

William Pura

Gallery I.I.I., School of Art, The University of Manitoba

CROSSROADS

November 20-December 15, 1988



COVER:

*Crossroads*, 1986 oil on canvas, 101.5 cm x 152.5 cm

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William Pura

**C R O S S R O A D S**

Gallery 1.1.1.  
School of Art  
The University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada

**I** should like to paint the portrait of an artist friend,  
a man who dreams great dreams,  
who works as the nightingale sings,  
because it is his nature.

Vincent van Gogh  
Arles, 1888

In a musical composition which I once heard performed in Chicago, William Pura created the impression of a cloud by having the pianist literally pound the center of the keyboard with both forearms at once, producing a large chord which floated/echoed through the concert hall. As this sound/form hovered in my memory another more precise passage of music emerged from underneath growing out of, but opposite from, the original form. A very haunting and provocative device.

Writing in the *Kitchener-Waterloo Record* earlier this year Robert Reid observed how Pura's works "...challenge and expand the limits of representational imagery by creating a heightened sense of reality verging on the surreal." In some respects I am reminded of several other twentieth century realists: Edward Hopper and Walter Murch; Edwin Dickinson and Alex Colville. But I am hesitant to group them all too easily into one category. There have been many attempts in the past few years to categorize and thus polarize certain directions such as representation and abstraction in painting. It is more difficult and more rewarding to try and understand how these categories and limits break down and how they eventually overlap. To strict realists I would warn that subject matter without form is only illustration; and to abstract artists I would remind that mere formal concerns without content are meaningless.

In the recent paintings of William Pura such as *Crossroads* and *White House at Night* from 1986, *Five Awnings* from 1987, and *Turquoise House at Night* from this year the foregrounds are aggressive and are forced upon us, they close in and fill up the picture plane as if a door has just been slammed in our face. To proceed further into the space of these paintings would require courage and

persistence on the part of the viewer. This persistence, however, would soon be rewarded for the light in these paintings is harsh but not blinding, the color is intense but not acid, and the surfaces everywhere are rich and invite very close inspection.

The final result of this work is to produce a somewhat disconcerting combination of emotion and intelligence. The light and the edges of all of these images are sharp and produce a sense of restraint and understanding, while the color and the surfaces are intense and expressive and produce a feeling of wonder. Qualities which are traditionally opposite and function so as to blind one and another are here combined in such a way as to provoke and intensify. In the paintings of William Pura we are shown a world caught in the twilight between feeling and knowing, between observation and wonder, and the results are a whole new sense of poetry and precision.

Richard Emery Nickolson  
*Indianapolis, Indiana*  
October 1988



William Pura

## Artist's Statement

With the title *Crossroads* this exhibition affirms the recent reassessment of my work, and clarifies the subject matter, form, and content that have become important to me over the past few years. Many of the works began as views of my immediate environment: glimpses of buildings, foliage, the light and shadows of the different times of the day, or the unusual colours cast from artificial light at night.

Having some sort of political or aesthetic agenda seems to be an important component of most current critical writing. For the most part such an agenda has been of no particular interest to me as an artist. If there is any driving force behind my work it is the visual poetry along with the mood of a place that has kept my explorations vital. Many of the subjects are humble, even banal: they have not been chosen for their picturesque or sentimental quality, indeed, I have often stressed their formal qualities through a more frontal arrangement within the composition. Nor have the transitory effects of Impressionism been of interest. Although many paintings are rooted in a particular time of day, the movement of light and colour or the passage of the seasons have not been significant sources of inspiration. In many situations, the development of the image has involved a kind of stripping away of excess subject matter, reducing the forms to their most essential, and helping to focus all the elements.

For the past 10 years I have worked also as a composer. Initially it was very important for me to understand the relationship between the two art forms, and several important compositions grew out of my investigations. I explored many different kinds of correspondences, letting the visual art dictate certain qualities in the music, and vice versa. Most recently, however, I have been inclined to accept each on their own terms, rather than continuing with mixed media projects. Perhaps the closest connection my most recent music has had with my visual art is a sense of place. For instance, *Black Water* (1986) for violin and piano came out of my yearly visits to northern Manitoba. Other recent works have continued with that approach, where I have searched for the formal means to make subtle references to both a mental and physical space. Ultimately my evolution as an artist has involved



a constant reevaluation of the issues I have found most significant. Looking at and listening to other works has always been important, but trying to understand my own place and time, outside of current fashion or trends, has always produced my most satisfying artworks..

