

## Hugh Scott-Douglas

CASEY KAPLAN

When British artist Rebecca Moss boarded the container ship *Hanjin Geneva* last summer to begin a “traveling” residency arranged by Access Gallery in Vancouver, she expected to arrive in Shanghai twenty-three days later. But after the craft’s operator, the Seoul-based Hanjin Shipping Company, went bust a mere week into the voyage, Moss ended up in Tokyo instead, the *Geneva* having been denied access to its intended port amid worries that docking fees would go unpaid. The artist made it onto dry land just a couple of days later than planned, but the crew members of numerous other Hanjin ships weren’t so lucky, remaining adrift while their destinations were renegotiated. While briefly worrisome for Moss, this strange turn of events finally illuminated what was so interesting about her residency, casting light on the vagaries of an extensive but—to most people—invisible system of global trade.

In “Trade Winds,” his solo debut at Casey Kaplan, Hugh Scott-Douglas also navigated international waters, but from the more stable perspective of a studio in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Using software designed to track sea transport, Scott-Douglas has produced a series of fragmentary maps that concentrate on tidal and weather conditions. After removing any images of oceangoing vessels and imposing his own color schemes, the artist printed the resultant designs on canvas, producing a set of quasi-abstract panels in which swarms of tiny arrows—indicating the direction and interaction of wind, current, and wave as traced by multiple satellites—punctuate mottled areas suggestive of military camouflage. Each work’s title refers to the

commercial route it pictures, so *Boomerang* (all works 2016), for example, shows the area traversed by a container vessel as it sails the “NEA Boomerang–Westbound” route from Yokohama, Japan, to Fremantle, Australia.

Applying patches of glossy resin to augment, minimally, the thin, fuzzy look of ink-jet printing, Scott-Douglas renders visible—if not fully comprehensible—the layering of data inherent to such coded representations, digital or otherwise. The cumulative impression is one of a system in constant flux, which can be mapped in enormous detail as it changes but cannot be reliably predicted. As the US electorate now knows to its cost, any information—even when gathered in massive quantities—may prove woefully misleading as an indicator of future events. The long-haul journeys on which Scott-Douglas’s works center (albeit obliquely, through the visual absence of their participants) are also necessarily unstable, defined by economic relationships that are subject to continual reconfiguration or cessation according to shifts in political regime, just as all markets—not least that for contemporary art—are vulnerable to boom and bust. (And as Allan Sekula and Noël Burch emphasize in their 2010 documentary film *The Forgotten Space*, the container-shipping business has a disheartening reliance on cheap labor.)

Also on display was *Shudder*, a looped video shown on a large monitor set horizontally into the top of a boxlike pedestal. Essentially the record of an air compressor filling up, the work offers a view of the artist’s studio floor from the perspective of a camera attached to the top of the machine. For most of the video’s two-minute, nineteen-second duration, the picture oscillates so rapidly as to be unreadable. But finally, as the compressor achieves full pressure, the image of a power cable curled across a paint-splattered surface snaps into focus. Again, Scott-Douglas directs his attention toward a force—here that of the air itself—that ordinarily goes unseen (and thus, he implies, unconsidered). But where the prints’ visual richness counterbalances a theme that, while pertinent, is also familiar, *Shudder* is spartan indeed, and functioned here primarily as a concluding period to an ultimately rather circumscribed exhibition.

—Michael Wilson



Hugh Scott-Douglas,  
*Boomerang*, 2016,  
inkjet print and resin  
on canvas, 80 × 53".