



BROOKLYN RAIL

MAY 2024

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

INDEPENDENT AND FREE

FEATURE INTERVIEWS WITH

LUBAINA HIMID

NATHANIEL DORSKY

& JEROME HILER

SUZANNE MCCLELLAND

LEELEE KIMMEL

GUEST CRITIC

MICHAEL AUPING

PETER NADIN

BY JESSICA HOLMES

The Invisible World
Off Paradise, New York
January 17–May 17, 2024

When polymath Peter Nadin moved from New York more than thirty years ago to live at Old Field Farm, his rural property in the Catskill Mountains, he consciously left behind his role as a key figure in the city's downtown art scene for a more contemplative lifestyle. Despite this, Nadin never stopped painting and two years ago had a debut exhibition at Off Paradise, *The Distance From a Lemon to Murder*. These paintings, mostly made during the COVID-19 pandemic, drew inspiration from Nadin's interest in plant grafting; in his greenhouse the artist experimented with melding one type of lemon plant with another, and undertook painting from life. The paintings and sculpture in his present show, *The Invisible World*, push the ideas Nadin generated in his previous exhibition to new realms.

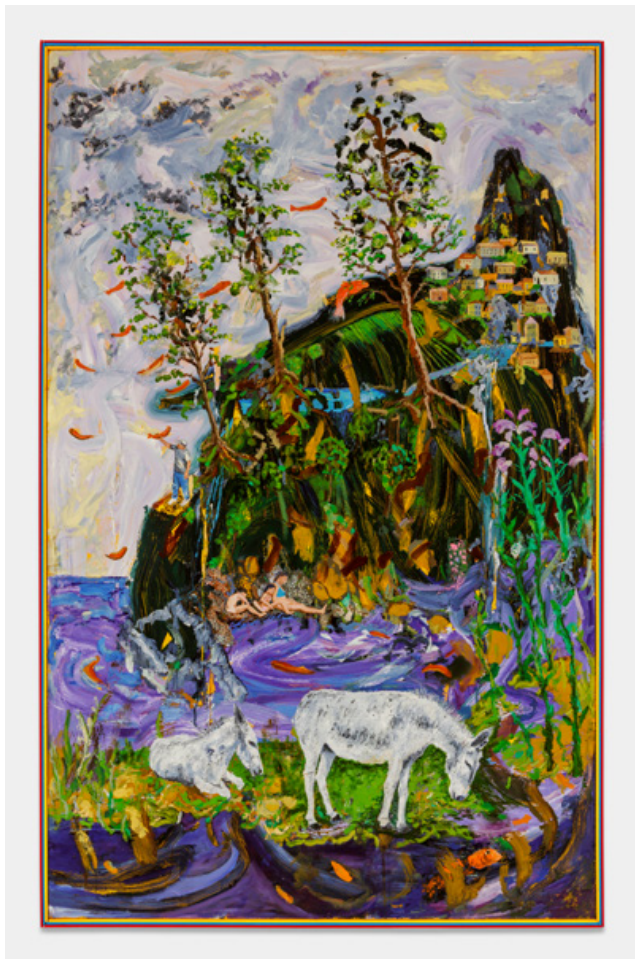
In Nadin's new body of work, brilliant orange fish fly off into the sky, and sometimes so do people. An invisible groom weds his bride, and the installation of municipal utility lines takes place in the Garden of Eden, with Adam himself as head of the work crew. In these paintings Nadin continues to portray the scenery, neighbors, animals, and plants that surround him upstate, with the concept of grafting at the forefront, suffusing the works with an import of magical realism. Yes, these settings, these characters, those donkeys all materially exist. But on these canvases, Nadin seems to ask: Can we actually trust what our own eyes see? And how do we know it's the case, that what we see is truly what is before us? Most potentially, what is reality, anyhow?

Works like *Sharkey's Donkey Watching a Fish (A Migration of Golden Orfe)* (2023) provide an entry into these metaphysical inquiries. Here, two white

donkeys rest on a riverbed, one of them gazing into the water at a large, orange fish (a Golden Orfe, which makes repeated appearances throughout these works) while a small family lounges on the riverbed nearby. All but one seem oblivious to the action that surrounds them as they drowse on the waters' shores—a swirl of orange fish stream from the river into the sky, carried by upward winds, or fins, or alchemy. The lone figure who sees them stands on a small ledge away from the rest of the group, arm extended in an action of stretching for an airborne fish. Whose reality is genuine? By their numbers, it would seem the unconcerned humans and animals have the grasp of materiality; no one seems bothered by a school of flying fish. But that single individual, his rendered gesture so pure and humane, gives us pause. He sees the fish in flight, he knows it so surely he reaches out to try and catch one. To say which is the actual experience is impossible, and perhaps, both are true.

