

The Morning News

The Paint Storm Whitney Bedford



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Whitney Bedford, *Ships (Shadow and Smoke)*, 2014. Ink and oil on canvas on panel, 48 x 84 inches. Photo: Evan Bedford. Courtesy the artist and Carrie Secrist Gallery, Chicago.

The Paint Storm

Interview by Rosecrans Baldwin

November 10, 2014

Whitney Bedford's paintings of ships and shipwrecks, ocean ice and fireworks, are simultaneously hot and cold, catastrophic and serene. It's a tension that makes for some very turbulent art.

Whitney Bedford (American, b. 1976) lives and works in Los Angeles. Her exhibition history includes The Jewish Museum, New York; Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, Mass.; Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena, Calif.; Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver, Colo.; and St. Paul St. Gallery, University of Auckland, Australia.

Bedford's work may be found in public and private collections worldwide including Jumex Collection, Mexico City, Mexico; Francois Pinault, Paris, France; The Saatchi Gallery, London, UK; and Rosa and Carlos de la Cruz, Miami, FL. She is the recipient of an MFA from the University of California Los Angeles (2003) and the Fulbright Visiting Artist grant, Berlin, Germany (1999). Whitney Bedford is also represented by Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Art & Concept, Paris, and Starkwhite, Auckland.

Bedford's solo exhibition at Carrie Secrist Gallery is on view through Nov. 15, 2014.

The Morning News:

What's your attitude toward the sea?

Whitney Bedford:

I live right on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, so it's an ever-present horizon in my life. I think it's also a metaphor for a balancing act in our lives: a stage on which we fight our great dramas. Man v. nature, from the most epic to banal degree.

TMN:

As you develop a painting, when does emotion play a part?

WB:

I develop a painting from the structure of previous academic paintings, or widely available source material of whatever subject I'm pursuing for its iconic connotations. I go through a whole process of drafting and editing an image on canvas before I really let myself unravel it. I would say the unraveling side of painting it out is pretty emotional, as in gestural.

TMN:

Is it always gestural? Isn't it often mechanical?

WB:

It's mechanical in the beginning, the drafting, and then turns gestural in the paint storm.

TMN:

The show combines turbulence and serenity, foreboding and calm. Did you want the paintings to come off as balanced?

WB:

No, I think of them as conversations. If they were easy we wouldn't be talking about them.

TMN:

Yeah, but that "conversation" happens long after you're involved.

WB:

I consider the conversation to be my commune with the piece, the this-for-that and then-that-falls-apart-and-the-other-part-pulls-back-up. The conversation continues long after I have left behind my ambitions, and the painting starts to finish itself in dialogue.

The hope is that the audience finds something resonant in the work and starts to unravel the work of the conversation I've had with the piece into an understanding of their own.

TMN:

When are you most confident as a painter?

WB:

I think the whole thing is pretty humbling. But there is a sense of awe and relief when you finish something and really know that it's finished. That it has reached its own pitch and that I have left it to its own ending.

TMN:

What was the first piece of art you ever sold?

WB:

I can't exactly recall. I think it might have been when I was an undergraduate at the Rhode Island School of Design, at a student fair, to another student collector. I think I was surprised that there was a money equivalent to the work. The work seemed so personal and expletive—it was hard to imagine that it could mean something desirable to a stranger. I felt lucky to have it be both personal for me and yet somehow also for someone else. I still do.

TMN:

Here's a quote from Charles de Gaulle, "Old age is a shipwreck."

WB:

I love that. I will be surrounded by friends.