

## Press Release

**Rhett Leinster**

***Send a signal wherever you are***

**November 23, 2024 – January 18, 2025**

*Motifs* or subjects are suspended in a perpetual state of becoming ... found images hold the mind's attention ... an eBay seller inadvertently validates the use of a torch ... sounding the call (a signal) to chase meaning into the margins. Thoughts and perspectives poised – perhaps forever unfurling, the image gradually revert *elsewhere*; not, as it might seem, in the immensity of the imagination (or, not only) but in the layers, fault lines, and filters intercalated in its surface. Where finality, per the finished work, might otherwise foreclose the possibility of vision's drift into what it asserts as meaning, here, by the artist's foregrounding of compositional forces that permit movement in the image, we are drawn into the fold, perpetuating the moment's ceaseless arrival as image.

The paintings of Rhett Leinster are wrought in this mysterious force of fascination, in the compulsion to look closer, Leinster's paintings gesture towards something. Like doors slightly left ajar, these paintings open partial views to places, forms, and objects – like bunkers, a neckerchief, wings – in perpetual indefinability, therefore propelling viewers to peek into the painting's unvis-itable, sometimes incomprehensible, or incoherent, place. In passing correspondence, the artist had referenced a print after Mantegna, *Christus daalt af in voorgeborchte*, [Christ descends into Limbo]; particularly, an inconsequential half-seen figure caught in the picture's margins, perhaps emerging, or submerging, from limbo. Leinster had suggested the figure's obfuscation as perhaps analogous to what happens in his work *Bunker*.

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It seems worth pausing here, in the *indeterminacy* of place, and so posing a question about the position one takes when faced with an image. Or, what happens when we linger within an image? Like repeating a word over and over until it starts to feel strange in our mouth, what happens when our looking persists, when we are drawn into the flatness of the pictorial field? *Searching ...*

Look long enough and the space will eventually break open; out pour concentrations, intensities, wavering densities of light, texture, pigment. So, into the space of the matter we go, seeking something deeper and deeper within the surface, until we come so close, disoriented in our own field of vision, that the image draws us near its scumbled limit.

This limit intimates something about how we situate ourselves in relation to the work – for all it encloses, discloses, or conceals. For instance, what does it mean to be *enclosed* in writing about images? Thousands of these things are penned per year and not many of them offer perspective to this positioning. Distance is implied, yet the prerequisite is to find a means to an end. Perhaps most exhibition texts are devoted to information about the works or the contexts and concepts that underwrite their making and are not concerned with the perspective from which the accompanying text is written. So, what is the form supposed to communicate, or *signal*? What does it mean to read an exhibition through its text, or rather, through this form of textuality, which so often delegates *knowledge* to the dissemination of mere information – if information, to paraphrase Elizabeth Hardwick, 'can be thought of as *mere*.' It seems that the point pressed in the exhibition text should offer some kind of *release*, i.e., a liberation of contained meaning, making something hidden in the works generally available, 'allowing something to return to its resting position by the cessation of pressure,' to paraphrase the dictionary definition of the term. Still, nowadays, as the written form has become established under the mandate of an information economy hellbent on occupying the space of art as 'mere' semantic relation – and so, clearly unconcerned with the *form* – how does one approach writing about works of art, which in themselves refuse the "resting position," resist the release, and instead apply pressure (stress, emphasis) on forms of resistance:

perspectives, methods, and gestures that essay to escape the clarity of definition?

Instead of asking what of an artwork's meaning should be released, should we be asking what, instead, does an artwork release in our thoughts? Or, could the artwork, ideally, subsist in a *neither/nor* state, where meaning plays out in the relation, i.e., by one influencing the other, edging and nudging facts with preponderation, effects with affects, thoughts with textures? By moving sideways, thinking in reverse, letting go of the image, to push writing into its essential non-attachment, resisting disclosure, yet still *arriving* at meaning, one perhaps shifts the pressure onto the image's capacity to make entire systems of meanings slip, and fall – out of frame.

In the perspective of graduating change, the “signal” that is called for and sounded, is refracted. It bounces off the surface of works into the writing, like so informing the form of the *release*: as, then, something so inclined to wander, slip, and shift – perhaps chasing signals from wherever in the pictorial field they are found. For a text to then act analogous to the works, appropriately responding to their calls, signals, and pings – not exactly emanating from clear subjects, nor a de-fined space – entails instead paying due attention to a movement. And, more importantly, where it breaks.

