

## Al Taylor: A / LOW / HA

### *The Hawaiian Works*

March 5–April 18, 2020  
537 West 20th Street, New York

Opening reception:  
Thursday, March 5, 6–8 PM



Al Taylor, *Bondage Duck*, 1998. © The Estate of Al Taylor.  
Courtesy The Estate of Al Taylor and David Zwirner

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of sculptures, drawings, and prints by the American artist Al Taylor at the gallery's 537 West 20th Street location in New York. Spanning the last decade of his career, the works on view focus on Taylor's fascination with Hawaii—its scenic beauty, history, oceanic culture, and the daily lifestyle of the Hawaiian people.

Taylor first traveled to Hawaii in 1987, working as an art handler for a hotel developer on Maui and then again on Kauai in 1988. These initial visits sparked the artist's curiosity and became an important source of study and inspiration in his work over the ensuing years. Using his characteristic humor and unique sense of perspective, these works examine ordinary objects such as plastic leis, broomsticks, and foam fishing net floats, and explore a range of the natural phenomena that he observed, including reflected sunlight and the flow patterns of ocean waves. To celebrate his fiftieth birthday in 1998, Taylor visited Kauai and the big island of Hawaii. Upon his return—and inspired by his Hawaiian experience—the artist created an explosion of new drawings and sculptures, which, following his untimely death in March 1999, would turn out to be his last works.

Taylor's Hawaiian works demonstrate the fluid relationship between three-dimensional constructions, drawings, and prints within his oeuvre, and the way in which the process of working in each of these mediums informed the others. One of the earliest works on view, Taylor's 1989 print portfolio *Ten Common (Hawaiian Household) Objects* developed from a series of drawings made following the artist's initial visits to the islands. At once formal and irreverent, these etchings present nearly abstracted representations of often overlooked, everyday items that he observed during his trips, including a window screen, a strip of fly paper, flip flops, and mosquito coils.

Two groups of the sculptures and drawings—*Bondage Ducks* from 1998–1999 and *Layson a Stick*, which the artist worked on intermittently in the late 1980s and early 1990s—further reveal Taylor's unique sensibility and interest in rethinking how we see found objects. Although they were made almost a decade apart, both series demonstrate the artist's precise use of color, as well as his fascination with language, phonetics, and wordplay. *Layson a Stick* belongs to a larger body of works that incorporate segments of factory-painted broomsticks the artist had scavenged from the street trash in New York City. Here, Taylor drapes the broomsticks, which jut out from the wall into the space of the viewer, with colorful plastic leis, creating a lewd visual pun. Similarly titled with suggestive innuendo, Taylor's *Bondage Ducks* are composed of foam fishing net buoys he found washed up on the beach in Kauai. After the artist reoriented the elliptical shape of the floats by slicing them in half, gluing them together at ninety degree angles, and then literally binding them with multi-colored rubber bands, these assemblages assume facial features that simultaneously elicit both comical and mournful emotions. Mounted on bamboo garden stakes, the totemic presence of the artist's *Bondage Ducks* subliminally conjure Hawaiian Tiki god figures, African Dogon masks, and Donald Duck.

Several bodies of work from 1998–1999 underscore Taylor’s facility with color and form. In his *Counting Without Riggers* series, the artist makes further use of the beachcombed floats, some painted in vibrant colors, which he stacked and interconnected with bamboo stakes. The wordplay in his title and the elongated shapes of the sculptures with their extended “arms” evoke the outrigger canoes used for centuries in Hawaii. These three-dimensional works in turn spawned a group of brightly hued drawings in which two-dimensional space is playfully expanded. In the related *Fish Float* drawings, the artist uses multiple layers of rich black washes to render the undulating movement of water above and beneath the surface of the ocean. Images of the foam “floaters” also appear in some of Taylor’s *Wave Theory* drawings, faux-scientific charts inspired by ancient Polynesian navigation techniques, in which he maps out his theoretical observations of the ebb and flow of wave swells.

One of his most painterly groups of work on paper, the *Rat Guards* series was prompted by observing the reflection of sunlight on bands of sheet metal wrapped around palm tree trunks to prevent Hawaiian jungle rats from climbing up to pilfer coconuts. Encompassing drawings in bold black ink and gouache as well as compositions in sensuous colors of acrylic often mixed with luminescent mica mortar, Taylor’s *Rat Guards* hark back to his abstract geometric paintings of the 1970s. At times seeming to bend and wave in the breeze and at others standing erect and still, the depth of field and gestural brushwork in these attenuated tree forms elucidate Taylor’s lifelong quest to expand the possibilities of vision by exploring meaning and finding new ways to experience space.

The exhibition at David Zwirner will coincide with *The Drawings of Al Taylor*, curated by Isabelle Dervaux at The Morgan Library & Museum, New York, on view through May 24, 2020.

At 5:30 PM on Wednesday, March 11, the gallery will host a panel discussion on Taylor’s Hawaiian works featuring Isabelle Dervaux, writer Mimi Thompson, and artist Stanley Whitney, moderated by Lucas Zwirner. RSVP to Michelle Kim [michelle@davidzwirner.com](mailto:michelle@davidzwirner.com).

Al Taylor (1948–1999) was born in Springfield, Missouri, and received a B.F.A. from the Kansas City Art Institute in 1970. He moved to New York later that year, where he would continue to live and work until his death, in 1999. His first solo exhibition took place in 1986 at the Alfred Kren Gallery in New York. His work would go on to be shown in numerous exhibitions in America and Europe, including solo presentations at the Kunsthalle Bern (1992) and the Kunstmuseum Luzern (1999), both in Switzerland.

Other recent solo exhibitions were presented at Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2006 and 2010); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark (2011); Santa Monica Museum of Art (2011); The Glass House Painting Gallery, New Canaan, Connecticut (2014); and High Museum of Art, Atlanta (2017–2018).

Work by the artist is represented in a number of prominent public collections, including the British Museum, London; Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Glenstone Museum, Potomac, Maryland; High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Morgan Library & Museum, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, among others.

The Estate of Al Taylor has been represented by David Zwirner since 2007. This is the seventh solo exhibition of the artist’s work, following on: *Al Taylor: Early Work* (2008); *Al Taylor: Rim Jobs and Sideeffects* (2010); *Al Taylor: Pass the Peas and Can Studys* (2012); *Al Taylor* (2014) at our Mayfair, London, space; *Al Taylor: Pet Stains, Puddles, and Full Gospel Neckless* (2015); and *Al Taylor: Early Paintings* (2017).

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