

An essay for In the Wake

Wake: the track left on the water's surface by a ship; the disturbance caused by a body swimming or moved in water... a region of disturbed flow. Scholar Christina Sharpe's concept of the "wake" resonates with the ongoing trauma of slavery on Black life, with the making and unmaking of identity that arose in the abysmal passage between land and sea. Taking its title from Sharpe's work, the artists of *In the Wake*—Simon Benjamin, Rocío Guerrero Marin, Polina Tereshina, Miko Veldkamp, and Matthew Weiderspon—explore a multitude of disturbed and disrupted flows:

the delicate balance within ecological systems

altered ways of consciousness

shifting tides of power

the porousness of language

and constant states of wandering.

With these throughlines, they orient us toward sites of identity formation and rupture.

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Édouard Glissant discusses identity through the concept of "errantry" [from the French *errance*], an act of nomadic navigation that acknowledges the multiplicity of cultural influence and being. Simon Benjamin drew inspiration from Glissant's work for his video installation, *Errantry*, as well as Krista A. Thompson's theory of "tropicalization," which frames the picturesque perception of the Caribbean as a remnant of the colonial gaze. *Errantry* was shot on Jamaica's Treasure Beach, a region that has remained relatively isolated from the country's tourist culture. A native of Kingston, Benjamin spent three months in 2020 visiting and documenting the beach. He ended up forming a unique bond with one of the local fishermen, 64-year-old Tommy Wong, who began his occupation at the age of twelve. Tommy agreed to be the subject of Benjamin's video, which is split into two channels: one is a continuous shot of Tommy pulling up one of his traps (which the artist recreated for the show), an action that seems so methodical and precise that it appears to be second nature. In the other channel, Tommy describes his struggle to adapt to greater competitiveness within the fishing industry, the sabotage wrought by amateur fishers, and the readily felt impact of climate change and its disproportionate effects on the Global South. As Tommy speaks, his dialect weaves in and out of clear articulation, reflecting, in Benjamin's words, "an opacity of language" and the porousness inherent in articulating the postcolonial experience.

Rocío Guerrero Marin explores the physiological and cultural relationship between the human body and water. Her exploration is informed by her personal experience growing up in Chile, but the artist also considers the ubiquity of rituals and daily practices that center around water across cultural and geographical boundaries. Her installation *Sobbing Water* consists of glass bottles that are inspired in form and use by an ancestral object native to the Andes. As both a vessel and an instrument, water shifts back and forth between each chamber of the bottle to create a bird-like whistle that emerges from the spout. As objects used in mourning rituals, their music, in Guerrero Marin's words, represents "an ancestral sound" that at once embodies generational loss and manifests the internal rhythm shared between the body and the object. With her documented performance *Steam Signals*, Guerrero Marin uses a device of her own design to enact one of the oldest forms of long-distance communication. She releases short bursts of steam to seemingly produce a message, but our expectation to decipher its meaning is thwarted through the untranslatability of this invented language. We may not understand the message verbatim, but the rhythm of her signals suggests lexicality. The act of communication is present, not as a practical tool, but as a gesture of outreach or a desire for connection.

Russian-born artist Polina Tereshina's work is informed by the language of resistance. The artist disturbs the flow of information communication through the subversive representation of familiar images. Her monumental painting *Rider*, for instance, plays on the man-on-horseback trope seen throughout visual culture. Often associated with historical works of art, there are also contemporary instances of this trope being used by world leaders to proselytize the image of the strong man. While the trope is meant to convey power and virility, the artist replaces the classical subject with a recurring soft, semi-nude, pink figure, who clings to the back of the horse in apparent distress. In its many iterations the character always seems to be out of its depth or caught in the middle of an embarrassing act; it evokes our empathy, but also inspires a strange revulsion to the uncanniness of what Tereshina describes as a "squishy, perverse innocence." By referencing traditional modes of academic artmaking and bringing new meaning to the term "soft power," Tereshina breaks down the power of images. In so doing, she reveals the societal weight that we place behind them, whether through our perception of contemporary media, or through our reverence for the canonical history of art.

Miko Veldkamp's paintings weave together geographically disparate locales—spaces that the artist has at one point or another called home. Figures who represent "pseudo-self portraits" principally occupy his lush, botanical dreamscapes. Each scene conveys a vague sense of place, but certain elements (a checkered floor, an exaggerated arch bridge, a field of grazing cattle) suggest enigmatic specificity. Upon first glance his compositions are vibrant and playful, but incorporated elements such as coca and tobacco leaves represent both the beauty and the cultivated danger hidden within a fructified landscape. These imagined spaces are drawn from the artist's memories, and as such, they often diverge from our physical reality, but represent the felt experience of wandering. Veldkamp was born in Suriname and grew up in the Netherlands before relocating to the US in 2014. His work is a response to living across dispersed geographies, and the ways in which his identity has shifted in the process of navigating degrees of otherness. Works such as *Garden Ghost* convey the experience of otherness, or otherizing, through the physical barrier between interior and exterior spaces that separate the represented figures. Veldkamp's richly complex scenes embody longing, but also the potential to recreate and invent moments pulled from the depths of our subconscious, while revealing the fluidity of identity as a construct.

