

A high-contrast, black and white illustration. In the foreground, a man's face and hands are visible. He has a pained or desperate expression, with his mouth open. His hands are reaching out, fingers splayed, towards the viewer. The background is a chaotic, swirling mass of dark, textured shapes, resembling a storm or a turbulent sea. The overall style is graphic and expressive, with heavy black lines and stark white highlights.

*And I,
a newly
evolved fish*

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a newly
evolved fish*



*Chris Soal
Bronwyn Katz
Jody Brand
Zenaéca Singh
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Points of View Lucinda Roy

Even now, women bend to rivers,
Or to wells; they scoop up life and offer it
To men or to their children, to their elders,
To blistered cooking-pots. Heavy with light,
and the brief mosaics of the world,
Water is carried home. Even now,
Women bend to see themselves in rivers
Or catch unsteady faces in buckets drawn
From wells. And water sucks them in,
Catching the wild geometry of the soul
Tossing it onto a plane. The wells
Are brimming with women's fluid faces;
The rivers are alive with women's hands.
Reflections savoured for a while, then gone.

From up here, what can I know of water?
I catch it tamed from metal spouts encased
In quiet glass, contoured in porcelain.
I compartmentalise the beast in ice,
Then serve it, grinning, to distant friends.
What do I know of water? Tomorrow
I must go again to find it. I will swim
In rivers thick with time, permanent as eyes
Of sleepy crocodiles. I will watch women
In slow genuflections ease water
Into round bowls. The river-blinded boys
With jellied eyes transparent in the sun
Will look at me. Children will jump from element
To element making paths through air to water,
Shooting diamond-drops along trajectories
Too long for me to measure. "This is water,"
A new baptism free of metaphor
Will be mine. Water will be water,
And I, a newly-evolved fish, will hear
The aquabatic rippling of gills.

From *Daughters of Africa: An International Anthology of Words and Writings by Women of African Descent from the Ancient Egyptian to the Present*, Margaret Busby (ed.) (London: Jonathan Cape Publishers, 1992).

Introducing

And I, a newly evolved fish

And I, a newly evolved fish considers bodies of water, particularly oceans, as sites, subjects, and frameworks through which to imagine gender, sexuality, and power otherwise, and within broader social and environmental justice goals.

The show's title is borrowed from the poem, *Points of View*, by Jamaican-British poet, Lucinda Roy. In the poem, the “newly-evolved fish” represents the speaker’s desire for an unalienated and embodied relationship with water. More broadly, it refers to a fundamental idea of the exhibition: that water, being fluid and forceful, is a vector of constant change, or evolution. Water connects all life on this Blue Planet, and humans did indeed evolve from primordial seas. In this way, we are all fish: old, new, and ever-evolving.

‘Hydrofeminism’ is a guiding principle of the show. Credited to oceanic humanities and feminist scholar, Astrida Neimanis, “hydrofeminism” recognises that we are all bodies of water connected in an abundantly fluid and permeable “multibeing, more-than-human hydrocommons,” and asks what water can teach us. Critically, that “we” is held in tension, resisting a flattening universalism that disregards the urgent politics of difference. The South African-based volume, *Hydrofeminist Thinking With Oceans* (2024)¹, brings together authors and artists who think in, with, and through the oceans and beaches of South Africa and beyond..

¹ Shefer, T., Bozalek, V. & Romano, N. (2024). Hydrofeminist thinking with oceans: Political and scholarly possibilities. Routledge.

It insists on a feminism in, of, and for the water, practiced in ways that are affective, place-based, embodied, and relational. Challenging the conservative determinism of terrestrial thinking, and engaging the hauntological complexities of the South African coast, hydrofeminist epistemology and practice seeps and floods across times, poetics, sciences, politics, humanities, and humanity.

The exhibition includes artworks and practices that represent and engage with water and wateriness, to disrupt gender and other binaries, and their entanglements within post/coloniality, patriarchy, the Anthropocene, and the Capitalocene. It attends to these entangled violences within our increasingly vulnerable hydrocommons in the coastal and riverine Cape Town area and beyond. The exhibition primarily consists of contemporary artwork, accompanied by a selection of modern works from the collections of the University of the Western Cape and Centre for Humanities Research.

One fundamental invitation of this exhibition is to expand, deepen, and evolve our thinking and feeling in response to and *with* water, with the ambition that this can evolve our ways of thinking and ethics of living. The notion of a “newly evolved fish” points to the changing of life due to the changing of the water, begging the question, “what happened in the water to necessitate evolution?” What conditions have changed? How does water, and our need for water, organise us as humans, and how have we as humans dangerously reorganised water?

The artistic practices gathered in the show demonstrate diverse watery methodologies, like erosion, submersion, sweating, genesis, crystallisation, drifting, splashing, and play, which are interpreted as evolving fishy methodologies.

RE-WIRING

The exhibition is part of Realising Women and Girls' inclusion, representation and empowerment (RE-WIRING, <https://re-wiring.eu/>), a three-year project (2023–2026) located in six different national contexts (Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, South Africa, Spain, and the United Kingdom). Through transformative research, RE-WIRING seeks to rewire institutions to prevent and reverse gender inequalities, catalyse change processes, and actively involve diverse stakeholders in the research process. This approach generates socially robust knowledge, necessary for sustainable and enduring transitions towards a more inclusive and equal society. How can intersectional gender inequalities across society, globally and locally — in families, education, law, politics, education, corporates, workplaces, the media — be systematically challenged and transformed? How can institutions in Europe and (South)Africa foster long-term inclusion, just representation, and empowerment of girls and women at institutional, experiential and symbolic levels?

These are the key questions driving RE-WIRING, a transnational research project funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme (Grant Agreement no 101094497).

Located within the Work Package 5: Media and Representation, the RE-WIRING project features a series of five exhibitions, each exploring *gender inequalities through art and material culture*. These exhibitions — held both online and in physical spaces — aim to challenge dominant gender representations and illuminate intersecting inequalities. Rooted in the broader goals of RE-WIRING's dedication to addressing structural gender disparities, the exhibitions provide tangible ways to disrupt normative gender binaries and open up alternative imaginaries of gender and other forms of binary and inequality. They emphasize materiality and reveal how gender, labour, mobility, and intersecting social identities are shaped and may be (re) shaped through interactions with physical objects, environments, and technologies.

