ALMINE RECH

Peter Peri
Course

Jun 18 — Jul 31, 2020 | London

Almine Rech London is pleased to present *Course*, an exhibition of recent work by London-based artist Peter Peri, on view from June 18 to August 1, 2020. This will be the artist's fourth exhibition with the gallery.

Candy-striped beams radiate around a quadrilateral shape, bleeding. Hand drawn with a ruler, aerosol paint and flecks of ink, the coloured lines exude demonic symmetry. Staring at Peter Peri's large painting *Super Topology* (2019) resembles something like riding a carousel at a haunted, Victorian-style fun fair, whirling into the dark. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the artist's earlier projects were inspired by horror novels. I sense the phantom of writer H.P. Lovecraft lurking beneath the saccharine grid on view here. In the 1920s Lovecraft – who was a real noxious ghoul – drifted around New England's white, neo-Gothic buildings and picket-fenced, emerald lawns, penning weird tales inimitable in their vistas of despair and bone-soaking chill. Peri's paintings, such as *The Call* (2005), referenced Lovecraft's 'Cthulhu mythos': a cycle of stories about a Leviathan-like creature who rises from the depths of time to torment humanity. Peri's spiralling compositions remind me of Lovecraftian narrative arcs: the writer's monstrous 'circling' around a cold space. They synthesize a vortex and pull you into the centre.

As titles such as *Super Topology* suggest, the works are also imbued with the cerebral gloss of early twentieth century Modernism. In revolutionary-era Russia, for instance, artists painted geometric shapes against plain grounds in a visual enactment of radical philosophy. They probed deep mathematics and the laws of physics within their practices. And then watched them fall apart. Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist oil painting *Black Square* (1915) depicted a void of infinite blackness that swirled all logic into oblivion. It invoked a darkling lunarscape lifted from the Futurist opera Victory Over the Sun (1913), which imagined a solar system where the sun is caged inside a concrete cube, dripping crimson fire. Nearby, in Peri's drawing *Soldiers March* (2020), the artist smudges Suprematist sublimity with old-fashioned experiments in opticality. Created using a magnifying glass and pencil on unbleached paper, up close the hairline-like markings shimmer and flow. (The spidery texture is disarmingly real – I wonder if each strand may horripilate in cool air.) From afar, however, the metallic contours transmogrify into a jagged, three-dimensional structure, wielding points as sharp as a silver dagger. Step forward and disembodied faces float within the tan, leather-soft backdrop, gently rousing you out of the abstraction's spell. The ground's naturally occurring dots and slashes become an angelic eye, or an aquiline nose, with the wave of a warlock's wand.

Looking at Peri's paintings can also resemble falling down a pictorial wishing-well. In *Tower of Rising Clouds* (2019), for example, viewers are transported back through history's silvery mist to the ninth century court of imperial China, where the painter Mi Fu is blotching a pane of silk with ink, glittering wetly. Dark, cursive brushstrokes and nude flushes feign the Chinese landscape. Back to the present: Peri's vertical seams simulate three-dimensional curves. Their compositional arrangement reanimates Fu's undulating hilltops as if now levitating in front of the canvas. Elsewhere, in *Blind Field 3* (2020), bluish grooves cascade down another graphic landscape. Collectively, these works evoke the ancient Chinese painting technique and belief in 'dragon veins', along which waterfalls, mountains and luxurious greenery conjured the Earth's enchantment. It's as though the exhibition were the result of some transtemporal, art-historical meeting, existing, like a Lovecraftian extra-terrestrial, within the cracks between dimensions. 'Course' also refers to progressions of time. The idea being that the works achieve, what I would describe as a 'visual time', from a sensation of their own making. But the noun 'course' also delineates a process in architecture: a slow, 'continuous horizontal layer' of stone within another wall. Peri's rainbow streams are embedded within thick black grounds. He tells me this is a visual metaphor paralleling earlier artistic experiments with temporality. In H.G. Wells' novella The Time Machine (1895), for example, the Earth melts into a state of entropy. As the protagonist time-warps they witness, and are sometimes sequestered within, layers of decaying rock. In the final pages Wells drops you onto what remains of the planet's sweeping, white sands to watch a dying star. The smouldering sun grows to a perilous size, fading red.

Gabriella Pounds