Through his installations, Matthew Weiderspon enables moments of encounter with the natural world. His delicate constellations comprise the physical objects that one might find along a water bank—gravel, mud, driftwood, weeds, rocks, and sand evoke the remnants of water, the residue leftover by the waning tide, or the dormant traces of a quiescent ecosystem. The precarity of these materials engenders intimacy within the work; the delicacy with which we must encounter it reflects a truce between the fragile materials and the body. Weiderspon incorporates both found and constructed materials into his installations, such as clay dice imprinted with thistles, entangled ropes, and animal sounds. His unique configurations encourage new ways of responding to our daily environments, or interacting with (rather than reacting against) the small objects that we often discard or overlook as ordinary detritus. Through the principles of queer ecology, the artist disrupts dualistic notions of the natural and the human made, or the natural and the unnatural, the living and the dead, and instead creates landscapes that exist in a constant state of flux.

If water is the common thread linking each of these artists' practices, the "wake" represents an activation of their work, or the psychological traces of their individual activations. As unique as their practices are, it's difficult not to see In the Wake as an activation of their shared space, the embodiment of close kinship and entangled experiences among the artists. Deep in the slipstream, we encounter the fluidity of language, memory, and meaning—through their relational connection, the artists in this show delve into the poetics of the unarticulatable.

—Re'al Christian

IN THE WAKE

Simon Benjamin
Rocío Guerrero Marín
Polina Tereshina
Miko Veldkamp
Matthew Weiderspon

Hunter College MFA Thesis Exhibition Part VI
May 21- 29, 2021, 10 am- 7 pm daily, by appointment
205 Hudson Gallery (access on Canal Street)
New York, NY 10013



To schedule a viewing appointment, please visit <https://linktr.ee/inthewake> or use the QR code

Simon Benjamin

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Simon Benjamin is a Jamaican artist and filmmaker living in New York, whose work includes experiential installations, photography, film, and sculpture. Through research, oral history, and critical fabulation, he calls attention to the contradictions entangled in the enduring myths and images of the Caribbean as tropical paradise—a carefully constructed imaginary that replaced the harsh reality of the exploitative plantation. With the intention of moving beyond critique and pointing to systems and power – he creates open-ended poetic and lyrical moving images and objects, which bring together the immaterial and the tactile. Rethinking the relationship of margin to center in archival representation, vernacular materials, such as cornmeal and fish traps, become sculptural elements, embedding multiple temporalities and narratives.

Errantry, his current body of work is comprised of a series of multi-channel video installations and related works, centered on the polyphonic rhythms of coastal space, the Caribbean sea, and the life sustained by it in a non-linear narrative that raises questions about time, labor, environmental degradation and the ongoingness of colonialism.



Rocío Guerrero Marín

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Rocío Guerrero Marín is a multidisciplinary artist born and raised in Chile, and currently living in New York. In her work, she composes systems with poetic gestures that explore the affective relations and commonalities between bodies and environments through ideas of language, experience, and materiality. Rocío is interested in how the relations we establish with others, human or not, affect our understanding of the world and sense of being. Her work makes visible different bodily connections, including forces of nature: the wind, the sea, the desert, which challenge us to become absorbed with them, as we are all together matter, sharing ways of being vulnerable in the world. Rocío makes tools for communication to happen, objects that when activated, amplify experience: helping us to understand and share in transformative mediated situations.



Polina Tereshina

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@polinatereshina

Polina Tereshina (Chelyabinsk, Russia) is a Brooklyn-based artist working in painting and sculpture. She uses a wide range of vocabulary, from the language of zines and protest to that of abstract expressionism. Tereshina weaves together the discourse of the white cube with comic book humor, reflecting on canonical ideological constructs. By condensing binaries of representation, such as abstraction and gender, as well as other cultural tropes, she creates areas of openness where these categories begin to lose their assertive power. Sundry references to art history and geography swim in a sea of loose brush marks where archetypes are untethered from the frameworks they rely on to exist. Tereshina creates arrangements where each object is a concrete proposition: social, political, and imaginary, creating a constellation of varying ideas that forms an overall conceptual gestalt.



