

WATER

Mark Adams
Jennifer Day
Susan Denniston
Mona Dukess
Phyllis Ewen
Terry Gips
Nancy Kunik
Barbara Curtin Millot
Deirdre Portnoy
John Portnoy
Francie Randolph
Robert Shreefter
Luke Simpson
Lisa Studier
Thomas A.D. Watson

An Exhibition Curated by Terry Gips

The Water Project

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Panel Discussion: Friday, December 11, 1-2 pm

WATER

Introduction

Terry Gips, Curator
Wellfleet, Massachusetts

I came to Cape Cod because of the water. Well...not exactly. It was the *margin* between the water and the land that I came for. I am no fish and definitely need to stay “above water.” I immerse my body in the sea with caution, preferring my toes to be within reach of terra firma. I lived here several years before sailing *on* the water. Like most of us who have been raised on the Cape or uprooted from inland homes to find a place near the water, I have great respect for the “ferocious wilderness” of the ocean, a phrase used by Wellfleet author Robert Finch in a recent radio interview. Even when we choose not to paddle into strong currents or ride large waves, we can experience the vicarious thrill of water’s power. Interestingly, water’s inherent dangers seem to make the pleasures and sustenance derived by playing at the edge more irresistible.

I organized this exhibition as a way to explore not only these pleasures and dangers—the sounds, smells, tastes, and physical and visual sensations—but also the aspects of water that don’t usually appear in the art we find in the galleries up and down the coast. Much of the work included acknowledges the dual nature of water: “We can’t live in it and we can’t live without it.” Of course, the “we” are humans, and the artists here do not pretend to know the view from “underneath” although some try to take us below the surface. Mona Dukess’s egg-like images in handmade pigmented paper may be read as cells drifting upward in a watery bath; John Portnoy’s microphotographs record actual phytoplankton suspended in tiny drops of water. Nancy Kunik’s wood reliefs and Lisa Studier’s woodcuts give voice to sea life in playful and heroic portraits of fish and turtles that are threatened by human consumers/predators. Robert Shreefter’s monotypes of undulating aquatic reeds and Barbara Milot’s ink wash drawings speak of wetness and fluidity, fragility and mutability.

Luke Simpson, a surfer and photographer of surfing, takes us to the “backside” of the outer Cape in photographs of the extraordinary drama of waves rolling in from the open Atlantic. Like early settlers and most full time residents even today, Tom Watson usually stays on the more subdued bayside in his mesmerizing oil paintings of water, sand, dunes, and sky, showing us quiet moments in their transient intersection. Susan

Denniston, from the opposite side of Cape Cod Bay, is also interested in this intersection and the “myth of permanence.” Her images are tranquil like Watson’s even though her main subject, concrete sea walls that have been constructed to control turbulent water, are reminders of both the literal and symbolic struggle and the discomfort that land-based dwellers feel in relation to rising waters.

In my series of photographs, I present entries in a catalog of intersections between myself and water, giving equal recognition to water as it occupies its natural settings of rivers, ponds, oceans, clouds, etc., and water as it is contained, diverted, and moved by society’s structures. Deirdre Portnoy and Phyllis Ewen step back from individual experiences to draw “big pictures” of water. Portnoy’s composite photographic grids of glaciers, deserts, floods, human communities, and wildlife habitats pose narratives of our current epoch on the planet. She titles the works “Anthropocene,” a term proposed by scientists to identify a shift from the Holocene epoch, starting about 11,000 years ago, to the current time when they argue that humans have become the key determiners of global climate and ecosystems. Ewen also observes the effects modern societies have on water world-wide by constructing dams, canals, and irrigation systems. Her works consist of graceful curves of ink and wire flowing like water over and beyond the chopped edges of the background collages of text and image fragments which Ewen cut from various printed materials about water.

