

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

Leidy Churchman

Press Packet

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Scott, Andrea K. "Leidy Churchman." *The New Yorker*, March 16, 2020, p. 14.

Fateman, Johanna. "Leidy Churchman." *4Columns*, March 6, 2020.

Marcus, Daniel. "I of the Storm." *Artforum* 58, no. 2, October 2019, pp. 170–79, 245.

Noor, Tausif, and Leidy Churchman. "Merging With: Leidy Churchman, Interviewed by Tausif Noor." *Bomb*,
October 3, 2019.

Eisenman, Nicole. "Best of 2019." *Artforum* 58, no. 4, December 2019, pp. 158, 162–63.

Battaglia, Andy. "Crocodile Rock: Painter Leidy Churchman Cedes the Floor to No One in First Museum Survey."
ARTnews, July 10, 2019.

Sillman, Amy. "Leidy Churchman: Crocodile." *Artforum* 57, no. 9, May 2019, p. 92.

Hirsch, Faye. "Leidy Churchman." *Art in America* 103, no. 8, September 2015, pp. 145–46.

"Q/A Leidy Churchman: How do digital images change painting?" *Spike Magazine*, no. 44, Summer 2015.

Smith, Roberta. "Review: Leidy Churchman, 'The Meal of the Lion.'" *The New York Times*, May 21, 2015.

Ammer, Manuela. "Ab-Ex Clichés, Living Canvases, and Graveyards." Translated by Nicholas Frindell. *Frieze*, no. 5,
Summer 2012.

Galerie

IN THE MOMENT

The latest edition of the temperature-taking Whitney Biennial, presenting a strikingly disparate array of artistic voices and visions, captures these complicated, unsettling times

By Ted Loos

If the Whitney Museum of American Art's biennial exhibitions, famous for surveying the U.S. contemporary art scene, are meant to crystallize something essential about the culture right now, it's telling that the current iteration, titled "Quiet as It's Kept," has a dark section and a light section. The yin and yang structure is both functional—the dark galleries are heavy on film and video—and symbolic, a reflection of our disquieting, changing times.

On view through September 5, the Whitney Biennial presents the work of 63 artists and collectives, the bulk of it displayed on the museum's fifth and sixth floors. The upper floor, with its dusky walls and carpeting, enclosed galleries, and minimal lighting, exudes an uneasy, ruminative feeling. One story below, ample daylight and white walls project a sense of openness and possibility.

"We don't do themes, but we do hunches," says David Breslin, who curated the show with Adrienne Edwards, regarding the way the artists and projects were chosen, with an emphasis on fostering conversations among multiple generations. Edwards adds that, given the political and social unrest of the past few years, the exhibition asks "questions around collectivity—does each individual 'I' represent a 'we?'"

The four Biennial artists profiled here take wildly different approaches to their art. What they share is a refusal to accept the limits of what has come before while also learning from it. As Breslin puts it, savvy mining of the past "helps us lean into the present."

“What’s more contrived than starting with water lilies?” says Leidy Churchman. “I thought, I’ll start from what I like about the Monet and then go deep with it”



Leidy Churchman's Whitney Biennial contribution, a 36-foot-wide triptych titled *Mountains Walking*, draws inspiration from Claude Monet's Impressionist paintings of water lilies as well as a 13th-century Zen text.

LEIDY CHURCHMAN

Claude Monet's "Water Lilies" paintings, in particular the eight mural-size works installed in a circular gallery at the Musée de l'Orangerie in Paris, have long been an important art historical marker for Leidy Churchman. "I've wanted to do this for a while," the artist says of *Mountains Walking*, a 36-foot-wide, three-panel painting conceived for the biennial that partly riffs on the Monet series. The triptych also takes inspiration from a 13th-century Zen text called *Mountains and Waters Sutra*.

Churchman creates work that, while often figural, doesn't have a signature style or focus. Their talent is embracing the

quotidian, even cliché, and transforming it into something personal and elevated. As the New York artist puts it, "What's more contrived than starting with water lilies? I thought, I'll start from what I like about the Monet and then go deep with it."

The swirling blues, greens, and whites of *Mountains Walking*, shot through with areas of pink, make an impactful misty landscape, but Churchman doesn't stop there. These hues are overlaid with a yellow grid; something beyond mere appreciation of nature is going on here, and the artist says the grid is what moves it into the conceptual realm. A bit of surprise and humor comes from the fact that the painting is set on clawlike animal feet—not exactly a Monet move—that are connected to Buddhism, Churchman explains, noting, "They bring a wrathful protector energy."

The Pennsylvania native, who recently showed new paintings at Matthew Marks

Gallery in New York, says that keeping an openness is part of the recipe for artistic success. "Painting it was quick, about a month of working every day," Churchman says. "I wasn't sure what I would do, but I was ready for it."

ArtReview

Leidy Churchman *New You*

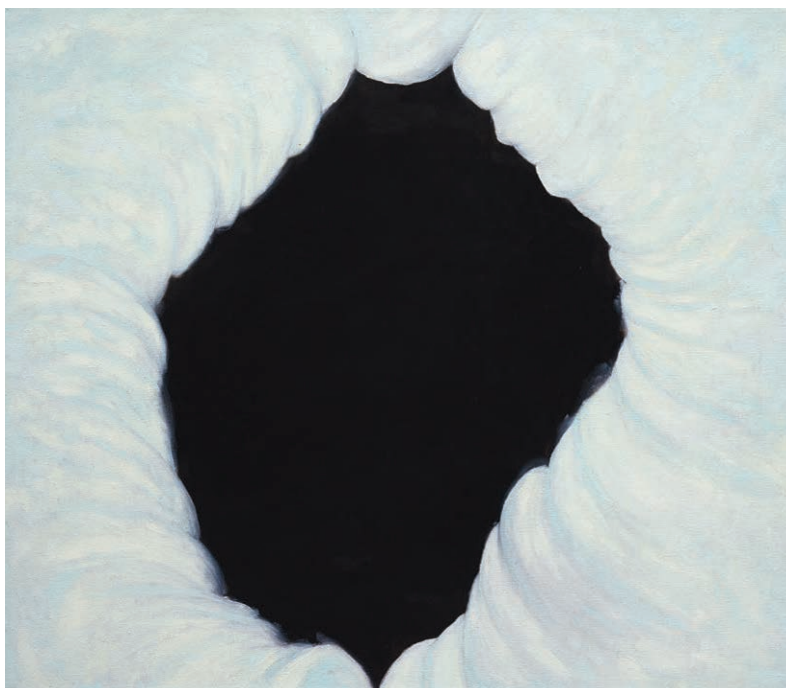
Matthew Marks Gallery, New York 11 March – 23 April

In 1435 the artist Leon Battista Alberti described painting as ‘an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen’. Sometimes these windows open inwards, onto subjects that reside in the human psyche; sometimes they cut through aspects of art that can be more readily theorised than perceived. The intimate scenes and broad vistas of Leidy Churchman’s *New You* offer all these views – internal and external, material and abstract, earthly and metaphysical – and summon both the history of art and the construction of the self in equal measure.

The content of this exhibition is so diverse as to feel like a scroll through an image bank. Nonetheless, each unframed canvas serves as its own frame around a subject that

is profoundly searching. Several (*In The Mood, So Bright* and *Ohh I like That...*, all works 2021) approximate casements in warm pastel colours with the quietude of Agnes Martin paintings. These are hung salon-style with more comically figurative windows onto contemporary life, such as *MOM* – an incoming call from the artist’s mother on their iPhone screen – and *Calculator*, the square icon for the titular Apple app. There’s an aperture onto the artist’s bedside reading, too, with a faithful rendering of a dust jacket: *Dying Every Day: Essence of the Bardos*, a book about the states attainable after death. According to Tibetan Buddhism, in the afterlife you may eventually reach the bardo of becoming. To become the ‘new you’, you must leave your past self behind.

In the show’s most ambitious paintings, Churchman invites us to depart from this world and enter the sweeping landscapes of the soul. Seafoam rendered with the dappled softness of Gustave Courbet coats the rocks of *Wonderland* in white, beneath the watchful eye of a waxing moon. *Eternal Life New You*, Churchman’s largest wall-bound painting to date, imagines water lilies floating impossibly on the ocean’s salty surface. At the centre of this marine vista, a dark rectangular void both flattens our view and opens an escape hatch from reality. A similar crevasse has been rent from the grooved white edges of *Not Knowing*, like the bottomless melt hole in a glacier. Nature is the consummate space for self-reflection; look out Churchman’s windows and see in. *Evan Moffitt*



Not Knowing, 2021, oil on linen, 66 × 76 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

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THE BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

ArtSeen

Leidy Churchman: *New You*

By **Ksenia Soboleva**



Leidy Churchman, *Exterminate All The Brutes*, 2021. Oil on linen, two panels, 30 x 52 inches overall. Courtesy Matthew Marks, New York.

Leidy Churchman is a queer gift to the tradition of American landscape painting. This might seem an odd statement, given that Churchman’s subject matter ranges from nature views and animals to interiors, abstract compositions, and screenshots. Yet the physical world and the world of the mind are interconnected, and approached by Churchman—who maintains a dedicated Buddhist practice—with the same curiosity and care. Each of the thirty paintings currently on view in the artist’s second solo exhibition with Matthew Marks conveys a powerful sense of place in a rapidly changing world. The press release informs us that Churchman “conceives of each painting in the exhibition as part of an interconnected body of work.” Moving across a variety of scales, palettes,

ON VIEW
Matthew Marks
March 11 – April
23, 2022
New York

Soboleva, Ksenia. “Leidy Churchman: New You.” *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 2022.



Leidy Churchman, *MOM*, 2021. Oil on linen, 10 1/2 x 15 inches. Courtesy Matthew Marks, New York.

and imagery, the exhibition unfolds like a mood board or mind map, giving the viewer a glimpse into Churchman's inner and outer visual landscape.

Entering the gallery, I am instantly drawn to *Wonderland* (2021), a rocky seascape Churchman likely painted in Maine, where they are partially based. As the foamy water splashes onto earth-colored rocks, a triple moon floats in a gray sky. I cannot help but make a comparison to Frederic Edwin Church's *Fog Off Mount Desert* (1850), which was also painted in Maine and depicts a very similar landscape. The serendipitous resemblance of their names aside, Church and Churchman share an ability to convey the sublime aspect of nature and its various moods, a worthy alternative to religion.

Unlike Church, however, Churchman lives in a time when much of our interaction with nature is mediated through computer screens. For the majority of us, the screen of a phone is our first view upon awakening: many of us check the weather app before looking out of the window. And when we do look out and see a nice view, we feel an urge to capture it with our camera. Every time I spy a particularly pretty moon, I snap a photo and text it to a special someone. Yet instead of simplistically critiquing technology and our relationship with it, Churchman considers the ways in which screens have become part of our daily landscape, for better or worse. Much of the artist's own inspiration comes from browsing the internet, hunting for imagery that catches their interest. Rendering screenshots in paint on canvas has become one of Churchman's signature gestures, an act that materializes the quintessential desire to deny impermanence.

Soboleva, Ksenia. "Leidy Churchman: New You." *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 2022.

One of several smaller canvases hung salon-style, thus emphasizing their interconnectedness, *MOM* (2021) depicts a screenshot of the artist's mother in their contact list. The avatar circle shows her wearing a white bathrobe and looking into the camera somewhat skeptically. Above, we can see that Churchman has a full battery and a perfect Wi-Fi connection. A two-panel composition of an astronaut casually cruising by planet earth (*Exterminate All the Brutes* [2021]) does not reveal its source so easily, that is until you step closer and notice the progress bar at the bottom that tells us Churchman is about two-thirds of the way into a TV-show episode.

The exhibition title, *New You*, speaks to Churchman's ongoing interest in transition, whether related to their gender identity, spiritual practice, or creative space. A small painting titled *New You* (2021), hung on the same wall as *MOM*, depicts a cartoonish elephant head attached to an ostrich-like torso and grasshopper legs. Reminiscent of a *cadavre exquis*, the figure is a playful representation of someone constantly shedding and remaking identity. The phrase *New You* is repeated in the largest work in the exhibition, one of the largest pieces Churchman has created to date. Consisting of two panels, *Eternal Life New You* (2021) presents a Monet-inspired landscape with waterlilies floating in a pond more reminiscent of clouds than water. A grasshopper sits atop an ambiguous structure—perhaps an abstracted tree limb—and the alphabet appears camouflaged in the sky of the right panel. Tree branches peek in from the top left while a rough parallelogram is sliced out from the landscape like some kind of metaphysical frame or door, its borders slightly elevated in perspective. In the bottom corners, tan stones unfold onto the landscape like hairy limbs emerging from the water.

Most striking, a black monochrome rectangle looms at the heart of the composition, centering abstract form in an otherwise figurative work. Unlike some of the other abstract works in the show, which can read like close-up views of skies and window patterns, this black rectangle provides the eye no hint of representation. Within Churchman's visualized landscapes of the mind and experience, the black void is a poignant embodiment of the Buddhist journey to transcendence. Relinquishing a desire to grasp the material world, it opens up the potential to discover new landscapes yet unknown to consciousness.



Leidy Churchman, *Eternal Life New You*, 2021. Oil on linen, two panels, 79 x 205 inches overall. Courtesy Matthew Marks, New York.

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T THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

ARTIST'S QUESTIONNAIRE

An Artist Whose Buddhist and Painting Practices Converge

Leidy Churchman's latest show encourages a focused, joyful kind of looking that feels deliberately at odds with our increasingly distracted world.



