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Ebony, David. "David Ebony's Top 10 New York Gallery Shows for April." *news.artnet.com (Artnet News)*, 22 April 2015.

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Malcolm Morley, *Napoleon Crossing the Alps with Cannon* (2014). Photo: Courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York

1. Malcolm Morley at Sperone Westwater

The Napoleonic Wars are still raging—at least in several recent works by Morley in this terrific show. Armed conflict has long been a central theme in works by legendary painter Malcolm Morley. He uses children's toys, especially airplanes and warships, as models for elaborate war narratives that seem incongruous, played out in clashing historical periods, and unlikely geographical settings. This exhibition is no exception.

Napoleon Crossing the Alps with Cannon (2014) features a striking painting-installation, featuring a large canvas that mimics Jacques-Louis David's heroic equestrian portrait commemorating Napoleon's foray into Austria in 1800. As a matter of historical fact, Napoleon actually rode a donkey and lugged a cannon through the mountains, which Morley humorously conveys here with 3-D elements, including a realistic-looking cannon and a pile of cannon balls, all made of

paper covered in black encaustic. Elsewhere, Admiral Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington strike dashing poses in *Trafalgar-Waterloo* (2013), with their portrait panels separated by a life-size cannon barrel rendered in low-relief.

Morley culls most of the images in the show from his childhood memories of World War II. He witnessed his toy ships and airplanes being blasted from their shelves as his family's London apartment was bombed in the Blitz. The family survived, though their material possessions vanished in a flash. There is sorrow and joy in that story, just as in each of the seventeen works on view here

The Turner Prize winner, now 83, manages to imbue his poignant war tales with touches of humor, and delivers them with masterful, painterly panache. At the show's opening, my friend and colleague Walter Robinson likened the works in this exhibition to late Picassos, and the analogy seems apt. After an extraordinary career spanning nearly six decades, Morley today produces works whose childlike freshness conveys more than ever an exuberant outlook on life, despite all of its conflicts and mayhem.