

Toronto Star  
By PETER GODDARD  
Thursday, June 3, 2004 – Page K7

**Palette knife hits ground with a roar**  
**Kristine Moran solo show flies - Paintings evoke past and future**

To hear Jaime Angell tell it, Kristine Moran could not be happier to get her own studio space at 401 Richmond St. starting in July, one of the rewards of receiving the 2004 Painting and Drawing medal at the Ontario College of Art & Design.

"Now she can paint all the time," says Angell. Eventually Moran can even quit her day job as a flight attendant for Air Canada to concentrate entirely on her art. "That's all she wants to do," he adds.

Now, Angell has a vested interest in Moran buckling down to work, with his gallery showing "Trip Wire," Moran's debut solo exhibition. From the number of little red sold stickers already affixed to pieces on the wall, he has a hit on his hands. Actually, we don't need the little red stickers.

Moran's lavishly painted muscle cars crashing and burning across a design universe represent one of the stronger debuts in years. Veteran artists would kill to show off this kind of confidence. Heavy chunks of paint (impasto) hint at improvisation — work done fast, freely and fearlessly, muscle car action for the hand. "I'm totally into impasto," she says. "I'm using a palette knife for those cars that are exploding."

But the looseness is deceptive. The cool sheen of her hard enamel backgrounds pins down these roaring cars in stop-action, like the dark blue sky-without-end in *Unhinged* (2004). The cars are classic media-manipulated bursts of power and destruction, the kind you find in old print ads for cars or in a vintage Arnold Schwarzenegger film like *Total Recall*.

But violence isn't the issue here. The control of the violence is. The various design elements Moran brings into play, the grid-like structures or jags of yellow or white cutting paintings in half, perhaps speak to the three-year course she took in landscape architecture at Ryerson University.

Just as likely, their source can be found in the computer-designed artificial universes in the modern techno-flick or borrowed from Moshe Safdie's mid-1960s design for Montreal's Habitat apartment complex.

To hear Moran tell it, her Air Canada gig is not such a bad thing. Like many other attendants, she's learned to fit a second career into her life. The travel is a plus, too. "I get to see all the great galleries in the world," the 30-year-old artist tells me. She goes on to list the other perks that come with the job, like the work benefits and passes, "where you

jump on a plane and go see a show," she adds. "Flying can be physically tiring. But not mentally."

But her reaction to flying goes deeper. She thinks her flight experience connects directly to her painting, surrounded as she is by high tech designed to give a good old-fashioned sense of comfort and security to the passenger. "The faster things change, the speedier things get, the more we're going to hold on to things from the past," she says. "However futuristic a new building may be, it will probably be beside another one that's older."

But for all the tough talk and hard edges in Moran's show, there's a softness here coming from a kind of nostalgia for the hot action aspects of yore.

In "Trip Wire," '70s-'80s' content — the Pontiac Firebirds and other hot cars Moran's dad loved so much — is played out a '90s digital-like context. No wonder the paintings are so seductive and saleable. The inviting sense of never having seen stuff like this before in fact comes from having seen stuff like this before, it's just not been replayed in your imagination in this way.

Playing with future-nostalgia didn't start with Moran. As the recent "Art Deco 1910-1935" show at the Royal Ontario Museum indicated, we connect much better with a period that shares our modern go-go values than with one that doesn't.

Conversely, if you wrap the future in the past — as George Lucas showed us with Star Wars — it goes down a whole lot easier, particularly with those most likely to be scared of it in the first place.

But Moran's trip back to the future has a lot more to do with painting than with image-manipulation, even though she talks elsewhere about her fascination with violence while wanting to keep some psychological distance from it.

The car-referencing blasts of colour coming off the surface — yes, sometimes the paint is that thick — would seem to be Moran getting the feel for a blast of another sort, where her own creativity lets loose of its past and goes where it wants to go.

When she really does put the pedal to the metal — and "Trip Wire" is not quite there yet — this auspicious debut will come to seem all the more important.

[pgoddard@thestar.ca](mailto:pgoddard@thestar.ca)

*Kristine Moran's Trip Wire runs at the Angell Gallery 890 Queen Street West Wed-Sat, noon to 6 p.m. to June 12*