The artist Leidy Churchman in their Brooklyn studio with their work "Kishkindha Forest (Jodhpur)" (2020). Jacob Pritchard

By Osman Can Yerebakan

March 5, 2020

Tucked at the end of an unassuming alley in Red Hook, Brooklyn, amid 19th-century red brick houses originally built to accommodate fishermen, Leidy Churchman's studio feels like a refuge — a minimalist retreat that exudes the kind of tranquility found in the artist's meditative paintings. The 800-square-foot space, located on the first floor of a former industrial building, is unfurnished but for a trio of stainless-steel and wood work tables, which are entirely covered with palettes, brushes and oil paints

Yerebakan, Osman Can, and Leidy Churchman. "An Artist Whose Buddhist and Painting Practices Converge."
T: The New York Times Style Magazine, March 5, 2020.

— mostly Old Holland but Churchman, who uses “they” and “them” pronouns, favors Gamblin for white and sap green. On a breezy afternoon in February, they stood surrounded by five large-scale paintings — including “Kishkindha Forest (Jodhpur)” (2020), a vibrant landscape populated by monkeys and bears that’s based on an 18th-century Indian work by an unknown artist, and the abstract “Groundless Ground” (2020) — which they completed for “Earth Bound,” their current exhibition at Matthew Marks Gallery in New York. Their dog, a black Saluki-and-Doberman mix named Sarah, sat alongside Churchman as they put the final touches on the works.

It’s been six months since the artist moved into this studio — previously, they rented a space on the Lower East Side not far from their Alphabet City apartment — and working in the former port neighborhood has grown on them. “I see trucks and forklifts coming and going, I hear people fixing motors and engines. I enjoy being the only artist in this building,” they say. But now that they’ve finished the 21 paintings for the Matthew Marks show, they admit they’re already eager to move on. “When I devour a space, I believe I am done and ready to go,” says Churchman, who spent just three years in their former studio. The sparse furnishings in the Red Hook space are, in part, a reflection of the fact that they are just passing through.

Churchman, 40, is known for their contemplative, detailed explorations of a broad array of themes relating to memory, pop culture and art history. If they have a signature, it is perhaps the diversity



The work “Karma Kagyu & Essex St. (Yellow Studio) (Devotion)” (2020), one of the new paintings on view at Churchman’s show at Matthew Marks Gallery in New York. Jacob Pritchard

Yerebakan, Osman Can, and Leidy Churchman. “An Artist Whose Buddhist and Painting Practices Converge.”
T: The New York Times Style Magazine, March 5, 2020.

of their subject matter, which has included exotic animals, Tibetan Buddhism, maps, online videos, paintings by other artists, from the French Post-Impressionist Henri Rousseau to the American Modernist Marsden Hartley, and book covers. In fact, they compare a painting to a good book, one that reveals new depths with each reading — though they often like to present multiple images within a single canvas without any clear hierarchy, as if inviting the viewer to sequence the narrative as they please. Last year, the more than 60 diverse paintings in the exhibition “Crocodile” at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College, which remains the largest survey of Churchman’s career to date, especially highlighted the artist’s wide-ranging interests. One work — “Don’t Try to Be the Fastest (Runway Bardo)” (2019), a 32-foot-long collagelike painting spread across the museum’s floor — included images of a scene from the 1982 movie “E.T.,” a notecard bearing a Buddhist Lojong slogan (“Abandon Any Hope of Fruition”) and a skunk captured mid-spray. Another painting, “Disappearing Acts” (2019), was inspired by the conceptualist pioneer Bruce Nauman’s “Contrapposto Studies, I through VII” (2015-16). “There is so much detail and nuance surrounding us,” they say about the abundance of seemingly ordinary images that we have the potential to overlook.

Buddhism, which Churchman has practiced for six years, is a primary theme in their new show. “Karma Kagyu & Essex St. (Yellow Studio) (Devotion)” (2020), a large yellow-drenched painting, shows a Buddhist ceremony taking place in a room that resembles both the Karma Triyana Dharmachakra monastery in Woodstock, N.Y., which Churchman visited shortly before making it, and the artist Zoe Leonard’s former New York studio (some years after Leonard left that building, Churchman occupied the adjacent space and that connection lingered in their imagination). “Buddhadharma Fever” (2019), another vast painting in autumnal colors, is an ode to both a bedroom in Churchman’s father’s house in Maine, where they often spend time and sometimes paint in the garage, and to the same Woodstock monastery. “What I didn’t quite realize was that the monastery there is modeled after a traditional one in Tibet, and that we would actually be chanting in Tibetan,” they recall. “So much seeped in and manifested there — my yearslong Buddhadharma fever transitioned into something much roomier, an easy, breezy devotion that feels like letting go.”

Working in contrasting scales — “White Girl” (2019), which depicts a young woman on a kind of recumbent bicycle, measures just 9 by 11 inches — allows the artist to engage their viewer more actively in the practice of looking, inviting them to move closer to or farther from a canvas, an exercise they consider especially urgent in our era of iPhone snapshots that are forever an arm’s length away. “Looking at paintings is healthy for us,” Churchman says. The idea for “iPhone 11” (2019-20), a painting in which the device resembles a planet or spaceship floating within an infinite darkness, came to the artist while they were navigating the F.D.R. Drive en route to their studio: There, above the parkway, was a gigantic billboard promoting the phone’s three-lens technology, the positioning of which recalled a human face. Removed from their original context in Churchman’s work, those lenses seem to stare quizzically back at the viewer, all but demanding you stop and meet their concentrated gaze.

As we took shelter in the studio from the blustery day outside, Churchman made cups of espresso, opened a can of dolmades and answered T's Artist Questionnaire.

What is your day like? How much do you sleep? What's your work schedule?

My schedule depends a lot on my dog. If I don't bring her to the studio, I leave her with my Buddhist mentor, Gayle.

How many hours of creative work do you think you do?

Around eight hours every day, although it depends on whether I'm working from my studio, my apartment or Maine. It's a 10-hour drive from New York to my father's house, so when I go, I tend to spend a good amount of time there.

What's the first piece of art you ever made?

I believe it was a sculpture that I made as an undergrad at Hampshire College in Massachusetts. I just took stuff — a coffee pot, for example — from all over the place and wired it together to create a human figure.



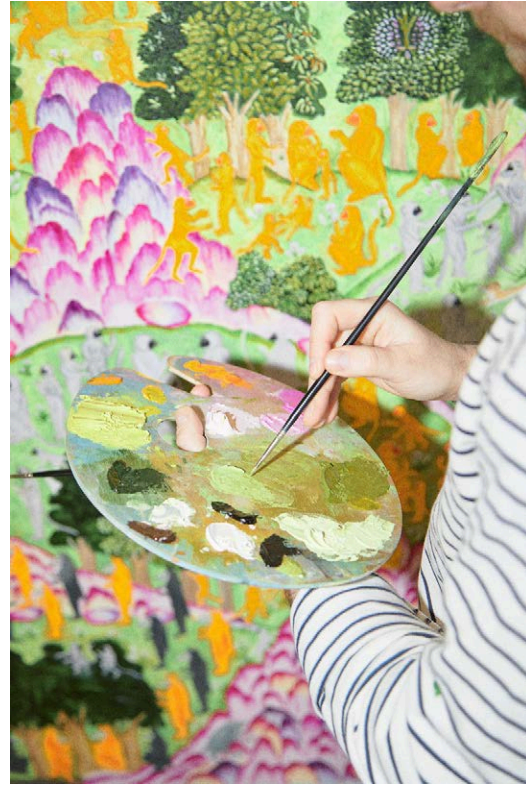
Churchman usually works alone in their studio, though their dog, Sarah, often keeps them company. Jacob Pritchard

Yerebakan, Osman Can, and Leidy Churchman. "An Artist Whose Buddhist and Painting Practices Converge." *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, March 5, 2020.



While the artist makes large-scale paintings in their studio — pictured here is a selection of their tools and a jar of turpentine in their Red Hook space — they also make smaller works at their Alphabet City apartment.

Jacob Pritchard



To create “Kishkindha Forest (Jodhpur)” (2020), Churchman used a projector to trace details of the original 18th-century Indian painting on which the work is based onto their canvas. Jacob Pritchard

What’s the worst studio you ever had?

Probably my Columbia University studio during grad school. It was a small space right next to the boiler with no windows. A studio with no windows can be really depressing, but this one led me to create video work, which benefits from darkness, so it turned out O.K. in the end.

What’s the first work you ever sold, and for how much?

I had a painting in one of those coffee-shop exhibitions, and a man paid me \$100 for it in cash. This was in Amherst, Mass., in 1999, while I was in college. They kept the painting up until the exhibition was taken down, by which point I had lost his phone number. I guess he never received that painting.

How do you know when you’re finished with a work?

I believe I’m not done most of the time. But that’s why we artists always have to look. If we turn around, close our eyes and then look back, we see what the painting is doing by itself. We have to closely watch what we’re putting out there.

How many assistants do you have?

I use temporary assistants once in a while. For example, I had a few people help me paint “Kishkindha Forest (Jodhpur).”

Have you assisted other artists before? If so, whom?

I helped my friend MPA do her hair for one of her Los Angeles shows, which was in the same vein as her show “Red in View” at the Whitney in 2017. We once lived in the California desert together, and we also did a performance together, in the Netherlands in 2012.

When did you first feel comfortable saying you’re a professional artist?

I don’t think I feel comfortable with it. I don’t like saying I’m an artist because people don’t have a reference point for being an artist as a profession.

Is there a meal you eat on repeat while you’re working?

My mom bought me this water bottle that has motivational instructions on it to remind me to hydrate. I’ll usually eat something on repeat for a week, and then move onto something else. This week is dolmades, as you can tell.

What is the weirdest object in your studio?

Maybe my sun lamp. They also call them SAD lamps for people with seasonal affective disorder. I admit that I bought it on Amazon.

Are you binge-watching any shows right now?

I really like “Real Time With Bill Maher.” And I was sick a couple of weeks ago and binged “Cheer.” I think I identify with Morgan the most — I loved her hair!



“Groundless Ground” (2020) is one of two new paintings that Churchman named after a principle of the Mahamudra meditation tradition. The artist started the work in Maine and was inspired by the region’s rocky landscape. Jacob Pritchard

Yerebakan, Osman Can, and Leidy Churchman. “An Artist Whose Buddhist and Painting Practices Converge.” *T: The New York Times Style Magazine*, March 5, 2020.



Churchman, seated in front of "Reclining Buddha" (2020).

Jacob Pritchard



Churchman mostly favors Old Holland brand oil paints but uses Gamblin for certain shades.

Jacob Pritchard

How often do you talk to other artists?

I keep in touch with Nicole Eisenman; we send each other pictures of what we're working on. Also, my mom (who is not an artist) gives me really good advice on my work.

What is the last thing that made you cry?

Listening to the votes come in from the senators during the impeachment trial.

What do you do when you're procrastinating?

I text people or look at Instagram. I sometimes delete the app and come back to it.

What do your windows look out on?

A cobblestone courtyard full of rusty junk and old vehicles.

What do you bulk buy with the most frequency?

Granola bars and espresso pots.

What's your worst habit?

Vaping.

What embarrasses you the most?

Spending too much time alone.

Do you exercise?

I jog with my dog in the East Village.

What are you reading right now?

A book about two prominent teachings of Tibetan Buddhism called “Wild Awakening: The Heart of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.”

What’s your favorite artwork by someone else?

“Monkeys and Bears in the Kishkindha Forest,” an 18th-century painting by an unknown artist from Jodhpur.

This interview has been condensed and edited.

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GARAGE



Phone 11, 2019–20, Oil on linen. Photo: Aaron Wax

ART | By [HALEY MELLIN](#) | Apr 5 2020, 2:31am

The Meditative Richness of Leidy Churchman's Earth Bound

The painter talks about their latest show at Matthew Marks, and the way the Internet warps the way we experience art.

I met Leidy Churchman to walk through the artist's new show *Earth Bound* at Matthew Marks in New York, while the galleries were still open in February, prior to the COVID-19 closing. Kind and intuitive, Churchman deftly handles major topics—Buddhism, now-ness, the environment, abstraction, digital life—with gratitude and observational humility. The scale varies in the twenty-one new paintings on view, from a one-foot abstraction to an interior bedroom scene eight feet wide. Likewise, subject

Mellin, Haley. "The Meditative Richness of Leidy Churchman's *Earth Bound*." *Garage Magazine*, April 5, 2020.



"RECLINING BUDDHA," 2020, OIL ON LINEN IN NICHE DESIGNED BY THE ARTIST. PHOTO: AARON WAX

matter shifts between the personal, the shared and the monumental. One painting depicts a reclining Buddha carved into a granite cliff in Sri Lanka dating from the twelfth century, with modern-day stanchions rendered alongside. Others illustrate the camera lens of the latest iPhone arranged as three eyes, another a moon, while another pictures a cloud-covered Earth from space with a new Earth rising up behind it. We talked about looking at art online, and the current state of the world.

The timeline of this show is spanned pre-epidemic with the gallery, and now the show is visible digitally. What do you think about looking at paintings online?

I think you can learn a lot about art online but seeing work in person is special. Even for video, because an artist installs it stealthily, in their own way. Most everything is transmogrified to be online, from its previous form, and art is too. Should I start making iPad paintings like David Hockney? Maybe we can learn to be more aware of what we are seeing and what we are not. Especially with painting. It is like a picture of a person: you might get an idea of what they look like and be able to recognize them in a crowd, but you won't know who they really are, what they are capable of.

I enjoyed watching her with you. It is good to hear your thoughts on each painting. How do you reconcile technology with the mind-space of meditation and Buddhism?

You know the feeling you have in meditation sometimes, or if you're sitting quietly and you have that quiet library feeling in your stomach? To me, it feels like my belly starts to make honey, it's a warm inner-richness

feeling. Everything starts to fill up, it is an essential feeling and very ordinary, too. When we go so far outside our bodies when we are online, and for so much time, we need to have a real practice to cultivate open awareness. Our riches are in our body, which keeps us alive on earth. This makes me think about Martha Graham, Yvonne Rainer and others at the St. Mark's Church scene. They brought the embodiment of the everyday to performance art and dance. What can performance artists do to guide us now? My favorite artist over the past many years is Mariana Valencia. In her domain, everything in the world is hers, intimately. Could it be that we could craft our "online" to reflect every intimate way that the world sparkles for us, secretly?

