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Robert Berlind

Reality Is Everything: Selected Works 1995 – 2012

September 23 – November 4, 2017
Opening reception Thursday, September 28, 6 – 8 pm



Skowhegan Bridge, 2001, 54 x 42",
oil on linen



October Water, 1999, 80 x 60",
oil on linen

Robert Berlind's second solo exhibition at Lennon, Weinberg is focused on a selection of paintings of trees, water and reflections. The water's rippling surface provided him an opportunity to merge in these works both what lies below and the landscape above. Always an intuitive painter, he was drawn to subjects that were dynamic and unfixed, that challenged the acts of observation and painterly description.

His interest in reflection and transparency began with a series of nighttime paintings when he settled in a Chelsea loft after receiving his MFA at Yale and a few years teaching at the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design in the early 1970s. Of those paintings, he said:

"I got into painting reflections in windows at night. And those were the first paintings I did in my studio, which then had the old windows so it was kind of an interesting reflection, looking through and painting the reflection at the same time. And it was clear by this time that my interest was really in probing perception itself and those situations where you see more than one thing at a time, like seeing through a window, seeing a reflection and seeing the window itself, you know? I thought how do you do that?"¹

When he later bought a home in the western Catskills, the natural setting of fields, woods, streams and ponds raised the same question. *"For years, I looked at water surfaces, meditating on it, without thinking it was paintable or drawable. But I would look at the water, and it kept changing and moving and I could lose myself in that. You forget what you're looking at and you forget who you are and you're just there."²*

That state of forgetting, subsuming conscious attention to looking and painting to uninhibited expression, resulted in many of Berlind's best paintings. Having chosen a subject because some combination of elements caught his eye – a railing and trees seen in reflection through a foreground spray of branches in *Skowhegan Bridge* – he would make one or more plein-air paintings. Back in the studio, the

¹ *In Memoriam: Robert Berlind with Robert Kushner*, The Brooklyn Rail, February 2016.

² *"What you Really See Is How You Are Looking": Robert Berlind Interviewed by Elena Sisto*, Artcritical.com, February 9, 2016.



Skowhegan #4, 2002, 72 x 42",
oil on linen



Shore, Low Tide, 2004, 12 x 24",
oil on board



Convergence, 1995, 16 x 20",
oil on board

painting might suggest new interpretations as the subject broadened to include not only his memory of the scene but also the record of its observation in the painting itself.

The “on-site” paintings are necessarily small, painted quickly without planning or revision. Those processes got underway in the studio, where Berlind repainted the images, often at a larger scale, sometimes several times. Colors and compositions were adjusted and clarified, sketchy elements re-stated in passages of still-spontaneous, improvisatory paint handling. Made by an oil painter with an eye for subtle color and contrast, *October Water*, the largest of four versions of the subject, for example, is a masterful example of Berlind’s process of observing, describing and reimagining.

The title of the exhibition, “Reality is everything,” is borrowed from Fairfield Porter, who, like Berlind, was both a painter and a perceptive critic attuned to a wide range of historical and contemporary artists, and was one of his family of influences. It bears noting that Berlind’s undergraduate thesis was on the drip paintings of Jackson Pollock, who famously answered when asked if he worked from nature, “I am nature.” Both statements speak to what Berlind sought from the ever-flowing current of experience, briefly stilled through the act of painting.

Robert Berlind (1938-2015) received a BA in Art History at Columbia, and an MFA at the Yale University School of Art in 1963. His work began to appear in group and solo exhibitions in New York and elsewhere in the 1970s during a period of renewed appreciation for representational painting. He was included in several projects of The Artists’ Choice Museum, a roving artist-run organization formed to support exhibitions of figurative and landscape painters. One such show took place at Tibor de Nagy in 1980. The gallery would later present four solo exhibitions; several were reviewed in the New York Times, as well as in *Art in America*.

Berlind taught at the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and Yale. He is Professor Emeritus at the School of Art and Design at SUNY Purchase. His critical writing has appeared in *Art in America*, *Border Crossings* and *The Brooklyn Rail*. In 2013, he received the prestigious Art Writers Grant from the Andy Warhol Foundation in association with Creative Capital.

He twice received awards from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, as well as grants from the NEA and the Pollock Krasner Foundation. He was a member of the National Academy and received their B. Altman Award for Painting in 2007 and the Award for Excellence in Painting in 2015. His work is included in the collections of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Colby College Museum of Art, Neuberger Museum, Farnsworth Museum, the Mattituck Museum, and National Academy Museum.