



TALKING WITH: Andrea Grover On Discovering a New Art Movement & The Making of “Radical Seafaring”

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by Pat Rogers

When the Parrish Art Museum opened “Radical Seafaring” in May 2016, the Hamptons art museum made history. An ambitious exhibition in both breadth and intent, “Radical Seafaring” is a survey of art and artist projects in relation to water and calls attention to a new movement in art that’s been brewing for some time.

The exhibition includes documentation of performance art, water journeys and experiments along with sculpture, video art, drawing and other art mediums and features 25 artists or collectives from around the world. Some of the more dramatic works in the exhibition are installations that weave documentation with curation to create immersive experiences. Others are artist-made vessels, one installed inside the museum and one presented as an off-site project in Sag Harbor (*Hickory* by Swoon, 2009, and *WetLand* by Mary Mattingly, 2014, respectively).

“[Radical Seafaring](#)” would be a substantial show based solely on the art exhibited. It becomes groundbreaking in its exploration of a new art movement in which artists engage with water as central element. The curatorial decisions highlighting past performance art are equally noteworthy. Instead of including only recent performance art and earlier artist projects with full documentation so viewers could witness the action-based art for themselves, exhibition curator Andrea Grover selected works important to the developing art movement, tracing its course from its roots in the ’60s to the present day. In many cases, only a slice of the performance art, water-borne experiment or conceptual adventure is presented and curated to reveal the essence of artist intent and allow a window into the energy and actions that brought the art into being.

Grover’s innovation for the exhibition was recognized in the conception phase. Grover and the Parrish were the recipients of [multiple grants](#) in the planning stages, included those awarded by the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation, the Art Dealers Association of America (ADAA) Foundation, the Association of Art Museum Curators, and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. The Emily Hall Tremaine Exhibition Award program rewards innovation and experimentation among curators by supporting thematic exhibitions that challenge audiences and expand the boundaries of contemporary art.

Grover is the Century Arts Foundation Curator of Special Projects at the [Parrish Art Museum](#). Art unfolding in unexpected places and the process of creativity are interests of Grover’s that have been realized for The Parrish in two popular programming initiatives: The Parrish Road Show and [PechaKucha](#) Nights. Both programs were instituted in 2012.

In PechaKucha Nights presentations, Grover lifts the veil on the creative process across disciplines at the Parrish, linking the Hamptons museum to cities around the globe also hosting these events. The [Parrish Road Show](#) is an off-site exhibition project series pairing artists with atypical places for the creation of site-specific work where art might not be found: occupying a computer shop, waving on the water, positioned in a farmer's field, tucked in a historic barn or spread across a secluded parking lot of a New York State Park, among other locations.

In a way, Grover has combined both these interests in her curation of "Radical Seafaring," which points to a new art movement through its seamless entwining of conceptual art, sculpture, and artist participatory adventures with insights into the creative process that are essential for the fullest appreciation of art. Grover said that she started noticing artists working on water around 10 years ago or so and likens the now critical mass to the Land Art movement. Some art by these pioneers is included in the exhibition as grounding for what could be coined the Water Art Movement.

To capture some of Grover's own creative process when putting the show together, Pat Rogers of Hamptons Art Hub exchanged emails with the curator and explored what it took to bring "Radical Seafaring" to fruition. Andrea Grover will present a fuller perspective on the show in a talk and tour of "Radical Seafaring" on Saturday, July 16, 2016 at 2 p.m. at the Parrish Art Museum in Water Mill.

Pat Rogers: How did the idea for Radical Seafaring come about?

Andrea Grover: The exhibition came about through observation of the growing number of artists' projects sited on the water. For a long time I was fascinated by the Dutch Conceptual artist [Bas Jan Ader's performance](#) *In Search of the Miraculous* (1975), an attempted solo crossing of the North Atlantic in a small boat. I was also aware of a similar work, *B.C. Mexico* (1973), by the artist [Chris Burden](#), who solo kayaked on the Sea of Cortez two years prior. Then about 10 years ago, I began to see more and more artists using oceans, rivers, lakes and inland waterways as sites of inquiry. Artists like Constance Hockaday, Marie Lorenz, Mare Liberum, Duke Riley, and Swoon, and The Center for Land Use Interpretation, were using the water as a platform for performance, research, and curiosity-driven excursions.

