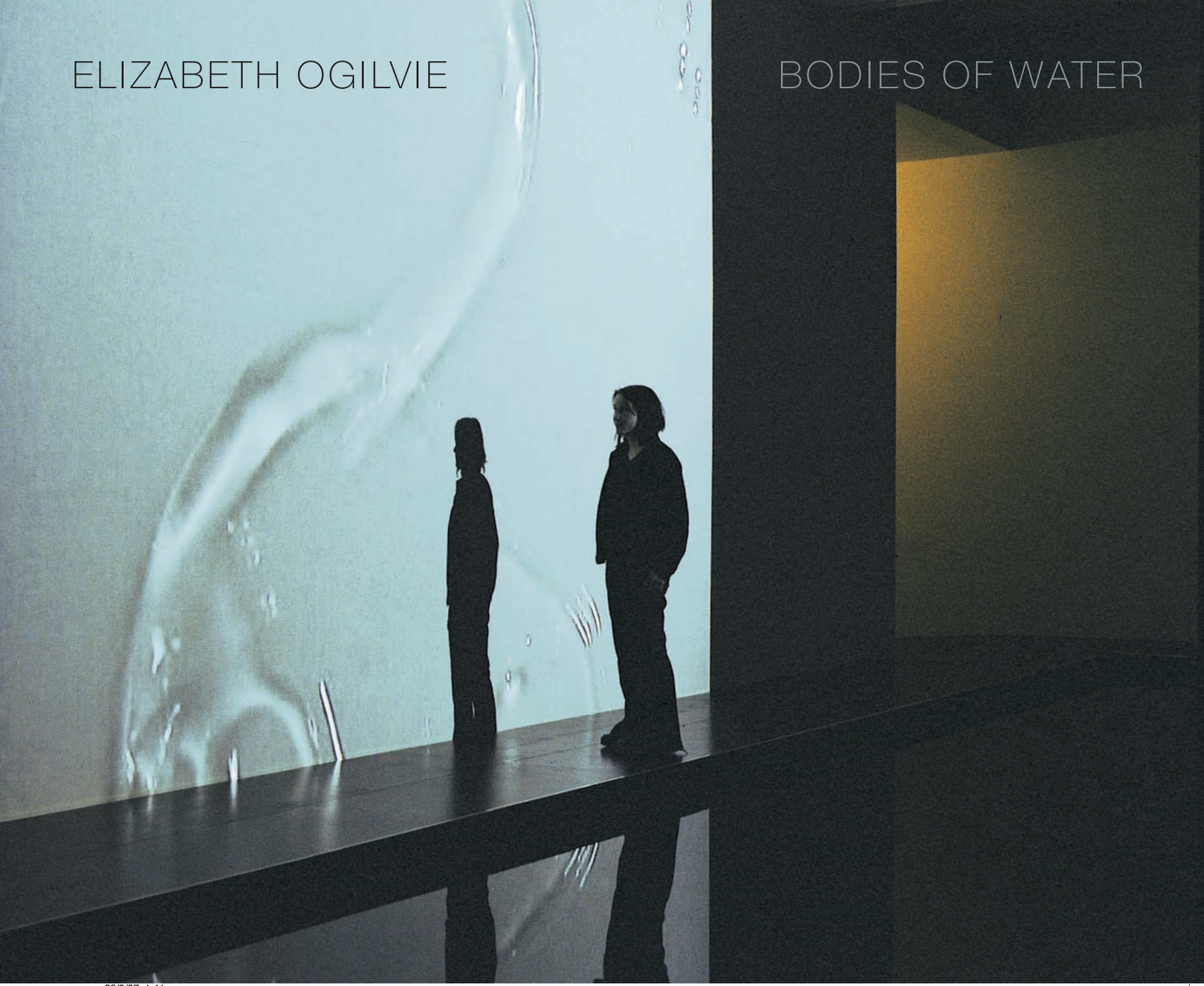


ELIZABETH OGILVIE

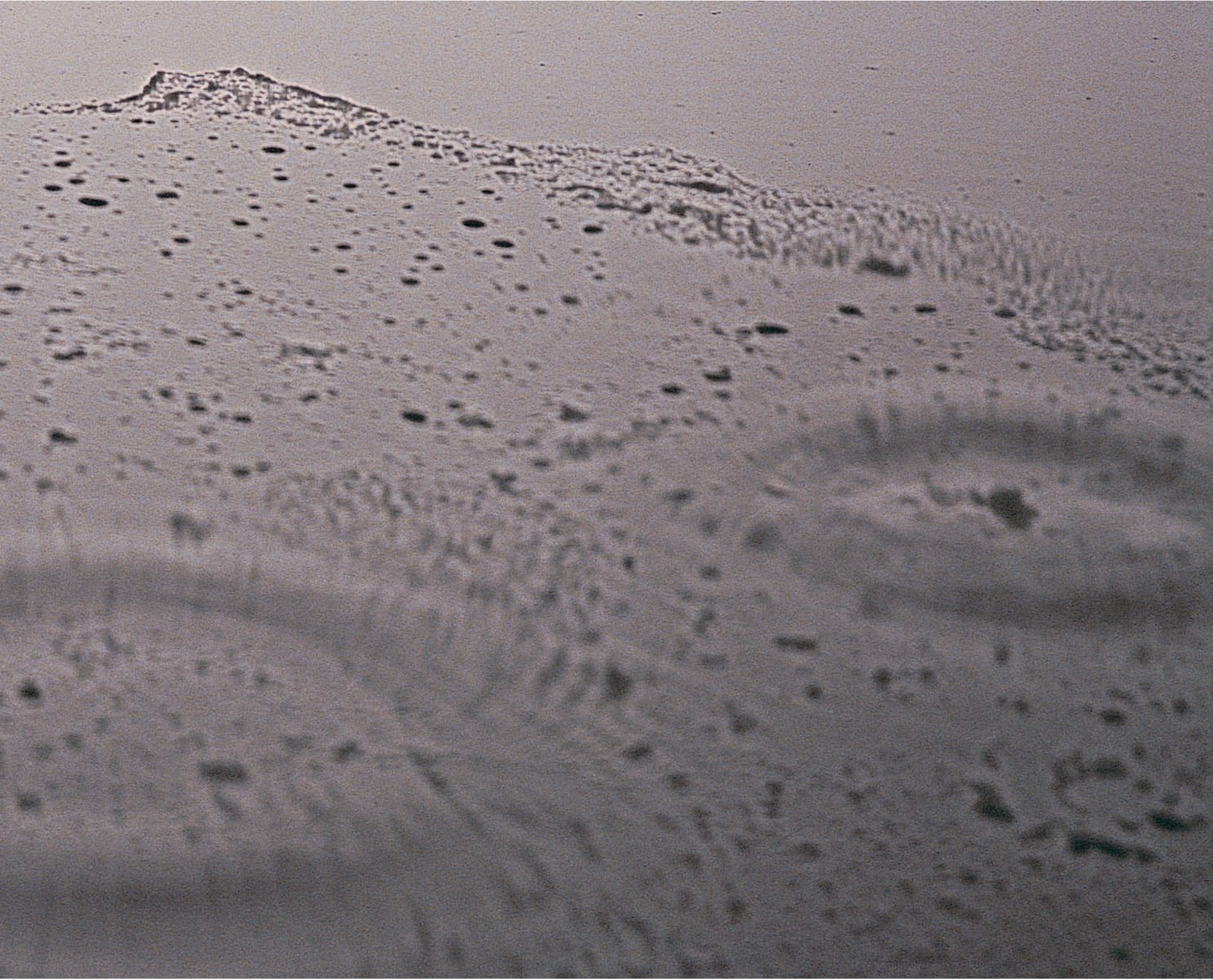
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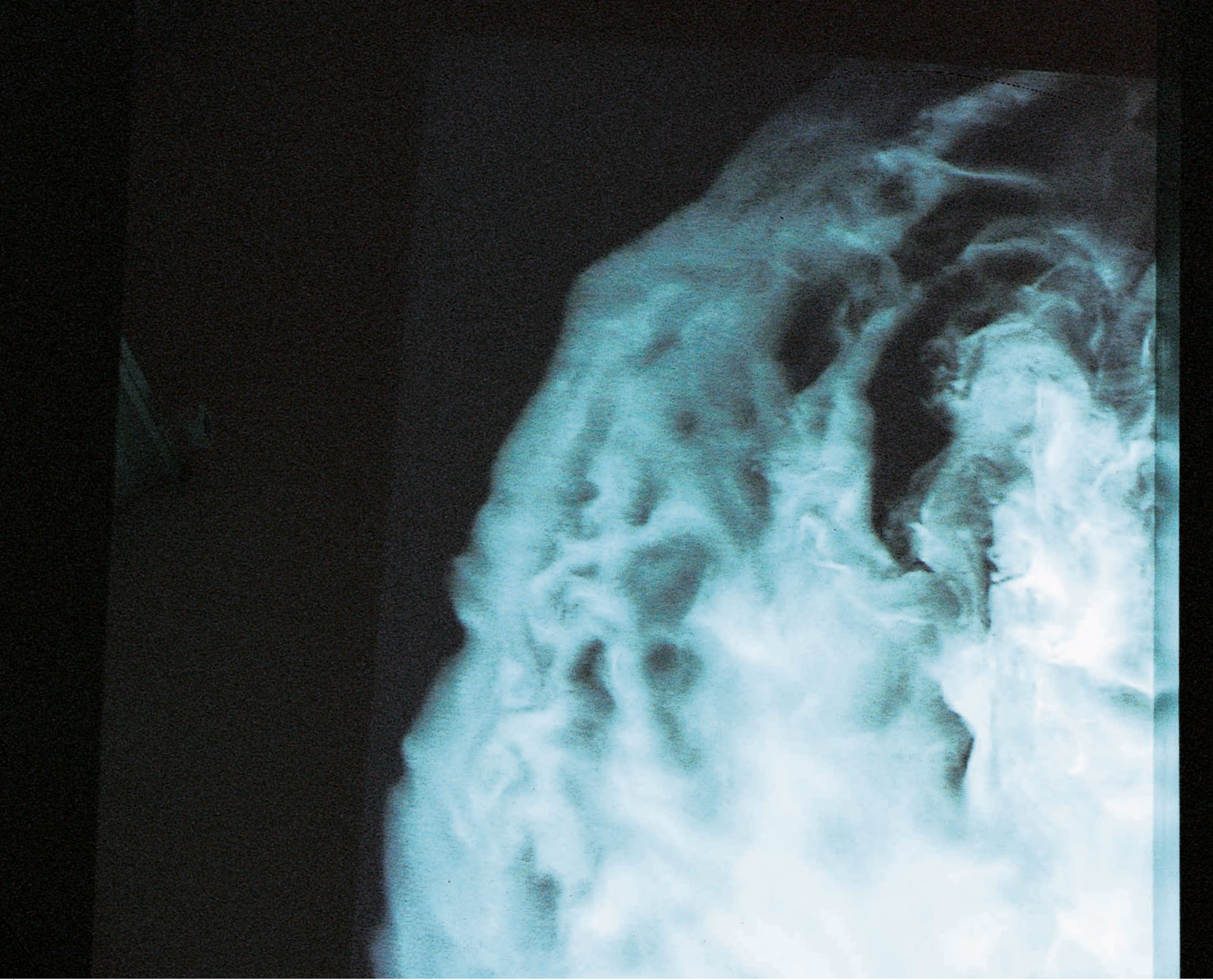


