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WATER

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# WATER



Klaus Dauven,  
Hanazakari-Matsudagawa  
Dam, Japan, 2008. Photo:  
Courtesy the artist.

# CROSS-CURRENTS IN WATER-BASED PERFORMANCE

**Daniel Rothbart**

Water is a complex and contradictory medium that is both innate and foreign. An intimate part of ourselves, we are surrounded by amniotic fluid in the mother's womb until birth. Water constitutes sixty percent of our bodies but is also incomprehensibly vast, covering seventy-one percent of the earth's surface. Our daily existence depends on this element. Chlorinated drinking water pours from our taps and cleanses our bodies. Dammed rivers provide hydroelectric power and we traverse oceans to harvest fisheries and trade goods. But water can never be fully dominated, and human attempts to exploit it have proved disastrous. Recent events like the Deepwater Horizon oil spill (2010) or the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear meltdown (2011) contaminate coastal waters. Global warming causes worldwide droughts and portends devastating changes for the Southern Hemisphere. From the awesome power of a storm at sea to the gentle surge of a subterranean spring, water also possesses mystery. Unpredictable and hidden qualities of water have made it an important theme in performance, both sacred and secular, since early antiquity.

Shaped by wind, tides, and currents, and infinitely transformed by changing light, water embodies the spirit of movement and flux. But the formless, reflective properties of still water also have great potency. By revealing surface and concealing depth, water suggests a doorway to the unconscious. Narcissus became enamored of his likeness in a pool of water, ultimately consummating his love through drowning. Ludwig II of Bavaria, a great patron of the arts, emulated the Narcissistic personality disorder by drowning both himself and his psychiatrist in Lake Starnberg in 1886. Some thirty years later, the protagonist of Jean Cocteau's *Le sang d'un poète* breaks his reflection, passing into a state of poetic consciousness through a water mirror. So water reflects, distorts, and consumes. It embodies danger and uncertainty, movement and free-flowing associations, memories and sensations. Water speaks to birth through our emergence from the womb but also contains the seed of death.

In numerous cultures, water takes on a feminine identity and has produced mythology around the dangerous allure of water-women. Aphrodite was borne from sea foam and sirens of mythology were wild, sexualized half-women and half-birds who sang mariners to their death and represented the seductive and threatening qualities of feminine energy. Shakespeare's Ophelia is a powerful embodiment of

the water-woman archetype. Spurned by Hamlet, Ophelia drowns herself in a brook, first buoyed by her garments and then drawn under as they become “heavy with their drink.” She represents innocence lost in an oppressive, patriarchal society from which her only escape is madness and suicide. Cuban artist Ana Mendieta sought to capture and channel this powerful feminine energy through numerous performance works that privilege nature and myth over male projections. In *Untitled (Creek #2)* of 1974, Mendieta floats downward in the live, burbling water of a stream in San Felipe, Mexico. Is so doing, she becomes one of her *Siluetas* and a symbol of womanhood, which, like the water around her, gives and sustains life.

Environmental issues such as sustainability, global warming, and pollution are prescient themes in contemporary art and performance. *Uranium Decay*, a video work by artist Eve Andrée Laramée, responds to the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Uranium-238 released into the environment has a 4.47 billion-year-half-life, changing into “uranium daughters” that flow into other elements before stabilizing as Lead-206. Cross-dissolve overlays of men in HAZMAT suits interact with topographies, which morph into unnatural new landscapes, at times mirroring one another and then transforming into radioactive seascapes. Ultra-violet clouds waft over oceans and into water glasses, human beings, and wildlife. Through digital animations and the filmic devices of Sergei Eisenstein, Laramée builds awareness of the devastatingly far-reaching impact of human error in our time.

Newton and Helen Harrison are pioneers of the Eco Art movement who seek to democratize global warming information. If all the ice melted, oceans of the world could rise three hundred feet. *From the 7th Lagoon* is a 360-foot map that was realized by the artists between 1974 and 1984 to document the prospect of shrinking land mass and upward migration of people. To combat global warming, the Harrisons proposed creating an Eco Security System, based on the Social Security model, that earmarks money for scientific research and creative experimentation. Literary essays, authored by the Harrisons, often accompany their studio production, capturing a melancholy poetic of world entropy.

