

Exhibition Checklist

Gallery 1, clockwise L-R:

1



shaping the day: lmb & sb, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
42 x 29 1/2 inches
106.7 x 74.9 cm

2



shaping the day: lmb & sb, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
42 x 29 1/2 inches
106.7 x 74.9 cm

3



shaping the day: sn & lmb, 2024
Acrylic on canvas
30 x 25 1/4 inches
76.2 x 64.1 cm

4



shaping the day: gz, ah, & lmb, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
27 x 25 inches
68.6 x 63.5 cm

5



shaping the day: as, cm, lmb, & aw, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
44 x 31 1/2 inches
111.8 x 80 cm

6



shaping the day: cs, mo, & lmb, 2023

Acrylic on canvas

46 x 37.5 inches

116.8 x 95.3 cm

7



shaping the day: ac & lmb, 2023

Acrylic on canvas

35 x 31 3/8 inches

88.9 x 79.6 cm

8



shaping the day: as, dg, & lmb, 2023

Acrylic on canvas

49 1/2 x 38 1/4 inches

125.7 x 97.2 cm

9



shaping the day: tv and lmb, 2023

Acrylic on canvas

16 x 12 inches

40.6 x 30.5 cm

Grid of watercolors, in office, L-R from top row:

10



Goat Rock, Somona CA, 12/15/22

Watercolor on paper

7 x 10 inches

17.8 x 25.4 cm

11



With Cole P at Northerly Island, 9-6-2022

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

12



Annie's Studio View , 12-25-2022

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

13



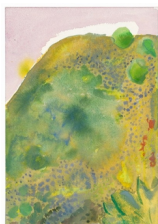
With Kirsten L at Neighborhood Garden, 8-28-2022

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

14



At Portia's, 3-1-2023

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

15



Caldwell Lily Pool with Allison W., 9-15-2022

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

16



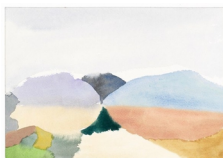
with Soumya at CW, 5-11-2023

Watercolor on paper

7 x 10 inches

17.8 x 25.4 cm

17



with John R at MCDV La Torraccia, 6-25-2022

Watercolor on paper

7 x 10 inches

17.8 x 25.4 cm

18



with Arnold K at GPC, 10-6-23

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

19



Red Clover in the Morning Fog, 8-12-2023

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

20



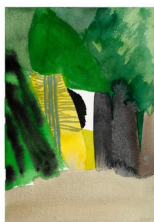
Humboldt Park Solo, 9-29-2022

Watercolor on paper

7 x 10 inches

17.8 x 25.4 cm

21



With Dan G at Watershed, 8-10-2022

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

22



with Pam J in her yard, 3-4-2022

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

23



with Ariel W. at Portland Jet Port, 8-12-2022

Watercolor on paper

10 x 7 inches

25.4 x 17.8 cm

Not on view in exhibition, also available (inquire for viewing):

24



shaping the day: sl & lmb, 2023
Acrylic on canvas
37 1/2 x 25 inches
95.3 x 63.5 cm

Leslie Baum: ordinary awe
March 9 – April 20, 2024



In Gallery I, Goldfinch is pleased to announce *ordinary awe*, a solo exhibition by Leslie Baum featuring new paintings and watercolor drawings from Baum’s ongoing *plein air* painting series, in which the artist invites other people—artists and non-artists alike—to paint outdoors with her, side by side. These “painting dates” and the social connections they forge have become intrinsic to the Chicago-based artist’s practice; more than 150 of these dates have been archived on Baum’s [*Plein Air Archive*](#).

The title *ordinary awe* derives from Baum’s understanding of her approach to painting as “a dance with awe”—a sense of wonder and humility at “the fragile poetry” involved in bringing a painting into being. “The work of this exhibition holds many awe-filled encounters,” Baum notes. “It reflects an array of still-resonating interpersonal exchanges, moments of deep observation, and the complexity of that studio conversation between

myself and the object or image I am painting, or more accurately that we, object/image and I are making in concert.”

Baum’s attuned engagement with nature, with other people, and with the sublime highs and lows of the painting process informs what is a radically inclusive and profoundly generous practice; it also offers a gentle corrective to still-common Modernist notions of the painter as a solitary figure engaged in a purely solipsistic relation to the canvas before them. Baum explicitly acknowledges the ways in which what she paints is partly shaped by forces *outside* of her self—other people, nature—and indeed, the titles of her *plein air* paintings always include the initials of the painting partner with whom she shared the date.

