

A RECORD
OF AN EXHIBITION
OF
PAINTING
entitled
BURGEONING
with a
COROLLARY STATEMENT
by
Victoria Anne Boardman

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Dedicated to Mom, Dad, and Billy, with endless love and appreciation.

And with deep gratitude to Thomas Bosket, Catherine Redmond, Joe Byrne, Joseph Smith, and Margaret Evangeline.

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I have spent my life surrounded by water. Born and raised on a peninsula between two rivers at the Jersey shore, I spent my childhood listening to the Atlantic Ocean pounding the beach at night, my days captivated by the tides, currents, and glistening, magical quality of sunlight reflected off water. My imagination developed in response to the silver fluidity and languid intensity of hot summer days on the water, juxtaposed with the violent duality of storms and erosion caused by relentless clashing of water and land the rest of the year. In this duality, I came to understand the nature of beauty and became endlessly fascinated by constantly changing abstract forms.

I make art that conveys my sense of wonder and awe in relation to the natural world. To describe the movement and complexity of natural growth processes and forms, I used water with ink dispersions. This series is comprised of seventeen works, made by moving water across the variously absorbent surfaces of paper and dropping ink to capture the water's seemingly random, yet highly ordered systems of flow and evaporation.

The works were created over a period of five months, two of which were spent in Venice, Italy, a city built on water. Swimming in the Adriatic, moving salty water with my fingertips, I recalled that seawater is the same salinity and pH as human blood. As I floated in isotonic solution, I felt I finally understood my connectedness with the material world, and I wanted a tangible way to see the movements and mutations of water in painting.

Smaller pieces, measuring approximately 12"x18" (31x46cm), invite close inspection of intricate details of absorption. The fractal-like patterns made when two pools of varying concentrations of ink and water meet reveal a competition of natural

forces: the osmosis of the two pools attempting to reach equilibrium, the evaporation of water at the surface, and the absorption of water into the paper. Tiny currents, formed by dragging natural-bristle brushes between pools of moving water, allowed the ink to diffuse over the surface in gradients and establish networks of interconnectivity. These passages served as visual metaphors for interpersonal relationships, psycho-philosophical concerns, and the simultaneous experience of events and processes on a micro and macro scale.

The larger paintings in this series seek to engage the viewer on a bodily level, with the flow of water organized into more suggestive, illustrative forms. Abstract shapes evoke undersea creatures, kelp forests, branching trees, sprawling capillaries which constellate to circulation, cells and vesicles which bud and burst, propagating populations, spores, tentacles, roots, and fictional organisms burgeoning in a primordial sea. The shapes were created as an amalgamation of many natural sources, recreating the curves and repeated structures of organic shapes in nature.

As a fish grows to the size of its habitat, the scale of the paintings in this series related to the available space I had to work. The largest piece in this series (Slide 16) was created in the twenty-four hours prior to hanging the exhibition, as the gallery space was the first area large enough to accommodate a 25-foot long work area.

Combined, the smaller and larger works represent alternate focal points within an overall system of order and inquiry, similar to recreating a landscape through sweeping vistas and macro photos of flower interiors and microscopy. At each level of focus, water is used to provide an uncontrollable, seemingly unpredictable element of nature. These images are not illustrations of nature or pictures describing water; rather, they are paintings *of* water, made by water, and consummately *about* water.

Painting is a bridge between my inner life and the rest of the world, a means of connecting the subjectivity of my experience and thought in the places where language and other forms of activity or communication fail. By developing a visual form of communication that can be perceived and understood by others, I gain access to parts of my consciousness otherwise denied. As humans, we inhabit and are inhabited by a paradox: we cannot adequately express the things we intuitively know and understand about life. To alleviate this basis for existential crisis, art reconciles

the gaps between the subjective mind and the physical, embodied life through a phenomenological and spiritually fulfilling aesthetic experience. To put it more simply, we come to terms with living and dying by understanding as much about the natural world as possible and developing an intimate relationship with the processes that guide us from start to end.

Consciousness, as defined by a basic neuroscience text, can best be understood as the awareness that one is thinking.¹ What this means is that sensation travels on a neurochemical pathway through the verbal and speech centers of the brain, resulting in the articulation of recognizable “thoughts,” a sense of an inner voice whose central narrator is self. These thoughts interpret sensory and emotional input in language, such that a particular sequence of electrochemical reactions is felt as characteristic emotion. Consciousness is the means by which we make sense of the world, the way we understand ourselves and others, and because of this, it operates as the basis of memory, which characterizes future experiences by recognition and differentiation.

