

# fine arts



These three landscape paintings by Luc Leestemaker are shown together in Shelley Hall's Gallery. Although they are similar in style, the paintings are not meant to form a triptych and are just a few from the artist's "Transfigurations" series, which includes many paintings.

## Collective consciousness

Luc Leestemaker's landscape paintings are abstract in nature

By Andrew Moore  
*The Bulletin*

Since her grand opening in April, Bend artist and gallery owner Shelley Hall has worked to adorn her space with contemporary artists of national reputation.

One of those is Los Angeles painter Luc Leestemaker. Hall may have only three of his small landscapes to display (see "If You Go") but she couldn't be more thrilled to have them.

"He's definitely one of those more collectible artists," said Hall.

The three paintings, each an oil on canvas, measure a foot square. They hang together and are similar in style and content but are not meant to be a triptych. Instead, they are just a few of the works from the artist's "Transfigurations" series, which includes pieces that have shown in galleries around the country.

Full of color and light, the paintings are representative of the "void" or empty spaces in the American West, said Leestemaker. But they are also abstract in nature, which gives the viewer the

ability to find their own identity within them, said the artist.

"If you're going into very complex abstract composition, you're going to find a very small audience that's going to connect with that," said Leestemaker. "But the landscape is such a wide universal language, everyone feels there's something in there for them."

As an example of the appeal of his landscapes, Leestemaker tells a story about another of his "Transfigurations" paintings (not at the gallery) that he took to an art fair in Buenos Aires. A man came up, said Leestemaker, and told him he knew exactly where in the world the artist had found that scene: in Argentina's Pampas region.

No, said the artist, he had painted it in his studio in Los Angeles. Two months later, Leestemaker took the same painting to an exhibition in Nantucket, Mass. Again, a patron at the show told the artist she knew exactly where he had found the subject matter in the painting: at nearby Hyannis Point along Cape Cod's southern shore.

"And I thought 'This is so cool,'" said Leestemaker. "It means there's enough space in these works for people to lay their own association into it. It's very deep and wide at the same time, and that's a fun notion, that you can paint yourself beyond personal boundaries and get into a space which is more like collective consciousness."

Leestemaker, 49, is a native of The Netherlands. His grandfather and others in his family were painters, but Leestemaker never seriously followed their lead as a young man. He did pick up his grandfather's paint set but "messed it up in an hour's

time." Discouraged, he instead settled for a career as an art consultant and eventually opened his own firm in Amsterdam. As his career advanced, however, he yearned to paint. He felt he was "on the wrong side of a glass plate door."

His chance came unexpectedly. His girlfriend at the time, an actor in London, decided to move to L.A. for work. Leestemaker said he thought about it for "10 minutes," sold his business and moved.

At first, all was bliss, he said. He married his girlfriend and started to paint, but he soon discovered that assimilating into a new culture was more difficult than he had imagined.

He eventually divorced and experienced a medical problem that almost left him without eyesight. But he continued to paint. The solitude he felt, both emotionally and culturally, left him free to explore his creativity, he said, far away from the artistic traditions ingrained in his Dutch upbringing.

Turns out moving to L.A. and being "down and out" was the best thing to happen to him.

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### IF YOU GO

**What:** Paintings by Luc Leestemaker

**When:** through January

**Where:** Shelley Hall Gallery, 833 N.W. Wall St., upstairs in Suite B, Bend

**Contact:** 382-8696 or [www.shelleyhallgallery.com](http://www.shelleyhallgallery.com)

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"When I look (back) now, it was the beginning of great success," said Leestemaker.

Leestemaker's "Transfigurations" series has brought the artist some renown, but he said he felt like he was painting himself into a corner. Within the last year, he's embarked on a new series of purely abstract works that explore inner landscapes, he said. But with both series, he said, the goal is moving from abstract matter (thought) to liquid matter (paint) to solid matter (the painting).

"We forget where we come from is not solid at all," said the artist. "It's all very fluid and abstract, so to find that ... it clearly becomes mind over matter, and that's sort of a challenge."

Leestemaker still lives in L.A. and recently purchased a home "literally right underneath the Hollywood sign." He finally feels at home in America and plans to

spend the rest of his life here. In fact, he said he knew he had arrived as both a painter and an immigrant when he attended a show of his work in Switzerland last year that featured a large banner with the words "American Painter" appended to his name.

Bend, of course, is not Switzerland or L.A. For her gallery, Hall secured the Leestemaker paintings after an art collector from Maryland popped into her gallery and purchased some of Hall's abstract-like landscapes. The collector noticed the similarities in style between Hall and Leestemaker, Hall said, and told Leestemaker he should show in Hall's gallery.

It was an exciting moment for Hall, she said, because she had tried to get Leestemaker's work into her gallery on her own, but the artist wouldn't return her calls. Instead, the collector told Leestemaker to call, and he did, said Hall.

Although Leestemaker is used to "big East Coast champagne receptions," he enjoys showing in smaller communities, he said, "where there's a whole different sensibility to the work." And someday, he said, he hopes to visit.

Hall hopes so as well, because she would like to show more of his work.

"Luc Leestemaker's paintings have such an impressive luminosity and depth that artists search for and work towards for years, and very few actually achieve," said Hall in an e-mail to the Bulletin. "We are very fortunate to represent Luc's work ... and have had such a tremendous response from these little 12 by 12 inch paintings that I can't wait to get large scale works of his."

**Andrew Moore** can be reached at 617-7820 or [amoore@bendbulletin.com](mailto:amoore@bendbulletin.com).



**Los Angeles-based artist Luc Leestemaker** is a native of The Netherlands but proudly considers himself an American painter.