Hydrofeminist thinking with bodies of water

Tamara Shefer

Humans are 70% water. While we think of ourselves as bounded separate entities, we are far more permeable than we think. Thus, '[w]e are all bodies of water, with pumped-up vulnerabilities, leaking, sponging, sloshing, dropping, sipping.'¹ Thinking with water, then, is a way of appreciating our entangled relationalities, of thinking of ourselves as connected with all others, both human and more-than-human, and the planetary hydrocommons. Astrida Neimanis coined the term, hydrofeminism,² which works with the feminist figuration³ of 'bodies of water' to theorise the stories that water tells us about our human histories and presents, about historical and current injustices, in relation to humans, and also in relation to other species and the planet. She explains how water has guided her scholarship:

My work as a writer and researcherhas been largely focused on one question: how might paying attention to water – *really* paying attention to it; how it moves, what it does, what it is threatened by, how it organizes itself and other bodies — how might this kind of 'thinking with water' open up a different sort of imaginative space, perhaps interrupting some of the foundational concepts and beliefs in dominant Western systems of thought that I have inherited?⁴

1 Neimanis, A. (2020). We are all at sea: Practice, ethics, and poetics of "Hydrocommons". <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/astrida-neimanis-sofia-lemos-2020/>. Accessed 16 July 2025

2 See Neimanis, A. (2012). Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water. In H. Gunkel, C. Nigianni & F. Söderbäck (eds.), *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice* (pp. 94–115). Palgrave Macmillan; Neimanis, A. (2017a). *Bodies of water: Posthuman feminist phenomenology*. Bloomsbury academic; Neimanis, A. (2017b). Water and knowledge. In D. Christian & R. Wong, (Eds.) *Reimagining water* (pp. 51–68). Wilfrid Laurier University Press. ProQuest Ebook Central.

3 There is a long tradition of *feminist figurations* in feminist scholarship. For Rosi Braidotti, a feminist figuration is an imaginative, aspirational response to specific material and historical conditions in our contemporary world. (Braidotti R. (2022). *Posthuman feminism*. Polity). A figuration is thus a conceptual persona which makes it possible to amplify material conditions, and provoke imaginative responses for reconfiguring these. As Nina Lykke puts it, figurations are "to be understood as created in balancing acts between a critique of lived social realities and affirmative, visionary movements towards other kinds of worlding practices." (Lykke, N. (2022). *Vibrant death: A posthuman phenomenology of mourning*. Bloomsbury, p. 212.)

4 Neimanis, A. (2012). Thinking with water: an aqueous imaginary and an epistemology of unknowability. Unpublished talk given at "Entanglements of New Materialisms," Linköping, Sweden, May 25–26 2012. <https://>

We have all inherited these foundational concepts and beliefs, given the dominance of euro-western (post)coloniality for centuries now. A key component is gender binaries, which are always entangled with binaries of race, sexuality, nature-society, and more. The cartesian logic, which privileges the mind and devalues the body, is also the overlapping logic of capital, patriarchy and coloniality. For example, the same set of logics that make the rape of women possible and imaginable, also play out in the long history of colonial extractivist engagements with indigenous peoples and lands. Such logics continue to rationalise the gendered, sexualised, raced, classed, ethnic, geopolitical exclusion of certain bodies from safety, health and well-being, and the extinction of many peoples, cultures, and other species.

Thinking with water, then, is a *hauntological* project. All bodies of water on our planet are haunted. In South Africa, and other postcolonial societies, our oceans and beaches speak to the ghosts of the hydrocolonial⁵ legacies of centuries of European colonisation and trans-Atlantic slavery. As Christina Sharpe reminds us “the atoms of the people who were thrown overboard are out there in the ocean today.”⁶ But bodies of water are also sacred places for many, and a part of diverse traditions and spiritualities. South African poet, Koleka Putuma, in her iconic poem, *Water*, interrogates white engagements with oceans, and the alternative meanings for many Black communities:⁷

For you, the ocean is for surf boards, boats and tans
And all the cool stuff you do under there in your
bathing suits and goggles
But we, we have come to be baptised here
We have come to stir the other world here
We have come to cleanse ourselves here
We have come to connect our living to the dead here

The ocean and other bodies of water are not only haunted by the past, but also hold spectres of the damages of the present and future – in

oceans and rivers, we face the effects of overfishing, and extractivist practices like seismic surveys, pollution and sewage. Indeed, we “reside within and as part of a fragile global hydrocommons, where water – the lifeblood of humans and all other bodies on this planet — is increasingly contaminated, commodified and dangerously reorganised.”⁸ This, too, links all on the planet.

However, in the moment of remembering that we are all a part of a shared hydrocommons, hydrofeminist thinking resists slipping into unitary thinking:

‘We’ are all in this together... but ‘we’ are not all the same, nor are we all ‘in this’ in the same way.⁹

In line with decolonial, postcolonial, and intersectional feminist thinking, Neimanis¹⁰ insists on ‘troubling’ notions of ‘we’. We are all implicated differently in current anthropogenic disasters, and are already being affected differently. Indeed, those already disadvantaged and living under harsh conditions, and in communities already disadvantaged by gender, sexuality, class, military conflict and more, are worse affected by climate and other environmental crises. Water can also teach us of difference – water is always changing, always different, and cannot be contained in one place, or one way of being. Thus it offers a way of acknowledging continual difference, continual change. Thinking with water, then, allows us to both acknowledge differences, while opening up relationalities and possibilities of alternative thinking and becoming.

Through thinking oneself as water, we can begin to occupy a political imaginary which appreciates our entanglements, while not erasing our differences, and therefore our responsibility and response-ability for this ‘contaminated hydrocommons,’ as well as for the climate crises related to such contaminations, and the gender and intersecting social inequalities that are further exacerbated by these. We can also be reminded to radically revise our ways of thinking and living that are shaped by the binary logics of capital, patriarchy and coloniality. These logics and normative binaries underpin the oppressions and subjugations of many people, and are deeply implicated in the

s3.amazonaws.com/arena-attachments/1906530/29d7f149a8903b0fab4c7580a6461130.pdf?1521279845. Accessed 16 July 2025.

5 A term coined by Isabel Hofmeyr. Hofmeyr, I. (2019). “Provisional Notes on Hydrocolonialism.” *English Language Notes*, 57(1), 11–20; Hofmeyr, I. (2022). *Dockside reading: Hydrocolonialism and the custom house*. Duke University Press.

6 Sharpe, C. (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Duke University Press. (p. 40).

7 Putuma, K. (2017). *Collective Amnesia*. Cape Town: uHlanga. Words for Water accessed at <https://pensouthafrica.co.za/water-by-koleka-putuma/>. Accessed 16 July 2025.