Can you talk with me about the painting that the show is titled after: Earth Bound (Card 21 of the Secret Dakini Oracle)?

In the book by Penny Slinger and Nik Douglas, the meaning of the Earth Bound card is written: *Realization of the underlying meaning of earthly existence. The completion of a cycle. Responsibility, understood in its broader aspect as humanitarianism. Action as the result of choice and free will. Liberation from the bondage of habit. Change in viewpoint. Strong e-mindedness, particularly with regard to worldly things.* I wasn't



"EARTH BOUND (CARD 21 OF THE SECRET DAKINI ORACLE)," 2020. OIL ON LINEN. PHOTO: AARON WAX

Mellin, Haley. "The Meditative Richness of Leidy Churchman's Earth Bound." *Garage Magazine*, April 5, 2020.



"BUDDHADHARMA FEVER," 2019, OIL ON LINEN. PHOTO: AARON WAX

reading these words while making the painting but reading them now is spooky considering this global crisis. Reverend angel Kyodo Williams came to walk through the show with me the day before it opened. Her riff on the picture was interesting: She saw the planet Earth floating in space as the way we view ourselves with our ego, the way we imagine and speculate and fret over our entire image as a separate being. The other view of earth in the painting, which is bigger and fluffier is more embodied and interdependent. It is like the view we see of ourselves looking down and seeing our chest and belly and legs. Earth bound, planted, connected.

How do you decide what to paint, since you work with a range of subjects?

At this particular moment it makes me think about how a dog chooses something to chew. Which toy, which stick. It just happens, in a self-secretive way. And then that thing goes into the mouth of a dog. When my dog Sarah chews something, she takes millions of little clicking bites with her front teeth. It happens throughout the day and I like to say she's at the type-writer, or she's texting.

While you paint a number of different subjects, you're pretty much sticking to painting an animal. Why paint?

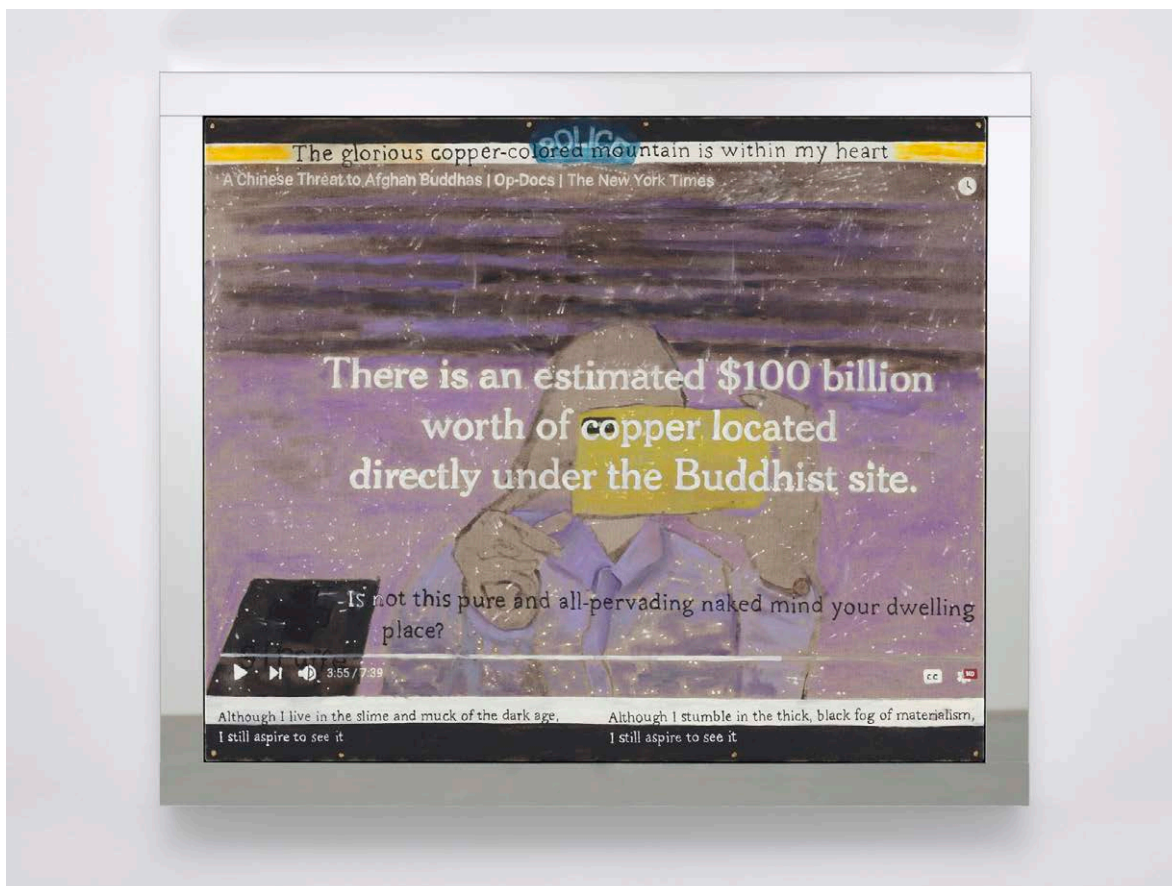
There are so many things to say about that question. My answer would look like an astrology chart. One small part of the chart would be my history of learning. Painting is a self-sufficient action. It is a direct action and

gives all the time in the world. I find so much in painting, for instance, making an answer to a question that reads like a chart.

A few weeks after the gallery walk-through Leidy reflected on the show while the exhibition is temporarily suspended, though viewable online, due to the pandemic.

Thinking about my recent paintings, bound on earth with the COVID-19 virus. This show is called Earth Bound, which turns out is just what a pandemic is. It is not ethereal; the virus clings to bodies and things. Out of the blue, it is trespassing into our most intimate worlds. I read something today by the historian Frank M. Snowden who wrote, "Epidemics are a category of disease that seem to hold up a mirror to human beings as to who we really are." Mirroring is very much what my works aim to embody.

The through-line of this show, for me, is the *Reclining Buddha* painting in the pale blue alcove. It faces the *100 Billion Sadhana of Mahamudra* painting, crossing two of the rooms of the gallery. The Reclining Buddha is a famous image. It was the first way in which the Buddha was depicted after he died, on his death bed, laying down at the end of his life. It is a meditation on his humanness, while at the same time, his enlightenment. I had this painting in the studio for six months, and it had an actual effect on me, which surprised me! I was really shocked by this body. It was so fluid, so peaceful and inviting. Enlightenment is



"100 BILLION SADHANA OF MAHAMUDRA," 2020, OIL ON LINEN, MIRROR. PHOTO: AARON WAX

Mellin, Haley. "The Meditative Richness of Leidy Churchman's Earth Bound." *Garage Magazine*, April 5, 2020.

a real human quality. That quality is always there in us. We can see it—our basic nature—in flashes. Seeing the Buddha appearing and dying everyday was very nice. I most likely won't find my way to enlightenment in this life, but I aspire to it. I would like to be like the Buddha: fluid, peaceful, and inviting; extending those flashes of realization for the benefit of others.

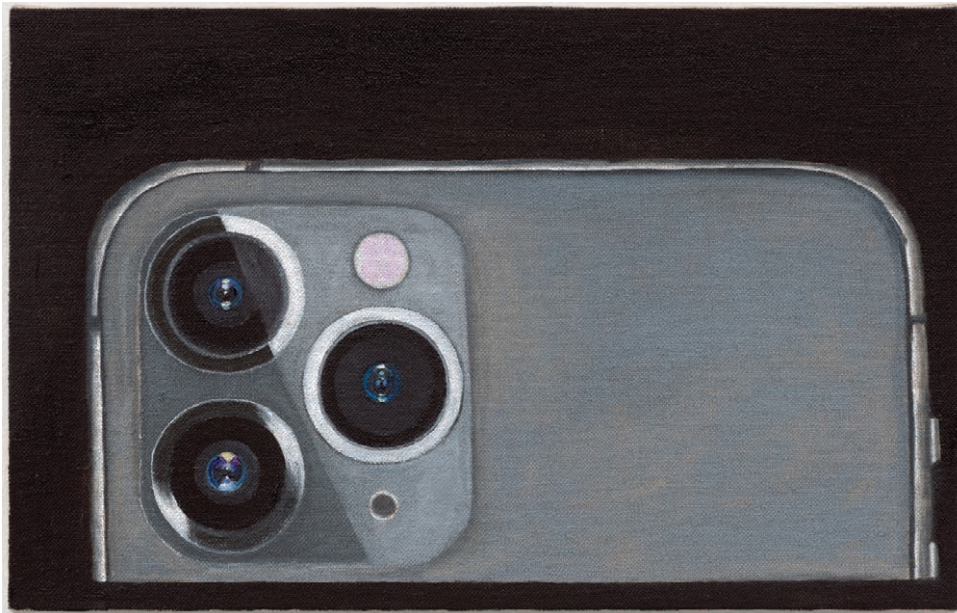
The *Billion Sadhana of Mahamudra* a painting, across from *Reclining Buddha*, depicts where we are right now — in Zoom rooms and in online isolation. I was inspired to make this painting in recognition of being online and my position in relationship to the internet—physically as a reflection in my computer screen and mentally filled with dread and fear and a feeling like there was an emergency. The painting holds the experience of sitting in two places at once. Not quite in either location—where are we exactly? The painting is framed by mirrored glass, which turns the whole work into a video or moving image. Words appear on the painting from the Sadhana of Mahamudra, which has an incredible origin story—asking the question, “Is not this pure and all-pervading naked mind your dwelling place?”

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

THE NEW YORKER

AT THE GALLERIES



Is there anything **Leidy Churchman** can't paint? Among the subjects of the twenty-one paintings in the New York phenom's new show at the Matthew Marks gallery (through April 18) are a fever-dream bedroom, a moonrise, a girl on a bike, a rose garden, a monkey-filled forest from the Ramayana, hypnotic abstractions, and a laundry-room sign. The palette runs from monochrome black to hot purple and pink; dimensions change from a scant dozen inches to more than ten feet wide. The only logic at work is intuitive, even oracular. The mood is less image-overload restless than optimistically omnivorous—Churchman seems hungry to paint the whole world in all its mystery and ordinariness, two categories that often collide here. In Churchman's deft hands, a cropped closeup of an iPhone 11 (pictured above) assumes a third-eye mysticism worthy of Hilma af Klint.—*Andrea K. Scott*

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|||| 4Columns

Leidy Churchman

Johanna Fateman

From iPhones to a mythic monkey kingdom: a show of paintings from the browser cache.



Leidy Churchman: Earth Bound, installation view. © Leidy Churchman. Image courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: Aaron Wax. Pictured, left to right: *Reclining Buddha* and *Kishkindha Forest (Jodhpur)*.

Leidy Churchman: *Earth Bound*, *Matthew Marks Gallery, 522 West Twenty-Second Street, New York City, through April 18, 2020*

• • •

My Kindle Cloud Reader displays a two-page spread from the 2008 book *True Perception: The Path of Dharma Art* by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the Tibetan scholar and meditation master who introduced Vajrayana Buddhism to the West. Another window shows a 2016 post on the Whitney Museum's Education

Fateman, Johanna. "Leidy Churchman." *4Columns*, March 6, 2020.

Blog titled “Teens Meet Leidy Churchman,” which tells of the artist reading passages of Trungpa’s book to a group of students, and meditating with them. I have, in other tabs, the press release for Churchman’s new exhibition, *Earth Bound*; a Twitter search for #coronavirus; a “quick shop” view of a jacket, which, now marked down, still costs too much; and various Wikipedia pages, including the one for “Reclining Buddha,” where I found the source image for Churchman’s 2020 painting of the same name.



Leidy Churchman, *Reclining Buddha*, 2020. Oil on linen in niche designed by the artist, 48 × 79 inches. © Leidy Churchman. Image courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: Aaron Wax.

Among the characteristically cryptic assortment of twenty-one canvases on view at Matthew Marks, *Reclining Buddha* is the only one that’s not installed on a white wall. Placed in a pale blue, shrine-shaped niche designed by the artist, it faithfully reproduces the Wikipedia photo’s generous vantage, showing the length of the monumental, stone-carved side-sleeping figure, which belongs to the twelfth-century Gal Vihara temple in Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka. A crumbling, low brick wall partially cordons the statue off; a simple bench avails itself to tired or contemplative visitors; and the composition’s postcard-like white border subtly signals that it’s not a plein-air portrait—all somewhat humbling features, at odds, maybe, with its devotional framing.

“The term *dharma art* does not mean art depicting Buddhist symbols or ideas, such as the wheel of life or the story of Gautama Buddha,” writes Trungpa, not with regard to Churchman’s scene, of course, but for the occasion of the first-ever session of the Naropa Institute, in 1974. (His missive is included in the aforementioned posthumous collection, *True Perception*). “Rather, dharma art refers to art that springs from a certain state of mind on the part of the artist that could be called the meditative state,” he continues. “It is an attitude of directness and unself-consciousness in one’s creative work.” The use of the Buddha—in the piece cited above, and in related, scattered references elsewhere—orients us to the philosophical concerns of Churchman’s art. But the assiduous painter, who mostly forgoes oil’s capacity for seduction, doesn’t glorify or even particularly highlight such symbols’ metaphysical significance. Instead, Churchman emphasizes their impermanent, un-iconographic existence as things in the world and on the internet.



Leidy Churchman, *100 Billion Sadhana of Mahamudra*, 2020. Oil on linen, mirror, 32 1/8 × 38 inches. © Leidy Churchman. Image courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: Aaron Wax.

