



In *Urban Portraits* at Harcourt House Artist Run Centre, Edmonton painter Raymond Thériault explores the changing city through carefully composed relationships of architecture, nature, and human presence. His paintings invite slow looking, opening familiar places to

memory, humour, and symbolic possibility. As a painter myself, I was particularly drawn to three works.

In Thériault's oil painting *Left Turn II: The Last Migration*, three women cross the street opposite Edmonton's former Greyhound terminal. Their clothing repeats the red, white, and blue of the company's logos. Their rhythmic movement is echoed in an antlered herd pictured across two framed panels behind them. Contained within the architecture, this migration becomes an image within the image. I see its collective movement as an echo of the journeys the terminal once made possible. At the far right, a woman, a cat, and a suitcase punctuate the scene, gathering its themes of companionship, movement, and departure into one small group.

The title draws these human and animal journeys together. The word "last" lends finality to a scene whose setting has physically disappeared: the terminal was demolished in 2016 to make way for the ICE District redevelopment. For me, the loss reaches beyond the building. Greyhound carried people and packages between small towns and large cities, a network whose continued presence I had taken for granted. Its withdrawal from Canadian domestic service made something dependable feel suddenly fragile: the possibility of leaving, returning, or reaching someone elsewhere. *The Last Migration* carries the weight of journeys that can no longer be made in the same way, if at all.

There is pleasure here, too. Amber light gathers in the terminal windows; subtle modulations of violet and blue animate the pavement. I read this gathering of colour, memory, and gentle invention as an attempt at healing: something loved has disappeared, but painting gives it a continuing presence.

The cats that appear throughout Thériault's work are little commas of happiness and humour. They also reveal his freedom to invent within recognisable places, where an animal, a sign, a repeated colour, or a figure can carry symbolic meaning. Here, the bright sign bearing a cat and a bicycle offers another playful pause. His mastery of colour and tone holds these details together with an apparent effortlessness.

There is comfort in that coherence; we can simply look and feel, discovering meanings at our own pace.

The crosswalk reads almost as a finish line. Its markings and the curved traffic-light poles form a broad enclosure around the scene. The red light and “Do not enter” sign reinforce a sense of arrival at a limit, suggesting the end of an era. Within the gathering dusk, however, the light in the terminal windows also suggests hope: the promise of another day, of a city continuing its journey, learning what to carry forward and what to care for along the way.



As a painter, I am continually drawn to stay longer in front of *Summer Evening Convenience* (2013), an oil on canvas. The subtle modulations of mauve across the wall's simple shape are a lovely meditation. Small shifts of warmth and coolness give this broad surface a quiet richness, inviting the eye to linger. The complementary yellow glow of the single window brings the mauve wall into fuller life. Rectangles recur throughout the composition: in the windows, the telephone booth and its sign, and the machine where the woman stands. These smaller shapes echo the broad wall, creating a quiet geometric play of familiar urban forms.

The light at the entrance and dispensing machine attracts our attention, but the woman standing there gives that invitation its human pull. She sees what we cannot see. Without her, we might remain content to contemplate the wall's colour. With her, we begin to imagine entering. The telephone booth, like the bus terminal in *Left Turn II*, also dates the scene. There is something almost “prehistoric” about this once ordinary convenience, a reminder of how quickly our inventions become relics. To the right, a narrower rectangular opening reveals the softly glowing street, drawing us further into the painting.

For all this human geometry, nature holds the scene together. Along the building's base, a subtle, irregular strip of green seems effortlessly to support its weight. A tree trunk surges upright, framing the broad mauve rectangle, while its foliage softens the architecture's edges. Reflected evening sunlight gives the plain concrete its beauty. Trees almost engulf the middle distance, with glimpses of another building repeating the rectangular forms through the foliage. Nature is the humble main character.

Now the title, *Summer Evening Convenience*, begins to sound like a gentle question. What are we being drawn into, and what follows from accepting its comforts? While nature lends the scene its beauty, the promise of temporary convenience tempts us inside.

One of the first paintings to greet me in the exhibition, *No. 1 Yellow* (2011), an oil on canvas, repeats the numeral of its title in the dollar-store sign. A one-way arrow points right, and the woman at the far left looks in the same direction, encouraging the eye along its familiar reading path. Yet there is too much happening here to simply move straight across. On the yellow wall, shadows construct a lively arrangement of angles and curves, answered by the repeated courses of brick and the balcony's iron railing and ladder above. Reflected colour beneath the balcony adds another shift to this intricate play of light and dark, large and small.



The signs add their own insistent voices. The one-way arrow tells us where to go, while parking restrictions announce where we cannot stay. Gathered together, these everyday commands begin to seem faintly absurd, a clutter of instructions competing with the dollar store's commercial promise. Thériault makes them part of the composition's play of shapes and colours, even as they regulate the life within it. Above the cluster of signs, a small cat perches on the balcony, a fuzzy comma of fun with perhaps a hint of risk, apparently unconcerned with the rules below.

As in *Summer Evening Convenience*, a broad wall appears almost flat while the street draws the eye into depth. At the left, diagonal lines carry us along the narrow sidewalk toward a cooler, brighter distance. The woman with her hand on her hip links that receding space to the warmer foreground.

Across these three paintings, I keep returning to the pleasure of looking, and to how much that pleasure can hold: grief for a lost connection, humour in an invented detail, or the quiet beauty of evening light on a wall. Thériault's paintings reward time spent with them. While *Urban Portraits* is still on view, there is time to stand before these familiar yet invented places and discover where your own eye takes you.

Victoria Stusiak
October 17, 2026

Urban Portraits is at Harcourt House Artist Run Centre, Edmonton, through November 21, 2026. All artworks pictured © Raymond Thériault.