



MARA KORKOLA *No place* 2001 Oil on wood panel 20.3 x 14 cm

## Mara Korkola

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LONSDALE GALLERY, TORONTO

Open highways, urban freeways, a roadside view of darkening fields: the new paintings of Mara Korkola are small, intimate views of big spaces. Displayed singly or in series of up to eight, the oil-on-panel works, none larger than 5 1/2 by 8 inches, show glimpses of roads most of us have travelled. A car approaches and speeds by another driver, another destination, another history passing in the opposite direction. One series situates the viewer along a side street looking into the back of the neighbours' houses. Lights are on; it's dusk, but the signs of life are distant and out of focus.

This sense of isolation is accentuated by Korkola's palette, which is dominated by the solemn colours of dusk and night and industrial lighting. She uses colour to create intense contrasts of dark woods against the last light of day, an apartment building's lights dappling the near-black night, the confusion between the glow of the city and the glow of the sun just set.

One of the most appealing aspects of this show is Korkola's willingness to use black so directly in creating landscape. Her approach seems aligned with Alfred Leslie's *100 Views Along the Road*, a series of black-

and-white watercolours of empty US highways, of which Leslie said, "...I used black as a color, not its absence; black as the carrier of light, not its executioner." With Korkola, black is used to intensify her primary colours, making them carriers of distant house lights and approaching headlights.

These compact paintings require that the viewer get up close and focus on detail. While Korkola clearly has used photo references in creating these paintings, she shows no pretence to photorealism. The work is direct and spontaneous. The images do not tell stories so much as meditate on particular moments. They betray no overt desire to become timeless or idealizing. It is work situated in the here and now of familiar retail signs and late-model cars.

Using very familiar sources continues the direction of Korkola's previous series *You Think of Houses*. That series, organized in groups of panels, portrayed humble bungalows and cottages. Variations between individual panels focused attention on the unique details of what were only seemingly generic homes and seemingly generic occupants. Her new work broadens this perspective by rendering the spaces between houses, the common paths to work and shopping.

The artist accepts that contemporary landscape is not nostalgic for some mythic reconciliation with nature. Instead, it encompasses the everyday—telephone wires, strip malls, unnatural light. The cumulative effect of her paintings is a mapping out of the shared experience of distance between one person and another, between one place and another, between what we can see and what is obscured by darkness.

ANDREW JOHNSON