The hazy, purple and gold *100 Billion Sadhana of Mahamudra* (2020) shows what seems to be a screengrab of a paused video on YouTube. In fact, we are looking at an ominous, dreamy composite: a still from a *Times* “op-doc” titled “A Chinese Threat to Afghan Buddhas,” which reports on the threat to Buddhist antiquities (from a Chinese mining company as well as the Taliban), is overlaid with an iPhone-holding figure and lines of text. It’s Trungpa again: “Although I stumble in the thick, black fog of materialism / I still aspire to see it.” (“It,” in the original text, part of a shifting refrain, refers to “the all-pervading naked mind,” among other related, poetic possibilities.) The layered painting is a despairing comment on global-capitalist rapacity and war. It also captures the particular kind of synthesis—and confusion—born of the easy and endless juxtapositions that the web affords. And it might recall, if you’ve ever sought meditation instruction, one of anxious thinking’s rapid crossfades that becomes particularly vivid as you try to let thinking go.



Leidy Churchman, *Earth Bound (Card 21 of the Secret Dakini Oracle)*, 2020. Oil on linen, 58 1/8 × 42 3/4 inches. © Leidy Churchman. Image courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

Yet, however prominent they are in this show, allusions to dharmic themes form just one category of image in a career that, on the whole, dissolves categories. (Although, I guess, that is itself a dharmic theme.) Churchman's substantial body of paintings (a densely hung survey closed at the Hessel Museum in October) is known for its disarming variety of styles and subjects, and this new gallery show is no exception. Its title work, *Earth Bound (Card 21 of the Secret Dakini Oracle)* (2020), is based on a Tantric divination card. Resembling a new-age take on the 1968 photo *Earthrise*, which was snapped from the window of the Apollo 8, the cheesy yet poignant image shows our planet not from the moon's orbit, but, impossibly, from the atmosphere of another, identical earth. A familiar brown and teal globe, marbled with clouds, appears like a long-lost twin, just above the glowing, misty horizon line of our current galactic home. Other images include a realist rendering of an iPhone 11 Pro; a Hallmark-ish close-up of roses in a mirrored frame; a small, orange grid of dots; an enormous, verdant panorama of Kishkindha (the mythic monkey kingdom in the Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*); and the big, flabbergasting, vaguely O'Keeffian abstract landscape *Groundless Ground* (2020).



Leidy Churchman, *Groundless Ground*, 2020. Oil on linen, 86 1/8 × 102 1/8 inches.
© Leidy Churchman. Image courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: Aaron Wax.

This is not to say that Churchman's approach is one of purposeful incoherence or opacity; the radical heterogeneity is not random. But maybe it's a little more mysterious than before. In the past, art-historical shout-outs to figures as diverse as Marsden Hartley and Barbara Kruger have mingled with careful facsimiles of book covers and inscrutable wildlife scenes to map a zigzagging, self-styled lineage. And intimate gestures of homage to contemporary queer and trans artists of Churchman's own community—such as in a lovingly copied painting of a moody 2010 photograph from Every Ocean Hughes's Christopher Street piers series, or a canvas depicting a realist sculpture of multimedia artist Juliana Huxtable—have offered a very specific, if fragmentary, view of a social and artistic cosmos. In *Earth Bound*, more often it's a dizzying, impersonal cosmos that is explored—though with the same eccentricity and personal passion as before. And Churchman's signature browser-cache quality still rules.



Leidy Churchman, *iPhone 11*, 2019–20. Oil on linen, 9 5/8 × 15 1/8 inches. © Leidy Churchman. Image courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: Ron Amstutz.

On its face, such internettiness strikes as irreconcilable with a meditative state. To be mindful online—in a culture where the internet is synonymous with distraction and compulsion, on a day when I refresh my feeds between every clause and tumble headlong down a YouTube chute—feels impossible, paradoxical. But the riddle of Churchman’s weird attentive practice, with its calm handling of both information and paint, does seem to open up space. While the internet has changed our experience of the world, it has not changed the nature of experience itself. Being online, Churchman reminds us, with a guileless rigor that Trungpa might call “directness and unself-consciousness,” is actually just being.

Johanna Fateman is a writer, art critic, and owner of Seagull salon in New York. She writes art reviews regularly for the New Yorker and is a contributing editor for Artforum. She is a 2019 Creative Capital awardee and currently at work on a novel.

ARTFORUM



Above: Leidy Churchman, *Don't Try to Be the Fastest (Runway Bardo)*, 2019, oil on linen, 7 × 32".
Opposite page: Leidy Churchman, *Basically Good*, 2013, oil on linen, 12 × 13½".

I OF THE STORM

DANIEL MARCUS ON THE ART OF LEIDY CHURCHMAN

TUCKED WITHIN THE DENSE ARRAY of canvases in “Leidy Churchman: Crocodile,” the artist’s survey exhibition currently on view at the Hessel Museum of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, is a small painting of a rat perched on the edge of a body of water. Pressing its nose close to the water’s surface, the rodent appears vexed by the sight of its inchoate reflection. Created in 2013, the painting was first exhibited in 2015 under the title *Narcissistic Rat*; Churchman later retitled it *Basically Good* in 2017, as if to allay its protagonist’s dysmorphic concerns. Does it matter what species we see when we look in the mirror? Or what gender? Or what shape? Not really, *Basically Good* reassures us. Still, something is not quite right about this scene of pondside self-examination: Churchman handles their rat Narcissus with Bonnardian wit, picking out the whites of the rodent’s bulging eyes and the hairs of its penile tail; yet the reflection in the water looks more mouse- than ratlike, its beady eyes peering meekly from an inscrutable face. Rather than resolve these differences, the painting seems to articulate the terms of their mutuality, positing rat and reflection on either side of an unbridgeable, but paper-thin, divide.



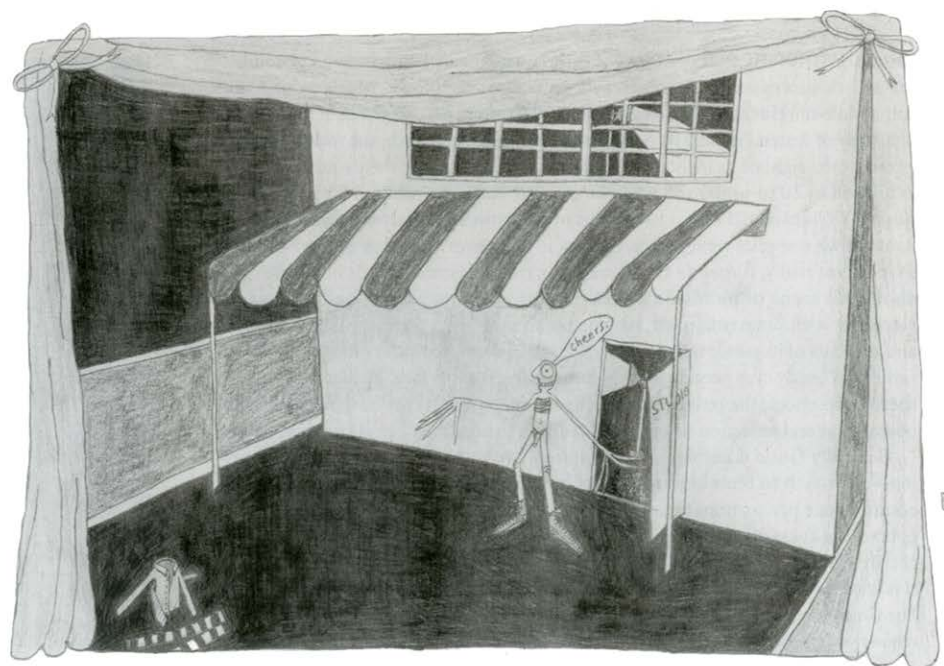
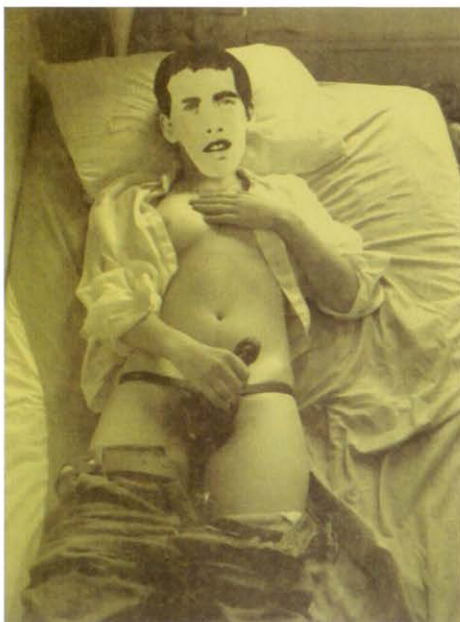
Basically Good is emblematic of Churchman's unlikely—and often disquieting—approach to representation, which, while never depicting the artist's own countenance per se, nonetheless toes the boundary between ego and imago. Of course, the coexistence of subjectivity with alterity furnishes one of modernism's core teachings, a legacy stretching from Arthur Rimbaud's dictum *Je est un autre* (I is someone else) through Adrian Piper's exaggerated self-portraits and beyond. For Churchman, who is both trans and a student of Buddhism, Rimbaud's mantra resonates in several directions, echoing queer-theoretical accounts of gender (and gender transition) while at the same time resonating with aspects of their own identity—including their racial positionality—that might well give the rat pause.

THE PREDICAMENT OF CHURCHMAN'S rodent owes much to the legacy of queer theory. It is, perhaps, especially indebted to Judith Butler's still-powerful critique of identity as a lived social category. Attacking the foundations of the gender binary, but with the entire philosophical edifice of identity in view, Butler emphasizes the inevitable failure attending each and every performance of self-coherence: It is just because identity *cannot* be adequately performed, she argues, that we are condemned to repeat its scripted gestures, enacting time and again “the vain and persistent conjuring and displacement of an idealized original, one which no one at any time has been able to approximate.”¹

These lines set the tone for Churchman's early experiments with performative self-representation. They publicly presented their work for the first time in 2002, while they were still an undergraduate, in the context of the New York-based queer feminist journal and art collective *LTTR*. Cofounded in the wake of 9/11 by K8

Hardy, Every Ocean Hughes (formerly known as Emily Roysdon), and Ginger Brooks Takahashi, who were later joined by Lanka Tattersall and Ulrike Müller, *LTTR* aimed to multiply rather than synthesize the diverse strains of new-millennium feminism (including transfeminism, then taking shape), while at the same time, and with increasing stridency, advocating street-level resistance to the forces of Bush-era neoconservatism. A friend of and collaborator with the group, Churchman contributed a drawing to the journal's first issue in which they confronted openly, albeit enigmatically, the theme of gender transition. Framed with a proscenium, with heavy curtains tied up in neat bows, it depicts a skeletal cyclopean figure who sports a strap-on cock and tightly bound chest. Posing beneath the awning of a film studio, and gesturing with Scissorhandsian fingers, the cyclops offers a simple greeting: “Cheers.”

It is hard to imagine a better alter ego for *LTTR* than this. From the beginning, the aims of the collective were frankly (and often uproariously) libidinal, defined in opposition to the mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identities and subcultures. Eschewing calls for gay and lesbian visibility, the journal's editors advocated a politics—and an aesthetics—of queer invisibility, proposing “a fluidity of names and gestures, outfits and pleasures, spaces and meanings,” in which each new role or pose is shed without hesitation. Churchman's drawing resonates with this project of transgressive self-performance, echoing Hughes's defense of the subversive potential of “dramatic arts.” (On *LTTR* 1's cover is a photo of Hughes wearing a David Wojnarowicz mask and a strap-on erection.) “Not an example of what has been termed ‘post-identity,’ implying progress beyond or transcendent of all categories,” as art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson argues, *LTTR* advanced “a vision of a more permeable, unbounded sense of possible identification.”²





Opposite page, left: Every Ocean Hughes (formerly Emily Roysdon), *Untitled* (David Wojnarowicz project), 2002. From *LTTR* 1, "Lesbians to the Rescue," 2002.

Opposite page, right: Leidy Churchman drawing from *LTTR* 1, "Lesbians to the Rescue," 2002.

Left: Flyer for the *LTTR* #4, "Do You Wish to Direct Me?," release party, 2005.

Right: Leidy Churchman and Luis Jacob, *Make Out Make Out Make Out Couch*, 2004, at the *LTTR* 3 release party, Art in General, New York, August 5, 2004.

Far right: Leidy Churchman cutting Math Bass's hair at the *LTTR* 4 release party, 22nd Street, New York, September 24, 2005.

Right, below: Leidy Churchman, *Purple Pals*, 2008, oil on wood, 31 x 23".



The impact of trans-ness in their art, and of their formative experience with *LTTR*, is best understood in terms of their release from the burdens of consistency and selfsameness.

Writing in the opening pages of *LTTR* 1, Hardy offered a slogan for this queer unboundedness: "Everyone in their own uniform!"

In everyday practice, social identities are harder to escape than Hardy's cheeky slogan admits, race and class in particular. Yet the journal's openness to transfeminism, and its centering of trans voices, was exceptional given the pervasiveness of transphobia even within feminist and lesbian circles at the time, and it remains exemplary. While there was little emphasis on passing in *LTTR*'s milieu, the importance accorded gender fluidity (or, per Hughes, "invisibility") in queer circles often placed trans artists in an ambiguous position. Reflecting on the stakes of transfeminism in the journal's first issue, theorist and activist Dean Spade, who had recently founded the Sylvia Rivera Legal Project, a legal-advocacy organization serving poor and marginalized trans communities in New York, countered the charge that trans men and women had betrayed the gay and lesbian cause with a rousing assertion of the subversive power of gender transition: "All of our bodies are modified with regard to gender, whether we seek out surgery or take hormones or not," Spade argued. "I want to be disturbed by what you're wearing. I want to be shocked and undone and delighted by what you're doing and how you're living. And I don't want anyone to be afraid to put on their look, their body, their clothes anymore."³

As *LTTR* morphed from a curated publication into a roving program of exhibitions and public events, Churchman's contributions to the collective took an increasingly participatory form. For example, on the occasion of 2004's "Explosion *LTTR*: Practice More Failure," an anarchic series of workshops, film and video screenings, lectures, and installations held at Art in General, New York, Churchman teamed up with artist Luis Jacob to produce *Make Out Make*





Six stills from Leidy Churchman's *Painting Treatments*, 2010, two-channel video, color, sound, 25 minutes 1 second.

