

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

Missoulian

Cory Walsh, "Figure in Landscape: Exhibition pays tribute to late accomplished painter," *The Missoulian*, July 8, 2016

Devin Leonardi painted lands like these for years before he moved West.

After he was done working for the day, he might go for a long hike up Rock Creek or in the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness. In the winter, he could cross-country ski at Lolo Pass or Georgetown Lake.

The paintings were shipped to galleries in New York City or San Francisco, or to a global art fair. His work sold in France and Germany, too, where they were celebrated as technically accomplished renderings and commentaries on American history, westward expansion and the questionable march of progress.

"We talked a lot about what it was like for him to leave New York and go to Montana and how he was kind of entering the paintings he was making," said Cora Fisher, a curator and friend of Leonardi's from Cooper Union art school.

Because his work was in such high demand, he'd never exhibited in his adopted home before his took his own life in the summer of 2014 at age 33.

"In Memoriam," a sample of the work he developed, is on display now at the Missoula Art Museum, representing pieces that earned reviews in Artforum and other publications.

"I don't think people knew that this exceptionally talented painter lived here," said Brooke Swancy, a Montana filmmaker and friend of Leonardi's who met him in New York.

With drafting skills he learned at prestigious art schools, Leonardi used historical photographs as raw material to depict American history and its consequences, and in a separate body of work, he painted nudes that reference the dawn of photography and its usurping of painting's role as the means of creating images.



"Lookout Mountain," a 2009 Acrylic on paper by Devin Leonardi. An exhibition at the Missoula Art Museum, 'In Memoriam,' is the late artist's first showing of his work in Montana.

Because of those underpinnings, Fisher said he should be understood as a conceptual artist, who drew on history to generate more emotional resonance than someone who simply produced "sentimental Americana."

There are "tropes you can rely on, because we know that they work in a certain way," she said. He would use a sunset or a figure in the distance, but she sees an "intellectual skepticism around those gestures."

In "Lookout Mountain," an acrylic on paper from 2009, a lone traveler stands upon a high vantage point, facing away from the viewer, the entire scene bathed in deep blue for except a blanket at his feet rendered in dark, thrumming green.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

A watery sky unbroken by clouds, discernible lines or brush strokes diminishes from clean shade to a thin band of light past the horizon. It's unclear who he is, only that a journey is paused.

The painting generates an absorbing "quietude," as one of his gallerists, Claudia Altman-Siegel described it, meditative and enigmatic because intentions remain elusive, a quality that keeps the viewer coming back. You can look at them for a long time, she said, and fall into them.



"Plains Near Anaconda," an oil on canvas on panel, was painted in 2011 after Leonardi moved to Montana from New York City.

Leonardi grew up in Chicago and started drawing at an early age. He studied at the Chicago Academy for the Arts and then attended Cooper Union, the prestigious private art college in New York City that until recently gave its art students full-ride scholarships.

He further developed his technical and conceptual skill and began showing his work at galleries his senior year.

He was working at the Museum of Modern Art when Annie Connole, a Helena native who'd moved to the city to study at the New School, walked in and asked to use the phone. They were together eight years.

He was funny, she said, a brilliant thinker and an excellent listener. "He could read people like

nobody else I've ever met," she said. He was generous. Having learned to cook when he was young, he would prepare a seven-course gourmet meal for guests. Often, three hours in the kitchen was his means of relaxing after a long day of painting.

He was a voracious reader, and consumed "In Search of Lost Time," Proust's multi-part novel that exceeds 4,000 pages, not once but three times. Fisher said his inspirations were just as much literary and historical as visual. Leonardi found success early, Connole said.

Three years after college, he was able to paint full-time for 12 months on his first solo exhibition. By the time he'd spent 11 years in New York, he'd found representation at Broadway 1602 and in San Francisco.

Altman-Siegel met Leonardi in spring 2008, after a recommendation from another artist whom she was seeking to represent at her new gallery in the Bay Area.

"I loved it from the second I saw it," she said in a phone interview. She admires the twin combination of the emotional weight and theoretical underpinnings, plus the "enigmatic quality" they hold.

It's an aspect noted by MAM curator Brandon Reintjes, who worked on the Missoula exhibition with Altman-Siegel, using works from her gallery and ones borrowed from private owners in San Francisco.

He said the roots in Western painting and photography make Leonardi difficult to pigeonhole:

"It slips out and defies any of those categories."

Leonardi didn't blink at the romantic and nostalgic aspects of that period's art, but used them to other ends.