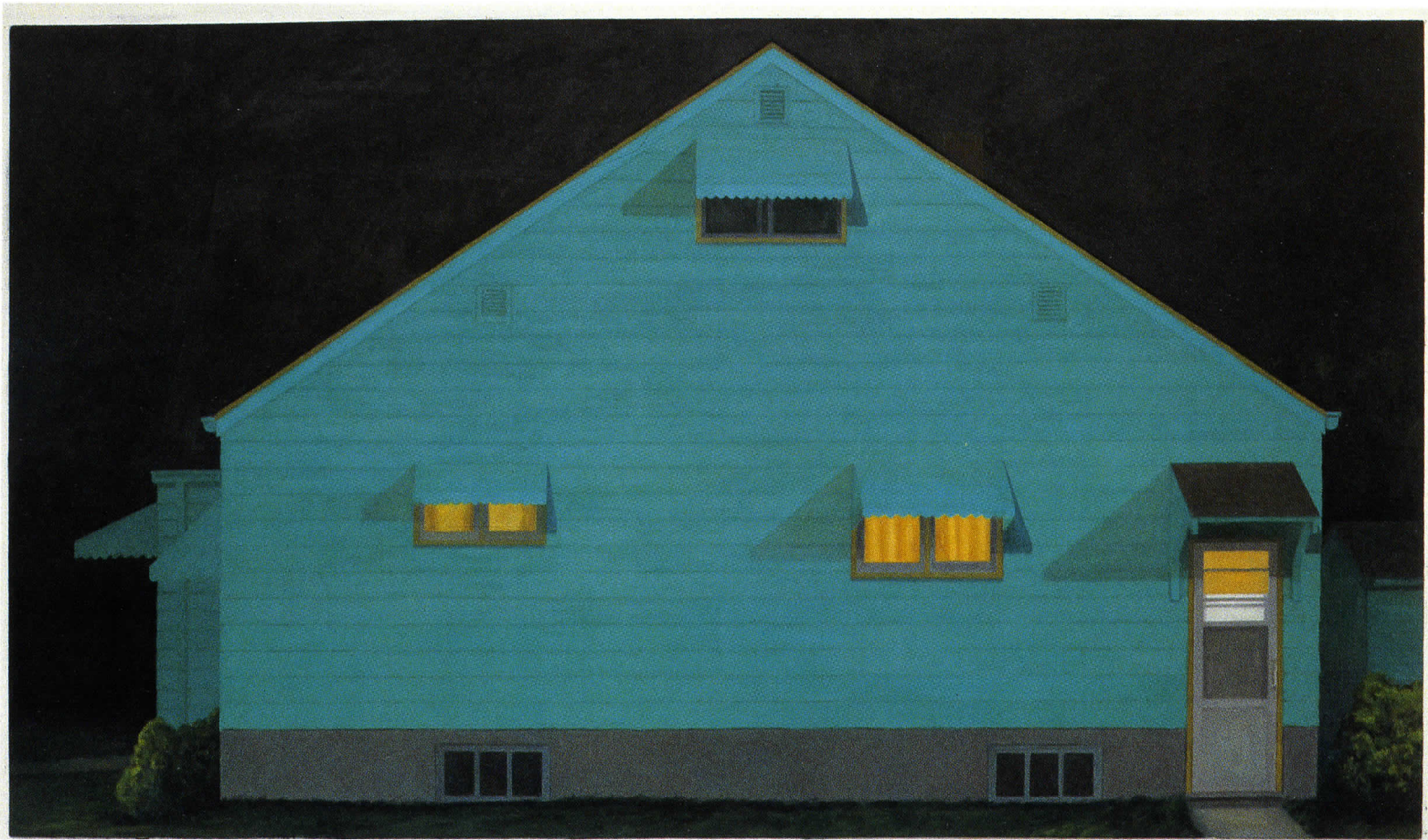


No. 2 *Freedman Crescent*, 1982 oil on canvas 76 cm x 96.5 cm





*Five Awnings, 1987 oil on canvas 127 cm x 216 cm*



*Turquoise House at Night, 1988 oil on canvas 140 cm x 241 cm*



*Awning, Chimney and Cloud, 1987 oil on canvas 101.5 cm x 152.5 cm*

## Biography

### William Pura

Born 1948, currently lives and works in Winnipeg, where he is an Associate Professor at the University of Manitoba. Received a B.F.A. (Honours) from the University of Manitoba in 1970 and an M.F.A. from Indiana University in 1973. Has studied piano, music theory, organ and composition in both Canada and the United States, and is an active composer as well as a visual artist.

### Group Exhibitions:

Canadian Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers, Toronto, 1968.

Mid-Western States Exhibition, Evansville, Indiana, 1970.

United States Information Service Prints for American Embassies, 1973

Canadian Printmakers Showcase, Carleton University, Ottawa, October-November 1974.