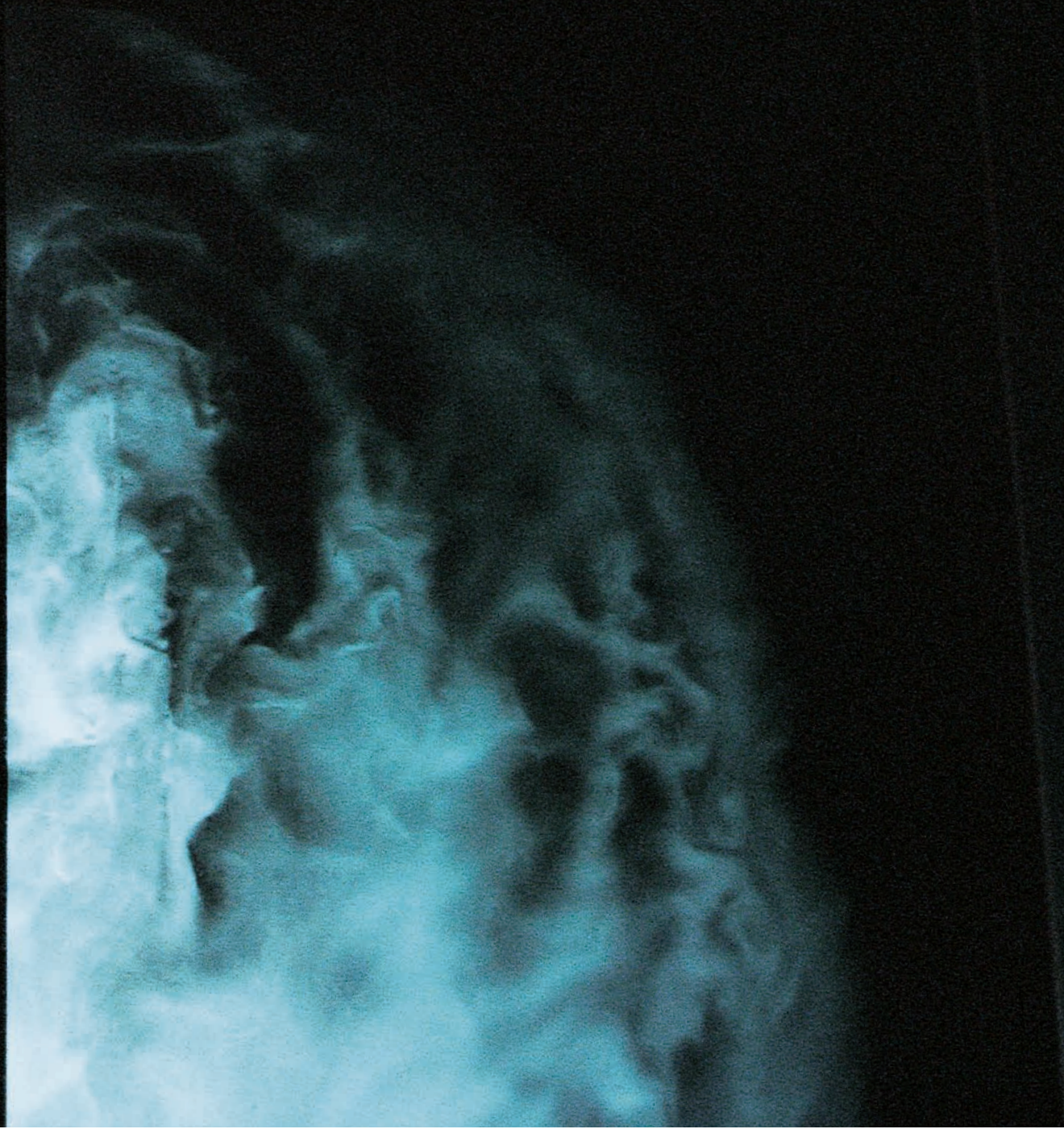
















**Elizabeth Ogilvie: Bodies of Water**

16 December 2005 to 12 February 2006

Dundee Contemporary Arts

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11	Foreword	Katrina M. Brown
12	Acknowledgements	
14	on a stretch of moor	Thomas A. Clark
23	Drawing with water	Wendy Gunn
39	Catalogue	
46	Biography	



## Foreword

Water has recently and increasingly been described as the oil of the twenty-first century. It is a powerful analogy, as it not only acknowledges the fundamental necessity of the substance to civilised life, its scarcity as a natural resource and the politics of ownership and control. It also evokes the prospect of conflict, for oil has been the source of so much of the crises of recent history. The suggestion that something we habitually consume, utilise and regard with little or no thought, that this substance we take so much for granted – particularly here in Scotland where we live literally surrounded by it – will become a serious source of contention, even violence, is undoubtedly challenging.

It is therefore a timely moment for the work of Elizabeth Ogilvie, an artist who has so often drawn inspiration from various 'bodies of water', the title of her major exhibition of new work at Dundee Contemporary Arts in 2005. Living and working by the sea for much of her life, Ogilvie has long

fostered an appreciation of its power, both physical and emotional. Her art does not seek to promote the fast emerging politics of water, but operates at a more essential level to encourage us to consider its worth: to marvel at its visual and physical effect, to appreciate its universal and sustaining properties. Moving on from two-dimensional and sculptural works in recent years to vast installations and environments, Ogilvie increasingly offers us experiences rather than images. Her work has turned to look at the uses or applications of water in architecture, in the creation of spaces – often conceived quite literally for reflection, both physical and mental.

In her stunning and dramatic transformation of DCA's galleries, Ogilvie invited us to explore and reflect on water, the most fundamental of substances. She looked at patterns of change, movement and transformation in subtle and delicate plays between light and darkness, in both live and recorded 'events'. In an ambitious

and technically challenging installation, DCA's large main gallery was darkened and converted into two large pools, surrounded and connected by simple, walk-able paths. One remained still and utterly mirror-like, while the other was regularly animated by various mechanisms, effectively creating live drawings with light in the space of the viewer's encounter. Abstract patterns and striking monochrome effects were created by water in its various states of movement.

Ogilvie's work involves elements of art, architecture, science and music, the smaller gallery being occupied by a three-screen video installation made in collaboration with Joji Hirota, a 'Taiko' drummer and internationally renowned composer and performer. This documented an interplay between sound and light, between Hirota's performance and Ogilvie's parallel manipulation of a small pool of water. Together the installations evoked

something of the wonder of natural phenomena, environmental concerns and the complexity of what can appear so simple. Dundee's renowned river setting, with the Tay flowing beyond the gallery walls, the specific backdrop against which Ogilvie developed these works, served to echo the patterns of ripples and resonance that ran throughout the exhibition.

We are grateful to the artist for the considerable time and energy she devoted to the project, as well as to Kenneth Pithouse for his engineering support and advice. Thanks are also due to Wendy Gunn for her thoughtful text about the artist's work, to Thomas A. Clark for the poem written in response to his experience of visiting Ogilvie's exhibition at DCA and to Hope Scott Trust, The Carnegie Trust, Edinburgh College of Art, for their support of this publication.

**Katrina M. Brown** Curator

### **Acknowledgements**

Elizabeth Ogilvie would like to thank the following for their cooperation and support in the production of *Bodies of Water*: Katrina Brown, Anne-Marie Watson, Robert Callender, GemLexSystems, Wendy Gunn, Thomas A. Clark, Joji and Michi Hirota, Andy Rice, Rob Page, 'Brady Cole' and Sean Crossan, Andy Neil, Alistair McCready for AML, Nathan's Blacksmiths, Dirk Mross, Joachim Römer and Marion Hasse. And at Dundee Contemporary Arts: Trevor Hall, Colin Lindsay, Anton Beaver, Clare Booth, Andrew Dodds, Steve Lawrie, Derek Lodge, Jason Shearer and Andrew Thompson.



