

# ARTFORUM

## New York

### “Pearls”

**LUBOV**

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“I don’t enjoy it here / squatting on this island / looking picturesque and mythical,” says the narrator of Margaret Atwood’s 1974 poem “Siren Song,” a second-wave-feminist retort to Homer’s amphibious temptresses in the *Odyssey*. Today, it appears that sirens have been culturally domesticated, seen less as femmes fatales than as ethereal beauty inspirations for #mermaidhair and #seawitch looks. “Pearls,” curated by Natalie Yang, brings together works by seven female artists in their early twenties who reclaim the siren as a symbol of desire, ecosorcery, and vulnerability.

A recent New York transplant from California, Yang includes two of her own works in the show. The rainbow-colored whorls of her weaving *Untitled* (all works cited, 2017) recall oceanic eddies and the recesses of the female body, while the photograph *Brianna* captures a dark-haired Ophelia submerged in water. Photographers Lula Hyers and Grace Hazel also depict lithe sirens in unspoiled nature, updating the sexualized tableaux of Gen X-ers such as Ryan McGinley and Justine Kurland for the Instagram age.

More piercing, however, are the quasi-surrealist works that consider the sea as a site of mystery and danger. In Grace Milk’s gouache-and-collage painting *Bedtime Bacchanal*, narrow-eyed nymphs frolic with maritime creatures and a nubile aardvark-woman hybrid, bedecked with a body chain. Sofiyah McCormack, who lives in Sydney, shows watercolor-and-collage compositions based on the shape of the poisoned Citarum River in West Java, the region from which her family hails. *Imelda*, named after her grandmother, traces the river’s shape over three sheets of paper. McCormack’s angry *Chin up* shows us a tributary split into two dangling, ovarian forms, one bearing the cut-out image of a shark’s mouth dripping blood.

— Wendy Vogel

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