

Peter Matthews: SHAPE SHIFTER

PREVIEW: SATURDAY 21 MAY 2022 (1-4PM)

EXHIBITION: 22 MAY - 11 JUNE 2022

*I was in the middle of nowhere and then some.
On the road again. Things starting to take shape.
Tough conditions but raw and beautiful.*

Peter Matthews, via email conversation, January 2022.

Peter Matthews' works have always been about how we, as individuals and a greater society of people, have to keep adjusting to the uncertainty and ambiguity of life and the natural world. Matthews presents his fourth solo exhibition with the gallery, and as always, the nomadic artist effortlessly combines painting and drawing with a greater holistic view of the natural world as it shifts around us.

Since his first exhibition with the gallery in 2013, Matthews' works have included a multitude of themes and artistic disciplines. His paintings and drawings have pushed the boundaries of his own comforts – the artist literally paints these on rocky shores, under torrential rainstorms, or upon the swell of an ocean wave. Typically, the artist presents his works with an accompanying video work that also documents his unique process. His drawings, titled (for instance) "8 Hours in the Atlantic", are both atemporal recordings of his process as much as they are wild, gestural studies of line and shape, with scientific and poetic scribbles of his sights and experiences. In *The End Is Where They Start From*, one of the artist's actual canvases-in-process was used as a gurney to hoist a drowning man from the Pacific Ocean in South East Asia.

As viewers, we see the sort of commitment and spiritual connectivity Matthews has to his work. We cannot help but share part of that religious or mystical sensation that seems to emanate from the work and his process. But one doesn't need to align oneself with any particular denomination to feel the immense sublime power of these works. Matthews – whose own doctrine of belief is never explicitly stated in conjunction with the works – posits the greatest respect to the power of the shapeshifting world.

It reminds us of the great playwright Henrik Ibsen, (around whom the gallery – way back in its infancy in 2012, developed a show entitled *When We Dead Awaken*); and perhaps Matthews has something of a spiritual and creative doppelganger in Ibsen. In the playwright's 1865 tragedy "Brand", the eponymous protagonist wishes to save the world, and with it, people's souls. In a poignant scene, readers are presented with the following:

Brand: Answer me, God, in the jaws of death! Is there no salvation for the Will of Man? No small measure of salvation?
[The avalanche buries him. The valley is swallowed up.]

A Voice [calling through the crashing thunder]:
He is the God of Love.

Peter Matthews' *Shapeshifter* is his fourth solo with the gallery, featuring hybrid paintings made from both the Atlantic coast of Cornwall (2021) and the Pacific coast of Peru (2022). The exhibition will feature paintings and drawings, as well as some sculpture and a video documenting Matthews' practice.

Crossing (2021)

Oil spray, enamel, oilstick, earth and pencil on canvas from the atlantic coast of Cornwall 153 x 133 cm



High Water (2021)

Oil spray, enamel, oilstick, earth and pencil on canvas from the atlantic coast of Cornwall 153 x 133 cm



Windy Hullaballo (2021)

Oil spray, enamel, oilstick, earth and pencil on canvas from the atlantic coast of Cornwall 153 x 133 cm



Peter Matthews' approach to art-making is entirely unique: he travels the world, ocean to ocean, where he then creates a make-shift drawing-table/flotation-device upon which he will abscond himself - for hours at a time - in the ocean, recording what he sees and experiences in a stream-of-consciousness manner. Most recently, his works are thereafter torn into shreds upon the beach, where he sits throughout the day restitching the works into complete pieces to be mounted upon a canvas when he returns to his native UK. Through the simplicity of the works, Matthew's comments as much on performance and 'the conceptual' as he does the two-dimensional picture plane. For these are paintings that are not really about painting at all, but rather about man's inability to recapture the momentary sublime held in the vastness of nature, the bleak romanticism in the ocean as it consumes and intoxicates. Through extended hours (sometimes up to 12 hours adrift, alone at sea,) Matthews is working in real time through a very direct approach and immediate relationship with the ocean, where it becomes evident that his process is so much less about draftsmanship or material and more about an idea connected to nature and personal spirituality. Matthews seeks to question and challenge the nature of the artwork, whether an artwork can approach the metaphysical, and even momentarily take us closer to nature with him. There is an immediacy and connectivity in Matthews' practice that articulates something that even a painting cannot - for a painting is about production, and these drawings are not about the artist's studio or statement: they are about a place and moment in time. Most recently, he has begun pairing his works with videos which offer perhaps the most straightforward documentation of a practice defined by its very indefiniteness, its incalculability, and the presence of video may be more apt to contextualize something beautiful and profound that art-making, even after hours and hours drifting in the ocean, may not be able to fully explain for his viewer.



PETER MATTHEWS (b.1978, Derby, England) lives in England and works along the Pacific and Atlantic coasts. He graduated with a BA in Fine Art with honours and an MFA from Nottingham Trent University. Solo exhibitions include: 'Grounded', GylInn Vivian Gallery, Swansea, Wales (2021); 'Between the Ocean, the Sky and Ourselves', White Conduit Projects, London (2020); The Former Bank of Hiroshima (supported by the Daiwa-Anglo Japanese Foundation), Japan (2019); The National Maritime Museum (supported by the Arts Council, England), Royal Museums, Greenwich, London (2019); 'The End Is Where They Start From', BEERS London (2019); 'The End Is Where They Start From (cat)', Montoya, Barcelona, Spain (2018); 'From the Pacific to the Atlantic', Strange Cargo, Folkestone, Kent (2017); 'In Search of the Sublime', BEERS London (2016); Artissima Torino, Turin, Italy (2016); and 'Surroundings', BEERS London, (2013). Group exhibitions include: 'Ikon For Artists', Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK (2021); 'Pacific Breeze II', White Conduit Projects, London (2021); 'Wisdom and Nature', Christie's New York and Christie's London (2020); Zona Maco, BEERS London (2019); 'Summer Exhibition', Royal Academy of Arts, London (2019, 2018, 2017); 'Underwater', Filatoio di Caraglio, Caraglio, Italy (2019); 'John Moores Painting Prize', Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2018); 'Sea Marks', Drawing Centre, New York (2011); 'Landscape' at the James Cohan Gallery, New York (2012); and '0:60 The Experience of Time Through Contemporary Art', North Carolina Museum of Art, US. Awards and residencies include: The Pollock-Krasner Foundation, New York (2020); Winston Churchill Memorial Trust Fellowship (2019); The Arts Council of England (2019, 2017); John Moores Painting Prize (2018); Hugh Casson Drawing Prize, Royal Academy of Art (2017); Scripps Institute of Oceanography Residency, California (2015); and Francois Schneider Contemporary Talents Finalist, France (2014). Matthews' works have been collected by the Coppel Collection, The National Maritime Museum, Soho House Collection and various other public and private collections internationally and throughout the UK.