# on a stretch of moor

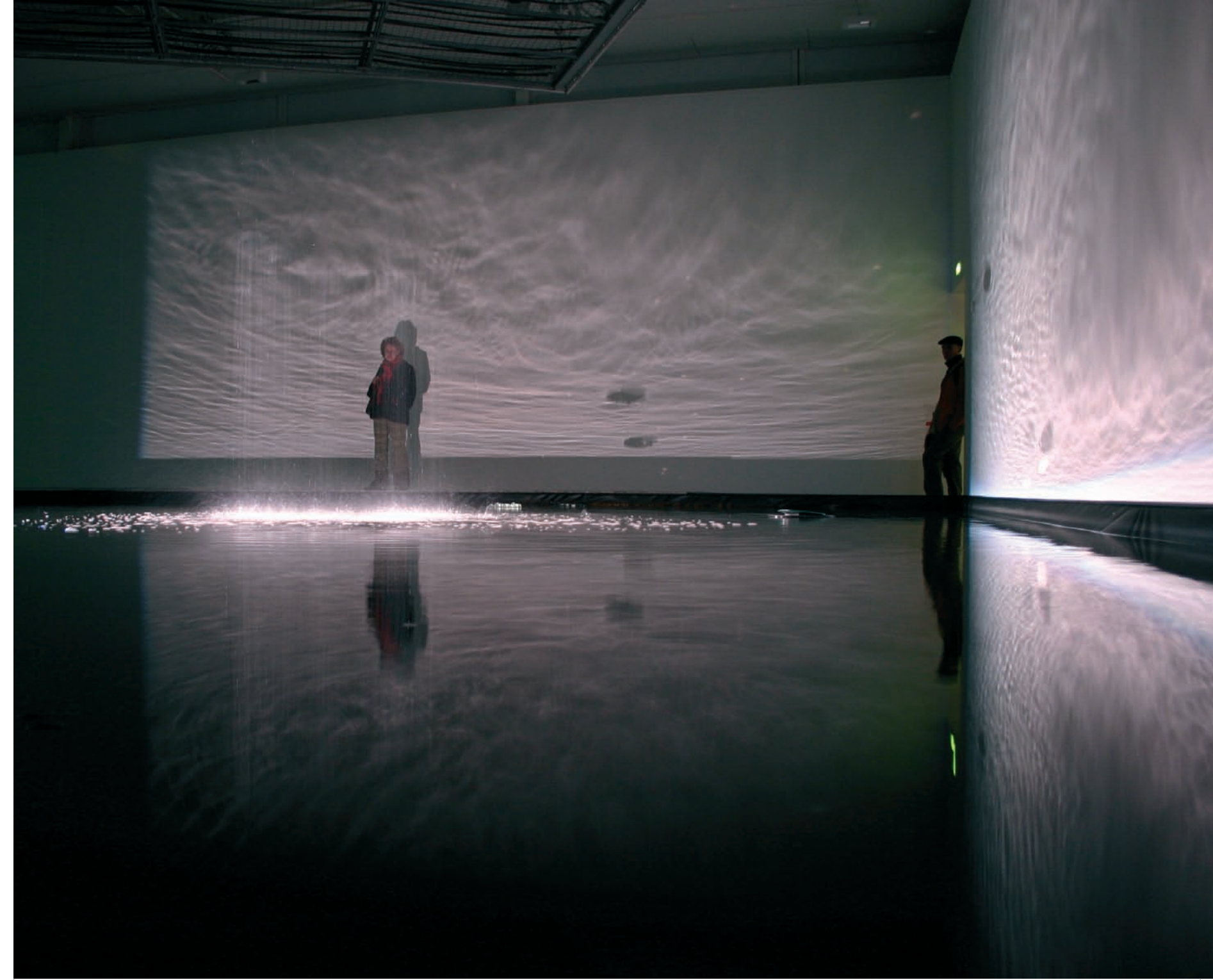
Thomas A. Clark

in a place of stones  
a delay of water  
hidden among reeds  
clumps of wild daffodils  
inclined towards it

water seeps and drains  
out into blanket mire  
water drips and drops  
it stands and spreads over  
a bleak stretch of moor

grasses pencilled in  
softly on flaking light  
occasional glint  
of light on a black stone  
dark mood of water

no path leads down to  
the edge of the lochan  
a slight depression  
or digression in grass  
suggests you follow





ELIZABETH  
OGILVIE

BODIES OF

**Dundee  
Contemporary  
Arts**

WATER

as you lean over  
the fringed water margin  
a specular form  
rises to meet you through  
long strands of crowfoot

parting the pondweed  
it glowers up at you  
floats away from you  
to break up again in  
thin twists of water

the self that flows out  
in a look can turn back  
you must recognise  
yourself by a constant  
looking and checking

dusk is to linger  
in a collapse of thought  
looking at looking  
until a thrum of light  
troubles reflection



all day you have gazed  
out over distances  
followed the traces  
deep into forests where  
you failed to appear

for hours you were lost  
in the folds of the hills  
then at evening found  
your features mirrored in  
green folds of water

are you what you see  
or are you what you know  
body of water  
or a dry consciousness  
that can turn away

if you throw your voice  
against the woods and rocks  
your name will come back  
from the woods and the rocks  
sounding tired and strange



through all the long glens  
a heron by water  
does not glimpse a form  
half as transfixing as  
now swims through duckweed

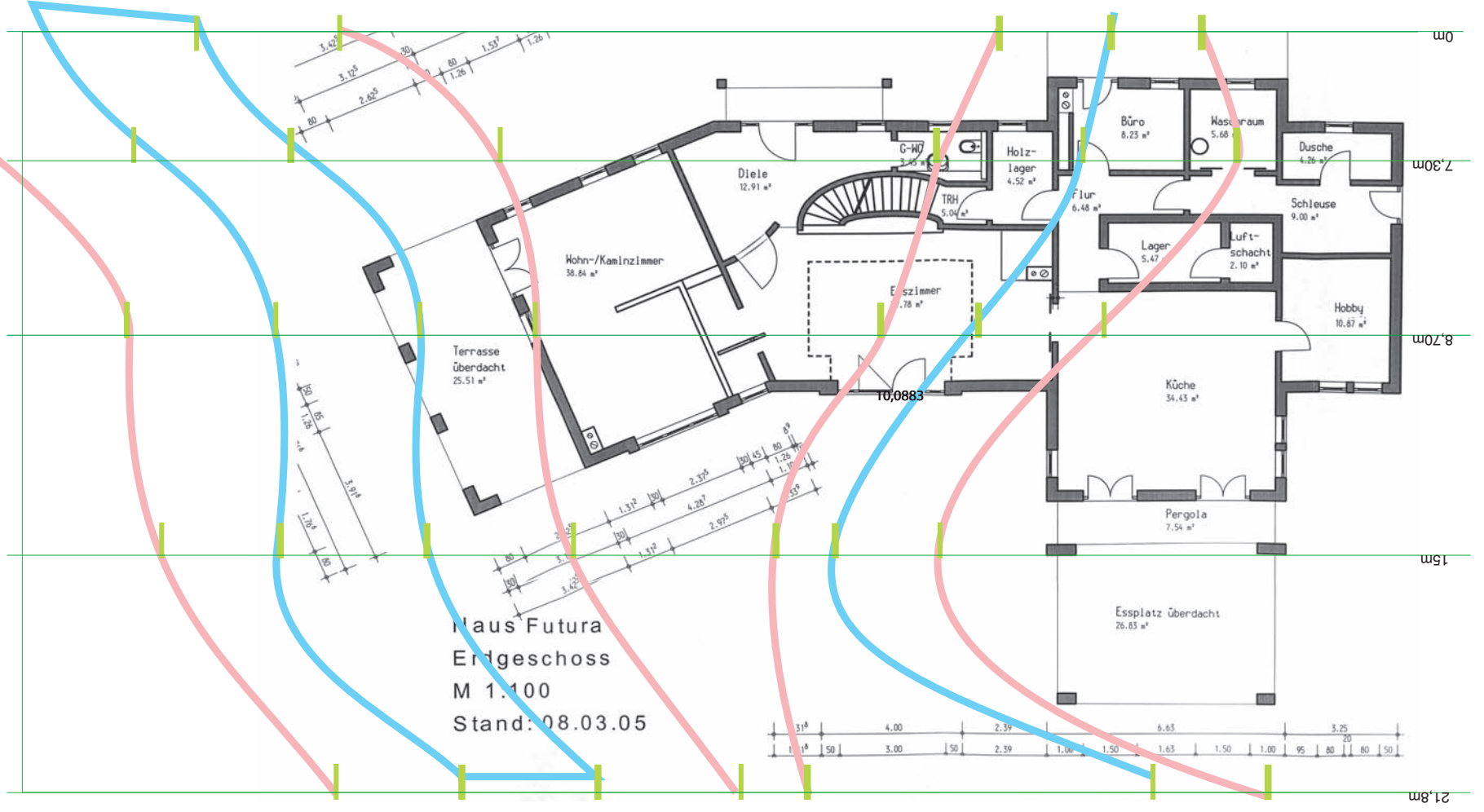
the cries of lapwings  
couldn't lure you away  
or divert you from  
something in the water  
not of the water

as you hesitate  
between self and image  
a space opens up  
between self and image  
empty of content

a forlorn water  
cold in the spreading dusk  
a few daffodils  
light and ingenuous  
leaning over it



- Rutenausschlag
- Wasserader
- Winkelstrahlung
- Gänge mit der Wünschelrute
- Gebäudegrundriss



10,0883



# Drawing with water

Wendy Gunn

Left: A diviner's mapping of how water behaves underground<sup>1</sup>

1. The water diviner's lines overlay an architectural ground plan, Gebäudegrundriss [Grey plan], for a proposed private dwelling. Before delivering the final plans to Planning & Building Control, the water diviner is employed by clients to check waters behaviour on the chosen site. Gänge mit Wünschelrute, [Dark green horizontal lines], indicate a series of routes where the water diviner has traced streams with his water divining rods. Rutenaussschlag [Acid green short vertical lines] are the small markers he places, like small different coloured flags on sticks, to mark points indicating streaming water and therefore building up a gradual picture of what is underground. Wasserader [Aqua lines] denote natural streams or watercourses, Winkelstrahlung [Pink lines], the extent of emissions from underground streams.

2. The early German verb 'muten' means; to focus your sense on something, to desire, crave.

According to the German water diviner Dirk Mross, when underground streams cross over, if people work or live above that point for example in an office building or block of flats; it is those situated furthest away from the water that suffer the greater negative effect on their health ...

He continues to tell his story:  
Of all the original elements, (archetypal, ancient elements), water is the most fluid one and is classified as the female principle. From a biological point of view, water permeates all life on earth. In spiritual and mythological terms, water is inhabited by beings known as Undines. These have been investigated using a divining rod [dowsing rod, dowser] just in the same way as underground watercourses are detected. This work is called 'Muten'.<sup>2</sup> Since the early Middle Ages people have practiced 'Muten' to trace watercourses and, later on, minerals and other natural resources. The phenomenon of water divining is based on finely

tuned energies, not effectively demonstrable with today's instruments. The 'measuring or reading instrument' which has been performing for centuries is, of course, the human being. We originate from water and our life is determined by water. Consequently, our ability to react sensitively to this element should not come as a surprise. Instincts among the animal kingdom also, are unfailing when focused on water. Camels, for example, are able to sense and position water from a distance of several kilometres.

Stones on the riverbed, polished until smooth, clearly demonstrate the tremendous power of shallow water. It is precisely this power in underground watercourses that deeply affects many forms of life, including human beings. The emergence of pressures, friction and erosion underground at the centre of gravity and in the vicinity of underground streams leads to radiation of fine matter. Assisted by the divining rod we can detect this effect. These fine emissions result in a

form of micro-stress inside our body, which can be clinically diagnosed. Micro-stress is a consequence of the exchange of energies between water in the human cell and the force created by water underground. The phenomenon is called resonance – or tuning fork principle. This emission causes a lasting, so called, depolarisation or split in the human cell membrane. The metabolism of the cell can be disturbed for an extended period, thereby causing the cell to lose its ability to heal and regenerate. Residing above an underground stream for a long period can lead to cancer invading the cells.

Animals react instinctively and are sensitive to these emissions from underground. Simultaneous progress of health in humans and animals can be studied. And, for example, when dogs choose places to rest, they avoid spots of higher emissions while cats, on the other hand, instinctively sleep in these sites, with no adverse effect on their health. However, when human beings sleep in or occupy

this same location for a long time, they are affected, resulting in a clinically proven disorder and imbalance, which can lead to serious illness. These circumstances reveal once again water's ambivalent nature. It is so extremely destructive, but so absolutely vital to our existence.

Dirk Mross, Cologne, July 2006

3. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and value* (Trans. P. Winch. Ed. Von Wright, G.H. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984) p.71e.

## Introduction

While still at school our children get taught that water *consists* of the gases hydrogen and oxygen, or sugar of carbon, hydrogen and oxygen. Anyone who doesn't understand is stupid. The most important questions are concealed.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1984<sup>3</sup>

What do people learn from extensive periods of observing the movements of water?