Like the previous two artists, painters Jennifer Day, Francie Randolph, and Mark Adams go after a “global” view of water. However, their works are big pictures with minimalist vocabularies. The water in Day’s paintings is simultaneously mundane and other-worldly. Using black paint only, she tips the choppy ocean surface right up to meet our gaze—rendering it in such a way that simultaneously invites and defies our understanding. Randolph partially obscures photographs with layers of oil and encaustic, enhancing the ethereal image of misty skies merging with softly undulating seas. Some works she titles “Ocean of Calm” which describes the temperament of the water as well as the painting’s meditative quality. In one mixed-media painting, Mark Adams portrays the translucent layers of atmosphere and water from the familiar perspective of a standing figure looking down and across the landscape. In the other, we see the back of a horizontal figure, his flattened body filling the frame and swimming through a field of blue squiggles. It is both a beautiful and disquieting image: Does it represent life emerging from primal waters? Or a struggle to survive a tidal surge? Or the idea that water has multiple and fluid meanings, an element that permeates our bodies and psyches, flowing above, below and around us in our environment, changeable and difficult to grasp. Perhaps the art in this show will help us become better “swimmers ” and more understanding of water’s facts and enigmas.

Setting a Tide Clock

Sandy Mcfarlane
Orleans, Massachusetts

The intent was to make sure I had the correct time for high tide – the directions with the new tide clock said to choose a full moon high tide to make the clock more accurate. So on a cool but sunny fall Sunday morning, I went to the Yacht Club with the newspaper to watch the tide. Many folks might consider this exercise as wasting time and unexciting but it wasn't at all. Sitting in my car watching the natural rhythm around me was cathartic in the most primal way.

The way to check the course of the flooding tide is to focus on something dry as the tide is coming in. The asphalt my car was sitting on was adjacent to a gravel swath that doubles as an auxiliary launching area when the fancy ramp is in use. The gravel was large, not pea-stone but rather the 1" variety so it was pretty easy to set my sights on a stone that was dry. It was a rather large specimen but it was set on top of another in such a way as to make it the highest relief in the general area – situated about one half inch above the rest of the surrounding gravel. Within ten minutes, it was covered with water and after another ten minutes, it was under water by its own height above ground. In twenty minutes, there were more than two inches of water where it had been dry moments before.

I found another stone further up the beach and watched that for a while until it too was under water. Then my eyes shifted to the wrack line left by the last highest tide. The water was up to it and I could no longer tell if more water was creeping higher under the vegetation until I spotted a hole in the wrack line where the water was visible. With choice pieces of gravel around the hole, I could again watch to see if the water rose any higher, and it did. I checked my watch against the time the tide chart indicated for high tide here and knew it wouldn't be long until the highest point would be reached. With little wind, this would be a true high tide, not a wind-driven one – a perfect day to set my tide clock.

As I watched the incremental flooding of the gravel beach, I thought about the forces involved in this movement. The science of lunar gravitational pull on this watery planet does not convey the magic. Every six hours, rain or shine, day in and day out, the water moves in one direction or the other – in toward the land or out toward the sea. It makes no difference what is happening on the land; it makes no difference what is happening to the creatures that inhabit the land, including us. We can go about our daily routines and rituals, calmly or violently, in peace or at war, in winter or summer, and the tide will still come and go just as the sun will rise and set.

These are the earth's rhythms. But we have stepped back and away from them. We no longer take the time to sit and watch this incredible dance or marvel in its simplicity and inexorable power.

Within minutes of the time stated for high tide, the volume in the little hole in the wrack line decreased. High tide had come and gone and the tide began to recede and move in the other direction. There was no sound or other obvious indication that a profound change had taken place but the natural hour glass had been turned over and the drops of water were falling in the other direction.

During this reverie, a single paddler glided toward the Yacht Club in a bright red kayak, his hooded sweatshirt pulled up over his head for protection in the chill air. He passed by a gleaming black point-snouted orb in the water but paid no attention to the seal that had surfaced a short distance from his boat. Seals have often followed me as I rowed around the water and I wondered if this seal had been following him on his journey. The kayaker got to the Head of the Cove, stopped for the briefest of moments, turned around and headed back up the cove but I didn't see the seal again. Buffleheads, a group of five, swam in front of me but they were spooked by a large flock of their comrades that flew close to the water toward the equivalent of greener pastures and the small group joined the larger flock, settling down in a protected lee further up the cove. A single willet darted back and forth at the wrack line on the asphalt launching ramp nearby and a solitary gull stood on the rail of the dock jutting out into the water. The gull preened for a while and then sat on the rail, tucking its head into its wings looking like it was taking a sunny snooze. A few geese swam among the marsh reeds in an area known as a freshet – where at low tide, a visible fresh water stream flows from the land to mix with the salt water. It is one of their favorite haunts.

