



May 23 -
June 30, 2024

Duke Riley
The Repatriation of King Skellig Mör

**PRAISE
SHADOWS**
ART GALLERY



Leave it to Duke Riley to weave together a narrative involving an Irish goat, a talking seal, battleships, Boston history, and lots of plastic trash. These are the elements of discovery in his solo exhibition at Praise Shadows titled *The Repatriation of King Skellig Mör*. Riley, a Boston native based in Brooklyn, broadens the repertoire of work shown in his recent Brooklyn Museum solo exhibition *Death to the Living: Long Live Trash*. The presentation includes new iterations of his acclaimed scrimshaws, sailor's valentines, and the debut of a new type of work inspired by Victorian-era ruby glass.

The exhibition's namesake, Skellig Mör, was a real-life celebrity goat that was brought to Boston from Killorglin, in County Kerry, Ireland. The animal was the subject of headlines across *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times* in the early 1900s. Riley, known for his layered visual chronicles of the entwined and often absurd interplays of institutional power and the natural world, became fascinated with the fate of Skellig Mör. The goat was exhibited and crowned at the 1905 Puck Fair in Killorglin before being purchased and brought to Boston by the Knights of St. Brendan with the intention of starting their own puck fair. After the organization splintered, a contentious dispute over the ownership and possession of Skellig Mör dragged out over the next four years and was highly publicized in *The Boston Globe* and *The New York Times*. Ultimately, the courts ruled in 1909 that Skellig Mör was to be donated to the U.S. Navy and live aboard the USS Vermont, a battleship built in Quincy, Massachusetts. Skellig Mör's time aboard the navy vessel was cut tragically short as he died on July 4th, 1909. According to press clippings, his body was stuffed and displayed in the main hall of a Boston museum.

This exhibition is the beginning of Riley’s attempt to locate the remains of the goat and repatriate it to Killorglin, Ireland. The centerpiece is a scrimshaw (No. 418 of the Poly S, Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum) made from a liquid detergent bottle found in the coastal waters of the U.S. eastern seaboard. The front of the bottle depicts a Naval officer kneeling and weeping at the gravestone of Skellig Mör. The surface of the salvaged plastic is treated to mimic the grains and coloration of the whale bone typical of traditional scrimshaw.

While Skellig Mör’s posthumous repatriation is the primary source of inspiration to Riley, he dedicates a scrimshaw bottle to another Boston-area celebrity: a harbor seal at the New England Aquarium named Hoover, who became a public sensation in the 1980s for its ability to “speak” with what sounded like a Boston accent. Hoover was able to imitate basic human speech, and he was renowned for his guttural exclamations of, “Hello, there!” and “Come over here!” For an exhibition like this, from a mind like Riley’s, it’s only fitting that another local animal hero should have the last word.



*No. 424 of the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum, 2024
DR176*

Ruby Glass





This exhibition marks the debut of Riley’s “ruby glass” bottle sculptures, the first new artistic genre he has introduced since the Brooklyn Museum exhibition in 2022. Inspired by a piece of ruby glass in his grandmother’s Cape Cod home, this set of “ruby glass” bottles (made from discarded single use plastic) recall a time in the late 1800s and early 1900s when ruby glass was a popular souvenir sold at beachside tourist destinations. Riley uses nostalgia for this material to connect the dots between this moment during the Industrial Era—when leisure time became more common among working Americans—and the United States’ strident flexing of its Imperialist muscle on nations following the Spanish-American War. Riley’s “ruby glass” bottles are installed together with found vintage ruby glass, and each new piece is engraved with depictions of the five destroyers built at the Quincy shipyard that participated in Theodore Roosevelt’s 1907-1909 global tour de force known as The Great White Fleet, a showcase of American naval domination.

Five Boston Battleships and Their Accompanying Mascots 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, vintage Ruby Glass,
vintage carved wood display shelf
37.5 x 48 x 4.5 inches
(DR177)





Sailor's Valentines





A new sailor's valentine mosaic measuring 8x8 feet towers over the show. Its overwhelming stature and meticulous assemblage of multicolored shells and found plastic trash from local waterways (plastic syringes, buoy parts, tampon applicators, disposable lighters, to name a few) immerse the viewer into the reality of the ocean's pollution crisis. While traditional sailor's valentines—popular between the 1830 and 1890s—were gifted by sailors to their wives as sentimental keepsakes during their voyage away from home, this contemporary work is a striking and profound message addressing our climate emergency.