The artist Elizabeth Ogilvie is concerned with the way people perceive the world around them. As a child, Ogilvie played a lot with water. She used to play beside and in the waters of the North Esk; a river located in the North East of Scotland. She was given the freedom by her parents to go on adventures beside the river and the sea.

Playing with water is an important part of her investigations. One of the principal aims in her work is to create interactive environments, which enhance people's understanding of non-

urban environments. Her training in sculpture led her towards a concern with the way light describes form. An education in learning how to *see* involved directly observing the body. Observing involved looking at and drawing with the same life-model for extended periods. The experience of repeatedly drawing and modelling with clay directly from the human figure developed her perceptual skills. Most of all this practice was a valuable learning experience, which she finds herself revisiting again and again. Revisiting involves discovering more and more – the more she looks, *the more she is able to see*.<sup>4</sup> The practice of drawing from the human figure did not necessitate any need for analysis. Instead, the practices of drawing and modelling helped her to attune her senses to the human body within a continuously changing environment. Importantly, Ogilvie was not concerned with perfecting an imperfect translation. She was searching for an intuitive

understanding through a simple act.<sup>5</sup>

*Just to sit down and observe tiny details is pure joy.* By sitting and observing water is to enhance our understanding with it. Light and movement influence her work, as does an element of control and manipulation of environments. She can spend whole days just observing tiny streams in isolated landscapes with a video camera and a sketchbook. Within these remote areas of North West Scotland, water is always moving even when it is still.

4. Quotes are from conversations the author instigated with Elizabeth Ogilvie about the preparation and installation of her exhibition *Bodies of Water* (2006).

5. Henri Bergson, *The creative mind* (Trans. M.L. Andison, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968 (1946)) pp.190–191.

### Looking at looking at

**When you look at water, you can choose to look at the surface or underneath. It is not possible to focus on them both at the same time.**

Elizabeth Ogilvie, 2006

While studying details of water pattern, Ogilvie builds up an intimacy with this movement. In the exhibition *Bodies of Water* her aim was to share this intimacy with others, describing the way water moves. In so doing, her installation heightens the senses of others in an attempt to create an awareness of what it is to be human. Inspired by Bachelard's essays in *Water and Dreams* (1983), Ogilvie is interested in the hidden poetry, scale and metaphors within the qualities of water. Her role is to enable water to act in itself. Water has a collaborative nature and does more than you can imagine. Enabling involves engagement and playing. Playing with reality, according to the anthropologist Michael Jackson (1998), *...enables us to renegotiate the*

6. Michael Jackson, *Minima ethnographica: intersubjectivity and the anthropological project* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998) pp.28–9.

7. Philippe Descola, *In the society of nature: a native ecology in Amazonia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) p.36.

*given, experiment with alternatives, imagine how things might be otherwise, and so resolve obliquely and artificially that which cannot be resolved directly in the “real” world.*<sup>6</sup>

It also involves standing back and becoming an observer. Within this process, surroundings are important. The large studio environment where she works is a place of contemplation. Within this environment she observes water at a distance and in detail, using large-scale projections which reveal wave patterns. The projections document water moving in response to her action on the surface.

In her investigations, she is searching for an equivalent of what she is learning from direct observation. This is an attempt to create an experience of *seeing*. Exploring new ideas and experimenting in the studio, she takes risks within the work and initiates new concepts, through making mistakes and discoveries. In order to understand what she is observing, she

is anxious to learn from other people. *How does water behave? What are the limitations of what could be done with it? Can I stretch the possibilities?*

Ogilvie’s research has involved collaborating with scientists and engineers, giving her the possibility to expand and extend her knowledge of how technology can support communication between the artist and audience. Dialogues with scientists and engineers help her to focus ideas, by making her aware of the limitations of the use of the medium within a gallery context. Water is both the medium and subject in her work, always enfolding back and enacting upon itself; reminding us of the Amazonian people’s concept of *Entza*, as being *both water from the river and the river itself*.<sup>7</sup>

Experiments in the studio, observations outside, textual forms and notes help her communicate to others what she is trying to create. Her notes are not a drawing because *it is*

*not possible to draw an experience*. Describing how she will *affect others is easier in words than drawn form ...* And during this process, *words are used to get you closer to what you want*. By writing, by making a storyboard, all the senses are involved when it comes to water in particular. This process is generative and involves a special kind of writing.

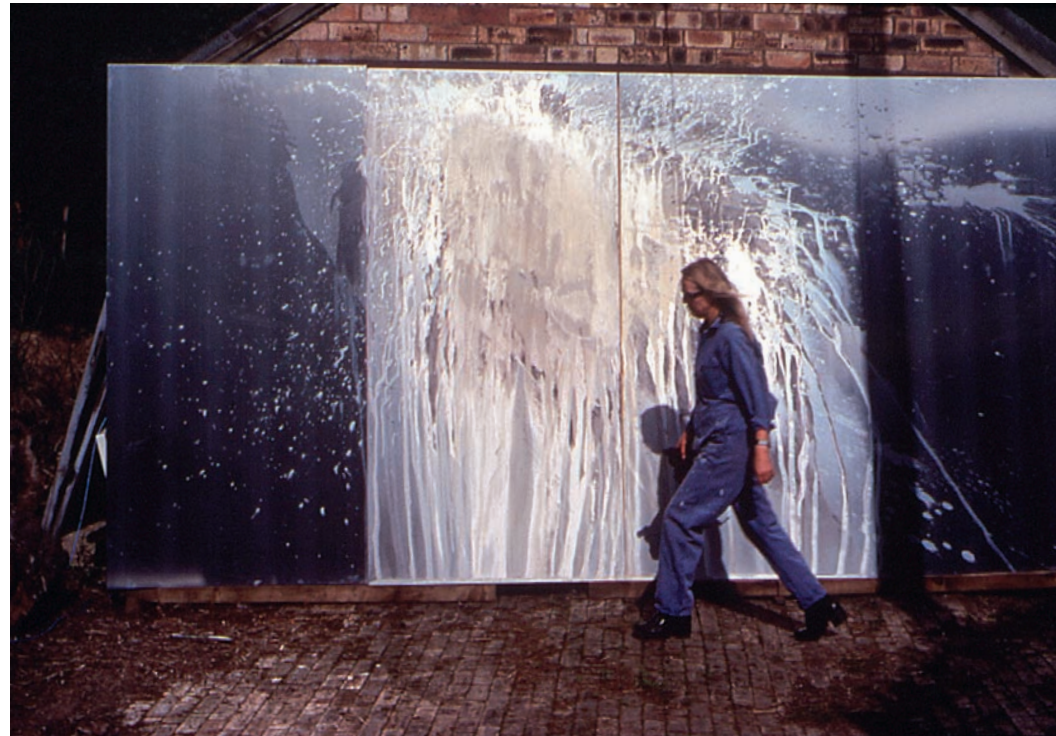
Comparing her own observational practices with that of a scientist, Ogilvie noticed that the scientist would usually set up a specific experiment, whereas her experiments were more general, dependant upon observations that go beyond what is visible under the microscopic lens.

**Oceanus**

Water, salt, aluminium, pvc pipes, dye, paint, glass  
250 x 625 cm  
Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, 1997



The artist at Graal Press etching  
with various mordants on aluminium  
for *A Poetics of Water*, Stephen  
Lacey Gallery, London, 1999





8. Examples of this work can be seen in two of Ogilvie's previous exhibition catalogues: *Island Within*, Arnolfini, Bristol, 1995 and *Oceanus Project 1*, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry, 1997.

9. Elizabeth Ogilvie, *A Poetics of Water*, Stephen Lacey Gallery, London, 1999.

10. Elizabeth Ogilvie, *Into the Oceanic (dhan chuan mhòr)*, Lochmaddy: Taigh Chearsabhagh Trust, 1999.

11. Earlier references to the twists and turns of waters movement were evident in Ogilvie's Fruitmarket Gallery exhibition in Edinburgh, *Watermarks: Two Solo Exhibitions Elizabeth Ogilvie and Robert Callender*, Edinburgh (1980).

12. *The Liquid Room* was realised after receiving a Creative Scotland Award (2001) used to develop an exhibition at Kirkcaldy Dock.

13. Tim Ingold, *The eye of the storm: visual perception and the weather* (Visual Studies. 20:2. 2005) p.101.



above

#### **A Poetics of Water**

Installation in progress, water, organic pigment paste, aluminium, polyplastic, timber, paint

1800 x 1800 cm

Hangar, Deephaven, Cromarty Firth, commission, Another Space Ltd, 1999

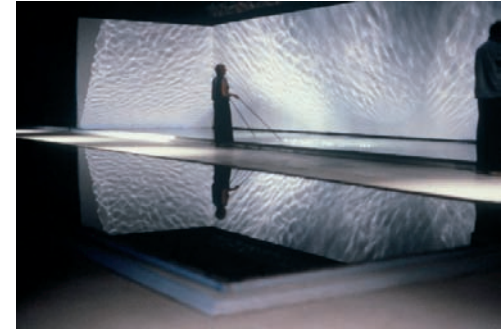
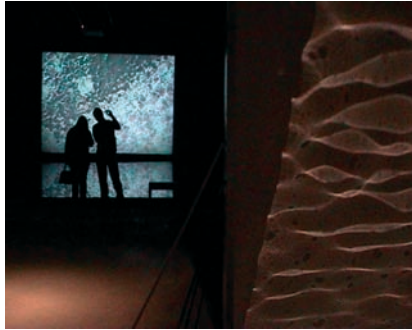
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#### **Into the Oceanic**

Water, roofing materials, timber, paint, aluminium, perspex, fans, pumps, benches

1500 x 1300 cm

Odapark Foundation, Netherlands, 2000



### Drawing with water

In her earlier work from the 1980s Ogilvie produced large-scale drawings in which she experimented with graphite on paper. During the 1990s she spent periods at Graal Press near Edinburgh, making marks with water and mixed media, texts and etching with mordants on metal.<sup>8</sup> Commissioned work at Deephaven Hangar, Cromarty Firth, provided Ogilvie with an opportunity to produce large-scale works, involving water as the main medium. In parallel, she was encouraged by Stephen Lacey Gallery to begin experimenting with liquids.<sup>9</sup> Using an etching technique, she became interested in documenting traces left by the movement of mordants in water.

It was however the late Joop Wismans at Odapark in the Netherlands, who gave Ogilvie one of her first opportunities to contain large volumes of water within a gallery interior. Again it was the scale of experience of playing in the extended territories from her childhood

environments, which led her towards surrounding herself and others with drawings. Drawings soon became installations.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the '90s, she began describing the way water moved<sup>11</sup> and became interested in the potential to realise its limitless possibilities. Throughout this time experimentation with materials was as it still is central to her working process.