What would our experience be like, however, without the limit of language on our consciousness? Some particularly articulate individuals may be able to typify complicated scenarios with words that adeptly approximate understanding, but most of the time we only have a collection of details and intuition for guidance. Literature alludes to “an unspeakable sadness” or “mirth beyond words,” pointing to the very spots where language lapses, yet consciousness persists. What if we include, in our experience of the world, a kind of consciousness that transcends declarative consciousness, operating at a pre-verbal level? How would we communicate in these terms to share our subjectivity with others? Does such a language exist that resists consistent codification of meaning and speaks directly to the experience or sensation at hand?

One proposed mechanism of pre-verbal consciousness is a sensory pathway operating at a retinal level. Pre-verbal consciousness is a neuropsychological form of information processing based in the James-Lange theory. In this model, sensory

¹ Mark F. Bear, Barry W. Connors, Michael A. Paradiso. *Neuroscience: Exploring the Brain*. Baltimore, MD: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins / Wolters Kluwer, 1996.

stimuli trigger a somatic and visceral response, which in turn instructs an emotional feeling. This pathway is contrasted with the Cannon-Bard theory, whereby the sensory stimuli first trigger an emotional response, such as fear, and this response elicits the somatic or visceral expression of this emotion. Following the James-Lange circuitry, visual data stimulates receptor cells in the eyes, and signals travel rapidly through a sensory pathway that initially bypasses the frontal lobe and rational, thinking portions of the brain. It is possible to form a nearly instantaneous response mechanism, based on rapid processing in the Papez circuit, a method of emotion processing involving the limbic system in the cerebral cortex, an area associated with instinct, immediacy, reflex, and libido. Because visual information can be processed and stored as declarative memory without ever traveling through the frontal lobes or so-called “rational mind,” it serves as the basis for an alternative form of consciousness, unclouded by language and formed by instinct. Pre-verbal consciousness allows us to recall the exact appearance of a loved one’s face without linguistic interference or the limitation of adjectives. Its categories are purely visual, allowing for differentiation as varied and comprehensive as the spectrum of sights in the world.

Art gives a means of speaking to one another in pre-verbal terms. Color, line, shape, and form provide direct sensory input, which is at once clear and simultaneously open to all possibilities of interpretation and elaboration in the minds of others. Understanding differentiation as a process of recognition, every person will experience visual information differently, based on what they have seen before. This is also the basis of pattern recognition, a significant facet of intelligence that allows for synthesis of ideas and interpretation of information. Abstract art is particularly effective in speaking to pre-verbal consciousness because it avoids the triggers of subject recognition and verbal understanding contained in representational art. Abstract painting speaks to the parts of the mind that are like a child’s imagination: seeing a world undifferentiated, mutable, and open to infinite possibilities. Limitless experience and constant change are a given, the world unfolding in mystery and wonder at every gnarled twist.

Many historical antecedents inform this work. The most direct parallel comes in Chinese landscape painting, in which images of mountains, water, and the meeting of the two were depicted on sized silk. The eleventh-century Song dynasty painter and courtier Kuo Hsi described a highly literate aesthetic in which the act of painting was performative, an effective expression of the elements achieved by balancing them within oneself. The scholar-painter worked standing, employing meditative breathing and precise handling of the brush, contemplating harmony and channeling the order of the universe in fluid, elegant brushwork.

As I read Kuo Hsi's highly revered instructional *Essay on Landscape Painting*, I was stricken by the parallels between his prescribed method and the contemporary scientific method of inquiry: making observations, collecting data, forming a hypothesis, testing this hypothesis with experimentation, and developing intuitive and instructional theories about the nature of life which serve as the basis of methodology.

Let one who wishes to portray these masterpieces of creation first be captivated by their charm; then let him study them with great diligence; let him wander among them; let him satiate his eyes with them; let him arrange these impressions clearly in his mind. Then with eyes unconscious of silk and hands unconscious of brush and ink, he will paint this marvelous scene with utter freedom and courage and make it his own.²

As an artist with a background in science, I was drawn to such a systematic and logical approach to large, endlessly complicated ideas about philosophy, growth, change, existence, adaptation, and realization. Kuo Hsi further emphasized the role of the artist in the world, likening the task of painting to readying oneself for an important visitor, upon whose arrival dialogue with all the elements and universe began.

