

ALISON SAAR

SILT, SOOT AND SMUT

25 MAY – 1 JULY 2016

RECEPTION FOR THE ARTIST: Wednesday, 25 May, 6-8 pm



Breach (large figure on raft), 2016
wood, ceiling tin, found trunks, washtubs and misc objects
155 x 60 x 51 in. (393.7 x 152.4 x 129.5 cm)

Venice, CA -- L.A. Louver is pleased to present an exhibition of new paintings and sculpture by Los Angeles-based artist Alison Saar. In this body of work, Saar uses figuration to weave narratives relating to the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, sourcing inspiration from historical documentation, mythology, poetry and music.

*Backwater blues done call me to pack my things and go
'Cause my house fell down and I can't live there no more.
"Back Water Blues," Bessie Smith, 1927*

During her 2013 residency at the Joan Mitchell Center in New Orleans, Saar was dismayed to see little had been done to rebuild African American communities that had been devastated by Hurricane Katrina nearly eight years prior. Upon her return to Los Angeles, she began research into the histories of American floods and their effect on

African Americans. The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 peaked her interest. The historic catastrophe displaced hundreds of thousands of people in the American South, and wreaked havoc and destruction particularly within the black population. Saar was also intrigued with the cultural implications that resulted from the flood and its influence on the music, dance and literature of that time.

At the entrance of the gallery, the viewer is confronted with a shelf of five illuminated glass jugs, each filled with water at varying heights. The jugs are etched with figurative motifs and represent the five rivers of the underworld, which according to Greek mythology, possess a distinct power to help lead those into the afterlife. Saar titled the work *Hades DWP* (2016), making connections with the ability of water to both sustain and take life.

Upon entering the gallery, the largest work in the exhibition *Breach (large figure on raft)* (2016), takes center stage. Measuring over 12 ft. (4 m) tall, a nude female figure steers a raft, while simultaneously balancing an enormous tower of found objects – trunks, pots, pans and various household essentials – on her head. Although the stacked objects exceed her own body mass, there is grace and strength in her stance that defies the weight she has been forced to bear. Nearby, *Deluge* (2016) features a floating head suspended aloft by a mass of swirling wire hair.



Sleufoot Slide, 2015
acrylic, gesso and charcoal on found sugar
sacks and linens
53 x 26 1/2 in. (134.6 x 67.3 cm)

An adjacent wall includes a series of charcoal drawings produced on the backs of steamer trunk drawers, such as *Lethe* (2016). Named after the Greek underworld river of forgetfulness, a woman is depicted neck-deep in water, her blank gaze emanates from the empty void of her eyes. Another series of wall pieces are acrylic paintings on “canvases,” which Saar assembled from found sugar sacks, old linens and mattress ticking. On these varied almost quilt-like surfaces, the artist portrays male and female figures submerged to their knees in water. With titles referencing music and dances that came out of the 1927 flood, like *Blackbottom Stomp* and *Sleufoot Slide*, each figure can be perceived as either dancing or fleeing.

A number of other sculptures also embody music from that era, such as *Jitterbug Djinn* (2016), a dancing figure carved from wood rises out of a vintage brown jug like a genie from a bottle. *Silttown Shimmy*, inspired by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s sculpture *Dancer with Necklace* (1910, Collection of LACMA), is a free standing female figure in wood, she contorts and writhes with an equal amount of pain and pleasure.

An online catalogue for the exhibition, which includes images and audio, as well as a video on Saar produced by her husband and digital media artist, Tom Leaser, can be accessed at lalouver.com/saar2016.

Alison Saar was born and raised in Laurel Canyon, California. Growing up the daughter of renowned artist Betye Saar and painter/conservator Richard Saar, played a crucial role in her formative years, as well as in the development of her artistic career. Saar received her B.A. in studio art and art history in 1978 from Scripps College, Claremont, California. She went on to earn her MFA from Otis-Parsons Institute (now Otis College of Art and Design). She has received three fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1984, 1985 and 1988), and was awarded the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship in 1989, the Flintridge Foundation Award for Visual Artists in 2000, the Joan Mitchell Foundation Award in 1998 and the Joan Mitchell Artist in Residence in 2013. In 2012, the United States Artists Program named Saar one of 50 USA fellows.

More recently, Alison Saar revealed a new public work in Downtown Los Angeles, CA in 2015 titled *Embodied*. Commissioned by the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, the 12 ft. (4m) tall sculptures is located in front of the Hall of Justice at the corner of Temple Street and Spring Street. Later this year, Saar will be the subject of a solo exhibition at the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C. (10 June – 2 October 2016).

Concurrently on exhibition at L.A. Louver (25 May - 1 July):

Second floor gallery

Don Suggs: *Paradise* / Recent paintings and archival inkjet prints

Skyroom

Richard Deacon / Sculpture

Forthcoming exhibition at L.A. Louver (13 July - 2 September):

David Hockney: *The Yosemite Suite* / iPad drawings printed on paper



Silttown Shimmy (red dancer sculpture with silt)
2016, wood, ceiling tin, enamel paint, tar and silt
28 x 8 1/2 x 5 1/2 in. (71.1 x 21.6 x 14 cm)