Like semi-inscrutable posts, Churchman's paintings since 2013 often cull their subjects from the internet's churn.

Out Make Out Couch, a plush sofa intended for amorous use. Answering *LTTR*'s call for practices of queer jouissance, Churchman and Jacob's contribution also responded to the group's assault on artistic norms, recasting the framework of success and failure in terms of collective libido. The following year, on the occasion of *LTTR*'s fourth-issue launch party, Churchman offered free haircuts to their collaborators; the gesture made use of their talents as a hairdresser (their day job), but also made space for social transitivity, affirming the participants' desire to change hairstyles at will. Mobilizing the prefix *trans* in a spirit of deviant self-fashioning, these undertakings drew strength from transfeminist accounts of performativity and self-modification, celebrating failure as destiny and inadequacy as basically good, or good enough.

This embrace of illegibility, misrecognition, and failure informed Churchman's nascent studio practice as well. In a statement posted to their personal website in 2008, they declared their commitment to "mak[ing] transgender pictures," linking the in-betweenness of trans experience with "the humor of uncertainty, and relationships of supposed opposites. I see people and their environments morphing into transsexual, not as a definitive destination but a space of complexity and amusement."⁴ Although a handful of Churchman's early paintings openly represent gender play, such as the dildo-wearing duo in *Purple Pals*, 2008, the impact of trans-ness in their art, and of their formative experience with *LTTR*, is best understood in terms of their release from the burdens of consistency and selfsameness.

This "practice more failure" ethos was equally pronounced in Churchman's forays into video, as with their *Painting Treatments*,

2010, in which they and associates apply various raw substances—paint, but also potatoes, wooden planks, and charcoal powder—to the bodies of assorted friends, who lie naked together on the studio floor covered in towels and slathered in detritus. As Amy Sillman noted in these pages, Churchman's videos treat *mise-en-scène* as a substitute for the painter's blank canvas, rehashing the gestures of Pollock's drip paintings and Yves Klein's "Anthropometries" "not by a parodic emasculation or a cynical recapitulation, but with a newly enthusiastic form of painting as nude activity."⁵ Not unlike other, equally unproductive group nude activities, 2010's *Painting Treatments*—and a related 2009 piece—give full rein to pleasurable excess; that they fail to coalesce into a fixed form (the videos loop before any "complete" pictorial state is achieved) is par for the course. Around the time they made these videos, Churchman began to experiment with sculpture, generating awkwardly painted facsimiles of commonplace objects—including a dildo in a sock, cigarettes, a wilted tulip, an oversize piece of Brie, and the then-ubiquitous *Art in Theory*, 1900–1990 sourcebook—in a queer repetition of Claes Oldenburg's flaccid commodities.

AROUND 2010, Churchman dialed back their work in painting and sculpture to devote themselves to a new series of videos. At least partly necessitated by their residency at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende in Amsterdam, where they committed themselves to making large-scale floor paintings as "sets" for videos and performances, the hiatus also followed from the dissolution of *LTTR*, which published its fifth and final issue in 2006. Upon returning to easel painting around 2013, and now working exclusively in oil on

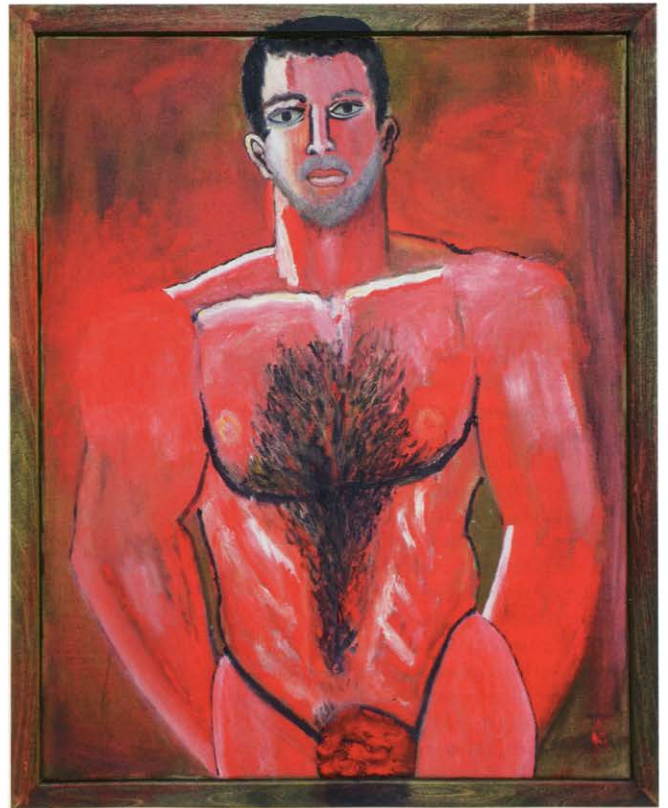


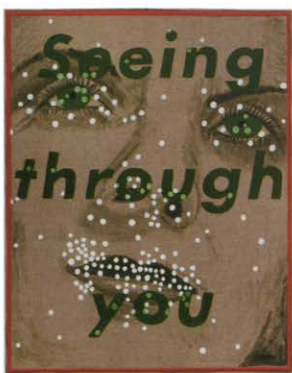
Left: Leidy Churchman, *Martha*, 2015, oil on linen, 39½ x 32".

Right: Leidy Churchman, *Bauhaus Boat Building Kit*, 2014, oil on linen, 44 x 33".

Below, left: Leidy Churchman, *Antique*, 2018, oil on linen, 76 x 66".

Below, right: Leidy Churchman, *New Dawn Marsden Hartley Soutine*, 2014, oil on linen, 34¼ x 28".





Churchman has come to describe the task of self-unfolding (and self-othering) in their paintings as a practice of mindful self-emptying.

linen, Churchman devoted themselves to the medium more fully than ever before, in the process summoning a new constellation of art-historical forebears—trading Pollock and Oldenburg for Marsden Hartley, Henri Rousseau, and Chaim Soutine, among other modernist lodestars.

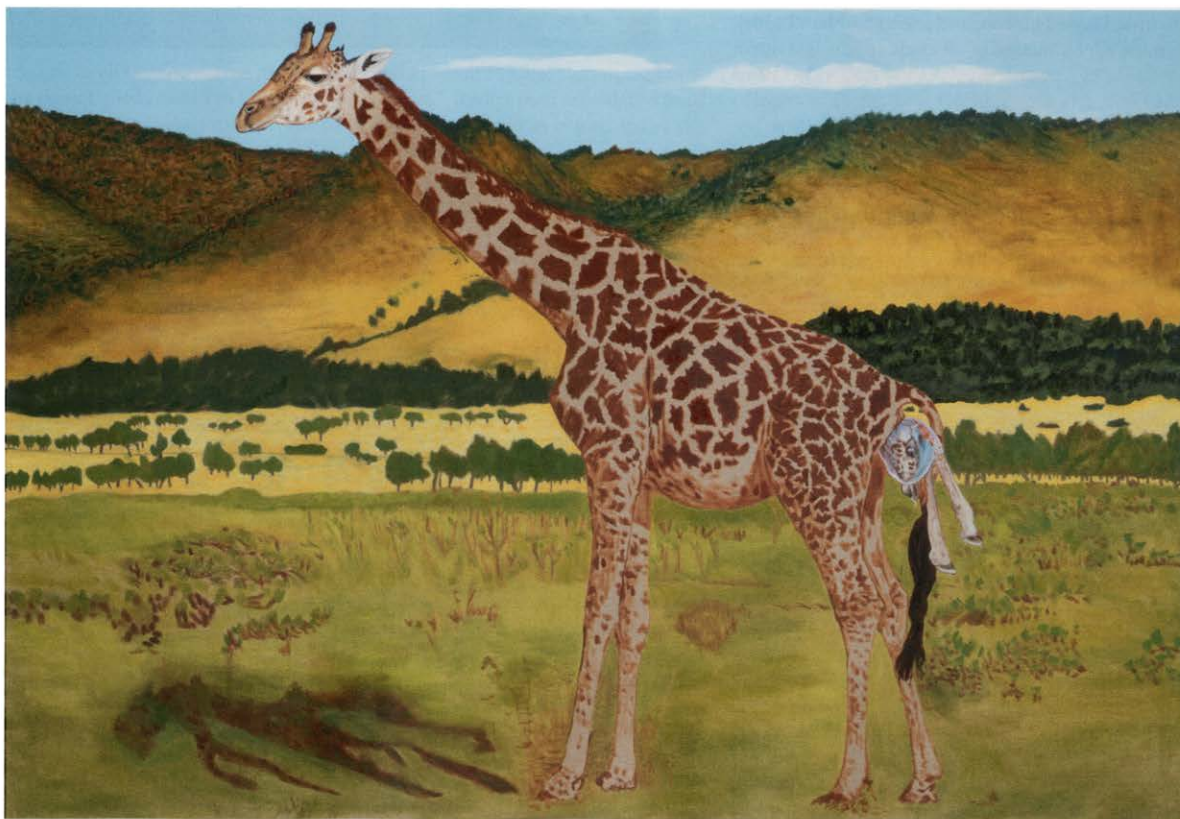
Churchman abandoned video when they returned to painting, yet they insist that this change of medium grew out of their work with digital technology, aligning the tabula rasa of the canvas with the performative space of the film studio—and also, importantly, with the networked spaces of social media. Like semi-inscrutable posts, their paintings since 2013 often cull their subjects from the internet’s churn, making the task of parsing their studio output in the aggregate akin to surveying an unfamiliar Instagram account. (“I can’t believe how many images I’ve seen,” Churchman admitted to a recent interviewer. “I’m in a scrolling world.”) In some cases, the subjects broached in Churchman’s paintings are unmistakably personal, as with *New Dawn Marsden Hartley Soutine*, 2014, their copy after Hartley’s beefcake painting *Madawaska—Acadian Light-Heavy*, 1940: Like Hartley, Churchman has put down roots in coastal Maine, where *Madawaska* was painted. Both artists approach the question of masculinity from a queer perspective, Hartley as a semi-closeted gay man, Churchman as a trans person.

Yet even in Churchman’s homage to Hartley, the differences be-

tween prototype and copy signify in ways that verge on illegibility: As its title suggests, the painting ranges promiscuously in style, as if treating Hartley’s *Madawaska* to a process of Soutinification, rendering the beefy model’s torso more literally beef-like. (Churchman’s liberal application of red pigment, streaked with chalky white, recalls Soutine’s paintings of flayed beef carcasses.) There’s a shift from sculptural solidity in the Hartley toward flat artificiality in Churchman’s copy, but this flattening effect is countered at the painting’s upper edge, where the model’s coiffure spills over onto the frame, as if projecting (ejaculating?) beyond representation into reality. The opposite of parody, *New Dawn Marsden Hartley Soutine* expresses an unrestrained zeal for its source, as if the copyist were bent on unleashing the erotic charge pent up (repressed, albeit only barely) therein.

While Churchman’s appropriation tactics might recall the anti-authorial (and anti-patriarchal) gestures of Sturtevant and Sherrie Levine, the “I” remains an open question in Churchman’s art, a signifier neither empty nor full. How, if at all, might Churchman identify with the taxidermy passenger pigeon in *Martha*, 2015, the very last member of its now-extinct species? What led them to discover the Bauhaus toymaker Alma Siedhoff-Buscher, whose wood-block sailboat is the subject of Churchman’s *Bauhaus Boat Building Kit*, 2014? Did the image, a jpeg that has made the rounds

on Pinterest boards, find them instead? In *Antique*, 2018, is the zebra who returns our gaze in the ornate bureau mirror Churchman's mammalian avatar or a smoke screen: the personification of the self's inaccessibility and vacuity? And what is to be made of their copies after friends and peers—see, for instance, Churchman's *Kruger*, 2017, which translates verbatim a photograph of Barbara Kruger's, *Untitled (Seeing through you)*, 2004, into oil on linen? Likewise, in *The Piers Untitled by Emily Roysdon*, 2016, Churchman copies a photograph by Hughes; elsewhere, they have appropriated an image of Frank Benson's *Juliana*, 2015, a 3-D-printed sculpture of artist Juliana Huxtable, and Cameron Rowland's *National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty, and Pension Association Badges*, 2016, as seen on the Museum of Modern Art's online database. What does it mean, moreover, that Churchman's appropriations of these works (should we call them Regrams?), and of other imagery as well, circulate not through the palimpsestic spaces of online social media—at least, not primarily—but within the closed circuit of the art market, where the codes of authorial self-expression remain as guarded as ever?



Opposite page, top, from left: Leidy Churchman, *Kruger*, 2017, oil on linen, 33 1/2 x 26 1/2". Leidy Churchman, *Juliana in Art*, 2017, oil on linen, 8 1/2 x 10 1/2". Leidy Churchman, *National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief, Bounty, and Pension Association Badges* by Cameron Rowland, 2016, oil on linen, 21 x 26". Leidy Churchman, *The Piers Untitled by Emily Roysdon*, 2016, oil on linen, 40 1/2 x 45 1/2".

Opposite page, bottom: Leidy Churchman, *Is the Universe a Simulation, Moderated by Neil deGrasse Tyson*, 2017, oil on linen, 12 x 26 1/2".

Above: Leidy Churchman, *Crocodile*, 2016, oil on linen, 32 x 39 1/4".

Left: Leidy Churchman, *Giraffe Birth*, 2017, oil on linen, 51 1/2 x 75 1/2".