Fisher, who curated Leonardi's first solo museum exhibition, held at Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, wrote in her catalogue essay that Leonardi employs "a shorthand of nostalgia" to pursue his

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

larger message. "On the contrary, these images ask that we consider and contend with history in the present. His work offers a pathway to do so."

She said his paintings, including a piece called "Charleston" of ruined columns and black figures seeking shelter that was shown not long after the shootings, resonated with the public. People came back four or five times to see the show, which she began working on before Leonardi's death.

Reintjes, too, saw the usage of landscape, representation and nostalgia as a point of departure. "He's almost depicting nostalgia coldly," he said, or observing it.

On a technical level, he said, Leonardi's surfaces are complex, with thinly painted layers that reward repeated viewings. "You don't take them all in at once."

As his source material, Leonardi employed "family photos, images of popular culture, film or textbooks" Fisher noted, or sometimes pure imagination.

He "photo-collaged images from different sources by repeatedly xeroxing. The images became generational copies, increasingly degraded and abstract. He drew back onto the final collage study with pencil and then began to paint," she wrote.

Altman-Siegel recalls that a figurative painting, "Jenny Chrisman," sprung from a historical photo shot during the homesteading period. The young woman stands alone on the plain – Leonardi edited out the other family members from the picture.

His work also references the era when photography supplanted brush and oil "as the dominant method of image-making," she said. He was interested in reversing that development: taking a fast process like photography and filtering it through a time-consuming one like painting.

Many of the figurative pictures reference Thomas Eakins, the revered realist painter who also pioneered photography.

Reintjes noted that influences like Eakins, and he sees a little of Maxfield Parrish, aren't fashionable

right now – a refreshing view born of his thinking about art history.

In one interview, Leonardi asked "(W)hat is modernity anyway? We all throw the term around very causally these days. But when you say something is modern you haven't really said anything at all because the whole concept can only be defined in very limited and contradictory ways.

"Nonetheless modernity (post or otherwise) asserts itself as a pre-eminent good against which most else is bad. It's just this sense of surety that I hope to question."

In 2010, Connole and Leonardi moved to Montana from New York after several visits, including a trip along the Hi-Line and a month's stay in Philipsburg. They lived there, too, and in Helena and spent two years in Missoula.

"Both of us were interested in exploring the landscape in a more intimate way artistically, and I think we felt we'd hit our limits in terms of being able to do that in New York," she said.

He explored his new home in myriad ways. He never had a driver's license before he moved here. He learned to cross-country ski and ride horses. He hiked for hours and loved fly fishing. He made friends in the Helena and Missoula artistic communities.

Vera Brunner-Sung, a filmmaker who lived in Missoula for a few years, said he was already a tour guide when she moved here and met him. Leonardi introduced her to the Helmsville Rodeo and the historic Washoe Theater in Anaconda.

Connole saw a shift in his work even after the first visit in 2007, a divergence from a more romantic depiction of the West to the perspective of someone living here, "and the struggles one has when they live in such a vast landscape, and the way that time slows down, and the way you do become relatively isolated from the rest of the world."

Brunner-Sung, who like Leonardi maintained an art career outside the state, said they "talked about

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

what it meant to make work in the relative isolation of Montana, how much it challenged us to be truthful with ourselves, to dig deep to create something meaningful."

Leonardi kept studios in Missoula and in Philipsburg, where he had easy access to the intense light. He had on hand books about Charlie Russell and Remington – Leonardi studied the latter's series of night paintings, and was particularly interested in capturing the moonlight, an effect out of the reach of historical photography, Connole said.

As an example of the early change, she pointed to two acrylics on paper at the MAM, "Manassas Junction" and "Millpond," both of which depict lone figures in the dusk light. In the former, a single traveler stoically pauses on the railroad tracks, gazing toward the horizon on the plains. In "Millpond," a nude is poised to reach into the water. In either piece, Leonardi has given more than half of the composition over to the night sky, one flecked with stars and one not, in an absorbing calm, or as Connole said, a silence that he tapped into upon experiencing the place in person.

"You can feel the space he started to enter. Once you get in touch with that, both the vastness in terms of physical landscape and in terms of silence, it changes you, and I think Devin was fundamentally changed by this new openness," she said.

Fisher concurred about the change in his work, and a breakthrough he experienced as he moved from acrylic into oils. In 2013, he painted "The Source is the Goal," likely developed from a historical black-and-white photo, judging from the feel of a reduced photocopy and the way the features of a woman in an ornate dress merge with the light flooding the window at which she stands.

"He said that was his favorite painting, and he did that after he moved to Montana," she said.