The work in this series uses similar dimensions as some Song dynasty paintings as well as the practice of using softly defined, wet gradients of ink to describe ephemeral mists and transitional states. The essence of this language,

² Kuo Hsi. *An Essay on Landscape Painting (The Wisdom of the East Series)*. London: Murray, 1935, p. 43.

distilling the vast complexity of nature into simple forms, evokes a sense of the infinite and cosmological. As a viewer of Song dynasty paintings can view a fisherman in a boat as any fisherman in any boat or all fishermen in all boats, it was the intention in this series to allow the viewer a universal experience of growth, nature, movement, fluidity, and being alive.

This sentiment was an aim of many Impressionist painters seeking to describe an exuberant, intense, and sometimes spiritual experience of nature. While this thread appeared to diminish to an undercurrent in light of more prevailing nineteenth and early-twentieth century art movements, it can be connected to European and especially American Modernism, in works by Arthur Dove, Georgia O'Keeffe, and the Stieglitz circle. Without arguing for their historical relevance, it suffices to say these periods in early twentieth century art were enormously influential on my past and current art-making sensibility. The ubiquity of Jackson Pollock's influence on twentieth century art makes meaningful examination of my personal influence seem trite. However, Pollock's work did open Contemporary Art up to formless art made from the body and established a canon of criticism and theory of varying relevance to this project.

The ideological impetus of this work derives in part from ecology and environmentalism, as I found myself reading works by Rachel Carson such as *The Sea Around Us* with a spiritual fervor. In a passage about weeds in the Sargasso Sea (Appendix 1), I found an astonishing similarity with my own spiritual condition, and I realized that Carson's writings on nature were discussing the very essence of life. She also recognized the philosophy inherent in natural science, explaining:

The winds, the sea, and the moving tides are what they are. If there is wonder and beauty and majesty in them, science will discover these qualities. If they are not there, science cannot create them. If there is poetry in my book about the sea, it is not because I deliberately put it there, but because no one could write truthfully about the sea and leave out the poetry.³

³ Rachel Carson, Acceptance speech of the National Book Award for Nonfiction, 1952. Published in Carson/Lear 1999, p. 91.

I am deeply concerned with the impact of industrialized society on the environment, and I struggle daily with my own life choices, carbon footprint, and fluctuating harmonious relationship with nature. I found my daily media consumption saturated with messages of sustainability, minimizing impact, and redesigning our societal infrastructure to attempt a less ravaging effect on the world around us. It seemed counterintuitive, therefore, to work with media that were toxic, including heavy metal pigments, organic solvents, acrylic binders, and other common artist's materials. With the same mindfulness as selecting organic produce or ecologically responsible furniture woods, I found myself drawn to gentler, cleaner materials. I used non-toxic sumi inks made from vegetable oil soot and natural bristle bamboo brushes. While working in Venice, I used well water naturally purified through rocks under the lagoon, but upon returning to Brooklyn, I made do with a Brita filter and tap water. For this project, I used commercially available papers, which I am aware were bleached and chemically treated, but future work may instead use minimally processed or handmade papers.

The relationship between ecological conscientiousness and art-making has been well examined in contemporary art. This work aims not to proselytize with a message of Earth Day proportions, rather to evoke a genuine respect and admiration for nature through intimate understanding and familiarity. Through an intimate relationship with nature and the universe, man rises above destruction and conflict. Rachel Carson expressed this philosophy in her 1952 acceptance speech for the John Burroughs Medal:

Mankind has gone very far into an artificial world of his own creation. He has sought to insulate himself, in his cities of steel and concrete, from the realities of earth and water and the growing seed. Intoxicated with a sense of his own power, he seems to be going farther and farther into more experiments for the destruction of himself and his world.

There is certainly no single remedy for this condition and I am offering no panacea. But it seems reasonable to believe – and I do believe – that the more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us the less taste we shall have for the destruction of our race.