*The Liquid Room* (2001)<sup>12</sup> was a major work and an important development in Ogilvie's practice as an artist. In this large scale installation she created a number of interaction areas which allowed people to contemplate large planes of water and create their own wave patterns. Observing the quality of water during the exhibition, Ogilvie became aware of water's ability to act as a carrier of light revealing the detail of how it behaves. Seeing in this instance as Ingold intones, *is the experience of light, what you see is in the light*.<sup>13</sup> Living by the sea

she is aware that reflective light on the water changes all the time. This constant movement and rhythm made her dissatisfied with two-dimensional drawing. After exploring drawing with different media including light and shadow, she began drawing with water – both still and moving.

above

#### The Liquid Room

Water, roofing materials, timber, paint, aluminium, floods, video projection, fans, pumps, benches  
72 m x 13 m  
Forth Ports Warehouse, Kirkcaldy Dock, Fife, 2001

### Water, movement and interaction

Uncertainty is important in any art form because ideas must continuously flow. Working with a medium you cannot control and do not really know how it will act is central to Ogilvie's practice.

Visitors to *Bodies of Water* were encouraged to spend time with the installation in order to directly experience the patterns of water movement. Comparing her own experience of non-urban landscapes, Ogilvie was particularly interested in what long-term effects this body of water would have on the public. To create certain types of wave pattern is to show the pattern of water over time. Water keeps on moving, *you just enable it*. Through experimenting and collaborating with water, she knows the kind of movement she wants to make. Collaboration involves standing back; allowing the water to behave and seeing how it moves through the situations you have created for it.<sup>14</sup> This movement was connected to the rhythm

of fluids moving within the body. Interaction with water occurred by making small gestures, bringing attention to fluids in the body that allow us to move and act in this way. Water was used to describe the way fluid moves.

Making things that do not work is part of her developmental process. You do not move forward in a period of certainty. Moving forward involves experiencing both known and unknown factors. She commented:

**You are never comfortable but it is a state required for the work to emerge. It is a matter of trusting your instinct through discovery and what you can achieve by that. You have to be confident. This is an important stage to go through in my work.**

### Learning from reflections

#### **Bodies of Water: Large Gallery**

The public enter from the smaller gallery onto a deck immediately adjacent to a still pool. This deck continues throughout the gallery enabling the viewer to walk around two large pools of water: one still, one moving. A video projection on the large east wall sits above the still pool and shows details of different rhythms found in water. This projected image is reflected on the surface of the pool magnifying its scale and depth. The central deck which divides the space and vast area of water in two, leads to a wide deck on the north wall. This provides quiet viewing areas. In the second pool, technological mechanisms, invisible to the public, provide a cycle of water events which disturb the water's surface. Small, scattered drops gently fall followed by more persistent rain, a series of water drips, resembling moderate rainfall moves across the pool in a seemingly random pattern. Each drop creates a distinct form as it displaces the water. These events are projected



onto the surrounding walls by a series of theatre lights installed in the roof and directed at the water's surface. The array of water forms displayed is infinite and each water cycle produces unique variations. Further narrow decks offer access to other views and immerse the audience in the wave patterns themselves.

#### Video Installation: Small Gallery

The film *Bodies of Water* examines water and rhythm echoing live events taking place in the larger gallery. The work is a collaboration with Joji Hirota, a Taiko drummer. Three synchronised projections surround the audience. By walking round a large freestanding wall of projected wave patterns, the viewer is able to enter the main installation.

Extract from artist's descriptions of the exhibition 2005

The design of the exhibition encouraged visitors to move towards the middle of the vast planes

of water, giving them the impression of being suspended over depth. Decks were designed to encourage individuals to walk, stop and pause between stillness and movement, looking at water's cycles and rhythm. Technology was used as a way to reveal to others the rhythm of water found in streams, rivers and the sea. For rhythm as Ogilvie has said *is the most important aspect of water, it is freshness and life.*

On one side of the space there was livened enacted water and on the other a still reflective pool. The two pools brought together these two different experiences of water into one place. Reflections according to Ogilvie are at their most striking, when utilising the optical qualities of water's transparency, inventing strange but beautiful non-spaces. The reflective pool was reminiscent of lakes and ponds that, *embody notions of collection and reflection; their glassy surfaces and calm bodies contrast with the energised liquid of fountains and rivers.*<sup>15</sup>

14. Ogilvie (2006).

15. Charles W. Moore. and Jane Lidz, *Water + Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd, 1994) pp.21-2.

16. Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: an essay on the imagination of matter*, (Trans. E.R.Farrell. Dallas, Texas: The Pegasus Foundation, 1983) p.8.

17. Ogilvie (2006).

By contrast moving water does not hold reflections. Observing reflections is understood by Ogilvie as a way of looking at our own world reflected back on us. Normally people enjoy the opportunity to reflect upon both the meaning and depth of water. As Bachelard reminds us, he takes, *great pleasure in following a stream, in walking along the banks in the right direction, the way the water flows and leads life elsewhere ... For in my own reverie, it is not infinity that I find in waters but depth.*<sup>16</sup>

Reflection involves looking inwards, clearing a way for further thinking. *After a period this reflective experience begins to impact upon you.*<sup>17</sup> By watching people interacting with the installation over a two-month period, Ogilvie learned from their movements how they responded to the environment she had created. The audience's engagement was made possible by perceiving and inhabiting her drawing of water from different points of view. Recalling a

18. From conversations with Thomas A. Clark about *Bodies of Water* (2006).

19. Ogilvie (2006).

20. Ogilvie (2006).

Welsh myth, *A woman made of flowers*, the poet Thomas A. Clark said of the relation between perceiving and inhabiting, *if wild flowers are our perceptions then it is precisely how we are made.*<sup>18</sup>

### Bringing the outside inside

Ogilvie observes water outside and returns to her studio with filmed and sketched observations. In order to see water's movement in detail, she deliberately alters the tempo of the films allowing her to watch a drawing evolving slowly. Slowness is important for understanding. She is learning with water as she goes, taking risks along the way.

By creating an artificial environment inside, Ogilvie's intention is to bring other's attention to the distance between their everyday life practices and elemental resources. As one visitor commented after visiting the exhibition:

***Bodies of Water* was like a laboratory experiment, which offered a way of observing water. When confronted by water within such an environment, the viewer could encounter a much wider range of subtle variations than one might notice outwith the gallery context.**

Taking and isolating water from its natural habitat, highlights its fundamental qualities and points back to its place of origin.

### I sat there, I stood beside

**The best art is to aspire to be not art, rather it is concerned with experience and how people relate to that experience.**

Thomas A. Clark, 2006

In *Bodies of Water* visitors were asked to spend time within experience itself. The installation was designed to *draw people in through the senses*. *Drawing people in* is another way of bringing their lives into the work; it is another way of learning new things.<sup>19</sup> People visiting the exhibition brought their own observations. As an artist, Ogilvie wanted to grasp this opportunity in order to understand the work better. So she draws people in and then steps back. This ability to step back is central to her way of looking. *Taking one's time* allows the creative practitioner to step back from direct observation. By stepping back you allow other influences to enter the designing and planning phases of the work.<sup>20</sup>



In contemporary society, we are continually talking to other people or ourselves. Ogilvie's intention was to share her ability to *wake up and look beyond the self*. In order to encourage visitors to move beyond their immediate experience, she juxtaposed still and moving water. The still plane of water was frightening to some visitors because by looking *you are always meeting yourself*. Whereas the moving water encouraged visitors to look outside themselves.

Since Ogilvie's installations are temporary she is reliant on her own recollections and those of others to remember the work. While remembering the public's responses, she has noticed that people enjoy being within the installations for long periods of time. She observes her own work as an artist through others experience of the places she creates and develops her practice from people's stories and responses to the work.



Stories about the exhibition do not exist in any particular form of inscription; rather they are *carried on in the form of oral narratives*. As Ogilvie collected people's experiences of *Bodies of Water* it reminded her of her mother's ancestors' tales from her native community of St. Kilda. Her mother always wanted to be beside the water and the recounting of St. Kilda stories was an influential part of Elizabeth's childhood relationship with the environment.



### Working with Joji Hirota

[1] 20 secs. Close up of Hirota surrounded with instruments and large metal symbols. He is watching the water to his left.

[2] 1 min 40 secs. He starts making minimal sounds.

[3] 1 min 10 secs. Build up of sound, first bells and then a long abstract screeching noise. The drums begin.

[4] 5 mins 30 secs. The sound builds up further on the drums and symbols. A very strong sound accompanies a fire like water pattern which fills the whole screen. Hirota watches the screen and as the fire pattern dies down and turns into sharp, bouncing vertical patterns resembling sound waves, Hirota uses his drumsticks, the sound echoing the patterns on the wall.

[5] 1 min 20 secs. Hirota quietyens his instruments; their sound and vibrations gradually die down. The water patterns diminish and finally come to a halt. He watches the water then stops playing.

Storyboard of Joji Hirota performing  
*Bodies of Water*, 2005



While developing *Bodies of Water* Ogilvie wanted to make something less passive and controlled than her previous work. To achieve this, she was aware she would have to be less reliant on a pre-planned design. Instead, the first part of *Bodies of Water* took the form of a three screen video installation documenting a live performance between Ogilvie and Joji Hirota, a Taiko drummer, which allowed her to explore improvisation as a potential *source of creativity*. Hirota based in London composes for international orchestras using classical notational systems but also continues to play traditional Japanese instruments independent of any system of notation.

Their understanding of each other's work comes from an empathy with their shared childhood experiences of mountain streams, the sea and hills. Hirota visited Ogilvie at her studio to take part in the performance and together they experimented extensively before

producing the final work. As Ogilvie commented on their working process, *we have experimented so many times, out of the corner of his eye he knew what to expect from me.*

In the work Hirota and Ogilvie communicate through action and sound. Their process of improvisation involved watching each other's movements and reacting to them. Hirota, watching the screen, responded to the movement of wave patterns created by Ogilvie's interactions on the water surface. His sounds build upon each other and begin to resemble the patterns made by the drops of water on the wall. Their final composition interweaves loud crescendos with both stillness and silences.

[1] 20 secs. There is no action from Ogilvie at the beginning. Screen shows close up of her with an area of pool in foreground.

[2] 1 min 40 secs. Ogilvie puts a tiny amount of water on her hands and begins to throw it into the pool projecting an image of single drops of water on the wall. Gradually, she gathers more water in her hands and throws it in the pool. This creates many circles on the water's surface. She is getting wet.

[3] 1 min 10 secs. She moves a pole across the water and back to produce a very strong diagonal wave pattern on the wall.

[4] 5 mins 30 secs. She moves the pole then begins splashing with it, using her hands to create lots of water flying through the air. She becomes drenched.

