

ART PROBE

ISSUE #13

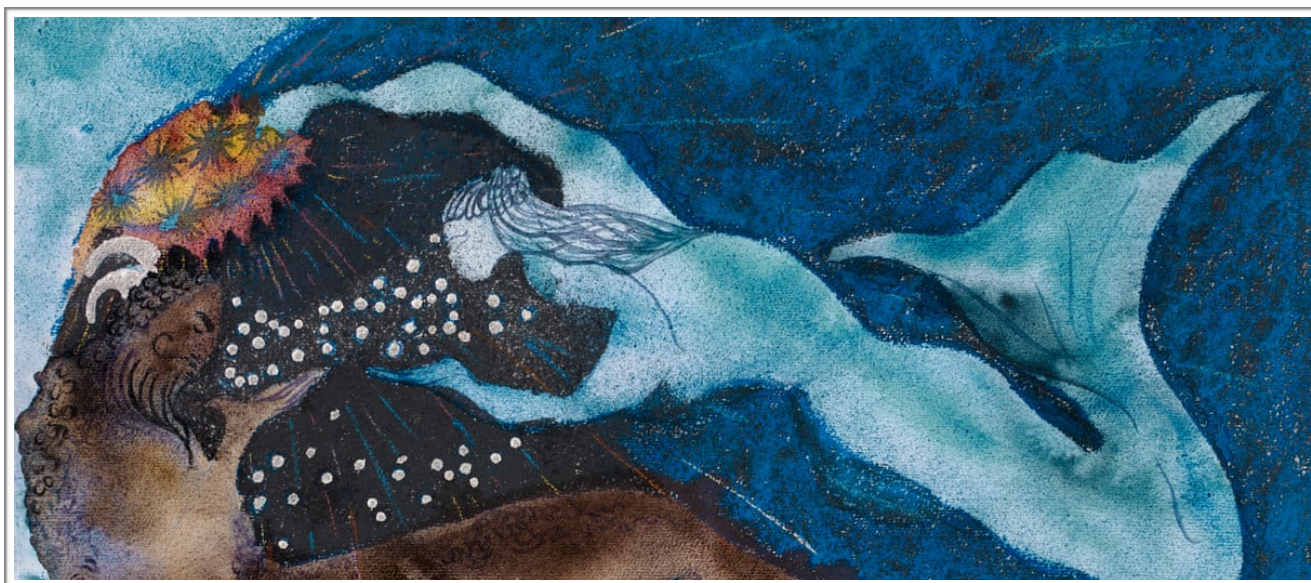
- Shristi Sainani

Exhibition : *The Sky was Blue the Sea was Blue and the Boy was Blue*

Artist : *Milton Avery, Jules de Balincourt, Ali Banisadr, NS Harsha, Secundino Hernández, Ilse D'Hollander, Chantal Joffe, Isaac Julien, Idris Khan, John Kørner, Chris Ofili, Celia Paul, Grayson Perry, Howardena Pindell, Tal R, Paula Rego, Do Ho Suh, Sarah Sze, Flora Yukhnovich.*

Venue : *Victoria Miro (London, UK)*

Dates : *24 February–31 March 2021*



Chris Ofili, Crowning of a Satyr (Blue), 2021 (detail)

Source : Victoria Miro Gallery

The colour blue has played a crucial part in culture throughout the years. Once upon a time, it was associated with royalty as it was a hard colour to extract and therefore, one of the most expensive to obtain. Ancient Egypt through to the Renaissance, the colour held its reputation to signify emotions ranging from elation to desolation. The Virgin and her heavenly robes were depicted with blue; Modernism saw Picasso's Blue Period and Yves Klein's patented IKB. It is now, in 2020-2021 one looks at the pandemic struck globe and affiliates these times with the 'Surgical Mask Blue'.

'*The Sky was Blue the Sea was Blue and the Boy was Blue*' is a celebration of the colour which continues to successfully persist in visual culture. Each of the artists featured in the exhibition employs the hue in distinctive ways. The exhibition is presented as part of the second iteration of the London Collective, which brings together more than 20 of the capital's leading commercial galleries to present virtual 3D exhibitions on Vortic, the leading virtual and augmented reality platform for the art world.

Some of my favourite pieces from the show *'The Sky was Blue the Sea was Blue and the Boy was Blue'* are:

1) Map of Nowhere (blue), 2008

Artist : Grayson Perry



Source : Victoria Miro Gallery

This complex piece of work by Grayson Perry involves fragments of illustrative attributes borrowed from medieval times. The elements draw out terms from an observer's lexicon; terms such as history, witchcraft, cartography, anatomy and cityscape. *'Map of Nowhere (2008)'* is a colour etching from five plates, measuring 153 x 113 cm.