When I was sure the tide had changed, I left and made my way home, back to the business of setting the tide clock. As I drove up the road, it struck me that once I tuned my back on the water, I returned to the land, the water but a recent memory. And yet, that which takes no orders from the creatures who think they rule the world, actually does rule the world. Without the movement of water around the globe, tides and currents, without the weather created by that movement, without the life-giving rain of fresh water evaporated from the seas, we would not survive. We take it for granted but it is truly the water that governs what happens on the land. We should pay more attention.

Sandy is the author of ***Rowing Forward Looking Back***, and ***Tiggie: The Lure and Lore of Commercial Fishing in New England***. She was the shellfish biologist and conservation administrator for the Town of Orleans for nearly 25 years and is currently President of Coastal Resource Specialists, a firm specializing in shellfish, aquaculture and community sustainability issues.



Photo by Sandy Macfarlane

Mark Adams

As a cartographer I have been focused on how layers of information are projected from three dimensions to two. Here the water surface seen from above and below is the interface on which we compress information from the gradient cloud to the collapsed plane. These paintings were originally part of wall-sized installations that explored layers of atmosphere, biosphere and lithosphere that sandwich our existence. Lately I've also done a lot of underwater video to better understand how light is transmitted through layers of air and water and how it feels to be suspended between them.



Surface, acrylic, ink and pencil on wood panel, approx. 30" x 40"



Kettle Pond Swimmer, acrylic, ink and pencil on masonite, approx. 16" x 48"

Jennifer Day

One might come to know waves at night, sleeping every night of summer within a fifty-foot reach of their rhythm. But it is impossible to know waves, only to make an attempt at such. This desire to understand the movement of water, coupled with a fascination for the American maritime paintings of the 19th century, have inspired these monochromatic paintings of the ocean. Though the glorious ships in those age-old portraits are absent here, much of the Romantic spirit remains, along with the abiding concept of the Sublime. One might define this as that which is found in the formless object, represented by a boundlessness of spirit. Further to my point, intense light or darkness (the absence of light) is sublime to the degree that it can obliterate the sight of an object. Where this may seem to contradict the highly organized and rational, almost “wooden” ship portrait, it is just this stylization that has set me free to explore liquid forms which defy capture.

One tube of lamp black paint was used in the process of creating these pieces. The white that you see is the underlying gesso surface which has been exposed by rubbing away the black with paper towels, brushes and fingers, to reveal light. The goal is to maximize the gray scale and organize it in such a way that is impossible for photography, while still maintaining the strange drama of the black and white construct.



Gray Waves, 2009, oil on panel, 48” x 36” **Rain**, 2009, oil on panel, 48” x 36”

Susan Denniston

These pieces are all part of an extensive and on-going series about seawalls and the myth of permanence. As I work, sometimes methodically etching, inking, and proofing plates, sometimes layering color upon color with abandon, I listen for the questions the seawall insistently asks of me.

Do we/I seek concreteness and certainty in a world that contains neither? How do we/I learn to live with ambiguity and make peace with a world in which things are not always quantifiable and clear? How do I live with the knowledge of fragility, vulnerability, and certain impermanence?

I have found the concrete seawall near my home a compelling object. Seawalls are built by man and

changed by the ocean, sometimes reflecting a delicate balance, other times a powerful imbalance, between nature and man, between us all, between what is revealed and what is concealed, between isolation and connection. I see undercurrents of danger, futility, and hope.

Through observation and contemplation of the image revealed, I hope subtle and perhaps uncertain currents and undercurrents of recognition and possibility begin to stir in the viewer who pauses to gradually decipher the image through their own perceptions and memories.



Seawall Study No. 8,

2005

monotype, 17" x 19"

(above)