At that time in 2006, I was working on a project in Houston called *Confluence: Points of View on Buffalo Bayou*, a public art series that invited artists to do projects on the water to build awareness of Buffalo Bayou, the then neglected waterway that winds through the city's urban and suburban corridors. Diana Shamash (1955-2006) was my partner in establishing *Confluence* and a substantial influence on "Radical Seafaring." She was a visionary curator who spearheaded the 2005 realization of Robert Smithson's *Floating Island to Travel Around Manhattan Island* (Smithson's drawing and related documentation are in the exhibition) and founded the public art presenting institution, Minetta Brook. The Center for Land Use Interpretation, Mark Dion and Pedro Reyes were all guest artists of the *Confluence* series, and now included in "Radical Seafaring."

PR: What came first: The idea to curate an exhibition with water as theme or the idea to curate an exhibition that would reveal what you described in the exhibition catalogue essay as a "new form of expression"—artists making site-specific work on the water instead of water in the distance as muse?

AG: Artists always lead the way. As I started to create files on creative waterborne voyages, performances, and field research, I realized the volume and synchronicity of these activities was approaching the scale of a movement. I use the term “offshore art” in a similar manner to Land art— identifying the site and sometimes the materials of these projects. Land art and offshore art have in common that the works are process oriented, temporal, often sited in nature, and distanced from art and commerce.

The water is a fascinating location for artists to investigate. It covers two thirds of the planet and yet is one of the most ungovernable places imaginable. Technological advances and commercial dominance of the world’s waterways have distanced us intellectually and emotionally from the seas, which is precisely why artists are going back to it.

PR: “Radical Seafaring” is a radical concept in and of itself. Are you aware of any other museum exhibitions or surveys presenting this apparently burgeoning movement?

AG: This is the first museum survey of artists’ projects that are either sited on the water or in which an excursion on the water is integral to the execution of the work. There have been non-profit art spaces that have explored this theme in the last few years. A series called *Seaworthy* was presented in New York City by Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, Flux Factory, and Gowanus Studios in 2011 and included a summer of waterborne performances, talks, workshops, and an exhibition. In 2014, Southern Exposure in San Francisco had an exhibition called “Offshore,” which included Constance Hockaday’s performance *All These Darlings and Now Us*—an illegal floating peepshow on San Francisco Bay. Like these exhibitions, “Radical Seafaring” looks at how access and visibility of the world’s waterways have diminished over the last three generations, and why artists are attracted to these overlooked spaces.

PR: How were the works selected for “Radical Seafaring”? Was there a guiding principle for how the performance-based pieces were selected?

AG: The artists selected for the exhibition have a sustained relationship with the water—they have a long-term investment in it as a site. It was also important to include artists like Robert Smithson and Dennis Oppenheim, who made the connection between Conceptual, Land and Offshore art more evident. The earliest works in the exhibition from the 1960s by the visionary designer Buckminster Fuller, and the Japanese collective, The PLAY provide a further through-line from the ’60s countercultural sentiment that artists, designers, and free thinkers could redirect us toward a more sustainable future.

PR: “Radical Seafaring” is divided into four themes: Exploration, Liberation, Fieldwork and Speculation. Were these themes born from your exploration of this relatively new form of expression?

AG: I like to create taxonomies when I am working on an exhibition. (This is probably a byproduct of having been in an art/science environment at Carnegie Mellon’s STUDIO for Creative Inquiry just before I moved to the East End.) The themes are a way of describing the impulses that drive artists to create on the water, and are by no means absolute; many of the projects overlap thematic areas. In essence, **Exploration** is about journeys and voyages on the water; **Liberation** is about using

the water as a means to escape “lex terrae” or the law of the land; **Field Work** is operating as a field scientist recording data about the environment; and **Speculation** is imagining the water as a site on which other realities could be built.

PR: What do you hope viewers will take away from the experience of viewing “Radical Seafaring?”

AG: I hope they will see this as an opportunity to think of the water as a commons—a public right—and question policy that governs its access, usage, and health, as many of these artists are doing through their creative ventures.



Andrea Grover. Photo: Lori Hawkins. Courtesy Parrish Art Museum.

BASIC FACTS: “Radical Seafaring” opened May 8 and continues through July 24, 2016. A full catalogue was produced in conjunction with the exhibition. Andrea Grover gives a talk and tour of Radical Seafaring on Saturday, July 16, 2016 at 2 p.m. at the Parrish Art Museum. Click [here](#) to RSVP. The Parrish Art Museum is located at 279 Montauk Highway Water Mill, NY 11976. www.parrishart.org.

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