is a subdivision called Peace Village built around a mosque. The inhabitants are devout Ahmadiyya Muslims, a branch of Islam; many are refugees from Pakistan, where they were persecuted by religious extremists.

My recent paintings of Peace Village were produced during a two-month artist residency this spring. *Peace Village*, consists of about 55 paintings (oil on wood, 16" x 16" and 24" x 24") related to each other thematically: the houses, the mosque, the surrounding landscape, the fabrics of the women's clothing – religious restrictions prohibit portraiture of women – and portraits of children in prayer postures. These paintings represent the second part to the series *Into the 905: The View From the Car*, where multiple images (oil on wood, 12" x 12") express time and motion through observation of changes in point of view and condition of light.

I fell into a relationship with the inhabitants of Peace Village simply because I was painting in their public spaces and it happens that in this community, because of the religious and cultural practices, there is a lot of participation in public life. As well, against of the backdrop of recent international wars, fear of multiculturalism, and a

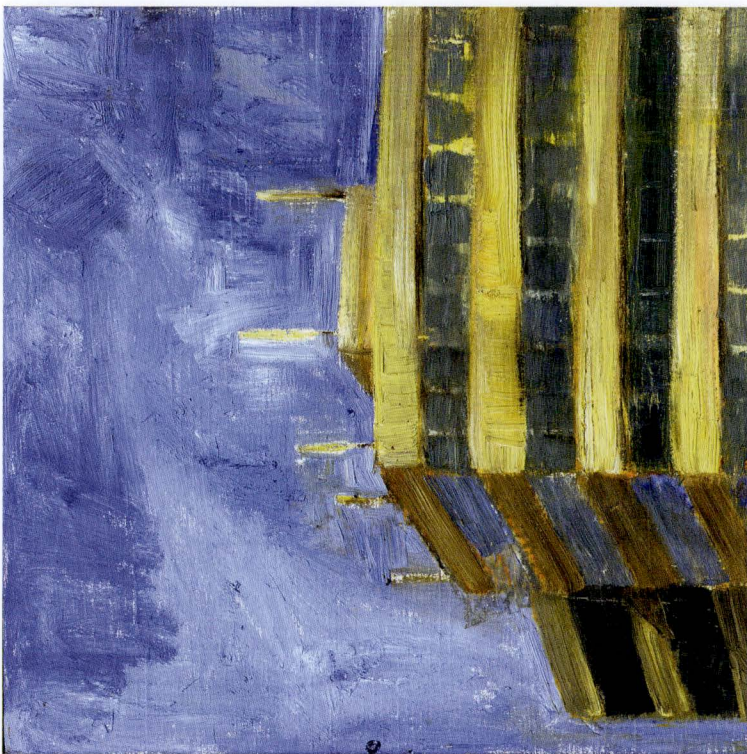
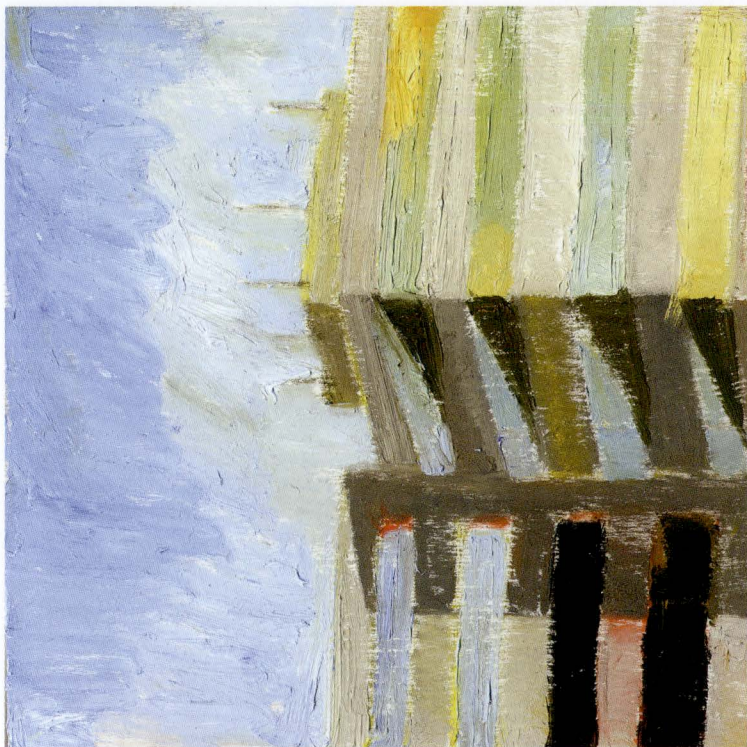
growing level of mistrust between Muslims and non-Muslims, my residency there was recognised by the leadership of the mosque as an opportunity to promote understanding of diversity through art.

