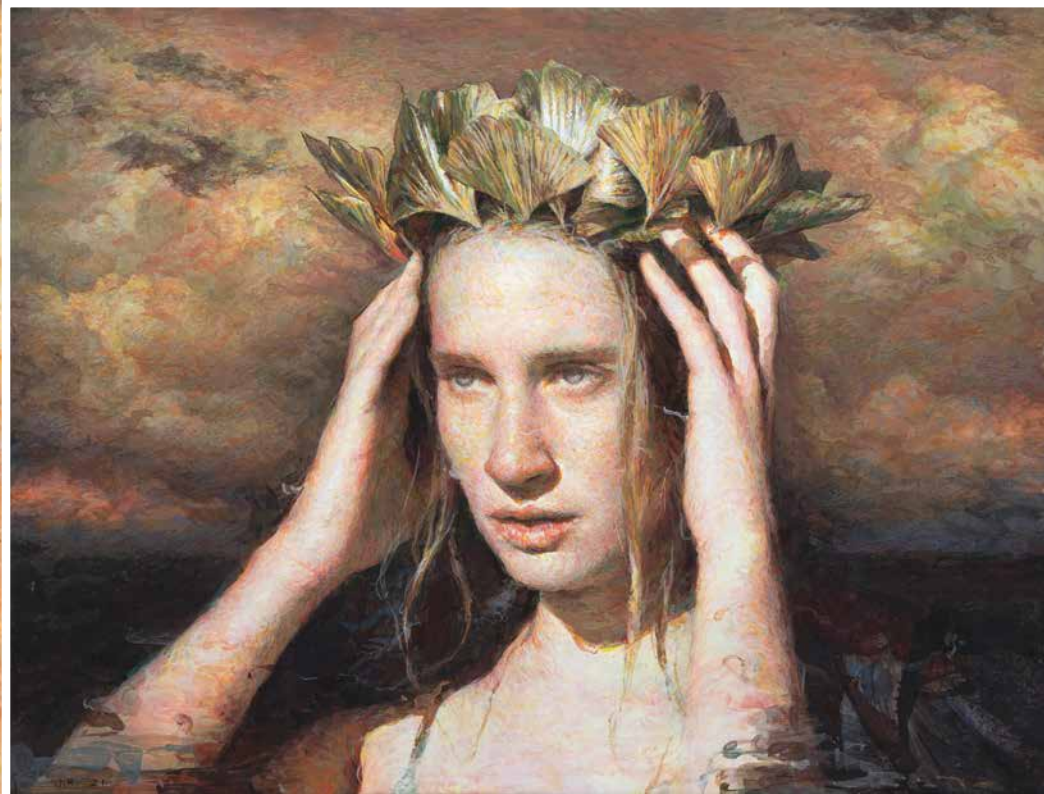




1
Born of the Sun, egg tempera
on panel, 12 x 12"

2
Golden Vow, egg tempera on
panel, 9½ x 12½"



THE GOLDEN EYE

*Julio Reyes captures
poignant moments on the
precipice of change.*

BY MICHAEL PEARCE



It is 'true, without untruth, certain, and most true' that Julio Reyes is the greatest living master of egg tempera. During the isolation of the pandemic, he was somehow blessed

by the curse of Covid-kissed solitude that dragged others down but raised him to the height of excellence, for his recent works are quiet miracles of memory, a bright and innocent world of boys and girls in sunlight, created in his alembic studio, and born from mediation and adaptation.

The real magic of his medium is in the finish, which is a uniquely delicate balance of layered strength and softness, and there is something of the alchemist in Reyes' preparation. The beginning of the work is a metaphor for birth and death, and life and light, and it is a ritual of preparation, of silence, of reverence. Standing quietly in his studio, he cracks a fragile egg, separating the lunar white from the golden sun of yolk. He cups the yolk in his palm, and the white slips away, then he gently pierces the delicate membrane with the point of a knife and lets the yellow liquid leak from the sack into a small bowl. He stirs in a little distilled water, and mixes this medium with small scoops of pigment pulled from a rainbow row of beautiful bags of color, mixing some of the smooth paint he will use to create the dreamy summer world of memory.

Slowly, an image emerges on his easel. It is an elemental scene distilled in the platonic palace of metaphors and allegories—as things are in the heavens above, they are here below in Reyes' studio. A collective memory of a child floating in the flow of a rippled river, his face gently held above the cool water by warm and golden sunshine. Delicate and fragile, the dreamy spirits of airy lacewings and fireflies drift over him, carried in the currents of the wind.

When the cimarron wind comes it is also the spirit of freedom, and when the fall sweeps away the leaves and strips the branches bare, the new buds soon bring spring. A masked girl wrapped in denim braces against the wild wind, her chimera repeated in the squalling air. Memory must take childhood, and she must become a woman.

