

Swimming

Summer 2023 was an informative and transformative season.

Shifting and adjusting, water played a big role, protecting and guiding through many conflicted decisions and choices.

Water held.

I swam and I understood.

A lonely wet choreographed figure, dancing with the deep.

The big brilliant blue bore witness.

Cold, threatening, all consuming, yet calming and wise, lifted up into buoyancy.

To swim is to let go, weightless and free, small and insignificant in the knowledge that this is a motion older than time.

I like the idea that water has always and will always be there.

We return to water and we come from it.

Almost every cup we drink has at one moment almost definitely passed through a dinosaur.

Water is poetry and prose.

Water is old.

For millennia, artists have been guided by water, inspired, revealing itself in unending infinite possibilities.

Whether it be the physical act of cleansing, the sad shower, the long lingering bath, the party jacuzzi.

The refreshing lake jump, river crossing, plunge pool, pond and stream.

The wild Atlantic, The Pacific, The Indian, all converging, all inviting, open to our presence.

Wet trunks.

Hose pipe bans.

Taps, fountains, sprinklers.

Puddles. Swamps.

Hazy, foggy, steam.

Water is the quiet friend that makes a lot of noise.

– Russell Tovey, 2024

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GRIMM is pleased to present *Swimming*, a group exhibition curated by Russell Tovey, on view at the gallery's Amsterdam location from 28 November 2024 until 11 January 2025. The exhibition brings together a selection of works by Alvaro Barrington and Dorus Tossijn, Andrew Cranston, Carroll Dunham, Jake Grewal, Brook Hsu, Derek Jarman, Cheyenne Julien, Anne Rothenstein, Wolfgang Tillmans, Caroline Walker, Shaquille Whyte and Xie Lei.

Born in Venezuela to Grenadian and Haitian migrant workers, **Alvaro Barrington** (b. 1983, Caracas, VE) was raised between the Caribbean and Brooklyn, New York, by a network of relatives. An unwavering commitment to community informs his wide-ranging practice. His series *Garvey* examines the cultural exchanges of early 20th century London and the Harlem Renaissance – both sites of large-scale migration from the Caribbean at the height of Modernism – and their ongoing influence on artistic output and notions of self-hood, sexuality, the soul, identity, nurture, nationality, punishment and death. Considering himself primarily a painter, Barrington's multimedia approach to image-making employs burlap, textiles, postcards and clothing, exploring how materials themselves can function as visual tools while referencing their personal, political and commercial histories. The work for this exhibition was made with long-term collaborator **Dorus Tossijn** (b. 1984, Amsterdam, NL). Tossijn is a London-based artist working in multiple media with a main focus on painting and drawing. In often small-scale works he explores the quick-paced current image-making culture through a slow painting process, questioning what we consider good and beautiful.

Andrew Cranston (b. 1969, Hawick, UK) is a painter-storyteller, a way of working that is enhanced by his often painting on the linen bound covers of old books. His stories coalesce in the process of making – the paintings emerging gradually through the manipulation of his materials: layering, lacquering, bleaching, collaging and constantly re-working his way into images that seem to shift backwards and forwards in time. He has described one of his works as '*a painting that came out of my brush one day*', a statement that sums up his approach. They are resolutely contemporary in spirit and yet connected by a strong thread to painters of the past, especially perhaps to the intimism of Vuillard and Bonnard, or to Matisse or Munch.

Since the 1970s, **Carroll Dunham** (b. 1949, New Haven, CT, US) has developed a unique pictorial language in a significant oeuvre encompassing painting, drawing, print and sculpture. Employing a stylization of the human figure, Dunham's work playfully and crudely examines painting tropes and traditions.

With thick black outlines and simple imagery – a blue sky, green trees, and pink flesh – he employs cartoonish semblances of nature and sexually grotesque imagery as a foil for experimenting with color and line. Dunham's take on painting is opposed to an authorial identity, and rather offers a complex integration of formal crafting and philosophical thought.

Jake Grewal (b. 1994, London, UK) transforms personal experiences into dreamlike scenes in natural landscapes in his paintings. Drawing on a Romanticism, Grewal portrays nude male figures through a queer gaze. Often employing a color palette of subdued greens and browns, the artist uses nature as a metaphor for his own internal landscape and personal musings.

