

## Montreal artist Antonietta Grassi shares the inspiration for her Edmonton exhibition



Montreal artist Antonietta Grassi lost both of her parents in 2013, and it had a huge impact on her work. She eventually started incorporating geometric forms and structure into her paintings—though her work remained abstract—and while many of her previous paintings had incorporated lines, those in her new work are much more thread-like.

While Grassi was sorting through the things in her parents house, she was also inspired by the obsolete objects she found—such as fax machines and clunky computers—that, she says in her artist statement, were “nevertheless hard to let go of, in part due the relevance they once held in our lives.” All of this has inspired the work shown in her Edmonton exhibition *Contemplation for Obsolete Objects: Postscript*.

Grassi explains that about half of the paintings have been shown before, but the others are being presented to the public for the first time.

“And that’s why I call it *Postscript* is because it’s kind of a continuation of work that I’ve been doing and that I have shown in Montreal,” she says.

Grassi didn’t officially begin working on the subject of obsolescence until 2017, though she says the theme had crept into her work before that time.

“I had been working in that vein, and it was leading up to that, but I had not really articulated it as such,” she says. “I was being inspired and influenced ... by these objects and by these ideas, but I had not quite pinpointed it—I had not labeled it yet.”



“Reboot.” // Antonietta Grassi

Jacek Malec, executive director at Harcourt House, points out that there are nods to Yves Gaucher, Mark Rothko, and Barnett Newman in Grassi’s work. She says that they were definitely artists she studied—in fact she studied as a student of Gaucher at Concordia University in Montreal where she received a BFA—but that all three artists were preoccupied with the universality of the painting and the art object, and that’s not an idea she prescribes to.

Because her process is so intuitive, any individual painting can take years to complete—not because it takes Grassi that long to put paint to canvas, but because the works involve over time and she creates multiple pieces at once. For instance, Grassi worked on “At the Seams” over a period of three years.

“It just started off as shapes, and then it became sort of like these cubist shapes, and then it started to have some lines, and then I put it away, and then I would take it back, and then I started adding more lines,” she says.

The final painting is completely covered in lines, with the earlier layers of the painting still faintly visible underneath.

“It’s probably not the most practical way to go about a painting,” Grassi says of her methods. “But it’s how I need to go about it to get what I want. And so the thing is, if I plan these things they would feel static to me. They wouldn’t have that element of surprise; I’m always looking for an element of surprise.”

