

apexart

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A Thousand Secrets **submitted by: Mae A. Miller**

This exhibition proposes a radical aesthetics of listening to ocean worlds. Oceanic undercurrents quietly structure contemporary social reality. The origin of the 'quarantine' dates to the bubonic plague-era practice of anchoring ships in isolation, while undersea cables support all modes of online connectivity from the Netflix Party to the Zoom classroom. Journalists have recounted the deafening quiet of 'just the sounds of waves breaking' (Dilipkumar, 2020) across the otherwise calamitous shipbreaking yards of the Indian Ocean and the appeals of stranded fishermen who, in May 2020, sailed from Antigua to the Azores to escape the impending catastrophe of hurricanes. What does it mean to learn from historical resonances and geographic unmooring outside of the promise of return to charted courses'

A Thousand Secrets is an immersive, multi-sensory exhibition that engages the sonic multiplicity and opacity of water as a provocation for alternative modes of collective listening to a world in crisis. Dionne Brand (2002) describes the sound of the ocean as a 'thousand secrets, all whispered at the same time.' Inspired by Brand, A Thousand Secrets holds multiple registers of world-making in tense relation and grapples with that which is ineffable--or perhaps, with the stories of the sea that are, 'inaudible to ordinary ears but still detectable with the right listening device, like the mother's ear' (Habla 2019). Working against the spectacle of human suffering, each artwork in A Thousand Secrets unsettles conventional listening devices to uncover entangled histories of extraction and whispered traces of the otherwise through the transformative properties of the ocean. The exhibit will be accompanied by a series of multimedia storytelling workshops for youth to engage with oceanic pasts, presents, and futures.

Trevor Paglen's photographic series, NSA-Tapped Undersea Cables, trawls the ocean floor and coastlines for visual traces of the security state. The series maps the seemingly amorphous world of the internet and complicates prevailing understandings of where and how states listen.

Jana Winderen's sound installation, Through the Bones, adopts the vernacular practices of Thai fishermen who listen to underwater life by placing their ears against the oar. These modes of relational living and listening challenge extractive logics and scientific 'expertise.'

Andrea Chung's The Westerlies is an immersive dome installation that inverts the nautical coordinates of the 'trade winds' and creates a speculative soundscape wherein children warn the ancestors of colonial and plantation futures.

Hajra Waheed's sprawling visual novel, Sea Change, explores the contradictory production of the sea as a space of disappearance and salvation told through tenuous and entangled fragments of selves left behind--returned love letters, newspaper clippings, postcards.

Edgar Arceneaux's series, Slave Ship Zong, stretches the speculative world of Drexiciya--the mythical underwater civilization populated by the unborn children of drowned slaves--from its saltwater origins in the Atlantic to the watery depths of post-industrial Lake Michigan, blurring the borders of land, sea, and linear temporality.

Bouchra Khalili's short film, The Seaman, juxtaposes the ghostly and seemingly desolate choreography of Hamburg's port terminals with the oral histories Filipino seafarers to explore questions of exile, alienation, and belonging in the context of modern container shipping.

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