Formally this piece is engrossing, with multiple narratives sitting in one comprehensive work of art. Although it is highly elaborate, the whole is balanced in terms of composition. As one zooms into different aspects housed within the image, new information is unraveled each time. One can follow connections in the Perry labyrinthine indicating ancestry, routes and internal, biological linkages. This is Perry, openly criticising as he states — *"I was playing with the idea of there being no Heaven. People are very wedded to the idea of a neat ending: our rational brains would love us to tidy up the mess of the world and to have either Armageddon or Heaven at the end of our existence. But life doesn't work like that – it's a continuum..."*

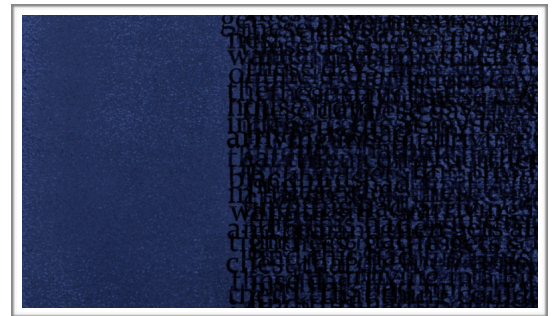
What sits most interestingly is the subject in the image. While the face might suggest, it is a self portrait of Perry. The arms of the subject are wide open, with palms making the same gestures as Jesus within medieval art, specifically da Vinci's *Salvator Mundi* or Christ's mosaic in Ravenna.

2) So Many all of Nothing, 2020

Artist : Idris Khan



Left hand side : *So Many all of Nothing (2020)*



Right hand side : *So Many all of Nothing (2020) detail*

Source : Victoria Miro Gallery

On examining Idris Khan's work, *So Many all of Nothing (2020)*, what a viewer initially sees is a minimal piece of abstraction. It is dominated with an Oxford blue backdrop, laying out four rectangular entities arrayed across the composition. The top and bottom-most rectangles are homogeneous. While the couple units in the middle are equally dimensioned; they are slender as compared to the other two. On taking a closer look at each of the rectangular entities, it is seen that the geometry is birthed by marginally-spaced text, layered in oil based ink. The text expresses Khan's thoughts, feelings and responses to 2020 which has been an unprecedented year. *So Many all of Nothing (2020)* is fabricated with an oil based ink on gesso, applied on aluminium.

Khan's '*So Many all of Nothing (2020)*', presents repetitive text to form bodies of geometry which are logical, a universal language in a sense. While doing so, the recurrent text loses its meaning. The overall display seems to mimic the pandemic and its consequences. While one can find in the blue composition, gestures of evasive feelings, multiplicity of racing thoughts and tangled emotions; there is also a stance which required one to stand still and introspect.

3) Lapis, 2021

Artist : Ali Banisadr



Source : Victoria Miro Gallery

Lapis (2021) by artist Ali Banisadr is an oil on linen, measuring 45.7 x 61 cm. On initial examination, one would assume the piece to be showcasing work in abstraction; lighter at the top with Prussian blue strokes getting denser at the bottom. But as time passes by, creatures emerge from the foreground. One can recognise eyes, limbs, beaks and textures of animal dermis. They look familiar but other-worldly. Their bodies overlapping one another; enacting a dramatic, colossal scene on the substrate. The Victoria Miro gallery, while describing the piece of work points at these figures in *Lapis*, made from pure lapis lazuli pigment. They might recall mythological creatures or Ancient Mesopotamian sculpture.

The lapis lazuli pigment used to construct this piece has been mixed by the artist himself. This piece was realised specifically for the exhibition, *'The Sky was Blue the Sea was Blue and the Boy was Blue'*, the artist mentions in his statement. He also links this piece to the ancient Mesopotamian poem *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, in which lapis lazuli plays a central part, as an enduring source of influence providing him with a rich source of visual imagery.

This painting was chosen as one of Art Probe's favourites from *'The Sky was Blue the Sea was Blue and the Boy was Blue'*, out of a lot of 22 because of its strong materiality and figurative stature. The piece instantly prompts a relationship between history and contemporaneity. Formally too, the artwork oscillates between multiple genres of paintings. The more time one spends observing *Lapis*, the beasts on linen get increasingly emotive showcasing motion and sentiments.

REFERENCES

The Sky was Blue the Sea was Blue and the Boy was Blue, 2021:

The Sky was Blue the Sea was Blue and the Boy was Blue. 2021. *The Sky was Blue the Sea was Blue and the Boy was Blue*.

Available at: <<https://online.victoria-miro.com/group-exhibition-blue-2021/>> [Accessed 1 March 2021].