

T O T A H

DAVID AUSTEN

the stars above the ocean the ocean beneath the stars

February 15 - April 22 2018

TOTAH presents *the stars above the ocean the ocean beneath the stars*, an exhibition of paintings and films by David Austen, on view February 15 through April 22, 2018.

The exhibition features selections from David Austen's career-long engagement with painting and watercolors along with two films. This will be the London-based artist's first New York solo exhibition, offering a view into to a fertile imagination that transitions effortlessly between the formal demands of different media.

Austen's works have a winsome quality about them that contrasts with the stark severity of their technical execution. Often presenting unsettling themes—such as a film about a smoking disconsolate moon, or watercolors of lonely, misshapen figures engaged in ritualistic acts—he confronts viewers with a world where there is no authentic resolution between the demands of the social world and the exigency of personal desire.

Austen's paintings and watercolors recreate situations where ambivalent interpersonal relationships bleed into the tactile qualities of each medium. In *Ocean*, a dark sky is illuminated by yellow stars reduced to geometric points, crystallizing the elusiveness of our most sought-after hopes. In text paintings such as *City of Love and Fear* and *Animal at Night*, crisp black lines and well-delineated edges lend these phrases an other-worldly detachment, suggesting places at once depersonalized and anthropomorphic.

His films continue the mindful austerity displayed in his art. In *End of Love*, staged in an empty theater, with no audience present, characters both folkloric and alien speak to their frustrations concerning the disquieting inconstancy of love. As each character gradually reveals him- or herself in the form of a poetic monologue, observers become thrust into the role of a voyeur witnessing heartbreaking soliloquies to nothingness.

Through the sheer diversity of the media Austen commands, viewers take away a sense of the buoyant richness underlying life's pantomime. However tortured Austen's portrayals might appear, they still remind us of ourselves; and in this act of recognition we are assured of the gift of knowledge, if not the promise of happiness.

David Austen was born in Harlow, UK in 1960 and studied at Maidstone College of Art and the Royal College of Art in London. His works are held in several public collections including TATE, London, Arts Council England, Government Art Collection and British Council, UK, as well as in numerous private collections in the UK, Europe and the US. He lives and works in London.

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