Artist Betsy Damon works with the theme of living water and founded *Keepers of the Waters*, a web-based communication network for artists who seek to shift public awareness of water issues. Damon’s *Living Water Garden* project was realized in Chengdu, China, in 1998. The garden, which blends aesthetics with sustainability, includes a water treatment system and wildlife refuge. Visitors regain a sense of intimacy with water and their broader environment. In Damon’s words, “When the source of water is local, known, and honored culturally, people understand the importance of water to their health and, thus, they care for this source.”

Water, myth, and performance have often evolved together, changing like the moods of light on a seascape. Dido, Queen of Carthage, was enamored of Virgil’s wandering Trojan hero Aeneas. When the adventurer abandoned her to pursue his voyage, Dido lay on a pyre and fell upon her sword. English composer Henry Purcell wrote an opera around this tragic story in 1688, which was reinterpreted by choreographer Sasha Waltz for the Staatsoper in Berlin in 2005. Waltz’s choreography featured



dancers who performed underwater in a great, backlit tank. Like mermen and sirens, they would glide through the water, flipping freestyle and cavorting, or moving on their bellies, like seals, as they emerged onto *terra firm*. Water is central to Waltz's choreography, representing both the agent of exploration for Aeneas, which carries his ships toward their destiny of founding Rome, but also sensual awareness, birth, and the death of his union with Dido.

The Marriage of the Sea ceremony, between Venice and the Adriatic, came into being around the year 1000. A procession of boats, led by the Doge's ship, set out from Lido with prayers for a "calm and quiet sea" as the Doge and company sprinkled themselves with holy water and cast the rest into the waves. The ceremony became sacramental at the behest of Pope Alexander III, who gave the Doge a gold ring and instructed him to cast it into the sea, and another each year to follow, on Ascension Day. With rising sea levels and high water ever more common, the conjugal relationship between Venice and the Adriatic is even more critical today. New York City, like Venice, is the capital of an empire nourished by trade on the seas, but American artist Robert Smithson turned the Venetian ritual on its head with *Floating Island*. Smithson's performance didn't seek to protect New York from the wrath of nature but rather nature from urban encroachment. An homage to Frederick Law Olmsted, designer of Central Park, *Floating Island* conceptually displaces a piece of its terrain. His idea was to float an artificial island, complete with sod, trees, shrubs, and boulders, around the island of Manhattan. Smithson conceived this project in 1970 but was unable to realize it in his lifetime. *Floating Island* dramatically took shape in 2005 with backing from Minetta Brook and the Whitney Museum of American Art. The surreal vision of a thirty-by-ninety-foot island, planted atop a rusty barge and laboriously pulled by a red tugboat, underscored New York's identity as an island while suggesting how it may have looked in a state of nature.

Water can also express playfulness and levity. Luc de Clerc designed and built a water organ at the Villa d'Este in Tivoli between 1569 and 1572 that stood eighteen feet high under an arch and was fed by a waterfall. The organ could play madrigals by itself, powered by water pressure, though incredulous visitors insisted there must be a musician hidden inside. This decadent manipulation of water is also embodied in Christo and Jeanne-Claude's 1983 *Surrounded Islands* in Miami. For this work, the artist-couple draped 6.5 million square feet of pink, polypropylene fabric buoyed by anchored Styrofoam booms around the Spoil Islands, man-made keys in shallow water between Miami and Miami Beach. From the beaches, determinedly artificial skirts extended two hundred feet into the bay, suggesting from above the pictorial space of a color field. Over the din of speedboats, bullhorns, and helicopters, the work unfolded to international media coverage and was broadcast to millions. The hot pink fabric resembled bubble gum and dominated its surrounding environment as a monument to human conceit and poor taste.

Wolfgang Becker, former founding director of the Ludwig Forum for International Art, works to restore ritual meaning to water by fostering dialogue between contemporary artists and mineral hot springs that course beneath Aachen, Germany. Historic bathwaters that delighted ancient Romans, and notably the Emperor Charlemagne,