My practice integrates formal observational painting, *en plein air*, with non-traditional subject matter and contemporary conceptual concerns. I am especially interested in bringing forward aesthetic and political aspects of my surrounding culture that are normally overlooked or misunderstood, but become interesting through observation of the fall of light on surfaces, the placement of forms in space, and of colours, natural and artificial. These concerns are as much a part of the meaning of my paintings as are the functions of these forms.







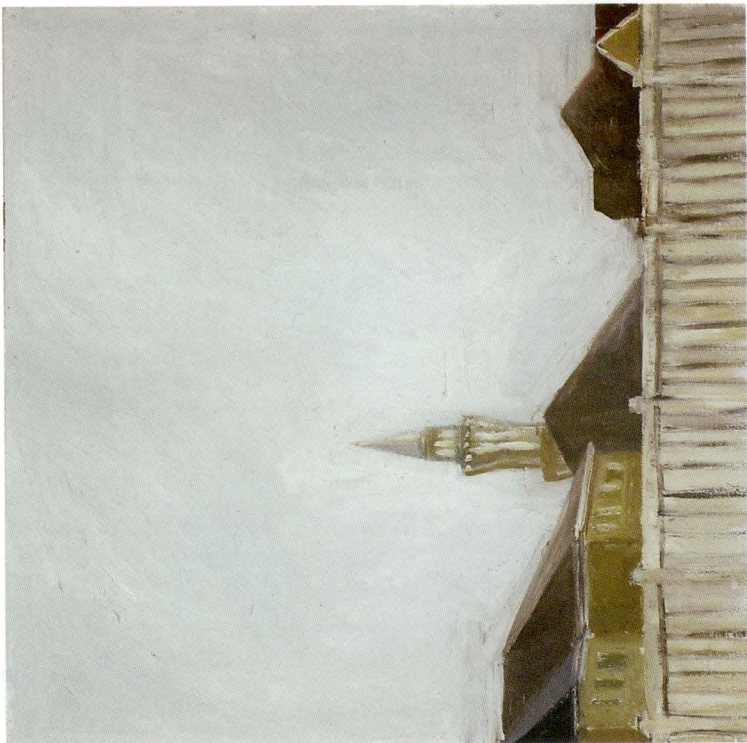


























# LIST OF WORKS

## INTO THE 905: THE VIEW FROM THE CAR

1. Hydro Towers #5 / Thorn Cliff #1  
12"X12"
2. Spring in Scarborough #2 / Spring in Scarborough #5  
12"X12"
3. Pickering Bridge #6 / Pickering Bridge #8  
12"X12"

### *Peace Village*

4. Hwy 400 #1 / Fazia Mehdi Park  
16"x16"
5. Ahmadiyya Avenue / Teston Road #1  
16"x16"
6. Abdus Salam #2 / Zafarullah Khan Crescent  
16"x16"
7. Mosque Gate #2 / Bai'tul Islam Mosque #1  
16"x16"
8. Beauty of Hijaab #2 / Beauty of Hijaab #8  
16"x16"

All paintings are oil on wood