

General Store – Spring 1883 – Sydney 2017

Where does our almost universal fascination with water and fluidity originate? And what is the potential for fluidity to signify meaning on an aesthetic or political level? Located in the Establishment Hotel, above the Tank Stream (a fresh water tributary of Sydney Cove used for drinking water over thousands of years until the early 1800s), it is apposite that the artists included in the *General Store* for this year's *Spring 1883* ask such questions related to the concept of fluidity.

Their work not only asks such questions but interrogates these avenues of inquiry, pushing the boundaries of social and poetic understandings of fluidity. For instance, Ulf Saupe's *Waterscape #16* (2016) presents a characterisation of fluid as at once peaceful and turbulent, encapsulating the dialectical potential of flowing water. Similarly, Ben Gavin's *Apparition at Sea* (2016) exemplifies a certain ambivalence to the sea, its spiritual or religious qualities coupled with the sense of a gate in the lower left of the painting, perhaps signalling the barriers often associated with sea travel within today's socio-political climate. The traditional hierarchy between foreground and background is broken down, offering a sort of Gestalt image in which the focal point switches between apparition/gate or freedom/restraint.

Alexis Destoop's work evokes the sublime and the uncanny, centring on the fluidity of form in an objective, formal sense, as well as in a more subjective, perceptive manner. *Fata Morgana* (2016) depicts a minimal vision of the horizon, blurring distinctions between photography/painting and the viewer/view – Destoop here presents a perceptual anomaly, an artwork as if viewed in nature with the human eye. *Last Light* (2016) extends this thread, challenging our perceptual limits and our ability to find poetic beauty in a context that is seemingly absent of light.

Irene Perez Hernandez's *Loop Series* (2010) transforms the 'ideal' form of the circle into a poetic and mutable structure, defying the strength of the steel loop in order to emphasise

the underlying malleability and potential fluidity of the form. The seemingly cool ease with which this manoeuvre has been made situates Hernandez's work within a Post-Minimal context, injecting an expressive touch into the work – in this case, perhaps 'expressive touch' constituted by a strong grip!

In *Hips* (2014), Juan Pablo Plazas challenges the limits of the male gaze and highlights humanities' drive towards finding meaning in everything. If *Hips* responds to a concept of fluidity, it is not directly through its relation to swimwear or beach culture, but rather, through the fluid nature of identity and meaning, and how the two relate to constructs of gender and commercial culture.

Antoine Aguilar uses light as medium, extending a Post-Impressionist lineage far beyond its typical boundaries. In doing so, Aguilar's light installations convey the fluidity of light, colour and form, constituted in an important way by the viewer's situation in relation to the work. In a similar way, Marihiko Hara merges the natural and the abstract in his compositions for *Habit* (2017) – Hara himself has described it as scenery mirrored on the surface of water.

This exhibition, devoted to such a coherent yet diverse exploration of fluidity is both timely and perfectly suited to its place on a site that historically brought fresh water to humanity over thousands of years. In doing so, these works show why water and fluidity are so central to us on multiple social, cultural, political and aesthetic levels.

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