

DAVID SORENSEN

Between Zenith and Nadir

A Peek at the MAJ Collection

David Sorensen's paintings draw their essence mainly from the natural phenomena that are associated with light, the horizon, colours, and the configuration of the landscape, but also from other inspiring sources like architecture and the cultures of the pre-Columbian era. Imbued with the nature of British Columbia, where he was born, and of Mexico, which he later regularly frequented, Sorensen's art is grounded in his deep knowledge of art and his relationships to different locales. On occasion, he would begin paintings in Mexico only to drive them across the continent to finish them in Québec, after the province had become his permanent anchor point in 1966. Ever mobile, Sorensen personifies the zenith-nadir, the vertical axis that links the point above our head to its opposite beneath our feet. Perpendicular to this verticality are the terrestrial and celestial horizons that evolve with the changing landscape and the advancement of day into night.

Sorensen's large-scale paintings—visual environments in themselves—immerse us in imagery that invites contemplation; their essential elements are transmitted as an intimate impression and recollection of a lived and felt

environment. In 1959, he discovered colour field painting, an abstract style that grew out of New York City during the 1940s and is characterized by large fields of colour. In the early 1970s, Sorensen integrated this influence into his pictorial practice, focusing it on the luminosity and warmth of the Mesoamerican environment. He described how he enjoyed spending time on the roof of his house in Mexico, with ample cushions and a good book at hand, slowly awakening to observe the surrounding flora and ambient light.

The three works by Sorensen presented here, and an additional one on the second floor in the permanent collection exhibition, belong to his first two decades of production as a painter, a change of course after having studied to become an architect or a sculptor. Two of these paintings were presented in Montréal in 1974 as part of his first solo painting show at Espace 5, an event that had an immediate impact on his artistic trajectory. That same year, he bought land in the Eastern Townships and began converting an old barn—the property’s sole building—into a luminous studio. His *modus operandi* and *vivendi* became stabilized once he began teaching in 1981, which he continued to do until 2000.

Julie Alary Lavallée, Curator of Collections

DAVID SORENSEN

Vancouver, Colombie-Britannique, 1937 – Montréal, Québec, 2011

1. *Stripes*, 1974

Oil on canvas, 91.2 x 79 x 3 cm

Gift of Guy and Jeanne De Repentigny

1983.055

1973 marks the year of Sorensen's passage from sculpture to painting. During a long trip to Mexico in 1973 and 1974, he developed a series of work based on light that featured the interaction of multiple coloured lines and planes. As evidenced in *Stripes*, the series takes shape around side-by-side horizontal lines against a saturated and luminous orange background. Reminiscent of a landscape, the work demonstrates the poetic influence of abstract painter Mark Rothko on Sorensen's practice at a time when Op Art was in vogue in Québec.

2. *Corner Series No 1*, 1984

Oil on canvas, 170.5 x 128 x 5 cm

Anonymous gift

1991.007

Considered to be an important series in his career, which had reached its full pictorial maturity, *Corner Series* represents the balance between contemplative and constructed space. The work becomes the receptacle of an asymmetrical structure compartmentalized into coloured areas. The canvas's structure is concentrated in the bottom right corner, while colour is freed from its representational and symbolic role. In this series, a vertical and inverted letter "L" hovers over two or three short vertical stripes. Weightless and perfectly balanced, these structural elements convey order, but also a kind of freedom through their gestural and expressive treatment.

3. *Basho's Jump*, 1987

Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 189.6 x 123.5 x 4.5 cm

Gift of Yvan Landry

1992.010

Beginning in 1984, Sorensen produced a variety of colour field configurations that emanated a perfect balance between order and intuition. *Basho's Jump* is divided by a sinuous diagonal line. A rectangle, the characteristic motif of his *Corner Series*, is visible in the upper right corner. Coloured areas painted with a palette knife appear creamy and thin, but also quite expressive. The lines that make up the painting's structure and the blending of white into his colours brings to mind both Mexican buildings and the wintry countryside of Québec.

FLOOR PLAN

3rd floor in the hallway

Espace 3^e étage