Wonder and humility are wholesome emotions, and they do not exist side by side with a lust for destruction.⁴

Carson's ideas about nature were expressed in 1874 by Vincent van Gogh when he wrote, "If one truly loves nature, one finds beauty everywhere."⁵ Van Gogh drew parallels between religion and nature, explaining the depth of intangible feeling to his brother Theo:

Feeling, even a fine feeling, for the beauties of nature isn't the same as religious feeling, although I believe that the two are closely connected. The same is true of a feeling for art. Don't give in to that *too* much either.⁶

In his caution against becoming carried away with natural beauty, van Gogh actually provided a mechanism for finding a religious connection with nature. Being out in the world among the wonders of nature, with a contemplative spirit, he explained, one cannot help but find greater systems of order and a sense of connectedness with the universe, which contemporary thinkers may understand as a form of spiritual ecstasy. "Always continue walking a lot and loving nature," he wrote, "for that's the real way to learn to understand art better and better. Painters understand nature and love it, and *teach us to see*."⁷

Seeing, in van Gogh's sense, goes beyond vision to understanding or knowing. Relishing the beauty of the natural world, identifying and categorizing one's sense of wonder and awe, allows for a connection that transcends physicality or perception, creating a phenomenological experience of reality. When such a deep, emotional or spiritual connection is experienced, a person is no longer a viewer or passive recipient of visual stimuli. Space opens up for unconscious or subconscious projections, and subjectivity dissipates into an open-ended consideration of one's place in the universe and time. Though a painter may not inspire awe with his

⁴ Rachel Carson. Linda Lear, ed. *Lost Woods: The Discovered Writing of Rachel Carson*, 1999, p. 94.

⁵ Vincent van Gogh. "Letter to Theo van Gogh. London, Thursday, 30 April 1874." *The Letters: The Complete Illustrated and Annotated Edition*. Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam / Huygens Institute-KNAW. Accessed May 2010. <<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let022/letter.html>>

⁶ Van Gogh. "To Theo van Gogh. Paris, Friday, 17 September 1875." <<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let049/letter.html>>

⁷ Van Gogh. "To Theo van Gogh. London, beginning of January 1874." <<http://vangoghletters.org/vg/letters/let017/letter.html>>

depictions of nature or wonder, it is possible to elicit in the viewer a similar, fervent reaction, like the camaraderie of two worshippers at the same altar seeing the face of God together.

In making abstract art about nature, it was my intent to make work that is evocative, not descriptive. The liminality of forms that are both solid and vaporous, determined and amorphous, and undulating between physicality and imagination invite imaginative projections and limitless experiences for the viewer. These pieces allow for each unique sensibility's reading and sensation, be it violent and filled with trepidation, sexualized and charged with eroticism, mystical, spiritual, scientific, analytical, philosophical, or purely perceptual, to name a few. The open-endedness of abstract painting and forms that are created by the movements of water tap into a form of pre-verbal consciousness, allowing for an intuitive, immediate sensory and emotional response in advance of socialized, contextualized, or verbalized associations and cognition.

The use of black ink and white or off-white paper was an attempt to mitigate the psychological and experiential responses of the viewer to color. Song dynasty landscape painters also preferred a monochromatic palette, using the scribe's ink of the *literati* and eschewing native color for the evocative abstractions of atmospheric mists and forms. In the infinite array of grays, it was said, all color existed, as well as none. The viewer was invited to project his own colors into the landscape, imagining the tone and quality of the light and water depicted in an idealized universe that existed outside of current space and time.

Because I was not making paintings of water, rather *with* water, I used only black ink and allowed the water to control the tonality by concentration and movement. When the paper is saturated with water, the ink absorbs in gradients, expanding the range of grays in subtle shifts. When water is moving on the surface of less absorbent papers, the ink follows its movements, articulating swirls, eddies, and currents among pools. The spread of water, captured with ink, demonstrates mathematical processes of growth and change, with connotations of the dynamic nature of water in response to obstacles.

Math and natural forms were a strong source of imagery and association in this series. Reading D'Arcy Thompson *On Growth and Form* and his theory of mathematical elegance as the driving force of evolutionary biology, I was impressed by the orderliness and regularity of seemingly chaotic, cataclysmic forces. I became interested in the elements of growth at all scales, from subatomic physics through the propagation of microorganisms, species, colonies, cultures, and the universe. Central to my concern was man and his place in these movements, as I used growth and change as a means to explore the individual experience.