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

frieze

Germany is Your America Broadway 1602

Published on 01/02/12

‘Germany was our America – our dream frontier, road movie, epic, historic landscape, in which we would find ourselves, our generation and our moral consequences finally and clearly reflected. That was the dream, anyway.’ Michael Bracewell wrote these lines in the first of his 2011 series of essays for BBC Radio 3. Galvanized by the sojourns of David Bowie and other musicians in Berlin in the 1970s, as well as art, movies and the Weimar-era ‘literary tourism’ of writers such as Christopher Isherwood, W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender, Bracewell and others of his generation who were enamoured of punk had vividly imagined a nation at once Gothic and Modernist – a ‘Dream Germany’.

In fact, the essays, and the group show ‘Germany is Your America’, which Bracewell co-curated with Anke Kempkes, and which included the work of 14 artists, were inspired by a dream he had in which Brian Eno appeared like an oracle and declared, ‘Germany is your America’. Bracewell had not yet visited Germany when Eno paid his visit, but he subsequently began to explore cultural exchange between the US and Germany, and ‘a modern cosmology of German Romanticism’ as it has surfaced in the work of those who have travelled to Germany or have been exiled from it. Quotes from the first essay appeared on the walls in the exhibition; one mentioning the ‘coolly dazzling radiance’ of the spectral Eno accompanied a pastel drawing of a luminous blue cloud by Nick Mauss, who also designed the text arrangement.

Joseph Beuys’s 1974 performance *I Like America and America Likes Me* was a touchstone, as well as the works George Grosz made stateside. Grosz’s watercolour *The Nun / Gas Station, New York* (1933), depicting a mysterious figure in the glow of nighttime lights, is one of the romantic works he made after leaving Germany, while *Stickmen Meeting Members of the Bourgeois* (1946), with intimations of nuclear devastation, reflects his more familiar mordant wit. Xanti Schawinsky’s *Steptänzer versus Stepmachine* (1924), a dynamic image of a dancer and a dancing mechanomorph from his Bauhaus years, contrasted with *Untitled (Armor Heads)* (1944), a moody charcoal drawing of helmets from suits of armour, which he made after settling in the US.

Other works engaged in a subtle dialogue with each other, as well as a poetic kind of time travel. Ged Quinn’s print *I Like America and America Likes Me* (2007), based on an 18th-century painting of a spaniel by George Stubbs, was on view in the same room as a film of the Beuys performance. A black US-shaped blot in the dog’s fur suggests an opaque, menacing portent; speckled with foxing marks, its title engraved in copperplate script, the print exudes an ersatz authenticity, as if the US had been a dark lure from the days

of its founding. Dexter Dalwood’s painting *Mapplethorpe’s First Loft – Collage* (1999), which imagines peering into Robert Mapplethorpe’s loft – with a black floor and ceiling, through the chicken wire that the photographer used to make his bedroom cage-like – evokes a similarly menacing glamour, as does the starker *Mapplethorpe’s First Loft* (1999).



Devin Leonardi *Civil History*, 2011, oil on canvas

If ‘Germany is Your America’ was more like a prose poem than an intellectual exercise, as Bracewell has suggested, Devin Leonardi’s *Civil History* (2011) was an especially unsettling passage. Alluding to the photographic nudes shot by Thomas Eakins’s circle, a blindfolded model standing in the glare of artificial light evokes the birth of Modernism in the US, and the moment when photography struck a blow to painting and European academicism.

In this context, Beuys’s performance seemed especially haunted. On a wall opposite the projection was Meredyth Sparks’s diptych *Untitled (Brian Eno)* (2011), a glitter-embellished digital scan in which three identical images of Eno, looking away from the camera and toward spectral geometric shapes evoking Modernist abstraction, seem at once to move toward and recede from the viewer, like the other ‘phantasms of a heightened cultural identity’ that surfaced throughout the show.

Kristin M. Jones

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Devin Leonardi

BROADWAY 1602
1182 Broadway, Suite 1602
March 15–April 23

Devin Leonardi's new paintings evoke a relatively unusual influence: the precise aesthetic of nineteenth-century American realists such as Thomas Eakins. In Leonardi's latest exhibition, this exacting style produces a sense of stasis when combined with straightforward, simple subject matter including landscapes dominated by sky or lone figures within interiors. In an untitled work from 2010, for instance, a nude child stands atop a piece of furniture in order to look through a large window. The figure's precarious position communicates a desire frustrated by the blue, monochromatic view of the outdoors, which appears just as barren as the room in which the child stands.

