



# Art Review: Robert Berlind Works Yield Large Rewards from Smaller Scale

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by Peter Malone

Discovering the paintings of the late [Robert Berlind](#) in “Reality Is Everything” at [Lennon, Weinberg](#) had a soothing effect on a reviewer overwhelmed with exhibitions nearby that seem to aspire more to the industrial scale of a typical Chelsea gallery space than to the meditative silence such spaces are ostensibly designed for. Berlind’s chosen subjects and the contemplative aura they generate were a comforting reminder that the brush invariably turns in an orbit defined by the radius of an artist’s reach—or to put it another way, painting is best when it recognizes its special relationship to the intimate space we occupy as individuals.



“Robert Berlind—Reality Is Everything: Selected Works 1995-2012” at Lennon, Weinberg. Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg.

One of the many appealing properties of easel painting, to use Clement Greenberg’s mid-century term for a portable canvas, is the residual trace of a painter’s experience that can live on in a picture. The painting process itself is remarkably well suited to expressing solitude, and as this exhibition reveals, Berlind was very much in tune with solitude and the contemplative mode. His motifs are often distillations of quiet, overlooked places isolated from nature’s greater sprawl. They are significant in their very contemporary emphasis on individual observation and their Thoreau inspired approach to the natural world.

As Jill Weinberg Adams explains in her catalog essay for the exhibition, half the pieces in the show are smallish plein-air panels often used as studies for more expansive studio pictures, some of which are included in the show. For instance, the four by eight-foot *Light Play, Ten Mile River, 2004*, more than adequately illustrates how the artist’s purpose was always to maintain the tranquility of his experiences, both in the on-site studies and in the later studio versions. His consistency of purpose even carries over to his paint handling, which changes little from the smaller to the larger pictures.



“Light Play, Ten Mile River” by Robert Berlind, 2004. Oil on linen, 48 x 96 inches.  
Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg.

Some plein air studies are direct and uncomplicated. *Shore, Low Tide, 2004*, measuring no more than 2 feet wide, is a rendering of exposed stones on a beach defined in a loose painterly manner by the shadows they leave on the sand. A section of receding water extending down from the upper edge introduces the blue of a reflected sky, which contrasts dramatically with the warm greenish beige of the sandy foreground. This random scattering of stones translates into an abstract pattern, though not so removed from their context as to become decorative.



“Shore, Low Tide” by Robert Berlind, 2004. Oil on board, 12 x 24 inches. Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg.

Other paintings revel in more complex spatial phenomena, while a few rely more on a pronounced flatness. One of the two largest in the show, *October Water, 1999*, does both. An intriguing compression of differing planes, it depicts overhead tree branches reflected in a pool of water, visually interrupted by fallen yellow leaves apparently floating on the water’s surface. The fallen leaves—one assumes they are from the same tree—push to the fore, while the still hanging leaves recede into the water’s reflection and into the background. The composition is thus defined by two distinct planes, offset by contrasts in color that enhance the separation of those planes, while holding to the surface by means of a sturdy two-dimensional design.



“October Water” by Robert Berlind, 1999. Oil on linen, 80 x 60 inches. Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg.

*Fence, Trees, Raindrops, 2002*, a canvas identical in dimensions to *October Water*, but composed entirely of black and white elements, reads like a drawing more than a painting. Yet despite its pronounced ordinariness, it displays the same sort of mesmerizing imagery that pulls a viewer into reverie. The reflection of an iron fence in a street puddle, tilted by perspective away from a strictly symmetrical presentation, and peppered with leaf silhouettes along the top, mixes with tree branches reaching down toward the bottom of the frame. Together, they form a hard-edged black-on-white field that stands rigid but for a scattering of delicate elliptical ripples apparently caused by tiny raindrops disturbing the reflection.



“Fence, Trees, Raindrops” by Robert Berlind, 2002. Oil on linen, 48 x 96 inches.  
Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg.

Based on a near diagrammatic reading, I wondered if the image had been entirely the product of the artist’s memory and not derived from a small study. A painter who observed reflections this carefully and with this much passion could have easily done so.

Aside from how they are constructed, what comes through to the viewer in each painting is a clear absence of anxiety. Even in the most complex of Berlind’s paintings, like *Honen-in Pond, 2012*, a compelling calm envelops the viewer in meditative quietude. Not surprisingly, a room full of these paintings provided the perfect diversion from the fraught theatrics that often accompany a new gallery season.



“Honen-in Pond” by Robert Berlind, 2012. Oil on board, 21 x 24 inches. Courtesy of Lennon, Weinberg.

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**Basic Facts:** “Robert Berlind—Reality Is Everything: Selected Works 1995-2012” is on view September 23 through November 4, 2017 at Lennon, Weinberg, 514 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001. [www.lennonweinberg.com](http://www.lennonweinberg.com).

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