



DAVID LEONARD

# Urban Reflections

David Leonard doesn't currently live in the city, but the urban landscape has long been a source of inspiration for the artist, rotating between the cities he has called home: Austin, Texas, Philadelphia, Boston and the nearby city of his youth, New York.

A sampling of his New York scenes is the subject of an upcoming show at George Billis Gallery's Connecticut location from March 4 through 29.

From sweeping skylines photographed from a distant pier or bridge, or from a rooftop bar or apartment high above; to intimate street level scenes, Leonard is most interested in color and light, and the interesting effects it creates as it reflects off of glass skyscrapers or the Hudson River.

Leonard grew up in a rural town in Central New York and went to art school at Rochester Institute of Technology, from where he would regularly make trips down to Manhattan to visit museums and galleries. "Each city is unique but in New York, the way the water reflects the light, the atmosphere is always different...I'm after capturing the essence of the light, whether it's a beautiful sunset or foggy and rainy, or hazy. In the summer you get the pollution haze which can also be fun to paint."

Panoramic scenes like *Among Piers* and *Garment District*, captured at various stages of sunset, bestow a quietude on the urban life, and demonstrate Leonard's range between the highly detailed and more gestural.

*Downtown*, for which Leonard took a more abstract approach, takes us into the traffic and frenetic energy of the city streets, a scene of glowing brake lights and dense buildings stretching down the long avenue that Leonard captured with a long lens. Only one loosely-rendered figure is visible in the foreground, hailing a cab, yet the presence of humanity hums throughout, one of the more conceptual ideas that propels Leonard's urban, industrial scenes.

"The primary subjects of my paintings are 21<sup>st</sup>-century man's working monuments, which represent our culture's dedication to production and consumption," he says. "The essence of our way of life can be seen in



1  
*Garment District*, oil on canvas, 18 x 24"

2  
*Chrysler*, oil on canvas, 40 x 28"

3  
*Among Piers*, oil on canvas, 30 x 60"

4  
*Downtown*, oil on canvas, 28 x 33"





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our never ending attempt to subdue our environment. It is not my intention to either glorify or to condemn this objective, but to invite contemplation and leave judgment up to the viewer. I'm always looking for places where the man-made environment inundates the natural. I paint this in a way where subtle abstraction disassociates elements from the environment, creating an oscillating view of the natural and the fabricated."

Leonard also sees his paintings as a way of documenting different eras. He points out how the models of taxi cabs often change with the decade; and shares a poignant story about the Twin Towers. "Everything is temporary even though it seems permanent," he says. "When I painted the World Trade Center in 2001, I finished it right before it got knocked down. I never actually liked those buildings until I really started thinking about working them into a painting. I did a couple of good ones and then they were gone." ●



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