

:: GRANT WAHLQUIST GALLERY

Leon Benn: Waves

6/3/22 – 7/30/22

Grant Wahlquist Gallery is pleased to announce Leon Benn's second solo exhibition at the gallery, "Waves." The exhibition will run from June 3 – July 30, 2022. The gallery will host an opening reception with the artist on Friday, June 3rd, from 5 – 7 pm.

"Waves" features new paintings produced in the Spring of 2022 and marks a significant shift in themes, affect, and technique from Benn's first exhibition at the gallery, trading the interstices of Portland's landscape for far-flung, potentially interplanetary vistas and scenes. In place of serene consideration of the intersection of the pastoral and urban, these paintings are flush with drama and emotional turmoil. This transition exists not only with respect to the paintings' contents, but also their execution. Though Benn continues to incorporate a Batik-like process of dying linen supports as grounds for painterly experimentation, they are now less visible and frequently covered by overpainted gradients, figures, and landscapes recalling the styles of 19th Century masters as filtered through a Gaussian blur. Similarly, the impasto-like surfaces for which Benn is well known are nearly absent, replaced by virtuosic, expressionistic oil stick marks that push the importance of drawing in the artist's practice to the fore.

As an ensemble, the paintings in "Waves" suggest a narrative that is both a *katabásis*—a descent into the underworld—and a science fiction journey to an exoplanet. Benn merges the cosmic adventures of Captain Future and Orpheus's mythic rescue of Eurydice from Hades in paintings where descent and ascent become indistinguishable, especially in paintings in which figures converge or submerge with water. His adventurers are accompanied by animals (bats, beavers, egrets) who are benign fellow travelers but also symbols for both mythic characters and contemporary concerns (pandemics, climate disasters). Benn further heightens the drama of these paintings with a renewed attention to the play of light, through glowing suns, moons, faces, and hands. Though the exhibition's references are historically broad, from ancient tales to Old Masters to retro comic books, its mood is absolutely contemporary. In times like these, fantasy—especially of escape—is a survival instinct.

Leon Benn lives in Portland, Maine. He studied at the Rhode Island School of Design (BFA) and the University of California, Los Angeles (MFA). He has had solo exhibitions at Grant Wahlquist Gallery; David B. Smith Gallery, Denver; Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles; Stems Gallery, Brussels; and Carter & Citizen, Los Angeles. His work has been featured in group exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Portland (forthcoming); Able Baker Contemporary, Portland; Space Gallery, Portland; Brand New Gallery, Milan; the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis; James Harris Gallery, Seattle; and Lisa Cooley, New York, amongst others. Benn's first exhibition at the gallery received significant press coverage in the Boston Art Review, Portland Press Herald, the Maine Arts Journal, and NPR (WBUR – the Artery).

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The gallery is located at 30 City Center, Portland, Maine. Gallery hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm, and by appointment. For more information, visit <http://grantwahlquist.com>, call 207.245.5732, or email info@grantwahlquist.com.