

Alexander and Bonin

EXHIBITION: Matthew Benedict: *Crossing the Line*
DATES: Saturday, March 1 – Saturday, April 5, 2003
LOCATION: 132 Tenth Avenue between 18th and 19th
HOURS: Tuesday-Saturday 10am –6pm

Beginning on March 1st Alexander and Bonin will exhibit new paintings by Matthew Benedict. The subject of these works all relate to a ceremony at sea, in which sailors who are crossing the equator for the first time, are initiated into the society of Neptune and his court.

Crossing the Line ceremonies matched the initiation ceremonies of many medieval guilds, and by the 16th century, a pattern of customs had emerged in European shipping to provide a 'baptism' for all sailors aboard who have not previously crossed the equator. Neptune, usually the oldest sailor who had crossed the equator the most...and his retinue would come over the bows of the ship and take over the deck. The retinue might consist of, among others, 'Davy Jones' or the Devil, two 'Bears', men dressed in skins who would pull Neptune's chariot, a 'Barber' and a 'Doctor'. Often Neptune was accompanied by Amphitrite, the wife of Triton or Neptune, usually a young sailor dressed up with a wig and outlandish female clothing.¹

This ritual is the subject of Benedict's largest painting, *The Mariner's Baptism*, which depicts more than two-dozen sailors in costume. Portraying sailors in the role of mythological characters echoes Benedict's working methods as he typically photographs friends dressed to approximate the characters he intends to portray. Benedict continues to use the conventions of illustration and the decorative arts. Several of these new paintings incorporate faux framing and an unconventional installation. Aside from the *Baptism*, seascapes and portraits of Neptune, Triton, Amphitrite and Davy Jones will be exhibited as will a painting depicting the shaving of an initiate.

Matthew Benedict has worked in a variety of media including photography, embroidery, painting and sculpture. Born in 1968, he lives and works in Brooklyn and has exhibited in New York since 1993. His most recent solo exhibition, *The Unseen World* was at Mai 36 Galerie, Zurich.

¹ *Jack Tar, A Sailor's Life 1750-1910*, J. Welles Henderson and Rodney P. Carlisle, 1999, Antique Collectors Club, England