



DUKE RILEY | TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY
SEPTEMBER 16 - OCTOBER 21, 2023

DUKE RILEY

TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY

Charlie James Gallery is pleased to present *Tomorrow is a Mystery*, New York-based artist Duke Riley's second solo exhibition with the gallery, opening September 16. Riley is a multimedia artist whose practice circumnavigates the urban waterfront, and includes sculpture, drawing, tattoo, mosaic, video, and performance. Images and techniques from historic maritime culture inform Riley's aesthetic, which is infused with a sense of humor, anarchy, and winking political provocation. Riley is perhaps best-known for his 2016 Creative Time project *Fly By Night*, dubbed one of the works that "defined the decade," in which he choreographed an aerial ballet performed by hundreds of homing pigeons equipped with LED lights above the New York City skyline. Mostly recently, Riley closed out a widely acclaimed, yearlong exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum.

The title of the present exhibition, *Tomorrow is a Mystery*, alludes to the ominous, rhyming adage, "Yesterday is history, tomorrow's a mystery." The phrase is evocative of Riley's distinctive artistic approach, which combines rigorous research into forgotten niches of history with a career-long focus on contemporary environmental protection and ethics. The artist's commitment to the future health of the environment is both material and conceptual, as Riley primarily makes his work from single-use plastics he scavenges from the beaches and urban waterways of the American Northeast.

For over two decades, Riley has been making scrimshaw—a form of ink drawing etched into whale bone by sailors—out of repurposed plastic vessels like those used to hold laundry detergent or motor oil. In an era when the whaling industry was the dominant source of oil, scrimshaw often depicted sea captains or other titans of the field. On Riley's contemporary scrimshaw, he often pictures CEOs or lobbyists for the fossil fuel and plastics industries in the style of the oceanic profiteers of yesteryear. In the artist's words, these "new leaders of the sea," push us ever closer to a world in which petroleum-based plastic trash overwhelms oceanic ecosystems. By juxtaposing the romantic aesthetic of yesterday's whaling industry with the powerful industrial forces of today, the works in *Tomorrow is a Mystery* connect the ecological injustices of the past with our contemporary landscape of environmental catastrophe.

In addition to featuring Riley's scrimshaw, *Tomorrow is a Mystery* also presents the artist's work in other types of traditional maritime crafts, such as "sailor's valentines," fishing lures, and tattoo-style ink drawings. Sailor's valentines are octagonal mosaics made from a variety of seashells glued into concentric designs, and were popular souvenirs or gifts from whalers or merchant seamen to their loved ones when they returned home from sea. Riley's colorful mosaics also use seashells collected around the beaches of Brooklyn, but combine them with other materials he finds there as well, like Bic lighters, tampon applicators, bottle caps, and floss picks. The exhibition features an epically-scaled new mosaic depicting an industrial ship titled *O'er The Wide and Plastic Sea*. Additionally, Riley produces grids of vibrant, enticing, fishing lures from this variety of trash. For Riley, a lure is, in essence, an object designed to use the desires, psychology, and primal instincts of an animal against itself. From the series *Monument to Five Thousand Years of Temptation and Deception*, these meticulously crafted grids of lures serve as a poignant reminder of the widespread impact of consumerism and corporate-driven pollution on our oceans.

As a special feature of the exhibition, Riley presents a pair of short films titled "Welcome Back to Wasteland Fishing," first shown in the Brooklyn Museum exhibition, in the form of a kitschy, YouTube-style tutorial on how to repurpose plastic tampon-applicators, or "New Jersey beach whistles," as sea bass or fluke lures. Like all his work, the videos use wry humor and a bit of a crusty, punk rock ethos that produces a sense of empowerment and possibility in the face of the dark circumstances and political challenges. Throughout his creative practice, Riley explores the intersections of art, history, and environmental advocacy, shedding light on pressing global issues while pushing the boundaries of artistic mediums.