8 Neimanis, A. (2013). ‘Feminist subjectivity, watered’. *Feminist Review*, 103(1), 23–41. (p. 27).

9 Neimanis, A. *Bodies*, 15.

10 Neimanis, *Bodies*; Neimanis, ‘Preface.’

intersectional gender inequalities that this exhibition, and the larger project, are surfacing and challenging.

Finally, of importance to the current project, hydrofeminist work is inspiring much creativity and artistic work, what Bailey-Charteris calls, “hydro-artistic methods.”¹¹ Mirroring feminist traditions of embodied, affective, aesthetic and other creative ways of making and sharing knowledge, there is a growing effort to generate and think with watery art. Neimanis argues, “Perhaps by imagining ourselves as irreducibly watery, as literally part of a global hydrocommons, we might locate new creative resources for engaging in more just and thoughtful relations with the myriad bodies of water with whom we share this planet.”¹²



Sabelo Mlangeni
*6th of January 2024, inside the
police van. Charges_ operating in
municipal space without a permit*

Silver gelatin prints; C-print
Courtesy blank projects, Cape Town

¹¹ Bailey-Charteris, B. (2024). *The Hydrocene: Eco-aesthetics in the Age of Water* (Taylor & Francis).

¹² Neimanis, 'Feminist subjectivity,' 28, our emphasis.

Fluid Boundaries: Bodies of Water, Gender, and the Environment

Lwando Scott

Through the RE-WIRING project, our desire is to challenge, and try to undo, gender stereotypes, to move beyond simplistic ideas of the gender binary, and project an expansive idea of gender. The thematic of our exhibition, *And I, a newly evolved fish*, speaks to bodies of water through a wet imaginaries philosophy, to imagine gender, sexuality, power and the environment otherwise. In an era of environmental crises and identity politics, conversations around ecology, gender, and the body intersect in increasingly visible and urgent ways. Water, the element most synonymous with life and transformation, becomes a natural metaphor, and a literal medium through which the relationship between gender and the environment can be examined. For those who identify as gender fluid — existing beyond the binary norms of male and female — bodies of water can resonate on both symbolic and material levels. Through this exhibition, we explore how water reflects, challenges, and expands our understanding of gender and environmental consciousness, and how a gender fluid perspective offers a powerful framework for reimagining the human-nature relationship in a time of ecological uncertainty.

Water is inherently fluid — changing states from solid to liquid to gas, defying containment, and reshaping landscapes over time. Similarly, gender fluidity defies fixed categorisation, embracing motion, multiplicity, and transformation. Where traditional gender roles and identities are often defined in binary and hierarchical terms, water resists such binary thinking. It is neither inherently passive nor aggressive, neither male nor female, but adaptable, persistent, and vital.

Gender fluidity forces us to think expansively about gender, because through this concept, we understand gender identity as shifting over time, or as existing outside normative gender categories. In this sense, the reality of people with a gender fluid lived experience mirrors

the hydrological cycle — evaporating, condensing, flowing, pooling, freezing, and thawing in a continuous dance of transformation. This resonance creates an affinity with natural systems that reject rigidity. A gender fluid perspective, therefore, can inform a more nuanced understanding of ecological relationships — one that value dynamism, interdependence, and change over control and dominance.

The imposition of binary gender categories is deeply tied to colonial and patriarchal systems that have also historically sought to dominate and regulate the environment. Just as Indigenous and non-Western understandings of gender were suppressed in favour of Eurocentric norms (see, Amadiume,¹ Oyěwùmí,² and Lugones)³, water sources — rivers, lakes, oceans — have been dammed, redirected, polluted, and privatised in the name of progress and control. This desire to fix and dominate — to decide who is “man” or “woman,” what is “wild” or “civilised” — reveals a common root: fear of ambiguity.

In this light, gender fluidity becomes not only a personal identity but also a form of resistance against structures that enforce conformity. The environmental destruction wrought by extractive capitalism mirrors the cultural erasure inflicted on those who do not fit binary gender roles. The gender fluid body, like a body of water, is a contested site where power plays out — subject to attempts at definition, containment, and exploitation. Yet, both continue to resist and overflow imposed boundaries.

Our own bodies are composed primarily of water, and this internal ocean links us to the wider ecological web. For gender fluid individuals, who may experience dysphoria or euphoria in relation to the body, this watery nature is more than symbolic. It speaks to the lived reality of change. Hormonal shifts, changes in presentation, or transitioning in ways that affirm one's fluid gender identity, all echo the rhythms of tides and rainfall. The body, like a river, is never the same from one moment to the next.

This connection fosters an embodied environmentalism — one that recognises the body not as separate from nature, but as an extension

1 Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society*. Zed Books.

2 Oyěwùmí, O. (1997). *The invention of women: Making an African sense of western gender discourses*. University of Minnesota Press.

3 Lugones, M. (2008). *The coloniality of gender*. *World's & Knowledges Otherwise*, 2, 1–17.

of it. From this vantage point, protecting waterways becomes an act of self-care, and respecting gender diversity becomes an act of ecological justice. A polluted river or dried-up lake is not just an environmental issue, but a violation of the same principles that underlie gender fluid existence: respect for fluidity, openness, and multiplicity.

Water has long been gendered in cultural narratives — oceans as feminine, rivers as masculine, or vice versa — depending on the tradition. These attributions often reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes: the ocean as nurturing yet dangerous, the river as forceful and linear. Yet, when viewed through a gender fluid lens, these simplistic associations dissolve. Instead, we can see water not as gendered, but as queer — resisting fixed meaning, embodying both softness and strength, continuity and rupture.

Today, artists, environmental artists, and activists of diverse gender identities, are reclaiming watery symbols to express nonbinary and fluid experiences. The works of arts that are included in our exhibition, *And I, a newly evolved fish*, embody water and watery symbols to speak to race, place, power, coloniality, and performance art that engages with rivers, seas, and tidal zones, playing with ideas of border-crossing, liminality, and transformation — core themes for both environmental and gender justice movements.

Traditional environmentalism has often mirrored the same patriarchal structures it seeks to challenge — centred on control, conservation through separation, and top-down regulation. A gender fluid perspective calls instead for relational, adaptive, and inclusive models of environmental care. Rather than “managing” nature, we can ask how to live with it, learn from it, and honour its dynamic essence.

This perspective aligns with Indigenous ecological knowledge systems that have long recognised the sentience and agency of water. From the Standing Rock water protectors to Māori beliefs about rivers as ancestors, from Nguni folktales about water to the poetics of the black Atlantic diaspora, these worldviews share with gender fluidity a reverence for the interconnected, non-binary, and sacred nature of life. The fight for clean water becomes inseparable from the fight for gender liberation — not just metaphorically, but in lived experience. Connectedly, then, we see that trans and gender non-conforming

people are disproportionately affected by environmental harm, often lacking access to safe housing, clean water, and healthcare.

