



I Give Thanks For Love, 2006
Archival Inkjet
80 inches X 40 inches



The Rose Season, 2006
Archival Inkjet
80 inches X 40 inches

I Give Thanks for Love is perhaps the most poignant plant in Lehrer's garden. It includes images of artwork by his late daughter, Anna-Katrina. Although she was severely restricted by cerebral palsy, Anna-Katrina lived a full and fruitful life, becoming, against all odds, both a poet and a painter. Her struggle, her strength, her determination, was born of her love for her parents and their deep and abiding love for her. This work includes some EEG graphs, images of Anna-Katrina, and, at the top, a Hebraic text. To some this may resemble a tombstone, but it is much more than a memorial, it is a monument, a celebration of life and love, that transcends all rational sense of time.

Self Portrait with Almost Everything represents not the culmination of one's experience but the confluence of a life lived, remembered, influenced, molded, structured, mended and torn, torn and mended. The complex patterns combine virtually all of the components seen in other individual works, creating an ordered yet elusive sense of self. The work is like a river, flowing from the mountains into the sea.

The study of garden history yields a wealth of information about the inner psyche of man and definitive mindsets. In the eyes of the Western world, the Garden of Eden was the sublimely beatific place; and Mankind's fall from Grace planted seeds of discord and discontent. The English tradition of garden design was to copy nature in an effort to replicate Paradise. The French theory of rationally planned geometrical gardens was based on the argument that man was born into a bestial state that was eventually overcome by technical and intellectual prowess.³

Perhaps Lehrer's own fascination with the Alhambra and the Moorish occupation of Spain lies with another super-imposition, an overlay of one culture upon another and the remnants that encompass time past, present and future. The ideal garden in the Quran was a reward for the faithful. The Islamic gardens were seen to reflect human biological and physiological needs as well as the Islamic principle of unity and order. The designs referenced both the rational and spiritual nature of man.

While Leonard Lehrer incorporates aspects of these divergent pathways into his design, his garden is unique in its combination of emotional and rational thought. Unlike many artists working in the realm of digital technology, with the collaboration of his talented assistant, Erick Rowe, these compositions do not become mired in simplistic plays of technical tricks: like Anna-Katrina, they transcend physical limitations. They are carefully cultivated to exist beyond the constraints of time.

¹ The title of a book by Borges.

² From notes by Allen B. Rush on a talk by Carlos Fuentes at the Unterberg Poetry Center in New York City, October 18, 1999.

³ See Christopher Youngs, *Paradise Revisited* (Reading, Freedman Gallery, Albright College, 1999), p. 2.

On the cover:
Boabdil's Sigh, 2006
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About The Artist

Leonard Lehrer is a painter and printmaker whose work has been seen internationally for three decades. He has had forty-three solo exhibitions in the United States, Germany, Austria and Spain. His work is represented in the collections of many museums, including: the Museum of Modern Art, the National Gallery, and the Philadelphia Museum. Leonard has a distinguished history of running major art programs: the School of Art, Arizona State University; the Department of Art and Art Professions, New York University; and, he presently serves as Dean, School of Fine and Performing Arts at Columbia College in Chicago. As well as being the recipient of two Fulbright Scholar Grants, he has received numerous international awards.

Acknowledgements

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Gallery Hours:

Tuesday: 12 - 8 p.m.
Wednesday - Friday:
12 - 6 p.m.
Saturday - Sunday:
12 - 4 p.m.
Summer Hours:
Wednesday - Sunday:
12 - 4 p.m.

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LEONARD
LEHRER

THE CONSUMMATE
GARDENER

FREEDMAN GALLERY
ALBRIGHT COLLEGE

LEONARD LEHRER

THE CONSUMMATE GARDENER

Several decades ago I became interested in gardens. Although I know nothing whatsoever about gardening, I have visited many gardens (both modest and extravagant) throughout Europe and the United States. As a curious tourist, and under my wife's tutelage, I have come to acquire a layman's basic understanding of some of the cultural concepts upon which gardens are based.

I have also come to feel that the usage of the garden as a metaphor of life has become somewhat clichéd and exhausted. Nevertheless, in discussing Leonard Lehrer's life and art, I sense that some parallel discourse on gardens is fitting. So I suppose that I am going to be guilty of extending the allegorical role of plant life on our planet.

