

An abstract painting featuring a dense, textured composition. The upper portion is dominated by thick, overlapping brushstrokes in shades of light blue, white, and pale green, creating a sense of movement and depth, reminiscent of waves or a thick layer of ice. Below this, a horizontal band of dark teal and green is interspersed with numerous small, white, crystalline shapes that look like ice floes or snowflakes. The bottom of the image shows two large, rectangular blocks of white, textured paint, possibly representing ice or snow, set against a background of horizontal teal and green strokes.

UNDERCURRENTS

WATER + HUMAN IMPACT

JUNE 16 - AUGUST 16, 2022

Curated by Elizabeth Awalt

UNDERCURRENTS

WATER + HUMAN IMPACT

The effect of climate change on bodies of water has been a source of inquiry for each artist in this exhibition for a substantial period of their art practice. Global warming, ocean acidification, loss of species, storm surges and flooding, over-fishing and plastic pollution are some of the topics they are dedicated to tackling in their work. Working within a wide range of media—including video, sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, and installation—this diverse group shares the knowledge that we are at a critical moment in the health of our planet as well as a commitment to bringing this fact into the studio to visualize it.

Several of the artists in *Undercurrents* were born by the sea, and others are fortunate to live near ponds, rivers, and the ocean. Daily walks, swims and kayak rides provide opportunities to witness environmental changes in the same location for many years. A few of them enjoy activities such as scuba diving, sailing, and surfboarding and have consequently developed deep respect for the power of the sea. As a result of their personal love of watery environments, the exhibition artists all participate in environmental activism.

Working directly and collaboratively with the ocean, **Meghann Riepenhoff** creates cyanotype images that capture elements of time, power, and impermanence. **Joan Hall**, **Elizabeth Awalt**, and **Christopher Edwards** look to the oceans to address loss of species, water quality and impacts on coral reefs through the mediums of handmade paper installations, paint on canvas, and ceramics, respectively. Painter **Anne Neely** records weather in her small watercolors and confronts environmental issues in her large-scale abstract paintings while **Ilana Manolson** uses paint to translate what she sees into organic and fluid marks connecting the microcosmic and macro view of fluid substances. And in her video *Laomedea*, **Youjin Moon** presents a painterly composition melding oceanic landscape and outer space to elicit a sense of wonder.

Infused with a wry sense of humor, **Mags Harries**'s sculptures refer to storm surges and flooding. "I approach my studio work whimsically, referencing and taking different points of view to create a conversation about the environment," she says. "There are no hard facts." **Jackie Brown**'s ceramic sculptures from her *Aggregate Series* contain twisted forms that refer to the tangle of fishing rope and organic material that can be found along the wrack line. Working on paper, **Evelyn Rydz** draws intricate images of the sea and explores the vulnerability and resiliency of coastal ecosystems, the communities they impact, and our entangled relationships with interconnected bodies of water. Inspired by the classic novel *Moby-Dick*, **Heidi Whitman**'s series of drawings is part of an installation, *Leviathan*, which addresses the relentless American obsession with violence.

