

## Byron Kim Achieves Equilibrium

February 15, 2022 | By Seph Rodney

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Perhaps these paintings are what it feels like for the artist to be in a state of not being harried, anxious or in deep existentialist dread.



Installation view of *Drawn to Water* at James Cohan gallery (2022)

(all photos © Byron Kim 2022, courtesy the artist and James Cohan, and by Phoebe d'Heurle)

My experience of the ocean is that it's always in flux, never quite at rest or ease. But Byron Kim has, with the acrylic paintings in his *Drawn to Water* exhibition has fastened to panels draped on the walls of James Cohan gallery versions of the sea that are placidly dormant. Take "B.Q.O 13 (Tobey Pond)" (all works 2021) in which the hazy atmospherics of the bottom two panels of the painting call to mind the littoral zone of a body of water. The bottom view is supposed to be from underwater, and it feels so, with its stratified layers of deep indigo, which morphs into green and then into tawny sand as my gaze rises up. The middle panel which is supposed to depict a view of the water's surface and its reflections, has sprays of ultramarine mostly enveloped a mucky brown with gray highlights and dutifully reproduces part of the cloud seen in the top panel. There the blue which is typically associated with a bright, afternoon sky surrounds a small gauzy cloud. All the paintings in the show replicate this theme of three distinct perspectives associated with the ocean, and this vertically tripartite compositional structure. And with perhaps the exception of "B.Q.O 25 (Solaris)" and "B.Q.O 25 (Honu)," which do something more vivid and active with the paint, the works here feel like a portrayal of inertia.



Byron Kim, "B.Q.O 13 (Tobey Pond)" (2021) acrylic on canvas mounted on panel, 104 x 72 inches

But inertia isn't the right word. The story that the gallery tells of this series is that Kim found a kind of healing power in swimming in the open ocean. Perhaps these paintings then are precisely what it feels like for the artist to be in a state: to not be harried, or anxious or in deep existentialist dread, but to have equilibrium. The exhibition has been described to me by another artist as boring. But perhaps Kim making his way through these last two years of political upheaval and widespread death, and wrenching loneliness to find this composed serenity feels like an achievement.

*Drawn to Water continues at James Cohan gallery (48 Walker Street, Soho Manhattan) through February 19. It was curated by gallery staff.*