



Phillip George

Drawing in Water
the metaphysics of disappearance





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Greek Blues

George Alexander 2018

This work – beautiful, mysterious – almost defeats language. Each panel is a zone of pure pleasure. Yet there are stories to be told even as they gently take the top of your (my) head off. Those colors (lapis blue and amber gold) engage the spirit as well as delight the senses.

As in much of his recent work Phillip George keeps a close proximity to the mystic temper of the Orient, in both its ruined splendor and the remorseless march of political events. It keeps the East and the West in creative tension (has it ever been more intractable than now?), a tension that over 14 centuries has given us Gnostic, Sufi, Pagan Greek and NeoPlatonic offshoots.

With his Egyptiotes background (Αιγυπτιώτες; Greeks from Asia Minor) he vibrates to these traditions. If he grew a long beard Phillip George could easily pass for one of those tall monks of Mount Athos – the last mystics of Greek Orthodoxy – with their slow breathing and lama-like repetitions of a single prayer. You follow your breath going out and there is this space just before the in-breath comes back in. It may occur to you then that the next breath may not come. But if you let yourself keep experiencing that moment when nothing exists, right at the end of the exhalation, you learn how to let go. Briefly you are nobody.

In many ways close to yoga; and let's not forget that as a long-time surfer – his coastal Australian side – George has that intuitive mojo of knowing what its like to work across the face of the wave with a few S-turns on a long board. The surfer spending his gravitational advantage as the wave steadily regenerates underneath him: it is a perfect matching of rates. You dream it could go on forever! But the wave will peter out, and the surfer stalls in the cutback.

Transience. This was a key note in George's description to me of this series.

The flickering here-and-gone thing that lives in rhythm, of tides and of music and art. You sit the current as if it were a horse and ride its relay.

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These C-Type photographs do what many of the great abstractionists do – Malevich, Rothko, Pollock – they make cosmic parables. They plug in to the idea of art that can be a channel to invisible realities. But here, under the satin finish of what looks like mineral-flecked resin, there is a sort of history lesson going on as well. You can just about hear the creak of the papyrus and the breaking of ships timbers, hear chants under the golden cupolas, from the gilded and illuminated world of the Byzantine and Ottoman Middle Ages.

The works in blue are titled Acheiropoetia. A Byzantine term for ikons meaning, “made without the intervention of the human hand”. This miraculous appearance of ikons found on the shore of some Greek island can be the site where churches are built. Perhaps when photography was first invented there was a sense of the miraculous too where the image is made without the intervention of human hands.

The backstory is of shattered fragments: shards of table jugs, of broken columns, and hull planks, and sunken perfume bottles – all the flotsam of past civilizations scumbled to the bottom of the sea, to the edges of the frame, and gathering with the crushed crabclaw and dissolving bits of sea urchins.

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes:
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.
(from Shakespeare's The Tempest)

Looking at the work requires both tremendous concentration and a relaxed sensibility at the same time. The eye seeks out these maritime objects as though we were on an underwater archeological trip. But the eye is also involved in the delicate mechanics of the picture – the compositional tensions of taut narrow borders, the tensions building between opaque and transparent, surface and edge, representation and abstractions.

There are so many planes of visual sensation to be had as you check out the layers of gold particle turbulence and the movement of the ultramarine eddies. And the method the artist has used to get these effects mimes the way that waves in shallows, full of the sand they have scooped up, turn a cloudy gold as they rise.

In the *Drawing in Water* suite the artist shoots from below and from above in the water and magically stitches them together. The undersurface of the sea creates distant mirrors in which a boat on the horizon or the shore may be trapped. Water always creates an uneasy sense of balance, as it tries to loop through itself (something that has fascinated artists like Monet or Matisse in his *Vase with red fishes*, or in the tolling pitches of Debussy's *La Cathédrale engloutie* (The Sunken Cathedral)).

Drawing in Water is a departure from stationary one-eyed perception; here the combination of many pictures in the brain are orchestrated into different and fluid relational spatialities. The sea changes the trihedral perceptions of height, width and length. It's not a classical gaze inherited from Renaissance straight lines. The sea is a mirror that reflects and repeats our broken images. Its fluctuating surfaces can be feathered or quartz, crimped and moiré. You cannot try and depict the sea with just the 2 degrees of the 200 degree angle which constitutes our total visual field. Every instant is variable.

As the water moves and the sediment settles – these multiple perspectives combined create the effect of a changing state: these photographic works unravel and begin to look like paintings. Fractal shimmies as fine as paint spray.

Water makes light dance. Ripples dissolve and twine or curl into silky folds. The gold panels are velvety. The blue is more serpentine, and makes light dance.

Gold, the most malleable of all the metals, can be beaten to an airy thinness. It connects to the golden mean, to Byzantine halos, to wedding rings. Apparently the deep water of the Mediterranean contains concentrations of gold (from wind-blown dust). It has the color of butterscotch, of caramel, of Baltic amber.

