

# DAVID LIGARE



## MAGNA FIDE

SONOMA VALLEY MUSEUM OF ART



*Ponte Vecchio/ Torre Nova*, 2015, oil on canvas, 28 x 40 inches

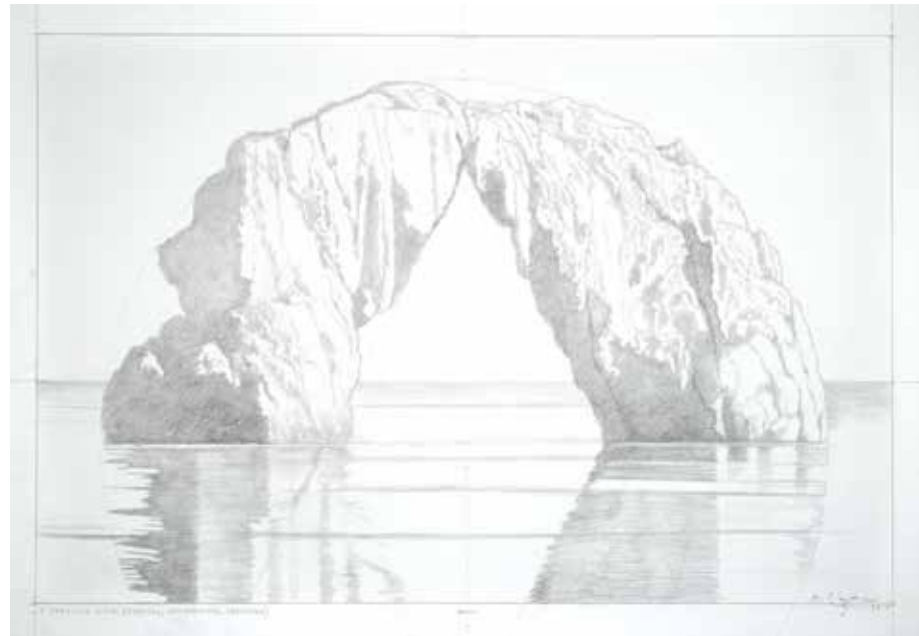
## FLORENCE AND THE MAGNA FIDE

I have been visiting Florence, Italy, frequently for over thirty years. There is, I believe, a centrality to its meaning and its importance in the world and that there is a great value in how Florence used the Greco-Roman past to create the future. For me, the essence of Florence is just that: a meeting of time and space where “past and future are gathered.”

One focus of my Florentine attentions since the 1990’s was Filippo Brunelleschi and his investigations and adoptions of ancient Roman architecture in the Fifteenth century. This inspiration resulted in paintings that were meant to point out that it is possible to supersede the present with the past. In my painting, *Ponte Vecchio/Torre Nova*, I added to the Vasari Corridor a Neo-classical tower in an architectural style inspired by Brunelleschi. It contains a statue of a Vitruvian man – the inspiration for Leonardo da Vinci’s famous drawing of a man within

a circle and a square. My point was to emphasize Brunelleschi’s use of the ancient Classical architectural elements that he had studied in Rome surmounting the Medieval bridge. It was the past becoming the future.

While on the Tuscan Coast with friends in 2014, I made a small drawing in my notebook of an invented rock formation containing a shrine sheltered by a coastal pine all set in a quiet sea. The next day I produced a small drawing and then later, an etching printed by Arte Grafica in Florence. In each version, the shrine consisted of a plinth with a stone sphere. My idea was to honor Leon Battista Alberti, the Fifteenth century artist, architect and writer. In his book *De re Aedificatoria*, Alberti wrote that “nature herself enjoys the round form above all others as is proven by her own creations such as the globe...” When I returned to my studio in California, I painted a large version of this idea that I



Study for *A Specific View; Veritas, Universitas, Venustas, (Truth, Wholeness, Beauty)*  
2015, graphite on paper, 22 ½ x 30 inches

have called, *Magna Fide (The Great Belief)*, to celebrate the possibility of a perfect form. That work, exhibited here along with some of its preparatory studies, is a summation of my Florentine ideas and experiences.



Study for *Magna Fide*, 2014, ink on paper, 8 ½ x 11 inches

While I was inspired by the pines and rock formations along the Tuscan shore, I was also inspired by Arnold Böcklin's series of paintings called *The Isle of the Dead*. Böcklin painted three out of five versions of the subject in Florence in the 1880's, based, according to some historians, on the English Cemetery in Florence. I believe that this

series is the source of so much enigmatic art in the Twentieth century from de Chirico and Dali to Abstract Expressionists like Jackson Pollock and Emilio Vedova and even Arte Povera artists like Mario Merz and Jannis Kounellis. The enigma suggests that there are things we cannot know such as the nonsense of dreams and irrational behavior. I would like to propose that the enigma can also occupy an idea or an image with a golden atmosphere of melancholic beauty and can, in addition, offer a specific idea that we might all know and embrace. I have long used the balance between opposing elements in my paintings, what Nietzsche called the "primal unity." In this case, it is the irrationality of the enigma paired with the rationality of Alberti.