are largely invisible today. Through his *Wasserkunst* project, Becker worked with Sigrid von Lintig, an artist who observes and paints swimmers in pools fed by living mineral water. Beneath the rippling surface, bodies are distorted and fragmented by overhead light, underscoring water's transformative power even in the most controlled setting. Becker also invited the graffiti team MTK Super (Fetzo, Hook, and Super) to paint a one-hundred-fifty-foot mural on the wall before a hot spring called *Great Monarch*. MTK Super responded to the site by creating a wild type treatment of the word "Monarch" over blue forms, flanked by Jabba the Hutt, a modern-day Cheshire Cat, who could slyly disappear like the hot spring beneath city streets. (I describe my own *Wasserkunst* project with Wolfgang Becker in this special PAJ section.) Brigitte Franzen, Becker's successor at the Ludwig Forum, worked with Turner-Prize recipient Susan Philipsz on *Seven Tears*. Philipsz created a sound installation beneath a bridge over Asee Lake, from which recordings of her voice were played singing madrigals from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the subject of tears (old, new, sighing, sad, forced, lover's, and true tears). This powerful work reinforced the direct relationship between water in our bodies, emotions, and waterscapes.

Historically, the field of water-based performance is characterized by dialectic currents and cross-currents, reflecting our complex and often contradictory relationship to the element. Today, the effects of climate change and pollution dramatically underscore a need for creative and enlightened stewardship of water. The essays that follow focus on contemporary artists Klaus Dauven, Peter Fend, and Lisa Park along with my own studio practice. Dauven uses water in a focused act of erasure, creating Reverse Graffiti imagery on concrete walls and colossal dam faces by washing away exhaust accretions. In his hands, pressurized water liberates pictures of sylvan settings, wildlife, and free-flowing waterways, suggesting the potential restoration of lost ecosystems. Peter Fend designs watercraft to harvest biomass, an alternative clean energy source, from our oceans and lakes. Lisa Park gives form to human emotions by converting brainwaves to sound waves, which animate vessels filled with water. Water in Park's work expresses a gamut of emotions, affirming our broader shared humanity. My own work with floating sculpture and ritual performance in Lido di Venezia, Aachen, and the Gowanus Canal seeks to restore appreciation for the power and mystery of abused and neglected waterways.

All of the works highlighted in these pages engage important issues, often in dialogue with history and tradition, expressing the time we live in and the unique challenges we face to redefine our fundamental relationship with water.

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## Lisa Park

Lisa Park's performance work gives distinctive form to ideas and emotions through the medium of water. Grounded in Eastern spirituality, Park's work is meditative and ritualistic, at times seemingly archaic. However, it also expresses discomfort with real-time digital technologies that often mediate communication through online venues and personae. The same technologies that facilitate international communication and collaboration (or brainwave transmission) are paradoxically isolating. Narcissus became enamored of his reflection in water, but today, for many, that water is a cold digital simulacrum. In Park's work, water becomes a mirror for the inner self, to which, at least during the course of a performance, the artist is blind.

In 2014, Park performed *Eunoia II* at Mana Contemporary in Newark, New Jersey. She was seated in a white room, surrounded by forty-eight vessels filled with water. The vessels were arranged concentrically around her, drawing inspiration from the Korean Buddhist symbol *Gan Gyl*, which signifies peace and harmony. Beneath each vessel was a speaker with a vibrating plate. On her brow was an EEG headset, equipped with fourteen sensors that captured the artist's emotions by transforming them into sound waves. As thoughts and feelings passed through her mind, music from the speakers caused movement of the plates, animating the water through ripples and subtle effervescing. Central to the artistic resonance of this work was Park's dialogue with water. Like the protagonist of Jean Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*, who passed into a state of poetic consciousness through a watery mirror, Park and her audience were transported to a common aesthetic experience by means of this basic element on which all human life depends.

