

Mysteries of the Mesa: the Restoration of William Robinson Leigh's "Thunder Mountain"

October 26, 2017 – January/February until complete, 2018
Palm Springs Art Museum, Denney Western American Art Wing, Leo S. Singer gallery

Image: William Robinson Leigh, American, 1866-1955, *Thunder Mountain*, ca. 1910, oil on canvas, 40 ½ x 72 ½. Museum purchase with funds provided by the George Montgomery Acquisition Fund



When East Coast artist William R. Leigh (1866-1955) embarked on his first tour of the West in 1906, he recorded in his notebook that his visit to the Zuni Pueblo was like “a waking dream...of endless beauty.” Upon viewing the sacred Dowa Yalanne (Thunder Mountain), a prominent feature near the pueblo, he described it as “...bathed in the magical light of the red, low sun while the town and the plains were already in shadow.” Influenced by the 19th-century American tradition of panoramic landscapes, Leigh carefully constructed *Thunder Mountain* to emphasize both a sense of grandeur and an Arcadian portrayal of the Zuni (A:shiwí) in their ancient homeland. One of the most highly trained artists working in America, Leigh also became one of the most prolific painters of the American West. “The West had called forth the best there is in me,” he declared in 1913. *Thunder Mountain*, then, endures as a distinctive expression of the region’s magic and mystery.

With the support of painting conservator Mark Leonard, the museum recently received a generous grant from the Friends of Heritage Preservation for the conservation of this important painting. Beginning October 26, this unique project will take place in the Denney Wing where the public will be invited to observe the conservator at work. Weekly question/answer periods with the audience will be held over the course of the treatment which is expected to extend into February. Sponsored by the museum’s Western Art Council, Leonard will present a free public lecture on this project in the Annenberg Theater on January 18.



Conservation of the William Robinson Leigh painting *Thunder Mountain* is generously supported by a grant from the Friends of Heritage Preservation—a small, private association of individuals based out of Los Angeles, California—which seeks to promote cultural identity through the preservation of significant endangered artistic and historic works, artifacts and sites. Additional support is provided by Gerald Peters, of Gerald Peters Gallery in Santa Fe and New York.

Hours visitors may observe the conservator at work in the gallery:

Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday 2–4p.m.
Thursdays 3–5 p.m. with public Q & A 4:30–5 p.m.

The Conservator will not be working in the Gallery on the Following Dates:

November 12
November 23-26
December 23 through January 1

About the Conservator: Mark W. Leonard began a distinguished career as a painting conservator at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and then worked for twenty-six years at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Most recently he took on the role of Chief Conservator at the Dallas Museum of Art, and retired from that position in January of 2017.