

# ACROSS THE POND

For his latest art expedition, John O'Hern traveled to England to explore its both historically rich and cutting-edge contemporary art scene.

**Michael Leonard** has been a friend for many years, since the time when I was in awe that there were painters in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who didn't slavishly mimic the greats of the past but who had a new vision and could express it with extraordinary skill. His painting *Taking Off II* and the series of drawings and paintings of which it is part, was inspired by a figure in the background of Piero della Francesca's *The Baptism of Christ*. The figure is pulling off his shirt. Leonard's figures, shown disrobing or bathing, are very much in the moment.

All his paintings are studies in composition—the figure in *Taking Off II* parallels the left side of the frame and, on the right, the arm disappears beyond the frame and a finger appears in the upper right pointing back to the center. The round, negative shapes of the arm and head holes of the model's undershirt are countered by the solid, 3-D form of his head. While it is interesting to contemplate the compositions, Leonard's mastery of color within a tight tonal range is visually stunning (and almost impossible to see and appreciate in reproduction).



Michael Leonard in his London studio with a 1984 tondo on the wall.



Michael Leonard, *Taking Off II*, alkyd-oil on masonite, 19 x 17"  
COURTESY FORUM GALLERY, NEW YORK, NY