

Immersion

July 10 – August 16, 2024

“We originate from water; we consist to a large extent of water. Without water any life would be unthinkable. In its liquid state, water is without its own shape and form...Water is a universal element.”

– Jitka Hanzlová



Yancey Richardson is pleased to present *Immersion*, a group exhibition examining the varied and charged associations of figures in water, with images spanning the early twentieth century to the present. The eighteen international artists in the show include Olivo Barbieri, Lillian Bassman, Lucas Foglia, Adam Fuss, Jitka Hanzlová, David Hilliard, Justine Kurland, Alex MacLean, Arno Minkinen, Marilyn Minter, Richard Misrach, Zanele Muholi, Alex Prager, Mark Steinmetz, Larry Sultan, Hellen van Meene, Masao Yamamoto, and Kanoa Zimmerman. The exhibition is on view from Wednesday, July 10 through Friday, August 16, 2024 with an opening reception Wednesday, July 10 from 6–8 PM.

The works in *Immersion* explore water's ability to evoke altered states of being such as birth, death, dreams, sensuality, and spirituality. The large-scale photographs of New York-based British artist **Adam Fuss** (b. 1961) often explore the poignancy of new life, death, and nature. His silhouette of an infant floating upwards in an amorphous liquid alludes to both the origin of life and to scenes of ascension in western religious painting.

Wonders of Water, a 1959 black-and-white image of an elegant figure diving into inky darkness by the innovative fashion photographer **Lillian Bassman** (1917-2012), exemplifies the impressionistic sensibility for which she became known. Los Angeles native **Alex Prager's** (b. 1979) dreamlike film still of a fully clothed woman swimming underwater suggests her bodily transcendence by death or love. The title of the series from which the photograph comes, *La Petite Mort*, is the French term for orgasm, translated as “the little death.”

For his narrative, multi-paneled works, Massachusetts native **David Hilliard** (b.1964) often captures private moments of contemplation, vulnerability, and seduction. His images imply intimacy, seeming to occur the moment before or after a sexual encounter and calling into question the relationship between photographer and subject. In her *All Wet* series, **Marilyn Minter's** (b.1948) tightly-framed, painterly images of women's faces carry an erotic charge, claiming and celebrating their sexuality from a female perspective.

Piloting his own plane since 1975, Boston-based artist **Alex MacLean** (b. 1947) has photographed vast swathes of the United States from the air, creating images that combine documentation and disorienting abstraction, such as his surfers dwarfed by a huge wave, while Bay Area artist **Richard Misrach** (b.1949) has photographed swimmers from the balcony of the same Hawaii hotel room since 2002, using a single perspective to capture the scenes of humanity unfolding below him. On commission from the MAXXI Museum in Rome and working from a helicopter above the Italian coastline of the Adriatic Sea, **Olivo Barbieri** (b. 1954) captured groups of people in shallow water performing a joyful, ritualistic dance, evoking both the figures in Matisse's 1910 painting *La Danse* and stills from a Technicolor Busby Berkeley film.

For fifty years, Massachusetts-based Finnish photographer **Arno Rafael Minkinen** (b. 1945) has created a series of self-portraits in the natural environment, contorting his body into sculptural shapes that surprise and amuse. In *Oulujärvi Afternoon*, Minkinen's semi-immersed body communes with the water, creating the illusion of a glistening rock.

In 1978-82 California native **Larry Sultan** (1946-2009), determined to overcome his fear of immersion, undertook a project to photograph underwater in Bay Area public pools, capturing unexpected choreographies of colorful figures distorted and reflected by the rippling water. Born and raised in Hawaii, **Kanoa Zimmerman**'s black-and-white photograph *Diver 10* reveals a diver, isolated and suspended in a seemingly infinite expanse of gray space in which time seems stretched and life on land a distant reality. "Light behaves differently underwater. It bends and slows down, giving rise to optical phenomena," observes Zimmerman. "Our movements and heart rate also slow, our bodies suspended as if weightless. Without the normal metronome of breathing, time seems to stretch... There is a dreamlike quality to being underwater, a feeling of being removed from yourself."

Best known for her carefully staged portraits of adolescent girls exploring the psychological tension and ambiguity of this transitional stage of life, Dutch artist **Hellen van Meene** (b. 1972) created a modern-day Ophelia floating atop shallow water. Also focusing on young women, **Justine Kurland**'s (b. 1969) *Bathers*, a seminal work from her landmark series *Girl Pictures* (1997-2002), features a group of girls who lived on a commune and spent the summer along the banks of a river in Southwest Virginia. Based out of New York, much of Kurland's work has been made on the road, where she says she focuses on "a space where the female experience is foregrounded and affirmed through mutual recognition of one another... where performances became actual exchanges of intimacy and protection." Originally from a farm in suburban New York and currently living in California, **Lucas Foglia**'s (b. 1983) interest lies in the intersection of human beliefs systems and the natural world. For his series *A Natural Order*, Foglia spent five years interviewing and photographing people that chose to live off the grid in the southeast American backwoods.

In the images of Georgia-based photographer **Mark Steinmetz** (b. 1961) and South Africa-based visual activist **Zanele Muholi** (b. 1972), water serves as a transformative medium. Steinmetz's image of a young boy waist deep in a river as he is being baptized examines the idea of immersion in water as an act of spiritual cleansing and rebirth. In their self-portrait *Manzi I, West Coast, Cape Town, 2021*, Zanele Muholi emerges from the depths of water as a powerful, goddess-like figure confronting the viewer with a penetrating gaze. The image is drawn from their series *Somnyama Ngonyama ("Hail the Dark Lioness")* which explores themes of racism, sexuality, and the politics of possessing a Black body.

Throughout their careers, Czech-born artist **Jitka Hanzlová** (b. 1958) and Yokohama-based photographer **Masao Yamamoto** (b. 1957) have looked to animals and plant life for their inspiration. In her extended project *WATER 2013-2019*, Hanzlová traveled the world to examine water in all its different states. Taken in Mauritius, her image of a reef shark swimming silently through the crystal-clear Indian Ocean showcases the artist's wondrous approach to the natural world. Yamamoto's small, intimate handmade photographs of overlooked moments in nature are informed by animism and Japanese aesthetic traditions.

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Image: Larry Sultan, *Untitled #16*, 1978-1982 from the series *Swimmers*, Archival pigment print, 30 x 44 1/2 inches.