Seawall Study No. 6,

2005

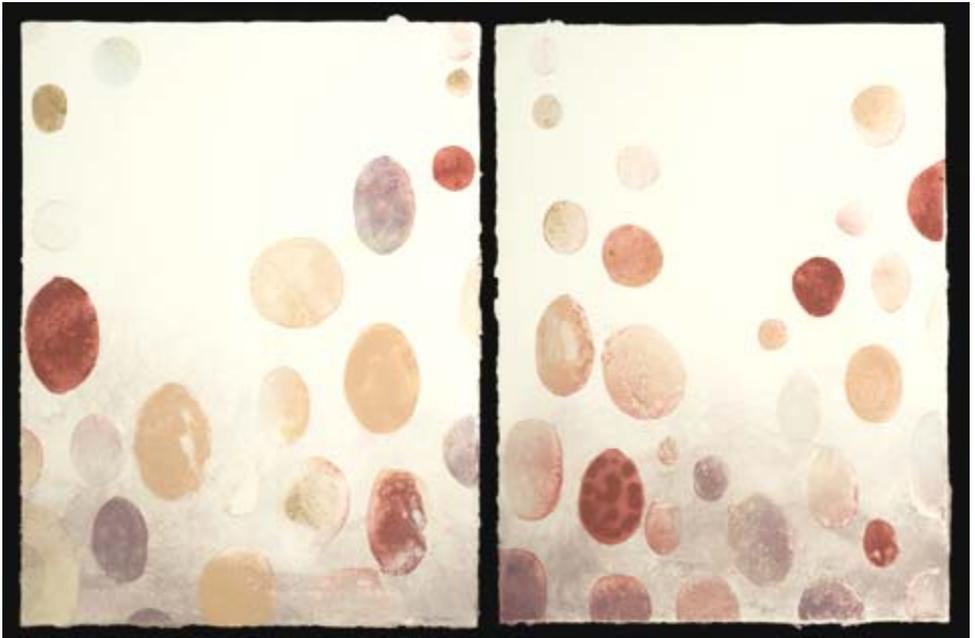
monotype, 16" x 20" (left)

Mona Dukess

The pieces selected for this exhibition, “Suspensions—#1 and #2” and “Beginnings”, are papers that I made by hand. They are part of a continuing series of works in paper and egg tempera paint.

The process of hand papermaking begins with a large vat of water to which macerated fibrous pulp has been added. A specially made screen with wooden sides is dipped into the vat, and the papers, formed one sheet at a time, are laid flat on thick felts. On the surface of a still sopping wet sheet, I place a stencil with cut out circles, ovals and egg-shaped openings. Into these spaces I float colored pigments diluted with water. As the colors seep into the wet pulp, the images sink into the paper. The colors are both contained and allowed to run. After my composition is completed, the sheet is dried. I particularly like how the image develops at the same time the sheet of paper is formed. No further drawing or marking happen on the surface.

I have often used these round, ovoid and biomorphic shapes in my art. It is only natural that I use them here as I see water as a metabolic vessel for birth and sustenance.



Suspensions—#1, & Suspensions—#2, 2009, pigmented handmade paper, 31” x 23” each

Phyllis Ewen

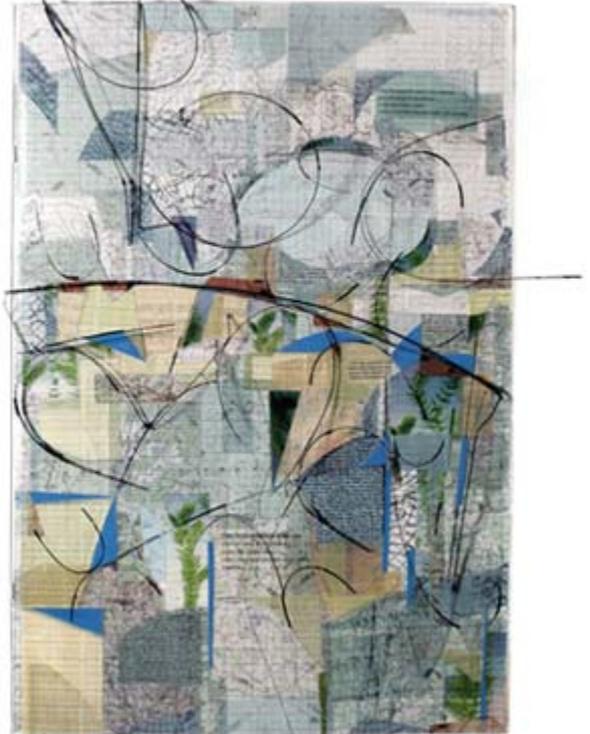
As an artist, I have long been interested in the ways that our imagination interacts with the natural world that is never far from the effects of human intervention. In 2004, I had the opportunity to collaborate with a Cuban artist on a series of installations, in which we used water as a metaphor for issues facing contemporary society in each of our countries. *Azul y Blue* was exhibited in Havana that year. Since then, I have been thinking about the cultural and social history of water and its role in land disputes, the development of agriculture, and the building of empire.

