November 6 - 28, 2026

Allan Thomas
Pigment and Pavement



Essay by Agnieszka Matejko


ALLAN THOMAS
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RAINBOW

As We Walk By: Allan Thomas's Portraits of Vanishing Streetscapes

By: Agnieszka Matejko

Contemporary realist painter Allan Thomas loves beauty, but he finds it in places few of us would dare to look. Majestic mountains and sunlit vistas have their appeal, but he is far more likely to screech to a halt in one of the city's most neglected neighbourhoods. Sometimes he jumps out, snaps a few hurried photos, and beats a hasty retreat to the safety of his car.

That is precisely what happened one night, when Allan was driving along Edmonton's 95th Street and spotted an arresting sight: Arden's Varimart, its postwar storefront façade glowing softly in hot-pink hues against the black sky.

Back in his studio, he selected four or five of the best shots, printed them on 4-by-4-inch paper, and laid them beside him. As Allan worked on other paintings, he kept glancing at the photographs. Eventually, his attention settled on an image of a speeding car cutting through the stillness of the night. This became *Varimart*.



Varimart, 2026. Oil on Panel, 14 x 14”



Varimart, 2020. Scratchboard, 8 x 8”

The blurred car racing past an 80-year-old storefront captures the heart of Allan's *Pigment and Pavement* exhibition: the ephemeral beauty of family-owned businesses. Most of us drive past with barely a glance, yet these small, familiar landmarks are fast disappearing, bulldozed to make way for glossy corporate chains.

Allan brings these humble monuments to life. Each small business is like a full-frontal portrait that lets you see right into the soul of the sitter—character flaws and all. *Mona Lisa*, for instance, depicts a dilapidated storefront on Montreal's St. Lawrence Street and is among the most tactile of these works. The zebra stripes above the entrance are unapologetically lush, while the grit, graffiti, posters and broken tiles add layers of history.



Mona Lisa, 2026. Oil on Panel, 36 x 36”

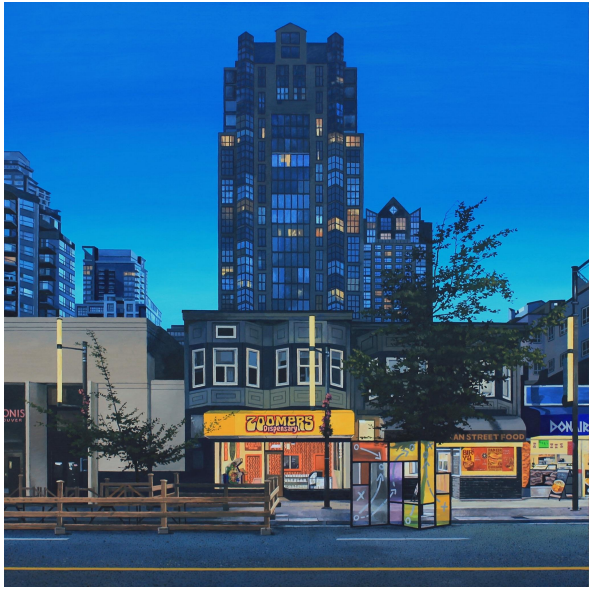
This, and other paintings in the show, monumentalize a disappearing way of life. For Allan, it's more than an artistic concern; it is a lived experience. Together with his brother, he has owned Flying Colors Murals, for over twenty years. Many of their clients have been small business owners. Thomas has watched some of them struggle and close.

"I have so much respect for the places I choose to paint," he says. "These people put their heart and soul into these businesses. I always hope that they do well."

One of the ways he expresses his respect is by painting exactly what's there. His paintings are faithful to every crumbling concrete detail, with one small exception: in some works, he hides the names of his daughters, Meghan and Alison, amid the graffiti.


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While Allan's paintings are beautiful and tender, some reflect his love of punk rock and its irreverent, anti-establishment spirit. These works bring a subtly subversive edge: a magic mushroom shop called Zoomers on Vancouver's Granville Street, a drug paraphernalia shop, and a run-down liquor store. Unexpectedly, it's one of these dingy outlets, the *Cinema L'Amour* on Montreal's St. Laurent Boulevard, that becomes one of the most poignant and memorable paintings in the show.



Zoomers, 2026. Oil on Panel, 30 x 30"



Cinema L'Amour, 2026. Oil on Panel, 24 x 24"

The sensuous letters of *L'Amour* dominate the façade, almost disguising the porn posters beneath. Above them, in a window at the very centre of the composition, Thomas has painted a solitary figure—a young woman accidentally captured in his original photograph. She gazes down the street, as if awaiting someone. Her presence is striking in an exhibition otherwise devoid of people.

Perhaps that's what gives Thomas's painted businesses their human quality. The eerie absence of people animates the buildings, making their symmetrical façades resemble the faces of elders, etched with time and wear. Their loss feels all the more acute. Once gone, these character-filled community hubs cannot be replaced. But in Thomas's paintings, they are immortalized.



Paul's Boutique, 2026. Oil on Panel, 40 x 40"

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Essay written by Agnieszka Matejko.

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Allan Thomas
Varimart, 2026.
Oil on Panel
14 x 14”

Allan Thomas is a self-taught contemporary realist who focuses on documenting the organic relationships that are present in urban environments. The subjects of his works portray ordinary landscapes that surround us, often overlooked in everyday life. With acute detail and dynamic compositions, Thomas invites viewers to find beauty in the mundane.



Allan Thomas

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