



Leon Benn | The Violet Hour

January 31 – May 10, 2025

Opening Reception: January 31st, 3 – 5 pm

Rockland, ME – The Center for Maine Contemporary Art (“CMCA”) is thrilled to announce Leon Benn’s first institutional solo exhibition, “The Violet Hour.” Organized by CMCA’s new Curator Grant Wahlquist, the exhibition runs from January 31 – May 10, 2025. An opening reception will occur on Saturday, January 31st, from 3 – 5 pm.

Leon Benn’s adventurously colored, materially inventive paintings combine technical virtuosity and art historical awareness with popular symbols in an extended reflection on the relationships between nature and culture, innocence and experience, and childhood and adulthood. Featuring a suite of new works in which chemical and alchemical processes combine, “The Violet Hour” evokes narratives of creative and destructive forces engaging in a *pas de deux*. Setting post-apocalyptic landscapes alongside primordial forms and wistful bouquets of flowers, Benn acknowledges our ongoing ecological catastrophe while envisioning a future in which nature displaces the harms wrought by humankind.

Benn frequently begins by transferring drawings to linen or canvas by dyeing them in a Batik-like process. This initial step prepares the substrate as a ground for painterly experimentation in oil, oil stick, and acrylic paint in a mixture of fluid marks, loose geometric forms, and an accumulation of (occasionally *impasto*) lines and curves. The resulting works recall German Expressionist landscapes filtered through the complicated, post-Photoshop paintings of Laura Owens, with a dash of science fiction comic books and Walt Disney films thrown in for good measure. The paintings in “The Violet Hour” also continue Benn’s interest in representing illumination in a style that owes as much to the animations of Hayao Miyazaki as the paintings of Georges de La Tour.

The stories these paintings suggest are awesome in every sense of the word. In *La Place à Gaz, Zone Rouge* (“*Place of Gas, Red Zone*”) the *zone rouge* of northeastern France, devastated by poison gas and artillery shells during WWI, contains portals to astral realms alongside discarded skulls. The cabin in *Lakeside Charm of the Quaternary Anthropocene* dissolves into the landscape while *Snow White* plays on a television inside. In another domestic scene, *Midnight Roomba*, fungi grow inside a lamp underneath a painting of the aurora shimmering above a mountain range while a Roomba patrols the desolation outside. “The Violet Hour” conjures ruinous landscapes, nuclear tests, landfills, even microplastics, but channels them through the fantastic imaginings of childhood, suggesting—as does T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*, from which it takes its title—that all is not lost where imagination persists.

“I sat upon the shore / Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order?” - T.S. Eliot



This exhibition was made possible by the generous support of the Roxanne Quimby Foundation.

About the Artist

Leon Benn received his BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design and his MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles. He has had solo exhibitions at David B. Smith Gallery (Denver, CO), Roberts & Tilton (Los Angeles, CA), Stems Gallery (Brussels, BE), and Carter & Citizen (Los Angeles, CA). His work has also been featured widely in group exhibitions at venues including CMCA, the Institute of Contemporary Art (Portland, ME), SPACE Gallery (Portland, ME), Brand New Gallery (Milan, IT), the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (St. Louis, MO); and Lisa Cooley (New York, NY). This is his first institutional solo exhibition. He lives in Portland, ME.



Leon Benn
Lakeside Charm of the Quaternary Anthropocene, 2025
Oil, oil stick, and fabric dye on canvas
64 x 45 inches
Courtesy of the artist and the Center for Maine Contemporary Art



About CMCA | cmcanow.org

Located in downtown Rockland, Maine, CMCA is a contemporary arts institution presenting year-round exhibitions and educational programs for all ages. Location: 21 Winter Street, Rockland, ME, 04841. Hours:

- November through May: Wednesday - Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm, Sunday 12 to 5 pm;
- June through October, Monday - Saturday, 10 am to 5 pm; Sunday 12 to 5 pm;
- Closed Federal holidays.

Admission is \$10; seniors 65+ and students with ID are \$8; children under 18 are free; CMCA members are free.

For more information, please contact Grant Wahlquist (gwahlquist@cmcanow.org, 207.245.5732).