In the work exhibited here found maps and texts digitally printed on weather-graphing paper are collaged to indicate the divisions that human intervention has imposed by the use of dams, canals, and irrigation. The calligraphic elements in ink, in the collages, and in wire, represent our most precious resource and its refusal to be controlled without a fight.

Thanks to Hugo Vergara and Rosario Parodi.
Ilé, Journal of Cultural Ecology and Society
Havana, Cuba



Untitled (Imperial Hand),
2009, paper, digital prints,
acrylic panel, ink, wire, 36"
x 24" x 4". (right, and detail
above)



Phyllis Ewen

Cambridge and Wellfleet, MA www.phyllisewen.com, phyllisewen@phyllisewen.com

Terry Gips

It was hard to decide what work to make for this show. I reflected on the many different pictures of water I had made in the past. Because I hoped, as curator, to present perspectives that went beyond water within landscapes, I browsed scientific information, I looked at my experiences with water, how it felt on my body, how I used it on a daily basis, etc. A structured approach to such an immense subject seemed a possible strategy. I toyed with several ideas and began a diary—simple notes on every encounter with water for a 24 hour period—to see where it would lead.

Flush. Drink. Flush. Wash hands. Make coffee. Read about water pollution in *NY Times*. Flush. Walk along shore. Enjoy sparkling water, see boats in bay. Observe street eroded from overnight rain. Rinse dishes. Sponge counter. Flush. Wash face, hands. Take vitamins. Clean teeth. Water arugula in cold frame. Feed neighbor's koi fish. Wash car. Drink. Read about rising water on golf course for Conservation Commission meeting. Flush. Boil water for tea. And on and on.

This exhibition includes a few of the visual typologies that were inspired by the diary.

Water: Ice, Blackfish Creek. 2009

Water: Washing, 2009

Water: Road Drain, 2009

archival pigmented prints, 12" x 12" each



Nancy Kunik

Why do I carve wood? I like the feel of making patterns and textures in different ways by cutting and sanding. It is easier for me see depth and to create a desirable design. The freedom that I feel while carving is both satisfying and uplifting for my soul. The progress is never the same and neither are the results. Constantly changing tools and ideas as I go along, change is always happening. Surprises are great, and rewarding to the outcome of my work. Finished pieces are stained with color or left natural, coated with varnish.

I choose my subject matter for two reasons. I am forever fascinated with the ocean and its creatures, especially fish. They are beauty in motion—great shapes and colors. The other reason is my sadness over what has happened to various species by over-fishing. I know it's hard for fishermen with the regulations and all, but many are unwilling to accept **the fact** that countless years of taking many fish before they reached maturity and spawned has taken its toll. By-catch of fish (usually young ones) is

also a problem and exacerbates the cycle. Fish, one of our great natural resources, were never meant to be caught and tossed overboard dead. Nowadays, there just aren't "plenty of fish in the sea."



Current Fish, 2007, wood relief, 5 1/2" x 12"



Peace Offering, 1996, wood relief, 9" x 16 1/2"

Barbara Curtin Milot

My drawings are abstractions of land and water with the imagery taken directly from maps. I am interested in the relationship between the uncontrollable element of water and the constructed elements made by humans. The transparent layers of ink wash are meant to seem fragile and ephemeral, always moving and impossible to fix, just like water. The liquid quality of the dried washes makes even the solid, more permanent depictions of cities, roads, and boundaries seem fluid and mutable.



River (Deep Country), 2008, ink wash on Yupo, 24" x 20"



River (Source), 2008, ink wash on Yupo, 26" x 32"

Deirdre Portnoy

“Water is neither strong nor weak, neither wet nor dry,
neither moving nor still, neither cold nor hot,
neither existent nor non-existent, neither deluded nor enlightened.
When water solidifies, it is harder than a diamond.

Who can crack it?

When water melts, it is gentler than milk.

