

Press Release

Brooklyn Museum



Written, directed, and produced by Duke Riley, cinematography by Alexandra Egan, and edited by Brett Land and Duke Riley. *Welcome Back to Wasteland Fishing, Episode Two, 2019*. Single-channel video, color, sound, 6 min. 12 sec. Courtesy of the artist

The Brooklyn Museum Presents *DEATH TO THE LIVING, Long Live Trash*, a Solo Exhibition by Artist Duke Riley

The artist has created a full-fledged maritime museum within the walls of the Brooklyn Museum, debuting approximately 250 new and recent works made entirely out of discarded plastic found in New York waterways.

DEATH TO THE LIVING, Long Live Trash, a critical, provocative look at the ecological impact of capitalism across centuries, connects the history of American maritime art to current themes of environmental justice. The exhibition presents a suite of new works by Brooklyn-based artist Duke Riley (American, born 1972). Many are shown in the Museum's seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American period rooms known as the Jan Martense Schenck and Nicholas Schenck houses, which will be open for visitors to step inside for the first time. This immersive display emphasizes the exhibition's historical context and creates a vivid dialogue between past and present environmental devastation. The artist has also selected examples of nineteenth-century scrimshaw from the Brooklyn Museum's collection to draw further parallels between the whaling and plastics industries, and between the decimation of whale populations and of New York's waterways. *DEATH TO THE LIVING, Long Live Trash* is on view through April 23, 2023.

The presentation opens with video footage of Riley catching several species of fish with a lure made from a used tampon applicator found on the beach. It continues with over 250 new and recent works from Riley's *Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum* series, which reenvisions traditional New England maritime crafts—such as sailor's valentines—through the use of bottle caps, syringes, and other plastic beach trash. The series also includes Riley's contemporary interpretation of scrimshaw (ink drawings historically etched into whale's teeth), replacing commemorative portraits of whaling

captains and shipowners with those of CEOs and lobbyists from the plastic, beverage, and petroleum industries, and swapping the medium's base material of bone with repurposed plastic containers. In addition, two of New York City's Superfund sites (Newtown Creek and the Gowanus Canal) are represented in Riley's signature map drawings, accompanied by interviews with his friends from the liveaboard boat communities who have been inhabiting these contaminated waterways for the past two decades.

Riley's practice often tackles political and social issues and examines the relationship between the precarious nature of the waterfront and transgressive culture. The artist works across drawing, printmaking, mosaic, sculpture, performance interventions, and complex multimedia installations, intertwining obscure historical events with populist myths to shine light on social and environmental issues that remain unsolved. From presenting historical reenactments, such as his elaborate recreation of a Revolutionary War submarine mission in *After the Battle of Brooklyn* (2007), to scouring New York and northeastern beaches for the trash that he transforms into his canvases, Riley seeks to emphasize what nearby communities have at stake in the devastation of their regional ecosystems. As part of the exhibition's call for visitors to assess the impact of their personal consumption of plastic, the Museum is developing partnerships with the New York Aquarium, among other institutions, and grassroots organizations to promote education around green consumer habits and the restoration of New York waterways.

"Duke Riley has consistently challenged dominant narratives around important social and political issues through his drawings, installations, and public art projects. Executed with a rollicking mischievous streak, Riley's work in this exhibition offers an exciting opportunity to explore his longtime passion for maritime history as well as contemporary environmental issues, particularly the detrimental impact of pollution and single-use plastics on New York's waterfront communities," says Liz St. George, Assistant Curator, Decorative Arts.

DEATH TO THE LIVING, Long Live Trash is on view through April 23, 2023. The exhibition is organized by Duke Riley and Liz St. George, Assistant Curator, Decorative Arts, with Shea Spiller, former Curatorial Assistant, Arts of the Americas and Europe, Brooklyn Museum.

Generous support for this exhibition is provided by the Brooklyn Museum's Contemporary Art Committee, Agnes Gund, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Seven Turns Fund.

Wallpaper donated by Flavor Paper, Brooklyn's wallpaper maker.