



# Swimming sensations

Painter and Printmaker **Anita Klein** strives to create artwork that shows how something feels rather than what it looks like, **Ella Foote** finds out about her new exhibition, **WATER**



“Water is so damn difficult, I don’t want to paint what it looks like, I want to paint what it feels like,” says Painter and Printmaker Anita Klein. “I feel like I have captured it well in some of my work, but other paintings are never as good as being in the water – but then that is what keeps you going as a painter, you never do a perfect painting. Giving myself the challenge to paint what it feels like to be in the water feels like I am going to be doing this until I die, but in a lot of ways I have kind of come up with a different language, a different way of expressing, I have been inventing. It is no good looking at the way other people have done it; they focus on what water looks like which is so distant to the kind of painting I do. I concentrate on the physical feeling, so I have had to reinvent, which at my age is a lovely challenge and has made me swim more too.”

**NEW EXHIBITION**

Anita Klein’s new exhibition, WATER, opens this month at Eames Fine Art Gallery in Bermondsey, London. Due to the pandemic, it is Anita’s first exhibition of the year and features a number of paintings of her swimming at London Royal Docks, which she discovered as a result of lockdown and pool closures earlier in the year. Over the past 40 years Anita has created over 2,000 different prints and hundreds of paintings. Her work is famous for representing family life and celebrating ordinary daily moments. This year Anita was selected as *Printmaker of the Year* by Printfest in the Lake District and was due to exhibit and be part of a residency. She had painted and printed swimming before, but it was always one image of many others, but with the Lake District exhibition she chose to concentrate on water only and how it feels. As a result, she now has a new body of work focused on the water. From swimming in the rain to showering at the pool after, the work is a collection of sensations in and around the water.

**FROM SYDNEY TO LONDON**

Anita has always been a swimmer. She was born in Sydney, Australia and moved to London when she was eleven. She studied at the Chelsea and Slade Schools of Art, first painting and later learning printmaking. She used to swim in a pool every day, swimming



Into Lake Windermere

outdoor in the summer and usually only when she was in Italy where she has a studio. “Before lockdown I was definitely more of a pool swimmer,” she says. “But I missed swimming so much, then I discovered the London Royal Docks and I realised it was possible to swim again. I was slightly nervous at first, because while I have dipped in rivers and lakes, I had never done any proper swimming. But with the circuits I could work out how far I had swum, it became a good work out. I have been going more and more, I don’t need to tell you how addictive it is! I have actually been back to the pool, but they seem really yucky now. Hot and unpleasant compared to swimming outside, so I am going to see if I can continue right through winter now. The majority of swimmers seem to be very professional in their wetsuits and there is me just swimming along. But I actually don’t want to go too fast because it is so beautiful. It is so much

better than in a pool as there is so much space, you don’t notice if people overtake you or you overtake them, because you have so much of your own water.”

**PAINTING THROUGH LOCKDOWN**

Despite the Lake District Printfest exhibition being postponed to 2021, Anita did head up to the Lakes, swam and painted, these will feature as part of the collection in the WATER exhibition. “I would have done four or five exhibitions by now normally,” says Anita. “However, without going from exhibition to exhibition I have done a lot more work. My work life is pretty isolated anyway, so lockdown didn’t make a huge difference, apart from not being able to see my children and grandchildren. Otherwise I work alone every day, so have just been painting away.” As a result, there is a lot of work up for sale and to be exhibited, it won’t all be able to be hung.

“I never say I am pleased with my work, because the whole point of being a painter is having great hopes for every piece and then it not being as perfect as you want, which makes you go on to do another and another,” she says. “Swimming at the Dock has been really beautiful. Have you ever noticed the reflections of the buildings? There are these buildings that are vertically striped in different colours along the water and their reflections are absolutely stunning. I have been completely distracted from swimming, treading water and just looking at the reflections. It has been such a surprise and lovely that something like lockdown has led to a whole new experience.”

**SWIMMING IN THE RAIN**

As well as the docks, paintings and prints feature wonderful swimming experiences like swimming in the rain and swimming alongside wildlife. “I think *Swimming in the Rain* will be one of the first to sell,” says Anita. “Not so much because of the painting, but because of the experience. It is such a lovely thing to swim when it rains. I think it is something about spending our lives rushing inside to avoid rain and when you are already in the water and wet anyway, it is such a joyous thing. As a child in Australia we would have weeks and weeks of boiling hot weather and then there would be this slight breeze, everyone would start to say cool change is coming, cool air is coming and you would get torrential rain for an hour or so, the temperature would drop about 20



The Grebe

degrees. I remember as a child putting our swimming things on and running up and down the road in the rain. The absolute joy of rain, it can be so beautiful.” Another painting features a grebe and fish, it reminds me a little of swimming in the River Thames. “We are in their world when we swim,” says Anita. “The way they look at you, like they are asking what the hell are you doing in my water!”

**CELEBRATING THE ORDINARY**

As well as the wilder water there are lido swims, swimming in the sun and family experiences of jumping and showering. The celebration of the

ordinary, Anita’s signature style is still strong. “If you look through a photo album it looks like life is just holidays and birthdays,” says Anita. “But it is what happens in-between those things, the small things you do – that is life.” Anita explains she is still adding to the collection, while she continues to swim at the docks. “It is completely life changing to swim outside, especially as it gets colder,” she says. “It makes me feel better for the rest of the day.”

**WATER will exhibit at Eames Fine Art Gallery, Bermondsey 10 Oct- 1 Nov. Visit: [www.eamesfineart.com/exhibitions/46/](http://www.eamesfineart.com/exhibitions/46/)**



Swimming in the Rain