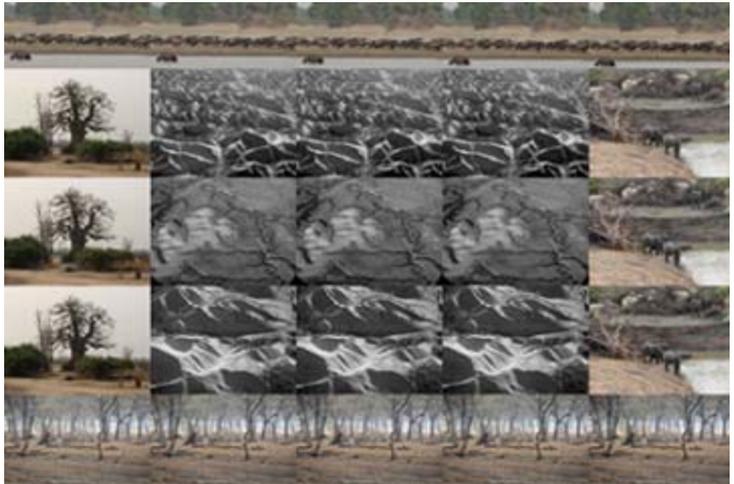
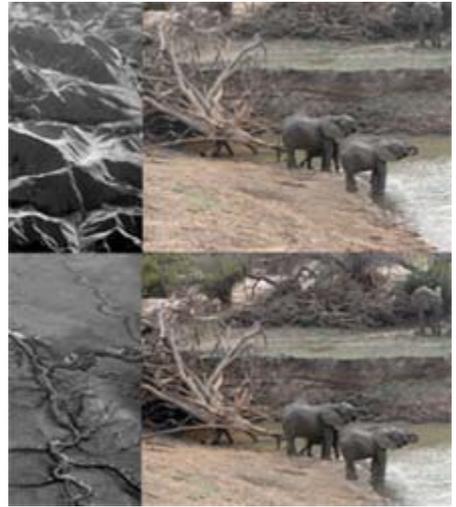
Who can destroy it?”

...SANSUIKYO

by Dogen Zenji

The human footprint has impacted the entire planet and is the dominant feature in the current era being called the ‘anthropocene’. Human population pressure dominates the globe affecting the environment, social and economic issues. Increased climatic changes have resulted in devastating natural disasters.

The challenge is to communicate these devastating impacts and take responsible actions toward changing the most dreaded worst-case scenarios. The series of composite photographs visually links some of these issues. The solo images in the show (not shown here) represent the balance.



Anthropocene #1, archival pigmented print, 24” x 30”, (detail above)

John Portnoy

These images are digital microphotographs taken through a Lietz compound microscope of phytoplankton and macro-algae collected in outer Cape ponds and coastal bays. Phytoplankton are mostly microscopic algae that drift as single cells or in colonies, which can be spherical or filamentous. Like true plants, algae use photosynthesis to convert solar energy into chemical energy, stored in carbohydrates in their cells, in the well-lit layers of the water column. This “fixed energy” is passed on to both larger organisms, e.g. zooplankton, aquatic invertebrates, fish, ospreys, and other microbes, e.g. bacteria, fungi, through complex food webs. Though for the most part invisible to us, algae contribute about half of the globe’s primary production, i.e. production of organic matter through photosynthesis. This means that algae are about equal to much more conspicuous terrestrial plants (e.g. northern forests, grasslands, tropical rain forests) in oxygen production and carbon dioxide removal in the Earth’s atmosphere.



Cyanobacteria (Green Sphaerand Column), East Harbor, Truro, Massachusetts, 2009,
color print from digital microphotograph, 8” x 10”