[5] 1 min 20 secs. She stops and just looks to her right at the wave patterns dying down.

Storyboard of Elizabeth Ogilvie performing *Bodies of Water*, 2005

### Changes within the surface

We had much more respect when we physically had to carry water. When it glided underground, we changed our attitude towards it.

Elizabeth Ogilvie, 2006

Attunement to difference is fundamental to knowing water for Ogilvie. If the sense of difference *is dulled you are unable to read the wind*, as Thomas A. Clark has written. Ogilvie's practice is concerned with what Bateson has described as an ecological consciousness.<sup>21</sup> Her intention therefore is to bring others attention to their unconscious relations with the environment. In making her drawing involving others, ideas of emergence, transcending categorisation, and the relation between chance and order are central to her investigative process. Ingold's discussion concerning the *poetics of dwelling*, helps us to compare Ogilvie's approach with that of the working methods of the scientist.

He says:

Intuitive understanding, in short, is not contrary to science or ethics, nor does it appeal to instinct rather than reason, or to supposedly 'hardwired' imperatives of human nature. On the contrary, it rests in perceptual skills that emerge, for each and every being, through a process of development in a historically specific environment. These skills, I maintain, provide a necessary grounding for any system of science or ethics that would treat the environment as an *object* of its concern.<sup>22</sup>

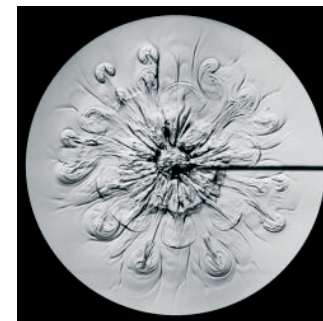
Until recently, scientists have been concerned with studying the content of water rather than its behaviour. Influenced by 'sensitive' chaos theory, scientists at the Herrschried Institut für Strömungswissenschaften,<sup>23</sup> Germany, have been focusing on the importance of observational skills as a way of understanding water. They argue that observing the way water behaves is a legitimate scientific method

21. Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an ecology of mind* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000 (1972) pp.141–2.

22. Tim Ingold, *The perception of the environment: essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill* (London: Routledge, 2000) p.25.

23. Schwenk, W. 1979. 'der Aufbau', no.1–3. Reprinted in *Water the Element of Life*. 1989. Germany: Herrschried Institut für Strömungswissenschaften, p.205. For further information concerning the research institute see <http://www.stroemungsinstitut.de/prospect.htm>.

towards understanding water. While evaluating their data, judgements are not based on subjective impressions; rather they are made on the basis of empirical experimental findings. When a drop is applied to the waters surface, scientists studying waters behaviour know what the pattern means. As is evident from the image shown below, the pronounced pattern indicates a low level of pollution.



Drop picture method

Herrschried Institut für Strömungswissenschaften

## Engineering water

Ogilvie communicates with the engineers in her projects through texts, scribbles, sketches and experiments in the studio. Usually they discuss concepts through these differing forms and then together they design prototypes. Her simple experiments within the studio reveal that it is not possible to prototype all experiences of water that occur within the environment. Words are often more effective when describing the movements of water. As she explains she can draw *the environment but not the contents of the environment*.

While preparing for *Bodies of Water*, she worked with Kenneth Pithouse, a chemical engineer. Ogilvie collaborated with Pithouse because of his specialised knowledge and problem solving expertise in mechanics and electronics. Pithouse did not feel comfortable with Ogilvie's writings about the emotional content of water and instead their investigations centred on water and rhythm, the largest

rhythm being the water cycle. They also looked at a number of smaller more commonly observed movements in water such as meanders and vortices. Vortices are easy to see in cloudy water but difficult to understand and meanders, a classic movement of water are most visible when seen moving across the sand. Their challenge was to create an ideal environment in which water could perform. Pithouse's main concern was to make sure *the installation worked* whereas Ogilvie was concerned with how things would become.<sup>24</sup>

What is clear is that the process of making for Ogilvie cannot happen in isolation as she requires others to help her realise the work. The dialogues that come from these collaborations are more akin to singing, where the making of the song is intrinsic to the sound itself. During an ongoing dialogue, feedback time is slow but allows both makers and the audience to consider:

How can we describe the kinds of creativity that occur when people act together?

Collaboration requires other's respect. According to Ogilvie, collaboration occurs when you do not know what the outcome is going to be. You meet and through discussion discover what feeds into your own concerns. You go away, come back, meet and go away again. *As you go your separate ways, you have the other in mind.*<sup>25</sup> This approach plays out as a kind of melody. It is not just a matter of referring to each other, instead it is related to John Cage's notion of the relation between chance and order. It is not a matter of reacting, referring to or illustrating another's work. *It is unsaid in many ways.* The unsaid things are the collaboration. Referring to her collaborative work with Hirota, Ogilvie commented; *We look, observe and listen but do not speak about the work. Instead we share formative experiences*

together and these experiences are from the same family. You could hear this in the sounds made. Each person involved in such a collaboration brings a story that touches, reinforces and enriches the others telling. During this process, freshness is very important for generating and suggesting new directions in the work.

### Shared understandings

Returning to Dirk's story of how water behaves underground and the original question posed at the beginning of the text:

What do people learn from extensive periods of observing movements of water?

Although contained water can have negative effects and affects, as has been illustrated by Dirk Mross's story and some of the visitors' responses when visiting *Bodies of Water*, water has a tremendous reach and energy even when contained within restricted spaces. However, people do not experience a space, they engage within an unfolding environment. Sounds, stories, images and designs created within the galleries at Dundee Contemporary Arts served to conduct the observer as Ingold says,

... *into the world, deeper and deeper, as one proceeds from outward appearances to an ever more intense poetic involvement. At its most*

24. Henri Bergson, *Matter and memory* (Trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer, New York: Zone Books, 1991) p.77.

25. Thomas A. Clark (2006).

26. Ingold, *The perception of the environment: essays in livelihood, dwelling and skill*, p.56.

intense, the boundaries between person and place, or between the self and the landscape, dissolve altogether. It is at this point that, as the people say, they become their ancestors, and discover the real meaning of *water*.<sup>26</sup>

It is, therefore, no surprise to discover that Ogilvie's great aunts, Euphemia and Rachel MacCrimmon were poetesses in her ancestral home of St. Kilda.

Visitors to the exhibition were immersed within, as mentioned previously, a continuously evolving drawing of water. This drawing contained places for the viewer to be still and just be. In the installation Ogilvie developed content which would heighten others sensitivity towards their surroundings and by doing so created a new place for people to experience. Importantly, she highlighted the need for observational skills in recognising environmental change; challenging positivistic scientific traditions that consider knowledge produced

27. Juhani Pallasmaa, *The eyes of the skin: architecture and the senses*. (Great Britain: Wiley-Academy, 2005) p.71.

through such an approach as having no scientific value.

Most artists walk away from their work after an exhibition has been installed. The artist leaves it behind for others to find. Ogilvie however was keen to spend time with *Bodies of Water*, building up her intimacy with the installation and waters movement within it. It is through these movements that the work is reflected back upon itself, as well as reflecting different views of the world back upon the observer. Sharing experiences in this way, opens up a dialogue concerning human beings relationships within their environment. Sharing involves pointing out and bringing attention to an ongoing relation in the making, between self and other, and self and the environment. What you choose to share is important. As Ogilvie said, *it is not a share of everything* because everyone takes away different experiences of engaging with an environment that is never

quite the same from one moment to the next.

The success of *Bodies of Water* lies with Ogilvie's commitment to the audience enabling them to interact with, experience and explore one of our most precious natural resources. Through the installation the viewer is offered the opportunity to share in Ogilvie's experience of sensorial engagement within an environment.<sup>27</sup> The effect of the work is then to affect.

Wendy Gunn, PhD, is an anthropologist and Associate Professor at the Mads Clausen Institute of Product Innovation, University of Southern Denmark.



# Bodies of Water

16 December 2005 – 12 February 2006

Dundee Contemporary Arts

Small gallery

## **Bodies of Water**

Three screen video installation of performance  
with Joji Hirota

Filmed in the artist's studio, 2005

Large gallery

## **Bodies of Water**

Two pools of water formed with pvc and timber,  
electronic controls, plumbing, theatre lights,  
decking, video projection, benches

5 m × 23.5 m × 15.5 m

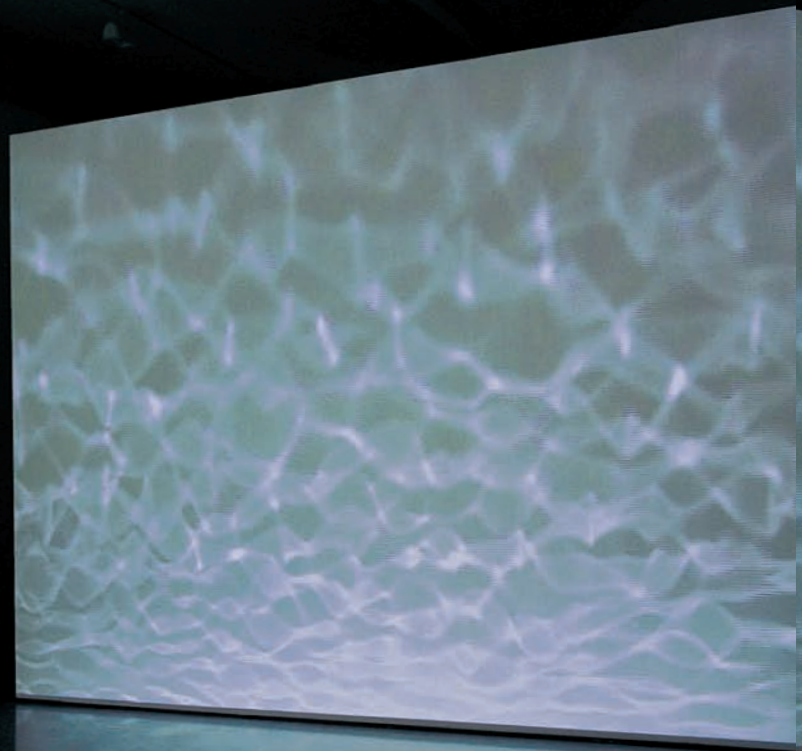
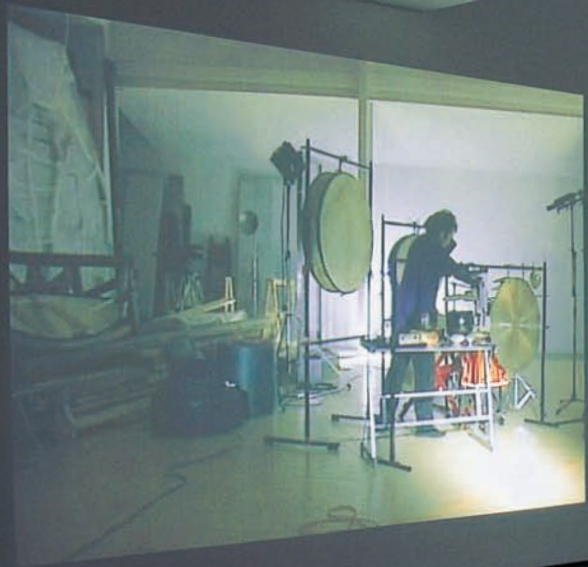
Side Gallery North

