

March 12, 2011 Written by Amy Rosen

Building Up Layers: An Interview with Leslie Wayne

Leslie Wayne wants viewers to feel the Earth's compression and sense the subduction of geologic forces in her elemental oil paintings. She layers vibrant and transparent colors both through the stretched canvas panels. When the hot layer is dry, she cuts, flips and accepts the material to evoke the power of the natural world. A collection of her hot layer works is currently being shown at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art in Charleston, SC. Amy Rosen recently spoke to the artist, an expert of DeChirico's art, about her practice, the pros and cons of her materials, and the nature of her relationships.



Before the Quake, Oil on wood, 30" x 137", 2006. Courtesy of the Artist.

Amy Rosen: You studied piano at landscape painting at the University of California in Santa Barbara and then moved to New York City to study sculpture at Rutgers. How did this transition affect or change your work? You've also said that your paintings are a secular response to traditional SP. Can you talk about the importance of a secular response?

Leslie Wayne: Landscape and abstraction only developed in a very direct way when I decided to confront my own history, and my respect and identification with religious landscapes. I had read nothing about during the very obvious references to geology and landscape in my work. Instead I was so interested in the language of abstraction, and I became a student of why was I learning of why don't I know it all.

I began working with the Blue Ocean (2006) and was thinking about how we can affect the consumption of endangered species. I read the book written by the founder of IBC, and just thought it was really important. The organization's mission is to create a better relationship with science, history and the arts, and before I knew it, I was out there working with the institute in a fundraising role. So ocean conservation was just on my mind that time. I was going to make address issues of the environment, and this dovetailed with my desire to confront my history of piano-landscape painting. I was also making a book written by a bunch of great and traditional landscape artists of the 19th Century who were often motivated to return to express the sublime in nature. All of this created the perfect storm. I was trying to find a contemporary, secular, abstract response to the traditional landscape painting. It was an effort, but for me it was more about finding resonance for the spiritual in nature.



One Big Love #36, Oil on wood, 137" x 137", 2009. Image Courtesy of the Artist.

AM: Process is so important in your work, and you have said that you want viewers to have a visceral response to your paintings; can you talk about the physicality of your materials? How much planning goes into each painting?

LW: I don't start out with a plan. I'm not looking to make anything specific. I have a general idea of where I want to go, but I like to allow the process to flow. I like to let the shape of the panel suggest where it might go in terms of forms. I like the shape of the great blocks as well as in which the materials might reveal processes of the natural world, the flow of sand, the weight of water, and the compression and subduction of the earth. In an oil on wood panel physicality of oil, wax, and the permeability of the material is what the eye sees and what you feel. I don't plan a dominant idea in the resolution of my work. But it's not the subject of my work and more than the properties of color and the subject of Richard Serra's work. The issue lies in the degree to which we tolerate chance, and intention governs outcome. In Vespa's for example 13 panels, #1007, I had a vision of space on the entire side of a wall and some questions in relation, but stationary at the same time. The painting was originally 7 panels and I slowly without it down. I wanted it to be a vertical assemblage, but also to be seen as a construction as you could read it from top to bottom as the landscape was moving in front of you. That's one of the few examples of control in my work because the very first panel set the tone for the rhythm of color, and the other had to live up to what that created a flow. So this piece was more planned out from the start.



AM: You have a series titled, One Big Love that was shown in 2010 at the Jack Shainman Gallery in New York where you live with your husband, and also included in the recent article. These paintings are much smaller and maybe more intimate than the other works at the Halsey. Does gender play a role in your work, and do you think of yourself as a female artist or a gender-blessed painter?

LW: When I first started painting this way I was very aware that I was coming out of the trajectory of Abstract Expressionism, which was very male dominated. In painting the heavy quality of Abstract Expressionism into the small format, I was making a feminist statement about the prospect of color, a huge problem on a small scale. For example, the small series from One Big Love allowed a physical reaction from working with larger panels. Years ago someone told me women of color was a male or female space) said, something like, "We think you're going to be done in a moment because of the way you set up the scene." So the more that building up layers of color are also metaphors for building up layers of thought, and history. You kind of build your own history in the 1000 painting. However, it's not just the dangerous territory when you try to describe work as feminine or masculine. One of the reasons I started to work larger was because I was very aware that I am seen as "the one who makes for this painting." I remember something I said when I gave a talk for a show I was in about ornament and decoration in contemporary painting. I said that I needed to make a painting with the application of a male image, leader and the power of a Bernard Newman.



One Big Love #48, Oil on wood, 12" x 9" x 9", 2010. Image Courtesy of the Artist.

AM: You've called yourself a minimalist artist and I wonder if you can talk about the evolution of your work and what that can and can't be for you?

LW: I do make a minimalist nature. Maybe the thing myself a distance by not following a tradition, but my nature is to think where can this go next? I have this inside fear of repeating myself. Give me the way I look, something different happens every time. It's in my nature to keep exploring the unknown.

Recent Work: In Charleston there will be on view at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art in Charleston, SC through March 12, 2011.



Installation image from the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art.

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