The painting dates that informed the paintings exhibited in *ordinary awe* are as follows:

Arnold Kemp, Garfield Park Conservatory, 10.6.2023
Sharon Lind, Red Clover Ranch Wisconsin, 8.9.2023
Annie Coleman, Kickapoo Valley Reserve, 8.6.2023
Tyler Vlahovich, Arroyo Seco, LA, 5. 10.2022
Anne Stevens, Humboldt Park, 9.4.2022
Ariel Wood, Portland, Maine 8.12.22
Dan Gunn, Maine, 8.10.2022
Christy Matson, Hahamongna LA, 5 3.2022
Elliot Bergman, suburban Illinois, 7.20.2022
Soumya Netrabile, Montrose Bird Sanctuary IL, 7.13.2022
Corrie Slawson, Monte Castello di Vibio Italy, 6.19.2022
Alex Harvey, Maine, 9.11.2021
Gwen Zabicki, Humboldt Park, 6.24.2021
Melissa Oresky, Merwin Preserve IL, 5.6.2021
Samantha Bittman, Garfield Park Conservatory, 7.23.2019

Leslie Baum: ordinary awe is on view from March 9 – April 20th and will afford numerous opportunities for audiences to engage with the artist. The opening reception will be held on Saturday, March 9th from 2-5pm; on Friday, April 12th, from 5-7pm, Goldfinch will host an evening “Meet and Greet” with exhibiting artists Leslie Baum and Andreas Fischer in conjunction with Expo Art Week’s “Art After Hours;” and on Saturday, April 13th at 2pm, Justin Witte, Director and Curator of Cleve Carney Museum of Art at College of DuPage, will moderate a conversation on painting with Leslie Baum and Andreas Fischer. All events are free and open to the public.

Artist's Bio

Leslie Baum's painting practice is invitational in nature and informed by her long tenure as museum educator at the Art Institute of Chicago. Baum received her BA from the University of Vermont and studied abroad at the Glasgow School of Art. Her drawings and paintings are in permanent collections of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Elmhurst Art Museum. Baum's exhibitions have been reviewed extensively, including in Artforum, Art in America, Hyperallergic, New City, and the Chicago Tribune. She

received residencies at Watershed Center for Ceramic Arts, the Nido project in Monte Castello di Vibio Italy, Yaddo, and the Vermont Studio Center. A 2020 DCASE grant funded the creation of pleinairarchive.com, a site documenting her ongoing painting social practice. In 2023, Baum was named one of 50 key members of Chicago's art scene by New City magazine.

Recent solo exhibitions include *for IRIS and Other Flowers*, Compound Yellow, Chicago (2023); *The Plein Air Project*, Wege Center, Maharishi International University, Fairfield, IA (2022); *An Instrument in the Shape of A Woman*, Chicago Cultural Center, Chicago (2022); and *A Garden in a Vase*, the Drawing Room at The Arts Club of Chicago (2022). Participation in recent group exhibitions includes *Friendship's Death*, Andrew Rafacz Gallery, Chicago (2023); *Nido*, organized by Michelle Grabner, Monte Castello Di Vibio, Italy (2022); *Wheel of Life*, organized by Scott Wolniak, Hyde Park Art Center, Chicago (2022); and *Plain Air*, Carrie Secrist Gallery, Chicago (2021).

Q&A with Leslie Baum
Conducted by Gallery Intern Divya Chandrasekaran

DC: The title of your solo exhibition is *ordinary awe*, and indeed, the subject of your bodies of work centers on everyday natural themes – flowers, gardens, communing with friends to make art together outdoors. Deep engagement with nature is integral to your art. Can you elaborate on the value you see in the ordinary and in the natural world?

LB: I have come to value the small, overlooked, and unnoticed. A Chicago city park can offer as many delights as a national one. It is a site for noticing nature: the unfolding of seasons, the first leaf buds, the smell of autumn, turtles sunbathing etc. And people too: folks fishing, dog walking, exercising, bird watching. In life and in art, the grand and the monumental have a gravitational pull. We want to go bigger, to acquire and experience more. We can lose sight of what is in front of us. In privileging the everyday, the ordinary, I am striving towards an alternative to this make-it-bigger-give-me-more ethic/aesthetic. I am striving – not always succeeding - by working towards being alive to the present and celebrating the small moments, interactions, and observations.

DC: In previous writings, you've emphasized the importance of observing nature and then adapting your means of depicting it accordingly, as well as the importance of close observation. Can you talk about your process of visual engagement? In other words, when you are sitting before scene, how do you approach looking and interpreting what you see before you?

LB: I am observing to discover. My hope is to experience and to feel, rather than to render or illustrate. I love to play on the picture plane, to pluck out, and to move around shapes and colors from the landscape. I swivel my head to see what's over my shoulder. As time passes and conditions change, I continue to revise and add in new things. Part of the joy and pleasure of being outdoors is this multi-dimensional way of seeing. Everything is always in flux. The light shifts, the shadows vanish or deepen. I am very interested in this dynamic unfolding and try to make watercolors that respond to it.

