

KATE SHAW

UNCANNY VALLEYS





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222 Hollywood Road, Sheung Wan, Hong Kong / T +852 2291 0006 / www.thecatstreetgallery.com



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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

The Cat Street Gallery is delighted to present artist, Kate Shaw, and her debut solo exhibition, 'UNCANNY VALLEYS', in Hong Kong.

Kate Shaw is a Melbourne-based artist who creates landscapes that are simultaneously sublime and toxic. Formed out of 'paint pours' and collage techniques, her landscapes capture the transcendent beauty of nature; the swirls of acrylic paint, ink, glitters and powders mimic the flow of natural processes. But underlying these psychedelic scenes are hints of pollution and artificiality, inducing anything from wonder to discomfort. This intersection of creation and corruption in Shaw's alchemical creations teases out our conflicted relationship with nature – a relationship fraught with awe and fear, closeness and distance.

Shaw's works have been shown extensively throughout Australia, as well as New York, and Seoul. The artist has also been included in prominent Australian art prizes and significant private

Mandy d'Abo

Founder and Director
The Cat Street Gallery



Kate Shaw maps an oneiric topography — a seductively saccharine dream world infused with the lingering trace of reality. The contours of her hills and mountains register as legible forms but the colour and texture draped across them is pure fantasy. Her landscapes beguile and transfix but they also impart a sense of disquietude. They anticipate possible futures and pre-empt the total defacement of the natural environment, envisaging a world embellished with toxic spills and nuclear fallout.

In *Uncanny Valley*, as with much of Shaw's previous work, the organic and the synthetically hyper-real coexist within a hybrid ecosystem. This composite environment seems to share a genealogy with the Red Forest, the contaminated woodland surrounding the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. Having absorbed high levels of radiation during the nuclear disaster in 1986, the pine trees in the forest turned red. While the trees have since been uprooted and buried in nuclear waste graveyards, the site remains contaminated. In the ghosts of those red trees we find the preface to Shaw's surrealistic landscapes. The natural and the toxic collide.

It is fitting that in re-staging the synthesis (or collision) between organicity and toxicity, Shaw relies on the technique of collage. Her landscapes are assembled out of collaged fragments of marbled paint. Shards of dried paint are arranged in clusters before being encased in layers of resin. Each collaged cut (each edge) is exaggerated by the clash of adjacent and competing lurid colours.

Often punctuated by a spatter of glitter, the modulation of the marbled paint is hypnotic. It pulls the eye and draws the viewer in. Yet (again) a sense of unease takes hold. The thick semi-opaque resin thwarts access to this world. Behind its frosted veil, the landscape is out of reach.

In the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster, the conflation of these two unlikely bedfellows — the organic and the synthetic — continues. Radiotrophic fungi were found growing in and around the power plant in 2007. Able to assimilate gamma radiation using the pigment melanin, the fungus has adapted to the hostility of a toxic environment and re-populated the uninhabitable.



The supple pleats of the marbled paint and the glitter inject movement into these static paintings. The glitter's phosphorescence makes the mountains pulsate. Yet this movement is engulfed by stasis. The dynamism that emanates from Shaw's forms is mummified behind the semi-opaque resin. The glitter's playful wink is immobilized and the rivulets in the paint come to a standstill. It has been 28 years since the Chernobyl disaster. For nearly three decades, the dead leaves and plant matter in the area surrounding the power plant have remained undisturbed. The decimated organic material resists decomposition like the picture of Dorian Gray. A similar phenomenon occurs in Shaw's imagined geography. Here, the landscape is static and denied the privilege of decay.

The phrase 'uncanny valley' relates to the artificial simulation of human features. It is a term invoked when discussing robotics and 3D computer animation to elucidate the supposition that as simulated human form begins to resemble actual human form it becomes perturbing or unsettling. The closer a robot gets to human likeness, the more uncanny (the more uncomfortably strange or eerie) it becomes. In this context, the term 'valley' references the plummeting discomfort experienced by the viewing subject. It is the Freudian *unheimliche* for the digital age.

