

Visual Art

5 November 2023

This Land Is Your Land

Leslie Wayne and the verisimilitude of memory and landscape

by Kate Mothes

Landscape Painting Sculpture

Leslie Wayne is no stranger to windows and portals. Her sculptural oil paintings often take on the subject, including mirrors, doors, closets, or wardrobes, toying with the boundaries between painting, image, and object. As a young painter in California, she focused on plein air landscapes. "I was intent on observation, honing my skill on maintaining fidelity to the dry, scrubby hills of Santa Barbara and Laguna," she says. "Only when I moved East in my late 20s did my relationship to that landscape begin to shift into something much deeper and more complex, into what Simon Schama refers to as our myths, memories, and obsessions."

This Land is Your Land is a series of paintings stirred by one of many journeys by plane across the continental U.S., as the artist flew from her current home in New York to visit her childhood home in California. "There is always a point for me, when flying the southern route to the West Coast, where the vista below triggers an emotional response that really has no precise English term," Wayne says. "In German, the word is *heimat*, meaning a physical and social experience of reliable familiarity in the form of a homeland. Mostly it's the quality of light, distinctly unique to California, that is deeply resonant with me to this day."

On one particular journey along a more northern route, from New York to Washington, Wayne took around 50 pictures, 36 of which became oil paintings on paper, which she mounted behind handmade frames based on the classic Boeing 737 window. Even as commercial air travel has become a mainstay in an increasingly globalized society, approaching a kind of mundanity one might associate with a bus trip, if one tunes out the movie screens and in-flight promotions to simply look out the window, an entire dimension opens up—a slice of the sublime.



This Land is Your Land: 12:45, 2023. Oil on paper in artist's wooden frame with plexiglass, 23 x 16 x 2 ½ inches

This Land is Your Land draws its name from Woody Guthrie's famous song, penned in early 1940. One of the most influential voices of the American folk tradition, Guthrie reflected the everyday experience of people across the country, frustrated at the unequal distribution of wealth that he experienced in childhood and observed during his travels. During the Great Depression, nearly 20 percent of the nation's wealth rested with one percent of its population, which comes as little surprise, when today, "the one" claim about about a third (worldwide, it's more than half).

Guthrie penned "This Land is Your Land" as he traveled across the country, originally titling it "God Blessed America For Me," a sarcastic retort to Irving Berlin's "God Bless America," which in the 1930s was receiving ample air time thanks to a rendition by the so-called First Lady of Radio, Kate Smith. When it was written, "the song was considered by many to be no more than a fiction of unity and harmony," Wayne says. "As the scenic panorama below persisted in endlessly transforming itself into one sensational pastiche after another, I found myself wishing I could manifest a similar notion of harmony."

Traveling from one place to another, opening up memories along the way, Wayne eventually found herself circling back to landscape painting for the first time in decades. She approximated her experience through the work, "replicating that sense of wonder and awe that only a view from above can give us—a moment of transcendence beyond the cacophony of our everyday lives," she says. "The Renaissance window becomes the airplane window, allowing us to survey the horizon in ways that only in modern times do we have the luxury of beholding."

Find more on [Wayne's website](#) and via [Jack Shainman Gallery](#).



This Land is Your Land: 1:00, 2023. Oil on paper in artist's wooden frame with plexiglass, 23 x 16 x 2 ½ inches



This Land is Your Land: 2:06, 2023. Oil on paper in artist's wooden frame with plexiglass, 23 x 16 x 2 ½ inches



This Land is Your Land: 1:20, 2023. Oil on paper in artist's wooden frame with plexiglass, 23 x 16 x 2 ½ inches



This Land is Your Land: 1:33, 2023. Oil on paper in artist's wooden frame with plexiglass, 23 x 16 x 2 ½ inches

Header image: *This Land is Your Land: 1:33, 2023*. Oil on paper in artist's wooden frame with plexiglass, 23 x 16 x 2 ½ inches

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