

Gertrude Abercrombie
Ana Benaroya
Dike Blair
Katherine Bradford
Ann Craven
Carroll Dunham
Louis Eisner
Jane Freilicher
Maureen Gallace
Elizabeth Jaeger
Merlin James
Allison Katz

SEA SHOW

Opening Reception:
Saturday July 30, 4-7pm

Winter Street Gallery
22 Winter Street, Edgartown

Robert Longo
Sam McKinniss
Alina Perez
Loïc Raguénès
Kenny Rivero
Wilhelm Sasnal
Dash Snow
Tabboo!
Rachel Eulena Williams
Nicole Wittenberg
Joseph E. Yoakum
Coco Young
Jack Yuen

Winter Street Gallery is pleased to present *Sea Show*, an exhibition featuring 25 artists addressing themes around the ocean. For centuries a fertile source of inspiration to artists, the sea and its environs are newly animated in fresh and unexpected ways by the artworks presented. On view from July 30 to August 28, the exhibition is accompanied by a new essay by Reilly Davidson, which follows below:

Artists have wrestled with seascapes since antiquity, though there was a notable uptick in popularity during the Dutch Golden Age. Painters of this era sought to announce the region's newfound trading powers alongside exploring the subject's technical potential. Depictions of the sea subsequently came to represent the beauty of nature, time, tranquility, freedom, narrative accounts, and the like. However, as styles shift, so does the subject. The genre has waxed and waned avant-garde sentiment in more recent years, as its history has been challenged by abstract and conceptual artists alike.

Sea Show presents a myriad of image-makers assembled in order to reconcile the past, present, and future of maritime painting. Here, disparate parts combine to create a succinct vision of the seascape.

In Alain de Botton's charming recapitulation of a Proustian sentiment, he calls upon Monet's *Impression, Sunrise* (1872) in order to uphold the fictional Elstir's vision of the conjugation between land and sea. The invented painter seeks to "paint something of what we *actually* see when we look around, rather than what we *know* we see." Elstir renders the coast of Balbec with "no demarcation between the sea and sky" and a harbor where "a ship that is out at sea seems to be sailing through the middle of the town, women gathering shrimps among the rocks look as if they were in a marine grotto overhung by ships and waves, a group of holidaymakers in a boat look like they were in a carriage riding up through sunlit fields and down through shady patches." All of this is to say that there is remarkable value in abandoning conventions and exploring the mind's proclivity for surreal perceptions.

Likewise, **Nicole Wittenberg's** landscape attunes the viewer to the beauty and unexpected hues of a shoreline at dusk. Her inspirations land somewhere between Munch and Monet, as she recognizes the value in relinquishing control of her paints and submitting to the viability of *plein-air* impressionism. This particular work is the re-

sult of Wittenberg's summers in Maine where she's able to channel direct expression to her immediate setting. The artist brought a study of *Cradle Cove* (2022) back to New York where she reproduced the scene in oil. The resulting composition reveals a cotton candy bay meditating in a woodland's shadow.

Coco Young's brand of impressionism is also settled in the epoch's reverberations. She manipulates instruments of transparency and figuration under the direction of her singular brushwork. Her whirling *Aleppo pine* (2022) is set against a viridian and lime green sky engulfing a pearlescent moon. Some of the oil seeps into the linen while elsewhere the material sits boldly on the surface. Clarity is inevitably subverted due to Young's hallucinatory style.

In keeping with the hazy image, paintings by **Merlin James** expose memory and time to the challenge of restraint and exploring material logics. James imparts his own conception of the "universal sea," one that sits firmly beside its historical counterparts as he assesses painting's general authority as a medium. He mutates personal and collective memory, calling upon post 16th century Western European traditions as a means to simultaneously applaud and deconstruct precedents.

Historicism endures as a theme in **Louis Eisner's** *Flood* (2022). This painting is reminiscent of Turner's *Snow Storm* (1842), but engages the language of 20th century expressionism in order to generate a fitful scene. Here, a vessel is overwhelmed by a catastrophic set of tidal waves. The tenacity Eisner employs while painting results in a body of work that is largely motivated by archetypes and sublimations. A struggle at sea is also materialized in **Robert Longo's** *Study of Turned Over Ship of Refugees* (2018). This work mimics a fragmented photograph of a ship — mid-capsized — with those on board struggling to maintain footing. The cinematic representation of tragedy is culled from a practice Longo describes as existing "somewhere between movies and monuments."