The energy, the quiet strength, manifested in Lehrer's artwork is hardly a tired cliché. Like his work, instead of embracing exhausted allegories, I want to explore the essential vitality that is evident in his process and production, and, more importantly, the underlying motivations and reasoning behind his designs. I say designs because, as well as a gardener, I think of Leonard as an architect—a builder of structures in the present that both reflect upon the past and project into the future.

One may presume that such a *mélange* of components would place Lehrer into the Post Modernist realm. Certainly a work such as the digitally engineered *The Birth of Venus, etc.* combines apparently disparate parts of art history and personal history (Ingres' harem scenes with Lehrer's early life drawings). The center of this work is fragments of his watercolors of water and sky. On the far right and left, they are bordered with delicate line drawings of coastlines seemingly extending across the expansive eighteen-foot panorama into the very peripheries of perception. Yet, I can not help but feel that Lehrer is (to paraphrase Barnett Newman) about as interested in the Post Modern tenets of art theory and the Deconstructionists as a bird is intrigued with ornithology.

Long before the advent of the moniker *Post Modernism*, Leonard was fascinated with the writings of Jorge Luis Borges. This Argentine author introduced critical constructs into Lehrer's way of thinking (I hesitate to say philosophy as the term seems pretentious and inappropriately concrete when contemplating a state of fluidity).

In Borges's world of *The Garden of the Forking Paths*,¹ one is always faced with divergences; and, the reader becomes a creative component. Within the author's labyrinth, the route unfolds as the inner workings of the mind—not as a narrative about discovery so much as about the process of exploration itself.

Borges's stories were structured to engage the reader, to make the reader into an active participant. Carlos Fuentes has compared Borges to the writer of detective stories where the true mystery is the thought process of the detective himself, as if "Poirot were investigating Poirot, or as if Holmes discovered that he himself is Moriarty."²

Inherent within this garden is a multi-layered sense of time: A notion that meaning does not simply lie behind us; that as we read we reinvent a new reality; and, that reality is an infinite series of realities. The nature of reality itself becomes a contest of wills. What becomes known as concrete reality is actually simply the land of mutual perceptions, a consensus of sorts, a convergence of parallel times. Within this realm of divergent beliefs, the present is instantaneously composed of time past and time future. As Eliot put it in *Burnt Norton*:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden...

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.

Looking back at Ingres's harem scenes bears witness to how the passage of time, cultural constraints, and new pathways of interpretation, or reading, effect our perceptions. Strangely, despite the conservative nature of French society, early in the 19th Century, nude concubines were considered acceptable as subject matter. Yet, when Manet, some forty years later, depicted naked Parisian women, it was considered scandalous. The difference was that Ingres's exotic women were distant and foreign, whereas Manet's women were local girls, too close to home—too real.

In today's world of sexual politics, Ingres depictions are frequently viewed as peep shows—voyeuristic exploitations of women who were relegated by their society to become concubines (prostitutes), but also were literally slaves. In his work, *The Birth of Venus*, Lehrer has selected images from Ingres harems as well as other voluptuous depictions of the female nude. Over these images, he has super-imposed some of his masterful life drawings of the female nude. This cultural overlay seems to suggest that one learns from history and that one should be able to enjoy beauty beyond eroticism. So, within a new reading (even if I am totally wrong-headed in my interpretation), it is demonstrated that paintings, like Borges books, always live in the present and are constantly being reborn. These combinations of fragments of Lehrer's work and selections from art history trace how the mind works and how the memory assimilates information—constructing the temporal chimeras of recollection into a snapshot of dreamtime.

The inclusion of water and sky within many of these images, such as *Barcarole* (the songs traditionally sung by Venetian gondoliers) reflects matter that is in a constant state of flux, flickering reality. Other works, *The Rose Season* and *Boabdil's Sigh*, depict architectural motifs from the Alhambra. At times, the very titles, like *Boabdil's Sigh*, indicate not only an interest in Moorish history, but also the passage, the deathbed of a cultural era (Boabdil was the last of the Moorish Kalifs of Granada).

Boabdil's Sigh was also inspired by Manet's late flower paintings. Here there are a number of Lehrer's own still lifes superimposed on what could be a ceiling within the Alhambra. Clearly flowers are temporal, sprouting from seeds in the past into their present beauty only to fade into the future. When they are cut from a garden and placed in vases, they are killed (they literally become *nature morte*); but their beauty lingers on in the present and is captured in this artwork.



The Birth of Venus, etc., 2006
Archival Inkjet
40 inches X 210 inches



Barcarole, 2006
Archival Inkjet
40 inches X 80 inches



Self Portrait With Almost Everything, 2005
Archival Inkjet
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