In this series, Shaw appropriates the concept of the 'uncanny valley' as both a metaphoric agent and a thematic descriptor. Each work is a portrait of a physical valley. With titles that correspond to different names for the geographic feature, Shaw's landscapes are tethered to topographic veracity. Together, they form a geographic taxonomy and survey the research accumulated during Shaw's recent residency in Iceland and her studies of other landscapes. Yet, as simulations of natural scenes — as landscapes steeped in the glare of the synthetic — they recalibrate the affective impact of the 'uncanny valley' condition. Shaw's landscapes are hyper-real yet as they obliquely replicate the forms and contours of real world topography they unnerve in the same way that a robot with human features would. As has been previously stated, the sense of unease that Shaw's work possesses manifests through the tension between attraction and impermeability and relates to each painting's synchronic ability to allure and repel. It is a tension that is played out in the conflict between surface and depth.



A valley is a dip or depression in a landscape; a low-slung trough surrounded by higher altitudes. It activates a downward pull and delineates a descent. Shaw's valleys prioritize this directional force. In each work the valley commands the viewer's sight line. We are implicated in its descent. The downward pull of these valleys is augmented by the texture and patterning of the marbled paint shards. With the undulation of their serpentine ripples, these segmented blocks of mottled colour resemble mineral sediments. They are presented to us like cross-sections of rock specimens dredged up in an excavation; they are relics from the centre of the earth.

Shaw's composition and perspective flirt with the illusion of depth. The glitter that adorns her collaged mountains also serves to amplify the deceit. Enshrined beneath the resin, the glitter retains its texture. It rises and falls like an estuary or a river delta. The glitter inlaid within the triptych Fjord converges in dense clusters as it swarms over the mountaintops. Even through the resin we register its density and sense its tactility.

Many of these valleys cradle pools of water. The confined fields of colour gradients that fill these pools echo the tonal sweep of the sky. But while the sky is expansive — a crescendo of colour that bulges and swells — the water is shallow and depthless. We can't see beyond its reflective surface. It doesn't expose a sub-aquatic landscape but projects inverted mirror image reflections of the surrounding mountains. It erodes the illusion of depth.

The limitless topography of the digital realm finds its metaphoric echo in the surging colour gradients that shoot beyond the horizon of Shaw's landscapes. These two simulated intangible geographies — the digital universe and Shaw's candy coloured stratosphere — are tensile and elastic. They stretch and swell, blind to the constraints of their two-dimensional reality. Both are cavernous image spaces that animate the deception of depth.



Shaw's use of collage performs a similar feat. The collage technique is predicated on the act of cut and paste. In Shaw's collages, the edge, a partition between dissonant colour palettes and adjacent paint fragments, asserts itself. It refutes any suggestion of foreshortening and draws each fragment into the same perspectival playing field. This edge possesses compositional agency. It forces all forms to congregate at the surface of the work. These are landscapes of plummeting hillsides yet they refuse to leave the shallow end.

It is the resin that cements this last point. A thin membrane that envelops the mountains, the water and the sky, the resin is the shroud that settles over each landscape. It compresses the wide panorama and the rough terrain into a smooth matte surface. This surface is impenetrable. It is a buffer and a shield. A screen — a transparent fourth wall and an analogue compatriot of the computer interface. Like a computer screen, this layer of resin is a portal into an expansive yet inaccessible spatial field.

The significance of Shaw's invocation of the term 'uncanny valley' rests on this observation. Shaw appropriates a concept allied to certain facets of digital discourse through veiled references to the strictures of the digital apparatus. These references materialize through metaphoric allusions to the simulacral (to the robotic and the computer generated) but also through the fabrication of a pseudo-digital screen space. It is in this screen space that Shaw's prophetic vision of the future unfolds. Faced with the inundation of the digital and continued assault from the toxic and the synthetic, the natural landscape can only survive in its present state as a screened image. The real becomes hyper-real as digitization becomes Darwinian. To acclimatize (to survive) one must embrace the screen. Shaw's work stands as a pre-emptive homage to this transmutation. It anticipates the instant in which depth is consumed by the surface.





