

AMANITA

World-Honored One
Nicholas Campbell

1 Freeman Alley, New York, NY 10002
January 17, 2025 – February 23, 2025

Amanita is pleased to present *World-Honored One*, Nicholas Campbell's first solo exhibition in New York and the inaugural show at Amanita's 1 Freeman Alley location.

Nicholas Campbell (b. 1995, Los Angeles) is an artist currently based in New York City and holds a BA from Pitzer College. Self-taught, his practice consists of large-scale, labored paintings that wrestle with modern pathologies attributed to social, historical, and technological change. Recent exhibitions include solo shows at Smart Objects Los Angeles and group shows at CLEARING New York and Los Angeles, and Mammoth Gallery in London.

Being an artist requires engineering a distinct, structured mode of creation in order to come to terms with an unfixed, disordered world. It is through the trials of undoing and rearticulation that one establishes a coherent perspective. Nicholas Campbell is mired in this turmoil of actualization, injecting his ideological proclivities into the spirit of painting. Heroism and vulnerability are united under Campbell's auspices while he pursues a highly intuitive system. These imposing canvases are deposits for evaluation and happenstance. Toggling with the rejection and permission of light, Campbell eases into his final composition with agility.

Campbell's energy becomes the composition's form. Effort and endurance are the fundamental tenets underpinning the artist's productive attitude. He first overwhelms the canvas's blankness with color, reflexively moving through space. The first few weeks are spent without clarity, but chocked full of raw work. Campbell builds the canvas slowly, until direction materializes and he can see his way through the amalgamated paint. Linework is wonderfully scarce. Occasionally, however, the brush's path is revealed and the artist's hand is made visual. One can see in these marks the conducting gestures of a maestro or stochastic animalistic scratchings. No matter the case, these ornaments destabilize perspective with their disruption of relative continuity. At times they seep into the abstract vortex, and others they float just above Campbell's massive tangle of paint.

Campbell's colorfields are subterranean, infernal even. Their hues recall Hieronymus Bosch's underworlds and the subdued landscapes of Ralph Albert Blakelock, while swerving from representational aspects. He also targets the alchemical properties of metals, considering gold's association with transmutation and the symbolic purity of silver. In certain instances he's attached gold leaf directly to the surface of his painting, but in this body of work Campbell opts for subtler articulations of the protoscientific conceit. A sheer glimmer can be found throughout *Nirvana*, whose webbed paint vibrates in place. He stages numinosity within this arena of intensity. Here too, jewel tones flit and flitter about, an aspect that Campbell peppers throughout multiple works on view. Alternatively, *Leader* foregrounds the mirage of a waterfall whose burnt umbers cascade down toward a murky conclusion. Optical play strikes a nerve, as the palette's weight distracts from the fact that these surfaces are relatively flat.

Campbell observes the historic shift from representation toward pure abstraction, which necessitates an extreme degradation of selfhood. He mentions the work of Anselm Kiefer when discussing his own practice, nodding toward the brazenness and general magnitude of the celebrated German. Karl Ove Knausgaard's New York Times profile of Kiefer elucidates this perfectly, musing that "because his works are so monumental, so charged with time, so burdened by history, and because the private sphere, the near and the personal, is so completely absent from them." While Kiefer tracks a distinct post-War sense of loss, he reaches further back toward ancient ruins and medieval mythology. Campbell works in deference to the same spirit of history, though his situation reasonably contrasts Kiefer's.

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Susan Rothenberg is another notable figure who implicates antiquity, injecting symbolic forms into planes of minimalist abstraction. In a 1995 essay for Parkett, Mark Stevens explains that Rothenberg makes “pictures that seem at once archaic and modern.” He likens her work to the primal act of cave painting and emphasizes her particular affective notches. “The blunt, physical existence of her hand never lets up,” Stevens continues, “Rothenberg’s art can evoke a powerful sense of loss in us, for our culture is dominated by machined surfaces and is losing the feeling of the hand. The light in her painting, not surprisingly, also seems pre-modern. It is the light of the cave, the candle, the sun.” Campbell similarly appraises and absorbs traditional models, while maintaining a more discerning ear to the ground of contemporaneity.

Despite the aforementioned figures from Campbell’s inspirational database, the artist alternatively relies on pure abstraction, moving away from any Gestalt principle. Certainly, some compositions are reminiscent of J. M. W. Turner’s calamitous seascapes, apparently containing trace elements of negligible forms. Though the viewer might search and find such landscapes, rock formations, etc. any such referent is a mirage, a mere projection. Ultimately, these paintings are resolute and without didacticism. Campbell’s personal investments in history and aesthetics are undulant. He doesn’t pursue any visual proofing, instead tracking his own philosophy of effort.

– Reilly Davidson