

PAUL THIEBAUD GALLERY

Dennis Leon *Collage, Pastels, and Sculpture 1975-1990*

May 17 – July 3, 2025

Opening reception: Saturday, June 7th, 3–5 pm

Remarks: 3:30 pm

Paul Thiebaud Gallery is pleased to announce its representation of the Estate of Dennis Leon (1933-1998) and the gallery's first exhibition of the artist's works. On view starting May 17th, *Dennis Leon: Collage, Pastels, and Sculpture 1975-1990* will have its celebratory reception on Saturday, June 7th, from 3-5 pm with remarks at 3:30 pm. Featuring a monumental collage, six pastels of different sizes, and four intimately scaled, unique cast bronze sculptures, each work conveys Leon's interest in the landscape and his desire to intervene in the land to make his artistic mark. The exhibition will be on view through July 3, 2025.

An important member of the Land Art movement in the United States, Dennis Leon's interventions in the natural environment were distinctly different in their intention and execution from those of his contemporaries, including Agnes Denes, Andy Goldsworthy, Michael Heizer, Nancy Holt, and Robert Smithson. Leon would spend hours studying a site before making his mark on the land, creating drawings in pastel and collage to visualize himself in the space and how it might look. Leon's site specific works in the land could be as simple as inserting a series of painted wooden dowels into the ground along a hillside, or entail the creation of bronze and/or textual elements that were then integrated into the site to appear as if they had always been there.

His early engagements in the late 1960s and early 1970s were mostly guerilla actions that appeared without warning or sanction in the hills, wild spaces, and marginal areas of the San Francisco Bay Area. The works would remain in place until wind, water, or human hands disrupted them, sometime only hours after they were completed. Leon sought to bring together the nuance of the observed, the constructed, the acted upon, and the evolved in each of his works. As his reputation grew, Leon's installations began to be commissioned for both public and private spaces, one of the most significant being *Untitled*, which was installed at Oliver Ranch in 1993. Parallel to the

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creation of his installations, Leon mounted numerous gallery and museum exhibitions of his paintings, drawings, and collages paired with his bronze and wood sculptures across the United States until his passing. Many of these works were related to his site interventions, though there are numerous series Leon created that are independent of them.

Dennis Leon was born in London, England in 1933. During the Blitz, he and his brother were evacuated to Wales. The family moved to Leeds in West Yorkshire after the war where Dennis studied at the Roundhay School and dreamed of a career in medicine while spending free time drawing everything around him. Leon and his parents immigrated to the US in 1951 and settled in Philadelphia, where he initially applied to Temple University as a pre-med student, but switched to art on the advice of his counselor. He went on to earn his BS in Education, as well as his BFA, and an MFA in 1959 from the university's Tyler School of Art. An ROTC student at Tyler, Leon entered the U.S. Army and remained in the Army Reserve until 1963. After his active duty, he became the art critic for the Philadelphia Inquirer in 1959 and continued in that role until 1962. In 1959, Leon also joined the faculty of the Philadelphia College of Art (now the University of the Arts) and served as the Director of the Fine Arts Department (1965-67) and the Sculpture Department (1967-1970).

In 1972, Leon accepted an invitation to serve as a guest faculty member at the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland (now California College of Arts, San Francisco). In 1973, he was appointed Chairman of CCAC's sculpture department, a position he retained until 1992. In 1993 he retired as Professor Emeritus from the school, and CCAC honored him with a Distinguished Faculty Award and an Honorary Doctorate. Dennis Leon died in Oakland, CA in 1998.

Leon was the recipient of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1979. He also was awarded fellowships and residencies from The Glass Art Society, Headlands Center for the Arts, Djerassi Foundation, MacDowell Colony, Yaddo, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, as well as recognition from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

Leon's work is in the collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Storm King Art Center, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Oakland Museum of California, San Jose Museum of Art, Crocker Art Museum, di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, and American University Art Museum at the Katzen Art Center (Corcoran Collection), among many others. His permanent,

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site-specific outdoor installations can be found at the Oliver Ranch Foundation, Djerassi Resident Artists Program, Greenwood Plaza in Greenwood Village, CO, and numerous locations around the San Francisco Bay Area.