**Proud Winner of the Guinness Book
of World Records Largest Sailors
Valentine in the World, 2024**
Found plastic trash, mahogany frame
8 x 8 feet x 4.5 inches
(DR112)





Order From Prescription History, 2020
Found plastic trash, mahogany frame
67 x 67 x 4 inches
(DR105)



Order From Prescription History was on view in Riley's Brooklyn Museum solo exhibition in 2022-2023 (center)

Scrimshaw



Scrimshaw Sets



Three Articles Selected for the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum (No. 403, 319, and 184), 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
22.25 x 15.5 x 3 inches (framed)
(DR147)



Five Articles Selected for the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum (428, 429, 325, 417, and 422), 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
36.5 x 18 x 6.25 inches (framed)
(DR141)



Four Articles Selected for the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum (No. 204, 419, 408, and 416), 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
27.5 x 16.5 x 4.75 inches
(framed)
(DR145)



Five Articles Selected for the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum (No. 198, 411, 390, 415, and 9), 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
33 x 17.25 x 5 inches (framed)
(DR142)

Individual Scrimshaw



No. 420 of the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum, 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
7 x 3.75 x 1.75 inches (object)
13.75 x 11 x 4 inches (framed)
(DR175)



No. 418 of the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum, 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
9.5 x 6 x 3.25 inches (object)
16.75 x 15 x 5.25 inches (framed)
(DR139)



No. 421 of the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum, 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
9.5 x 5.5 x 3.25 inches (object)
16.75 x 15 x 5.25 inches (framed)
(DR140)



No. 424 of the Poly S. Tyrene Memorial Maritime Museum, 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic, ink, wax
9.5 x 3.25 x 3.25 inches (object)
16 x 10.25 x 4.25 inches (framed)
(DR176)

Scrimshaw Cassettes Series



Scrimshaw Cassettes



Kill Kill Kill - Jerry's Kids, 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR151)



Do Somethin' Crazy - Bosstones, 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR155)



Maelstrom, 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR153)



All That You Have is Your Sole - Tracy Chapman, 2024

Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR169)

Scrimshaw Cassettes



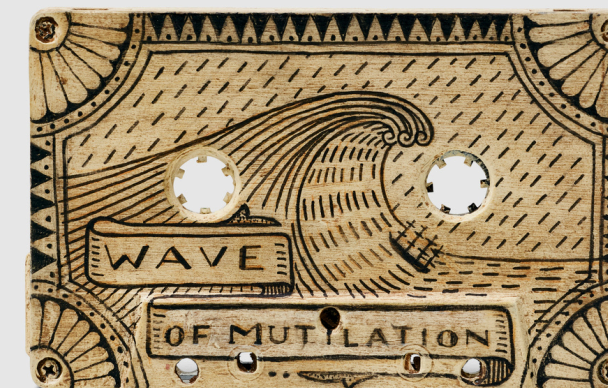
Tugboat - Galaxie 500, 2024
Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR168)



Back on the Map - Slapshot, 2024
Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR150)

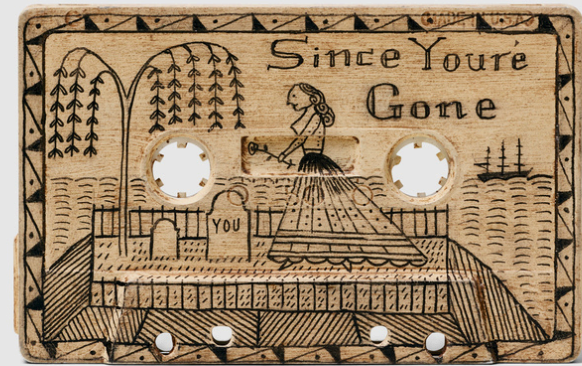


Apocolypso - Bim Skala Bim, 2024
Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR170)

