

## INTERVIEW: Sam Leach on Singapore Show (Part 1)



by Nicholas Forrest  
12/09/13

In 2010 Adelaide-born artist **Sam Leach** won two of the most prestigious Australian art awards – the **Archibald Prize** for portraiture and the **Wynne Prize**. Not only was Leach the third artist to win both awards in the same year, he did so having only been a full-time practicing artist for four years.

Since his Wynne/Archibald double, Leach has continued his rapid rise through the ranks of the Australian art scene. His distinctive and engaging practice deals with a range of different concerns, including the relationship between the figurative and the abstract, as well as the influences behind the development and evolution of formalism.

Currently on show at the Singapore-based gallery and project platform **Future Perfect** is Leach's first solo exhibition in Singapore. The exhibition, titled "Careening Meteorites and the Early Mind," features a new series of paintings, a suite of sculptural works, and an accompanying sound piece made in collaboration with musicians **Tim Young** and **Dan Gawler**.

To find out more about his intriguing new body of work, **BLOUIN ARTINFO** got in touch with Leach and asked him a few questions. In part one of this two part interview, Leach reveals the inspiration behind the title of the exhibition and discusses his relationship with the traditions of 17th Century Dutch painting.

**Your exhibition at Future Perfect has the rather interesting title “Careening Meteorites and the Early Mind,” how did you come up with this title and what does it reveal about the works in the show?**

The title is taken from a lecture given by the critic Barbara Maria Stafford during the Felix Burda memorial lecture in 2012. She contrasted a contemporary emphasis on formalism as a rhetoric of absence or loss with the earlier, romantic ideas of formalism such as associationism and the notion that the human mind was formed in primordial fear and response. She stated that “the careening meteorites, the glacialization, the sudden warmings, volcanos, tidal waves, monsters, other menacing hominids, the broken twigs on the snow, animal spore, the sooty handprint: these were phenomenological gifts to the early mind. We have now become accustomed to pessimistic exercises of formalism as a negative theology. Degrees zero pieced together from omissions, gaps, deferrals and ellipses. It is difficult to imagine ourselves in a time when schematic configurations were not either hermeneutically overdetermined or, conversely, cold and empty but revealed something essential about how the brain generates reality.”

While I share a love of romantic formalism, I think the aesthetic discoveries of late modernism and formalism are incredibly valuable, as are any “schematic configurations” which help to increase understanding of the human mind or any aspect of the world. So the idea for this show was to try and collapse or conjoin those ideas and test the possibilities for including some of Stafford’s phenomenological gifts within the schematic configurations of contemporary formalism. Some of the works include elements of data visualization showing aspects of perception, while others make reference to key works by Ellsworth Kelly and Kenneth Noland and the designer and inventor Buckminster Fuller. The works address the theme of the emergence of modern humanity from fossil hominid to early stone tools and emergent civilization.

**You are known for drawing upon the traditions of 17th Century Dutch painting. What role does this period play in the works in your Future Perfect show?**

I have been very interested in the history of modernism beginning in the 17th Century, the period that saw the emergence of experimental science and the beginnings of the Western Enlightenment. Dutch painting during this period was becoming less dependent on commissions by the Church and the ruling elite, so those works provide an important insight into both the topic of interest to broader public in the 17th Century and their aesthetic taste. For me this seems like a way to gain some understanding of the sort of fears and responses (as Stafford might say) that concerned people living through the beginnings of modernity.

One of the key works in the show is based on a 1597 painting by Cornelis van Dalem called “landscape with the origin of civilization.” The original Van Dalem painting is a fascinating artifact that hints at a very modern awareness and reflection on structures that make up society and how these might be both knowable and changeable. I have combined this with Buckminster Fuller's design for a dymaxion projection of a world map.

*“Careening Meteorites and the Early Mind” is on show at Future Perfect, Singapore until October 18.*