These questions can't really be answered; nor should they be. If Churchman's return to painting implies a departure from the queer-communitarian framework of *LTTR*, accepting studio solitude and the valorization of individual authorship, their work remains steeped in the collective's core values: illegibility, misrecognition, and failure. Devoted as ever to *LTTR*'s tactics of invisibility, Churchman's art thrives on the tension between contradictory models of selfhood and alterity. This tension becomes especially pronounced in their paintings of nonhuman life, such as *Giraffe Birth*, 2017, a work derived from a BuzzFeed listicle, "Tour Operator Captures Incredible Pictures of Baby Giraffe Being Born." Typical of its genre, the BuzzFeed post aggregates a group of images shot by photographer Andreas Knausenberger into run-of-the-mill clickbait, tracking the newborn giraffe's progress out of the womb and into the world (the listicle ends by showing the baby giraffe's confident first steps). Isolating the first photograph of the BuzzFeed series, Churchman's painting calls attention to the mother animal's unexpected stoicism; indeed, were it not for the amniotic sac and the stray pair of legs protruding from her hindquarters, we might not guess that anything out of the ordinary was transpiring.

At first blush, *Giraffe Birth* seems to celebrate the miracle of nonhuman nativity, perhaps aligning the infant animal's phal-



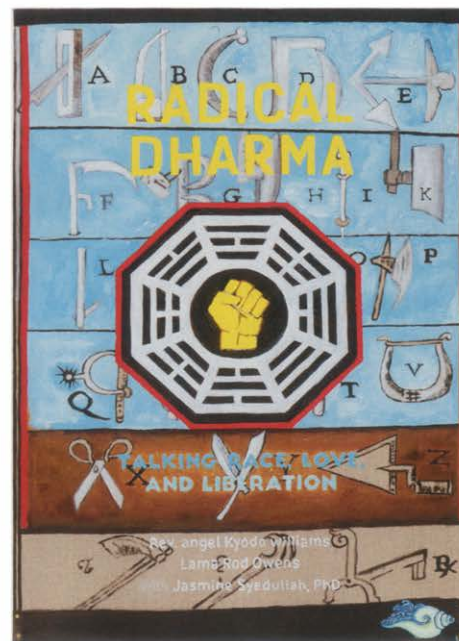
**Wealth is power, and power keeps the police in uniform.
The mind can be emptied, after all, but power, unlike evil,
is mindless; it keeps its hold where all else is swept away.**



Above: Leidy Churchman, *Relief of Weariness by Ultimate Mind*, 2017, oil on linen, 47 1/2 x 44 1/2".

Left: Leidy Churchman, *Infinitely Rich Qualities of Mind*, 2017, oil on linen, 35 x 45".

Right: Leidy Churchman, *The Teachers*, 2018, oil on linen, 30 x 22 1/2".





Above: Leidy Churchman, *Chief Police USA*, 2014, oil on linen, 35 x 31 1/2".



Right: Leidy Churchman, *Flotsam & Jetsam (Jail)* (detail), 2014, oil on twelve linen panels, overall 13' 9 1/4" x 1' 5 3/4".

lic protrusion with the self-birthing experience of gender transition. Yet the painting's subject—and its hero—is unmistakably the mother, not the child: Notice how Churchman leaves the body of the giraffe—at least, the pale parts of its reticulated coat, up to but excluding the animal's head—unpainted, letting raw linen show through, so that the central presence in the image turns, on close inspection, into an eerie vacancy. Likewise, the shadow cast by the giraffe, which barely registers in the original photograph, becomes a dark stain in Churchman's painting, its arboreal shape impressed on the grass like a burn mark or discarded skin. Then, too, the whole subject of the painting, a female giraffe in the throes of labor, points toward the political significance of pregnancy in trans communities. In any case, the enduring presence—or rather, the presence-as-absence—of the mother giraffe, the “I” of the painting, is unmistakable.

Other aspects of Churchman's paintings seem calculated to highlight their own awkward presence-as-absence as painter: For instance, in a diminutive painting titled *Is the Universe a Simulation, Moderated by Neil deGrasse Tyson*, 2017, Churchman renders a paused image of the American Museum of Natural History in New York's 2016 Isaac Asimov Memorial Debate, including their video player's volume bar at the top of the canvas—a marker of the artist's power to amplify or mute their sources at will. In other works, Churchman expresses their authorial role in quieter ways, by marking arbitrary borders around the edge of a painting or decorating its four corners with small circular marks, as if to emphasize the artist's paradoxical status within and outside the field of representation. While Churchman's paintings (including their paintings from photographs) rarely fail to make the artist's

hand felt, the feeling is most often equivocal, communicating imposture more than mastery.

THIS AWARENESS OF IRRESOLVABLE DUALITY, and especially of the artist's dual role as author and receiver, stems from Churchman's study of Zen Buddhism—an aspect of their recent work about which they are unusually voluble (unusually, insofar as artists and their critics rarely admit to the significance of spirituality as motivator). Placing themselves within a rich tradition of modernist and queer Zen, from John Cage's aleatory experiments to the writings of bell hooks, Churchman has come to describe the task of self-unfolding (and self-othering) in their paintings as a practice of mindful self-emptying. Consider Churchman's account of their painting *Crocodile*, 2016, a picture born after an unusually long gestation: “In 2013, when I was living out in the desert town of Twentynine Palms, a line came into my head: ‘A crocodile walks into the water.’ It was such a plain sentence, so I Googled it and found a couple of images that pictured my feeling. They gave off a stunning sense of immersion, of going into the world—farther.” Speaking with art historian Arnisa Zeqo, Churchman attributed this unbidden catchphrase to their yearning for a “feeling of meditation, a glimpse into a mind so large, reflecting, empty, endless, aware, and awake, with no time at all or all the time.” The crocodile thus becomes “a portal into the self,” Zeqo suggested. But it is also, simultaneously, a portal *out* of selfhood, casting the artist as an unfathomable reptile—a figure, like the rat Narcissus, poised at the limit between identity and difference.

Several recent paintings make Churchman's debt to Buddhism explicit: *In Infinitely Rich Qualities of Mind*, 2017, for example, a

pearlescent (and not subtly clitoral) chinoiserie pattern, painted against a Robert Ryman-type background, figures the mental void multiply, as arabesque, as cloud, as genderless bodily substrate. In *Own-Being Emptiness*, 2016, Churchman depicts a solitary console table, its wooden body left unpainted, highlighting its thingly impermanence; *Relief of Weariness by Ultimate Mind*, 2017, juxtaposes the artist's empty shadow with a menagerie of bugs and cats copied from a medieval manuscript. Each of these works is a meditation on subjective vacancy—less a glimpse of the artist's mental furniture than an attempt at opening the mind to what exceeds it.

Churchman's effort at mental exfoliation informs their largest, most ambitious work in "Crocodile": *Don't Try to Be the Fastest (Runway Bardo)*, 2019, a massive floor painting on linen, thirty-two feet in length, made with collaborative input from the painter's Buddhist mentor, Gayle Hanson, and friend Siobhan Liddell (who helped embroider its framing edge). Images of all kinds appear laid out in trompe l'oeil fashion across its throbbing red ground; as Churchman explains, the painting was meant to "have a runway effect." Rather than articulate a fixed web of relationships, however, the runway evokes a void as capacious as the mind; the images—which include NASA's ubiquitous black-hole photo, an April 2019 cover of *Vogue Paris* featuring model Adut Akech (an homage to the late Karl Lagerfeld), paintings by René Magritte and Giorgio de Chirico, a kente cloth, and a trans-rights poster emblazoned with the words safe space—scatter like paper in the wind. Interspersed throughout the composition are mind-training cards bearing slogans of the twelfth-century Tibetan Buddhist master Chekawa Yeshe Dorje: IN POSTMEDITATION, BE A CHILD OF ILLUSION; SELF-LIBERATE EVEN THE ANTI-DOTE; ABANDON ANY HOPE OF FRUITION.

Dorje's slogans chime with *LTTR*'s "Practice more failure," albeit in a more personal, self-hectoring vein. As Avram Alpert has recently argued, while Zen Buddhism is often misinterpreted as a call to blissful self-erasure (self and world becoming one), its theorists emphasize the necessity of "return[ing] to the world not with demands but with gifts of clarity and insight."⁶ Drawing inspiration from the Reverend angel Kyodo Williams, Lama Rod Owens, and Jasmine Syedullah's 2016 book, *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation*, which aligns the path of self-awakening with the difficult work of racial consciousness, Churchman has come to locate race—implicitly, whiteness—at the root of their Buddhist practice: Insofar as the "sociopathic environment of white supremacy plays out through minute, fractured thoughts that race through the analytical mind and make everyone sick," they suggest, *Radical Dharma* attempts a "conversation from this abstract place of self. It is different from trying to be effective; it is trying to understand the truth."⁷

It is hard to say, though, where truth—and especially the truth of identity and difference—might find a viable outlet in Churchman's art. In a series of works from 2014, painted during a high-water mark of recent black liberation struggles, they come near to addressing their own position as a white artist—see, for example, *Chief Police USA* or *Flotsam & Jetsam (Jail)*. Distinguished by their foregrounding of logos and text, these works largely abandon Churchman's premise of ambiguity; easily read and comprehended, they offer little room for tactics of authorial invisibility. Legible as confessionals, they lay bare the artist's position within networks of economic power and state violence, figuring whiteness in place of the "I." As exercises in self-exploration, they re-

veal familiar truths, but ones art rarely lets be seen or said: Wealth is power, and power keeps the police in uniform. The mind can be emptied, after all, but power, unlike evil, is mindless; it keeps its hold where all else is swept away.

If self-emptying is self-othering, how are we to arrange ourselves before a binary that cannot be so easily circumvented, that resists performative imitation and self-transfiguration alike? In a recent interview with Sara Ahmed, Butler offers a tentative answer, reframing the question of identity and alterity in terms of mutuality and copresence: "What if we shift the question from 'who do I want to be?' to the question, 'what kind of life do I want to live with others?' . . . If the I who wants this name or seeks to live a certain kind of life is bound up with a 'you' and a 'they' then we are already involved in a social struggle when we ask how best any of us are to live."⁸ While the truth of white privilege, and of other forms of privilege as well, can't be performatively side-stepped, as Churchman's project makes clear, we can nonetheless imagine a framework in which such truths might be lived with—not singly, solipsistically, but reciprocally, in a space over which no one (neither identity nor difference; neither "I" nor "you") can exercise full sovereignty. Letting hope of fruition fade, we might learn to cultivate this fragile mutuality, a place of common life—and also, necessarily, of common failure. It wouldn't be everything, wouldn't solve anything; but it would be basically good.

"Leidy Churchman: Crocodile" is on view at the Hessel Museum of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, through October 13.

DANIEL MARCUS IS THE ROY LICHTENSTEIN CURATORIAL FELLOW AT THE COLUMBUS MUSEUM OF ART, OHIO.

NOTES

1. Judith Butler, "Lana's 'Imitation': Melodramatic Repetition and the Gender Performative," *Genders*, no. 9 (Fall 1990): 1.
2. Julia Bryan-Wilson, "LTTR: Repetition and Difference," *Artforum*, Summer 2006, 110.
3. Dean Spade, "Dress to Kill, Fight to Win," *LTTR*, no. 1: "Lesbians to the Rescue," 2002, 18.
4. Personal statement posted to www.leidychurchman.com, accessed via the Internet Archive.
5. Amy Sillman, "Ab-Ex and Disco Balls," *Artforum*, Summer 2011, 325.
6. Avram Alpert, *Global Origins of the Modern Self, from Montaigne to Suzuki* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 275.
7. "Lauren Cornell and Leidy Churchman in Conversation," in *Leidy Churchman: Crocodile*, ed. Lauren Cornell, Karen Kelly, and Barbara Schroeder (Annandale-on-Hudson, NY: Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College; New York: Dancing Foxes, 2019), 141.
8. Sara Ahmed, "Interview with Judith Butler," *Sexualities* 19, no. 4 (2016): 491.

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BOMB

Merging With: Leidy Churchman Interviewed by Tausif Noor

On mystifying moments big and small.



Leidy Churchman: Crocodile. Installation view. Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. Photo by Chris Kendall.

Oct 3, 2019

Leidy Churchman has been painting the world as he sees it, accumulating a catalog of things, people, places, events, and ideas of astonishing range, from zoo animals and mythological creatures to book covers and branded credit cards. He is as likely to be inspired by the modernist canon as he is by a string of words or a stray ad on the internet, and he filters these inspirations through his canny gaze and commitment to Buddhist philosophy. What emerges from these two purviews is a style defined by clarity and grace, an even-handedness that extends to the way our conversation developed

Noor, Tausif, and Leidy Churchman. "Merging With: Leidy Churchman, Interviewed by Tausif Noor." *Bomb*, October 3, 2019.

over the course of several weeks during which we covered the surprises that come with paying attention, painting with and for your friends, and the importance of complete and total freedom. Like Churchman's paintings, our correspondence was grounded in the tangible, real things that surround us, but also extended into the singularly enchanting musings of an artist in tune with a larger, metaphysical universe.

—Tausif Noor

Tausif Noor

Let's start with *Don't Try to Be the Fastest (Runway Bardo)* (2019), a site-specific floor painting you created for your exhibition *Crocodile* at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College. Was the process of making this piece different from other floor paintings you've done? It pairs beautifully with your video work and a new painting, *Disappearing Acts* (2019), which is of Bruce Nauman's 2015/16 video *Contrapposto Studies*. There's a kinetic quality that unites these works, even if they are technically different mediums.

Leidy Churchman

This floor painting was different than others I've made. I think previous ones have been more related to video, gravity, and objects mixed into painting. This one is about the pictures' signage and positioning as they seem to drift and transform along the runway. The Nauman painting brings a kind of highly fractured momentum. I like how they work together: in both pieces, there is a sense of forward motion but also a kind of pause within a heightened and groundless atmosphere.

