

EQUINOX GALLERY  
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## **Ben Reeves: Morning Cloak**

September 9<sup>th</sup> to October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Reception for the artist: Saturday September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2 to 4pm

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“The act of painting brings one’s attention to the present moment.”

- Ben Reeves

The critical potential of Ben Reeves’ work emerges from two things: his profound observations of the world around him combined with deliberate choices he makes to optimize the potentials of paint. In this exhibition, Reeves presents a focused body of work that represents his active and deep investigation into a seemingly simple subject: the ocean. These paintings are far from idyllic seascapes, instead his surfaces of water pose deep ideological questions about the state of the world we currently inhabit. The works are masterfully painted, yet they unsettle classical representations of water and subtly raise questions about the importance of water to life on earth, and the threats it faces with climate change and pollution hovering just below the water’s surface or indeed, just above the horizon.

Additionally, these paintings offer a meditation on the space that painting occupies when it is simultaneously idea and phenomenon. Utilizing a range of invented and inherited notations for waves and water, the infinite dimensions of the ocean (visual, metaphoric, spiritual, cultural) reveal themselves as aspects to contemplate through the act of painting. Working entirely from experience and memory, rather than direct observation (even if the artist lives and works 10 minutes from the ocean), Reeves is guided by a series of intuitive decisions that allow the paintings to develop into works that are about the act of painting as much as the subject of water. Devoid of figures, boats, or any other narrative markers, the paintings are, in a sense, empty. It is through this emptiness that the intensity of the subject unfolds. This focus reminds us of the epic works of American artist Vija Celmins or Vancouverite Gathie Falk’s “Pieces of Water” from the 1980s, yet his approach yields different results, suitable for present times.

For Ben Reeves, the process of painting is itself generative as much as it is meditative. Much like the surface of water, Reeves’ paintings are also physical surfaces; at times they are explicit, ambivalent at others, and generally they resist fixed interpretations. Whether it is through the accumulation of paint in differing volumes or states of liquidity, the scraped layers, or the matte and shine that appear in uneven measures, a close examination of the canvas offers insights into the artist’s fluid

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process. And through it, we add our own glimpses of the global context to fill these seemingly empty images of water with profound meaning.

Ben Reeves' art has been included in such significant exhibitions as *The Painting Project: A Snapshot of Painting in Canada*, Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal, 2013; *Shifting Space*, Museum of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, 2005; and *For the Record: Drawing Contemporary Life*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003. Reeves' works are held in numerous collections including Montreal Museum of Fine Arts; Museum London, ON; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Surrey Art Gallery, BC; and Vancouver Art Gallery. Reeves received a BFA from the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and an MA from Chelsea College of Art and Design, London. He resides in Tsawwassen, BC, and is Associate Professor in the Audain Faculty of Art and the Jake Kerr Faculty of Graduate Studies at Emily Carr University of Art + Design, Vancouver where, for over 15 years, he has engaged with generations of emerging painters.