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Leo Mock
Who cares that it makes flowers
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by Jody Zellen



Leo Mock's oil stick, oil and charcoal paintings are imaginative hybrids that distort the recognizable elements found in the natural landscape into something fantastic and surreal. Through six large-scale paintings, viewers are taken on a journey to an unknown world. Previously, Mock's landscapes were filled with disembodied legs—awkward linear forms that signed for a human or animal presence in unfamiliar settings. In his exhibition, "Who cares that it makes flowers," these appendages either bisect the canvases as colored "zips" (à la Barnett Newman) or allude to entities with exceptionally long feet and legs in the form of the letter "L" traversing the picture plane. Created in both Mérida, Mexico, and Los Angeles during the year of COVID19, the paintings reflect the dystopic and unsettling atmosphere brought on by the pandemic. These seascapes and semi-naked vistas possess the loneliness of that recent and yet incomplete isolation, by suggesting empty shores that are anything but pacific, filtered through the glowing colors and ocean vistas of Mexico and California.

Although Mock portrays unpopulated worlds, the paintings evoke human emotions. In *But Memories are uncertain friends* (all works 2021) two solid black circles are attached to thin black lines that angle across the composition, alluding to heads and bodies. One circle rests below the other on the right edge of the canvas, evoking a gesture of love or longing. Behind is a sepia-toned landscape in thirds—white at the bottom, black in the middle, and a tan to deep brown gradient at the top. The scene is filled with shapes that suggest both rocks and clouds, and has a post-apocalyptic aura.

The only horizontal work in the exhibition, *Who cares that it makes flowers*, is the most humorous. Here, empty overlapping pink-toned thought bubbles ascend from cream-colored clouds (or perhaps rocks) that float in a pitch-black sea below a deep-green horizon line. Again, the composition is strangely bisected by a brown line that extends from the top to the bottom of the painting and subdivides it into two uneven sections.

"*What is it about them? I must be missing something*" elicits an ocean speckled with regimented whitecaps or birds skimming the green surface. Again, the composition is divided into horizontal bands: a row of yellowy green clouds above, and a pea-soup middle of green sky. Below is a brown band embodying ground. A royal blue "L" hugs the left and bottom edges of the painting

—the leg of a gigantic creature venturing through this disconcerting and irregular landscape.

Though lush and beautifully rendered, Mock's off-kilter landscapes feel familiar, yet impossible. Whether an imagined future or an ancient past, Mock infuses them with a jarring presence. The unknown trespassers through the works leave no trace, and these fantastical worlds of clouds, rocks, sky and sea defy logic. They are calming and foreboding places that transcend reality—off-putting and inviting, simultaneously.

<https://artillerymag.com/leo-mock/>