As the climate crisis deepens, so, too, must our capacity for imagination and transformation. A gender fluid approach to the environment doesn't offer easy solutions, but it does offer a radical reorientation. It asks us to embrace uncertainty, to value resilience and change, to deconstruct harmful binaries, and to find kinship where we once saw separation.

Water teaches us that boundaries are porous. Coastlines shift. Rivers change course. Glaciers melt. Likewise, our understanding of gender and nature must remain open to evolution. The gender fluid perspective brings with it an ethic of care, responsiveness, and humility — qualities urgently needed in our planetary moment.

Ultimately, both water and gender fluidity remind us that life is not fixed, but flowing. In learning to navigate these flows — not to dam them, define them, or deny them — we may find new ways to survive, connect, and thrive.



Mikhailia Petersen
Woman of the Water, 2024

C-print on Polytwill
Courtesy the artist

Watery re-wiring of the symbolic

Rosemarie Buikema

In South Africa, but also globally, political and cultural transitions often go hand in hand. These implicit and explicit relations between aesthetics and politics form the focal point of our work package's contribution to the RE-WIRING project. Studying the interaction between experience and representation, affect and mimesis, the imaginary and the symbolic, lies at the heart of the praxis of cultural critique — especially when that critical work is politically engaged. Ever since it came into existence, within feminist and decolonial theory, the guiding principle has been not only that it is important to lead different possible lives than those prescribed by traditional and/or conventional clearcut binary social roles, but that it is just as important to have the opportunity to create new iconographies and vocabularies to visualise and tell alternative stories about those so-called liquid or queer lives. Such alternatives enable new narrative and visual structures, in which it becomes possible to imagine different relations of signification, and other options for action than tradition or convention might suggest. The link between narrative plots and possible options for agency is an important research theme that is elaborately foregrounded by, and studied within, decolonial and feminist scholarship. Research has clearly established that the way in which we are used to telling stories, and thus making identity and meaning, is structured by a gender-, class-, and colour-specific division of roles and tasks. That is to say, we are dealing with a legacy of an ingrained division of binary power relations in our dominant narrative and visual technologies. Therefore, undoing rigid patterns in lived reality can only become structural when they are rendered present within the symbolic system, in how we visualise, think, and talk about the world.

In this exhibition, we choose to think with water as a process of resistance against these ingrained binary power relations and univocal truths. We are thinking with water as a search for how that which is inevitably excluded from binary oppositions and universal truth claims can be given form, place, and meaning. Water, as an epistemological and ethical medium, reminds us that we only exist in relation with a

myriad of other human and non-human species. We do not exist as one autonomous subject, clearly separated from other autonomous subjects, as western philosophy would have it; rather, we co-exist. We as human beings are in a constant flow of exchange with other species.

Neo Matloga is only one of the exemplary artists whose work is exhibited in *And I, a newly evolved fish*, who embrace the paradoxical nature of water to explore black subjectivity as fluid, layered, and non-linear. His collage-based compositions, made of magazine clippings and fluid media, evoke connection, fluidity and mutual care, not only in the depiction of bodies, but also in his deployment of water as his material. The use of water as a medium gives his work a quality of unresolved liquidity. "I turned to water to give me a chance to think differently about surface and to gain additional time to make my gestures," Matloga states.¹ Surface and depth are entangled. Time becomes expanded. Faces and bodies appear as memories in the process of forming and/or dissolving, both beautiful and unsettling. In this way water becomes an aesthetic agent of ambiguity and change. Acknowledging these ambiguities inevitably pushes us toward more interconnected ontologies. As watery beings, we depend on each other, and on the connection with planet earth.

As such, the selected artworks visualise recent transformations in the ways in which we, as feminist and decolonial critics, theorise political crises and change. They lead us to recognise alternative iconographies and vocabularies to theorise injustice on local and global scales. There is no once-and-for-all solution for dismantling the accumulation of inequalities and injustices which continue to threaten our lives and our planet today because, as argued elsewhere in this catalogue by Lwando Scott and Tamara Shefer, these injustices are intersectionally intertwined. Rethinking to feminist and decolonial agenda with and through water includes acknowledging the different ways in which water is politically and symbolically deployed with gender-, class-, and ethnic-specific consequences for a liveable life, such as access to clean air and water. Thinking with water helps us to permanently articulate and visualise the multi-layered process of change, to reactivate the memory of interconnected histories of systemic injustice and work through them. Only then can we reimagine and live our relationships with ourselves and others as permeable watery beings, always in flux.

¹ <https://www.stevenson.info/exhibition/8325>. Accessed 22 July 2025

Swimming through the exhibition

Rory Tsapayi

In Lucinda Roy's *Points of View*, the 1992 poem from which this exhibition borrows its title, the poet laments her alienation from water, and fantasises about an embodied and transcendent hydrological homecoming. Her verses overflow with sumptuous description as she dreams of jellyfish, diamond-drops, and rivers thick with time and heavy with light. And then Roy discards metaphor and simply submerges. The closing lines of the poem are spoken from underwater. Or rather, they are bubbled from below the surface: *And I, a newly evolved fish, will hear / The aquabatic rippling of gills.*

She becomes piscine.

My Piscean traits — dreamy, romantic, changeable — are pleased by the image of a human evolving into a fish. It evokes the Greek myth of the Pisces constellation, where Aphrodite and Eros are lovers, imperilled by the raging monster Typhon. To escape him, they transform into a pair of fish, tying themselves together with a rope around the tail so as not to get separated in the currents. The myth speaks to the Pisces' tendency toward evolution as the mutable water sign.

The newly evolved fish completes an evolutionary loop, too. As Shawn Michelle Smith reminds us, "Life on earth began in the ocean. Land plants and animals gradually emerged from the sea, cells reorganising into roots and stems, branches and leaves, gills becoming lungs, flippers and fins becoming legs and feet."¹ To evolve into a fish, return to the water, would then perhaps be to evolve backwards, to return to old-yet-new worlds of watery sensation. Maybe we are all fish: old, new, and ever-evolving.

