



Peter Alexander
DEEP DIVE

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LIQUID DEEP

by Julia Couzens

“Water ... where any-angled light would congregate endlessly.”

– Philip Larkin

To the extent contemporary life overloads our perceptual capacities – pinging and clobbering the senses to such a degree that our ability to hear, perceive, understand, and relate breaks down – art can exorcize the daily excess. Peter Alexander’s ravishing paintings perform such exorcisms. Monochrome blue, or nearly so, light glowing from within, the glistening expanses of his paintings slow-walk us back into contemplative consciousness and entrancement.

Peter Alexander devoted his career to questioning and expanding the definition of painting through his contemplation of light. Since the 1960’s Alexander and a loose coterie of other L.A. artists, Larry Bell, Mary Corse, Robert Irwin, and Craig Kauffman among others, were allied with the groundbreaking Light and Space movement. Alexander’s nine paintings composing *DEEP DIVE* were made in the years 2005 to 2008. Sensuously minimalist, these consequential works give form to the acute intangibles and redolent spectacles of liquidity and luminescence. They are brilliant and moving testimony from this seminal California artist.

The paintings explore the auras and properties of light as seen through water. Although these paintings appear effortless as if born all of a piece, Alexander took pains with his process. Beginning with an aluminum metal panel, he sandwiched and alternated layers of oil, sprayed resin, acrylic, and occasionally metal flake to finish with a glaze or veneer of the sprayed resin. The work miraculously appears both liquid and solid – active, seemingly poured, yet frozen in time. His omni-directional applications are without orientation or a picture plane, literally pointless— no up, no down, no sideways— only atmospheric, translucent poolings of blue.

Alexander’s hand is invisible throughout all the works. Guiding his materials, he was the consummate watcher, subordinating his touch to what surfaced at the moment of application. Observing the behavior of gravity with concentrated attention is what determines notions of gesture, composition, and hand. In works such as *Culebra* and *Claire*, space and scale toggle back and forth between vast and minute. The undulating topographies of radiance slow down the speed of our perception, locating us on a fluid continuum of consciousness that lands us in a plausible reality— the reality of reverie in which fragmented recollections, fantasies, and ideas bubble up in Alexander’s lakes of light while life’s noise and din recedes.

In *Pozo*, *Muna*, *Morelos*, and the jewel-like *Untitled*, 2005, colorful daubs, dribbles, and quirky gestural encroachments of shimmering metal flake are suspended, floating elusively like nature’s flotsam in silent, alchemical ponds of monochrome blue. Seen from a distance these twinkly interventions implicate scenarios of cosmic chemistry in coalescing gaseous eddies. Drawing closer, viewing begins to feel immersive. Peering into the viscous depths we find ourselves face-to-face with squiggly, sparkling life forms born of pigment and glitter. Lithe worms of sour yellow writhe within lush clusters of deep indigo blots as pale pink splats and dots unexpectedly sport fancifully animated natures. Viewed from afar this subaqueous life is hidden and impervious to our experience,

Yet, the irrefutable reality and abiding significance of Alexander’s art is that in the liquid, reifying depths, life improbably winks back.

Julia Couzens is an artist and a writer.

³Larkin, Philip. Excerpt from the poem “Water,” *The Whitsun Weddings*, Faber & Faber, London, 1964.



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