Brook Hsu (b. 1987, Washington, DC, US) deploys and weaves the autobiographical and the mythopoetic into paintings using an array of materials, including ink, oil paint, industrial carpets, and off-cuts of ready-made lumber. The sources for Hsu's imagery come from her own observations, sometimes arising from art history, film and literature. Working across painting, drawing, sculpture and writing, her works aim to question how we define representation today, producing abstract and figurative works that employ a host of signs and motifs, recounting stories of love, pain and humor.

Derek Jarman (1942-1994, Northwood, UK) was a leading avant-garde British filmmaker whose visually opulent and stylistically adventurous body of work stands defied the established literary and theatrical traditions of his national cinema. With influences ranging from the eccentric writing-directing team Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger to seminal gay aesthetes Jean Cocteau and Kenneth Anger, Jarman advocated a personal cinema more dedicated to striking imagery and evocative sounds than to the imperatives of narrative and characterization.

Cheyenne Julien's (b. 1994, Bronx, NY, US) work delves into cultural and collective histories as seen through her personal experiences. Frequently rooted in memory, her paintings and drawings capture intimate subjects drawn from her closest relationships and life in New York. Through portraits, landscapes, and still lifes, she emphasizes the interconnectedness of people and their environments, paying particular attention to the architectural backdrops and everyday objects that shape daily life. While grounded in the more challenging aspects of reality, Julien's work also carries a humorous touch, illuminating how built environments can influence racial perceptions.

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In **Xie Lei's** (b. 1983, Huainan, CN) paintings, animals and plants are personified, while human characters are intimately incorporated in their surroundings. While these environments are depicted by conventional signs, Xie Lei often eschews delineating ground from sky, and foreground from background, disseminating a sense of ethereality into paintings that look no more like windows into a new world but as symbolist talismans facing the viewer. Xie Lei's canvases are like infernos, foreign substances that ceaselessly consume themselves and deliver themselves entirely to us. Each representation is a culmination, a moment chosen because it is the most intense.

Anne Rothenstein's (b. 1949, Essex, UK) enigmatic paintings are frequently characterised by a dreamlike quality. Mysterious figures often populate her flattened landscapes and interiors. The artist draws inspiration from found imagery, personal experience and memory, working instinctively to communicate atmosphere and psychological tension. Rothenstein's scenes are rendered with sinuous lines and a distinctive palette built up of thin washes of oil. Often painting directly on wood panel, the artist allows grain to blend with figure and landscape.

Wolfgang Tillmans (b. 1968, Remscheid, DE) is an influential contemporary German photographer whose work is in dialogue with artists such as Andreas Gursky and Gerhard Richter. Emerging in the 1990s with his snapshots of teenagers, clubs, and LGBTQ culture, Tillmans' practice has expanded to include diaristic photography, large-scale abstraction, and commissioned magazine work. Capturing landscapes from an airplane window, still lifes of crustaceans, or straightforward portraits, his work conveys the profundity of an encyclopedic archive.

Caroline Walker's (b. 1982, Dunfermline, UK) large canvases and intimate panels depict anonymous women in settings that blur the boundaries between public and private. Walker's paintings are a lens for the everyday lives of women, and her portraits of diverse subjects tell their story through the spaces they inhabit. In her recent artworks, Walker turns her focus to her immediate surroundings. She explores the boundary between being an observer – that is preserving the “objective” eye of an outsider – and magnifying the experience of a place which has become part of the fabric of her life. They are conceived as a reflection on community and how the anonymous people we encounter become characters in our own stories.

Shaquéelle Whyte (b. 2000, Wolverhampton, UK) imagines fictional environments in his paintings, creating an enigmatic atmosphere that contributes to his psychoanalytic approach. The painted medium is paramount for the artist whose broad, loosely rendered brushstrokes are mirrored in his expansive compositions, in which time and space expand and contract across the canvas. Although non-linear, narrative plays a central role in Whyte's work, which sees him carry certain motifs over from one painting to the next. These recurring details contribute to the sense of theatre that pervades his work; Whyte directs his subjects as though they are actors and his canvas a stage.

With special thanks to all participating artists and their representing galleries.

About the curator

Russell Tovey is an award-winning actor and podcaster. His podcast *Talk Art* has had over 10 million downloads and his first book, *Talk Art: everything you wanted to know about contemporary art but were afraid to ask*, co-written with his podcast partner Rob Diament, became a Sunday Times Bestseller. Their second book, *Talk Art: The Interviews*, was released in 2023. He has curated multiple exhibitions in and around the UK, Paris (FR) and New York, NY (US) and he is a patron, benefactor and ambassador for many institutions and museums.

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