

Anthony Peyton Young

Tidal Wave

29 June – 27 August 2023

OTP Copenhagen is proud to present *Tidal Wave*, a solo exhibition by Boston and Charleston-based visual artist Anthony Peyton Young (b. 1988, Charleston, WV; USA). Featuring a selection of new paintings and works on paper, the exhibition explores the historical relationship between black American culture and water, the conceptual link between blueness and blackness, and the potential for objects, images and memories to act as portals between the physical world, and a spiritual realm. The exhibition marks the artist's debut presentation with the gallery and first solo exhibition in Europe.

Water imagery plays an essential role in this exhibition. Young's practice is heavily informed by references to contemporary black American culture, and in works like *Healing Waves* the artist uses a fluid painterly aesthetic to collage motifs that map different ideas of spiritual cleansing within this context. Here we find depictions of a river baptism, a film still depicting scenes of queer male bonding in Barry Jenkins' film *Moonlight* (2016), a trail of half-submerged figures that evoke the millions of people who were drowned in the Middle Passage of the transatlantic slave trade, as well as a 40 oz bottle of liquor and a head jug (a traditional folk object used to convey spiritual protection), both pouring out liquid libations for those who have passed away.

Seemingly composed according to the logic of a splash, the different images in this painting dissolve across a central figure that Young has inserted as a direct reference to the Renaissance work *Lamentation of Christ* by Andrea Mantegna. Instead of depicted barefoot, Young's 'Christ' figure wears Timberland boots that ground him in a sense of the physical world. The brown palette of the boots contrasts with the celestial blue tones that link dark skin with water (as well as connotations of royalty and the industrial production of indigo) throughout the rest of the image. In fact the title of the exhibition springs from the artist's interest in the connection between water and the cosmos, and specifically the influence of the Moon on the Earth's tides.

Many of the figures in these works are based on ideas real people, even if the association is more subtle than direct physical resemblance. Several works refer specifically to Young's late father, who was a basketball player. In works like *Hoop Daze*, a trio of otherworldly figures group together on a hazy basketball court (based on the artist's memories of elementary school), standing resplendent under the rays from a basketball-sun; the image of this hybrid celestial orb is unique within the exhibition as it has been bleached into canvas, rather than painted the surface. In this work, basketballs are imagined as circular portals, linking the physical world with a celestial domain, connecting the artist with the memory of his father but also establishing a spiritual connection between the immediate world and the afterlife.

Works like *Life Line* approach similar ideas from a different direction. Here two figures, split between the two panels of a diptych, communicate using a string telephone and two conch shells. The first drawing, a vibrant blue self-portrait shows the artist with his back to the viewer, holding the conch to his ear to hear the ocean inside the shell's cavity. In the second drawing (black and white this time) a disembodied hand emerges from a whirlpool holding the other end of the string telephone. The band name "Nirvana" emblazoned on the artist's jersey in the first image seems to indicate the destination of the call as much as the artist's state of mind. In this work, as well as in *Conch: Your Voice Sounds Like The Ocean*, the artist uses whirlpools to symbolise loved ones who have passed away. In both works, as well as the artist's Vermeer-inspired portrait of his mother (*Girl in the Durag*), Young uses head coverings to convey a sense of saintly protection, in the same manner as traditional religious iconography.

Throughout this exhibition, the water and the cosmos are imagined as inter-connected realms of infinite expanse. Outside of the confines of historical social infrastructure, cleansing and healing are made possible as figures communicate intimately with one another, across boundaries that would typically separate the worlds of life and death, past and present and mythos from reality. The effect feels both affirming and uneasy as Young presents a world of catharsis and mutual connection, foregrounding narratives of loss and grief all the while.