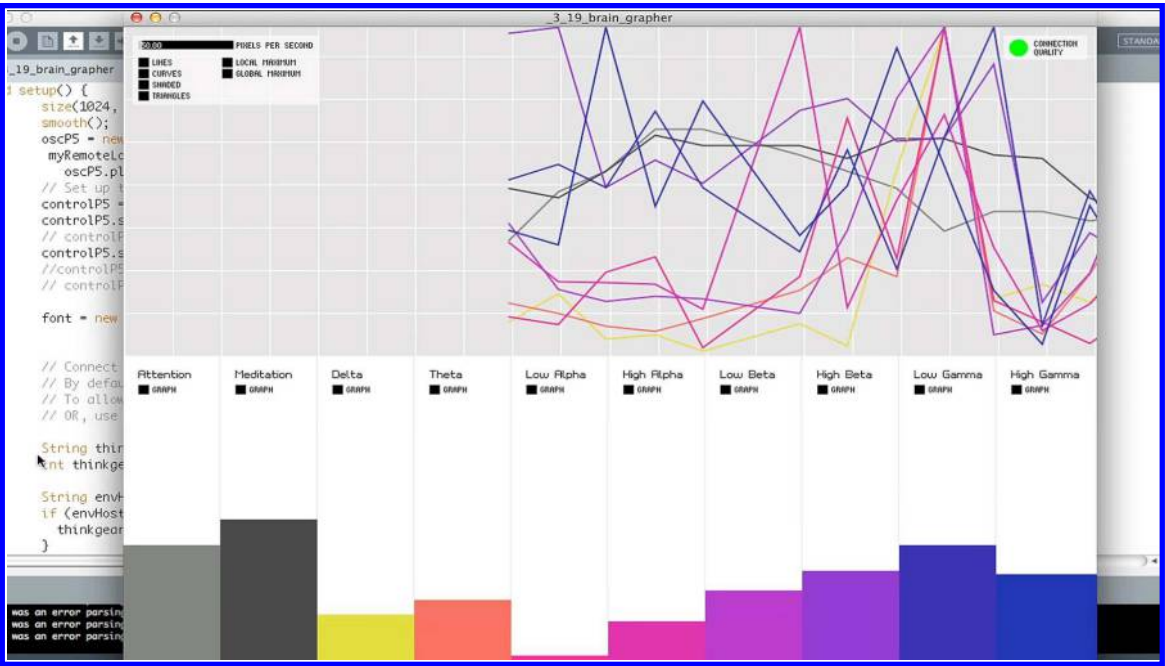
Her philosophical research led Park to the *Ethics* of Baruch Spinoza. This seminal work of 1677, which discusses the relationship between God and Nature, defines forty-eight different emotions. Each of them constitutes a manifestation of three basic affects consisting of desire, pleasure, and pain. Spinoza's categorization of feelings is embodied in Park's array of forty-eight vessels in *Eunoia II*. Emotional values register as data to the brain sensors. They consist of frustration, meditation, boredom, engagement, and excitement, among others. The more frustrated Park became, the louder the corresponding sound. The more tranquil her mind, the softer the sound, causing brain and water waves to flow outward as gentle ripples from one vessel to the next.

Park has a longstanding interest in spirituality and meditation. The focus of her meditation practice is to quiet the mind, arriving at a place of tranquil balance. *Eunoia II* illustrates the profound difficulty of this task. In seated meditation, Park found it easier to control her thoughts and the pools of water. In walking meditation, however, and particularly when surrounded by the public, thoughts and emotions traversed

her mind and the vessels, setting water into quicksilver movement. Earthy Korean ceramics that I recently viewed at the Musée Guimet in Paris called *Eunoia* to mind. They were fashioned and fired for the Korean tea ceremony and shared a graceful demi-spherical form with Park's vibrating vessels. The arrangement of *Eunoia* vessels and movements was thoughtfully studied and choreographed, but the variable was her state of mind, which could never be fully mastered.

Park is currently working on a collaborative experiment titled *Eudaimonia*. For this project, several people will wear the brainwave sensors. Working with groups of two, three, or five people of different ages and genders, occupations, and backgrounds, Park will look for emotional connections and points of synthesis. She seeks to ascertain which kinds of emotional reaction might be experienced as a group and whether emotions, as a universal language, can transcend various cultural or linguistic barriers through an unspoken understanding. Park's interest in expressing emotion and the subconscious or finding connections by technological means is highly intriguing. She lacks a formal scientific approach, but if *Eunoia* is closer to alchemy than neuroscience, it finds a poetry and mystery of mind and water waves coursing in unison that can only be attained in this way.





Lisa Park, *Eunoia*, 2013, 319 Scholes, Brooklyn. Courtesy the artist.



Lisa Park, *Eunoia II*, 2014, Mana Contemporary, Jersey City. Photo: E. Lee Smith. Courtesy the artist.

