

albertz benda

SARAH LEE: DEEPER
SEPTEMBER 10 – OCTOBER 10, 2026
ALBERTZ BENDA, NEW YORK, NY



Before Dark, 2026. Oil on Canvas, 70 x 80 inches

New York, NY | albertz benda is pleased to present *Deeper*, Sarah Lee's second solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from September 10 – October 10, 2026. In this new body of work, Lee expands her focus from nightscapes to waterscapes, opening new compositional, material, and conceptual lines of inquiry.

No humans are depicted; instead, a narrative emerges through Lee's manipulation of the horizon line, a fundamental structure of the landscape. Where her earlier nocturnal scenes – snow fields, darkened forests, starlit skies – were viewed from above, here the perspective shifts across the works. In paintings such as *Before Dark*, the composition is evenly divided between mountains and water. As one progresses through the exhibition, the horizon rises gradually until the viewer is fully submerged, where new sightlines and rules of physics are established.

This perspective challenges the sensory norms of Western landscape traditions. One thinks of Caspar David Friedrich's Romantic landscapes, where a male figure on a mountain peak turns his back on the viewer and gazes down upon the world, or of nineteenth-century American landscape painting's portrayal of "empty" land waiting for settlers: a stable, aerial view that enforces a privileged position over the environment. In such traditions, water remains a mirror-like surface, passively reflecting the world above it.

In Lee's work, it is the landscape that dominates the viewer. Her oil paint registers this directly: lustrous texture and layered brushwork render the resistance and pressure of the underwater world, while varying saturations of blue – from luminous turquoise to deep ultramarine – reflect its depth. Different brushes distinguish land from sea, with extremely fine, soft brushes reserved for water and rougher, more textured ones for land, rock, and current. Together they capture the

subtle movements of aquatic plants, the viscosity of water mingled with oil and other substances, and refracting light and shadow moving through turbulence.

Where her previous work drew from nature photographs and documentaries, Lee's practice has gradually pulled away from direct reference in favor of fragmentary visual sources: images created at the edge of the known, where documentation and imagination blur. Pulling from illustrations of wave patterns in hydraulic journals and nineteenth-century science fiction, such as Alphonse de Neuville's plates for Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and William Saville-Kent's fantastical marine botanical illustrations, she constructs scenes that are logically plausible yet visually unfamiliar, a world that feels discovered rather than invented.

Lee's paintings offer access to a world that would otherwise be impossible to inhabit. These underwater scenes are seductive and enchanting, yet a persistent sense of unease runs beneath the surface: the human body cannot exist here. The paintings hold that contradiction, drawing the viewer in while reminding them they do not belong.

ABOUT SARAH LEE

Sarah Lee (b. 1988, Seoul, South Korea; lives and works in Brooklyn, US) creates oil paintings that foreground the interplay of elemental forces, where aerial, aquatic, sylvan, lacustrine, and lithic motifs converge into speculative landscapes. Her works collapse distinctions between reality and imagination, twilight and daybreak, the atmospheric and the meteorological.

Working in deep, saturated tones of blue, green, and violet, Lee builds her compositions through layered washes and finely tuned palettes. Her imagery evokes forest clearings, celestial skies, and distant horizons, shaped by quiet reflection and poetic ambiguity. At the same time, the viscous and luminous materiality of her surfaces complicates any notion of these subjects as purely otherworldly or detached from human experience. Notably, her earliest landscapes were painted during the pandemic, their serenity and mystery emerging from a socially shaped and collectively shared moment. Rooted in her reflections on recent global shifts, Lee's practice unsettles conventional distinctions between visual representation and elemental process, history and fiction, political ecology and landscape.

ABOUT ALBERTZ BENDA

Founded in 2015, albertz benda is a contemporary art gallery with an international program exploring material and textuality as well as cultural and social dialogues. Our Chelsea space is host to rotating exhibitions with an emphasis on solo presentations of emerging artists, new research into historical figures, and thematic group exhibitions. In 2021, the gallery expanded to a second location in Los Angeles. Featuring an evolving identity separate from our New York program, the LA space is realized within the context of a domestic setting, advancing new connections between visual arts, craft, and design.

Media Contacts:

Rachel Tretter, albertz benda
rachel@albertzbenda.com