

ArtSeen

## Annesta Le: *Eternal Current*

By David Ebony



Installation view: *Annesta Le: Eternal Current*, Yi Gallery, New York, 2023. Courtesy the artist and YI GALLERY.

In his classic 1942 book *Water and Dreams*, French theorist Gaston Bachelard states, in typically poetic fashion, that:

The material imagination of water is a special type of imagination. Strengthened in the knowledge of depth of a material element, the reader will understand at last that water is a *type of destiny* that is no longer simply the vain destiny of fleeting images and a never-ending dream, but an essential destiny that endlessly changes the substance of the being.

Bachelard’s musings came to mind when viewing *Eternal Current*, a show of recent works by New York-based artist Annesta Le. In this evocative exhibition, Le explores the phenomena of water in motion: currents, rivulets, and intimate, cascading waterfalls, all imaginatively rendered in a series of four glowing blue neon wall reliefs from her “Fluid Form” series (2023), which protrude several inches into the gallery’s main space. The exhibition’s viewing event title, *Neon After Sunset*, refers to the darkened room as it appears in the darkness of the evening, with the walls and floors painted wrought-iron black, effectively conveying the feeling of a nighttime reverie or a dream state.



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For the “Fluid Form” series, produced in a Brooklyn glass studio, the artist bent blown glass neon tubes into elegant curvilinear shapes with irregular twists and turns. They are convincingly emblematic of water in motion, as if highlighted, in this case, by the moon. The works are something of a departure for Le, whose previous neon series were based on the contours of the human body—her own. And an earlier neon series inspired by letters of the Vietnamese alphabet was in part a nod to her heritage as a daughter of immigrants from Vietnam to America. Her

family were boat people, in fact, which further underscores the personal significance of water for the artist.

Le created an immersive environment for this show; viewers pass from the main gallery to other exhibition areas accessible via a long, narrow corridor, also painted entirely in black. At the end of the corridor we find *Beacon* (2023), hung adjacent to a tall bank of windows with white trim. This soaring vertical neon, nearly six feet tall with a subtle graceful curve and a milky white glow, corresponds to the natural light of the sun, the radiant natural light visible each day through the glass windows. *Beacon* served as a meditative pause, or a respite from the azure cascades continuously glowing in the pitch-black main gallery, while also leading the viewer into the final gallery space. Here, *Labyrinth* (2023), a freestanding cylindrical painted-wood vessel approximately thirty inches high, holds a pool of mineral oil in which an intricate circular labyrinth of ultramarine-blue neon appears to float. A mesmerizing configuration of luminosity, reflection, and material density, *Labyrinth* is one of the high points of the exhibition.



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According to the artist in a press statement, the labyrinth alludes to the Cretan myth and functions as a metaphor for the path toward self-discovery, just as water connects to the emotions, and light epitomizes the spirit, creative force, and cosmic energy. The final work on view, *Flowing* (2023), a monumental two-dimensional work hung near the ceiling that measures some ten feet tall and four feet wide, features a bold abstract composition made with brightly colored acrylic and markers. Here, thick, curving bands of magenta snake through all-over patterns of undulating blue and green lines, evocative of a river or stream. All of the elements in this ambitious and unforgettable exhibition coalesce to suggest a rarified life journey, a type of destiny, as Bachelard suggests, arrived at via some exalted waterway of the imagination.

## Contributor

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ON VIEW

Yi Gallery

*Eternal Current*

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<https://brooklynrail.org/2023/11/artseen/Annesta-Le-Eternal-Current-Neon-After-Sunset>