The two kinds of shapes I find most appealing are those that are highly regular, even modular, and those that seem alien for their irregularity. Equally, I enjoy perfect spheres arranged in pure mathematical patterns or sequences and unpredictable cracks, rivulets, and splintering, morphing forms resulting from unbalanced and uncontrollable life forces. By seeing both barrenness and pestilence as data points in the same equation, it is possible to understand a greater fullness, complexity, and simultaneous simplicity in life. This duality – by which I mean that pregnancy and cancer are the same miracle – is part of the intuitive knowledge that makes a life in nature both seductive and terrifying. We celebrate what we perceive as good, lament what we sense as bad, and in between draw categories and distinctions which are the necessity of consciousness. Painting has the unique capacity to blur these distinctions and transform experience into the uncategorized.

Growth unmitigated can result in disaster, pestilence, and annihilation; inadequately nurtured, it results in famine, poverty, and the acts of cruelty perpetrated by individuals who cannot find a harmonious and equitable relationship with the natural world. Generally, growth is both the driving and destructive force around which most human events circulate in one way or another, and it is the psychological force which drives us to propagation, collection, and death. Different kinds of growth tend to look the same when considered numerically. Thousand of cells or thousands of people lay in the same range on a graph; diagrams of growth of a small child or a population of algae represent the same maturation curve. Forms of life are unified by this similar movement of accumulation over time, and in their verisimilitude, also reveal interdependence. To understand growth in a subatomic, individual, global, and

even cosmic level is to achieve a truly harmonious insight and relationship with nature.

Mathematics provides a means to understand growth in terms of ratios, order, patterns, frequencies, curve trajectories, and geometry. Erwin Panofsky wrote of the architecture of Gothic cathedrals, calculating the spiritual experience based in spatial and axial relationships, providing a formal method for art historical analysis that can extend to all aspects of visual stimulation. By outlining the composition, calculating the relative refraction indices of adjoining color planes, or otherwise extrapolating visual data, it is possible to explain many pleasurable aesthetic experiences as pure mathematical phenomena, establishing a data set as that which the eye sees as beautiful and intriguing. This would make beauty seem tangible and concrete, however in spite of a great deal of perceptual science, we cannot explain the ways that nature continues to serve as a source of mystery, providing novel visual experiences at every turn. While Fibonacci sequences or high-contrast color vibrations are highly logical, we cannot account for the irrational forms of beauty that defy numerical expectations and evoke awe every day. Growth is an especially curious phenomenon, surging out of control or lapsing behind expectations without explanation. As any parent or gardener could attest, growth can never really be predicted and seems to operate with a logic of its own. Representing growth visually is a means of sharing the mysterious and irrational aspects of being, mapping out systems which are both orderly and strange.

My paintings work out linear growth patterns in curves, fluid movements, and the tangling complexity and strangeness of the world around us. I am also concerned with growth as it is imagined, an abstract process manifest in imagery. The actual processes of growth serve as imaginative triggers, and subconsciously, I move through ideas and impulses, creating shapes that are meant to speak to something pre-verbal, universal, and shared among other imagining beings. In Jungian terms, this could be called archetypal, but in lay speak, it is simply the recognition of self in the world around us. The parallels of self break points of differentiation around consciousness and allow for unmitigated, uninhibited conversation with the universe.

Virginia Woolf described the process of life, which is the trajectory of growth, in terms of consciousness:

Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.⁸

To understand this envelope that surrounds us, it is necessary to expand consciousness into a language that intuitively understands growth, that is the language of imagination. By making art through processes of intuition, sub- or unconscious forces guide shapes and meandering lines, and provide a diagram of existence in communication; in a sense, paintings are transcripts from my conversations with life, remnants of meditation and contemplation. The key to the process, which has consistently been the most difficult aspect, is tapping into pre-verbal consciousness and operating on a rapid processing level, removing the conscious voice that binds with language and artificial distinctions.

Through painting, I put things in order, as writing conforms ideas to grammar or music develops emotion into tonic logic and mathematical relationships. Translating sensory and psychological sensations into a formal language provides the basis against which imagination expands and elaborates. The abstract painted form is the sun-dried dock from which a diver launches into a sea of intuition, mystery, and contemplation. I do not wish to describe the world as it is, rather consider the world as it may be, existing in countless manifestations in the minds and imaginations of others. Instead of bringing the viewer with me on my journey, I would like to provide the tangled foreign terrain to be explored. By raveling growth, curves, longing, hope, pleasure, and suffering, the things that make us human are juxtaposed with all the elements that make us living things.