TN

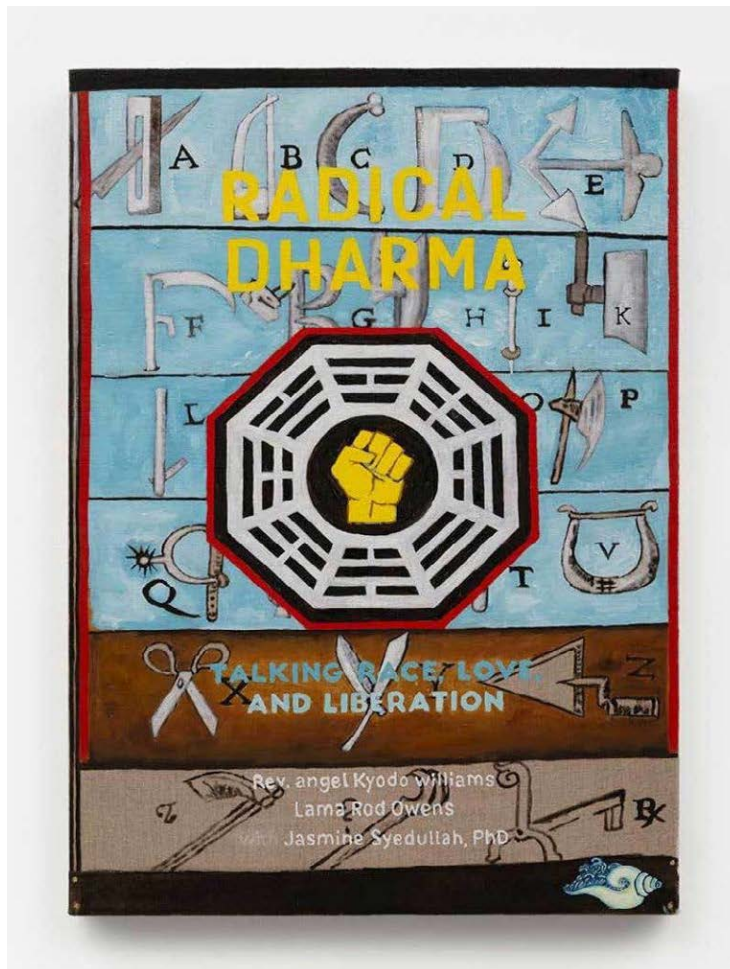
In the exhibition catalog, curator Lauren Cornell refers to you as a "sign-painter—someone who crafts literal messages, often copied directly from the world." You've suggested that paintings are similar to signs in that they can open up and be available to the viewer through multiple points of entry. I'm wondering if this "openness" of painting is something that you've come to as you've progressed in your career, or if this is how you've always approached painting.

LC

I think it is possible for my paintings and my artwork in general to go in any direction. The way I am able to get into my work and feel motivated to try painting again and again is by letting things go and moving into the larger notion of complete and total freedom. When I begin, all possibilities are on the table: there is nothing I *should* be doing. I think this "openness" is not just about variety; it is about working with things as I see and feel them, and I was going to say demystifying, but maybe also *mystifying*, that is, the way we look and think our way into things, into our moments, from the big spaces and thoughts of and in our collective mind to the small voice in our stomachs that once in a while we acknowledge.

TN

Part of what motivates that question is thinking through the boundaries between the world and the self in your work, and what being present in the world might look like. I'm thinking of *Is the Universe a*



Leidy Churchman, *Radical Dharma "The Teachers,"* 2018. Oil on linen. 20 x 16 inches. Collection of Scott Lorinsky. Courtesy of Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo by Aaron Wax.

Simulation, Moderated by Neil deGrasse Tyson (2017), a painting of the 2016 Isaac Asimov Memorial Debate. More accurately, it's a painting of a video of that debate, as indicated by the little volume bar you've painted at the top. Someone is there, watching and being present—in one sense—for the event that's happening.

LC

Something funny I remembered recently was that in 2016 when I painted Barbara Kruger's piece that says "Seeing Through You" I was on some website and a small advertisement came up telling me that this work was available at auction that day. There are no particular requirements I have, but in this case the work was so stunning and fit nicely with the other paintings I was working on. Plus, it was having a live moment.

TN

Being present in a metaphysical sense is also something that runs through your practice. We see it in a title that's cited from the Buddhist meditation master Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, *Knowledge Must Be Burned, Hammered and Beaten Like Pure Gold* (2018), or in the painting *The Teachers* (2018) for which you've reconfigured the cover of the book *Radical Dharma: Talking Race, Love, and Liberation* (2016). Simone Weil thought of attention as a form of prayer. I'm wondering how your attentiveness to the quotidian bits of contemporary life might constitute something similar.

LC

I think that might be true. I love the surprise element that comes from giving attention. There is always more to be seen. In some moments, with some things, I feel that they could become a painting, but not for the purpose of transcribing those things. The surprise comes from the thing, or idea, merging with painting. The painting ultimately takes over. It is more powerful than the information.

TN

What if an observation or an idea that might become a painting *doesn't* become one? Do you ever become obsessed or attached to those ideas? I tend to think of Buddhist philosophy as one that rejects attachment to the material world, but I wonder about the world of ideas.

LC

It is definitely okay if something does not become a painting! There is always another painting. The painting is the thing that happens, not the idea. But ideas can leave and return again. Just as you look back, it's there.

TN

Your paintings take stock of the world's ephemera, but you also make references to a smaller network of artists and art history, like in your Marsden Hartley paintings or a painting after a photograph by Emily Roysdon, who is now known as Every Ocean Hughes. Making art can often seem like a solitary, lonely activity; but your paintings embrace artmaking as a social activity.



Leidy Churchman: *Crocodile*. Installation view. Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY. Photo by Chris Kendall.



Leidy Churchman, *Antique*, 2018. Oil on linen. 66 x 76 3/16 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Rodeo, London/Piraeus. Photo by Lewis Ronalds.

LC

When you are on your own—solitary—those are the times when you can get such a sense of how much the world is within you. The biggest things you can imagine coming in your mind and your open heart. I love concentrating on other artworks because of that intimacy. And the longing. I love the longing. *The Piers Untitled* by Emily Roysdon (2016) came about as a painting from looking at a mix of photographs that Every Ocean Hughes took of the old Christopher Street Piers. This is a landmark in the queer community, a place to which in the past people could escape to be themselves, together. Maybe I would paint it sometime, but this particular painting is about Every. This painting is because Every went there in a boat to take pictures on what turned out to be a wildly rainy day. And I love that, and I feel that very much.

Leidy Churchman: *Crocodile* is on view at the Hessel Museum of Art in Annandale-on-Hudson, NY, until October 13.

Tausif Noor is a writer and contributing editor at Momus.

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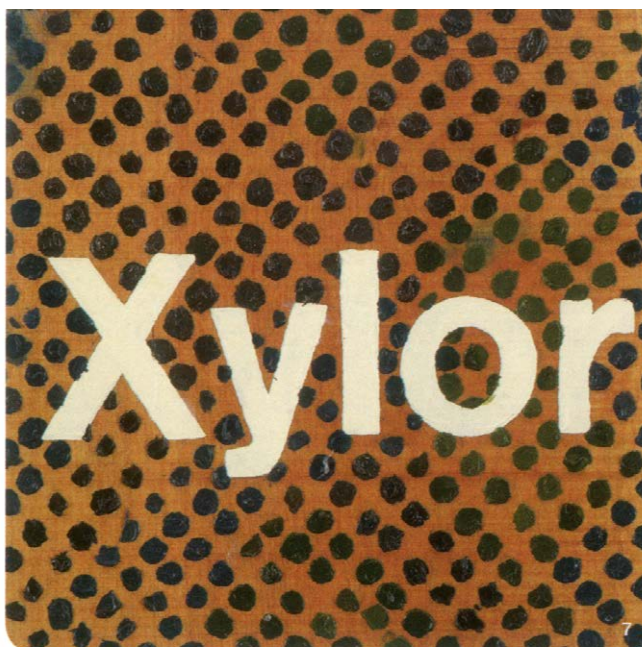
ARTFORUM

BEST OF 2019

EACH DECEMBER, *Artforum* invites a group of distinguished critics, curators, and artists from around the world to consider the year in art. Ten contributors count down their top ten highlights of 2019, while four others select the single exhibition or event that, for them, rose above the rest.

NICOLE EISENMAN

NICOLE EISENMAN IS AN ARTIST WHO LIVES AND WORKS IN BROOKLYN. SHE IS A MEMBER OF RIDYKEULOUS.



1. Xylor Jane, *10th Order Magic Square for Planet Earth*, 2019, ink and oil on panel, 19¾ x 19¾".

7

LEIDY CHURCHMAN (HESSEL MUSEUM OF ART, ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON, NEW YORK; CURATED BY LAUREN CORNELL) *What* Churchman paints is a fascinating riddle. Their choice of subject is almost the subject itself. It amazes me that the same person who paints, say, a new ad for the iPhone 11 Pro or a cover of *Vogue Paris* could also paint their dreams or, plain air style, their backyard in Maine. Enigmatic—and yet Churchman paints without tricks. Their approach to the material is always open and honest.

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ARTNEWS

ARTISTS — NEWS

Crocodile Rock: Painter Leidy Churchman Cedes the Floor to No One in First Museum Survey

BY *Andy Battaglia* POSTED 07/10/19 5:02 PM



Installation image of "Leidy Churchman: Crocodile" at the Hessel Museum of Art.

CHRIS KENDALL

When Leidy Churchman was given the floor for his first museum survey since starting out as a painter, he did not squander the opportunity. Nor did he fail to take the proposition literally—with a 32-foot-long floor painting that serves as a sort of stream-of-consciousness survey of its own.

Battaglia, Andy. "Crocodile Rock: Painter Leidy Churchman Cedes the Floor to No One in First Museum Survey." *ARTnews*, July 10, 2019.

“It’s like another show in it,” the artist said of a new work taking special pride of place in “Crocodile,” an exhibition spanning Churchman’s career dating back to the mid-2000s at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. “I thought I should do something big and abstract, but I don’t really plan much in advance. I didn’t know I was going to do this.”

When we met up, Churchman was in his studio on New York’s Lower East Side, and he was not yet finished with the floor work that would soon travel up to the Hudson River Valley. Most of it was complete, but there were some final tweaks and tinkering to be considered. The painting, titled *Don’t Try to Be the Fastest (Runway Bardo)*, features some 40 smaller paintings within it, all of them connected—or disconnected—in ways that can be difficult to describe.

“I think of the whole thing as a sort of mind,” Churchman said. “I’m always painting about the mind in a way. There’s this idea of emptiness in Buddhism that is hard to comprehend—that emptiness is not something that doesn’t have anything in it [but] is about the in-between between everything. It made sense to put all these pictures together in space. I think of it as bumper boats or something like that.”

The subjects that double as bumper boats vary: playing cards, a skunk, a *Vogue* magazine cover, E.T. and Elliot hover-biking in front of the moon, a pink pony, a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, a sunset spied through the window of an airplane. All of it together covers the kind of ground that Churchman focuses on in his practice as a whole (two mini paintings inside the floor painting are



Installation image of “Leidy Churchman: Crocodile” at the Hessel Museum of Art.

CHRIS KENDALL

already-extant works of his own), and fittingly, perhaps, that practice can be intriguingly elusive.

Here's writer Alex Kitnick, in an essay about Churchman's work in the "Crocodile" catalogue (a handsome new tome published by Bard's Center for Curatorial Studies and Dancing Foxes Press):

"There are patterns here, just as there would be in an archive of web searches, but there is also a radical juxtaposition between things that are hard to make coherent. The shape of the constellation is big and diffuse." And then: "His interest, I think, is less in burrowing into things and reading them than in moving around their edges. Once, someone might have called that superficial, but today it might be one way of sensing (not making sense of) the glut of the world."

Lauren Cornell, who curated "Crocodile" from her post as director of the graduate program and chief curator at CCS Bard, said of Churchman,

"He's evolved into a painter who can do anything, from complicated abstractions to intricate landscapes or portraits. What he puts in his paintings has always felt very timely. He paints the people around him and things he cares about. His painting tracks his preoccupations in a way, whether he's looking at other artists' work or thinking about different philosophies or books he's reading or an awning on a restaurant across the street from his studio. I appreciate how over time he has created a kind of visual lexicon or archive of him and his life and interests."



Installation image of "Leidy Churchman: Crocodile" at the Hessel Museum of Art.

CHRIS KENDALL

Cornell said she sees the floor painting as "a kind of key for the show," and Churchman spoke of the special significance of its placement in front of another work, *Disappearing Acts* (2019). That one is a wall-hung painting of a scene from one of Bruce Nauman's recent *Contrapposto Studies* videos, in which he walks in a pose privileged in classical European sculpture (hands clasped behind head, hip thrust out) and exaggerates it in a manner that is pointed, playful, and preposterous all at once. "He

looks like he's walking a runway," Churchman said of Nauman, "and it gives it a movement that is nice." (Hence the *Runway Bardo* part of the title, the artist explained: "Bardo" is a Tibetan-Buddhist word for "the in-between." And then "Disappearing Acts," the name of the big recent Nauman retrospective in New York and Basel, Switzerland, intimates Buddhist notions of erasure.)

Churchman's mind seemed to wander, by design, as he walked around the floor painting in his studio, trying to size it up. The idea to make it sprang from the mode of reflection that attends the process of organizing a survey show with some 60 works—"showing all your cards," as he said with a nervous grin akin to the look of the gritted-teeth emoji.

He was in good hands, he said, with Cornell, a friend of nearly two decades with whom he worked closely on the show, which runs into mid-October. "She was one of the first people to buy a painting from me," Churchman said. "It's a flying carpet with an ocean and these cats and bears in telephone wires. I'm in it and I'm throwing up on the rug. It's on stained wood and looks like Maine folk art. But that was major."

As he spoke, one couldn't help but be curious about a tattoo of a watch on Churchman's wrist. "I wanted to get the time of the tattoo, but it turned out I was getting it at 4:20," he said. "So I got my birthday time, which was 9:08. In ads it's always 10:10, because it looks like a smile. At 9:08, it looks like a smirk." (Another clock was stitched onto his button-down shirt: "At Muji you can pay \$3 and get a lot of different things embroidered. I have a sweater with a praying mantis.")



