

## Night Moves

**Mara Korkola** has become a creature of the night. She feeds her art by getting in a car and taking nocturnal photographs of the cities in which she lives—in the last five years: San Antonio and Toronto. These photos are the source for a body of small, utterly compelling oil paintings that carry on a bright romance with the dark.

Her first subjects in San Antonio, where she was doing graduate work, were multiples of houses painted at dusk

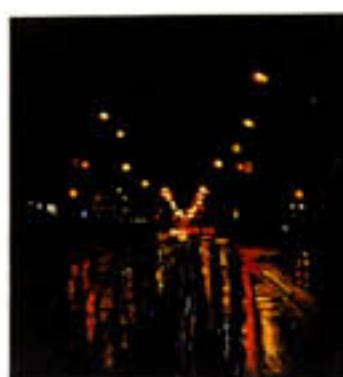
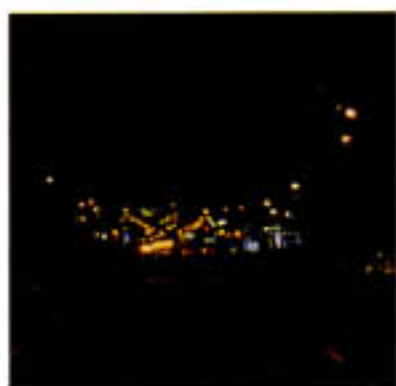
bottom right: Mara Korkola, *No place 64*, 2003, detail, oil on two wood panels, 7 3/4 x 7 1/2" each. Photographs: Brian Pitz. Mara Korkola is represented by Lonsdale Gallery, Toronto, and Douglas Udeil Gallery, Edmonton and Vancouver.



because she liked the stillness and the silence at that time of the day." The houses were similar to the ones in the gold-mining town in northern Ontario where I grew up and the light was the symbol of the lives being lived inside."

The work changed when she moved back to Canada. The Victorian houses she encountered were grander and more detailed and she again sought the night because it permitted her to obliterate those details. "I went out in search of subjects that were more humble, more everyday, and that's when the 'Highway' paintings started. It began to be more about the journey than the place. The 'Highway' paintings have themselves evolved. "Right now it's about density of light in the distance. I love the ones with the wet surfaces."

The paintings are becoming more abstract and more elaborate. Some look like necklaces of coloured lights in the distance; others, like fireworks going off in the night sky. In *No place 64* the structure of the painting puts us in mind of what, in our most optimistic moments, we would like space to be: an inhabitable, concentrated flotation of welcoming lights. Korkola's paintings are paradoxical; they are no place in particular, and yet they are familiar. As the name of the series implies, they are utopias, wished-for places that don't actually exist.



But how they exist is readily apparent. Korkola is as much a champion of her chosen medium—"it's always oil, it's buttery and just feels so good going on"—as she is of the range of painters she admires—J.M.W. Turner, Giorgio Morandi, Rackstraw Downes, Luc Tuymans, Gerhard Richter, Vija Celmins and Chuck Close. "His most recent paintings—oh my god—they're so incredible. They're highly representational and yet they're completely abstract. You can stare at them, salivating at the way he puts paint on. I really appreciate beautiful painting. It goes back to the way I was trained. Technical skill isn't an end in itself but it certainly will carry your imagery a lot better. I love to paint. People who don't care about paint application or being technically adept probably don't enjoy the process as much. I'll catch myself smiling while I paint—it just feels so good." ■



## BORDER views

top right: Mara Korkola, *No place 61*, 2003, oil on two wood panels, 6 5/8 x 7 1/2" each.

top left: detail.

middle right: Mara Korkola, *No place 51*, 2002, oil on three wood panels, 5 1/2 x 5" each.

lower right: detail.

lower left: *No place 64*, 2003, oil on two wood panels, 6 5/8 x 7 1/2" each.