## Peter Fend

Peter Fend's creative practice bridges the traditional divide between art-making and earth sciences, his objectives residing largely outside the realm of contemporary art. Together with artists Colen Fitzgibbon, Jenny Holzer, Peter Nadin, Richard Prince, and Robin Winters, Fend incorporated Ocean Earth in 1980 to challenge artistic barriers between earth art, performance, ecology, and activism. Fend engages with water through basin-mapping along with algae and water plant harvesting for alternative energy and other projects, under the aegis of Ocean Earth Development Corporation. Ocean Earth emerged from an interest in collaboration and drew inspiration from the construction company founded by Walter De Maria and Michael Heizer. Performative process in the sense of excavating earth or harvesting water plants is central to his practice.

Fend takes inspiration from Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* for his basin-mapping work and engagement with biomass harvesting as an alternative fuel source. The Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans represent the "three main urinals" of the world because they receive and circulate gravity-driven descending water. Water flows into these urinals with aggregates (soil), which make the oceans more fertile. Algae and other water plants are abundant and can be harvested as zero-pollution biomass, which produces methane gas when burned. Fend has experimented with biomass harvesting in freshwater, notably behind Ruhr district dams in Germany and from lakes in New Zealand. He proved his concepts through work in the field, harvesting water plants from small boats. In the Ruhr he discovered that the greater the quantity of plants harvested, the faster they would grow back. In New Zealand he found that enough plants could be harvested in two hours to cover an average family's gas and electric bill. The social and political implications of this work are far-reaching.

Richard Prince once referred to Fend as the "Lawrence of Arabia of the art world," referring to the guerilla tactics he used to affect geopolitical change. Despite artworld receptiveness to his projects, Fend considers himself an architect rather than an artist. Leon Battista Alberti believed an architect is responsible for the city and must assure that it has good air, clean water, proper circulatory spaces (urban planning), and defense. Fend's "good terrain" would ensure slopes and wedges to supply water, informed by the work of Michael Heizer, Dennis Oppenheim, and Robert Smithson. His ecological vision is to restore the land to wilderness, in which a balance between floras, fauna, and humanity would ensure a natural equilibrium. The films of Paul Sharits could provide the blueprint for a satellite-enforced eco-tax, while the work of Joseph Beuys would influence Fend's stewardship of basic life cycles and the relationship to wildlife. Similarly, dwellings would mimic body structures as they stand or straddle in the work of Carolee Schneemann, and other structures

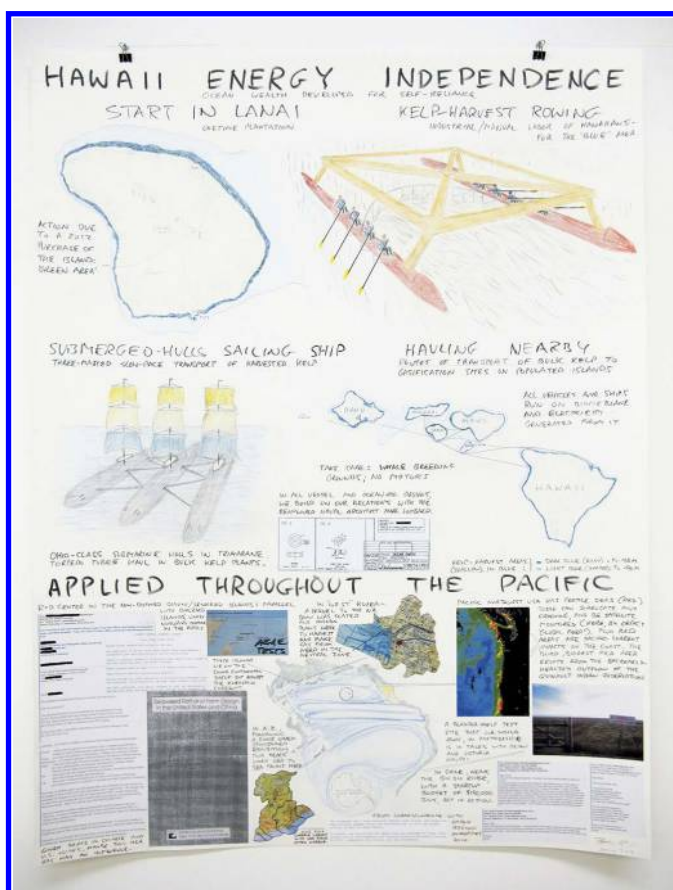
would be influenced by the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, Richard Serra, and Alan Saret, among others.

