

Tanya Leighton

Press Release

Galleries Curate: RHE
with Sadie Coles HQ

‘TEMPEST’

Michele Abeles, Alvaro Barrington, Pavel Büchler,
Monster Chetwynd, Sky Hopinka, Oliver Laric

18 January – 27 February 2021

Water. Its form only knowable by way of other forms: surfaces, receptacles, landscapes. But really a law unto itself, stateless and forever transforming. Some of its transformations are legible, mundane even: from droplet to puddle, from puddle to sheet ice. Some so vast or distant or gradual that you can only suspend your disbelief as their consequences engulf *us*: the glaciers *melt*, the seas *swell*, the rivers *rage*. For humankind, water — as a *force* — has been feared, mythologised, understood, mastered, denied, and now, finally, provoked. The exhibition ‘Tempest’ reflects on the physical and metaphysical transformations of water. To nourish, to flow, to force, to fall, bathe, consume, drown, and to reemerge, renewed, in an ongoing cycle. Each of the artists in this exhibition negotiate with such transformative potentials.

At the entrance to the exhibition Monster Chetwynd’s large painted latex sculpture of an octopus is splayed out on the gallery floor. The wallpaper which acts as backdrop to this intelligent sea creature is an enlarged xerox of of Katsushika Hokusai’s erotic scene *Kinoe no komatsu* 喜能会之故真通 (commonly known as *The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife*), a popular nineteenth century Shunga print depicting a woman entwined in embrace with a pair of octopi. As elsewhere in Chetwynd’s work, there is a desire for metamorphosis, to be other; in which the natural world becomes a channel for expression. Water here becomes an immersive sustaining force and mythic harbinger for imagination.

Syncretic inter-species representations recur in Oliver Laric’s *Untitled* animated film, in which Laric re-draws found footage of humans morphing into animals from hundreds of animated films. In a continuous loop, these shape-shifting characters blend swiftly and hypnotically to the rhythm of a contemplative orchestral score. This work is shown paired with a new 3D digitally printed sculpture, *Hermanubis*. Laric’s version of this psychopomp deity, half-man and half-jackal, is recomposed in a patchwork of different materials, suggestive of a broader interest in the hybridisation and instability of matter.

Michele Abeles delights in the slippage of the image, torn between its pristine digital future and a past fast decaying and discolouring. Abeles’s *Nymphaea* series is based on the vacant imagery that populates waiting rooms. The banal, the cliché, and the knock-off are freely recombined with imagery from the artist’s own archive and output as seductive large format digital tapestries. The example shown here, reviving Monet’s *Water Lilies*, is displayed with

Tanya Leighton

Abeles's small scale collages, titled after reptiles found in the swamps of Florida, and incorporating elements such as imitation crocodile skin, fragments of mirrors, and lost cameras.

Clouds appear, sensual and majestic, in the work of American artist Alvaro Barrington. Inspired by the transient states between water and air and J.M.W. Turner's tempestuous seascapes such as *The Slave Ship*, 1840, Barrington mediates between subjective gesture, historical allusion and his own personal biography. Intuitively recording shifting skyscapes he witnessed from his home in London and reflecting on his journey from the United States to the UK, Barrington pays homage to the Atlantic crossing of his ancestors. Through these understated compositions, Barrington transforms everyday meteorology into biomorphic symbols, expressing the fluidity of cultural exchange and collective memory.

In the second gallery space, the exhibition continues with *Lore*, a film by Sky Hopinka, bringing forth ideas of reincarnation and cyclical return. A stream of fragmented images are assembled on an overhead projector, as a voice tells us of a not too distant past; a lore uttered in the present as a promise for the future. "Stories of oceans in the afterlife, or the spirit world in our own... This endless mixing and reconfiguring, overlapping of images (like waves)." These motifs reappear in a series of photographs with hand-inscribed words suggestive of an introspective journey through memories and landscapes.

Water is the purifying agent in the material transformations of Pavel Büchler's *Modern Paintings* series. Found at flea markets and auctions, these works have their painted surfaces removed and their canvasses put through a washing machine cycle. Patches of paint, reversed back to front, are then re-assembled in the manner of 'crazy paving' or abstract mosaics.

Culture is accelerating. As ice melts into water its constituent atoms get faster. More collisions occur between them. The ancient Greeks observed that *panta rhei: everything flows*. The artists in 'Tempest' contemplate processes of change, growth and renewal in the everyday to the mythological, inviting collisions, as connections, between us and everything around us.

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'Tempest' is part of Galleries Curate: RHE – a collaborative, free-spirited format, consisting of a series of exhibitions and special contributions, taking place both in the spaces of participating galleries and online. Loosely addressing the theme of water in all its fluid, geographic, allegorical and political dimensions, Galleries Curate: RHE is the first chapter of a dynamic dialogue between the individual programs of 21 international galleries. To find out more about the Galleries Curate: RHE initiative and upcoming projects, please visit: www.galleriescurate.com.

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