Blue, is the body's version of the color of the mind; the color, William Gass wrote, "of consciousness when it's caressed." Certainly with Persian blue, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, and with ultramarine the mind becomes serene. Bliss seen from the shores of pleasure.

Now you know what I mean when I say this work defeats language.

The sea is uneasy marble, grape-bloom silk, blue mud – but these are static instants, hence untrue. They simply tell you about the sea going by. The sea – a mosaic which dances - never returning to the same beach once.

The sea, breathing its blue-green pulse, and the blue sky over the Pacific surely exorcises all the wickedness from the world?

Phillip George's artwork is how, I'm guessing, he personally tries to neutralize the evil mana of our current situation: rocket launchers, unmanned aerial vehicles, electromagnetic death rays. East and West in deadlock.

This is his ritual of purification by water. His kleptic song (all artist's are brigands), his wail of Greek blues and his Kyrie eleison.



Acheiropoieta Persia, 1 of 4 / 1AP, 125cm x 175cm, CType Print

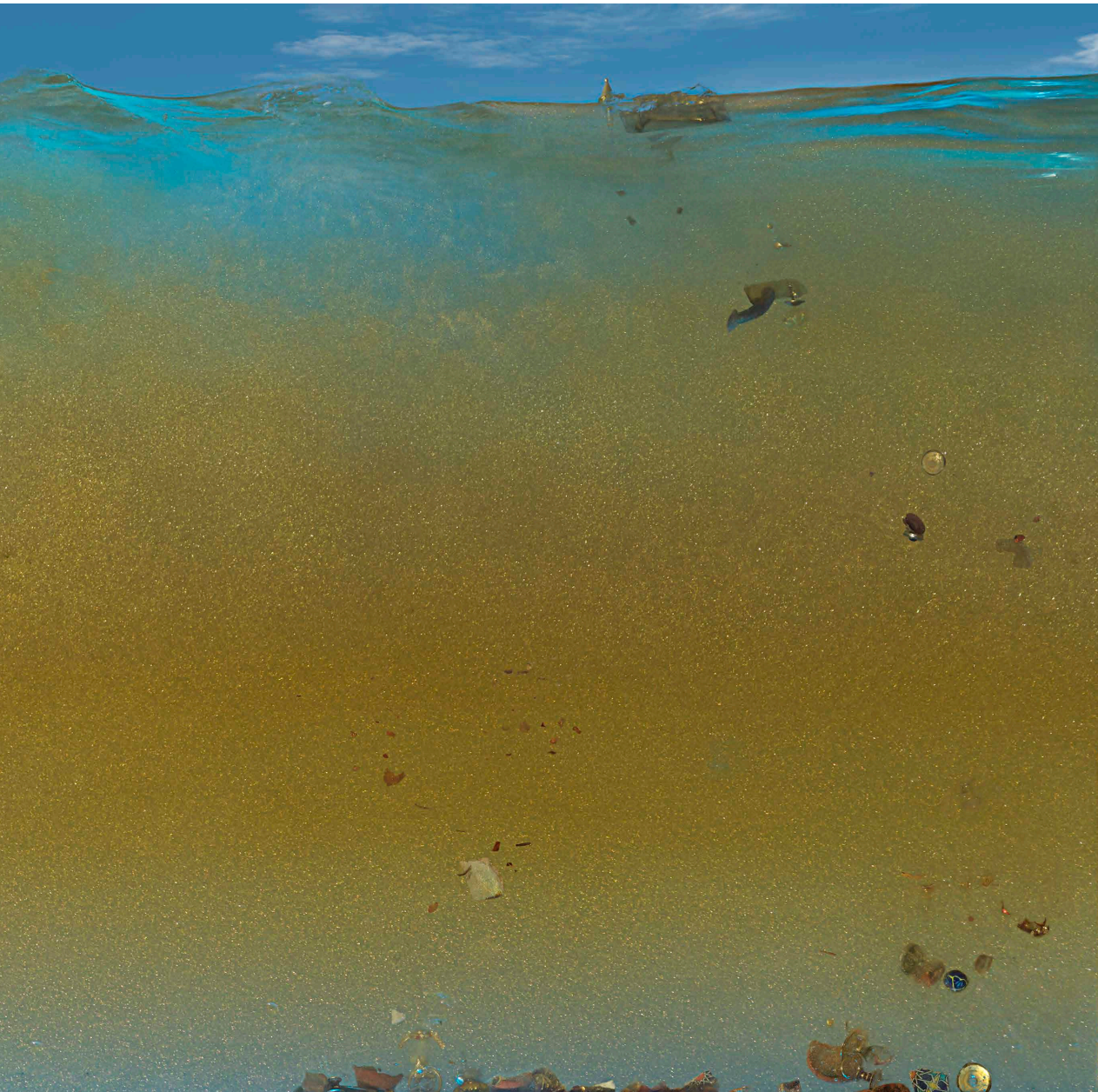


Acheiropieta Persia 2, 1 of 4 / 1AP, 125cm x 175cm, CType Print



Acheiropoieta Drowing, 1 of 4 / 1AP, 125cm x 175cm, CType Print





About the Drowning of Haji Zorzopoulo # 2, 120cm x 242cm,1 for 4 /2 AP, C Type Print