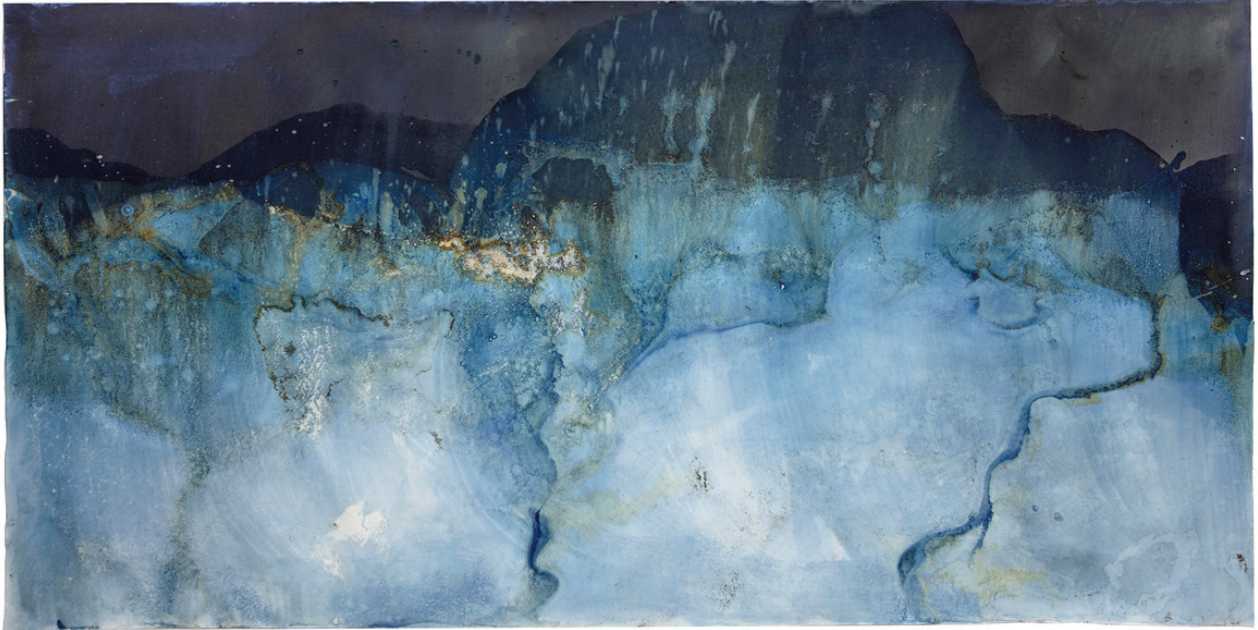
From his *Animalia* series, photographer **Henry Horenstein**'s tender black-and-white portraits of sea animals in captivity invite us to look closely as they peer back at us. German-born painter **Elsa Bostelmann** (1882-1961) accompanied naturalist and scientist William Beebe and his team as they explored deep-sea life at Bermuda's Nonsuch Island in the early 1930s. Bostelmann translated Beebe's verbal descriptions of creatures and organisms he observed while traveling 3,000 feet under the sea in his and Otis Barton's bathysphere, a two-person cast iron submersible.

– **Elizabeth Awalt**, *Curator*

Each artist was asked the question:

"Tell us why Water is an important subject for you."

Their answers accompany their work.



This work stems from my fascination with the nature of our relationships to the landscape, the sublime, time, and impermanence. Entitled *Littoral Drift*, a geological term describing the action of wind-driven waves transporting sand and gravel, the series consists of camera-less cyanotypes made in collaboration with the landscape and ocean, at the edges of both. The elements that I employ in the process—waves, rain, wind, and sediment—leave physical inscriptions through direct contact with photographic materials.

Meghann Riepenhoff
Littoral Drift #969
(*Fay Bainbridge Beach, WA 03.06.18, Nine Waves in Ebb Current*), 2018
Dynamic Cyanotype, 42" x 84"
© Meghann Riepenhoff, Courtesy Yossi Milo Gallery, New York



Joan Hall

The New Normal: In with the Tide, 2018

handmade paper made with Kozo and Gampi, hand cut and pulp painted with over-beaten abaca, printed with collagraph and laminated to mylar with acrylic, 70" x 100" x 15"

Courtesy of the Artist and Child's Gallery, Boston, MA

I have always been drawn to the sea. The beauty of the ocean, its endless shifting from serene to deadly and back, and our physical relationship to the sea has informed a lifetime of creative research. Climate change demands new and different ways of navigating how we exist. The warming of the ocean due in part to floating plastic detritus has already affected over 700 species of marine life and is causing coral reefs to die at an alarming rate. Being an artist and avid sailor, I am drawn to the tension between control and surrender, and I embrace the unpredictability of the processes and materials I use in my research. My work combines my need to make art that is visually arresting with my passion for marine advocacy. It is about cause and effect, the past and the present, love, and loss.



I began scuba diving at age 60 because coral reefs were beginning to die at an alarming rate, and I needed to witness this magical underwater landscape before it vanished. The experience of diving is akin to Alice's own in Wonderland: an immersion into an alternative universe of infinite blue space, anthropomorphic forms, and psychedelic colors teeming with life. As a painter of nature and landscape, I find the undersea world to be a subject of overwhelming strange beauty that I have only begun to investigate. It is also a subject that feels necessary to paint now. My direct observation and study of coral reefs have given me a greater awareness of the critical role a healthy coral reef environment has for sustaining life underwater. Through painting this fragile environment, I invite the viewer to enter a world of beauty, chaos, and turbulence, and ask them to notice and consider the impact they have on this important ecosystem.