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Duke Riley (Boston-born artist based in Brooklyn, NY) is a former tattoo artist who lived in a pigeon coop while attending RISD in the early 90s before earning his MFA from Pratt Institute. He taught art in underserved communities and domestic violence shelters in Boston and New York City in the late 90s and early 2000s. In 2007, Riley made headlines after being arrested for piloting a homemade submarine into the security zone of the Queen Mary 2 in New York Harbor as part of the project *After the Battle of Brooklyn*. Over the past two decades, he has produced critically acclaimed works that explore the interface of institutional power and the natural world. Some of these often extralegal projects include trained pigeons smuggling cigars from Cuba to Key West, a suitcase of bed bugs that appeared in a Trump hotel, flying 2000 pigeons wearing LED lights over the East River from an aircraft carrier, and an action movie written and filmed by inmates in a Somali pirate detention center. Duke Riley has had solo exhibitions at the Queens Museum of Art, Havana Biennale, MOCA Cleveland, the Sydney Biennale, and recently closed a year long exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum of Art titled *Death to the Living, Long Live Trash*.

Artist Instagram: @dukerileystudio



Written, directed, and produced by Duke Riley, cinematography by Alexandra Egan, and edited by Brett Land and Duke Riley. *Welcome Back to Wasteland Fishing, Episode Two*, 2019. Single-channel video, color, sound, 6 min. 12 sec. Courtesy of the artist

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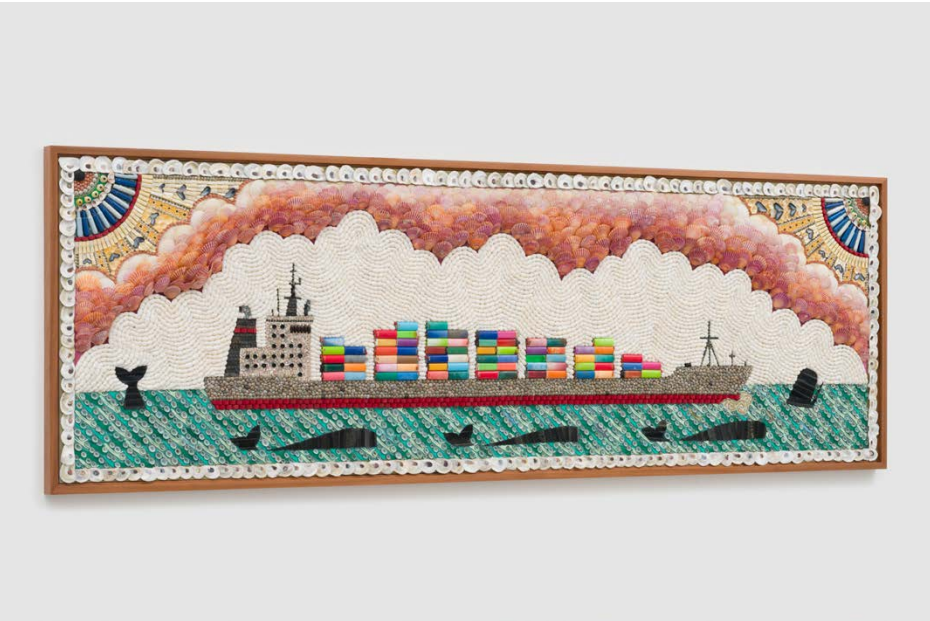
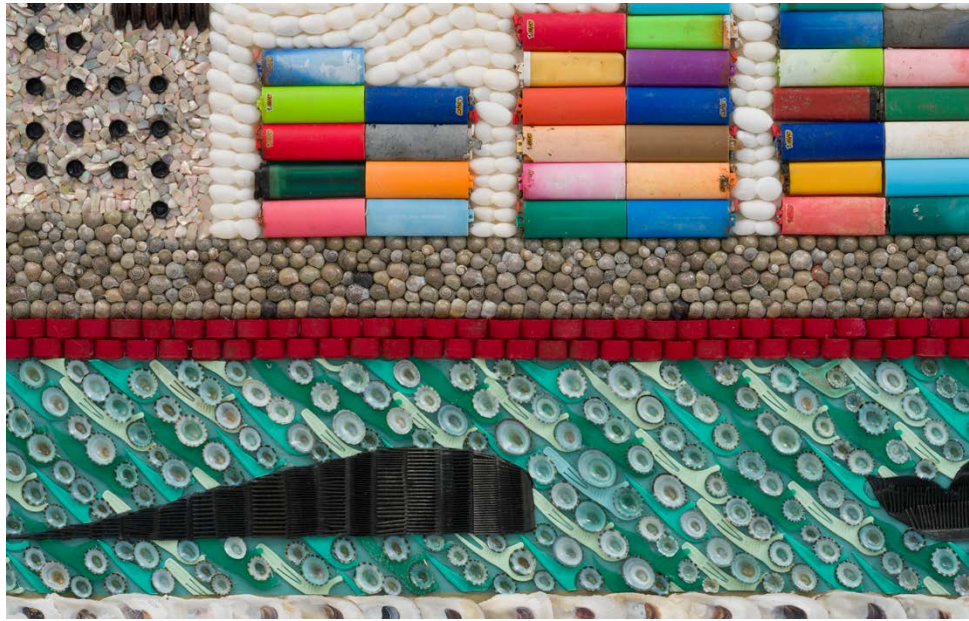