It should be said, that this text has also been produced in a manner (at least conceptually) analogous to the painted works themselves; i.e., in continuous motion, on flights and trains, chasing ideas through the dimness of the shifting season, and the gravity of daily affairs, teasing thought to see states of transience, through literally refracted views to meaning that move across the virtual through to the haptic.

What's caught on a page, these words piling up, has been wrought in partial obscurity, through distances and separations, which lands – by default – at no destination.

The element of arrival here is particularly important, not only in the idea that painting holds down some intermediate site, but that each work here draws near and delimits a balanced equivocation. Searching the image, going *there*, closing in, moving *near* - this is somehow the point. Yet, in do-ing so, one is led into errancy, set to wander – the space of vision's error. He's a painter seeking, as it were, seeking nothing: “that which exhausts being exactly where it represents itself as inexhaustible.” Images? Or, everything that transmits them: layers, filters, and lenses, not as mere digital tools, but as historical, cultural, and aesthetic veils – semantic barriers and systems of reception, which contain and create meaning; here, perhaps, as the historical framework of painting un-done, un-worked – broken open.

This is not to say that *meaning* exists beyond the frame or the texture, the surface, or materiality of the works; rather, here, meaning itself is shown to move within that field, shifting and unsteadied in the transformative influence of what happens to, and within, the image. It bids thought on the paradoxical mobility of the arrested image. In this, I had come to think about Maurice Blanchot's statement (of the poem, but why not painting?) that the “exceptional escapes,” namely, by wresting the subject from the present and setting *something* in motion. Leinster, too, tasks us to consider the “exception”: the effects, techniques, and gestures, which sends our mind into the detour, that suspends our immediate apprehension of the image, and so delay realisation. He is asking us to stay in touch with the process.

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Refraction becomes a refrain. It passes through the materiality and gestures of the works, more of a motion-mechanic than a reference. This movement is ubiquitous; it defines the presence of elements that disorient, as perhaps evidenced in the Fresnel lens installed on the gallery door. Coined by a French engineer of the Napoleonic era, this type of lens used in Lighthouses (as well as Paris' Eiffel tower) signals, but also seeks out. The eye passes through the oblique lens to witness another density through/to the image. Running through its multiple meanings, refraction could also designate a “change in direction of propagation,” dependent on a potentiality or the distribution of factors - some kind of “measurement of the focusing characteristics of an eye.” Like in dreams or states of exhaustion, estrangement, or dissociation, this obliqueness carries within the potential to alter the course of our reflections.

It also bears noting that the word refraction comes from the mid-16th century “refringere” – to “break up.”

Something in the making of any image is always wrecked or broken in perspective. To refract common meaning or sense – to fracture the easy read – opens the image to some resistance. The paintings on view reflect this change in the propagation of waking life. It's like relearning to "see" forms (of life) through other lenses, and so gaining some perspective on the estranged, what's shielded from view, things caught in partial obscurity: flickering, wavering, uncertain.

*Postscript*

Since *Bunker* already came mentioned (summoning thoughts to shelter, hiding places, defensive and offensive sites), the question also arises: What protects and preserves uncertainty in an image as the force of its fascination? What do we take underground to keep safe, as to safeguard the possibility of remaining at the edge of our interpretation? How does an image go incognito, absconding into its own action, to paradoxically make present the presence of an artwork?

To resist coherency means to resist the end. The image fills with elusive omissions, breaks, interruptions, fleeting perspectives, and meanings lost. And still, in all the stillness of compositional forces pressed to recede into the image, the base reality remains this incessant *signalling*, the *neither/nor* state that ensures the image's continuity.

Sabrina Tarasoff

**Rhett Leinster** (b. 1990) studied Painting and Printmaking at the Glasgow School of Art between 2009 and 2013, additionally completing a master's degree in Technical Art History in 2021. Recent group exhibitions include: 'Our Teeth are Reefs', curated by Slugtown, at Collective Ending HQ, London; 'First Impressions' at Gastatelier Leo XIII, Tilburg; 'Moderato Cantabile' at Stoppenbach & Delestre, London; and 'Armour', curated by Cento, at 20 Albert Road, Glasgow.