

ARTCRITICAL PICK: Christopher Le Brun at Friedman Benda



Christopher Le Brun, *Enter the City*, 2014. Oil on Canvas, 120 x 105 inches. Courtesy of Friedman Benda.

Robert Rosenblum's masterful 1978 study, "Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition" is good prep for British painter and President of the Royal Academy of Arts Christopher Le Brun. Otherwise, the developmental arc (or perhaps that should be pendulum) of this bistylistic abstractionist cum neo-romantic landscape painter/animalier might confound some admirers. Gerhard Richter's ironic twin track career strategy isn't much by way of precedence either as Le Brun's striving after painterly authenticity is nothing if not earnest. His oeuvre sees periodic returns to non-

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objectivity punctuated by an iconography of the horse, sometimes galloping wild, other times wistfully ambling along with a knight in the saddle and sporting Wagnerian titles. His first brush with abstraction in the 1980s recalled to many the Chinese phase of Brice Marden. But his latest foray into pure lyricism, which also happens to be his strongest, toughest, most ambitious painting to date, in a show that opened in Chelsea last week, marks a fusion of New York School abstraction (think mid-career Guston and classic Clyfford Still) with something akin to the proto-impressionism of J.M.W Turner. Le Brun makes sense of Rosenblum's subtitle, "Friedrich to Rothko", in his recapitulative syntheses. The glowing, pulsating, mysterious marvel that is "Enter the City" (2014) reveals the artist at his evocative, atmospheric best. When he told me at the opening that he had to turn this work to the wall in his studio for fear of getting sunburn I wasn't entirely sure that he was joking.

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