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Duke Riley
O'er The Wide and Plastic Sea
Reclaimed ocean plastic, shells
40 x 116 inches
2023

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TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY

Duke Riley
Order From Prescription History
Found plastic trash, shells,
mahogany frame
67 x 67 x 4 inches
2020



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TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY



DUKE RILEY
TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY

Duke Riley
Tomorrow is a Mystery
Found plastic trash, shells
mahogany frame
32.125 x 32.125 x 2.5 inches
2021



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TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY

Duke Riley
Erika
Vinyl Composition Tile,
alligator teeth, shotgun
shells
64 x 100 x 4 inches
2022



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Duke Riley
*Seven Articles Selected for the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial
Maritime Museum (No. 389, 322, 391, 53, 123, 388, and 394)*
Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
20.5 x 46.25 x 6 inches
2023

DUKE RILEY
TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY

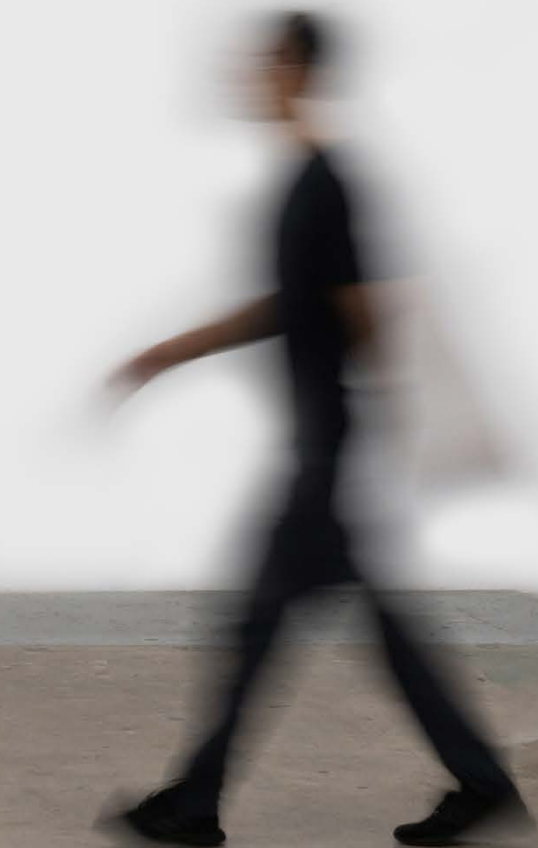


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TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY



Duke Riley
Six Articles Selected for the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum (No. 395, 392, 385, 56, 33-P, 386)
Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
17.5 x 43.5 x 5.5 inches
2023

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Duke Riley
No. 397 of the Poly S, Tyrene
Memorial Maritime Museum
Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
15 x 10.5 x 2.75 inches
2023



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Duke Riley
No. 399 of the Poly S, Tyrene
Memorial Maritime Museum
Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
15 x 11.5 x 3 inches
2023



DUKE RILEY
TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY

Duke Riley
No. 12 of the Poly S, Tyrene
Memorial Maritime Museum
Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax,
14.75 x 10 x 3.5 inches
2023



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Duke Riley
*Monument to Five Thousand Years of
Temptation and Deception V, VI, VII*
Reclaimed ocean plastic, paint, fishhooks
82.5 x 68.5 x 4 inches
2022



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Duke Riley
*Monument to Five
Thousand Years of
Temptation and
Deception XII*
Reclaimed ocean
plastic, paint, fishhooks
25 1/8 x 39 1/8 x 3 1/2
inches
2023

