



# Leslie Neumann: Manna from Heaven... and Earth

Morean Arts Center  
Hough Gallery  
May 12-June 29, 2018



# Leslie Neumann: The Happy Activist

One of the benefits of being an institution that has been around for a century is the ability to develop deep relationships with our regional artists. Showing an artist's work and the trajectory of their practice over a period of time is one of the Morean's strengths and privileges. In her third solo exhibition at the Morean, Leslie Neumann continues to stun us with her vision and her staying power as an artist. She is indeed a success story—an artist who paints what brings her joy and is able to make a sustainable living from her craft.

Leslie Neumann herself is a study in contradictions. She was raised in the bustling NYC area, but now finds peace and solace in a small fishing village on the west coast of Florida. She is a consummate, meticulous planner, yet she gladly surrenders to the will of her unpredictable medium of choice: encaustic. She is an outspoken advocate of land conservation; however, she wields her paintbrush as a microphone and her luminous paintings as protest signs.

*Manna from Heaven...and Earth* started out as a protest, of sorts—the artist using her paintings to express frustration over our current unsettling times. In *Winds of Change*, one of the first paintings in this series, her usual vibrant colors and joyous brushstrokes are replaced with a more somber palette. Dark storm clouds roiling in the sky mirror the neutral hues of the landscape below. Is this a dying land? Or a terrain coming back to life, as seen in the sparse bright green and lavender tones? For Leslie, hope springs eternal.

This attitude is what brings us to this exhibition today. As much as Leslie wanted to make this a show about troubling times as reflected in nature, she just couldn't do it; couldn't resist the beauty that surrounds her in her stilt home on the Gulf—or the sheer joy she gets from a colorful "accident" on the panel. And so, the first paintings in the series, with their ominous undertones, made way to a new dawn, if you will—the raucous colors and irresistible beauty of nature.

They say you catch more flies with honey, and in the end, this exhibition does succeed as a kind of protest. If you ever thought about land conservation and wondered why it was important or whether you should care about it—one only has to look at these paintings to see what we stand to lose. Sometimes a beautifully and lovingly crafted work of art speaks louder than a megaphone.

**Amanda Cooper**  
**Curator of Exhibitions**



# Artist Statement

After 68 years on the planet, I have a lot of stories, and I have lots of experiences. Some of my past doesn't even feel like me. But one thing has always been true. My family was brilliant, liberated, and creative, and they instilled in me these dual primary objectives: follow your dreams and do good in the world.

Follow your dreams? I make art because I love to paint. I make THIS kind of art because I'm awed by the beauty and the raw power of nature.

Oftentimes, I paint nature from the "kayak point of view," up close, nose to nose with the wetlands. These paintings are full of vibrant colors and lush textures. Occasionally, I paint nature from a flying bird's point of view, when I float above it all in the clouds, but I'm still within view of the earth. And once in a while, the journey is deep into the cosmos where there's no attachment to land, and I feel free from time and gravity.

My medium is encaustic—or hot wax—which is an unpredictable and seductive material. It supplies luminosity to my work, and intriguing surfaces, along with "happy accidents."

As to the other primary objective, do good in the world: I am a citizen activist, focused mostly on land conservation along the Gulf coast area of Florida. I belong to a small, but mighty local land trust that works to protect environmentally sensitive land by placing it into public ownership. We have a notable record of success, so much so, that if you look at maps of Google Earth on the Gulf in west central Florida, you can see the swath of "green" that shows our influence.

Some artists are activists in their art—using their art as a form of protest, to point out injustices or society's ills. I'm an activist in my day-to-day life, not in my art. I leave the studio to speak on behalf of land conservation to people who have the power and the purse strings: county commissioners, state legislators and other government agencies like DEP, Army Corps of Engineers, or the Water Management District.

But when I paint, it's a different story. As Amanda Cooper, the Curator of Exhibitions at the Morean Arts Center in St. Petersburg, Florida, said to me, "I think this is what you were meant to do...make beautiful paintings that underscore the importance of the natural environment. Your happiness and contentment are contagious through your art work. That's your role...the happy activist."



