

I N M A N G A L L E R Y

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 5, 2015

Inman Gallery is pleased to present:

Darren Waterston *Pavo*

and in the south gallery

Yuko Murata *bohemiens*

April 10 – May 22, 2015

Opening Reception:
Friday April 10, 6:00 – 8:00pm

Gallery hours: Tues. – Sat., 11:00am – 6:00pm
and by appointment



Darren Waterston, *Pavo no 36.*, 2014
Watercolor and gouache on paper, 14 x 11 inches

Inman Gallery is pleased to present two concurrent exhibitions: ***Pavo*** by Darren Waterston and, in the South Gallery, ***bohemiens*** by Yuko Murata. This will be Waterston's eighth solo show with Inman, and Murata's third. Both shows open Friday, April 10th with a reception from 6 to 8, and continue through May 22nd.

The peacock is a fitting totem for Aestheticism, the 19th century flowering of art and design that championed "art for art's sake." It is nature's foul-tempered dandy, a marvel of inefficiency, and a rebuttal of the idea that an animal's grace is purely functional. The peacock's job is splendor.

James McNeill Whistler's *Harmony in Blue and Gold: The Peacock Room* was perhaps the bird's Victorian high point. In 1876, shipping magnate Frederick Leyland hired Whistler to touch up his dining room. But the artist's ambition ballooned when his patron left town, and nearly every surface got a makeover. Whistler applied golden blossoms to the wall panels, a green feather pattern to the ceiling, and four massive gilt peacocks to the shutters. Leyland balked at the price of this enlarged (and unsolicited) project, and a wounded and vindictive Whistler finished the room with a mural that recast the former friends as bickering peacocks. The analogy is spot-on and surprisingly self-aware: pride, pettiness and excess abounded on both sides of the argument.

In 2013, Darren Waterston undertook a full-scale reimagining of The Peacock Room, entitled *Filthy Lucre*. Emulating Whistler's energy and conviction, but informed by the room's history and the larger social inequity it broached, Waterston's version is a deliquescent grotesque, in which self-justifying connoisseurship turns to self-destructive indulgence. Dripping with gold leaf, glutted with paint, the room buckles under its own opulence.

Waterston's new works on paper, named *Pavo* after the peacock's genus, extend *Filthy Lucre* into a more nebulous realm. Where Whistler bounded his spectacle in a decorative motif, Waterston feels no such constraint. The stylized flowers, blue-green palette, and peacocks are unmistakably Whistler's, but the dimension they inhabit is a vaporous primeval fever-dream, perpetually reinventing itself. Acid pink mists, sprays of ink and gouache, black blooms of acrylic, and mutating animal hybrids swallow and reconfigure the original Victorian ornaments. The ambition that first took root in Leyland's dining room is at the point of being overripe.

3901 MAIN STREET HOUSTON, TEXAS 77002 PHONE: 713.526.7800 FAX: 713.526.7803 INFO@INMANGALLERY.COM

WWW.INMANGALLERY.COM

How much is too much? In 1904, industrialist Charles Lang Freer moved *The Peacock Room* to his home in Detroit, ushering Whistler's masterpiece into the American Gilded Age. Waterston notes the parallel between that time and our own, but back then the excesses of Aestheticism had a rebellious undercurrent: the buttoned-up Victorian social order needed a shot of libertine exuberance, a return of the repressed. In our own time that release has been co-opted into a complacent acquisitiveness. Is unapologetically permissive art still worthwhile?

Waterston's use of the peacock's scientific name is worth noting here. It reminds us that a peacock is an animal after all. Whistler had little use for unmediated nature; he saw it as raw material, unremarkable without an artist's intervention. And his peacocks, though dazzling, have none of the mystery and menace of a real, living creature. By contrast, Waterston's birds, sometimes barely recognizable, are palpably animate. His paintings flutter, squabble, sprout and rot with a liveliness that too much refinement would extinguish.

In taking on *The Peacock Room*, and with *Filthy Lucre* especially, Waterston both honors and questions Whistler's extravagance without passing final judgment. There is real value to unfettered creative expression, but headstrong self-advancement can sometimes go too far. The *Pavo* works retain that ambiguity while suggesting another system entirely. They supplant dysfunctional social Darwinism with real animal struggle, and ruinous economic cycles with more primordial forces. Waterston's world is definitely scarier than Whistler's. It is more candid about the bargain between art and commerce, and strikes a truer balance between creation and destruction. But underneath that decay is a primal vitality that, while threatening, is also promising.

Yuko Murata characterizes her landscapes, and the animals that populate them, as "scenes along the way." She works from postcards and travel brochures, and her paintings share in that atmosphere of dislocated fantasy: they depict remote sanctuaries famous more as images than as actual destinations. Rather than pining for paradise itself, Murata settles down in its reflection. Her heavy brushstrokes and broad swaths of color pare the stock photos down to their simplest elements, emphasizing the distance between the image and its source. She makes her home in that disjunction, in composite scenery built from fragments of a collective ideal.

Murata's most recent body of work, *bohemians*, follows a group of swans across this synthetic environment: past felled trees, through rolling hills, and out into open water. Simplified to an iconic checkmark, the swans are moments of serenity amidst swirling expanses of bright green, soft pink and deep blue. They drift from painting to painting casting glances at an errant pair of moose antlers or gazing out towards a distant landmass, becoming proxies for Murata herself, guides into her makeshift world. Yet, as is typical of Murata's animals, these nomads aren't entirely approachable. Facing the viewer, clustered near the foreground, they seem to be forever crossing our path, rather than leading the way. As with the landscapes they roam, the swans are equal parts aspirational and transitory, inviting but fundamentally mysterious.



Yuko Murata, *bohemians (The fragrance of the lemon)*, 2014
Oil on canvas, 18 x 21 inches; 45.7 x 53.3 cm

For artist biographies or images, please check the website at www.inmangallery.com or contact the gallery at info@inmangallery.com.