

LOOMINGS

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 PAINTINGS AND WORDS BY
 CHRISTOPHER VOLPE



Westward. Oil paint, tar, gold leaf on canvas.



Corpus Santos. Oil paint, tar, gold leaf on canvas.

Loomings is a series of paintings executed in industrial tar, gold leaf and oil paint. Influences include Albert Pinkham Ryder, the 19th century American painter who used tar (among other unconventional substances) and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*. The title of each painting references a quote from the novel, Melville's apocalyptic vision of the American quest.

The paintings are primarily ambiguous and at times almost abstract—the intent was not to illustrate *Moby-Dick*, but rather to invoke the novel as a cautionary, foundational myth for our own age of accelerating climate change and social disruption. With its deep metallic blacks and tin-type sepia tones when thinned, the tar functions as a monochromatic signifier of industrialism and, by implication, the reckless continued over-extraction of fossil fuels.

T'Gallant Sails. Oil paint and tar on canvas.



To the Sea in Ships. Oil paint and tar on canvas.

Moby-Dick is America's most authentic epic myth. It's about Western culture's fundamental inability to understand or make peace with nature and ourselves. Melville uses the word "inscrutable" ("*The inscrutable is chiefly that which I hate.*"—AHHB) and much of the novel is about the limits of knowledge and the vagaries of perception.

So, the unfocused, indeterminate, "inscrutable" nature of some of the paintings reflects that idea. The problem of perceiving and representing reality, not to mention our inability to see clearly or to understand our place in the universe, much less the serious threats we're causing to our planet and our own existence.



Flukes. Oil paint and tar on canvas.

Maybe we need apocalyptic imagery to say no to the apocalypse. Or maybe we need the apocalypse as a way for humanity to move forward, to start over and live differently on the planet.

Maybe in these paintings there is a sense of longing—a sadness for our condition as homeless wanderers on the earth. Like Odysseus, we're longing for the safe harbor of home. But they're also about an acceptance of mystery, the mystery and power of the world and our inability to control or even know it completely—the *inscrutable*.

White Whale. Oil paint and tar on canvas.



Purposing to Spring Clean Over the Craft. Oil paint and tar on canvas.

AND instead of just being obnoxious and piling on the tar, there's an embrace of beauty despite the difficulties and the dire predictions. — C.V.