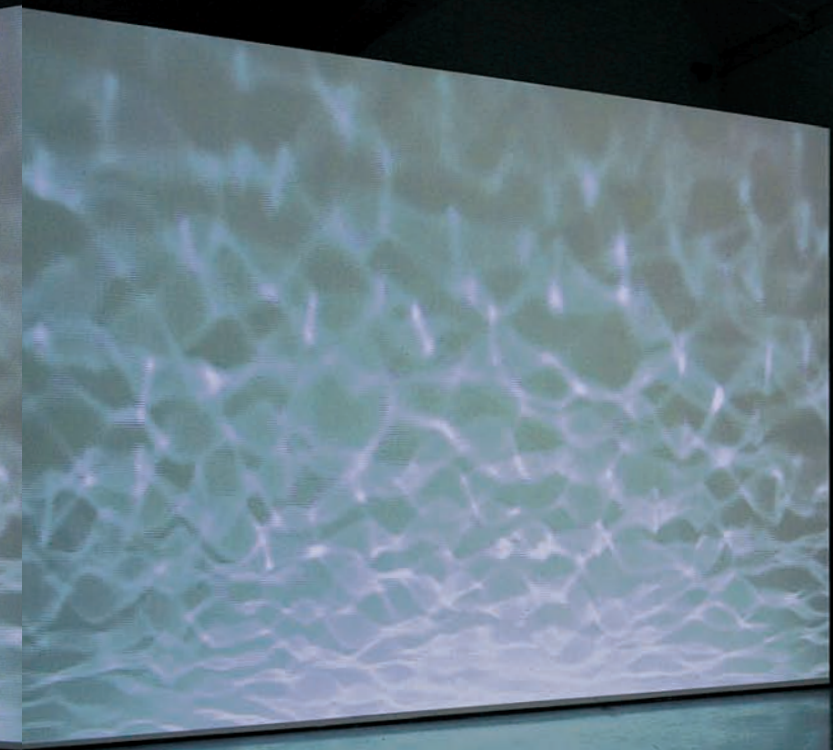
Housing electronic controls, plumbing, lighting  
control table

Side Gallery South

Pool of water, pvc, timber, pole, theatre light

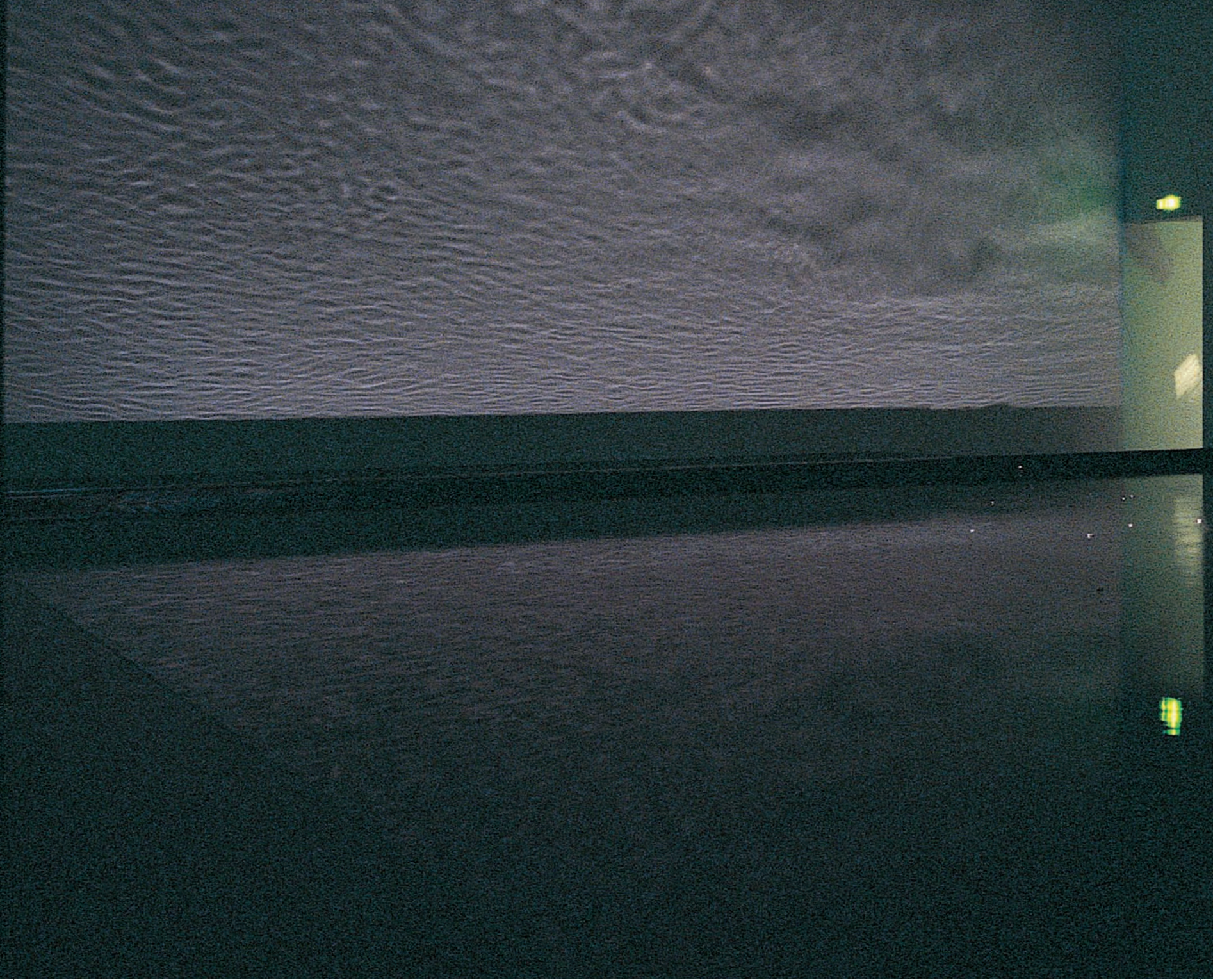
2.35 m × 4.55 m × 3.5 m

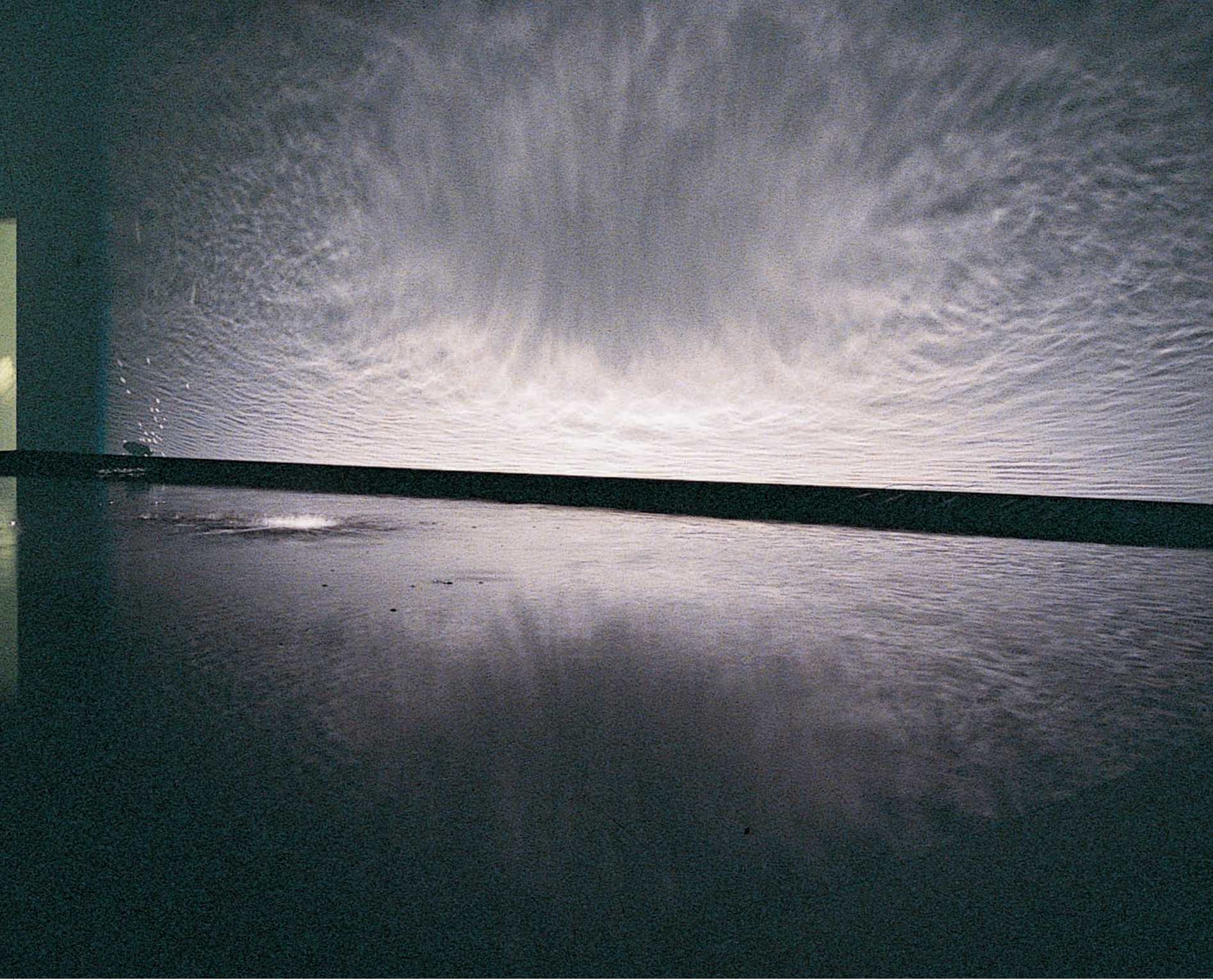












## **Elizabeth Ogilvie**

1946 Born Aberdeen

Lives and works in Fife, Scotland

### **Solo Exhibitions**

2006 *Nozome Project*, Kyoto

*Streams of Time*, Weissraum, Kyoto

2005 *Bodies of Water*, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee

*Die Tiefgrundigkeit des Wassers*, Kulturamt, art2b, Cologne

2004 *The Meaning of Water*, (text by Douglas Dunn), Crawford Arts Centre, St Andrews

