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# Direct Art

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Travelers Oil on linen 24" x 30" Courtesy of Lawrence Benenson

## The Endless Rehearsal by Stephanie Volin

Performance, especially of the solo nature, induces a certain amount of anxiety. Everyone from the most distinguished actor to the fifth chair violinist in a junior high school concert enters a stage with some degree of apprehension, discomfort or fear. It is no small irony that something which brings joy and fulfillment personally, could cause such trepidation publicly.

But what if there was an audience of only one? A performance executed strictly for the satisfaction of the performer: art for artist's sake. Or an audience of none; a performance of nothing. Just a stage, an instrument, an insinuation...

Such is amongst the subtexts in recent paintings by Lawrence Berzon. While some of the characters in Berzon's work are center stage, busy performing their parts, others stand back self-consciously, burdened by the awareness of the role which they play. Still others have fled the stage entirely, perhaps alarmed by their predicament.

The animals in "Travelers" have taken to the rooftops, far from the circusgoers and trainers of their daily existence. Unfamiliar people and situations are known to cause anxiety in animals, but as the title implies, they are nomads, thus tied to no particular location. And if there is an

audience, however distant, they are oblivious to it. No person is at hand to give incentive or reward, or to applaud and gasp with pleasant surprise.

They mechanically go through the motions of their acts, caught in an endless rehearsal for a play which they cannot understand, becoming only as good as their training will allow, unaware that they are even on a stage. There is no satisfaction to be had for this performer, but no dissatisfaction either. Only the comfort that repetition and familiarity bring.

In the painting "Epiphany," a dog stares anxiously at his reflection in a pool of water. Has he come to the sudden realization that he is an animal? Or that he is lost? More likely, as his tags indicate, he has discovered that his domesticated character has supplanted a once wild nature. With that revelation comes a formidable decision: to continue in the role of house pet or to unearth suppressed instincts. A skull in the foreground of the painting seems to suggest the danger of choosing the former.

The dog, no longer bound to the role of pampered companion, and no longer in the presence of his audience, is free to revert to more natural behavior. He has found liberation in the act of not performing.



Epiphany Oil on panel 24" x 18" Courtesy of Jennifer Sharky

The main character in "The Escapist" is missing. The title announces his absence, but does not seek to explain it. The viewer can't truly be certain if someone is about to arrive, or if they have just disappeared. And is that a spotlight shining on center stage, or just the light entering from the world outside the hatch?

But the title that Berzon has given this piece makes it even more intriguing. It could be read both as a contraction of escape artist (n. a performer who entertains by escaping from confinement), or taken at face value (adj. indulging or characteristic of escapism).

Either way, the viewer is left unsure if this living area, fashioned from a cave, is the place to escape from or to. The fact that it is entered (or exited) not from the mouth, but from a hole above, serves only to heighten the uneasiness we feel in this space. The scene is static, but full of the possibility for action: the piano, the books, the fire.

And what to make of someone who escapes from or to this scene: simultaneously comfortable and claustrophobic, familiar but foreign. One simply does not know what to feel for him.

While the images that Lawrence Berzon creates are both arresting and stimulating, they have the lasting impact of something enigmatic and worthy of attention. As he paints representationally, some might say that there is an amount of symbolism on display here, much of it very personal.

Others could infer that the artist wants the open-endedness that any good philosophical question leaves: the potential for positivism or negativism.

The artist Lawrence Berzon lives and works in Manhattan. Additional works can be viewed at [www.LawrenceBerzon.com](http://www.LawrenceBerzon.com)

Escapist Oil on linen 22" x 35"