Elizabeth Awalt
Soundings (for E.B.), 2018-22
oil on canvas, 72" x 60"
Courtesy of the Artist



In Hawai'i the ocean is an overwhelming presence, a source of extraordinary beauty, and an integral part of daily life. As a surfer, diver, and swimmer, I have seen the coral and fishes diminish with my own eyes. I have seen plastic pile up on the beaches, and invasive algae suffocate the lagoons. This is not abstract. These changes are happening fast enough to notice in the span of just a few years.

We have all heard the story of the canary in the coal mine. Coral, like the canary, is considered a sentinel species, and the rate at which it is dying is a warning to us all.

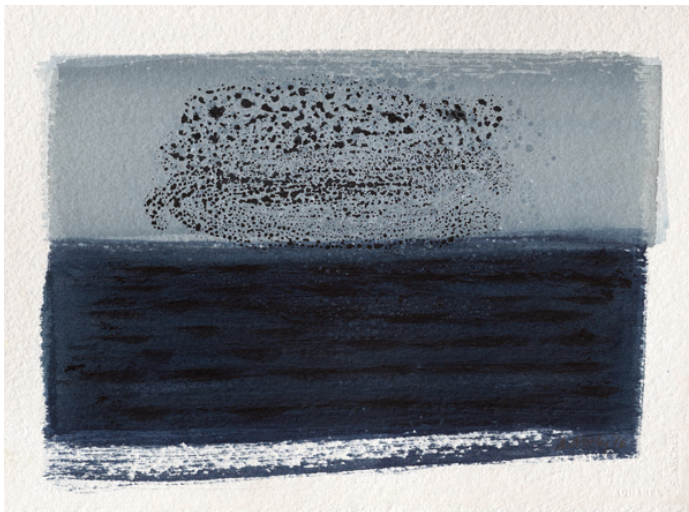
Christopher Edwards
Coral Canaries, 2020
ceramic, 43 total pieces, 1" x 3" x 1" each



Water cannot be thought about any more without thinking about the planet, climate change, and the tenuous grip humanity has on this space we inhabit.

Sandra Postal, a National Geographic Society Freshwater Fellow and Founder of the Global Water Policy Project, wrote in my 2014 Science Museum book, *Water Stories*: “Water is the planet’s greatest gift and the source of life itself... it is the great connector across space and time.” The importance of that statement cannot be emphasized enough.

Water in my work carries many visceral messages and imaginings through the fragile portal, balancing beauty and foreboding. In making these paintings about water, I use time-tested mark making from my printmaking days and transform them into painted strokes that become a joinery between one layer and another, not unlike water’s molecules.



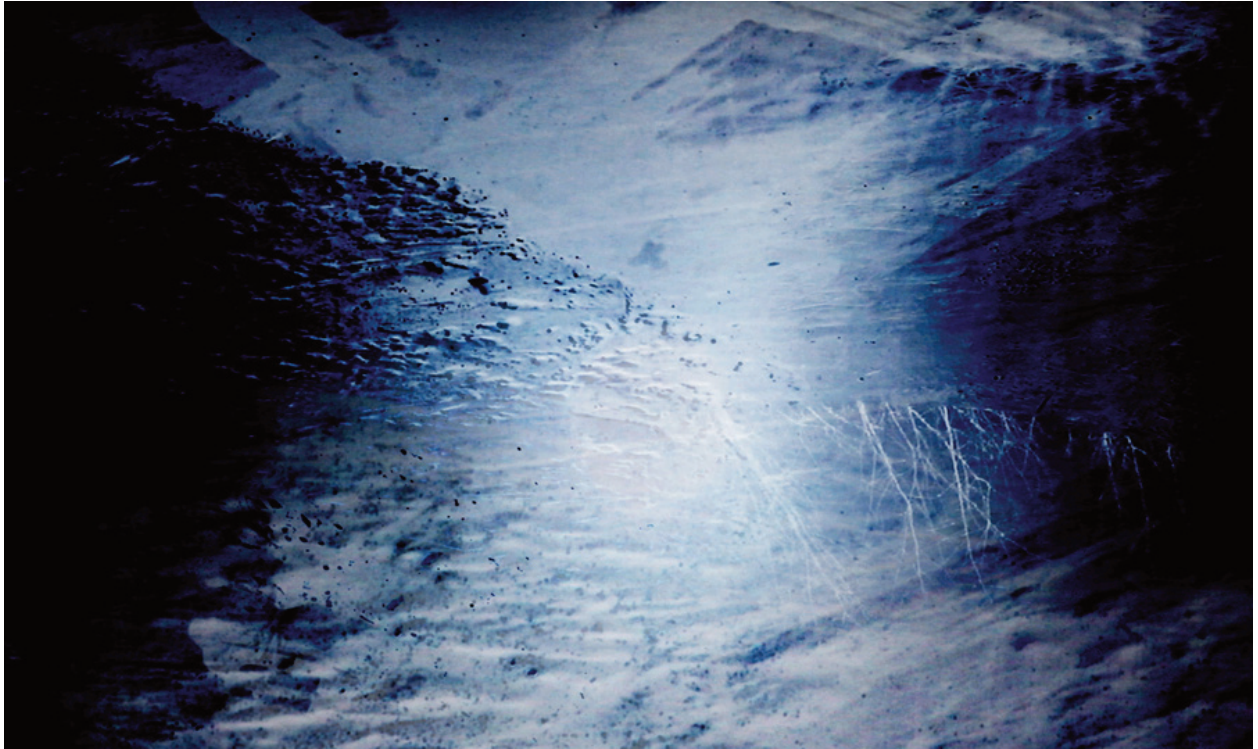
Anne Neely
Jonesport (M24), 2016, watercolor, 11.25" x 15"
Jonesport (M17), 2016, watercolor, 11" x 15"
Courtesy of the Artist



