

GARDEN

Challenger Deep

Paul Carlo Esposito, Delia Jürgens, Sarah McMenimen, Charisse Pearlina Weston

September 1 – October 14, 2018

Challenger Deep presents new work by Paul Carlo Esposito, Delia Jürgens, Sarah McMenimen, and Charisse Pearlina Weston that reflects on life in flux, deep ocean trenches acting as metaphor for our shifting status on the surface as we reckon with our geological influence and imagine ecological futures.

The Challenger Deep – the deepest known point in Earth’s oceans – sits at the bottom of the Mariana Trench in the Pacific, nearly 36,000 feet below the surface. Deep ocean trenches form in subduction zones where an oceanic tectonic plate slowly slides under its neighbor, reincorporating into Earth’s mantle; geologic rock memory forgotten. Lifeforms have adapted to this seemingly unforgiving environment, forming symbiotic relationships, developing bioluminescence, and feeding off marine snow – the detritus of dead organisms drifting to the ocean floor – as well as the chemical reactions surrounding hydrothermal vents.

The Challenger Deep was first sounded by HMS *Challenger* in 1875 as part of the vessel’s around-the-world grand tour scientific journey. Following this empire-building impulse of discovery, the Challenger Deep has been visited only twice by humans: in 1960 in the bathyscaphe *Trieste* by Jacques Piccard and again in 2012 in the DSV *Deepsea Challenger* by filmmaker James Cameron, director of the 2009 colonialist fantasy film *Avatar*.

This zone at first seems stable and unreachable, but in reality is subject to constant change from above and below. Geographies and geologies are constantly shifting due to Earth’s planetary structure and tectonics (a prerequisite for life as we know it). As a result of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, the main island of Japan, Honshu, permanently moved 8 feet to the east and Earth’s axis tilted 10 inches. Outside of moments of literal exploration, the deeps still feel the touch of Anthropos. Declining whale populations due to whaling, ship collision, noise pollution, and by-catch reduce a primary nutrient source where whale falls once created and fed localized ecosystems for decades. Other human interventions such as deep sea mineral extraction, marine litter, and deep ocean fishing further sculpt the geography of the deep-sea floor.

Challenger Deep brings together work that contemplates the deep as a site of forgetting, accumulation, and change. Charisse Pearlina Weston employs tempered and warped glass (recycled from previous installations) along with cinder blocks and fragmented images to consider the fragility and fungibility of blackness and the repetitious nature of black cultural production. Poetic text printed on transparencies invokes the infernal river Lethe, meditating on the limits of language and the joining of past, present, and future realities. In a speculative post-human future Paul Carlo Esposito imagines a soft silicone robot and the deep-sea stone it inhabits, its body slowly pulsating while audibly ruminating on the downfall of civilizations. Through this being, Esposito reflects on the ecological crisis and global capitalism, and deconstructs the definition of the Natural. Delia Jürgens complicates painting, refiguring it as a geological act. Reacting to the exhibition environment, her varied materials (including bone glue, water-storing pearls, paraffin wax, artificial nails, and a transport crate) depict dynamic, unstable, and human-inflected landscapes. Sarah McMenimen’s material experimentations accumulate cast aluminum shells and ocean matter, drawing form from mapped sea currents. McMenimen grapples with these forms and objects, their materials and histories carefully considered and approached with empathy.

Echoing the fluidity of plate tectonics, the works in *Challenger Deep* demonstrate the impossibility of a stable ground – artistically, historically, and physically. Contemporary moments and movements (artistic, political, environmental) are based on unimaginably deep histories and potentialities. These pasts and futures are constantly changing, revising, being forgotten, erupting back to the surface.