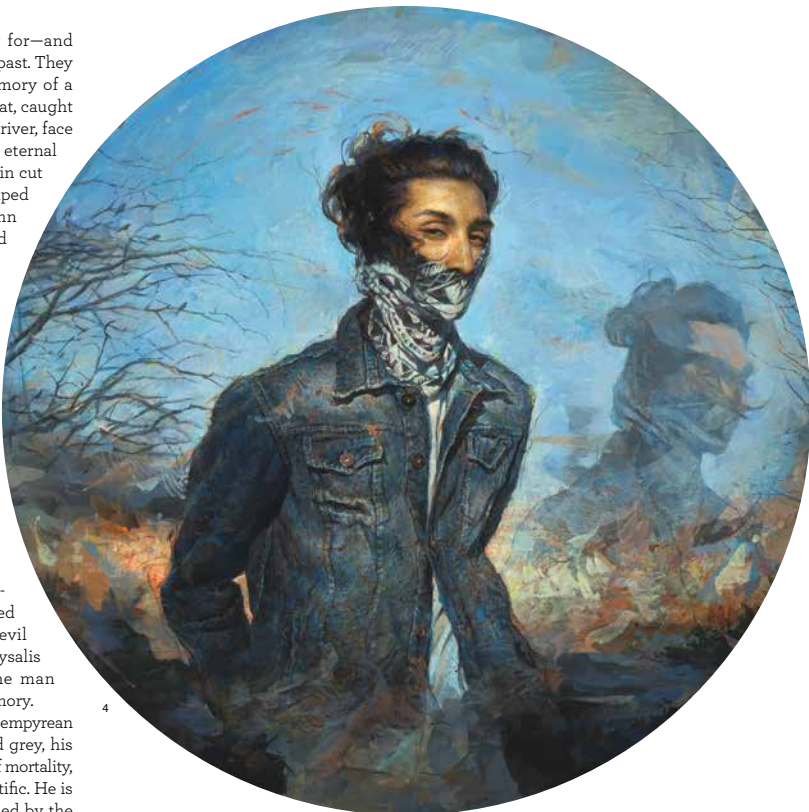
The wind of change and transmutation carries Reyes' work in its belly and his earthy pigments nourish it. His strokes are slow and careful, and he builds the work with infinite paternal patience, gathering the calm power of years of experience behind the simplicity of his brush. The paint cures fast, transformed by Texan air into the most durable of surfaces, but somehow, the warmth of that golden sun spills from the

dry image, birthing goodness.

They are fragments, feeling for—and finding—fine moments from the past. They are painted poetry. A brief memory of a small boy seated in a moored boat, caught by the ecstasy of freedom in the river, face enraptured and upturned to the eternal glory of the heavens, his pale skin cut by shadows of bare branches shaped by bright light—orange autumn must be coming, and the speckled air alive with floating fragments.

Fragments, for Reyes, is sensitive to the mystery of life and death that lies in the landscape of remembrance, too, and memory is always the friend of loss. Fearful forces lie hidden in the river's dark waters as seen in the cottonmouth moccasins that swim beneath the freckled boy. Flowers are scattered on the surface and lazy fish drift nearby. He is drowned Ophelia's living twin, this Laocoön of the river, but his meditative trance and sure enlightened stillness will protect him from evil until the Trojan horse of his chrysalis adolescence is opened and the man emerges. He is cocooned in memory.

Life and death embrace, and an empyrean youth emerges from a scumbled grey, his eyes closed again to the dull fog of mortality, his freckled face relaxed and beatific. He is here. He is not here. He is defined by the empty spaces where he is not. A memento



4



5

3
Empyrean, oil and egg tempera on panel, 47 x 24"

4
Cimarron, egg tempera on panel, 24 x 24"

5
Amber Waters, egg tempera on panel, 12 x 20"



6



7



8



9

mori skull reminds us of the absence, of the vacuum left by death, but even here, close to the edge of cold and concrete loss, the golden light seeps out from the physical bonds of the figure, the golden light of life.

With great care, Reyes distills the gentle subtlety of his images from crude reality, and finds the essence and mood of carefree youth, of hot days cooled to idle pleasure by the river. Born of the sun, the golden boy stands beside a stucco wall, all earthly simplicity, under magical light which slips from the sky—a painting that radiates both the power and light that descends from above and the living energy of youth. A golden girl crowned with a wreath of leaves adjusts her coronet with long fingers. She is the harvest queen painted in the palette of Apelles, in yellow ochre and vermilion, and lead white and ivory black, the colors of antiquity. These perennial children of the solstice season are the champions of potential.

Through his studied way of quiet and deliberate patience, Reyes has come to the moment of mastery. By focusing on the light as his subject, the light is on

him, and in him, and the shadows flee to the corners of his work, fugitive cowards in the face of its purity. The power of light, with its honest goodness and its strength, penetrates every stroke of the paintings and shapes the creation of the domain of summer rivers and its sunny children, these wonderful adaptations.

Reyes' paintings form a tripartite inquiry into metaphysics, for they are studies of being, they are studies of God and they are studies of origins—they make present their subjects' souls and God is with us in their light, and they help us to remember who we were when we were young, when the endless summer sun lifted us in light and we splashed joyfully into the living water and the mud sucked at our feet, and the air was hot and bright. The solar work is complete. ●

Michael Pearce is a dynamic writer, curator, and critic. He is a champion of skill-based art that emerges from popular culture and shapes the spirit of the age. He has published dozens of articles, and is author of "Art in the Age of Emergence." He is Professor of Art at California Lutheran University.

6
Wildling, egg tempera
on panel, 9 x 12"

7
Firefly, egg tempera on
panel, 14 x 16"

8
Moon Song, egg
tempera on panel,
9½ x 8"

9
Above and Below, egg
tempera on panel,
12 x 13"