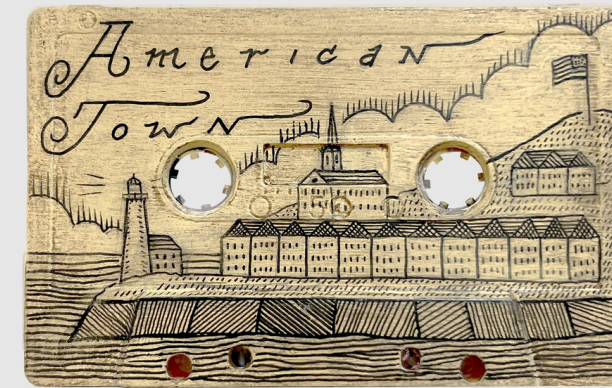


Wave of Mutilation - Pixies, 2024
Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR172)

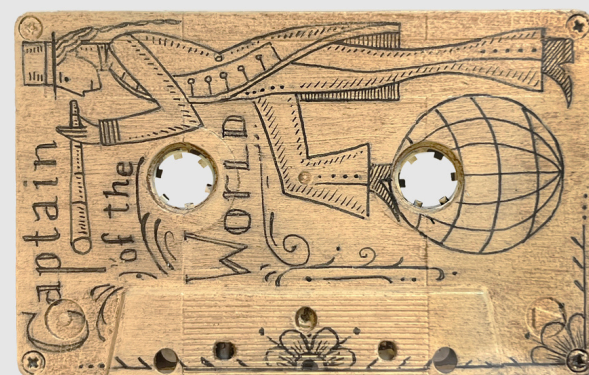
Scrimshaw Cassettes



Since You're Gone - The Cars, 2024
Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR173)



American Town - The Freeze, 2024
Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR180)



Captain of the World - Sam Black Church, 2024
Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR178)



No More Mister Nice Guy - Gang Starr, 2024
Painted, salvaged plastic
Framed: 6 x 8 x 1.5 inches
(DR179)

Riley's alluring fishing lure installations tell the story of the weapon's origins and the current state of our polluted oceans.

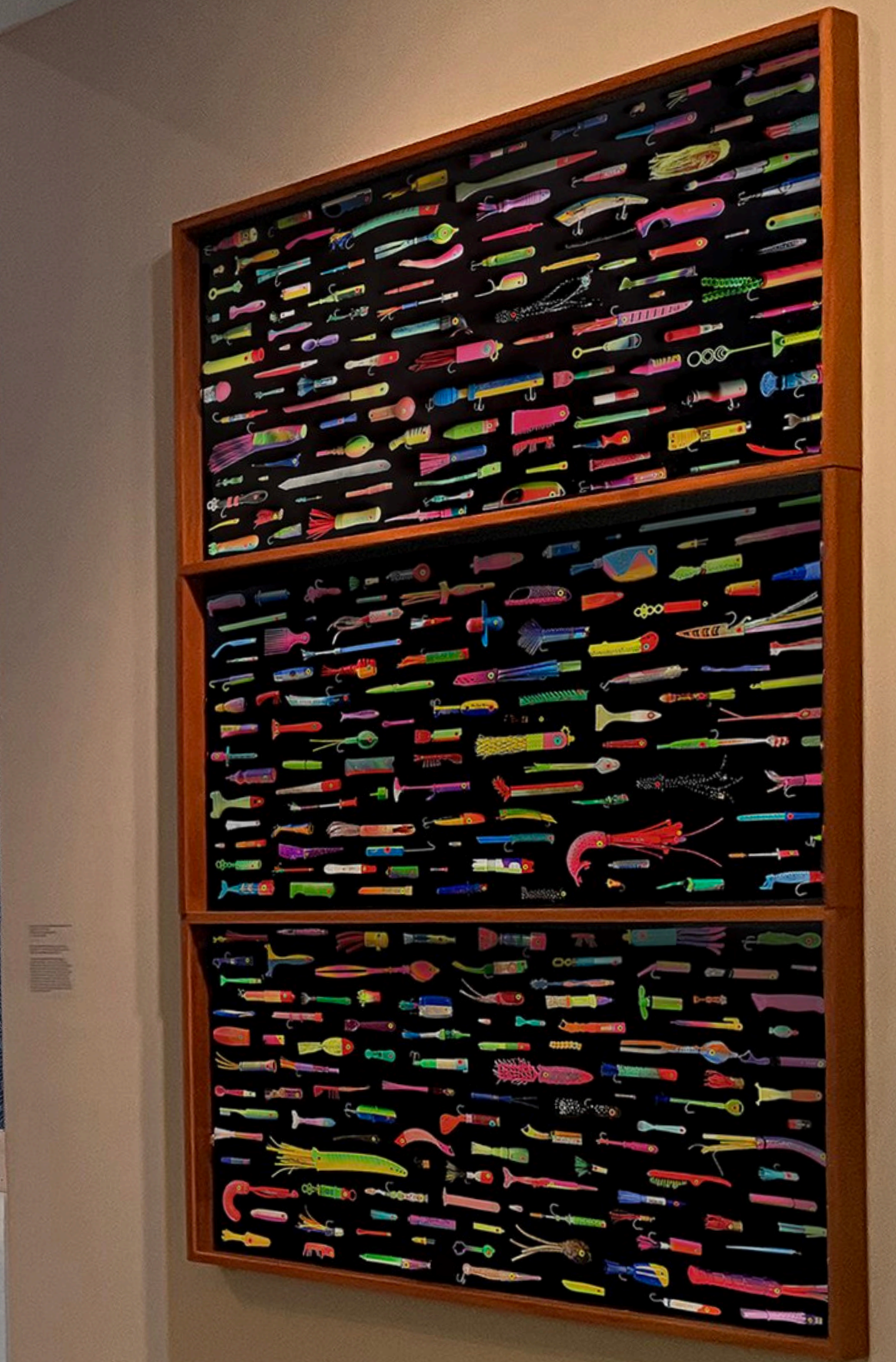
Considered an anthropological breakthrough thousands of years ago, the use of a fish-shaped object tied to a hook marked the first time when humans created a weapon in the likeness of an animal to catch and kill it.