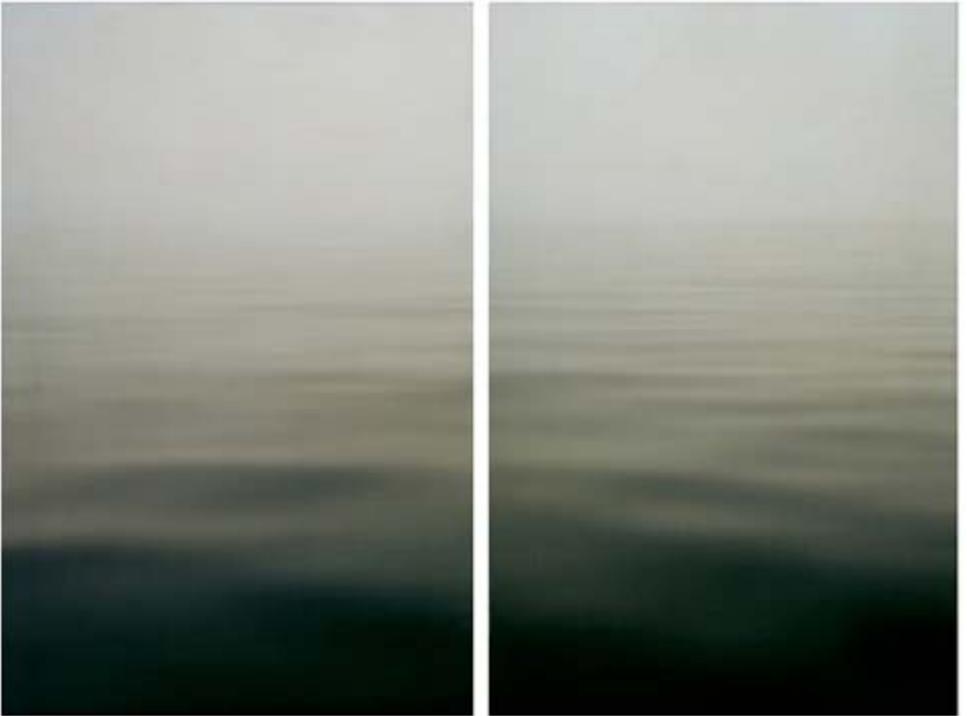
Uroglenopsis (Central Sphere), Herring Pond, Wellfleet, Massachusetts, 2009,
color print from digital microphotograph, 8” x 10”

Francie Randolph

Ocean of Calm *The mind dissolves into the rhythm of endless sea:
drinking in limitless space, flooding with shimmering calm.*

This year's work continues to focus upon the sea. As the perception of our world around us has shifted from stability to instability, from order to disorder, from equilibrium to non-equilibrium, it has also shifted from being to becoming. Yet it seems change itself is the only true constant. The stability of structure, much like the sea that surrounds our continents, depends upon this endless fluid change. The ocean—massive, powerful and with a permanence undeniable—will gently respond to the smallest shift of a breeze.

An Ocean of Calm quietly focuses our view on the endlessly shifting sea. Each photograph is suspended in layers of what was once molten wax; the undulating surfaces of both the subject and the medium capture the dualities of stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing, stability and change. *An Ocean of Calm* is my response to the shifting world around us, to the beauty of both the known and unknown.

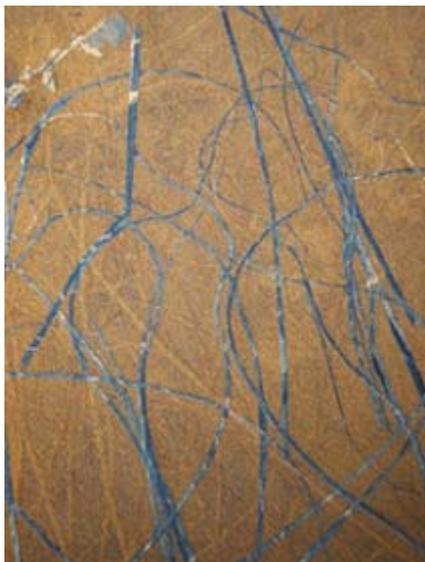


Ocean of Calm, Large Diptych #1, (Silent Sea), photograph, oil and encaustic, 18" x 22"

Robert Shreefter

These works included in **Water** are from a much larger body of work I made while on sabbatical for the 2008-2009 academic year. All the work made over eleven months are monoprints that focus on elements of nature and landscape of the Outer Cape. The Outer Cape is a place that I am familiar with, having spent much of each summer here for the past 25 years there. I was most familiar with the late spring, summer and early fall landscapes, but my time last year introduced me to the new and varied landscapes of late fall, winter and early spring. In many ways, it was like being in a new place, and I used my printmaking as a way to learn about the nature and landscape of this new terrain.

The work for **Water** includes work from the last two series, **Castle of Reeds**, and **Her House of Water and Stone**, which explore the relationship among natural elements—water, land, vegetation, stone, etc. Of importance are the ways in which these elements create the landscape that is familiar but ever changing. In addition, these two series of prints use poetry by poets such as Mary Oliver who mine waterscape/landscape for metaphor, meaning, visual images, texture, etc. Such poets capture the intensity, spirit and details of nature, especially outer Cape Cod. Here is my attempt is to translate poetic intensity and images inspired by words and lines of poetry into visual elements of the prints. An additional impetus of this work is rooted in the connection of the written and the visual and the intersections of visual imagery in poetry and two-dimensional visual representation.