Ilana Manolson
Up Stream, 2022
acrylic on Sintra, 28" x 28"
Courtesy of the Artist

Water is central to life on earth. As da Vinci said, water is "the earth's blood." As a naturalist and painter, I have been painting birth, growth, decay, death, and renewal for three decades and find myself drawn to the edges of swamps, ponds, rivers, and oceans. I look to water to tell me about the many changes in the environment. As water changes, it changes its environment whether through erosion, flooding, nutrition, or drought. And what we as humans do upstream, will, through the water, affect what happens downstream.

As I look at nature and reflect, I find myself observing, responding to, and painting water's fluid form. My paintings refer to both the seen and imagined; the marks and pools of paint transform the landscape into metaphors for tenacious life in which some species thrive and others disappear. Swaths of pure fluid color appear wavelike, close up, and then fall into perspective at a distance, confounding and surprising the viewer. I paint and edit simultaneously. I capture the growing and the dying with the fluidity of the medium.



I explore how visual experiences can cause an individual's perception of space to oscillate between reality and imagination. I focus on how layered information can evoke mental images of dreamlike spaces. Central to this exploration are elements of fluidity, transparency, softness, and changeability. Aiming to transform elusive, fleeting moments and atmospheric phenomena into imaginative space, I have developed an intimate relationship with the surface of water. The ways that water disperses colored light can conjure both intricate microscopic structures and fluid cosmic panoramas. In my video *Laomedea*, I created a painterly composition of an oceanic landscape and outer space. A fluid scene moves between organic and digital, micro and macro, reshaping each frame with liquid imagery. I compose a form of visual poetry that aims to challenge one's conventional patterns of perception and elicit a sense of wonder.

Youjin Moon
Laomedea, 2019
video still
Courtesy of the Artist



I come from a lineage of mariners. Water is the most dynamic element I can work with—it has different states, a contemplative and a destructive one. It makes noise; it cools, cuts through land, and creates new topographies. It is also what wars are about. Water divides cities, states, and countries, but it can also bring people together.

Mags Harries
Aqua Alta, 2015
3D print, 1 of 5, polymethylacrylate and plaster, 4" x 6" x 6.5"
Courtesy of the Artist



Jackie Brown
Aggregate Series I, 2020
ceramic sculpture, 15" x 9" x 6"
Courtesy of the Artist

Water erodes. It sculpts and shapes the world around us in countless ways. It helps bacteria and microorganisms thrive in the nooks, crannies, and crevices of all matter. It is essential to decomposition, and this process of breaking things down is vital to new growth. The forms in the *Aggregate Series* embody this, as if plucked from the shoreline and worn away by the pull of the tide. With references to driftwood and manmade ropes and knots, the series aims to explore human nature and ways that we try to control natural processes, both fostering and restricting growth. The abstracted forms conjure up notions of something that is at once alive and growing, dead and decaying, ecological, geological, and anthropomorphic. I see the work as a response to the complex challenges of our time, especially with regard to the environment and our fraught relationship with living systems.



