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**Magali Leonard**  
**Walter Wickiser Gallery**

Artists have long found the window a compelling motif—as a barrier to or opening on reality or exterior worlds. Not only for its symbolic associations but also for its formal properties, the window has been adopted by painters from Johannes Vermeer to David Hockney as an effective compositional device that extends the picture’s domain. French painter Magali Leonard makes use of the age-old artist’s tool in her “Crossing” series. Her approach, however, differs in that the vision she depicts through the aperture is not a static image, but a shifting one. These dynamic and luminous acrylic paintings evolved from Leonard’s continuous viewing experience from the window of a moving train as it powered west from Chicago to San Francisco.

The impetus for the series aligns with Leonard’s practice, her devotion to exploring the relations—or “crossing”—between space, light, and color. In doing so, her canvases impart a distinct sense of flux—of appearing and disappearing, emerging and rescinding, drifting in and wafting out. They speak at once of primordial echoes and apocalyptic ruins. Like a Turner watercolor or Japanese scroll, they are sublime visions identifying human potential in nature’s grandeur and boundless landscapes.

To be sure, viewers are apt to see distinct topographic imagery in the melding forms, reinforced by their earthy ochre and watery blue tones. It is hard, for example, not to equate foaming waves and a bleeding sun or willowy reeds and a heavy cloud with the drips, blots, and splatters that describe the panels of *Crossing 2*. In these paintings, Leonard re-envision reality as abstraction, espousing many of the methods and ideologies of the Abstract Expressionists. Like Jackson Pollock, Leonard tackles her canvas with the force of her full body by placing it on the floor and working from all four sides, uncommitted to a singular viewpoint and dedicated to the consistent, all-over treatment of its surface.

But within the abstract canon, it is the Color Field painters with whom she shares the strongest affinity, not only through her conflation of figure and ground but by her technique in which she applies paint to canvas. By pouring and often diluting her pigments, Leonard creates veils of color that, as she puts it, “stir up” the space, alternately opaque and transparent, soaking into the surface and gliding across it. The disparate densities that result reflect the intrinsic variations of color and matter and infuse the imagery with great vitality. While in *Crossing 1* the energy is nearly explosive, suggesting sprays of water crashing against rocks, the pervasive atmosphere in these works is more serene, an ephemeral dreaminess evoked by floating forms and blending hues. By presenting her paintings in adjoining panels, Leonard reinforces a sense of spatial continuity.

The view through the window, now moving, has become unrestricted, transforming physical grandeur into a spiritual one.

--Deidre S. Greben