It is estimated that 14 million tons of plastic enter our oceans each year, and the abundance of invisible microplastics contribute to a further devastation of the ecosystem. Discarded plastics are ingested whole by fish and birds, mistaking them for food.

Arranged like insect specimens, Riley's triptych **Monument to Five Thousand Years of Temptation and Deception V, VI, VII, 2022**, was originally exhibited in his Brooklyn Museum solo exhibition *Death to the Living: Long Live Trash*. At Praise Shadows, two of the cases will be on view and available as individual works, while a third will be exhibited in an upcoming art fair. All are available individually or as a complete set.

Monument to Five Thousand Years of Temptation and Deception V, VI, VII, 2022
Reclaimed ocean plastic, paint, fishhooks, 82 1/2 × 68 1/2 × 4 inches





Displayed as a triptych in Riley's Brooklyn Museum solo exhibition in 2022-2023



Monument to Five Thousand Years of Temptation and Deception V, 2022
Reclaimed ocean plastic, paint, fishhooks, 27 1/2 × 68 1/2 × 4 inches
(DR137)

This work is not on view at Praise Shadows



Monument to Five Thousand Years of Temptation and Deception VI, 2022

Reclaimed ocean plastic, paint, fishhooks, 27 1/2 × 68 1/2 × 4 inches

(DR135)



Monument to Five Thousand Years of Temptation and Deception VII, 2022
Reclaimed ocean plastic, paint, fishhooks, 27 1/2 × 68 1/2 × 4 inches
(DR136)

Duke Riley is a Boston-born artist based in Brooklyn, NY. A former tattoo artist, he lived in a pigeon coop while attending RISD in the early 1990s before earning his MFA from Pratt Institute. He taught art in underserved communities and domestic violence shelters in Boston and New York City in the late 1990s and early 2000s while continuing to pursue his art practice.

Over the past two decades, he has produced critically acclaimed works that explore the interface of institutional power and the natural world. Along with his highly intricate drawings, mosaics, and scrimshaw made from maritime detritus, he has carried out a litany of complex subversive projects including being arrested for piloting a homemade submarine into the security zone of the Queen Mary 2 in New York Harbor, trained pigeons smuggling cigars from Cuba to Key West, a suitcase of bed bugs that appeared in a Trump hotel, flying 2000 pigeons wearing LED lights over the East River from an aircraft carrier, and an action movie written and filmed by inmates in a Somali pirate detention center.

Duke Riley has had solo exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum, Queens Museum of Art, MOCA Cleveland, Havana Biennale, the Sydney Biennale, Mercosul Biennial, and Philigraphica. His work is in the permanent collections of the National Gallery of Art, The Whitney Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Boston Public Library, and more. Riley divides the year between his studio in the Brooklyn Navy Yard where he still keeps pigeons, and a studio on a boat in Rhode Island where he collects ocean plastic.



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