DC: Given that the Plein Air project/Archive has been an ongoing part of your practice, can you talk a bit about the common threads linking together the specific group of paintings you're presenting in our exhibition at Goldfinch, and how you considered the many choices involved in shaping the presentation itself?

LB: I love all my dates! Each one bursts with intimacy, feeling, and discovery. I am amazed at how these encounters forge strong emotional bonds. There are specific dates and watercolors, however, that I hoped to work with for this show. Something about these dates - the watercolors made, the locations, and particular exchanges between myself and my companion - resonate in a particular ineffable long-lasting way. Painting in the Portland Maine airport with Ariel Wood as we waited for our respective flights home from the Watershed Residency is one such date. The parameters of painting in this setting were totally new! My 2022 L.A. dates with Christy Matson in a Hahamongna park and with Tyler Vlahovich along a stretch of Arroyo Seco are two more. Christy is a longtime friend who I

was so happy to spend time with and Tyler, bless him, accepted my out-of-the-blue proposition to go on a painting date. We had never met, and I am a huge admirer of his work. The two most recent paintings in the show are from my autumn 2023 painting date with Arnold Kemp in the garden behind the Garfield Park Conservatory and my 2022 date with Soumya Netrabile at the Montrose Bird Sanctuary. Although Arnold and I had met briefly at a party, this was the first time we really spent time together talking. The date seemed bathed in magic from my perspective and Soumya and I met for the first time on our date. We painted in glow of a late summer evening as the sun was setting. We have painted many many times together since!

DC: This type of meaningful human connection is clearly integral to your creative process. Your Plein Air Archive is filled with documentations of hundreds of painting dates, and you've mentioned how your companions' work from these dates inspire your studio work. You've also noted that those painting dates feel just as much a part of the artwork as the paintings themselves. Can you talk in a bit more detail about how you bring elements of each painting date to your studio afterwards, and how that shapes the paintings you make in response to that particular day?

LB: When I am in the studio working on the painting that references a particular date, I am thinking about that person and our shared time. As the painting progresses, I often text them in-progress-photos. I know I couldn't make the work without their work, and it feels right to share, to somehow fold them into this more private part of the making process. The paintings arise out of collages. I compose these collages from printouts of the plein air watercolors -- mine and my dates'. I often have this material sprawled out on one of my worktables. I play with the imagery in between working on already in progress paintings, combining bits and bobs from various watercolors (in print out form), sometimes using one whole image as a support for the collage.

DC: Watercolor is a medium that's central to your artistic process, as seen in the grid of watercolor paintings on view in the exhibition. You've talked about trying to get other paints to conform to watercolor and behave like it, and have also mentioned that your affinity for watercolor stems in part from a desire to utilize a medium that has not been deemed serious, especially in its association with women artists. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

LB: I lost both my parents when I was in my twenties. Decades later, these profound losses play an outsized role in my desire to make invitational, beautiful, and accessible art that is generated out of connection and exchange with others. I think about my mother a lot. She was an accomplished watercolorist and my first art teacher. Perhaps then it is no surprise that I have always painted in her medium. Although it is only in the past ten years that I have come to prize watercolor, valuing it on equal footing with oil and acrylic. I can't talk about my predilection for transparent and soak stain painting without mentioning Helen Frankenthaler. She is a primary painting influence. I was lucky to encounter her work very young and it obviously made a huge impression! I currently employ acrylic as if it were watercolor. I have a multiple motivations. I love the challenge of coaxing one medium to appear like another. Most importantly this watercolor-esque language best suits the parameters of this plein air project. I have embraced a transparent use of paint with a larger purpose, to celebrate and elevate watercolor. Let's face it, watercolor historically has not had

the best rap. I can't help but think that is partially due to its association with dabblers and their "light" subject. I suspect when imagining such a hobby or "Sunday painters," many picture a woman, perhaps even an older woman.

DC: You are both an artist and educator. How does teaching shape your approach to art-making?

My work with the Nathan and Kiyoko Lerner Foundation is a powerful force shaping my studio practice. Nathan and Kiyoko are known for discovering the work of Henry Darger. I was 21 when I met them. Nathan reminded me of my grandfather; we hit it off. After his death in 1997, Kiyoko established the foundation and invited me to create and run an art studio at Thresholds Chicago, which serves people managing mental health issues. This studio - on Chicago's southside - is a level learning space, where the artists and I create side by side, learning from one another. This mode of making - a kind of parallel play - laid the foundation for the painting dates that are the heart of the plein air project.

At the start of the pandemic, the Art Institute – where I teach - closed. Thresholds no longer served its clients in person. I started offering art classes online, without institutional backing. I am now on my 15th class. I design these classes to foster community, joy in making art, and curiosity. All things that motivate and inspire me in my own practice. I have found my true voice as an educator through these offerings, helping folks – mostly women, as it happens - carve out space for a shared creative practice in their crowded lives. This scrappy way of doing things is a hallmark of my life.