David Ligare, after Arnold Böcklin, *Isle of the Dead*,  
2015, oil on canvas 18 x 29 inches



*A Specific View; Veritas, Universitas, Venustas, (Truth, Wholeness, Beauty)*, 2017, oil on canvas, 80 x 120 inches

In addition to the balance of opposites that is the essence of Classicism, I long ago noticed that whole systems are oftentimes described in tripartite terms, the most obvious being the description of life as having a beginning, a middle and an end. The paintings of the 17th century French artist Nicolas Poussin were described as consisting of drawing, color and knowledge. The Greek philosopher Plato gave his criteria for a work of art as requiring mimetic correctness, (truth to nature), usefulness and attractiveness. I present criteria similar to Plato's in the newest work in this exhibition, *A Specific View; Veritas, Universitas, Venustas, (Truth, Wholeness, Beauty)*. In a period when art has made a convention of rejecting rules, I thought that it would be interesting, radical even, to narrow the definition of art to something quite specific and precedential.

I propose in my paintings, inspired by the real underlying Florence of deep humanistic thought and scientific discoveries, that there are new insights to be found in the example of the Greco-Roman world and in the deeply curious and hugely inventive minds of the Fifteenth century. I believe that people everywhere can follow the examples of Brunelleschi, Alberti, Galileo, Böcklin, de Chirico and so many others, to build and invent the future as a place of substance, depth and significance, all wrapped in the golden beauty of an illuminating and enigmatic light.

—David Ligare



*Still Life with Gold Sphere, 2014, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 inches, private collection*



*Still Life with Sticks and Leaves, 1988, oil on canvas, 22 x 30 inches*

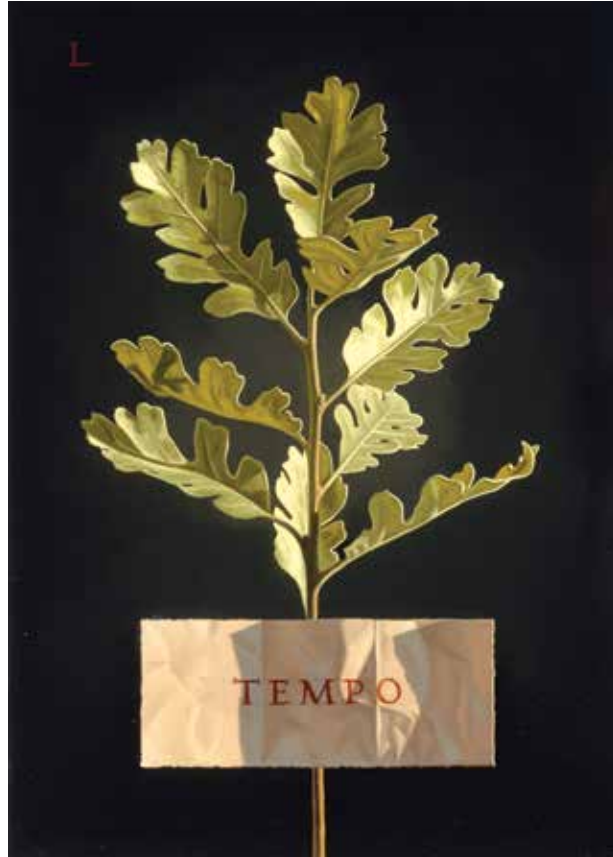


David Ligare attended Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles. Since 1969 he has had over forty solo exhibitions in New York, London, Los Angeles, Rome, San Francisco, and elsewhere. His work has been included in numerous significant group exhibitions around the world and his images have been used in textbooks and as book covers by Oxford University Press, Penguin, Phaidon and others.

In 2015 The Crocker Art Museum presented a retrospective exhibition of Ligare's work that traveled to three other museums. They also published the large format book entitled, "David Ligare: California Classicist."

Ligare's paintings and drawings are in the collections of The Museum of Modern Art in New York, The Wadsworth Atheneum, The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, the Gabinetto de Disegno e Stampe degli Uffizi in Florence, and many other institutions. In 2012 David Ligare was elected to the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, in Florence, an organization founded by Cosimo I de' Medici in 1563.

David Ligare is currently represented by Hirschl & Adler Modern in New York and Winfield Gallery in Carmel, CA. For a full listing of exhibitions, additional images and bibliography please see his website: [davidligare.com](http://davidligare.com)



*Tempo*, 2001, oil on canvas, 14 x 10 inches

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