



VILLANOVA
UNIVERSITY

Art Gallery

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cole Sternberg: *thirsty while drowning*

November 3, 2022 – January 18, 2023



Cole Sternberg, *a tenuous grip on arctic dreams*, 2020
Signed and dated on verso, mixed media on linen. 76" x 72" (193 cm x 182.9 cm)

September 14, 2022 [Villanova, PA] – Villanova University is pleased to present *thirsty while drowning*, a campus-wide exhibition of new work by Cole Sternberg. In the artist and alumnus' first solo exhibition with Villanova, Sternberg will present multiple site-specific installations across the university's many historic buildings and outdoor spaces, as well as a series of the artist's "contemporary plein air" paintings in the newly renovated Villanova University Art Gallery. The sprawling exhibition aims to flood Villanova's campus with Sternberg's multimedia commentary on sustainability. *thirsty while drowning* will open to the public on Thursday, November 3, 2022, with an opening reception from 4–6 PM, and will be on view through January 18, 2023.

Together, the expansive body of work evokes a feeling Sternberg characterizes as that of “the water consuming us,” in which “the earth has metaphorically tilted off its axis, spiraling towards a beautiful demise.” *thirsty while drowning* addresses the existential harm of humanity’s interdependence with the environment, simultaneously submitting to the inevitable and inescapable consequences of climate change, while manifesting the sublime grandeur of nature and its fathomless depths.

Sternberg’s large-scale photographic murals will be installed in outdoor and indoor spaces throughout the university. A serene, yet askew, waterscape will flow across the triptych-style windows on the Jake Nevin Fieldhouse facing Lancaster Avenue. The three-story columns of Bartley Hall, home to the Business School, will be transformed by the artist’s oceanic murals; Vasey, the old black box theater, will appear as if the water has filled its interior via murals that cover all of its windows. The images originated from Sternberg’s travels on the maiden voyage of a shipping vessel across the Pacific Ocean, during which he explored the meaning of a curved horizon and the power of the sea. Sternberg’s photographs interrupt time while remaining subversive in their unremitting search for truth, noting humanity’s attempts to create permanence while failing admirably. Many of the murals include subtle wordplay related to the unique space each piece inhabits. For example, in Connelly Center, the artist layers the words of Joseph Beuys, “to dismantle in order to build a social organism,” atop a dramatic image of the Pacific.

The Gallery will display Sternberg’s signature nature-mediated paintings, the project’s *pièce de résistance*. Sternberg drags the pieces through large bodies of water, overpainting his own brushstrokes with the patterns of the sea. They are, in essence, a continuation of his murals that ripple across campus. Informed by the theoretical framing of American conceptualism, Sternberg makes space for the water itself to intervene, allowing it to wash away the evidence of the hand imbued in each mark. The artist cites an array of diverse influences upon his practice, spanning Joseph Beuys’ social commentary, Abstract Expressionism, *Moby Dick*, and Bas Jan Ader’s “In Search of the Miraculous”.

Villanova University’s strategic plan, “Rooted. Restless.”, incorporates a ten-year sustainability initiative propelled forward by the Villanova Sustainability Leadership Council (VSLC). As stated in a letter from the University’s President, The Rev. Peter M. Donohue, O.S.A., “It adopts an inclusive definition for sustainability—one encompassing efforts to support the planet and its people and to ensure prosperity for all. It is rooted in both our Augustinian Catholic tradition and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals laid out by the United Nations in 2015.”

In keeping with this mission, *thirsty while drowning* will celebrate the return of one of the university’s most exceptional Fine Art alumni, and enrich the intergenerational cultural discourse at Villanova and beyond. “I’m hoping this exhibition will not only change the environment of the Villanova campus, but also encourage dialogue within the Villanova Community about the environment more broadly,” says Gallery Director and Curator, Jennie Castillo. In totality, Sternberg will mount an artistic installation that the campus has never before experienced. Villanova’s signature blue has never been more poignant.

About Cole Sternberg

Cole Sternberg is a conceptual artist who lives and works in Los Angeles. His practice contemplates humanity's existential quandary: that of being hopelessly destructive, yet forever and inevitably linked with nature. Through varied media—including painting, sculpture, installation, performance, photography, film, and writing—Sternberg positions the aspirations of humankind against the dominant and regenerative forces of the environment and the arbitration of time. For the artist, the conclusion is unavoidable. Human enterprises—art, language, history, law, and government—are ephemeral and illusory endeavors that attempt to reflect, parallel, and challenge the ascendancy of nature, but to no avail. His works are held by major museums and collections, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; the Pérez Art Museum Miami, Miami, FL; the El Segundo Museum of Art, El Segundo, CA; the American University Museum, Washington, D.C.; and Deutsche Telekom, Germany.

About Villanova University

Since 1842, Villanova University's Augustinian Catholic intellectual tradition has been the cornerstone of an academic community in which students learn to think critically, act compassionately and succeed while serving others. There are more than 10,000 undergraduate, graduate and law students in the University's six colleges—the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, the Villanova School of Business, the College of Engineering, the M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing, the College of Professional Studies and the Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law. Ranked among the nation's top universities, Villanova supports its students' intellectual growth and prepares them to become ethical leaders who create positive change everywhere life takes them. For more, visit www.villanova.edu.

Gallery Location

Connelly Center
800 E. Lancaster Ave
Villanova, PA 19085

Hours

Mon – Fri: 8 AM – 7 PM
Sat, Sun: 11 AM – 7 PM

Contact

artgallery@villanova.edu
610-519-4612
IG: [@vuartgallery](https://www.instagram.com/vuartgallery)
Twitter: [@vu_artgallery](https://twitter.com/vu_artgallery)

Media Contact

Lainya Magaña | A&O PR
347.395.4155
lainya@aopublic.com