

For immediate release.

**Alexander Lee: *The Departure of the Fish***

**November 4 – December 16**

**Kinkead Contemporary**

6029 Washington Blvd.  
Culver City, CA 90232

Organized by Scenic



Kinkead Contemporary is proud to present *The Departure of the Fish* a major sculpture installation and a first solo exhibition by Alexander Lee.

Foreboding yet sublime, *The Departure of the Fish* alludes to an underwater sanctuary teeming with fish & coral, arms & legs – all cast in glistening black volcanic sand. Exploring the interplay between mythology and history, souvenir and relic, Lee's ambitious installation takes its title from a creation myth of his native Tahiti.

The legend tells of a volcanic island that was transformed into a fish, swam from the mythological place of *Havai'i* to the South Pacific and then became land again; hence its name, *Tâ-hiti*, which means "transplanted." For Lee this creation myth of island formation has combined with a more recent historical fact: the 1973 tragic crash of a Pan Am airliner thirty

seconds after take-off from Papeete, whose victims were never found - save for the occasional limb pulled out of a shark's belly by a fisherman.

These stories left their mark on the artist, who spent his boyhood snorkeling off Tahiti's black sand beaches. *The Departure of the Fish* marks Lee's relationship to these images – and to all of our experiences of the gruesome contemporary spectacles of war and destruction. And yet, this is a beautiful and transformative installation. From death and decay, life springs in rebirth.

Working on-site at Kinkead Contemporary, Lee has cast dozens of body parts, fish, shells, and pieces of coral from a glittering amalgam of black sand and resin, creating artifacts that reference both the geological formation of Tahiti and the people who have crossed its shores: the tourists, the colonists, victims of disasters, and even Lee's own Chinese ancestry in the islands of French Polynesia. The feet cast in black sand also reference the expression "pied noir", or black foot – used to describe French citizens born in North African colonies.

Arrayed upon a stage of baby blue identical to Pan Am's trademark color – which has recurred throughout Lee's work - dismembered arms and legs with protruding coral growths mimic the aquatic environment of Tahiti's coral gardens. "It's sort of a mini biosphere," notes Lee. "You can see the ecology in the sculpture, and I think that's part of the salvation of it. It's a limb, but you can see the life cycle in it." The platform also recalls traditional Polynesian *marae*, a sacred place which served both religious and social purposes in ancient Polynesian societies.

*The Departure of the Fish* inhabits the "poetic gap" of the imagination – a magical space in which we can connect to history and humanity through something as simple as a shade of baby blue paint or a trail of black sand.

### **About the Artist**

Alexander Lee was born in Tahiti. He left to study fashion design in Paris and art in New York, where he received his M.F.A. from Columbia University and an M.P.S. from the Interactive Telecommunications Program at New York University. Since graduating, Lee has been Matthew Barney's studio manager and has overseen Barney's recent *Drawing Restraint* survey

exhibition in museums around the world, and acted as Production Manager on *Drawing Restraint 9*.

Alexander Lee's work has appeared in numerous group shows throughout Europe and New York, from *Arte Contemporanea* in Milan to *La Superette* at Deitch Projects. *The Departure of the Fish* at Kinkead Contemporary is his first solo exhibition.

### **About the Organizer**

Scenic is a New York-based arts advisory and curatorial agency founded by Simon Watson and Craig Hensala. With 35-years combined experience in the contemporary arts scene, Scenic has created more than 20 solo and group exhibitions over the past three years in association with clients such as Amnesty International, Bergdorf Goodman, Chanel, Coalition for the Homeless/ARTWALK NY, Susan & Michael Hort Collection, Kavi Gupta Gallery, LightBox, Marc Selwyn Fine Art, Perry Rubenstein Gallery, Planned Parenthood/LA, Roberts & Tilton, Rhona Hoffman Gallery and others.

### **About the Gallery**

Kinkead Contemporary is a new contemporary art gallery dedicated to emerging artists. Founded by collector John Kinkead, the gallery's mission is to introduce new voices through an ambitious series of solo and curated group exhibitions. Over the next 24-months a series of co-curated group shows are planned in concert with leading emerging gallerists from Chicago and New York. A native of California, John Kinkead is a graduate of both The Art Institute of Chicago and Cranbrook Academy of Art. A passionate art collector and patron, he is a member of the MOCA Contemporaries as well as LACMA's Print and Drawing Council.

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