I make paintings of fluid bodies moving and dancing through a mystifying, violent flash of experience in constant flux. Amidst so much activity, we find meaning, profound and pure, which we can know intuitively, yet never fully share with others. As the molecules of pigment swim among the flows of water and dry into

⁸ Virginia Woolf. "Modern Fiction," 1924. Published in Virginia Woolf, Mitchell E. Leaska, ed. *The Virginia Woolf Reader*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1984, p. 283-293.

recognizable bodies of substance and tone, I cannot offer answers or declarations, but I can make a map of where I've been and what it felt like. I cannot take the viewer back through the currents I swam in, but I can point to the turbulent surface of the water and say, "there is something amazing in there."

The seeds of subversion are planted in pre-verbal consciousness and the experiences it provides. We do not respond to beautiful things because we've read enough about them or because they are socially responsible: we respond because we feel compelled as physical beings in their presence. Immediate and instantaneous reactions provide the basis to change who we are and how we will encounter future stimuli, altering the system of differentiation by which we approach the world. Novel images force the development of new phenomenological categories: suddenly we are aware that there are new things to see in the world, and equally we are aware of how we are seeing them. These new categories incorporate vast networks of visual memory and can become the basis for purely visual consciousness.

By altering the way the world is imagined, painting may alter the way it can therefore be experienced. Making abstract images that evoke consideration of growth and nature, I make art that speaks to people at fundamental, pre-verbal levels of consciousness. If it is possible to subvert consciousness with abstract art, there is no end to the levels of communication possible between the various subjectivities of individuals in the world. By speaking to pre-verbal consciousness and providing as yet undifferentiated experience, abstract painting can function as a system of discussion outside of words, changing the very ways we think and feel.

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APPENDIX 1:

EXCERPT FROM *THE SEA AROUND US* BY RACHEL CARSON, P. 38-40

The Sargasso, with all its legendary terrors for sailing ships, is a creation of the great currents of the North Atlantic that encircle it and bring into it the millions of tons of floating sargassum weed from which the place derives its name, and all the weird assemblage of animals that live in the weed. The Sargasso is a place forgotten by the winds, undisturbed by the strong flow of waters that girdle it as with a river. Under the seldom-clouded skies, its waters are warm and heavy with salt. Separated widely from coastal rivers and from polar ice, there is no inflow of fresh water to dilute its saltiness; the only influx is of saline water from the adjacent currents, especially from the Gulf Stream or North Atlantic Current as it crosses from America to Europe. And with the little, inflowing streams of surface water come the plants and animals that for months or years have drifted in the Gulf Stream. The sargassum weeds are brown algae belonging to several species. Quantities of the weeds live attached to reefs or rocky outcroppings off the coasts of the West Indies and Florida. Many of the plants are torn away by storms, especially during the hurricane season. They are picked up by the Gulf Stream and are drifted northward. With the weeds go, as involuntary passengers, many small fishes, crabs, shrimps, and innumerable larvae of assorted species of marine creatures, whose home had been the coastal banks of sargassum weed.

Curious things happen to the animals that have ridden on the sargassum weed into a new home. Once they lived near the sea's edge, a few feet or a few fathoms below the surface, but never far above a firm bottom. They knew the rhythmic movements of waves and tides. They could leave the shelter of the weeds at will and creep or swim about over the bottom in search of food. Now, in the middle of the ocean, they are in a new world. The bottom lies two or three miles below them. Those who are poor swimmers must cling to the weed, which now represents a life raft, supporting them above the abyss. Over the ages since their ancestors came here, some species have developed special organs of attachment, either for themselves or for their eggs, so that they may not sink into the cold, dark water far below. The flying fish make nests of the weed to contain their eggs, which bear an amazing resemblance to the sargassum floats or 'berries.'