This exhibition looks at evolutions of a watery kind, and thinks with water in the language of visual arts practice. In gathering artworks

¹ Shawn Michelle Smith, "An Orientation to the Sea," *Art Journal* 80 (2021).

made by South African artists with oceanic concerns, it considers water as both a subject and a method. Water, an element of constant change, introduces its own aquatic agency in artworks made with techniques like liquid painting, beachcombing, crystallisation, photography, swimming, and erosion. When depicted in ‘dry’ media, it still eludes fixed representation. These engagements, of what Bailey-Charteris calls the “hydro-artistic,” consist of a range of practices where water — and especially the South African shore — is engaged with equal parts reverence and criticality.² Interrogating the variously material, spiritual, diasporic, violent, romantic, and temporal resonances of the Indian and Atlantic oceans in South African history, the artists and their works flow along the many lines of “the wild geometry” that Lucinda Roy sees in ripples. These following passages that briefly introduce the artists’ work try to swim alongside them.



Shakil Solanki
*He made it something else, a living
pattern painted on the air, 2023*

Ink on ghost colour etching

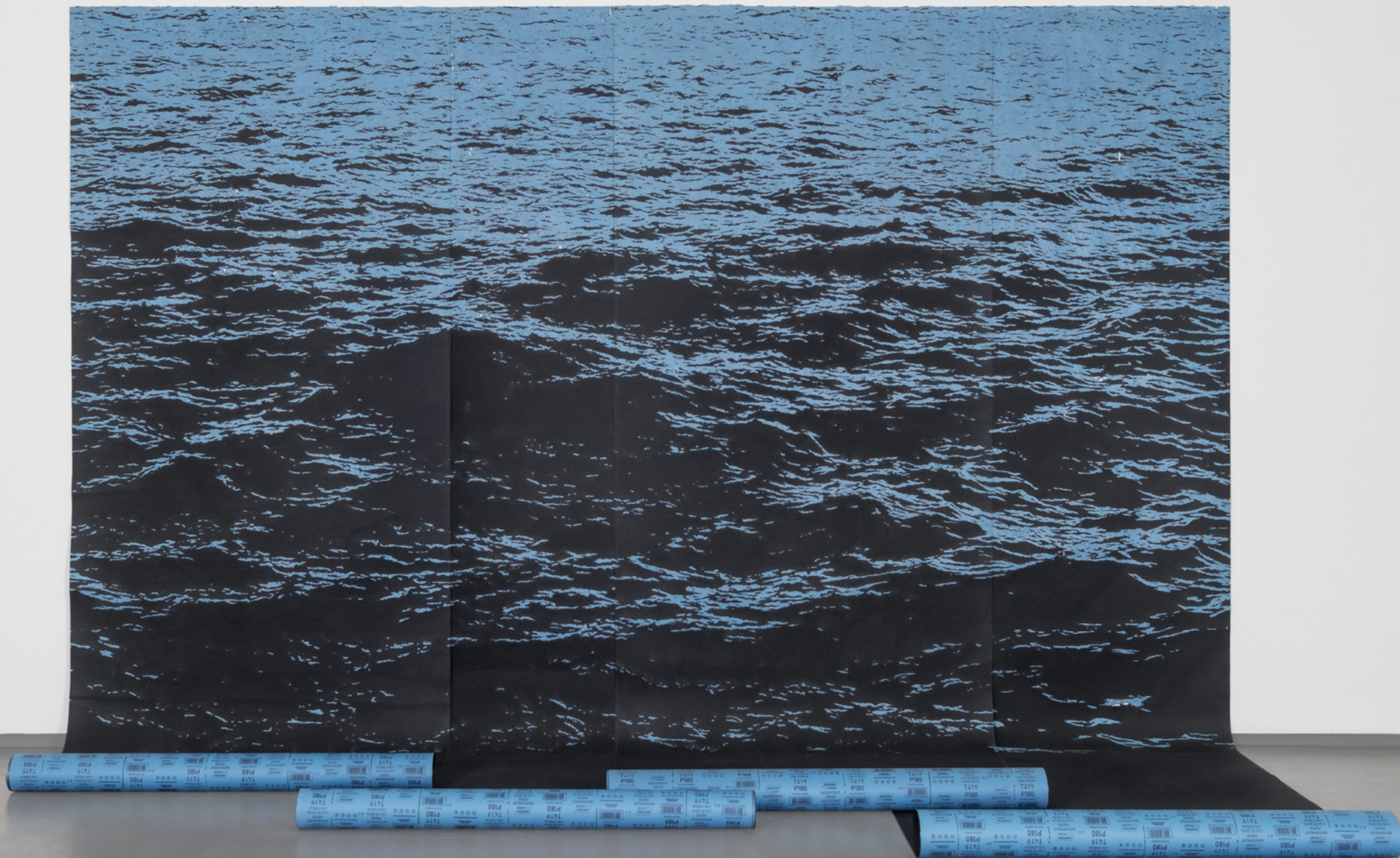
² Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris, *The Hydrocene: Eco-aesthetics in the Age of Water* (Routledge, 2024).

Chris Soal (1994, Johannesburg, GP) *The Expanse (to see the world in a grain of sand), 2024*

Woodblock impressions on eroded
sandpaper rolls (Norton P180)
Courtesy the artist

The surface of the ocean stretches from edge to edge in Chris Soal's *The Expanse (to see the world in a grain of sand)*. As an image, it has a sublime totality, and reminds me of a Piscean friend who declared on a Hermanus beach that no representation of the ocean could dare compare to the real thing. But Soal makes a different thing altogether, not just a representation, but a durational meditation. His image of the sea is rubbed out on long blue rolls of sandpaper. This material, typically used to smooth other things, is inversely repurposed as the pictographic surface. The artist erodes areas of the black sand coating to reveal a blue paper underneath, producing a monochromatic image of the sea. This process of erosion evokes the temporal and spatial incommensurability of the ocean. Water is as old as this planet, because it is this planet, and water systems have shaped the Earth's surface, through erosion and other geological processes, over millions of years. Ever moving, extraordinarily powerful, and endlessly complex, oceans are hyperobjects.¹ To contemplate them is to be dwarfed. Soal's work humbly, meticulously, and laboriously embraces that dwarfing, submitting to the vast and sublime unknowability of the ocean.

¹ Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).





Bronwyn Katz (1991, Kimberley, NC)

Maaghout (stomach wood) (ii), 2024

Mountain of the sea, copper wire, candle, mild steel
Courtesy the artist

Bronwyn Katz approaches the ocean, not as an inanimate site, but as a being with memory, mood, and will. She gathers stones from the beaches of Cape Town with deliberate care, asking the sea's permission to forage, and never taking more than her share. She uses these stones to make sculptures like *Maaghout (stomach wood) (ii)*. The artwork, bound together with copper wire — a material as conductive as water itself — becomes a quiet current, holding the tension between extraction and offering. Its form suggests coral or bronchi: something skeletal and soft, grown rather than made, and at home on the ocean floor or beneath the skin. The shape is drawn from the marks on the artist's own body, which she maps and interprets into constellations. The sculpture thus becomes an abstract, refracted self portrait, an echo diagram of a close-up. Invoking sea, sky, soil, and self, Katz folds the ocean into the body, and the body into the land, which ultimately returns to the ocean. This is not metaphor, but method. In *Maaghout*, the shore is not a boundary, but a meeting point, a permeable membrane between worlds of experience and knowledge that must be engaged mindfully. The work enacts a porous ethics where self and sea are co-constitutive. What emerges is a new kind of body of water, a newly evolved fish.



