

Conquista-Arizona, 2016, Oil on canvas, 40 x 30 in.



Onloaded: Darrin Armijo-Wardle/ *Conquista*

October 21 – November 13,
2016



In five paintings Darrin Armijo-Wardle has produced for his solo exhibition with Phoenix Institute of Contemporary Art, we see an emerging visual artist who uses his visual voice in a passionate social activist manner. His early-on romantic notions about being an artist have been replaced by a vigorous commitment to daily professional practice. In the past two years, Darrin's approach to his art work and practice have undergone significant changes, including learning patience and acceptance, employing discipline, wrestling with visual investigations, earning a painting degree at Mesa Community College, making plans to continue his studies at Arizona State University, learning about, then employing elements of color theory and various painting techniques, investigating the work of other artists, and Art History research. In fact his research in the history of art familiarized him with the early 19th Century Romantic/Neo-Classic work of French painter Jacques-Louis David and his series of five monumental equestrian portraits referred to collectively as *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* completed between 1801-1805. Like in many historical equestrian portraits, especially favored by royalty and military leaders, Napoleon is pictured astride a rearing stallion, leading his militia pictured around him. In this work, his gloveless right hand points up to an invisible summit. Never mind that Napoleon actually followed his men a few days later atop a mule ascending the summit or that he rarely sat for David which prompted the artist to use his young son as a stand-in.



Armijo-Wardle, especially in light of the upcoming U.S Elections, is concerned by what he refers to as the invasion by CNN (and others) and their continuous news cycles bombarding viewers with images of the exodus of Syrian refugees, the fluid border with Mexico and talk of constructing a monolithic wall, the controversial Black Lives Matter movement, rehashing of arguments concerning LGBTQ lifestyles in spite of advancements towards equality, and the ongoing and pathetic illegal, human rights violating, and grandstanding antics of Maricopa County's Sheriff Joe Arpaio. These non-stop, viewer grabbing, recycled news casts cause anxiety, even panic, and the erosion of critical and rational thought. People have become more self-focused and are circling the wagons around themselves for self-preservation, forgetting that participation in politics and social action are community actions, rather than just individual acts. Darrin's paintings are a contemporary remixing of these iconic portraits for the purpose of addressing and making a call for response to healing issues plaguing our society and personal lives through his own visual voice.

Armijo-Wardle's five portraits are closely scaled to David's 200+ year old paintings. Atop their horses, each figure is physically connected with the setting, echoing sloping geographical features, which along with the various, wind-blown flags, banners, and clothing, create a series of diagonal lines that counterbalance the clouds in the upper portion of each painting. Darrin's figures atop their horses dominate the pictorial plane. The features rendered with dynamic painting techniques have the overall effect of stabilizing the figures perched in precarious positions on the mountainside cliffs. In the preliminary process of painting, he creates a *grisaille*, a technique of black and white underpainting, after which he applies another traditional painting technique of laying down a layer of burnt sienna. Before starting work on what becomes the actual painting, he sketches the figures in and then applies another layer of burnt sienna.

Darrin Armijo-Wardle is a young artist to keep an eye on. His impressive personal dedication to his practice, a rapidly developing technical prowess, and art work that is both research-based and idea-driven, are keys to a rapidly rising professional career trajectory.

Ted G. Decker
October, 2016
Curated for phICA by Ted G. Decker



P.O. Box 45224
Phoenix, AZ 85064-5224
www.phica.org

Phoenix Institute of Contemporary Art (phICA) is a private, not-for-profit 501(c)3 educational organization committed to arts advocacy and education through its programming.