Such works convey Leonardi's ambivalence about today's increasingly disposable technologies, such as digital photography, and the way such developments may, in fact, detract meaning from the very instances they were made to record. In an inversion of this problematic relationship, Leonardi's paintings implement the comparatively labor-intensive medium of painting to capture seemingly arbitrary and random moments, such as the sun setting on an abandoned wagon or two alienated men standing on an expansive plain. The flat, planar style of the works and Leonardi's thin application of paint contribute an ethereal quality, causing portions of the works to appear as if they were fading. Combined with the work's forthright subject matter, this deliberate and simple linearity creates a subtle sense of nostalgia and moreover suggestively questions the increasingly complicated relationship between technology, images, and the culture they reflect.

— *Britany Salsbury*



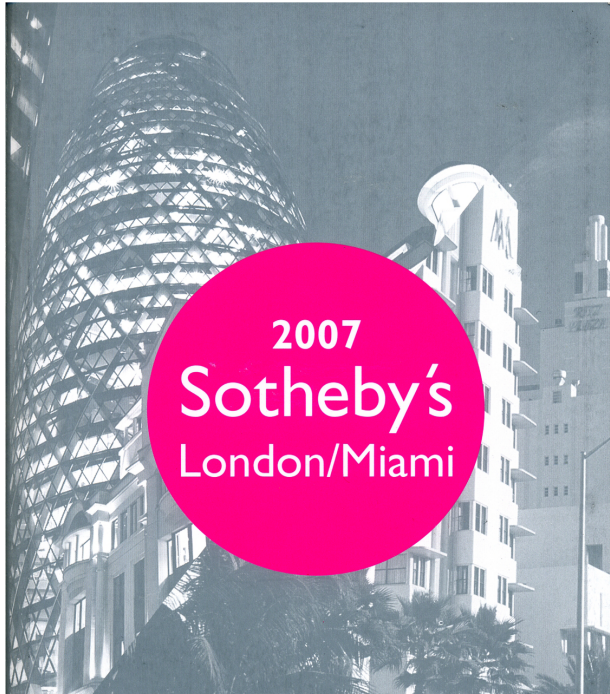
Devin Leonardi, untitled, 2010, oil on canvas on panel, 13 3/4 x 10 3/4".

ALTMAN SIEGEL

1150 25TH ST. SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94107

tel: 415.576.9300 / fax: 415.373.4471

www.altmansiegel.com



Sotheby's London

Frieze highlights THE HOT LIST

Sotheby's Contemporary Art specialists reveal which artists they will be rushing to see at Frieze art fair. The results are inspiring

Alexander Branczik Specialist

My favourites include Conrad Shawcross who will be represented in the Victoria Miro tent at the main Frieze fair. He stood out in his degree show at Oxford, and he produces amazing sculptural works, often kinetic with video installation, and always beautifully made.

For me, some of the most interesting exhibits will be at the Zoo art fair (12-15 October), in particular Douglas White, a young sculptor using natural and man-made detritus to create moody works that pack a visceral as well as conceptual punch. He's represented by a brand new gallery, Paradise Row. White's Owl, 2007, is the record of an unfortunate tawny owl that flew full-pelt into a window, leaving an immaculate imprint in dust and oils of every detail – talons, feathers and eyes. The work is beautiful and repelling, the history of its creation is as important as its elegant aesthetic.

12

WWW.SOTHEBYS.COM



Cheyenne Westphal Board Director Chairman

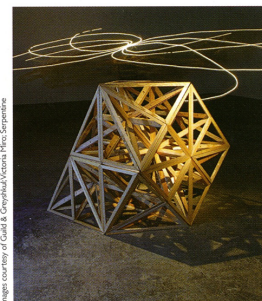
I'm looking forward to seeing new work by the young American artist Devin Leonardi who is working on ink paintings bathed in moon- and starlight using vintage photographs and images from the 1850s to the early 1900s. I first saw Leonardi's work at his sell-out Concordia exhibition at Guild & Greyskul in New York this summer. I loved his paintings

"SCULPTOR DOUGLAS WHITE
CREATES MOODY WORKS THAT
PACK A VISCERAL AS WELL AS
CONCEPTUAL PUNCH"

but they were already sold out by the time I spotted them online, so I'll be first in the queue to see his new work at Frieze.



Left: Waveland, by Devin Leonardi, 2006; Above: Drawing Restraint 9 (production still), by Matthew Barney, 2005; Below: Space Grid, by Conrad Shawcross, 2006



Images courtesy of Guild & Greyskul, Victoria Miro, Serpentine

13

WWW.SOTHEBYS.COM