



Contingent Bodies:  
Metamorphosis in the moment

## Description

# Brigitta Kocsis' art captures the relationship between body, mind, and society

By Willow Loveday Little

**Brigitta Kocsis'** upcoming solo exhibition at Galerie d'art d'Outremont, from **January 10 to March 3, 2019**, captures the relationship between body, mind, and society through a balance of abstraction and figuration.

Does it get more meta than discussing creative process with an artist whose work hinges upon the exploration of just that?

That's what I found myself doing on a Monday evening with Brigitta Kocsis, a Hungarian-Canadian artist whose upcoming show, ***Contingent Bodies***, is a visually charged reconstruction of figure and paint, addressing the implications of the structure and theory of the painting process. "I seek to challenge the 'shoulds' of painting," she explains, "and to say no. I'm going to go in the opposite direction." The interplay between figuration and abstraction defines *Contingent Bodies*.



BK0215 by Brigitta Kocsis

Kocsis, the recipient of a number of prestigious grants and awards, deftly balances bodies in various states of undress within a spectrum of realism and abstract art. Yet the clothed, semi-robed, and nude people that populate her paintings are not the extent of it. The canvas, too, disrobes for the viewer through washes of colour and loosely geometrical shapes, both taking up space within the canvas and occasionally “clothing” the figures. Frequently, one form blends into another.

That Kocsis can conjure to mind words like “mechanical,” “organic,” and “imaginary,” all from a single painted foot, speaks to her skill as an artist.

I find my eye drawn to one of Kocsis' latest pieces, a large canvas titled *BK2812*. Within, a cluster of women lean into each other, their bodies on display for the viewer. Except they aren't. At least, not how you might think. Their forms have been broken down: a realistic torso is paired with a leg framed in white paint like a chalk outline at a crime scene, while one woman “wears” an almost opaque blot of pale green as if it were a post hoc correction made to the piece, the painter's equivalent of *White-out* over a misspelled word. One leg ends in a prosthetic fitted with a satin ballet slipper.

That Kocsis can conjure to mind words like “mechanical,” “organic,” and “imaginary,” all from a single painted foot, speaks to her skill as an artist. She subverts the viewer's gaze, forcing us to consider the hybrid body – and the canvas – in all stages of process. This is art that captures metamorphosis in the moment.



BK2364 by Brigitta Kocsis

But the bodies aren't the only forms to consider. Paint drips, echoes of earlier layers within the canvas, and setting blocked in like the early stages of a work-in-progress vie for attention. Together, they create an atmosphere of contamination and displacement that challenges the viewer. There is also that recurring tension between the organic and the artificial. The natural world claims the canvas; green moss grows over abstract shapes sutured together like collage, transforming them into rubble. Magnolia blossoms unfurl in the foreground, their pink buds unfolding in various stages of flowering. Some blooms are crudely outlined, others realistically detailed, others still stamped with indigo brushstrokes. Yet there is something industrial to the austere grey shapes lingering in the painting which reminds of steel and concrete. It is a balance.

'Art that is both journey and destination: the final product and a visual documentation of the process that led to the result.'

Kocsis' approach to painting is backwards, and I don't mean that as a slight. She begins with the figure then builds up and breaks down elements of the painting until it feels right. Kocsis likens this process to musical improvisation. "Like how musicians play with notes until the form emerges and takes shape," she explains. The result? Art that is both journey and destination: the final product and a visual documentation of the process that led to the result.

Arguably, Kocsis is undergoing a journey and a destination herself. A distinguished artist, she now resides in our very own Boulevard Saint-Laurent. She began her journey learning how to draw at an early age in Budapest.

After moving to the UK, Kocsis learned English in Brixton, then came to Montreal in 1990 to study Fine Arts at Concordia University. She graduated with a BFA from the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2005.



Detail from BK2812 by Brigitta Kocsis

Kocsis exhibits nationally and internationally with ateliers in both Vancouver and Montreal. No newcomer to the art scene, her work has appeared in group and solo exhibitions worldwide, including the Geneva Art Biennale; the Balassi Institute, Szeged University, Harcourt House, Burnaby Art Gallery, and the Grunt Gallery. Her approach draws on the works of contemporary artists formulating new perspectives around painting traditions, like Rosa Loy, Neo Rauch, and Albert Oehlen, as well as those dealing with confrontational representations of the female body, such as Kati Hack and Jenny Seville.

In a world obsessed with sharing perfect, pristine images over social media with audiences that see this as the new norm, Kocsis' paintings force us to acknowledge that there are other perspectives of value that need to be considered. Through their visual dissonance, they challenge the viewer to confront the expectations of conventional abstraction and figuration. But more than that, the drip marks, translucent clouds-that-may-not-be-clouds and palimpsestic glimpses of earlier layers veiled beneath coats of paint ask us to reflect on our own ideas of what art is.

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Beholding a Kocsis painting is a paradoxical experience: you are at once the viewer observing the painting and the observed subject, challenged by the disembodied closeness of the figures’ gazes – whether aware of or ignorant to your presence – and the sense of detachment created by the abstract, pieced-together atmosphere.

It’s cerebral and visceral. it’s naked and covered. And overall, as the title reveals, it’s a body of work that is contingent. “Contingent,” meaning “occurring or existing only if certain circumstances are present,” applies to Kocsis’ process and the figures in her painting, of course. Yet the title is also, perhaps, an invitation to the viewer to be the something on which Kocsis’ bodies depend. What experiences will inform your viewing of *Contingent Bodies*? What will you come away with?

Don’t miss ***Contingent Bodies***, Brigitta Kocsis’ Montreal premiere from **January 10 to March 3, 2019**

at Galerie d’art d’Outremont, 41 Saint-Just, Montreal.

Vernissage: **Thursday, January 10, 2019** from 5 pm to 8 pm

Feature image: *BK2812* by Brigitta Kocsis

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