

PREVIEW: *Maine*

VICTOR LEGER: CAPTURING THE ENCHANTMENT OF SCHOODIC

Littlefield Gallery • Winter Harbor, ME • littlefieldgallery.com • July 19–August 16, 2021

Realism is alive and well in American art and, more specifically, in Maine, where the tradition is strong, from Church and Homer to Hopper and the Wyeths and beyond. Today, realist practice in the Pine Tree State is remarkable and wide-ranging: Lois Dodd, Linden Frederick, Janice Anthony, Alan Magee, Alison Rector, David Vickery, Joel Babb, and Sarah Knock come to mind, each a brilliant limner of whatever prompts them to paint.

Add to this cohort Victor Leger, a Connecticut-based painter who spends time in downeast Maine, in particular, the Schoodic Peninsula part of Acadia National Park. In the show Leger offers 15 meticulous landscapes painted en plein air. He

brings an immediacy to his images such that each painting is, in his words, “like a window on a wall opening into nature.”

Like many of his predecessors, Leger loves the Maine light. In several landscapes, he renders the beauty of sunlit days, of islands, sea and sky enveloped in a luminous atmosphere. The aptly titled *Transcendentalism* offers the visual equivalent of the kind of divine experience of the everyday Emerson and his brethren embraced. Low-lying islands raise



Victor Leger, *The Prophet*, oil on panel, 21 x 25 x 2" framed. Courtesy of Littlefield Gallery.

their pointed firs into the flawless heavens while Mount Desert Island hovers in the background.

Leger has a special passion for trees, treating them like respected elders. *A Study in Courage* is a cropped rendering of the torsos of two trees in fall plumage. The title of another painting, *The Prophet*, lends a biblical element to a study of a coastal tree that appears to point toward the horizon. Some of these arboreal studies bring to mind the paintings of Theophil Groell (1932–2004) who brought a similar focus to trees on Deer Isle.

Just as Blake could see a world in a grain of sand, Leger finds music in tide pools. The stunning *Symphony #3* captures the shadows and reflections found in a rock-bound cache of tidal water.

Leger places extra-wide frames on some of his paintings, which at times can seem to overwhelm the image within. On the other hand, they also enhance the aforementioned window effect, drawing us to look out on a glorious world.

—Carl Little

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LIFE STREAMS: ALBERTO REY, CUBAN-AMERICAN ARTIST

Ogunquit Museum of American Art • Ogunquit, ME • ogunquitmuseum.org • July 30–October 31, 2021

Organized by the Burchfield Penney Art Center, this exhibition offers a mini-retrospective of the painter, videographer, and fisherman Alberto Rey. From the abstract-conceptual *Through Windows*, 1988, which Rey made in graduate school at the University of Buffalo, to the realist *Lost Beauty: Icebergs XVI*, from the 2020 series that features renderings of remnants of the Bredamerkurjökull glacier in Iceland, *Life Streams* traces Rey's artistic evolution.

Rey works in series and the show includes a sampling from several. Many address his cultural identity: Born in Cuba, he moved to Mexico at age three and then to Miami and finally to Barnesboro, PA. His Cuban roots tug hardest and are referenced in such pieces as *House of Memories* and *La Basilica* from 1991.

Other work conjures Rey's early life in Miami, in what is now Little Havana. *Icon Series: Bag of Chicharrones (Pork Rinds)*, 1995, depicts the treat his mother would buy him, in all its creased and greasy glory. The artist chose a traditional

“high art” format—plaster on a fresco-like support system—to present this humble subject.

The *Las Balsa (The Rafts)* series, 1995–1999, drew on Rey's visits to the Cuban Refugee Center on Stock Island where he found remnants of the perilous voyages people made fleeing Cuba. *Las Balsa (The Rafts) Artifacts: Child's Hat and Seat*, 1996, is especially resonant.

Rey's ongoing *Biological Regionalism* and *Aesthetics of Death* series begun in the 2000s reflect on the fate of fish through images of salmon, steelhead, and other species in parts of the U.S., Iceland, Wales, and Cuba.

As a professional fly-fisherman, Rey feels a special passion for these creatures and the



Alberto Rey (b. 1960), *Las Balsa (The Rafts) Artifacts: Child's Hat and Seat*, 1996, oils on wood filler over wood, 8 x 10 x 4½". Courtesy of the Burchfield Penney Art Center at SUNY Buffalo State. Image courtesy of the artist.

environmental challenges they face.

The exhibition includes three documentary videos: *An Unkept Promise* (2005), which reflects on the joy and anxiety of Rey's first trip to Cuba in 35 years; *Biological Regionalism: Atlantic Cod, Salem, MA* (2007), which documents the history of the New England cod fishery made during his residency at the Peabody Essex Museum; and *Bagmati* (2016), a look at life along Nepal's most sacred and most polluted river. All of Rey's work manages to engage the eye while raising awareness.

These are brilliant and commendable acts of art.

—Carl Little