

# THE SHADOW OF THE SUN

ROSS BLECKNER

ZACHARI LOGAN

*The Shadow of the Sun* pairs New York-based painter Ross Bleckner with Regina-based Zachari Logan to remarkable effect. The artists share a sensibility in artmaking that makes for a powerful concert of ideas, forms and materials. Bleckner's use of absence and negation in his paintings have become resonant markers in the vocabulary of contemporary painting. His oeuvre straddles a wide range with related shifts in style, from images of primitivism to the spiritual (e.g., *Dome*), scientific (*Chains Fold Into Several Domains*) and the commemorative (*Mausoleum*), with a sustained focus on the devastation and loss wrought by the AIDS crisis. The result is a rich, diverse and highly influential oeuvre of visual markers and strategies around image-making and consciousness that have inspired a generation of artists in Canada <sup>(1)</sup> and abroad.

On the surface it may appear that Bleckner and Logan have developed oeuvres that are stylistically disparate. The visual references of style are only part of the picture, however. On a deeper level the exhibition proposes aesthetic links that underpin each artist's work. They are the means to create a context of understanding for shared notions of visibility/invisibility, sexuality, selfhood, contemporary landscapes, transcendence, the fragility of love and the omnipresence of sickness and death. On closer examination, both artists share an appetite for representing societal and personal melancholy, reverential beauty, and hint at the many obtuse corporeal sites of erotic pleasure.

Logan's drawings, paintings, and ceramics often centre on an imaginatively 'complicated' figurative representation of flora, fauna, camouflaged human forms and place. By combining species common to the Saskatchewan prairie and the lush vegetation along river banks, lakes and sloughs, the flora represents a nostalgia for both familiar places in Saskatchewan and perhaps an exotic other world that may well be found in the Indian subcontinent or the public parks of New York City's Bronx (where Logan has conducted studio based research). Much of Logan's juxtaposed plant matter is impossible for nature to realize in its selection and arrangement. Regardless of biological improbability, the foliage is "accurate" in its ability to visually seduce us, the viewers. He conjoins stems, leaves, flowers and thorns in wreaths (e.g., *Wreath I* and *Wreath [Silhouette]*) to suggest a sensuous memorial, guided in its making by aesthetic choices rather than biological accuracy.

Bleckner and Logan may depict flower arrangements as highly agitated and seemingly challenged to retain their figurative representation. Bleckner's post-impressionist flowers can appear brittle or lush, at once agitated and always speaking of transcendence from the here and now. Each image is carefully rendered in a blur of vision amplified by Bleckner's application of steel wool or, more recently, bleach, to alternately reveal and obscure layers of paint. Ghostly subject matter appears to hover in the middle distance, slightly unreal, not unlike Logan's finely wrought imagery although Logan achieves this by creating a middle distance in dreamy blue and black tones and again, a slightly unsettling juxtaposition of plant matter that can appear suspended or floating. Flowers may be subtly rendered (i.e., Logan's *Moon Flowers [My Father's Skin]* or the collaborative *The New York Obituaries*) or bursting with colour but they often appear stressed against menacing shades of black. The dark backgrounds of Bleckner's floral arrangements threaten to expressionistically invade and obscure the traditional symbolism associated with flowers. Symbols of generosity, sincerity, strength of character, faithfulness, honor, remembrance of a loved one -- are strong values challenged to remain present in the 21st century. Symbols of a love story and a horror story of death can become conjoined.

Logan and Bleckner propose a detailed figuration that is full of slippage -- images almost too attractive, too secure, detailed, and patterns suggestive of transcendent states (Bleckner's *Crowd* or Logan's *Nel messo del cammin di nostra vita [The Gate]*). Like Bleckner, Logan visualizes the sentimental longing and loss associated with, for example, the AIDS epidemic (e.g., *New York Obituaries*) and myriad other humanitarian crisis' to which artists are compelled to respond. Regardless of scale, Logan can present his subject of death and decay as intimate and almost familiar. However, his flora and fauna do not feel completely alive but aren't dead either. Silhouetted plant matter appears to hang in limbo. A human body part feels empty, and highly tentative (e.g., *Eunuch Tapestry 1*, panel 1), as if ready to dissolve into the ether or earth, empty of chlorophyll, of muscles, of bones, of feelings altogether. Could an 11-meter flow of darkly entwined flora, beautifully improbable, possess a new power entrusted to them? Has the soul of traditional landscape thrown off its impediments to better fly away in our imagination? As viewers we may well gloss over answers to the current interchanges of fact or fiction, figuration and abstraction, as easily as we contemplate a return to the waning artworld definitions of the same in the 20th-century. Both artists manage to ingeniously return to the human body, the forgiving qualities of nature, and give voice to the daunting socio-political concerns of humanity by having issues largely disappear from their works. Their shared rumination resonates as

something very present via idiosyncratic strategies of abstraction, figuration and restraint.

#### NOTES

1. Artists influenced by Ross Bleckner's appropriated images from the mass media can be traced stylistically to an inter-generational group of Canadians, such as Alison Norlen, Noam Gonick, Stephen Andrews, Attila Richard Lukacs and others.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**Ross Bleckner** received his Bachelor of Arts degree from NYU and his Master of Fine Arts degree from the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia, California. He is well-known for his large-scale paintings and his works have been shown in esteemed public collections throughout the world, including MoMA, MoCA L.A., Astrup Fearnley, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. In 1994 Bleckner had a mid-career solo exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. In addition to his New York City studio practice, he has taught at many of the nation's most prestigious universities and is currently Clinical Professor of Studio Art at New York University. Additionally, he is President of Community Research Initiative on AIDS (CRIA), a non-profit community-based AIDS research and treatment education centre. For more than thirty years Bleckner's painting and mixed media works have been largely an investigation of change, loss, and memory, often addressing the subject of AIDS.

**Zachari Logan** holds an MFA from the University of Saskatchewan's Art and Art History Department. Since graduating in 2008, Logan has maintained a studio practice focussing on drawing, painting, ceramics and installation. His work has been exhibited widely, in group and solo exhibitions in the Americas, Europe, and India. His work can be found in public and private collections worldwide, including National Gallery of Canada, Art Gallery of Ontario, Remai Modern, Mackenzie Art Gallery, Saskatchewan Arts Board, Leslie-Lohman Museum of Gay and Lesbian Art (NYC), and the Scarfone-Hartley Gallery, University of Tampa, among others. Logan has attended residencies in London, Paris, rural Tennessee, in Calgary in conjunction with the Alberta College of Art + Design's Ceramics Department and the Illingworth Kerr Gallery, in Vienna's Museum Quartier's quartier21: Artist in Residence Program, in conjunction with Vienna's Museum of Modern Art, in New York City at the International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP) in Brooklyn, and at Wave Hill Public Gardens in the Bronx as a part of their Winter Workspace Program. Most recently, Logan was artist in residence in the Tom Thomson Shack on the site of the McMichael Canadian Art Collection. His work has been featured in many

publications worldwide. Currently Logan maintains a dynamic studio practice while teaching full-time in the faculty of Fine Arts MAP: Media, Art & Performance at the University of Regina.

Introduction by  
Wayne Baerwaldt and Leah Taylor

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