



# Stephen Zaima

## Mysterious Bridge

June 10—August 15, 2019

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY  
**SU**ART  
ART GALLERIES

LOUISE AND BERNARD  
**PALITZ**  
GALLERY

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11 E 61st St, New York, NY 10065

## Stephen Zaima: *Mysterious Bridge*

“A writer says almost everything in order to be understood; painting builds a kind of mysterious bridge between the soul of the characters and that of the spectator.”

–Eugene Delacroix, Oct. 8, 1822

The ‘mysterious bridge’ that Delacroix describes is not one that need be traversed with hesitancy. In the best of cases, the bridge built by the artist should be approached with deliberate curiosity, and if successfully erected, it can be crossed an unending number of times.

*Mysterious* may not be an obvious descriptor one would use in characterizing Stephen Zaima’s works upon first glance. It would run contrary to the emphatic nature of his iconography, his palette, and often, the scale of the work. However, when trying to deconstruct a narrative in each painting, photograph, collage or installation, it’s never quite as there-for-the-taking as might be initially assumed.

The spare components that comprise the monumental *L’evitare*, 2000<sup>1</sup> (the most seemingly narrative in the exhibition), suggest an easy interpretation, but baked into the work are numerous subtle, right-turn decisions made along the way—the profound use of negative space; the textural treatment of the underbrush obscured by the main event; the object-ness created by the hanging mechanism—and it is these decisions laid bare that allow for infinite pleasurable attempts at deconstructing the painting for any active viewer.

As seen in the works in this exhibition, Zaima’s symbols and iconography recur throughout his oeuvre at varying intervals and across several media. Immediate examples seen in *A Real Allegory*, 1990, *Corona del Spina*, 1997, and *Anvil*, 1998, include the harpsichord, the airplane, the anvil, the dividing line, varying spiral forms, and the crown of thorns. The relationships between these icons and the manner in which they’re created involve no accidents. Personal and art historical anecdotes intertwine, previously visible imagery is obscured, and compositions oscillate between the Rorschachian and the linear.

Stephen Zaima does not spoon-feed narratives, nor does he fall into the contemporary trap of thoughtlessly amalgamating imagery into some ambiguous moat. In his work he captivates, he challenges, he provokes contemplation, and thus we, the fortunately-engaged viewers, enjoy every ramble over the bridge.

–Eric Gleason  
May 2019

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Notes: dimensions are measured height by width.

All works are courtesy of the artist.

### STEPHEN ZAIMA

American, Born 1947

***Deconstruction***, 1989  
oil on linen  
84 x 128 inches

***A Real Allegory***, 1990  
oil on linen  
61 x 100 inches

***Corona di Spina***, 1997  
oil on jute  
84 x 76 inches

***L’Evitare***, 2000  
oil on jute  
84 x 168 inches

***Imbroglio***, 2015–2019  
oil on canvas, vines  
95 x 80 x 30 inches

***Nuremberg 1***, 2019  
dye-sublimation on  
aluminum  
20 x 50 inches

***Nuremberg 2***, 2019  
dye-sublimation on  
aluminum  
20 x 50 inches

***Nuremberg 3***, 2019  
dye-sublimation on  
aluminum  
20 x 50 inches

This exhibition presents a brief look back at my work over the past 30 years. The exhibition was expertly curated by SU ’05 alum Eric Gleason, Director of the Paul Kasmin Gallery, and I am enormously grateful for the vital contribution he has made.

Wayne Thiebaud, one of my teachers in graduate school at the University of California at Davis, once remarked that “Those of us who are lucky enough to be painters have intimate access to ways in which paintings are made”. I was lucky enough to have had many good teachers in graduate school, who, in addition to Wayne Thiebaud, included William T. Wiley, Robert Arneson, Manuel Neri, Roy DeForest, and John Cage. We had no area disciplines or concentrations other than art, and some would say we had no discipline at all. But it was the end of the ‘60s, a tumultuous and heady time when Francis Picabia’s insightful words had particular resonance: “*Our head is round, so that our thinking can change directions*”.

– Stephen Zaima  
New York, 2019

<sup>1</sup> As this curatorial statement is limited to four-hundred words, the eerily prognostic date of *L’evitare* will not be discussed further.