Jody Brand (1989, Cape Town, WC)
Paradise Pickles, 2022 —

Lemon atchar, kumquat jam, sour figs
 and rooibos, glass jars, paper
 Courtesy the artist

Jody Brand's *Paradise Pickles* interpret 'preservation' literally and conceptually. The three pickle jars are filled with lemon atchar, kumquat jam, sour figs and rooibos, recipes that have been passed down over generations, with their roots in the culinary creolisation of Khoikhoi, San, Indonesian, and Dutch food cultures in the Cape. Suspended like flotsam among the fruits and spices are the names of people who were enslaved on the Leeuwenhof Estate in Cape Town, where Brand first showed this work in 2022. In the proceeding years, microbial worlds have come alive in the jars, small aquatic ecosystems living alongside and animating the memories of those who were trafficked across the Indian Ocean and forced to labour in South Africa. The pickle jars, conjuring the kitchen shelf and the family home, honour the descendants of the enslaved who, like the preserved perishables, have resiliently built and sustained communities and cultures in the Cape through centuries of near-constant oppression, violence, and erasure. They also honour the stereotyped colonial-enforced roles of women in the home, long devalued, but so key to the care and nurturance of all. Brand's living liquid memorials proudly insist that the work of memory is fundamental to the work of survival.



Zenaéca Singh (2000, Port Shepstone, KZN)
Finding a sweet e(scape), 2024

Crystallised sari, cotton sari with sugar
paste embroidery, sugar glass, resin
Courtesy the artist

Zenaéca Singh researches the gendered conditions of Indian indentured labour on the South African east coast, particularly in the sugar economy of colonial Natal. Using the material at the centre of her inquiry — sugar — she has developed techniques like molasses-staining, sugar glass, syrup-soaking, and crystallisation. Each offers its own metaphorical value to Singh's work, with liquidity, in particular, introducing an agency beyond the artist's own. Sensitive to heat and moisture, Singh's work never fully settles. It is susceptible to melting, dripping, and pooling, and suggests the ambivalences of history and belonging for South African Indians that Singh explores. On display in the exhibition are elements from the artist's installation, *Finding a sweet e(scape)*, which pays homage to indentured women who deserted sugar plantations, thus also gesturing to women and subaltern resistances and agencies. The suspended cotton sari has been submerged in sugar syrup, and left to crystallise over a long period. With the materials of cotton and sugar invoking the plantocracy, the deliberately drawn-out submersion-crystallisation process is a rebuke to the capitalist acceleration of time. It encourages slowing down and considering the lived experiences of indentured women. The crystallised cotton is crumbly and sparkly; accompanied by jewellery and marigold chains cast in sugar glass, the garments conjure the absent presence of the women whose histories Singh's work revisits.



Mikhailia Petersen (1992, Cape Town, WC)
Woman of the Water, 2024

C-print on Polywill
Courtesy the artist

In 2024, Petersen turned her lens toward a group of South African water women — marine biologists, free divers, activists, foragers, storykeepers — who steward environmental and cultural knowledge on the coastline. On display are two photographs of Traci Kwaai, a sixth-generation fisher-child from Kalk Bay, who has reclaimed her relationship with the sea through free diving. Petersen's portraits, of Kwaai and her teenage daughter at the fishing docks in Kalk Bay, tenderly document intimacy with the sea. The women's hair is dark and damp from a recent swim, and their knit dresses are reminiscent of fishing nets. In a close up of their hands, Traci holds a traditional fishing line like an amulet, while her daughter cradles an abalone shell. The objects feel like gifts shared with the sea, or like artefacts of once-abundant coastal worlds still under siege.

Developing her photographic projects in close collaboration with her subjects, Mikhailia Petersen's photography shares and celebrates the lived experiences of Black, Brown, and Queer individuals. Petersen resists the essentialism that the documentary lens so often imposes on marginalised groups. Her pictures radiate warmth and authenticity, and offer a visual archive of resilience, beauty, and community in post-colonial Cape Town. Traci Kwaai is a decolonial ocean historian, social and ecological activist. Her projects, like the Walk of Remembrance, Wall of Remembrance, and Sites of Memory, resurface submerged indigenous histories of False Bay, returning social justice to the heart of the area's history of colonial occupation and forced removals.¹

¹ Attiyah Khan, "Walking through Kalk Bay's history," Daily Maverick (originally published by New Frame), 2021.





Daniel Kgomo Morolong

(1928–2012, East London, EC)

Selected photographs from the Eastern Beach, East London, and KZN, ca. 1960s

© Estate Late Daniel “Kgomo” Morolong. All rights reserved.
Courtesy of Everard Read/CIRCA Cape Town.

Daniel Kgomo Morolong photographed beachgoers in East London in the 1960s, and his archive is filled with smiling faces and retro swimsuits, set against the backdrop of the sea. Taking his camera to what would soon be the ‘whites only’ Eastern Beach, Morolong published his images in the *African Edition*, a Black-oriented supplement of the *Daily Dispatch* newspaper. His social photographs were a joyful counter-representation of Black life and leisure in the face of the 1960 amendment to the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act that was expanded to include beaches.

Patricia Hayes¹ has written that Morolong’s photographs “slide” between documentary and snapshot, or between past and present. In the photographic frame, Hayes finds that the “indeterminate space of the sea” acts an invitation to slide into an open mode of historical interpretation. Likewise, in her writing on Morolong, Phindi Mnyaka² heeds an invitation to dwell in the ambivalent temporality of the beach, that “wet stretch between land and sea ... a space of crossings,” implicating Morolong’s photographs in a recursive swirl of past, present, and future. Her analysis loosens the linearity of photographic time and social memory, favouring a tidal history, one that ebbs and flows between past and future, never still, sometimes crashing. Following the fluid currents of these analyses, each of Morolong’s beach photographs, and indeed, each of the oceanic photographs in the exhibition, becomes an invitation to speculate and return, sustaining a critical space for Black coastal existences past, present, and future.

¹ Patricia Hayes, “Introduction: Visual Genders,” *Gender & History* 17, no. 3 (November 2005): 519–537.