A string of flavor-infused paintings supplement the coastal vision. *Lobster Dinner* (2022) is a faithful representation of the New England staple, involving lively brushwork that effortlessly hits the right nodes. **Sam McKinniss's** strength is in foregrounding moments, leading viewers to understand that the image they encounter holds innate value. His objectivity bucks the overwrought sentimentalism plaguing contemporary figuration. McKinniss instead works by temperature, gauging cultural conditions and then parlaying his findings into his practice. The lobster dinner supplants a Norman Rockwellian vantage point, lending the painting an aspect of American idealism. A less readily edible crustacean is depicted in **Allison Katz's** *Cancerian* (2021). Here, a legless crab marines in a wash of aquamarine and royal yellow chroma. Katz remains open to the possibility of subject, often flitting between apparently disparate concepts. Her resultant compositions are wrought with enthusiasm and saturated illusions.

Rachel Eulena Williams deals with a vastly different set of considerations. Her sculptural combustions are derived from sketches and then combined in parts. Rope and references to water feature often in Williams's compositions. She ascribes a clear identity to each component, seeking found objects that dialogue effectively with painterly concerns. *Symbols in Totem* (2022) displays the symbolic outline of a raindrop on top of a flower on top of a dumbbell. Local artist **Jack Yuen** contributes a Billy Bass-like mackerel affixed to a wood panel. Rather than crooning "Take Me to the River" or "Don't Worry Be Happy" this fish is ostensibly taxidermied, cemented in acrylic paint. Its static disposition is met with Yuen's regard for regional ecology. This mackerel species can be found in temperate waters, keeping to the shore in summer months and venturing out when the cold front hits.

Joseph E. Yoakum was more nebulous in his approach to composing images. He created imaginary landscapes that brush against real ones — waves and hillsides blurring the line between invention and nature. He illustrated his spiritual visions by impulse, applying his own methodology in an effort to convey his singular vantage-point. This particular drawing reflects his perspective of an Irish lake with mountains radiating bright pinks and greens. Another historical work by **Gertrude Abercrombie** casts what appears to be the shell of a sea snail beside a flag reading "EW." Beyond these objects, a luminous form breaches a calm body of water. Abercrombie's modest composition is engulfed by an outsized frame, emphasizing the delicacy of her central subject: the shell.

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Shells turn up again in **Dike Blair's** untitled work on paper, though this time they are upturned and contain the fleshes of molluscs. The artist flexes perceptibility in this modestly scaled depiction of an oyster plate set against a wooden platform. Blair habitually renders his subjects in a photorealistic style, though here the viewer meets a representation that is just left of center. **Katherine Bradford** conversely depicts pared down figures in stripped-down environments, exhibiting her preference for "people who are slightly falling apart." She universalizes her people, exposing them to interrelation: love, hate, joy, estrangement. *Evening Stroll by the Sea* (2022) sees two hand-holding figures ankle-deep in energetic waters. This composition picks up on Bradford's motif pool; swimmers and landscapes recur throughout her body of work in an effort for the artist to express the correlation between humans and nature.

A marked sensitivity is displayed in **Dash Snow's** untitled photograph in which a topless woman gleefully jumping and splashing as her counterpart is met by a heavy spray of water to the face. The implacability of the image lends itself to a reminiscent aspect innate to the artist's mythology. An analogous sentimentalism is lodged in **Jane Freilicher's** painting of a poolside Joe contemplating his shadow by the water's edge. Behind the figure a more substantial body of water is sandwiched between green landscapes. As a student of Bonnard and Vuillard, Freilicher navigated her paintings by recruiting a vibrant palette and romantic disposition. Her influence resurfaces in the paintings of **Maureen Gallace**. Each painter venerates the Eastern Seaboard, provincial coastlines budding from understated poetics. Gallace, however, restrains her brushwork with the tact of Alex Katz and the gusto of her own improvisational belief system. *October wave* (2022) appears as a quiet elegy to the beauty of a waterfront.

