

THOMAS DUNCAN GALLERY

PRESS RELEASE

CHARLES MAYTON

“SONG OF THE SHRIMP”

September 11 – October 31, 2015

“*Song of the Shrimp*,” Charles Mayton’s exhibition of new paintings at Thomas Duncan Gallery, Los Angeles, expands his reservoir of formal references beyond the modernist art historical canon, producing and exploring sedimented layers of imagery drawn from art of the ancient world, archaeological excavation, natural history and marine biology. In these large format paintings, fish appear and disappear along with eyes and other orifices, Medusa heads and human hands merge, and surrealist tropes take their place alongside fragments of classical mosaic.

The themes of taste and consumption that have preoccupied Mayton’s work for some time are developed here in depictions that pun on the painters’ palette and the gastronomic palate. Continuing in this line of metaphorical reasoning, from mouth to stomach, many of the questions of authorship and influence that appeared in his earlier work like the formal quoting of Magritte’s script for example, have now been *digested*. These new paintings plummet and rise, replacing Mayton’s earlier presentation of an array of motifs on flat tablecloths with a greater sense of incorporation and depth. The references to surrealism in these works show the process of their emerging and reemerging as motifs: moving between palimpsest and tableau, some are still indigestible and determined to return. These paintings insist on surrealism as a type of logic rather than a style that accretes around a handful of signifiers. With the conviction of a dream, its signifiers are less important.

To this end, the organizing consciousness of the exhibition is a giant painting of a black shrimp of the type found on specialist shrimp-breeding websites. Like shrimp bred for display in aquaria, this painting depicts a motif bred solely for the purposes of appearing in a painting. A farmed image, it refers only to things that populate imagery, as distinct from things that populate the world. The hobbyist shrimp exists only within the boundaries of its own discourse and fails to find a home or thrive outside its carefully manufactured environment. By importing a motif that doesn’t short-circuit the imaginary book of references, Mayton provokes an unexpected question about the generative properties of painting that is neither fully figurative nor abstract: for example, can painting perform a critique of anything outside its own proper field? If not, does it generate a strong enough alternative logic of its own? The sediment of ideas that the shrimp, as bottom feeder, consumes makes it wonder how we came by these notions in the first place. How long did it take for them to settle into these layers of accepted, self-evident historical narrative? At what point, it asks, did we receive *surreal* as shorthand for *weird*? The shrimp, with its complex digestive system, asks how we have come to accept a certain transparency or direct relationship between intake and output, when there are so many seas of experience to traverse? —Eva Kenny

Charles Mayton (b. 1974) lives and works in New York. Recent solo exhibitions: American Academy in Rome, Rome; David Lewis Gallery, New York; Campoli Presti, London; Campoli Presti, Paris; The Power Station, Dallas; Balice Hertling, Paris. Recent group exhibitions: Tanya Leighton, Berlin; Thomas Duncan Gallery, Los Angeles, Human Resources, Los Angeles; Federico Vavassori, Milan; Dominique Lévy, New York; The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.

THOMAS DUNCAN GALLERY

6109 MELROSE AVENUE

LOS ANGELES, CA 90038

T: 310.494.1177

W: WWW.THOMASDUNCANGALLERY.COM

E: INFO@THOMASDUNCANGALLERY.COM