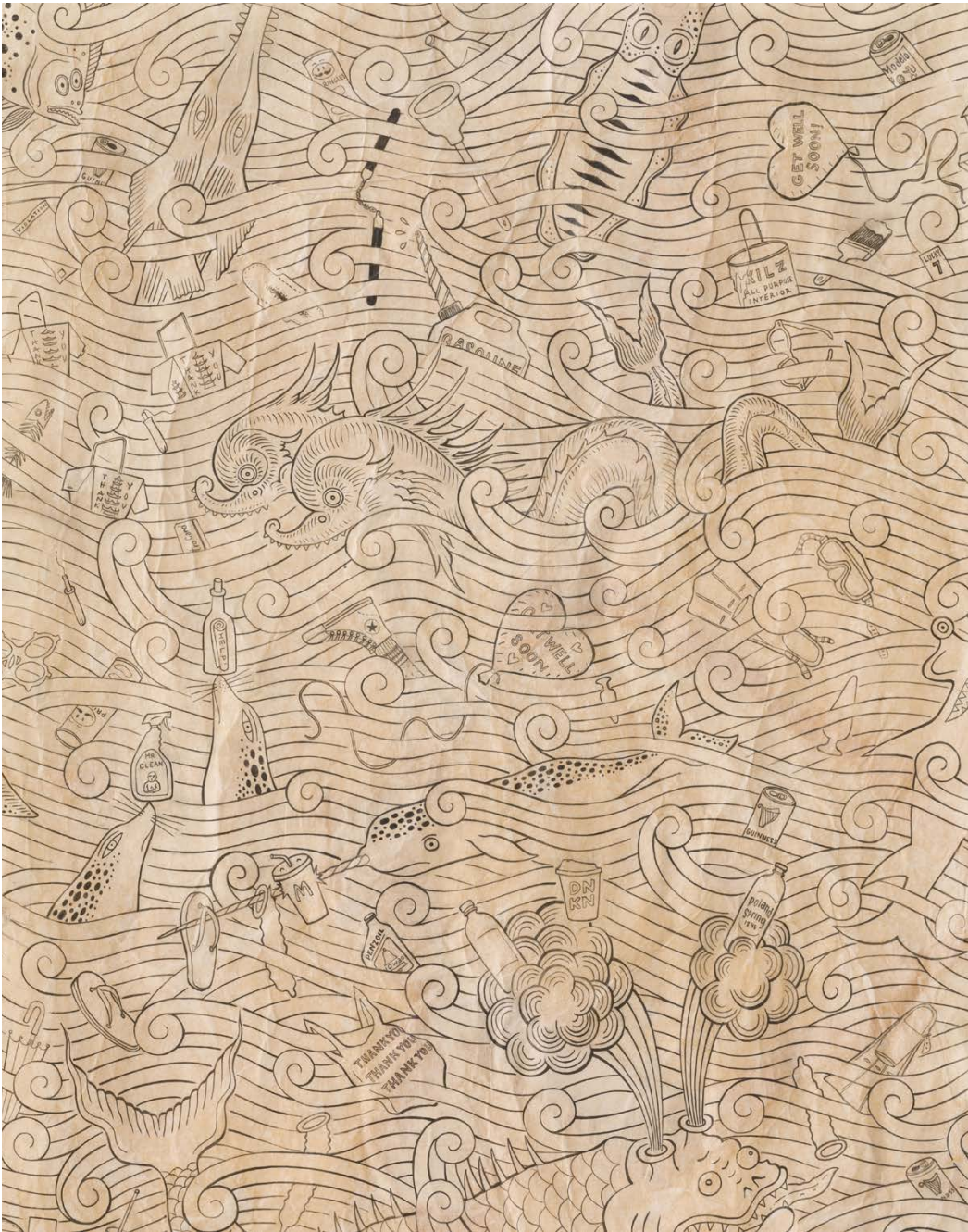


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Duke Riley
Trashy Nights
Ink on canary paper
89 5/8 x 31 7/8 x 2 3/16 inches
2022



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Duke Riley
There is a season, tern tern tern
Ink on canary paper
16.25 x 16.25 inches
2022



DUKE RILEY
TOMORROW IS A MYSTERY

Duke Riley
*I was on my way home from visiting
a friend and...*
Ink on canary paper
14.5 x 16.25 inches
2022