² Phindi Mnyaka, “The Profane and the Prophetic at a South African Beach,” *Ambivalent: Photography and Visibility in African History*, Patricia Hayes and Gary Minkley, eds. (Ohio University Press, 2019).

Sabelo Mlangeni (1980, Driefontein, MP)
*Inhlanzi ishelwe
ngamanzi (ii), (2021)*

*Ukufika kwengilosi. The
coming of an angel, 2016*

Silver gelatin prints; C-print
Courtesy blank projects, Cape Town

Taken over the past few years in Durban, Sabelo Mlangeni's *Honeymoon. Happily ever after?* series brings a different temporality to shore. His camera drifts with the queer and curious textures of eThekweni's beaches, sites of both leisure and ritual, spirituality and surveillance. The beaches of Durban are only superficially spaces of recreation and ease in Mlangeni's photographs, which grapple with the ways pleasure and politics brush against each other like seafoam on cement. Mlangeni's work in the wider series unsettles the postcard fantasy of Durban as a tropical paradise, quietly turning our gaze toward the sediment of instability: floods in 2022, collapsing infrastructure, the slow violence of state neglect.

The "honeymoon" of the title nods to a previous project on weddings, which includes a quietly surreal photograph of empty chairs arranged on a grassy bank. The suspended moment is dense with the anticipation of something sacred or strange. One imagines a spirit rising from the water to meet this bodiless congregation. Elsewhere, Mlangeni's still lives of ritual offerings left on the sand suggest the beach as altar, a threshold between worlds, an idea that recurs throughout the exhibition. His are not documentary images in the strict sense. They float, like dream-thoughts, across the porous edge of the real. Mlangeni's photographs hint at the ephemeral and elemental worlds conjured by the sea, toward realities and knowledges that cannot be tidily explained, nor stopped from continuing to surface, quietly, with the rolling tide.



Kewpie

(1941–2012, District Six, Cape Town, WC)

*Kewpie Doing a Split
at Strandfontein
Beach, c.1975–9*

*Kewpie, Brigitte, Margaret
and the Seapoint Girls
Outside a Demolished
Building, c.1960*

Courtesy the Digital Transgender Archive

Kewpie, an icon of District Six, and Cape Town's queer and trans heritage, was a hairdresser, socialite, and dancer, and is the centre of an extraordinary photographic archive of queer culture. Seen on Strandfontein Beach, an area zoned as 'Coloured' under the apartheid regime, Kewpie is seen smiling in a floral bikini, her legs spread in a split on the sand. The shadows of her friends, including the photographer, stretch towards her from out of frame, while three children frolic in the water behind her. It is a jovial scene of seaside leisure that's tinged with political disruption, challenging the policing of bodies by race, gender, and sexuality. It sits in uneasy companionship with a group photo of Kewpie and friends posing in the shell of a demolished building that immediately calls to mind the razing of District Six, and legacies of forced removals under the Group Areas Act. The crew is referred to as the Seapoint Girls, a tragic irony, as Sea Point was designated a whites-only area in 1957, part of the waves of forced removal and displacement of communities of colour away from the coastline.





Neo Matloga (1928–2012, East London, EC)
Tepen, 2022

Collage, charcoal, liquid charcoal,
ink and oil stick on canvas
Courtesy Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town

While Morolong and Kewpie's photographs offer a historical perspective on race and gender in South African coastal history with their playful and social performances of femininity and masculinity, Neo Matloga's artwork adds further fluidity to the human figure at the beach. Intriguingly, Matloga's collage-painting, *Tepen*, bears striking resemblance to one of Morolong's photographs on display. Both works depict three people holding hands as they emerge from the sea. It's a new birth of Venus, or the return of the tail-tied fish lovers, who have found a third who hides just beyond the edge of the frame. In his signature collage style, Matloga creates whimsical figures out of different features like noses, mouths, arms, and legs, that often bear no traditional gender markers. Seen hand in hand on the titular beach of *Tepen* (Durban), these three "surreal bodies ... prompt new interrogations of the human form."¹ The evolving figures stand in a shallow, churning sea, that Matloga rendered in liquid charcoal, further animating the painting with unpredictable energy. The evocative brushstrokes bounce off of the chop-and-paste edges of the photographs, conjuring the froth of the saltwater lapping around the ankles.

¹ Luyanda Mpangele, "Back of the Moon, Front of the Eye," in Neo Matloga - *Back of the Moon*. (Johannesburg: Stevenson Gallery, 4 2020), 13.

Shakil Solanki (1997, Cape Town, WC)
He Loves a Bodiless Dream, 2025

Lithograph
Courtesy the artist

Shakil Solanki's swirling blue lithograph conjures a new body of water. In an inverted perspective, a lone figure sits poolside, gazing downward, reaching not for a mirror image, but toward a shadowed presence submerged below. The reference to *Narcissus* is unmistakable, yet inverted. Here, there is no fatal vanity, only a spectral echo circling in the deep, an alter-ego caught in a watery spiral. Solanki's print is awash in fluid, hypnotic gesture. His water is not passive, but romantic and restless and consuming. Rendered in richly saturated blues, curves and eddies overwhelm the composition, their current sweeping the eye around in a dizzying swirl so dynamic that one imagines water will start churning and splashing out of the frame at any moment. Washing over everything, the water is not a surface but a portal. It blurs above and below, self and other, longing and becoming.



Cheri Hugo (1980, Cape Town, WC)