The theme of defense largely engaged Peter Fend's work in the 1980s. Fend and Holzer obtained satellite images of different regions that were part of a seminal exhibition entitled *Art of the State* at the Kitchen in 1982. While surveying imagery of the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq war, the artists made a fascinating discovery. It became clear that Iraq was working to divert the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers into new channels that would remove territory from Kuwait on one side and Iran on the other. The kilometer-wide, zigzagging channels were designed for Iraq by Russian engineers. Fend believes the engineers were versed in art history and had particular familiarity with American Earthworks. In Fend's words, "These were stolen from American Earth Art!" Michael Heizer's *Double Negative* of 1969, with its ambitious trench (30 x 50 x 1500 feet), is particularly relevant as a model.

Iraqi manipulation of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers may have inspired Fend's interest in flooding the Qattara Depression in Egypt to produce hydroelectric power. The idea to cut a channel between the Mediterranean Sea and sub-sea level depressions in Egypt was originally proposed in 1916. Fend wants to make a "cut" (in the tradition of Michael Heizer) from the Libyan coast along the Qattara Depression that would exit from Egypt, allowing the sea to flow in and out. This would result in a restoration of the historic Gulf of Tritonis, which was described by Herodotus. Bengazi would become an island. Fend contends that since these areas have been ravaged by recent wars, an Earthworks project of such magnitude could offer work to thousands of refugees and present an alternative to radicalization and terrorism.

Qualities that make Peter Fend's oeuvre so compelling are its humane aspirations. In the United States, Fend's biomass harvesting project would require the creative engagement of thousands of workers to restore ecological balance. This work takes on a strong performative dimension as well. Fend has designed a catamaran rowboat that cuts off water plants and could provide meaningful social involvement with water. He is fundraising now to build a prototype of this algae-harvesting craft. To paraphrase Fend, there are many people in the United States who could benefit from exercise and time out-of-doors. Why not offer them a way, through art-making and performance, to better themselves and produce clean energy? Fend's research and activism may at times overshadow his art, but the ambitious waterworks offer both meaningful experiences to the individual in nature as well as viable, renewable energy.





Top: Peter Fend harvesting algae for biofuel in New Zealand, 2010. Bottom: Peter Fend, *Hawaii Energy Independence*, 2013, marker, collage and pencil on paper. Courtesy the artist and Essex Street Gallery.





## Klaus Dauven

**H**anging from a swing stage hundreds of feet above a river, Klaus Dauven creates art on a massive scale by piping water through a high-pressure cleaner. He selectively blasts away dirt to reveal silhouette drawings on the concrete faces of dams in Germany, South Korea, and Japan. Automobile exhaust and grime become art material, defining an imagery of nature lost. Cherry blossoms, tigers, deer, and trout emerge as ghost images on these colossal man-made structures. The *Dam Drawings* call to mind a primeval state of nature and ecosystems once tied to waterways that are now harnessed to provide energy. Dauven's practice is sometimes referred to as Reverse Graffiti, an ecological alternative to spray paint, with its diverse and sometimes contradictory implications.

Dauven's art began on a more intimate scale. A classically trained artist who studied at the Kunstakademien in Münster and Düsseldorf, Dauven did not come from a graffiti background at all. His subtractive approach to art-making came about through an unexpected discovery in the late nineties. Black charcoal ash was cascading off Dauven's paper as he worked on a drawing. The artist brought his vacuum cleaner to aspirate charcoal grounds from the floor but, seizing a perceived opportunity, he lifted the nozzle to paper, where it sucked the charcoal away, leaving an unnatural, sharp-edged path of cleanliness. This led Dauven to take his work into city streets with a stencil and wire brush. He used the steel bristles to brush away dark soot from concrete or moss accretions that had overtaken urban structures. Images released by the artist reflect an ongoing conflict between nature and the city.

Water had been missing from these early experiments, but Dauven soon found that high-pressure spray cleaners offered the most powerful way to clean concrete. With this new instrument of erasure, he sought out work on a monumental scale, achieving his first dam commission in Hellenthal, Germany in 2007. The result was *Wild-Wechsel* (Wildlife Variations), a twenty-four-thousand-square-foot drawing that covered both faces of the dam. Structural piers that call to mind a Roman aqueduct traverse the Oleftal Dam, where Dauven interacted with projecting and receding spaces to depict somewhat camouflaged woodland animals on the forest side. Facing pent-up water, he revealed drawings of vigorous trout struggling to swim beyond the cement barrier. Both the dam and image-making are predicated on attempts to dominate and control water. The dam regulates water flow on a grand scale while Dauven's work depends on precisely channeling water to reveal silhouettes.

