



**Thomas Frontini**  
Eremite: Views and Visitors



Cover:  
*A God Appears Before  
the Temple*, 2012  
oil on panel, 45 x 33 in.

Top:  
*The Other Shore*, 2012  
oil on linen, 43 x 77 in.

Above left:  
*Loan Rabbit Dream House*,  
2012  
oil on panel, 44 x 38 in.

Above Right:  
*Doe, Mysterious Cloud*, 2012  
oil on panel, 39 x 48 in.

Opposite:  
*Dream House #1*, 2012  
oil on panel, 7 x 5 in.



There is a moment, in the history of Western painting, but also in the development of many individual talents, when observation and technique take a quiet but startling leap forward. And whether it is in the proto-Renaissance images of Duccio and Giotto, or on the page of a student's sketch pad, something beyond magic has happened. A new reality has entered into what was merely pictorial space, and a new psychological dimension. It's partly a matter of simple resemblance, composed from careful attention to perceptual data, yet meaning, also, rushes into the new pictures. In the context of Christian conceptualization this pivotal moment has to do with incarnation: It's as if the artist's materials are transmuted, extending beyond depiction toward a formal eternity. The works become examples of becoming and being, and on an intimate level there is a feeling that something has been added to the sum of existence, a new presence.

Thomas Frontini paints that moment, when a new sort of self is born, with new generative capabilities, pushing toward ever greater articulation, full of silent, swelling questions. The mystery of first impressions and the bottomless antiquity of human vision are the real subjects of Frontini's search as he moves back, getting as close to the beginning as he can. It is not so much his own childhood or even the primitivism of child-like folk vision that he interrogates (though these are subjects that may come into play, along with the sacred simplicity invoked by painters like Duccio), but the eternal

childhood of human perception, which is recapitulated in everything we see, in the latent newness of each moment.

Frontini has compared his images to postcards, and if that holds true at the exhibit *Eremita*, these latest souvenirs have been mailed from the caves of Judaea or some equally storied place. By way of the gallery wall he sends us pictures of animals and plants and sometimes a house or a mirage-like village, so subtly improbable that they can only be read as dreams, or as carefully rendered hallucinations. As the artist notes the depth of his solitude and spreads this condition, mixed delicately into oil paint, across panel or canvas, he remembers St. Jerome or St. Anthony—any of the tribe of desert-based Christian gurus known for the demons and the angels who came to visit them. Frontini's elephant, and the doe, the horse, the mouse—and most poignantly the whale—are anything but demons, and the opposite of invasive species. For one thing, all are social animals most commonly encountered in groups or herds, and they seem to come as comforters, paracletes stranded or delivered at the mouth of the painter's cave, as if to keep him company. At once muses and subjects, they obligingly stand, or lie down, usually on a kind of pedestal, waiting to be painted.

Titled *The Other Shore*, a picture of a whale, flopped up on a pile of rocks separating a patch of blue sea from a lower, lagoon-like stretch of green, is particularly good. Frontini says that Leonardo's recipe for mountain depiction was to "pile up some rocks," and that is more or less what we see here, a step-like pile that divides the landscape into alternate dimensions. But it also highlights the pathos and desperation of the animal's position. The only way it's going to get back to the water is by a series of strenuous jerks and flops. We feel his limbless state acutely—but of course it's also very clear that a whale just doesn't belong here, couldn't be here. Whatever else this image may intend, surely it is a parable about the difficulties of painting. How can one hope to render any part of the infinite subtlety and complexity of our reality? Yet however it may happen, it does happen, and the strangeness of human presence in the world leaks out around the outlines of Frontini's animals like a slow mirror.

# Thomas Frontini

Born 1967, Kingston, Ontario, Canada  
Resides in Cleveland Heights, OH

thomasfrontini.com

## Education

- 1992 MFA, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH
- 1990 BFA, Cleveland Institute of Art, Cleveland, OH
- 1989 The Institute for Art and Restoration, Florence, Italy

## Solo Exhibitions

- 2012 William Busta Gallery, Cleveland, OH
- 2007 Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong, China
- 2006 Lawrence Asher Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2005 Josaphat Arts Hall, Convivium 33 Gallery, Cleveland, OH
- 2004 Heights Arts, Cleveland, OH
- 1995 Space 700, New York, NY

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2012 The Corner Gallery, Brooklyn, NY  
LaGrange Art Museum, LaGrange, GA  
Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong, China  
(also 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007)  
Cross Gate Gallery, Lexington, KY  
(also 2011, 2010)
- 2011 Los Angeles Art Association, curated by Charlie Manzo  
of Gagosian Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
- 2010 Wall Gallery, Cleveland, OH
- 2009 MOCA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH
- 2008 The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH  
Tatar Gallery, Toronto, Ontario Canada  
(also 2007, 2006)
- 2007 Spaces, Cleveland, OH  
MOCA, Cleveland, OH  
Ballard and Fetherston Gallery, Seattle, WA  
(also 2006)  
Lawrence Asher Gallery, Los Angeles, CA  
(also 2006, 2005)
- 2006 Spaces, Cleveland, OH
- 2005 *8-Hour Drawings*, Bowman and Penelec Galleries,  
Allegheny College, PA  
*NEO+ONE Show*, curated by Ellen Rudolph,  
Cleveland, OH  
*Man and Beast*, curated by Mark Soppeland,  
Emily Davis Gallery, Akron, OH

Palm Beach Community College,  
Lake Worth, FL

ALL Gallery (two-artist  
exhibition), New Haven, CT

*Drawings*, curated by William  
Busta, Heights Arts, Cleveland  
Heights, OH

2004 *Fall Group Show*, Elevation Art  
Gallery, Cleveland, OH

*Pareidolia*, curated by Eleanor  
Antin, Orange County Center for  
Contemporary Art, CA

Cleveland Foundation Gallery,  
curated by Joanne Cohen,  
Cleveland, OH

*In America Now*, curated by Peter  
Frank, Don O'Melveny Gallery,  
Hollywood, CA

*Modern Visionaries: Mind,  
Spirit, and the Imagination*,  
Caladan Gallery, Beverly, MA

*It's a Wonderful Life:  
Psychodrama in Contemporary  
Painting*, Spaces, Cleveland, OH

2002 Cleveland Clinic, curated by  
Teresa DeChant, Cleveland, OH

2000 James Graham and Sons Gallery,  
New York, NY (also 1998)

## Professional Experience

- 2005 Adjunct Professor, Advanced  
Painting, Cleveland Institute of  
Art, Cleveland, OH
- 1992–97 Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
New York, NY
- 1991–92 Graduate Teaching Assistant,  
Life Drawing, Ohio State  
University, Columbus, OH



*Forgotten Ferret*, 2012  
oil on panel, 16 x 20 in.