Winnipeg Art Gallery, Winnipeg Artists' Invitational Exhibition, Winnipeg, January-April 1975

Manitoba Society of Artists, Winnipeg, March 1975, Honourable Mention

Thomas Gallery, Winnipeg, April 1976

Two-Man Exhibition, School of Art, University of Manitoba, Gallery I.I.I., January 1976

Virginia Beach Art Centre, Hand Held Print Show, May 1979

The Print and Drawing Council of Canada, September 1980 (Opus Frames Materials Purchase Award)

The Drawn and Printed Image: Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago, Illinois, May 19-June 30, 1983

Contemporary Canadian Printmaking—A Group Show Touring Australia, beginning with Queensland, April-May 1985

Two Artist Exhibition—with Diana Pura The Ukrainian Cultural & Educational Centre, Winnipeg, March 15-April 26, 1987

Pan Am Games Exhibition July 31-August 29, 1987  
431 Gallery Indianapolis, Indiana

Two Artist Exhibition—with Diana Pura, Kitchener/Waterloo Centre on the Square, Kitchener, Ontario March 10-April 10, 1988

### One Man Exhibitions:

Gallery Oseredok, The Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, Winnipeg, October 1974

Plug-In, Arthur Street Gallery, December-January 1977-1978

Gallery I.I.I., School of Art, University of Manitoba, October 24-November 14, 1980

Wilfrid Laurier University, January 1982

Senior Common Room, University College, University of Manitoba, March 1982

The Cardigan-Milne Gallery, Winnipeg, February-March 1984

The University of Arkansas Art Gallery, Fayetteville, March 1984

The Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago, Illinois, November-December 1984

The Winnipeg Art Gallery, "Variations", Winnipeg, Manitoba, January-March 1985

### Gallery Affiliations

Uptown Gallery, Winnipeg  
Van Straaten Gallery, Chicago

### Concerts:

IZ Music Concert, The Winnipeg Art Gallery Auditorium, 1981

Manitoba Composers' Association, The Winnipeg Art Gallery Auditorium, November 15, 1982

Beckett and McDonald Musical Art Club, 60th Anniversary Concert, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, September 1983

New Piano Music, 2 Composer Concert with Boyd McDonald, The St. Lawrence Centre, Toronto, November 14, 1983

Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio, November 1, 1984

The Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago, Illinois, November 4, 1984

Variations Concert, The Winnipeg Art Gallery, January 20, 1985

The Manitoba Composers' Association Concert, The Brandon Allied Arts Gallery, April 14, 1985  
Canadian Contemporary Music Workshop, Toronto, Ontario, May 1985

DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, May 8, 1986

The Ukrainian Institute of Modern Art, Chicago, Illinois, May 11, 1986

SATORI new music festival October 29-  
November 1, 1986 Canadian Chamber Music  
October 30

IZ Music Concert, The West End Cultural Centre, April 5, 1988

### Recordings:

*Black Water* and *Sonata for Solo Violin* with Victor Schultz, violin and Alice Enns, piano  
Augmented Forth records 1988

## List of Works

1. Turquoise House at Night 1988 oil on canvas 55"x 95"	140 cm x 241 cm
2. White House at Night 1986 oil on canvas 63"x 90"	160 cm x 228.5 cm
3. Grain Storage Building 1987 oil on canvas 64"x 64"	162.5 cm x 162.5 cm
4. Five Awnings 1987 oil on canvas 50"x 85"	127 cm x 216 cm
5. Crossroads 1986 oil on canvas 40"x 60"	101.5 cm x 152.5 cm
6. Farmhouse No. 5 1987 oil on canvas 40"x 60"	101.5 cm x 152.5 cm
7. No. 2 Freedman Crescent 1982 oil on canvas 30"x 38"	76 cm x 96.5 cm
8. Untitled 1987 oil on canvas 36"x 50"	91.5 cm x 127 cm
9. Twin Stacks 1986 oil on canvas 48"x 69"	122 cm x 175.25 cm
10. Two Cedars 1987 oil on canvas 38"x 65"	96.5 cm x 165 cm
11. Awning, Chimney, and Cloud 1987 oil on canvas 40"x 60"	101.5 cm x 12.5 cm
12. Night Bus Stop 1988 conte on paper 40"x 60"	101.5 cm x 152.5 cm
13. Two Cedars 1987 conte on paper 19"x 32"	48.25 cm x 81.25 cm
14. Cement Plant 1987 conte on paper 40"x 60"	101.5 cm x 152.5 cm

*Height precedes width*

## Credits

Exhibition Curator: *Dale Amundson*

Catalogue Essay: *Richard E. Nickolson, Associate Professor, Herron School of Art, Indianapolis, Indiana*

Catalogue Photography: Cover: *Ernest Mayer, Photographs of the artist: Ernest Kroeger, Photographs of paintings courtesy of the artist*

Installation Technician: *Tom Wood*

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