The works are ephemeral, canceled by new sun and soot, but the drawing performance resonates in the minds of viewers. Dauven is an experienced rock climber lacking any fear of heights, skills and qualities brought into play as he is lowered down a dam face in a tiny steel cart. Filaments of cable and cord are all that stand

between his life and death. Lasers etch critical points of his drawing on the dam wall, much like a paint-by-numbers canvas. Blasting water against cement from his swing stage, Dauven works in unison with a team of two or three cleaners to liberate shapes and forms in his drawing. It is a dangerous, industrial dance, accentuated by sound and spray and mechanized movement across seemingly endless cement.

The conflict in Dauven's work is notable. His work is "green" in the sense that it doesn't require spraying paint onto a subway car or wall, but it also celebrates industry. Dauven enjoys corporate sponsorship and ostensibly beautifies structures that modify the course of rivers and disrupt natural ecosystems. His drawing is a spectacular performance, enabled by high-pressure water cleaning equipment and other machines. The genesis of his work is a mechanistic spectacle that takes place hundreds of feet above a body of water. But the subjects of his drawings, depicted in baked pollutants and dirt, are pastoral idylls. There is perhaps a nostalgia or longing for things past in his work. The images suggest grand shadows that have somehow lost their masters.

Curator Wolfgang Becker evoked the story of Étienne de Silhouette in discussing Dauven's work. De Silhouette was a French Treasury Chief in the eighteenth century known for his austerity measures. Shadow profile cutouts made their appearance around this time as a cheap substitute for more expensive painted portraiture, and detractors deemed them "silhouettes." Dauven's work comes from this tradition of simple outlined forms and is also informed by the Italian Arte Povera works, like Michelangelo Pistoletto's figuration on mirrors. What distinguishes Dauven's work is the performative transformation of poor materials with the purifying agent of water.





Top left: Klaus Dauven, 2008, untitled reverse graffiti in Düren. Bottom left: Klaus Dauven, 2008, reverse graffiti on the Hanazakari-Matsudagawa Dam, Japan. Top right: Klaus Dauven at work on the Hanazakari-Matsudagawa Dam, 2008, Japan. Bottom right: Klaus Dauven, 2008, reverse graffiti on the Hanazakari-Matsudagawa Dam, Japan. Photos: Courtesy the artist.





## Daniel Rothbart

**G**uerilla installations of my sculpture on Roman city streets would confound, attract, or even intimidate passersby in the early 1990s. Camera in hand, I documented encounters as they unfolded in the project entitled *Semiotic Street Situations*. Since that time, my work has been predicated to varying degrees on performative interactions with my sculpture by invited or uninformed performers. My engagement with the theme of water began in Venice. In 2007, curator and art theorist Enrico Pedrini invited me to participate in OPEN, an exhibition of open-air sculpture, for which I resolved to work in the canals. In counterpoint to the element of water, I reflected on the fiery furnaces of Murano, which have produced molten glass since the thirteenth century. From incandescence, the glass chills to a solid likeness of water with its transparency and prismatic manipulation of light, and I wanted to harness these qualities for my project.

As sea levels rise in the Adriatic, Venice is more frequently plagued by high-water flooding and is slowly sinking beneath the waves. An engineering project called MOSE is being developed by which water-filled gates are pumped full of air, causing them to rise from the ocean floor and block floodwaters at Lido. I decided to work with the theme of buoyancy and resolved to make floating sculpture, buoyed in the canals by shape-shifting spheres of glass. For this work, I welded aluminum arabesques around found glass, creating serpentine chain forms that could freely move in the water. At the front of this piece, I worked with larger glass and a welded-aluminum framework that was weighted to float at controlled depths. The work, which I titled *Flotilla*, assumed an unintentional performative dimension while anchored in front of the Hotel Excelsior for OPEN during the Venice Film Festival. Vaporetti whisked actors, producers, and directors through the canal, sending strong wakes that would enliven *Flotilla*, causing it to glide and fold over the water. *Flotilla*'s metal and glass were illuminated sporadically by hundreds of camera speedlights, fired by journalists at Hollywood personalities as they alighted on to the red carpet.

