

THE ARTIST ROOM

LOST AT SEA

8 April – 27 April 2022

Private View: Thursday 7 April, 6–8pm

Opening times: Wednesday–Friday, 11am–6pm and Saturday, 12–4pm

Water... reassures you, affirms you, shows you who you are, extends you out into the world, camouflages light, sighs, sucks, laughs, splishes, splashes, slashes, washes, murmurs, gushes, bubbles, babbles, shimmers, shines, gleams, twinkles, sparkles, blinks, winks, waves.

– Roni Horn

The Artist Room is pleased to present *Lost at Sea*, a group exhibition including works by Sholto Blissett, Peter Doig, Roni Horn, Louise Lawler, Kang Seung Lee and Ding Shilun.

Titled after Louise Lawler's photograph *Lost at Sea (Curtains)* from 1996–7, The Artist Room's exhibition explores the different ways that artists have utilised water as a symbolic device to convey timeless notions of longing, melancholy and hope. Connecting drawing, painting and photography by emerging and established artists, *Lost at Sea* seeks to understand why water – which can simultaneously evoke emotions of calm, awe and fear – continues to be a source of fascination for artists in their practice.

Bestowing a quiet melancholy, Louise Lawler's (b.1947) *Lost at Sea (Curtains)* (1996–7) depicts a folded drawing by Lawrence Weiner, theatrically situated behind curtains in a seemingly empty room. A key artist of the Pictures Generation – who sought to analyse the relationship between mass media and popular culture – Lawler is known for finding images and re-presenting them in different contexts, dissecting questions about desire, value and memory. Reading 'Lost at Sea... Without a pot to piss in,' the image evokes feelings of isolation and loneliness inherent to the human condition. Describing Lawler's radical approach, Roberta Smith once noted how her 'images have multiple lives, exposing the ceaseless flexibility of photographs.' An edition of this work is housed in the permanent collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Roni Horn (b.1955) has been exploring the nature of water for over three decades. Her photographic work *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (1999) seeks to capture the 'perpetual wildness' of London's River Thames. As Horn once noted, 'The Thames has this incredible moodiness, and that's what the camera picks up.' In this series – which also resides in Tate's permanent collection – Horn seeks to understand the varying moods a river can evoke as one passes along. Numbered footnotes distributed across the image relate to eloquent and poetic responses by the artist to the water; that she describes as 'reverie, evolving quickly into a manic, obsessive, endless flow of consciousness.'

Kang Seung Lee's (b.1978, Seoul) practice is centred on the care of transnational queer histories. His polymathic and research-led work – recently included in the 2021 New Museum Triennial – pays renewed attention to important queer artists and gay rights activists, such as Derek Jarman and David Wojnarowicz. Laboriously rendered in graphite on paper, *Untitled (Peter Hujar, Hudson River 1, 1975)* (2020), re-represents Peter Hujar's iconic photograph of the glistening, rippling and undulating surface of the Hudson River in New York. The abandoned piers of the river were popular gay cruising spots; inspiring artists such as Alvin Baltrop and David Hammons.

Sholto Blissett (b.1996, Salisbury) creates dream-like vistas that sit beyond any traceable time period. Interested in notions of the idyllic, the rural, and the pastoral, Blissett's practice seeks to deconstruct the 'fictions societies create to understand their place in nature'. In *Garden of Hubris XXVII* (2022) a solitary, ornately-arched building is depicted at the top of a vast waterfall framed by a decadent mountainscape – exposing the fragility of human life against the vast, timelessness and wild landscape. Blissett has described this ongoing series as 'a play on the Garden of Eden, and a human dreamland that is slightly dystopian despite trying to be utopian.'

Ding Shilun (b.1998, Guangzhou) constructs imagined and fantastical tableaux that – through the depiction of beguiling figures – render the altered states that oscillate in our minds. Produced for this exhibition, *Late Night Cruise* (2022), depicts a treasure-filled boat *lost at sea*, an alluring place the artist describes as 'cold, dark and dangerous,' yet not without 'light and hope.' Incorporating figures both human and other-worldly, Ding bridges languages of expressionism, surrealism and 'manga' to distil layered and conflicting worlds that he names 'reflections of reality.'

Turner-prize nominated artist Peter Doig (b.1959, Edinburgh) is celebrated for his majestic, cinematic paintings of ethereal landscapes. *Jetty* (1996) is an intricate pencil on paper drawing depicting a solitary figure standing on a jetty, dwarfed by an expansive body of water and imposing nearby mountainscape. A pastel-on-paper version of this work resides in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Writing on this series in the artist's 2011 monograph, Richard Shiff noted how 'Doig paints the beginnings of dreams. *Jetty* is a beginning, a possibility, a condition, a situation without a plot.'

Water holds the literal and allegorical capacity to hold both history *and* possibility. Writing on this phenomenon, novelist Toni Morrison once observed 'all water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.' In different ways, the artists in this exhibition look to water as a transcendent and vitalising source of inspiration to better understand the human psyche through our relationship with the natural world. A dialogue between different geographies and conceptual modes of thinking, *Lost at Sea* seeks to understand how and why water remains an enduring and sensual motif for artists.

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