Castle of Reeds 5 and **Castle of Reeds 6**, both 2009, monoprints, 13" x 11"

Luke Simpson

My goal as a photographer has always been to share images with the viewer that they otherwise would not have seen. Maybe the image was captured in an overlooked corner of the viewer's backyard, maybe the other side of the world, or maybe inside of a breaking wave a fraction of a second before it crashes onto a beach and disappears forever.

Surfers experience the ocean's waves and the surrounding seascapes from a very different perspective than the average beach-goer. In the images selected for this show I have tried to convey the unique perspective of surfers, who as a group, take more time to understand and appreciate the beauty of water than most.



Secrets, color photograph, 24" x 30"

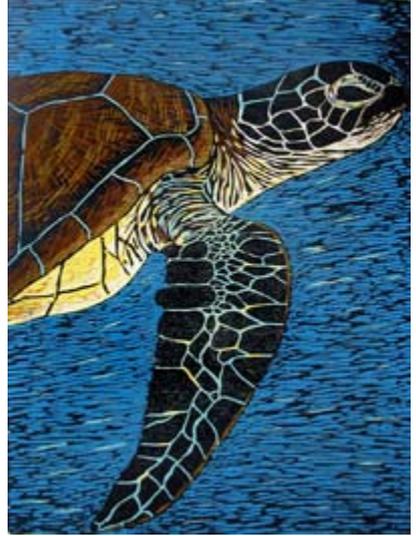


Meadow, color photograph, 24" x 30"

Lisa Studier

My woodcut prints explore the natural world, both land and sea. The imagery has developed from a deep interest in the environment, conservation, and natural history, and intends to celebrate the beauty and diversity of animal life in the face of increasing threats such as pollution, habitat destruction, and global climate change. In the tradition of portraiture, I seek to give a sense of dignity and identity to the individual, and by extension a collective face to a previously anonymous species.

My creative process is informed by a great deal of reading, both about the individual animals as well as in the broader areas of environmental responsibility, conservation, biodiversity, and natural history. I am intrigued by how science can inform art and how art can contribute to political and scientific dialogues. Many marine ecosystems are in great danger, with most major fisheries severely overexploited and some species facing extinction. All of the sea turtles and fish included in this show face serious conservation concerns; through my prints I hope to convey a glimpse into their lives and our responsibility for their fate.



Green Turtle, 2006,
woodcut, 21" x 17"

Orange Roughy,
2004, woodcut,
13" x 17"



Thomas A.D. Watson

“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a commodity to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

Aldo Leopold
Foreword, *A Sand County Almanac*

My fascination with landscape and nature stems from a lifetime spent in the outdoors. I continue to focus on those intersections where the water, land and air meet. These areas are constant and well defined in our minds and yet are constantly changing; everything about them is transient, and so they reflect the juxtaposition of our own view of constancy against the impermanence of the real world.

To me, nature is a source of truth. In today’s world of technology, media and consumerism, reality and truth can be difficult to define. Conversely, nature is a logical and harmonious system of order that provides an anchor in the confusion of the modern world.



The Gut in January, oil on linen, 12” x 17”



Fog, Ocean Beach, oil on linen, 22” x 30”

Acknowledgments

Without the financial contributions of the Sponsors and Supporters of The Water Project, this catalog would have remained just an idea, so I thank them all for their generosity. Additionally, I wish to thank the art committee of the Wellfleet Public Library for selecting my proposal, the Library staff for help in many ways, and Director, Elaine McIlroy, for her persisting enthusiasm for community learning. I am also grateful to Mass Audubon/Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary for use of their elegant space, and special thanks go to Audubon Director, Bob Prescott and Education Coordinator, Melissa Lowe.

I was thrilled when Sandy Macfarlane said that she would write a brief essay for the catalog. Sandy knows and loves the waters of our coastal communities as well as anyone, and she takes us to the water's edge with her insightful words in "Setting a Tide Clock." Thank you, Sandy.

Perhaps most important of all are the contributions of the artists, not only the work they created, but the efforts they made to provide images and text for the catalog, to frame and deliver work, and to promote the exhibition to their friends and colleagues. Bringing artists and artworks together for a public "performance" is the essence of curating. For me, this is as creative as making art. So I thank the artists for allowing me to get acquainted with their work and for inspiring me to take risks in organizing **Water**.

Terry Gips, Curator