Indeed, many of the little marine beasts of the weedy jungle seem to be playing an elaborate game of disguise in which each is camouflaged to hide from the others. The Sargasso sea slug – a snail without a shell – has a soft, shapeless brown body spotted with dark-edged circles and fringed with flaps and folds of skin, so that as it creeps over the weed in search of prey it can scarcely be distinguished from the vegetation. One of the fiercest carnivores of the place, the sargassum fish *Pterophryne*, has copied with utmost fidelity the branching fronds of the weed, its golden berries, its rich brown color, and even the white dots of encrusting worm tubes. All these elaborate bits of mimicry are indications of the fierce internecine wars of the Sargasso jungles, which go on without quarter and without mercy for the weak or the unwary.

In the science of the sea there has been a long-standing controversy about the origin of the drifting weeds of the Sargasso Sea. Some have held that the supply is maintained by weeds recently torn away from coastal beds; others say that the rather limited sargassum fields of the West Indies and Florida cannot possibly supply the immense area of the Sargasso. They believe that we find here a self-perpetuating community of plants that have become adapted to life in the open sea, needing no roots or holdfasts for attachment, and able to propagate vegetatively. Probably there is truth in both ideas. New plants do come in each year in small numbers, and now cover an immense area because of their very long life once they have reached this quiet central region of the Atlantic.

It takes about half a year for the plants torn from the Indian shores to reach the northern border of the Sargasso, perhaps several years for them to be carried into the inner parts of this area. Meanwhile, some have been swept onto the shores of North America by storms, others have been killed by cold during the passage from offshore New England across the Atlantic, where the Gulf Stream comes into contact with waters from the Arctic. For the plants that reach the calm of the Sargasso, there is virtual immortality. A.E. Parr of the American Museum has recently suggested that the individual plants may live, some for decades, others for centuries, according to their species. It might well be that some of the very weeds you would see if you visited the place today were seen by Columbus and his men. Here, in the heart of the Atlantic, the weed drifts endlessly, growing, reproducing vegetatively in a process of fragmentation. Apparently almost the only plants that die are the ones that drift into unfavorable conditions around the edges of the Sargasso or are picked up by outward-moving currents.

Such losses are balanced, or possibly a little more than balanced, by the annual addition of weeds from distant coasts. It must have taken eons of time to accumulate the present enormous quantities of weed, which Parr estimates as about 10 million tons. But this, of course, is distributed over so large an area that most of the Sargasso is open water. The dense fields of weeds waiting to entrap a vessel never existed except in the imaginations of sailors, and the gloomy hulks of vessels doomed to endless drifting in the clinging weed are only the ghosts of things that never were.

LIST OF WORKS EXHIBITED

1. *Mirth and Repose*, 2007, ink on paper, 42"x77" (107x196cm).
2. *Cultivation*, 2007, ink on paper, 30"x40" (76x102cm).
3. *Germination*, 2007, ink on paper, 30"x40" (76x102cm).
4. *Teeming*, 2007, ink on paper, 42"x113" (107x287cm).
5. *Always Already*, 2007, ink on paper, 22.5"x30" (57x76cm)
6. *Breach*, 2007, ink on paper, 22.5"x30" (57x76cm)
7. *Gentle Havoc*, 2007, ink on paper, 22.5"x30" (57x76cm)
8. *As a Consequence of Sentience*, 2007, ink on paper, 22.5"x30" (57x76cm)
9. *Jibe or Luff*, 2007, ink on paper, 30"x40" (76x102cm)
10. *Torrential Accretion*, 2007, ink on paper, 30"x40" (76x102cm)
11. *Eddies*, 2007, ink on paper, 12"x18" (31x46cm)
12. *Ebbing*, 2007, ink on paper, 12"x18" (31x46cm)
13. *Becoming and Going*, 2007, ink on paper, 18"x12" (46x31cm)
14. *Cat's Paws on the Navesink*, 2007, ink on paper, 18"x12" (46x31cm)
15. *Spliced*, 2007, ink on paper, 18"x12" (46x31cm)

16. *How We Live with What We Know*, 2007, ink on paper, 55"x294" (140x747cm)

17. *Subaqueous*, 2007, ink on paper, 42"x72" (107x183cm)

INSTALLATION AND DETAIL VIEWS

A. Gallery View

B. East Wall detail view

C. South Wall, detail view 1

D. South Wall, detail view 2

E. South Wall, detail view 3

F. West Wall installation view

G. Image 16, detail view

H. Detail view of wet ink technique

MULTIMEDIA: Slides of images and installation views.