



# ART REVIEW: In With the Tide—A Buoyant Exhibit Rewards at Southampton Arts Center

July 23, 2016

by James Croak

The Southampton Arts Center continues to punch above its weight with a large summer show of substantial works by mostly well-known artists, curated by two Hampton residents [David Kratz](#) and [Eric Fischl](#). This show, entitled “Water Bodies,” along with two current shows The Guild Hall’s [Peter Beard: Last Word From Paradise](#)” and The Parrish “[Radical Seafaring](#),” demonstrate that East End museum are rivaling their Manhattan counterparts.

The aqueous moniker for “Water|Bodies” is appropriate for a season of bathing suits and beach meals, presented by the New York Academy of Art, the ranking figurative art school in America, and the Southampton Arts Center. Fischl is a NYAA Senior critic and Kratz is the NYAA President.

The [NYAA](#) has always been sort of an odd man out. It was started in 1982, famously, by [Andy Warhol](#) and [Tom Wolfe](#) (among others), two conservatives from the worlds of art and literature whose own behavior was anything but. The idea was to teach traditional figurative skills that no longer seemed to have much credence in the arts, oddly because of 40 years of mechanical manipulation of existing imagery of which Warhol was the leading proponent.

“Water|Bodies” presents dozens of photographs, sculptures, paintings and some surfboards thrown in for good measure. The artwork depicts the sea, the shore, the pool, sunbathers and the nude in the season of recreation in or on the water. The show features established and emerging artists with connections to the New York Academy of Art and the East End.

The show in this space is buoyant and enjoyable with no outliers to keep a critic employed, but I shall try.

What’s up with water? In addition to “Radical Seafaring” at the Parrish, the first Public Art Biennial in perennially rain-starved Los Angeles is a sprawling program titled “[Current: LA Water](#),” with 12 organizations in 15 locations producing installations about the wet stuff. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art is showing “[Rain Room](#),” with computer controlled jets allowing viewers to wander in the rain without getting wet. Near Milan, Italy, Christo has installed his latest extravaganza, [The Floating Piers](#), an installation with a floating mat of polyethylene cubes that “allows people to walk on water.”

Clearly we’re done with earth.

In “Water|Bodies,” [Mary Ellen Bartley](#) presents what I would rank as one of the most poetic works in

the show, a photograph of a small wave taken through a set of blinds. Why look at water through blinds? It's not sunny and a better view could be had by spreading them. But wait: the water view also appears to be projected onto the blinds; perhaps this is the view desired, but not gained. *Blinds* is a beautiful contemplative image, on which I lingered for some time.



"Blinds" by Mary Ellen Bartley. 2/7. Courtesy of Yancey Richardson Gallery.

[Alexis Rockman](#) has four monochromatic pieces in the show, working on a theme he keeps separate from his typically highly colored works anchored in representations of wildlife. Two of the works are watercolors showing the tango of image and blur the artist has perfected over a lifetime of effort. Curiously the other two list as their materials "sand from Kirk Park Beach," a foreshore across from Ft. Pond in Montauk. Certainly a good story lurks behind this odd material.



"Lion's Mane Jellyfish" by Alexis Rockman, 2014.

Popular photographer [Ralph Gibson](#) shot a horizontal female nude framed by the morning surf in a raking light as if she had washed onto the seashore. His film camera bokeh is so intense that for a moment she could be mistaken for driftwood. This picture harks back to a time in photography when an image was found instead of assembled.



"Untitled (MJ with Surf)" by Ralph Gibson, 1989.

[Steve Miller](#) affixed his trademark animal X-rays to some surfboards included in the "Water Bodies" show. The relationship seems to be that the animals, in this case an alligator, are roughly the same size as the surfboards and hang around the shallows. Good fun.

[Reisha Perlmutter](#)'s "Aqua" series of delightful underwater nudes seem to have been painted with an effortless facility that belies her young age. Showing her work *Receive* in the show and also using it on the cover of the catalog seems entirely appropriate, but it is still quite a milestone for an artist in her mid-20s. Her work is vaguely photorealism but doesn't suffer from the stiffness so often

associated with “projected imagery.” If her work was created using projected images, I couldn’t tell. And videos of her painting indicate that she layers her paints and shapes her forms without the benefit of stifling projectors.



“Receive” by Reisha Perlmutter, 2016. 48 x 82 inches.

Perlmutter is from the Gulf Coast town of Naples, Florida, and studied classical French atelier painting in Paris and the Loire Valley, ultimately completing her MFA at the NYAA.

“Water|Bodies” is evenly curated and smoothly installed, a good addition to a surprising bumper crop of rewarding museum offerings on the East End this summer.

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**BASIC FACTS:** “Water|Bodies,” curated by Eric Fischl and David Kratz, is on view June 24 to July 31, 2016, at the Southampton Arts Center, 25 Jobs Lane, Southampton, NY 11968. [southamptonartscenter.org](http://southamptonartscenter.org)

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