2003 *The Waterfall of Time*, (performances by Joji Hirota, the artist and the Scottish Flute Trio), St Mary's Cathedral, Glasgow

2001 *The Liquid Room*, Forth Ports Warehouse, Kirkcaldy, Fife

*Fluss*, Galerie Ruth Walter, Basel

*Fluss*, IAAB Atelier, Riehen, Basel

*The Liquid Room*, (text by Douglas Dunn; with composer Kenneth Dempster and the Scottish Flute Trio), Taigh Chearsabhagh, Western Isles

*The Liquid Room*, An Tuirrean Arts Centre, Isle of Skye

2000 *Into the Oceanic*, Odapark Contemporary Arts, Netherlands

*The Nameless Waters*, Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth

1999 *A Poetics of Water*, Stephen Lacey Gallery, London

*Guernica*, Another Space Ltd, Deephaven Hangar, Cromarty Firth

*Into the Oceanic*, (text by Douglas Dunn), Taigh Chearsabhagh, Western Isles

*Into the Oceanic*, An Tuirrean Arts Centre, Isle of Skye

1998 *Time Lost Looking at the Sea*, Cairn Gallery, Gloucestershire

1997 *Oceanus*, Mead Gallery, Warwick Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry

1995 *Island Within*, Arnolfini, Bristol

1988 *Sea Sanctuary*, Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh

1986 *Sea Changes*, Crawford Centre for the Arts, St Andrews

1984 *Sea Papers*, Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh

*Sea Papers*, DLI Art Centre, Durham

1981 *Sea Papers*, Serpentine Gallery, London

*Watermarks*, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow

*Watermarks*, Ceolfrith Art Gallery, Sunderland,

*Watermarks*, New Art Centre, Stoke on Trent

1980 *Watermarks*, (Elizabeth Ogilvie and Robert Callender), Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

*Watermarks*, Aberdeen Art Gallery, Aberdeen

### **Selected Group Exhibitions**

2006 Daegu International New Media Arts Festival, South Korea

2002 *Guernica*, Another Space Ltd, Pamplona, Guernika, Spain

1999 *Artists and the Sea*, Kirkcaldy Museum, Fife

1998 *Hirta*, Gallery & Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow

1996 *Swinging the Lead - Contemporary Art on a Maritime Theme*, Old Leadworks, Bristol

1995 *ECA*, Pontevedra, Spain

1993 *The Art Machine*, Nikolai Gallery, Copenhagen

*Contemporary Painting in Scotland*, Flowers East, London

*Making Waves*, Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool

1990 *The Art Machine*, McLellan Gallery, Glasgow

*Scottish Art Since 1900*, Barbican Art Gallery, London

1989 *Open*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

*New Purchases*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh



- The City Collects*, City Art Centre, Edinburgh  
*Critics Choice*, Bohun Gallery, London  
*Scottish Artists*, Mercury Gallery, London  
*Scottish Art Since 1900*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh
- 1987 *Art Into Botany*, Talbot Rice Art Centre, Edinburgh
- 1986 *Scottish Art*, Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- 1985 *Drawing*, Perth Festival, Australia  
*Edinburgh / Dublin*, Edinburgh College of Art, Edinburgh  
*About Landscape*, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh
- 1982 *Art and the Sea*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London  
*Contemporary Choice*, Serpentine Gallery, London
- 1981 *Art and the Sea*, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow
- 1978 *Modernia Taideita Skotlannista*, Amos Anderson Gallery, Helsinki

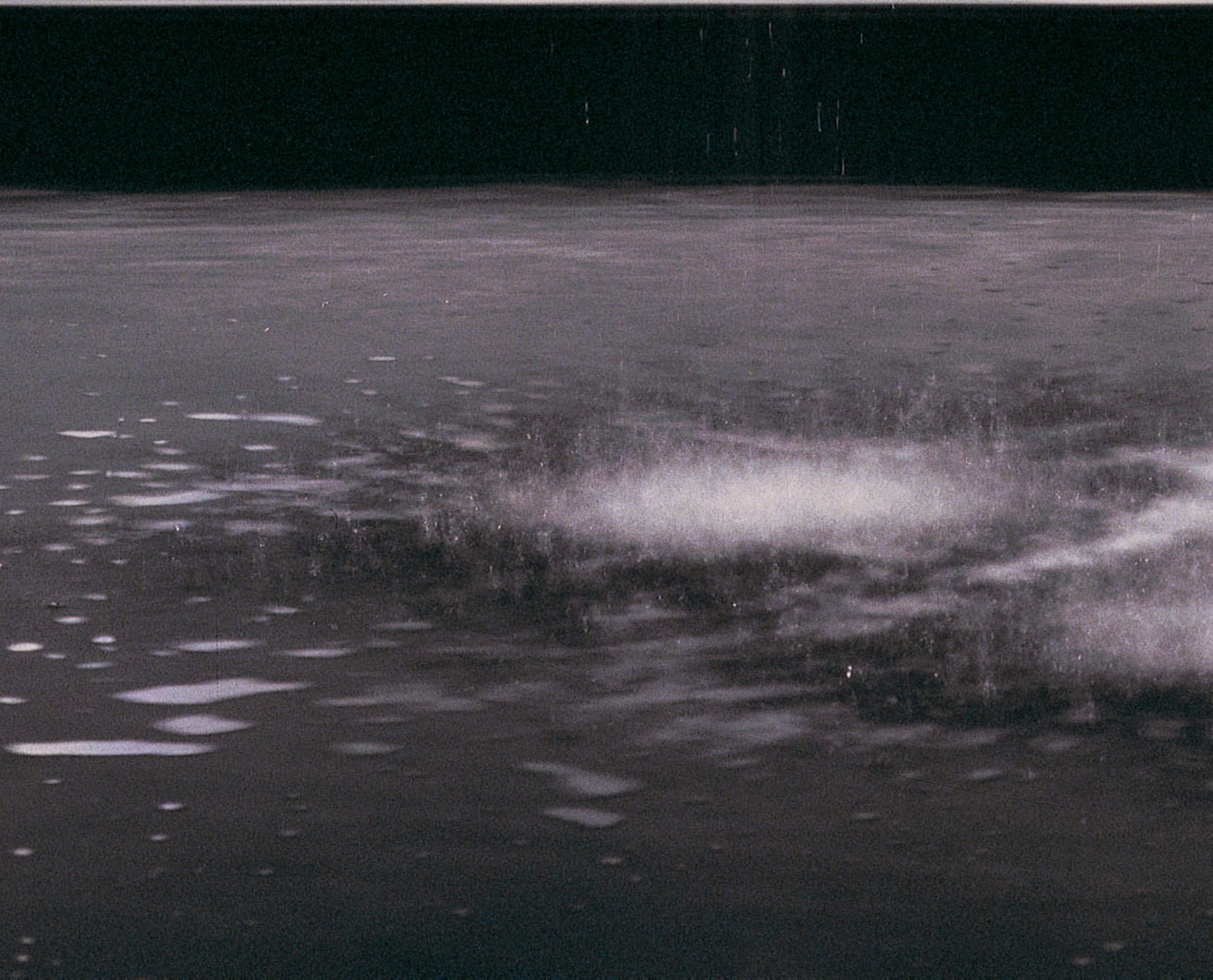
#### **Public Art and Other Projects**

- 2006 *Time and Tide*, New Urban Space & Installation, Kirkcaldy, Fife  
*Do Something for Wildness and Make the Mountains Glad*, Skateraw, Scotland
- 2005 *Dudelsack*, director, Deutzer Brücke, Cologne, Germany
- 2003 *Spaen*, curator, Deutzer Brücke, Cologne, Germany  
*The Imagination of Matter*, The Scottish Office, Edinburgh
- 2002 *Art & Architecture Award*, The Saltire Society, Scotland  
*The Great Book of Gaelic*, The Gaelic Arts Agency, Scotland
- 2001 *Creative Scotland Award*, Scottish Arts Council  
*International Artists Atelier Basel*, Residency, Switzerland  
*Profile, Hotel B*, Schweizer Fernsehen, Zurich, Switzerland
- 2000 *Flow – Zeros and Ones*, Bennetts Associates Architects, BT Headquarters, Edinburgh

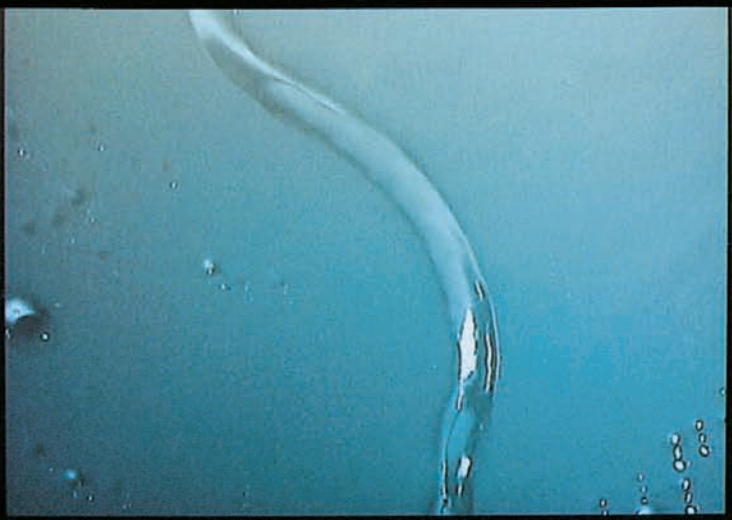
- 1999 *Undergrowth of Words*, Text Interventions, Scottish Poetry Library, Malcolm Fraser Architects, Edinburgh  
*in situ*, curator, Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh
- 1993 *British Rail*, Station, Aberdeen
- 1990 *Waving at the Tide*, performance / collaboration, The Kosh, Roger McGough, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Edinburgh

#### **Selected Publications**

- Etching*, Graal, Thames & Hudson, 2006
- Screenprinting*, Graal, Thames & Hudson, 2004
- The Liquid Room*, Taigh Chearsabhagh, Western Isles, 2001
- Great Britain, Elizabeth Ogilvie*, Stichting Odapark, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Netherlands, 2000
- Edinburgh Projections*, Edinburgh College of Art, 2000
- A Poetics of Water*, Stephen Lacey Gallery, London, 1999
- Into the Oceanic*, Taigh Chearsabhagh Trust, Wester Isles, 1999
- in situ*, Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh, 1999
- Oceanus*, Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, 1997
- Island Within*, Arnolfini, Bristol, 1995
- Sea Sanctuary*, Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh, 1988
- About Landscape*, Talbot Rice Art Centre, Edinburgh, 1985
- Sea Papers*, Talbot Rice Gallery, University of Edinburgh, 1984
- Watermarks*, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, 1980
- Modernia Taideita Skotlannista*, Helsinki, 1978







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