

## Studio Visit/Interview with Tom LaDuke

By Gary Brewer | March 2022



*the pit in the hole, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 55.5 x 68.5 inches, 141 x 174 cm*

I visited Tom LaDuke at his studio in Los Angeles, to talk with him about his work and the process through which he arrives at these elusive, ambiguous images. In his paintings there are representations of oblique moments, captured in glimpses and reflections that our minds cannot quite comprehend. In that cognitive space where one cannot disambiguate one's perceptions, an opening occurs; it is a door through which LaDuke is trying to hit a moving target, the elusive quicksilver presence that we call 'self'. It is a quixotic quest that LaDuke embarks upon: trying to locate oneself in the quicksilver stream of being.

These paintings have a profound impact on one's psyche. Though all of his image references may not be known to the viewer, the intentionality of each choice and how they interact, are conveyed with a Dionysian force that comes together into a singular poetic gestalt.

When I asked him what he is trying to do in these paintings, he said. "They are about location, a subjective moment in time and place. There is no edge, no entrance into my paintings- I try to fix moments in time, where something significant happened to me, or of an image that is important to me; to anchor this idea of self. But it is impossible to do- we are never the same person- we are always changing."

No person ever steps through the same river twice, and in these paintings, our minds are engaged in the strange flux of interpreting a complex, shifting overlay of image fragments, experiencing the oscillation of the figure and the ground in a fluid state of consciousness.

We spoke for a long time about the history of his work's development both in sculpture and painting, and how he goes about choosing the elements that are combined together in these complex imagistic arrays. These are large paintings whose range of stylistic approaches is achieved in virtuosic displays of pure painting. He said to me, "Each image that I use in my paintings come from experiences that I have had; being with my Father when he died and feeling as though for a moment I could see and feel what he was experiencing; to moments from films that are loaded with meaning; or quoting from works of art that are important to me. These are not arbitrary choices but are combinations of narratives that feel true. It is like when a bell is rung. It has a feeling of truth to it and that is the feeling I have when these combination of images come together in my paintings."

In the painting, *the pit in the hole*, he uses a near photo-realistic painting of the gallery Sadie Coles HQ in London as a background. It is a portrait of a gallery as a rarified architectural space; a form of architectural specificity that is designed solely for experiencing art. It represents the gallery as a psychological state of consciousness that is a reflection of the artist and of the art world that they inhabit as part of a living cultural biome. Within this luminous, pale gray illusionistic space, floats a spaceship. LaDuke designed this image using the digital tool Blender, morphing objects that he gathered from his studio floor into a shimmering vision: in this way he can insert himself into the painting. The spacecraft hovers weightlessly, creating a mysterious vaporous reflection in the space surrounding it. In a sense, it becomes a portrait of the artist as a voyager; an explorer of the infinite realms of self and consciousness that he can experience through the process of creation. In the foreground, several passages of lush, thick, vibrant painterly impasto offer a dramatic contrast with the low contrast gray of the background. The grisaille floral painting on the lower left is a copy of a painting by Don Brown that is based on a Henri Fantin-Latour painting. Urs Fischer's melting lamppost is suggested by the center vertical swipe of thick paint in pink striations. To the right, is a fragment of a Sarah Lucas sculpture and the upper right brown passage refers to the Chinese artist Yu Ji. LaDuke said of this painting that these references to other artists is a form of homage, and that it is a pleasure for him to paint them and through the process of painting, to feel them through his hands and eyes. The paintings in this series are a form of self-portraiture, as well as a unique portrait of the contemporary art world.



*the new gods*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 23 3/4 x 19 inches, 60.3 x 48.3 cm

LaDuke uses homage as a method to connect himself to artists that he admires from the past and the present. They whisper to each other through time and through the metamorphic materiality of paint. Painting, more than any other medium, conveys the central nervous system's somatic record of one's fleeting thoughts and emotions. He is capturing glimpses in the quicksilver stream of thought, memory and appreciation, of the artists and spaces that he feels an intimate connection to. In these image fragments, we can recognize something, even if we cannot place it, that rings a bell; and that is enough to open the door to see the whirling slipstream of our subjective experiences.



*all the whispers between us*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 57 1/8 x 57 1/8 inches, 145 x 191 cm

The painting *all the whispers between us* depicts another gallery, Gagosian-London. Again, the luminous pale gray image establishes a rarified psychological space where the theater of reverie unfolds. We see a grouping of rocks in the foreground that are from a Hans Memling Altarpiece of Saint Christopher, the vertical column that resembles a tree, is a depiction of a rope that holds a pouch filled with the money the patron of the painting is donating to the church. Hidden in this column are vestigial figures dancing in a rave peeking through at the bottom. There is a ghostly white apparition floating in space that is made from a cloth dipped in white paint pressed against the canvas: a one second painting whose folds suggest the folds in the fabric of the Memling masterpiece. Urs Fischer, Rachel Whiteread, Franz West, Robert Therrien, and Mary Weatherford are suggested in other passages of paint that hover over the pale illusion of the gallery in the background. LaDuke's head is a blurred visage floating in the upper right. In these paintings, he has expressed a reflection that speaks to the living creative ecosystem through which a symbiosis of imagination and expression coalesce into the fabric of our cultural moment in time.

Tom LaDuke conveys the multitudes that we all contain: these works are a song to oneself; but this self, that once upon a time seemed to be a stable ship, has become unmoored in the flotsam of a world that we now see as an ever-changing phenomena. We exist in a kaleidoscope of moments, and in LaDuke's paintings, he shows us a shimmering reflection of this evasive phantom we call self.

LaDuke will have six new paintings included in a two-person show with the artist Alex Dodge, titled "We Contain Multitudes", at Miles McEnery Gallery's new location in New York. This exhibition opening April 28, 2022 will be the inaugural show for the gallery's fourth space in New York.