

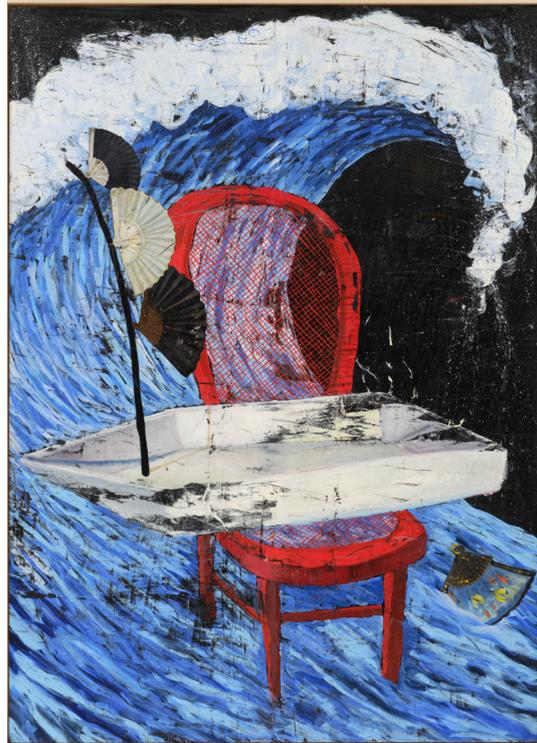
Press Release

Angel Otero. The Sea Remembers

Hauser & Wirth Hong Kong

1 June – 29 July 2023

Opening Reception: Thursday 1 June, 6 – 8 pm



'The objects in my painting are from my childhood memories, but also represent things that are still present in my life, both physically and emotionally. They are a sort of trampoline to things way deeper, a stage to bring in memories, thoughts, questions, and open towards the unknown.'

– Angel Otero

Angel Otero is known for his signature approach to visual storytelling, synthesizing magical realism and abstraction, the observed and the imagined, and the past and the present. Beginning 1 June, Hauser & Wirth Hong Kong presents 'The Sea Remembers,' Otero's first solo exhibition in Asia since he joined the gallery in 2022. Through a labor-intensive process of laying down, scrapping and collaging oil paint, Angel Otero's works are rooted in abstract image making and engage with the idea of memory through addressing art history, as well as his own lived experience.

Consisting of 10 new paintings and spanning two floors of the gallery space, the exhibition includes vibrant large-scale canvases that merge the figurative and abstract sides of Otero's innovative technical practice, advancing the artist's exploration of oil paint as a medium and a conduit for self-reflection and analysis. Drawing from his childhood growing up in Puerto Rico as well as more recent memories, and influenced by the gestural mark-

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making of canonical artists like Willem de Kooning, Otero has invented a visual realm that evokes the enchanting and sometimes strange ways in which everyday objects become personified through the lens of memory.

The exhibition takes its title from the painting 'The Sea Remembers' (2023), where an upright piano from Otero's studio, a former church in upstate New York, sits against an undulating crimson background and is engulfed by water. The instrument is surrounded by objects from his childhood home, like cabinets and a rotary phone, as well as drawings of waves and a sailboat. Below, the floor—visible through the water—is covered by decorative tiles that are a familiar sight in Puerto Rico, featuring patterns inspired by traditional sixteenth-century Spanish tiles. Found throughout homes in Puerto Rico, these tiles represent both the artist's personal recollections and the collective memory of colonialism in Puerto Rico.

Otero often thinks about the subject of the sea—something that is beautiful, but also terrifying. This exhibition debuts a new body of work in which he pushes the water motif further to create swelling and expansive waves, such as in 'Breakwater' (2023) and 'The Voyage' (2023), forging a connection between growing up in Puerto Rico and showing in Hong Kong— islands both surrounded by this powerful yet beautiful force. These waves represent the artist and the shifting nature of his memory. Otero said 'The idea of the singular waves is metaphorical, they are not a part of the landscape. They are singular objects, with specific meanings of washing out, taking away, bringing in and changing. They are the waves of emotion, and at the same time they're nature.' Within the waves, Otero embeds objects like chairs, beds, and mirrors—objects that often stand in for family members. Throughout this grouping of works, Otero depicts quotidian objects that Otero has imbued with surreal qualities—blurring the line between gesture and allusion, documentation and recollection to evoke a dreamlike state of consciousness.

The exhibition also includes a selection of new works, like 'Caribbean Symphony' (2023) and 'Moonriver' (2023), that are predominantly abstract. In a reversal of the typical painting process, Otero begins each new work by painting the foreground scene on plexiglass first and then working backward, in layers, so the background, frequently inspired by historical abstract masterpieces, is painted last. He then builds in a layer of fabric to hold the entire structure together before scraping it off and fixing it onto canvas. Afterward, Otero continues to add to the surface, collaging images of items like pots and pans, window shutters, bingo tickets and folded paper fans from a repository of previously made works to create an entirely new, multilayered composition. In this way, the artist merges process and intent: through the skilled layering and mixing of fragments from different sources, he effectively emulates the ways in which our memories of the past, imprecise and frequently distorted, are pieced together to construct our present.

About the artist

Angel Otero was born in 1981 in Santurce, Puerto Rico, where he resided until moving in 2004 to obtain his BFA



from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He currently splits his time between New York and Puerto Rico. Otero was recently the subject of major solo exhibitions in 2017 at The Bronx Museum of the Arts, NY, and in 2016 at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston. In 2009, Otero was included in the exhibition 'Constellations'

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at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, shortly after receiving his MFA. Otero's work is in numerous public and private collections including the Berezdivin Collection, Puerto Rico; Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx NY; DePaul Art Museum, Chicago IL; Istanbul Modern, Istanbul, Turkey; Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art, Kansas City MO; Long Museum, Shanghai, China; Margulies Collection, Miami FL; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL; Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art, Overland Park KS; North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh NC; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York NY; UBS Art Collection, Chicago IL; and the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond VA.

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Angel Otero

The Sea Remembers

2023

Oil paint and fabric collaged on canvas

213.4 x 152.4 x 3.8 cm / 84 x 60 x 1 1/2 in

247.3 x 186.7 x 7 cm / 97 3/8 x 73 1/2 x 2 3/4 in (framed)

Photo: Thomas Barratt

Angel Otero

Breakwater

2023

Oil paint and fabric collaged on canvas

213.4 x 152.4 x 3.8 cm / 84 x 60 x 1 1/2 in

216.5 x 155.6 x 7 cm / 85 1/4 x 61 1/4 x 2 3/4 in (framed)

Photo: Thomas Barratt

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