Photo Credit: Beth Reynolds



Photo credit: George Blanchette

*On the Theshold*



Photo credit: George Blanchette

*Reflections 52*





*Wellspring*

# Biography

Leslie Neumann received a BFA from the California College of Arts in Oakland, California, and an MA in painting from New York University in Manhattan.

After living in New York City for 14 years and teaching art at St. John's University in Queens for 6 of those years, she moved in 1991 to the small fishing village of Aripeka on the Gulf of Mexico in Florida.

An active environmentalist, Neumann and other members of her community have been successful in helping to preserve more than 14,000 acres of pristine coastal lands.

Neumann is a recipient of a Fellowship from the New York State Foundation for the Arts, an Individual Artist Fellowship from the State of Florida, an Artist Enhancement Grant from the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, and a Gottlieb Foundation Emergency Grant for Painting.

In 2005, Neumann was honored with a 15-year retrospective of her work at the Vero Beach Art Museum.

One can find Neumann's work in many private and public collections throughout the USA, including Nissan Motor Corporation, ADT Securities, Marriott hotels, Baylor College of Medicine, National Space Biomedical Research Institute, 42 Firebirds Restaurants in 15 states nationwide, Polk Museum of Art, Tampa Museum of Art, Leepa Rattner Museum of Art, as well as the City of Tampa and the City of Orlando's Public Art Collections.

[www.LeslieNeumann.com](http://www.LeslieNeumann.com)



*Blazing Heart*



*Squall*



# List of Works

*On the Rim* 2011

Oil and encaustic on panel 5 x 7 inches

*Reflections #55* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 10 x 8 inches

*Reflections #53* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 10 x 8 inches

*Reflections #54* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 10 x 8 inches

*Reflections #57* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 8 x 10 inches

*Reflections #51* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 12 x 9 inches

*Reflections #14* 2009

Oil and encaustic on panel 12 x 16 inches

*Reflections #28* 2011

Oil and encaustic on panel 12 x 16 inches

*Reflections #56* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 12 x 16 inches

*Reflections #58* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 12 x 16 inches

*Reflections #48* 2017

Oil and encaustic on panel 16 x 16 inches

*Reflections #49* 2017

Oil and encaustic on panel 16 x 20 inches

*Rising Up* 2005

Oil and encaustic on panel 16 x 24 inches

*Reflections #42* 2016

Oil and encaustic on panel 24 x 18 inches

*Reflections #43* 2016

Oil and encaustic on panel 24 x 18 inches

*Mint Green Light* 2016

Oil and encaustic on panel 20 x 24 inches

*Reflections #50* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 16 x 32 inches

*Purple Sky* 1998

Oil and encaustic on panel 16 x 32 inches

*Reflections #52* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 24 x 52 inches

*Blazing Heart* 2017

Oil and encaustic on panel 45 x 32 inches

*Fiery Marsh* 2017

Oil and encaustic on panel 36 x 44 inches

*Wellspring* 2016

Oil and encaustic on panel 44 x 36 inches

*Angle of Re-Entry* 2010

Oil and encaustic on panel 36 x 48 inches

*Winds of Change* 2017

Oil and encaustic on panel 45 x 60 inches

*Squall* 2017

Oil and encaustic on panel 45 x 60 inches

*Rolling In* 2017

Oil and encaustic on panel 45 x 60 inches

*On the Threshold* 2018

Oil and encaustic on panel 45 x 60 inches

*Approaching Infinity* 2011

Oil and encaustic on panel 60 x 45 inches

*Reflections #23* 2015

Oil and encaustic on panel 60 x 45 inches

# Artist Talk:

So, You Think You Know Leslie Neumann?:  
Art & Environmental Activism

Thursday, June 21, 6pm-7:30pm

 **morean** artscenter

Lisa and Perry  
Everett