My second experiment with water, performance, and video took the form of *Sea-Change*, a 2012 work that I realized with artist Marina Markovic and input from John Knowles. *Sea-Change* took the form of a ritual fantasy that evoked nymphs, mythological water maidens and magic in the Rockaways. Markovic swam repeatedly to a pier in Jamaica Bay, Queens, and with determination and focus she removed vessels and spun like a dervish in the water. Her arms were outstretched and she clasped the heavy vessels, which ploughed troughs in the water, creating deep vortices. From this circular movement, the video viewer transitions to a dreamlike underwater perspective. The work concludes with Markovic pouring saltwater libations from vessels atop a pier beside a surreally incongruous armchair.

Later that year, I was invited by curator Wolfgang Becker to create a videotaped performance work in dialogue with the thermal springs that course beneath city streets in Aachen, Germany. Becker introduced me to Pockenpuetzchen, a timeless medieval courtyard graced by two square brick wells. My performance, entitled *Everything Flows, Nothing Stands Still (For Enrico Pedrini)*, commenced on a brisk October morning as misty rain united with steam from the open wells. Laura Moreno Bruna (a young Spanish art student), Ahmed Kreusch (an imam of tall stature who sported a silvery beard), and I (then in my mid-forties) each stood beside serpentine chain-like sculptures with encased found-glass spheres. We were flanked on either side by wells; before them was a constellation of twelve cast-aluminum vessel sculptures containing dry ice. Annette Schmidt, a German actress dressed completely in black, approached the vessels with a ladle brimming with Aachen mineral water. Pausing before each vessel, Schmidt poured water, which on contact with dry ice sent plumes of vapor into the air. She then assisted each of the three performers to carry their corresponding sculpture to a well and gently lower it into the water. After each sculpture was withdrawn from the well, the performer would arrange it on the ground according to his or her personal sensibility, often playing on the theme of balance. A meditation on mortality, change, and underground energy, the work played out before a German audience that had assembled at Pockenpuetzchen, and was later presented as video with the addition of underwater imagery in the wells.

*WATERLINES* was a 2014 performance for floating sculptures and two canoes in Brooklyn's Gowanus Canal between the Union and Carroll Street Bridges. Once the Gowanus Creek, the waterway was the site of an historic battle during the American Revolution, and later became a canal for barge traffic. Nicknamed "Lavender Lake," the Gowanus Canal is now considered one of the most polluted waterways in the United States and has been designated a Superfund cleanup site. I conceived my choreography as a healing ritual for this water, contaminated by chemicals and pathogens from raw sewage but still wild and beautiful. Circumambulation as the act of moving around a sacred object is common to numerous faith traditions and become central to this work. I plotted a course for the canoes to navigate in counter-rotation to one another around a central floating sculpture anchored in the canal.

The work was performed by me, along with dancer/choreographer Jessica Harris, and presented by the Brooklyn contemporary art space Proteus Gowanus. Harris and I circumambulated the central sculpture, with its upward outstretched branching elements fabricated from welded aluminum around a large glass sphere, in canoes behind which serpentine chain sculptures drifted through the water. Our movement created circular wakes in the waterway. The choreography was punctuated by pauses in paddling, during which we reflected, through arm and hand gestures, the gliding movement of floating sculptures that trailed behind our canoes and the amphoric contours of the anchored sculpture.

*WATERLINES* explored dichotomies of appearance and reality, nature and civilization, creation and destruction, contamination and rehabilitation. These dialectics continue to drive my work with water in the aim to restore, through secular ritual, a sense of power and mystery that urban waterways have tragically lost.



Top: Daniel Rothbart, *Flotilla*, a floating sculptural installation for OPEN2007, aluminum and found glass, Hotel Excelsior, Venice. Photo: Sergio Martucci. Courtesy the artist. Bottom: Daniel Rothbart, *WATERLINES*, 2014, performed by the artist and Jessica Harris in the Gowanus Canal. Photo: Sean Dahlberg. Courtesy the artist and Proteus Gowanus.





Daniel Rothbart, *Everything Flows, Nothing Stays the Same (For Enrico Pedrini)*, 2012, performed by the artist, Ahmed Kreusch, Laura Moreno Bruna, and Annette Schmidt in Aachen. Photos: Joachim Gerich. Courtesy the artist.