Installation image of "Leidy Churchman: Crocodile" at the Hessel Museum of Art.
CHRIS KENDALL

In mind of the fleeting nature of thoughts surrounding the subject matter he paints—especially in the disparate *Don't Try to Be the Fastest (Runway Bardo)*—Churchman turned contemplative and open-ended. “I’m trying to think of all the ways that things get torn apart and then move along and come back and reemerge—things that don’t make sense and do make sense, and all the emotions that come with them. I guess it’s a place where all these things and all their different elements can just *be there.*”



Leidy Churchman (middle, black shirt) at the opening of “Crocodile.”
LISA QUINONES

Looking down at the painting at his feet, he asked, “Does it feel like they’re all hitting each other, or like they’re transferring codes? As long as it brings you to thinking about how your mind works...”

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ARTFORUM

ANNANDALE-ON-HUDSON

“LEIDY CHURCHMAN: CROCODILE”

CCS BARD HESSEL MUSEUM
Bard College Campus

Curated by Lauren Cornell

When I think of a “surveyor,” I think of that guy (yeah, humph, usually a guy) in a utility suit with a mysterious tripod, taking the measurements of the terrain and marking it with chalk and sticks. That’s not unlike my conception of Leidy Churchman, whose early videos feature exactly such tools, and whose entire project could be described as a kind of survey of the world, and as a culling, sampling, rearranging, and remaking of its signs and systems. This summer, American viewers will have their first opportunity to survey Churchman’s enchanted and estranged artifactual universe in a show titled “Crocodile” at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College. The exhibition will include more than sixty oil paintings from 2010 to the present, the 2011 video *Snakes*, and a newly commissioned floor painting, and will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue copublished by CCS Bard and Dancing Foxes Press.

— *Amy Sillman*

Art in America

LEIDY CHURCHMAN

Murray Guy

A scavenger whose painted appropriations strike an earnest chord, the New York-based artist Leidy Churchman (b. 1979) culls from the miraculous detritus of our visual world. His curiosity for materials high and low, along with a consistently light hand that alternates thinly applied descriptive stretches and somewhat heavier impasto in layered, patient strokes, made for a cohesive tone in what at first appeared to be a disparate display of 19 oils on linen. Only minor changes in palette flag as copies otherwise faithful renditions of Henri Rousseau's *Repast of the Lion* (1907), in which the titular beast gorges on a leopard, and Jacob Lawrence's *Victory* (1947), depicting a weary black soldier. Neither Churchman copy contains a trace of Pictures Generation irony, or any of the "vampirism" (as the critic John Kelsey put it) of Michael Kreber's chilly readymade Polkes and Baselitzes. Churchman's Rousseau and Lawrence, along with other images captured or invented, are produced with a uniform loving care that erases distinctions between different ways of devising content.

At 66 by 84 inches, and with some of the original yellow flowers changed to pink, *Rousseau* was the largest canvas in the show, Churchman's first solo at Murray Guy. The smallest (and earliest, at 2013; the rest are 2014 or '15) was *Insecure Rat*, a 12-by-13½-inch portrayal of a rat caught in a bramble beside a murky pool—an unlikely Narcissus. Falling in between: a rendering of an informational pamphlet on vegetarianism from a Brooklyn restaurant (*Jungle Café*); a crustacean floating in what looks like a starry sky (*Crab and Plankton*); an homage to a subcontinental tapestry with a monstrous red-striped beast at the center (*19th Century Flayed Elephant*); and *Billions of Never Ending Universes*, in which a big yellow stripe presents a borderless world map between bands of cosmic sky. Alighiero Boetti's maps come to mind—but here the sites are all place names in small lettering, a number of them misspelled.

One painting, *Native Elongating Transcript Sequencing Reveals Human Transcriptional Activity at Nucleotide Resolution*, was produced in honor of Churchman's sister, a DNA researcher; the work might be mistaken for a Terry Winters-like abstraction but for its reproduction on the cover of an issue of *Cell Magazine* (April 23, 2015—a commission, apparently), present on a bench in the gallery. Churchman clearly has a reverence for all kinds of science, though the emphasis in this show was on ecology.



Leidy Churchman:
*19th Century Flayed
Elephant*, 2015, oil
on linen, 72 by 51
inches; at Murray
Guy.

He imagines the last of the passenger pigeons sitting patiently on a branch (*Martha*), offers a view of a fish hovering over the watchful eye of a whale (*Pelagic Ocean Sunfish*) and charts ocean currents in red and blue (*The Great Global Ocean Conveyor Belt*). However, just as you think you've understood his themes as nature-based, you find *Tallest Residential Tower in the Western Hemisphere*, a view of Manhattan from a luxury bathroom tinted sunset pink (the image taken from a high-end realtor's ad), or *So-Called "Islamic State"*, in which the flag of ISIS appears in black and gold against what looks like a graph-paper background.

But there is also a large, handsome canvas presenting obscurely related objects, de Chirico-style: a half-open door, a duck sitting on eggs, and an empty highway, among other vignettes. The painting is titled *Freud!*; one guesses its symbols to be the contents of a dream. It reminds us of an era in which the unconscious provided the kind of incongruous imagery that Churchman mainly discovers in what he has called "the extraordinary junkyard" of contemporary culture—the preoccupation of much of his generation. Apparently, we now need seek no deeper.

—Faye Hirsch

SPIKE

Q/A LEIDY CHURCHMAN

How do digital images change painting?



Leidy Churchman for Spike magazine

I can't believe how many images I've seen. We're so engulfed in screens that I can't remember what it was like when you had to go to the library to find secret things. I'm not alone picking imagery; I'm in a scrolling world. Scrolling gives me an idea of what's out there and what people are doing right now. We have this stuff all around us and everything is so close. If I choose an image and use it to make a painting, people already know that image or something like it and have a relationship with it. We can then study the image together. You've seen it but you might not have really been able to get closer, because the devices we use separate our bodies from all these pictures.

Often I like to start work from signs, pictures, and paintings as if they're templates to build on. I pick an image that I feel is ready to be opened up (or I am ready to open it up). For me, to paint a thing is really to consume it, to eat it.

I'm chasing real things. For example, I made a copy of a Henri Rousseau painting from 1905, *The Meal of the Lion*. I had a picture in a book that had certain colors and a certain look to it. Then I saw a picture on the Internet that had really different, bumped-up color. Then I went to the Met and

saw the painting, and the real one was the best. I thought: Holy shit, this guy is so badass. The painting looked loose and crappy in such a beautiful way. I couldn't believe how imperfect it actually was. But I chose to paint the one from the Internet. It was really warm toned, and it reminded me of how I had remembered Rousseau's work. I think it's interesting what Michael Sanchez said in the essay "2011: On Art and Transmission," [Artforum Summer 2013] about how a warm, brown, earthy toned painting provides a point of relief during an endless scroll. It's a real thing to have that relief.

WHEN I SEE SHOWS, I DEFINITELY DO THAT SORT OF SCANNING TOO: "WHERE SHOULD I FOCUS?" I'M SCANNING AND DON'T KNOW WHERE TO START.

You do the weird thing a dog does when they keep circling and circling to figure out how or where to lie down. But that also makes an argument for stronger work that brings you to a halt (I have hungry eyes, give me something good.).

I think oil paint is still a very advanced system with which to make things. It doesn't fall short at all. Compared to the screen, painting is not flat; you go in and every part of that picture is going to be magnified in a way, like under a microscope. A painting is like an aquarium of traces – looping but rogue at the same time. Maybe it has a lot to do with empathy. Empathy determines our degree of happiness, and the feeling comes easily when our mind joins with our body. It is such a soft sadness, it is beauty. I definitely think about that a lot with painting. A painting holds all these feelings you have but don't really talk about much. It's about embodying that flat image: the imagined real space that's inside without ever being there.

*With the lack of inhibition characteristic of naive painting, Leidy Churchman's Dada-influenced works transform the stock of existing images from the realms of art and mass culture. Churchman (*1979) lives in New York.*

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

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The New York Times

Review: Leidy Churchman, 'The Meal of the Lion'

By Roberta Smith

May 21, 2015

Leidy Churchman's art comprises a range of mediums: painting, video, sculpture and installation. But painting and its infinite mutability are his main interest in this expansive solo show, his second at a New York gallery. Here, 19 canvases explore some of the subjects, styles, moods and meanings encompassed by representation, abstraction included. Materials and process receive acute attention. Most images evolved in some way from existing art, advertising or cartography, but personal imagination registers everywhere.

Especially prominent is "Rousseau," a reprise of Henri Rousseau's "The Repast of the Lion," which shows a lion savaging its prey in an otherwise peaceable jungle kingdom. Mr. Churchman changes Rousseau's big blue flowers to impassioned hot pink, emphasizing the rambunctious nature of youthful ambition in the china shop of civilization.

This appetite prevails throughout the show, restrained but restless and relentless. "Tallest Residential Tower in the Western Hemisphere" shows an elegant bathtub, tinged pink by the sunset, overlooking a darker, folksier rendering of Manhattan, contrasting real estate (and painterly) class with relative mass. In the mostly red-and-white "19th Century Flayed Elephant," a Tibetan weaving of an elephant with the claws and stripes of a tiger masquerades as a painting that is flat and ferocious. In "Pelagic Ocean Sunfish," two very different, mutually suspicious sea creatures evoke a famous photograph of Earth taken from the moon, equating the ocean's mysteries with those of outer space.

Other paintings take us up in the air with Alexander Calder, and down to sea level with a raw-looking linen canvas disguised as tarmac with smears of thin black paint. There's also a giraffe camouflaged by moody modernist stripes, a tribute to Jacob Lawrence's tribute to black infantrymen, and a portrait of Martha, the last known passenger pigeon. Finally, in "Freud!," Mr. Churchman exposes something of his dream life, depicting an open door, an open book and a bed with two pillows. Perhaps some painters contain multitudes.



Ferocity: Leidy Churchman's "19th Century Flayed Elephant," at Murray Guy. Murray Guy, New York

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Frieze

Features /

BY MANUELA AMMER

22 MAY 2012

Leidy Churchman

Ab-Ex clichés, living canvases and graveyards



Here, 2011

'You cannot hang an event on the wall, only a picture', remarked Mary McCarthy in her review of Harold Rosenberg's influential volume of essays *The Tradition of the New* (1959). She was referring to Rosenberg's *The American Action Painters* (1952), in which he casts the canvas as an 'arena in which to act': 'what was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event'. Approaching Leidy Churchman's work via such a digression may seem inappropriate if one considers Rosenberg's contribution to establishing the enduring clichés about Abstract Expressionism: fetishization of the (male) gesture and existentialist pathos.

Ammers, Manuela. "Ab-Ex Clichés, Living Canvases, and Graveyards." Translated by Nicholas Frindell. *Frieze*, no. 5, Summer 2012.

Nothing could be further removed from Churchman's painterly praxis, which positions bodies in a wide range of subject-object constellations and makes them just as much part of the form-finding process as the painting itself.

In his *Painting Treatments* videos (2009 and 2010), Churchman performs painterly actions recalling spa treatments on friends, never specifying whether painting is being subjected to a treatment here or the participants are. They lie, sit or crouch alone or in groups on the white studio floor, some naked, some clothed, usually covered with towels, cloths or newspapers. Branches, books and building bricks are then arranged on these 'living canvases'; potatoes, breakfast cereals and snow are poured over them; they are sprinkled with flour, ground coffee and various liquids. Paint is applied, rubbed in, dabbed on and banged in with brushes, ladles, mops and tape dispensers. The bodies 'treated' in this way lead a curious double existence: although immobilized in their role as picture supports (one scene recalls an autopsy), they nevertheless have a life of their own: someone has a smoke, a couple hold hands, a dropped bar of soap is politely returned.

Painting Treatments suggest that Abstract Expressionist vocabulary and bodies can be examined afresh; perhaps the 'power of transformation' Rosenberg saw in painting can be attributed to Churchman's praxis. This reading applies not only to his video works, which by definition possess a certain 'event character', but also to what are probably the artist's 'quietest' paintings to date: a 2011 series depicting graves. Contrary to one's expectations, the pictures are neither morbid nor dark but depict the graves as peaceful, charming places lying in the landscape like carefully-made beds. In spite of their quasi-naive rendering, the pictures perform complex compositional manoeuvres: with their formal rigour, the memorial stones, grave enclosures and floral decorations have an anti-spatial effect, tending towards flatness as geometrical figures and fields of colour. This effect is manifest most drastically in *Here: the final resting place of Rolf Guhl* (according to the inscription) has a grey border and is decorated by a disproportionately small tree which stands in the otherwise monochrome brown surface. The grave – embedded in the green meadow, with no horizon – effectively becomes a signed painting within the painting: an ambiguous figure caught between figuration and abstraction, between pictorial space and picture plane.

In these works, the question of the relationship between the body and the painting is addressed far less explicitly than in the videos. Yet the body is present here, too: as a motif implied by the deceased's name and years of birth and death, as a reason for the burial site, the headstone and the floral borders, and indirectly for the painting itself. As in *Painting Treatments*, the body – gently covered with a layer of paint – seems to shine through the composition and unsettle the picturesque landscape. Once one has seen the body, it cannot be 'unseen'.

In his foreword to the second edition of *The Tradition of the New* (1960), Rosenberg is prompted by McCarthy's admonition to ponder the 'activity' of painting outside the studio: 'The Bolshevik Revolution may have turned into a picture on the wall, but it was a picture that pulled the entire globe into it, and even outer space. No room was left for the spectator who merely looks, as there was in the days when the earth had empty spots and the heavens were full.' Although Rosenberg had an entirely different kind of picture in mind when he wrote these lines, I feel this same 'pull' in all of Churchman's painting – a pull towards more than mere contemplative looking.

Translated by Nicholas Grindell