Nadin's deliberation of his marks in paint, obvious in that poignantly executed arm of the reaching man, is evident in works throughout the show. In *The Blue Rope* (2023) a glamorous young couple idle in a small boat tethered to a dock in a verdant landscape. The canvas is an abundance of purple, blue, and green tones, but close inspection reveals how Nadin has strategically cut into the surface of the canvas, revealing gashes of red underpainting beneath the topcoats. The red streaks add a note of unease to the otherwise picturesque scene, reminding the viewer that what is outwardly visible is not necessarily the full range of reality.

A small selection of Nadin's sculpture is also on display. The most affecting work, *Three Self Portraits with a Ripening Lemon*, is a small, painted bronze of one of the artist's favorite shoes. The soft, custom-made leather shoe is one of a pair the artist walked in for over a decade, before time and the body wore them away. Realizing that the shoes marked a passage of his own life, Nadin had one cast in bronze, memorializing the cracks in



Peter Nadin, *Sharkey's Donkey Watching a Fish (A Migration of Golden Orfe)*, 2023. Oil on panel, 77 5/8 x 49 3/8 inches. Courtesy the artist and Off Paradise.

the leather where his toes broke through. On the inside of the shoe, he has painted a small portrait of his own face, a likeness that repeats as a motif across his work (the same facial portrait also appears in *How I Look, What I See in Barocoa When I'm Not There [Self-Portrait in Absentia]*, [2022] another self-portrait painting in the show). Finally, the shoe rests upon a cast lemon, the fruit that provided the genesis of Nadin's grafting. Shoe, lemon,

likeness, fused together to make up a fantastical rendering of the artist, which can neither be proven nor disproven as a reality.

Jessica Holmes is a New York-based writer and critic. She is an Art Editor and ArTonic Editor for the Brooklyn Rail.

JOAN JONAS

BY ALFRED MAC ADAM

Good Night Good Morning
Museum of Modern Art, New York
March 17–July 6, 2024

Animal, Vegetable, Mineral
The Drawing Center, New York
March 6–June 2, 2024

For T.S. Eliot, April was the cruelest month. For Joan Jonas, April marks the culmination, through two major exhibitions, of a career whose scope is as vast as America itself, providing an opportunity for all of us to experience the length and breadth of her *oeuvre*. Be forewarned:

Jonas's show at the Museum of Modern Art occupies the entire sixth floor and contains so many examples of her work that grasping it in one visit is impossible. Likewise, with over three hundred drawings at the Drawing Center, comprehending the totality all at once is hopeless. You must return. This vastness provides an insight into Jonas's *modus operandi*—a continual work in progress. While individual drawings or videos may be finite, they are part of an infinitely expanding artistic universe.

To eat an elephant, the best method is one bite at a time, so starting from the beginning is probably the best approach to the elephantine presentation at MoMA, *Good Night Good Morning*. The visitor is greeted by two works, a 1968 video, *Wind*, which is projected onto a wall and a 2006 video *My New Theater VI: Good*

Night Good Morning, shown in a coffin-shaped projection box. *Wind* captures people on a Long Island beach in midwinter during a gale so powerful that Jonas observes, "The wind became a character and a force." The characters buffeted around have mirrors attached to their clothing, and we will come to realize that what we see here introduces several of her important motifs. First, nature itself as an ineluctable presence, a theme which Jonas returns to later in her career in more explicit environmentally conscious works. Second, video-preserved performance, one of the essential features of Jonas's output. Performance is simultaneously predictable—it is choreographed—and aleatory: wind, sun, and the nature of the performers, whose motions are their own despite the presence of a director. Third, the mirrors, ubiquitous in Jonas's

output and essential to our understanding of how she conceives the relationship between the viewer and the work, be it a live performance, a video, or a drawing.

Jonas reinterprets the ancient hermeneutic circle, the idea that we apprehend a work of art by understanding both its constituent elements and the relationship each element has with the totality. Through her use of mirrors, she transforms the viewer from passive to active participant. Ideally, we become her mirror twin, identical yet reversed, during the time we experience the work. This is dramatized brilliantly in the *Good Night Good Morning* video, where Jonas appears to greet us or bid us farewell in a seemingly endless but constantly varied loop. Just as our reflection always pops up when we face a mirror, Jonas is there at the screen—standing, sitting, petting her