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JOHN TARAHTEEFF

Between land and sea



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Lands End, an exhibition of new work by John Tarahteeff, will be shown at Nüart Gallery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, June 26 through July 12. The transition point between land and sea is often a theme or the setting for Tarahteeff's paintings.

Complex narratives evolve as he paints and they continue to evolve as the viewer reads his or her own story into the objects and people the artist has carefully arranged within his composition.

"I start with sketches," he explains, "but sometimes as I paint, narrative elements will emerge subconsciously and move it in a different direction. Formally, I may need more dark or color in a particular area and the object that emerges in my mind moves the narrative again. It's a gut thing. It's not cerebral."

Every element in his compositions is important. Although the eye may be drawn to a yellow bathing suit, for instance, he will introduce lines and effects that lead the eye across the canvas to take in everything as it adds to the narrative.

The Last Dance is anchored by the embracing couple at the shoreline. Looming behind them is a cliff that drops precipitously to the shore. As he was painting and realized he needed something on top of the cliff, a police car with its lights on came to mind. The light indicates the end of the day and the cliff suggests something coming to an end—the story discovered by Tarahteeff as he painted and by the viewer as his or her eyes take it all in. The brightly lit female figure rises from sea to sky, a phallic element suggesting strength and control. "I didn't think about it literally," he recalls, "but whatever they are doing is about to end."

Tarahteeff says, "The paintings tell me where I was at that point in my life. I want them to be an expression of my place in the world at a point in time. They're successful if everything is important and in its place, the colors work, and there's no extra stuff. The shocking spots need to be balanced with relaxing spots."

For Tarahteeff the process is a dance...but not the last one. ●



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The Kite, acrylic on canvas, 35¼ x 42½"

Bather at Hopper House, acrylic on canvas, 23 x 17¼"

The Ramparts, acrylic on canvas, 41 x 53"

The Last Dance, acrylic on canvas, 30¾ x 23¼"

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