Canyon

Acrylic and resin on board
28 x 23 cm
2014

HKD 15,000



Cove

Acrylic and resin on board
73 x 68 cm
2014

HKD 40,000



Gorge

Acrylic and resin on board
64 x 79 cm (per panel, 3 panels)
2014

HKD 80,000



Fjord

Acrylic and resin on board
68 x 73 cm (per panel, 3 panels)
2014

HKD 80,000



Dell

Acrylic and resin on board
73 x 44 cm
2014

HKD 35,000



Glacier

Acrylic and resin on board
33 x 45 cm
2014

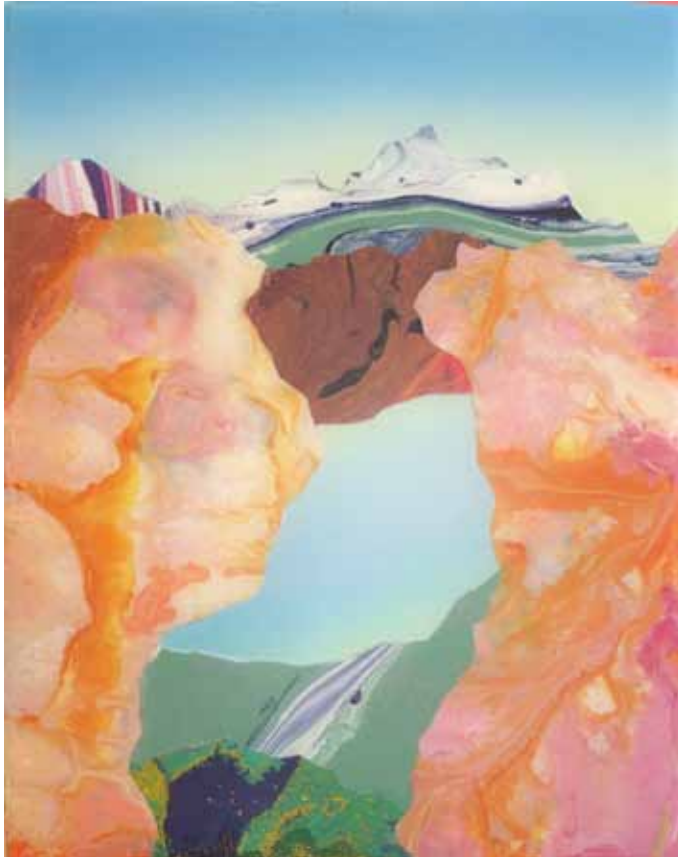
HKD 25,000



Gully

Acrylic and resin on board
33 x 45 cm
2014

HKD 25,000



Ravine

Acrylic and resin on board
23 x 28 cm
2014

HKD 15,000



Kloof

Acrylic and resin on board
28 x 23 cm
2014

HKD 15,000



Urstromtäler

Acrylic and resin on board
73 x 68 cm
2014

HKD 40,000



Holler

Acrylic and resin on board
73 x 44 cm
2014

HKD 35,000



Vale

Acrylic and resin on board
73 x 44 cm
2014

HKD 35,000



Strath

Acrylic and resin on board
33 x 45 cm
2014

HKD 25,000



CURRICULUM VITAE

Education

- 1997** Diploma of Museum Studies, Deakin University, Melbourne
1994 Bachelor of Arts, Fine Arts Honors (Painting) RMIT University, Melbourne

Group Exhibitions

- 2014** *Conquest of Space*, COFA Gallery, Sydney (curated by Andrew Frost)
In Your Dreams, Counihan Gallery, Brunswick (curated by Edwina Bartlem [catalogue])
Vertigo, touring with Asialink: Galeri Soemardja, Institute of Technology, Bandung, Indonesia
Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), Taipei, Taiwan
POSCO Museum of Art, Seoul, South Korea (curated by Claire-Anna Watson [catalogue])
- 2013** *New Horizons*, Gippsland Gallery, Victoria (curated by Simon Gregg [catalogue])
Spatial Dialogues: Keitai Mizu, Shibuya, Tokyo (curated by Larissa Hjorth)
Sim Sal a Bim, SIM, Reyjavik, Iceland
Dreamtime, Mirus Gallery, San Francisco
To Deny Our Nothingness, Brooklyn Gallery, New York (curated by Carolina Puente)
- 2012** *Everywhere but Here Blindside*, Melbourne
Flowers for You, Stephan Stoyanov Gallery, New York
Inspiring Artists: Recipients of NAVA Grants Maitland Regional Gallery, NSW (curated by Cheryl Farrell [catalogue])
Mangae, Korean Women's Art Association, Parliament House, Sydney
Space Oddity, S Cube Gallery, Laguna Beach, California
- 2011** *Seeing to a Distance*, Level 17 Artspace, Melbourne (curated by Amanda Morgan)
New Psychedelia, University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane (curated by Sebastian Moody, [catalogue])

