

# Wallpaper\*

ART | 10 DAYS AGO | BY PEI-RU KEH | PHOTOGRAPHY: STEPHEN KENT JOHNSON; PRODUCER: MICHAEL REYNOLDS

## Cape Cod exhibition explores legacy of artist David Wojnarowicz

In Cape Cod, exhibition 'Tidal Motion' explores the legacy of artist David Wojnarowicz. Though the artist's life was cut short by HIV/AIDS in 1992, his work continues to inspire a generation of contemporary artists



Installation view featuring David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Burning House)*, 1982 and *The Boys Go Off to War*, 1983

The natural beauty of Cape Cod, Massachusetts has long attracted venerable East Coast families, but it is the enclave of Provincetown on the peninsula that is known for its history as a haven for artists, intellectuals and the LGBTQ+ community.

Paying homage to both sides of the island's heritage is a captivating exhibition of works by the artist David Wojnarowicz, titled 'Tidal Motion'. Staged in a new project space in Provincetown run by the art dealer Joe Sheftel, who curated the show together with New York's PPOW Gallery, the first-ever solo presentation of Wojnarowicz's paintings, collages, stencils and photographs in Provincetown symbolically marks the 40th anniversary of when the first HIV cases were reported. Wojnarowicz succumbed to the disease in 1992, aged 37.



Exhibition curator Joe Sheftel outside his project space in historic Provincetown, MA

Although Wojnarowicz's work has been well-exhibited in the past, Sheftel and PPOW's Wendy Olsoff have fostered a unique dialogue by presenting his work and alongside that of contemporary artists, such as Leilah Babirye, rafa esparza, Oscar yi Hou and Cheyenne Julien amongst others. The contemporary works will be introduced and rotated weekly, thus creating a thought-provoking cadence for the show's duration.

'David Wojnarowicz is one of the artists who inspired me to become involved with art,' shares Sheftel. 'Seeing his work in my 20s opened up ideas to me of what was possible both visually and politically; how art can function as a vehicle for change. Wojnarowicz has such a venerated position in the art world that I became interested in exploring how his legacy continues to influence younger generations of artists. I had numerous conversations with Wendy about which younger artists are inspiring us right now, who we are looking at, and how a different generation is addressing some of the same themes of governmental indifference, the power of community, the relationship between individuals and the natural environment, and making art that reflects those concerns today.'





Installation views of the exhibition David Wojnarowicz 'Tidal Motion'

Water is a recurring feature in Wojnarowicz's work. Throughout his life and practice, he often returned to lakes, rivers and oceans as a means of escaping his so-called 'pre-invented existence'. In the artist's work, the theme of water is often linked to dreams and myths of emergence, in which the protagonist ascends to metamorphosis after submergence in a deep abyss.

Sheftel says: 'There is an attention given to Wojnarowicz's connection to the natural environment and the importance of water and nature as an escape from the continual pressures and regulations of existence.' Whether representing purification, a comforting oblivion, or merging birth, death, sex, solitude, movement, heaven or hell, Wojnarowicz's work dives into 'the continual rippling waters, the indigo that claims it all,' as he once put it.

The significance of Provincetown as a backdrop to the show should also not be overlooked. Sheftel explains, 'Provincetown has such a wonderful community of creators and artists that I hoped to share artwork that had never before been shown in town. With this exhibition, I intended to convey the breadth of Wojnarowicz's practice along with the continuing relevance of his art.'



Installation view featuring Nash Glynn, *Untitled*, 2021

‘It [also] really appealed to us because galleries are opening in places like Palm Beach and the Hamptons,’ adds Olsoff. ‘We found it much more in keeping with David’s and the gallery’s ethos to show work in Provincetown, especially being in the midst of a global pandemic and on the 40th anniversary of the first reported case of what would eventually be known as AIDS. It seemed like a powerful and pertinent moment.’ \*



David Wojnarowicz, *Untitled (Burning House)*, 1982, and *Untitled (eye w/ ants)* from the *Ant* series, 1988-89



Installation view, David Wojnarowicz, *From the Four Elements*, 1990 A - Earth and Wind: 9-color lithograph B - Fire and Water: 10-color lithograph



David Wojnarowicz, *Jean Genet Masturbating in Metteray Prison*, 1983

INFORMATION

'Tital Motion', until 31 August, Provincetown, MA. ....

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