From local rivers to global ocean currents, my work explores the vulnerability and resiliency of coastal ecosystems, the communities they impact, and our entangled relationships with interconnected bodies of water. For over a decade, I have studied, documented, and drawn from bodies of water across the Americas—from rivers in the Boston area where I live and work, to the coasts of Miami where I was raised, to the coasts of Cuba and Colombia, regions where my parents are from. In my artistic practice, water is centered as source imagery, physical material, and main subject to explore circulation, relocation, global economies, carbon cycles, and connections between everyday individual actions and lasting cumulative public impacts.

Evelyn Rydz
Folded Waters (Atlantic/Pacific), 2021
watercolors and color pencils on two sheets of cut paper, 14" x 20.5"
Courtesy of Ellen Miller Gallery & the Artist



I grew up spending summers near the ocean, but I now live in the city. I miss the vast wilderness of the ocean with all its beauty and power to both repel and attract.

Whales are the most magnificent creatures, and humans are doing their utmost to destroy both them and the oceans they swim in.

In 2020, I reread *Moby-Dick or The Whale*, one chapter a day. The dread and obsession in this great novel of whaling and the ocean echoed how I felt at that time in the pandemic. These four drawings are part of an installation, *Leviathan*, which, in referring to *Moby-Dick*, addresses the relentless American obsession with violence.

Now small fowls flew screaming over the yet yawning gulf; a sullen white surf beat against its steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago.

—Herman Melville,
Moby-Dick or The Whale

Heidi Whitman
Leviathan D7, 2022
ink, gouache and acrylic on paper, 17.5" x 20.5"
Courtesy of the Artist



Henry Horenstein
Cownose Ray, 2000,
archival pigment print, 12" x 18"
Courtesy of the Artist

Why water? So many reasons and none of them are very complicated. I was getting sick (and tired) of documentary work, my usual jam. I was looking for something different. Kind of like a midlife crisis.

For a freelance assignment in the early '90s, I was shooting at zoos and aquariums, and I liked what I was getting. Even more, I liked the pace. Slower and more deliberate than documentary work. Solitary and, dare I say it, spiritual. So I kept shooting. Galleries seemed to like it, as did publishers. And I like it when my work is liked, ha.

One other thing: Though I had some of the greatest photographers of the day for teachers—Minor White, Harry Callahan, Aaron Siskind—I wasn't so much into their work. But this aquatic work kind of brought me back to them, to what they taught me. Make good pictures of interesting subjects and concentrate on composition, lighting, tonality, etc. Core values of all artists really. These photos are about these old-school things and not about conceptual issues, gender, identity, etc. I'll leave it to younger photographers to work out those things.



“I saw the seascape coming to meet me. I gazed into a magnificent valley with peaks of tall coral reefs, swaying sea-plumes, slender gorgonians, purple sea-fans.... I had descended to fairyland, six fathoms below the surface—thirty-six feet as landsman know them, roughly equivalent to the height of a small two-story house.”

Excerpt from Bostelmann's writings describing her first experience descending 36 feet under the sea donning a sixty-pound copper helmet, a red bathing suit and sneakers, and carrying a small zinc engraver's plate and steel pin to record what she saw. (*Exploratory Works: Drawings from the Department of Tropical Research Field Expeditions*, presented by The Drawing Center, NY, April 14-June 16, 2017, pp. 126-27.)

Else Bostelmann
Chiasmodon Niger Stomach Contents, 1931
watercolor on paper, 14.5" x 11.5"
Courtesy of the Wildlife Conservation Society Archives

ConcordArt

Concord Center
for the Visual Arts

37 Lexington Road
Concord, MA 01742
Tues-Sat 10-4:30, Sun noon-4
Closed Mondays

Mission:
To promote and advance
the visual arts and artists,
and to enrich and sustain
our cultural community.



Honoring Concord Arts' centennial year and founder, Elizabeth Wentworth Roberts, who drew inspiration from the river in Concord and the ocean in Annisquam, **UNDERCURRENTS: Water + Human Impact** is part of the Concord Art Centennial Exhibition Series.

Exhibition Sponsor
EVARTS + MCLEAN + CO
evartsmcleanco@compass.com
Compass Real Estate
97 Lowell Road
Concord, MA 01742

Anne Neely
Melt, 2021
oil on linen, 49" x 80"

