

# Bradley Ertaskiran

Rick Leong  
*The Night Blooms*  
May 15 to July 5, 2025

Made over several years, Rick Leong's *The Night Blooms* is a meditation on tangled ecosystems, natural, cultural, spiritual, and otherwise. Across his rich, layered landscapes, little canvas is left bare; we are completely engrossed in the swirling branches, unfurling vines, and flowing freshwater streams of old-growth forests, a longstanding subject in Leong's work. In the tradition of Romanticism, Leong's landscapes show the sublime grandeur of nature beyond human interference while borrowing from Daoism's emphasis on our inherent connection to the natural world. His moody, detailed scenes are quiet but animated, captured right before the onset of nocturnal activity, when life bursts anew even with the sun's setting.

Leong, a Chinese Canadian, melds personal memory, observational painting, and traditional iconography into his landscapes. In this series, his use of a blue monochrome palette draws inspiration from blue-and-white pottery—an ancient Chinese tradition distinguished by its intricate cobalt motifs. This style was widely copied across 17th-century Europe alongside the development of Chinoiserie. One common design, the willow pattern, became mass-produced in Britain as a distilled imitation of Chinese pottery, coveted for its whimsical depictions of birds, flora, and other imagined semblances of Chinese culture and craft. The weeping willow tree, an enchanting symbol of this prized tableware and a frequent character in Leong's paintings, also bears a distinctive story, as it was once native to Northern China, later transplanted to North American shores. Leong sees these interwoven material histories as apt analogies for the diasporic experience, through which visual culture is carried, continuously evolved, and transformed through its relationships with the new lands it inhabits.

Leong takes great interest in the interconnectedness of things. His canvases are bursting with dense foliage, intertwined branches, and burrowing animals, a paradisiacal portrait of a thriving, symbiotic ecosystem that seems to grow reciprocally in real-time. This magic of ecology reveals itself through chimeric creatures, such as in *Spell of the Sensuous*, comprised of swathes of imagined floral hybrids. Within the grotto-like Bunker space, Leong's work reaches its peak fantastical splendour: free-flowing streams move through dark caverns and across thick undergroves towards hidden worlds. In these glimpses into untouched life, we sense that things are flourishing together in our absence, no less alive without our having witnessed them.

**Rick Leong** (b. 1973, Burnaby, BC) lives and works in Victoria, British Columbia. Leong received his BFA from the University of Victoria (2003) and an MFA from Concordia University in Montreal (2007). Solo exhibitions have been presented at Art Windsor Essex (Windsor), Arsenal Contemporary Art (New York), Empty Gallery (Victoria), Bradley Ertaskiran (Montreal), the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (Victoria), among others. Leong's work has been included in numerous group exhibitions staged at the National Gallery of Canada (Ottawa), the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Montreal), the Contemporary Art Gallery (Vancouver), the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (Victoria), PHI Foundation (Montreal), Esker Foundation (Calgary), and the Richmond Art Gallery (Richmond). His work can be found in numerous collections, including the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec, the Canada Council Art Bank, and the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

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