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Around The Galleries

Sense of motion is never stilled

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Leon Kossoff's recent paintings at L.A. Louver are not the same from up close and from afar. Neither are they the same from one moment to the next, though their surfaces are long dry. Kossoff has said that he would like to draw as if the camera had not been invented, blaming photography for the sense-dulling notion that a vision, an image, a scene can ever be fixed. These vigorous, insistently mutable paintings from the last 10 years make a convincing counterargument, a solid case for perpetual flux.

Kossoff, now in his 80s, has painted portraits and aspects of the London landscape since his earliest days, the long-repeated subjects remaining stirring and fresh. Christ Church Spitalfields looms, as ever, a steep stack of stairs and pillars, archway and tower, but even more so a thrashing tumult of pigment — swipes, skeins, skids — that tames itself only as you step back from it. Kossoff's portrait heads too are thickly encrusted around the edges,

from his practice of applying pigment and scraping it off, applying and scraping, building up a surface that reads easily, elegantly, as the image of an individual but also as a tactile, temporal chronicle of change. A cherry tree with one double-crutched branch is Kossoff's newest subject, and its form, varying with the seasons and the life passing behind it, fills eight panels here. The occasional wrinkly skinned pouch of pigment (echoes of the meaty, fleshy Soutine) reinforces what is intuitively felt in the encounter with all of these paintings — a resonance between living bodies.



LEON KOSSOFF: "Cherry Tree, and Young Girl," from 2007-08, evokes seasons and passing life.



Leon Kossoff, Christchurch Spitalfields, 1999
oil on board, 84 x 80 in. (213 x 203 cm)

L.A. Louver, 45 N. Venice Blvd., Venice, (310) 822-4955, through October 8.
Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.lalouver.com