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ART GALLERIES—CHELSEA

**Matvey Levenstein**

Courtesy the artist and Kasmin Gallery

Can loveliness shock? Yes, as witness the fantastically skilled and sensitive neo- or para- or faux-Romantic (you decide) work of **Matvey Levenstein**, a forty-nine-year-old Russian-American artist. The subjects of his paintings and ink drawings

(at the Kasmin gallery through March 2), some on copper or wood, are forthrightly generic: landscapes from around Levenstein's home, on the North Fork of Long Island, floral still-lives, and a portrait of his wife, the painter Lisa Yuskavage, in a white bathrobe. Layered grays, orange-flavored sepia, and the odd palely simmering pink or blue constitute—or conjure, or exhale—spectral woods, clouds, a snow-covered ancient graveyard, and a storm at sea. Caspar David Friedrich comes to mind as an ancestral spirit, but the work recalls no specific precedent. Its tenor is coolly confident, assuming a viewer's empathy. That jolts. You would expect a wink or a nudge, or a smack of naïveté or perversity in so atavistic a style. But no soap. Levenstein's temerity fascinates.

— *Peter Schjeldahl*

**Through March 2.**