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DUKE RILEY

CV

Education

- 1995 BFA; Painting; Rhode Island School of Design;
Providence, RI;
2006 MFA; Sculpture; Pratt Institute; Brooklyn, NY

Solo Exhibitions

- Sep 2023 Tomorrow is a Mystery, Charlie James Gallery,
Los Angeles, CA
June 2022 DEATH TO THE LIVING, Long Live Trash, Brooklyn
Museum, Brooklyn, NY
Mar 2022 RIVUS, The 23rd Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, AU
Feb 2021 Lovers, Muggers, and Thieves, Praise Shadows
Art Gallery, Boston, MA
Sep 2020 Far Away, Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles, CA
Nov 2019 Non-Essential Consultants, Inc; Pioneer Works,
New York, NY
Jun 2018 Fly By Night London; Presented by 1418NOW
and LIFT; London, U.K.
Sep 2017 Now Those Days Are Gone; Magnan Metz Pop Up
Space; New York, NY
Sep 2017 A Selection of from the Past Decade; Magnan
Metz, New York, NY
Feb 2017 Flights of Fancy; University of S. Florida
Contemporary Arts Museum, Tampa, FL
May 2016 Fly By Night; Presented by Creative Time and The
Brooklyn Navy Yard; Brooklyn, NY
May 2015 La Esquina Fria; Havana Biennial, Havana, Cuba
Nov 2013 See You At The Finish Line; Magnan Metz Gallery
New York, NY
Feb 2011 Two Riparian Tales of Undoing; Magnan Metz
Gallery, New York, NY
Sep 2010 An Invitation to Lubberland; Museum of
Contemporary Art, Cleveland, OH
Feb 2010 Reclaiming the Lost Kingdom of Laird, Philagrafika,
Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA
Nov 2009 Those About To Die Salute You; Queens Museum
of Art, Queens, NY
Feb 2009 First St. Patrick's Day Parade; Havana Biennial,
Havana, Cuba
Nov 2007 After the Battle of Brooklyn; Magnan Projects,
New York, NY
Aug 2006 Duke Riley Presents Paul Pierce for Chanel, Six Feet
Under Series, White Box; New York, NY
Jan 2006 The Bright Passage: East River Incognita 1,
Magnan Projects, New York, NY
Oct 2005 United Islands of the East River: East River
Incognita, Sarah Lawrence College, NY

Grants, Scholarships and Commissions

- 2020 Tempus Projects Art Residency, Tampa, FL
2019 Lighthouse Works Artist Residency, Fishers Island, NY
2017 MacDowell Colony Fellowship, Peterborough, NH
2017 Yaddo Residency, Saratoga Springs, NY
2016 Village Voice Lifetime Achievement Award for Elevating
the Prestige of Pigeons in the Public Consciousness,
New York, NY
2016 Art Garda Residency, Italy

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- 2015 Percent for Art Commission, PS 343 Manhattan, New York, NY
- 2015 Pratt Institute, Mid-Career Achievement Award, Brooklyn, NY
- 2015 Vermont Studio Center Residency, Johnson, VT
- 2013 Creative Time Global Residency, Eastern Africa
- 2012 Gasworks Residency, London, UK
- 2012 Ox-Bow, Visiting Artist, Saugatuck, MI
- 2012 'This Tree Which Men Cut Down', Wythe Hotel Drawing Commission, Brooklyn, NY
- 2012 smARTpower, Shanghai, China
- 2011 Joan Mitchell Foundation, Painters and Sculptors Grant, New York, NY
- 2011 The Wassaic Project Residency, Wassaic, NY
- 2011 Pollock-Krasner Foundation, New York, NY
- 2010 MTA Arts For Transit Commission: Beach 98th Street Station Renovation
- 2010 Art Matters Foundation, New York, NY
- 2006 Residency; Fremantle Arts Center; Fremantle, Western Australia
- 2004 Pratt Institute; Graduate academic Achievement Scholarship
- 2004 Circumnavigate; Artist Space; independent project grant
- 2003 Lagside Development Corporation Grant; Cathedral Arts Quarter; Annual Festival; Belfast, NI
- 2002 Belfast Arts and Business Partners Foundation Grant; Northern Ireland