About the Drowning of Haji Zorzopoulo # 1, 120cm x 242cm, 1 for 4 /2 AP, C Type Print



Drawing in Water _ Breath, 125cm x 170cm, 1 of 4 / 1 AP, C Type Print



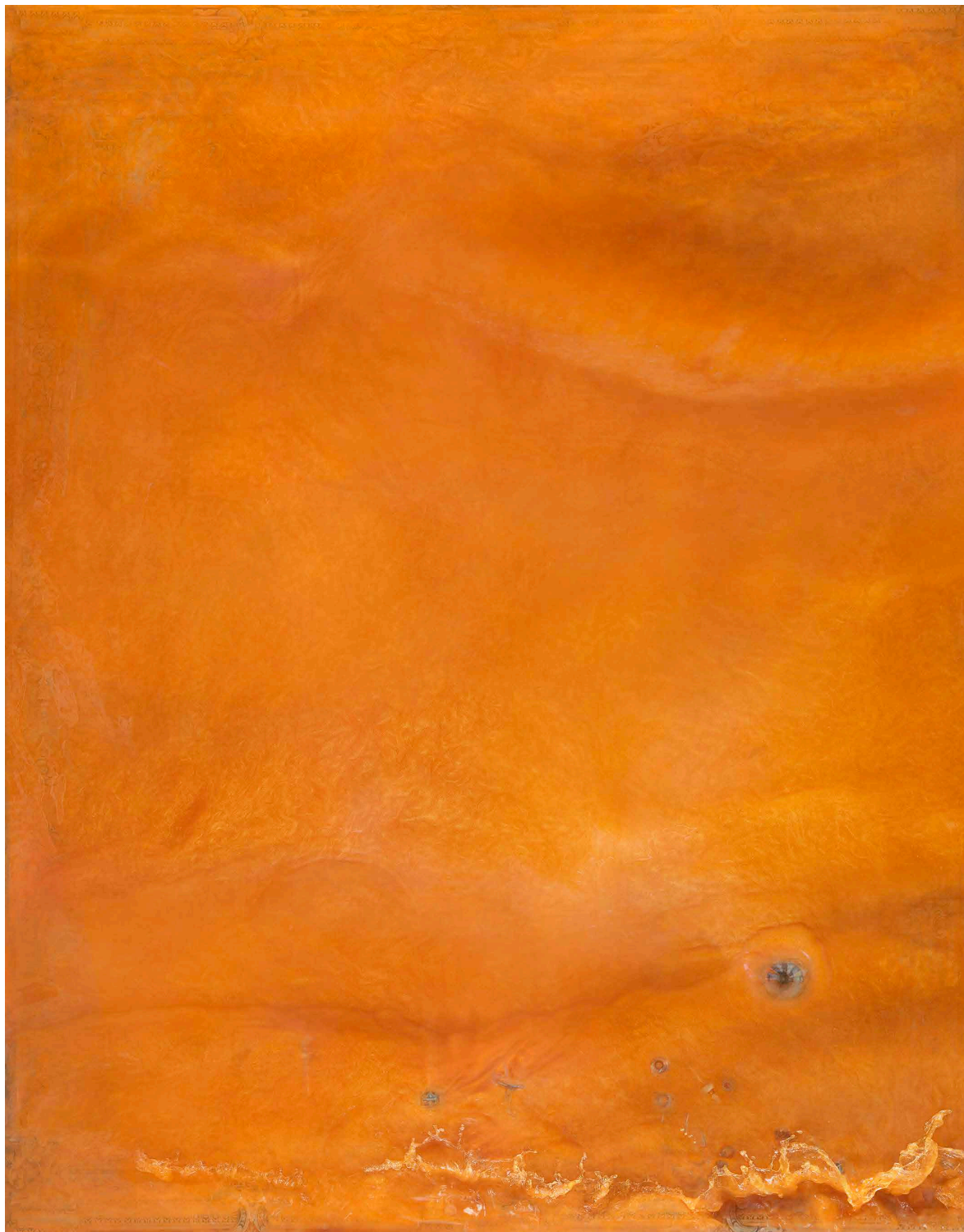
Drawing in Water _Breath #4, 125cm x 170cm, 1 of 4, /1AP, C Type Print



Drawing in Water #12, 125cm x 160cm, 1 of 4, /1AP, C Type Print



Drawing in Water #15, 125cm x 160cm, 1 of 4, /1AP, C Type Print



Drawing in Water #18, 125cm x 160cm, 1 of 4, /1AP, C Type Print