TWO COATS OF PAINT
Award-winning blogazine, primarily about painting

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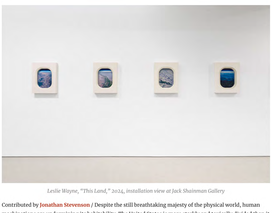
SOLO SHOWS

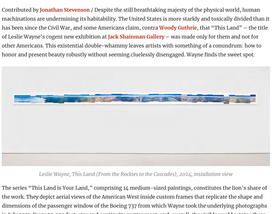
# The ringing in Leslie Wayne's head

June 12, 2024 1:41 pm



*Leslie Wayne, "This Land," 2024, installation view at Jack Shainman Gallery*

Contributed by **Jonathan Stevenson** / Despite the still breathtaking majesty of the physical world, human machinations are undermining its habitability. The United States is more starkly and toxically divided than it has been since the Civil War, and some Americans claim, contra **Woody Guthrie**, that "This Land" – the title of Leslie Wayne's cogent new exhibition at **Jack Shainman Gallery** – was made only for them and not for other Americans. This existential double-whammy leaves artists with something of a conundrum: how to honor and present beauty robustly without seeming cluelessly disengaged. Wayne finds the sweet spot.



*Leslie Wayne, This Land (From the Rockies to the Cascades), 2024, installation view*

The series "This Land is Your Land," comprising 14 medium-sized paintings, constitutes the lion's share of the work. They depict aerial views of the American West inside custom frames that replicate the shape and dimensions of the passenger window of the Boeing 737 from which Wayne took the underlying photographs in July 2021. From 20,000 feet, size and continuity matter most, and, overall, the visible world retains these qualities. At altitude, the colors are relatively subdued and familiar, the scenes schematic. A single painting feels permanent, reassuring, and vaguely calming. But apprehended seriatim – per the 22-foot-long painted scroll *From the Rockies to the Cascades* or the handmade accordion book displayed in a vitrine – they become a quiet metaphor for **Manifest Destiny** and both the glory and the shame that it has entailed.

*Leslie Wayne, This Land is Your Land, from the Rockies to the Cascades, July 6, 2021, 2:05 PM, 2022, oil on paper in artist's frame, 23 x 18 x 3 inches*

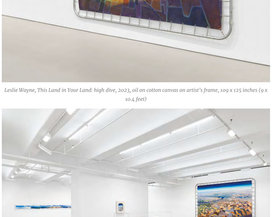
*Leslie Wayne, This Land is Your Land, from the Rockies to the Cascades, July 6, 2021, 12:22 PM, 2022, oil on paper in artist's frame, 23 x 18 x 3 inches*

*Leslie Wayne, This Land is Your Land, from the Rockies to the Cascades, July 6, 2021, 12:598 PM, 2022, oil on paper in artist's frame*

The five larger, almost psychedelically vivid vertical paintings on wooden planks are confrontationally seductive. Seven or eight feet tall and wider at the bottom than at the top, they splay before viewers, driving home the messy physicality of life on earth. Here Wayne brings her signature paint-handling virtuosity to bear, channeling the downward flow and coagulation of the substance to dramatic and insightful effect and encapsulating the passage of time and its consequences at both the geologic and the civilizational scale. *The Water Understands* ascribes an unsung intelligence to nature, *The Unintended Blues, for RK* ominously completing the thought. *Pleasure Principle III* and *Low Tide* suggest, respectively, the blitheness and the hazard of unchecked human indulgence. The gorgeously fluid *Summer Slope* as well as *Rush*, a shorter symmetrical painting of extraordinary visual drama, work together as a kind of pastoral coda: life-affirming beauty need not cost anything.

*Leslie Wayne, Low Tide, 2023, oil and acrylic on wood and styrofoam, 96 x 32 x 7 1/2 inches*

*Leslie Wayne, This Land is Your Land: high dive, 2023, oil on cotton canvas on artist's frame, 109 x 125 inches (9 x 10.4 feet)*



*Leslie Wayne, "This Land," 2024, installation view at Jack Shainman*

Yet, in line with **Son Volt**'s aching ballad "Bandages and Scars," Wayne can't help thinking about hell, with the words of Woody Guthrie ringing plangently in her head. Perhaps the most loaded piece in this subtly provocative show is the quizzical *This Land is Your Land: high dive*, painted on cotton stretched with springs like those of a trampoline. Wayne frames a sublimely expansive vista that a skydiver might behold in awe, momentarily ensnared by the delusion of immortality against the peril of the proverbial hard landing. She might be saying that instants of transcendent grace belie more sobering generational realities. Hinting at this idea are the juxtaposition of Guthrie's canonical lyrics and **Taylor Brorby**'s poem "The Ages Have Been at Work," both appended to the accordion book. If indeed "this land is made for you and me," both parties must overcome "dear matters of blood too deep for words."

"**Leslie Wayne: This Land,**" Jack Shainman Gallery, 513 West 20th Street, New York, NY. Through August 2, 2024.

**About the author:** **Jonathan Stevenson** is a New York-based policy analyst, editor, and writer, contributing to the *New York Times*, the *New York Review of Books*, and *Politico*, among other publications, and a regular contributor to *Two Coats of Paint*.

Tags: Jack Shainman Gallery, Jonathan Stevenson, Leslie Wayne, Son Volt, Taylor Brorby, Woody Guthrie

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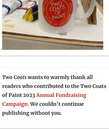

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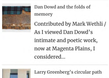

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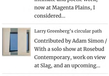

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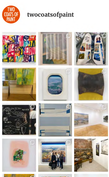

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