

Landscape Artist's Statement
Ed Wong-Ligda

As a young man I appreciated literature and the theater more than the visual arts, so when painting became my focus I naturally transferred many literary and theatrical interests to painting. I've always thought of the people I paint as actors in a repertory theater, who I choreograph more than compose. The difference in my mind being that choreography is more fluid than composition. Thinking in this manner expands, for me, the time frame of the painting to a series of events rather than a single moment. What the figure is doing in the painting is usually a reaction to a previous event or is in preparation for a future action.

While my new body of work is landscape I'm still choreographing rather than composing. Thinking about landscape painting in this manner, I am naturally drawn to the strong narrative aspects of romantic 19th Century American landscape painting, especially the works of Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Cole, and Frederic Church. Their paintings function more as epic morality plays rather than outdoor scenes.

Stately clouds, mountains or icebergs usually occupy center stage in their narratives. Landscapes speak of upheaval, long forgotten seas and erosion. Of evolving vegetation and animal species. Of endless seasons of rain, snow and drought. The painting is the present, which is simply a consequence of the past. And in the most compelling of these works the present is dominated by monumental events which are helping to shape the future. After viewing one of these paintings it is impossible not to contemplate both mortality and the persistence of life.

In my current body of work I am attempting to relearn how to see and think about painting, and make 19th Century decisions in relationship to significance, artistic convention, and purpose. Within this context I am focusing on incidents: a gust of wind that scatters loose pine needles, cloud shadows moving over a valley, a bird alighting on a dead branch, or the moment a volcano plume takes a certain shape. To accomplish the desirable feel of the work, my painting process begins with the veracity of objectivity, which is then transformed with a combination of misinformation, fiction, and 19th Century subjectivity, hopefully resulting in melodrama.