Miko Veldkamp

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@mikoveldkamp

Miko Veldkamp was born in Suriname and grew up mostly in The Netherlands. He has been based in the United States since 2014 and lives in NYC. His work combines his personal life with folklore and ancestral histories, as if existing in one fantastical time and place, in order to reflect on race, privilege and historical relations between the United States, the Netherlands, Suriname and the Asian Diaspora. It's populated by shape-shifting, skin color changing and translucent pseudo-self portraits interacting with each other in different roles, that occupy a continually developing psychological landscape of bicycles, dairy cows, nightclubs, checkered floors, forest spirits, and tobacco and coca leaves. Playful, sensitive, dreamy and lucid, the paintings build complex and idyllic scenes that are reminiscent of Les Nabis and Expressionism, yet they escape a colonial gaze that racially and geographically codes notions of civilized and wild, joy and suffering.



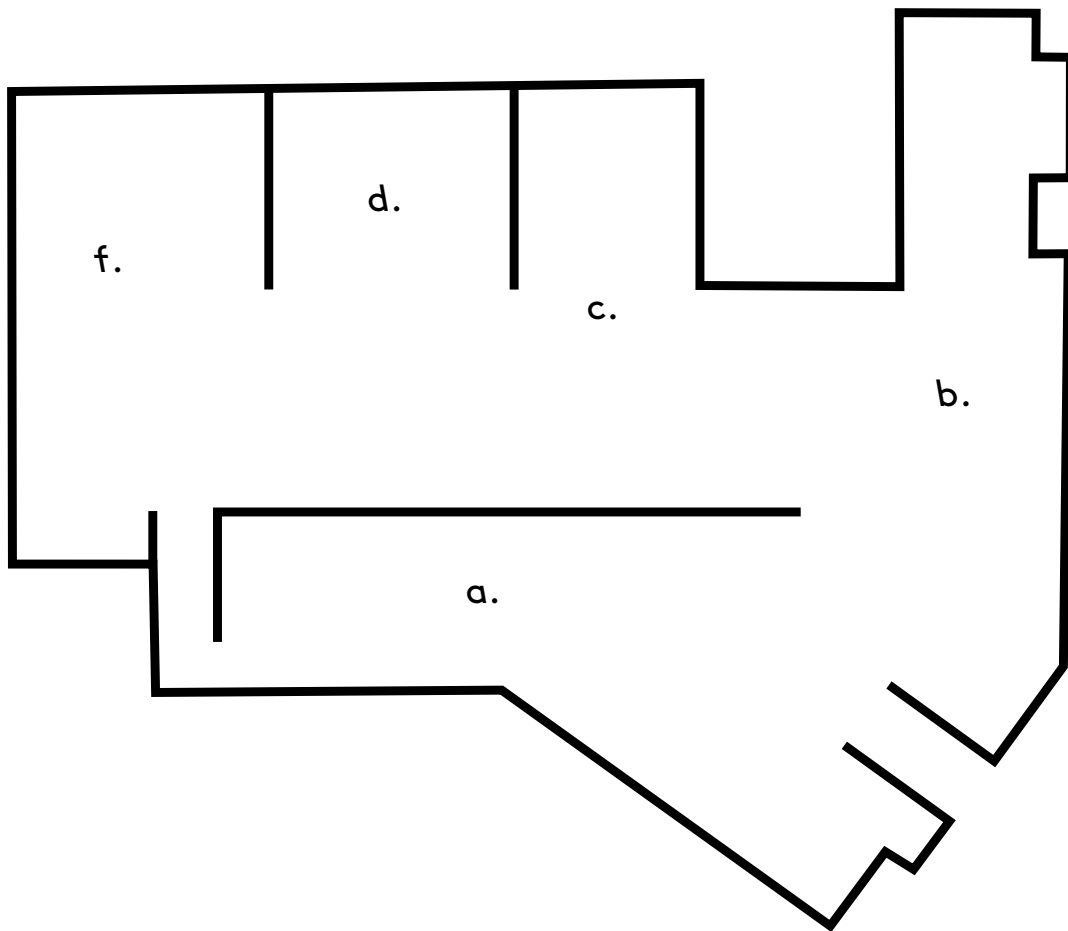
Matthew Weiderspon

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Matthew Weiderspon was raised in northern Colorado and currently lives in Brooklyn, New York. Being with Mew's scattered floor dispersals, calling sounds, and bodily gestures asks viewers to take a closer look at the situated and relational material intimacies of a rural, familial, femme disorientation. In an affective poetics of approximation, the material and performative echoes of these spatial suggestions mark a present past of loss. Queering scale, association, and spatial orientation, the work also prompts reconsiderations of hope in precarious conditions. Drawing inspiration from environmental and queer theorists, the work engages possibilities for being in kinship with the material world of soil types, aggregates, seeds, branches, bones, twine, and animal calls and movements.





- a. Polina Tereshina
- b. Matthew Weiderspon
- c. Rocío Guerrero Marín
- d. Miko Veldkamp
- f. Simon Benjamin