Extemporization appears again in the work of **Kenny Rivero**. He finds his forms within applied paint, pushing the medium around and allowing scenes to emerge in a jazz-like spontaneity. In the process, familiar landscapes become ciphers for personal iconographies to emerge. *Little Red Lighthouse* (2022) reflects Rivero's childhood spent in Washington Heights. The decommissioned structure operates as a totem of the past, made especially notable by the 1942 children's book *The Little Red Lighthouse and the Great Gray Bridge*. Beyond the distinctive New York landmark, an otherworldly firmament boasts a multicolored atmosphere. The coexistence of real forms and imagined environments stirs Rivero's modified subjectivity.

Alina Perez alternatively plunges her viewer underwater. A charcoal and pastel abstraction subtly diverges from the figure-laden canvases that dominate Perez's oeuvre. Her mark-making is unmistakable — subtle figurative allowances intersect the ambient surface. A seahorse engages with a starfish on the composition's right side while a manta ray hangs coolly at the picture's edge. She imports images from her mind and distorts formal conceits in order to forgo faithful representations of the past and establish a new dimension of recollection. **Elizabeth Jaeger** conversely suspends her sea creatures in a minimalist copper and steel construction. The display is unnerving as surreal fish hang out to dry in an ongoing situation.

In formulating his structural inquiry, post-minimalist **Carroll Dunham** represents the building blocks of a seascape by weaving together soft and severe pencil marks. This cartooned styling emerges from Dunham's drawing "laboratory." Impulse guides his remarkable economy of line as he maps out space. He seeks to situate order and chaos within the same framework, infusing perspicuous forms in a mass of harsh scratches and diffused scribbles. Dunham offers a generous and astute observation on painting, contending that "awareness can feel like a bright island in an ocean of namelessness. The unthought and the unseen wash the shores, leaching into the ground of the mind under sagging frames of reference. There is endless erosion of the coastline, a subversive give-and-take. Objects are soaked with feelings and their identities compromised."

Subject breakdown is also manifest in **Loïc Raguénès's** *Grey Early Stones* (2017). The simple duality of white waves against an uneven mass of blue allows the viewer to ponder formal skeletons, dissecting visual experience into uncomplicated parts. As a foil to these abstractions, **Ana Benaroya's** graphic female figure gazes at the viewer, a lit cigarette hanging out of her mouth. The bewitching scene features a topless woman set against a moonlit ocean and is knowingly rendered timeless by its lack of specificity.

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Saturated paints recur in a lively seascape by **Tabboo!**. An inscription reads “Suddenly this SUMMER” spelled out in his signature calligraphy. The curlique proclamation floats across a transitional sky, a precise moment where the sun is either making its ascent or else retreating so that the moon can take its place amongst the clouds. A dark mass punctures the horizon line, perhaps reading as a distant landscape decorated by glittering lights. A similar alchemy is lodged within **Ann Craven’s** *Moon (Little Green Haze Full, Cushing), 2022 (2022)*. The two artists apply frenzied brushstrokes in order to arrive at dynamic horizons. While there are no visible celestial bodies in Tabboo!’s *Suddenly Last Summer* (2021), Craven’s image casts a full moon as the leading role in a pared down depiction of the sky and sea’s meeting. She tackles direct expression and fleeting memory by asserting her idiosyncratic lyricism directly onto the canvas.

Wilhelm Sasnal takes a more subdued approach. In the untitled painting on view he substitutes a seagull for an alien spacecraft. This black and white image produces a cool ominosity; is the object in the sky just passing through or is it bound to enact a sinister plot? The effect of this image mirrors New Yorkers’ complicity in a recent PSA outlining the steps requisite for the survival of a nuclear attack. Does the knowledge that something bad *could* happen oblige one to take action? How does a harbinger operate on the anxieties of an individual? More often than not, one is immobilized by fear, compelled to take stock of possibility rather than response.

The considerable range of artists on view have been called upon to uphold the seascape genre’s durability and favorable prospects. Collisions between mediums and ranging interests elicit new patterns of dialogue between multigenerational image-makers. A firm mutualism is established by way of context, as Martha’s Vineyard provides a chance interaction between these works and a real coastal topography.

— Reilly Davidson, 2022