Together in Harmony for 50 Years, KWASS, Korea Foundation Culture Centre, Seoul
Arboreal, Macquarie University Gallery, Sydney
(curators, Rhonda Davis and Andrew Simpson [catalogue])
Inhabit Fiesta, City of Brisbane Laneway Festival, Brisbane

- 2010** *Missing Link*, Residency Unlimited, Brooklyn (curated by Martha Kirszenbaum)
Lost in Painting, Diane Tanzer gallery, Melbourne (curated by Olivia Polini)
I found it, I broke it, I stole it, Stephan Stoyanov Gallery, New York (curated by Nathalia Mount)
Lumen Stanton Island, Atlantic Salt Factory, New York (curated by Ginger Schulick)
Possibility of a Painting, Chelsea Hotel, New York (curated by Tara de la Giza)
- 2009** *NADA*, Miami, Stephan Stoyanov Gallery, Miami
Auckland Art Fair, Nellie Castan Gallery, Auckland
Spectrum, ACGA Gallery, Federation Square, Melbourne
Salon de Refuse, SH Ervin Gallery, Sydney
Create, Sustainable Living Festival, Federation Square, Melbourne
- 2008** *CIGE*, Beijing Art Fair, Luxe Gallery, Beijing
Singular, Luxe Gallery, New York Galleries building, New York (curated by Stephan Stoyanov)
- 2007** *U Turn*, Glendale College Art Gallery, Los Angeles (curated by Larissa Hjorth and Kate Shaw [catalogue])
Places, Luxe Gallery, New York Galleries building, New York (curated by Stephan Stoyanov)
- 2006** *FIAC*, Luxe Gallery, Grand Palais and Louvre, Paris
Create, Sustainable Living Festival, BMW Edge, Federation Square, Melbourne

- 2005** *Paper Chase*, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne (curated by Olivia Polini)
Selekta, Westspace, Melbourne [catalogue]
- 2004** *Simply Drawn*, Luxe Gallery, New York Galleries building, New York (curated by Stephan Stoyanov)
Flora Nova, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne
- 2003** *Home Loan*, Delfin Display Homes 'Warehouse Conversions', Caroline Springs, curated by Kate Shaw and Larissa Hjorth
- 1998** *Postal Presence*, Stripp Gallery, Next Wave Festival (curated by Ester Pierini and Larissa Hjorth)
- 1997** *Just Looking*, City of Yarra and Gertrude Contemporary public art project (curated by Charlotte Day [catalogue])

Solo Exhibitions

- 2014** *ART 14*, Fehily Contemporary, London
Uncanny Valleys, The Cat Street Gallery, Hong Kong
Luminous Worlds, Gippsland Art Gallery, Victoria
- 2013** *Fjallkonan*, Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne
Auckland Art Fair, Fehily Contemporary, Auckland
Nightingale, Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney
- 2011** *Wilderness of Mirrors*, Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney
KIAF, Sullivan and Strumpf, COEX, Seoul
Liquefaction, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne
- 2010** *Irrational Geographic*, Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney
Phosphorescent, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne
Room 1, Flux Factory, New York
Spilling Twilight, Ryan Renshaw, Brisbane and 212 Projects, New York

- 2009** *Meridian*, Sullivan and Strumpf, Fine Art, Sydney
Underground Sun, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne
- 2008** *Visitant*, 24hrART Contemporary Artspace, Darwin
Drifter, Ryan Renshaw, Brisbane
Redux, Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney
- 2007** *Mirror Matter*, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne
Hell and Highwater, Sullivan and Strumpf, Sydney
- 2006** *Pattern Recognition*, Luxe Gallery, New York
InFlux, Alluvial Gallery, Bendigo
Lands End, Spacement Gallery, Melbourne
- 2005** *Earthy Delights*, Spacement Gallery, Melbournekug
- 2003** *Process Colour*, Conical Gallery, Melbourne
- 1999** *Lightlife*, Stripp Gallery, Melbourne
- 1998** *DJ Betty Ford*, Stripp Gallery, Melbourne
- 1995** *Just the Block*, collaboration with Natasha Johns-Messenger, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne



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