



52 WALKER ST | FEB 15 – MAR 16, 2024

Mernet Larsen

Thinking about Cézanne

Mernet Larsen, *Cézanne's House*, 2023,
Acrylic and mixed media on canvas
54 1/4 x 50 1/2 in. (137.8 x 128.3 cm).

James Cohan is pleased to present *Thinking About Cézanne*, an exhibition of new paintings and works on paper by Mernet Larsen, on view from February 15 through March 16, 2024, at the gallery's 52 Walker Street location. This is Larsen's fourth solo exhibition with James Cohan.

Over six decades of art-making, Mernet Larsen has developed a distinctive dialogue with art history drawing from traditional 13th-century narrative Japanese scrolls, the 18th-century Royal paintings of Udaipur, India, and the non-objective paintings of the Russian Constructivist El Lissitzky. Larsen harnesses their unlikely geometries to depict our everyday reality, populating her vertiginous and uncanny world with characters that reflect contemporary angst and humor in equal measure. For this exhibition, Larsen looks back on her lifelong fascination with the work of Paul Cézanne.

Larsen recalls, "*When I was in my late twenties, I was obsessed with Cézanne. I felt his work represented a true revolution in what 'realistic' painting should be, reflecting seeing as a constructive act, built out of a roving eye – scanning the motif, piecing it together, building an image that seemed the essence of what was seen.*" Over fifty years later Larsen revisits this formative influence, wondering, "*how have I changed? How has the world changed?*"

Eight new paintings and related studies reflect Larsen's generative and ongoing "conversation with Cézanne," yet remain completely her own. Larsen reexamines his most canonical imagery – bathers, the French countryside, his family members – to expose and animate their underlying and essential frameworks. Larsen moves and multiplies the physical place from which Cézanne stood in relation to the subject at hand, going beyond his singular and frontal point of observation. In this way, she becomes omnipresent within the scene, untethered by traditional perspective or gravity. Her images are comprehensive and panoramic, inclusive of numerous and discordant locations, timelines, and sightlines.

Larsen's instinct to narrativize abstract form pays homage to Cézanne's methodology, in which the act of painting becomes a kind of structural thinking. She builds upon Cézanne's strikingly modern synthesis between formal composition and lively psychological presence. Larsen has long been drawn to imagery of Jas de Bouffan, a country home and farm owned by Cézanne's father, which he painted often over forty years. In *Cézanne's House*, 2023, the house and triangular yard are perilously balanced on an inverted triangle that recalls a contemporary highway, incongruous against the traditional 19th-century Provençal architecture and farmland. Larsen introduces foreboding weather and storming paratroopers into this pastoral tableau, a striking juxtaposition of the peaceful years of Cézanne's life set against the two World Wars that would follow his death.

Cézanne consistently returned to unchanging forms and motifs as a way to see, and see again, the world anew – reckoning with the same familiar scene across dozens of artworks. Larsen, on the other hand, actively deconstructs and reconstructs the same subject over and over again, within a single artwork – allowing for other, both concurrent and conflicting, ways of knowing or seeing.

Mernet Larsen (b. 1940, Houghton, Michigan) has exhibited extensively since the late 1970s and has been the subject of over thirty solo exhibitions, including *Mernet Larsen: The Ordinary, Reoriented*, Akron Art Museum, 2019, and *Getting Measured: Mernet Larsen, 1957-2017*, Tampa Museum of Art, 2017. Her work is in numerous collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, PA; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; the Alford Collection of Contemporary Art, Cornell Fine Arts Museum, Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida; the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Israel; and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, the X Museum, Beijing, China, among others. Larsen received her BFA from the University of Florida, and her MFA from Indiana University. A solo presentation of her work is currently included in *Florida Contemporary 2023-24* at The Baker Museum at Artis—Naples, in Naples, FL through June 30, 2024. She lives and works between Tampa, Florida and Jackson Heights, New York.

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