

THE COMMERCIAL

LILLIAN O'NEIL



THE LONELY ISLE

FRIDAY 19 December, 6-9pm
exhibition opening and end of year drinks

exhibition: 19/12/14 - 31/01/15

summer break 20/12/14 - 14/01/15

Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-6pm

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How do we see the ocean?

Lillian O'Neil's latest work, her largest collage to date, submerges us in this problem. In fact two: the complexity of seeing (and consequently thinking); and, the conundrum of the sea, arguably the most profound image in human culture. The Bible opens and closes with references to the ocean and immersion in water is found as a mystical process in most major religions. Lacan's famous theory of the gaze perhaps best unites these concerns: his motif of a sardine floating in the sea casts the ocean as all that lies beyond the image, the unknowable and consequently the unthinkable.

Experiencing O'Neil's triptych is to shift (or flow) between these registers, a rip tide of Analytic Cubism, filmic montage, photographic observation and Romantic sublime. Collage was the defining artistic practice of modernism and the twentieth century – from Schwitters and Höch, to Vertov and Eisenstein. For good reason: the agency involved in cutting and splicing challenged (literally) frames of reference and the coherence of epistemology. The early twenty-first century saw the rise of the re-mix, a problematic term that lost much of the political impetus of collage in favour of the smooth, seamless spaces of the digital. Beginning her career working in digital film, O'Neil consciously returns to the haptic and the analogue: instead of skimming increasingly perfect surfaces, her approach is more akin to free-diving, coming up for air with handfuls of another world.

The Tempest, Shakespeare's last and most mysterious play, has the sea as its stage. The dramatic personae perform against this backdrop, rising and falling against a meniscus of both Prospero's lonely island and language itself, to explore (as Lacan suggested) what lies beyond. The sprite Ariel sings:

"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,
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell,
Ding-dong.

Hark! now I hear them, ding-dong, bell."

O'Neil's latest work similarly shows us something rich and strange - a horizon-less field, a faceted liquid, an impermeable formless threshold – legible yet inscrutable, the infinitely pliable surface of the water remains out of reach, opaque and impossible to transit in its image form. The pictorial space is both flat and inflected, tonally and chromatically unified yet dappled like camouflage. (Cubists artists were involved in the development of camouflage patterns for the Allied navies of World War II). With water anticipated to be the most contested commodity of this

millennium, coupled with dire predictions of rising sea levels, *The Lonely Isle*, provides a glimpse of this simultaneous absence / surfeit; suggesting that seeing the ocean is always to be looking beyond.

Text by Kit Wise

Lillian O'Neil (b. 1985, Melbourne) works in large-scale analogue collage. *The Lonely Isle* is her second solo exhibition at The Commercial Gallery, Sydney. Earlier in 2014, she presented a two-person exhibition, *Isle of Somewhere*, with Laura Delaney at West Space, Melbourne. Prior to 2014, solo exhibitions included *Total Romance*, The Commercial Gallery, Sydney (2013), *Love Machine* at MOP, Sydney (2012) and *Cream* at Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney (2010).

Group exhibitions include the *NSW Visual Arts Fellowship (Emerging)*, at Artspace, Sydney (2014); *In the Cut – collage as idea* (which included works by Ellen Gallagher, Richard Larter, Linder, Elizabeth Newman, David Maljkovic, Henning Bohl, Tom Burr, Nikolas Gambaroff, Matthew Griffin, Mathew Hale, Ry Haskings, Henrik Olesen, Lillian O'Neil, Lia Perjovschi, Amanda Ross-Ho, Kelley Walker) curated by Hannah Matthews, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; *Pantone 705 C*, The Mews Project Space, London; *Living in the Ruins of the Twentieth Century*, curated by Adam Jasper and Holly Williams, UTS Gallery, The University of Technology, Sydney (all 2013); *THREE/THREE* at The Commercial Gallery, Sydney (2012); *House of Love* at Seventh Gallery, Melbourne (2011); *Super Market* (curated by Kim Brockett) at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces (2010); *Evolution*, as part of the Next Wave Festival, Melbourne (2010); *Group Group Show*, curated by DAMP, at Margaret Lawrence Gallery, The University of Melbourne (2008). As part of the group, Safari Team, O'Neil exhibited in a collaborative solo exhibition, *Molto Morte*, that toured in Australia and Canada (international venues were Galerie VAV, Concordia University, Montréal and Lab Synthèse, Montréal) (2008).

In 2013/14, The Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, commissioned O'Neil to create a billboard for the CCP/City of Yarra Billboard.

O'Neil has been awarded numerous grants including those from the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Victoria, Melbourne City Council, the Besen Foundation and traveling awards from both Monash University and Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney.

In 2012, she completed a Master of Fine Art at Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney, with an Australian Postgraduate Award supervised by artist, Mikala Dwyer.

Her work has appeared in *Architectural Digest*, *Art Collector*, *Art Monthly*, *Belle Magazine* and *Australian Vogue*.

O'Neil's work is held in the Anne and Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide; the BresicWhitney Collection, Sydney; and private collections in Sydney, Melbourne, London and New York. Artbank, Sydney, have recently acquired *The Lonely Isle* (2014), O'Neil's major work to date in a public collection.

The Lonely Isle was recently exhibited at Artspace, Sydney, as part of the *NSW Visual Arts Fellowship (Emerging)*. At The Commercial it will be presented as a single work exhibition, as O'Neil originally intended.



Lillian O'Neil, *The Lonely Isle*, 2014 (central panel detail)



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