Iris: Water, 2022

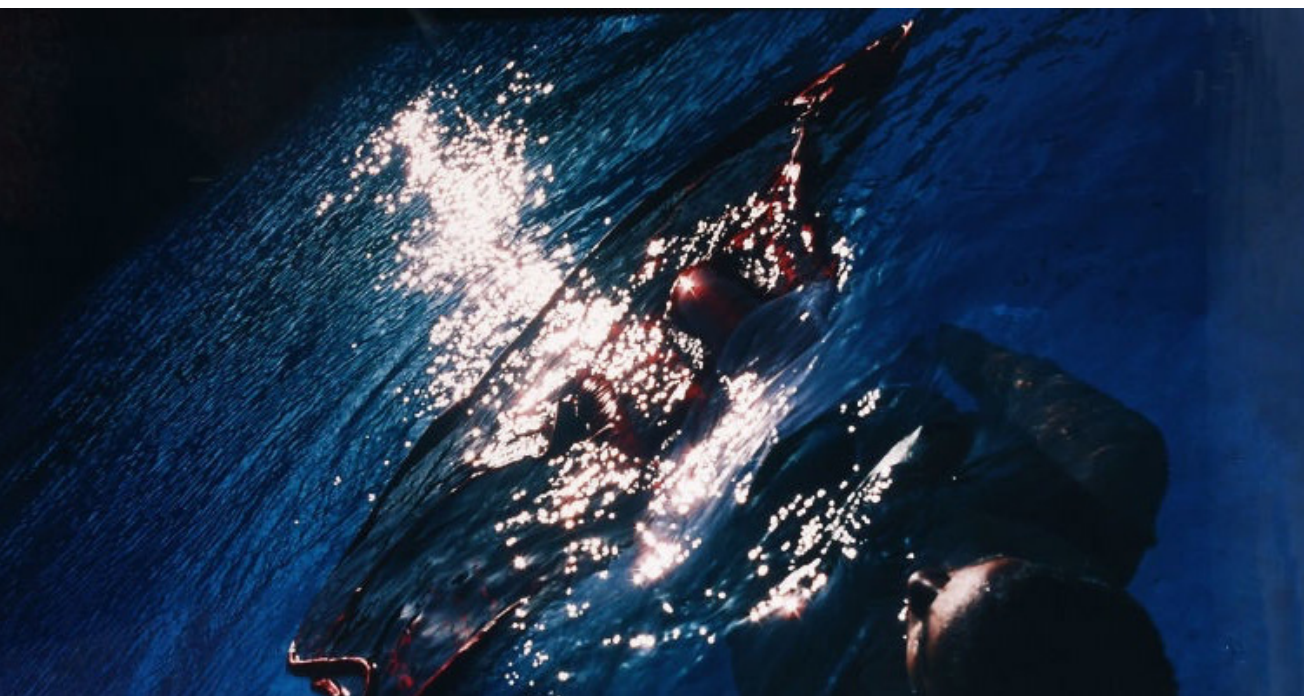
Eileithya: Birth, 2022

C-print

Courtesy the artist

Cheri Hugo was once terrified by the ocean — it was a watery graveyard, a channel of violence, and a zone of exclusion. For Hugo, this mirrored her experiences in academia as a Black womxn. The sea and the academy were both difficult, even dangerous, places for her to navigate. In 2020, called by the health benefits of the ocean amid the pandemic, she began to face her fears, entering the cold salty water that she thought was never meant for her, describing it as a powerful “sense of freedom and release.” Gradually gaining the confidence to free-dive, Hugo began to apply her learnings from the sea to her academic life on land, using swimming as a method of personal and political survival. In a poignant reclamation and return, Hugo’s photographs — produced collaboratively with Verity Fitzgerald — document her transcendent communing with the ocean. Taken underwater and at close-range, they tell of an intimacy between womxn and water. In one frame, refracted sunlight coats Hugo’s skin like a network of shimmering veins. In another, her back is clouded by an eruption of bubbles that evoke the tactile sensation of diving into the water. Here, as elsewhere in the exhibition, the human figure is in total synchrony with the ocean.





Berni Searle (1964, Cape Town, WC)

By Night, 2003

Lambda print

Courtesy of the artist

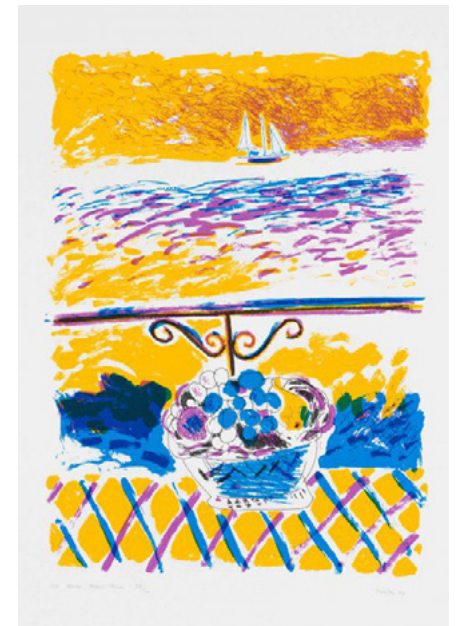
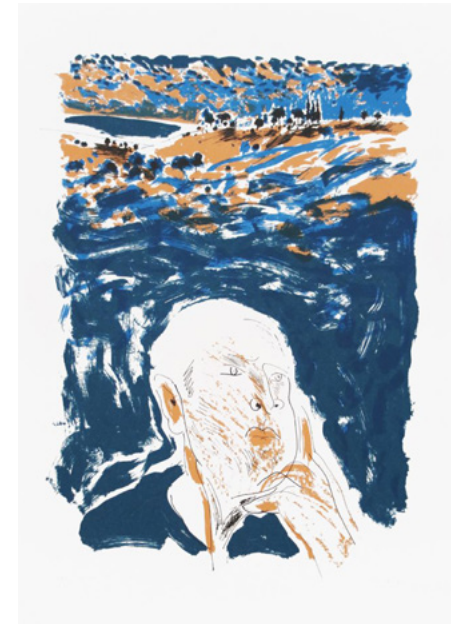
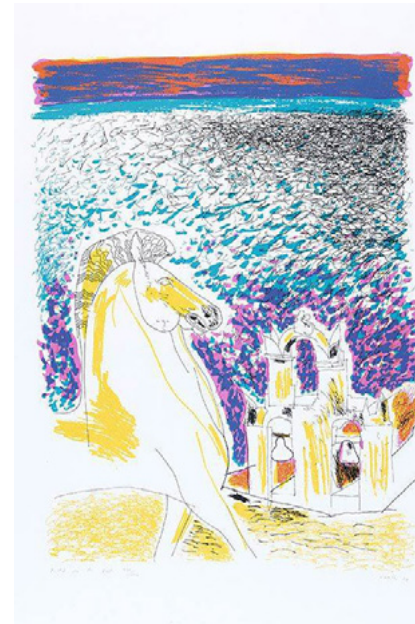
From a disorienting perspective that monumentalises her in the foreground, we see Berni Searle suspended on the sea's surface, a blood red skirt spilling out in front of her. Her wet body, the striking fabric, and the rippling surface of the sea all sparkle under the moonlight in a dazzling shock of bright white that cuts across the image, tracing a line from Searle's gaze to the tilted and hazy horizon in the distance, as if the light emanates from inside of her. The photograph feels as if it was conjured from a dream, bobbing on the edge of sleep and waking, here and there.

It was made by Searle in the the Strait of Gibraltar as part of the body of work *Home and Away* (2003). This narrow passage between Spain and Morocco is the saltwater threshold between the landmasses of Europe and Africa. Bodies, beliefs, and goods have circulated for centuries in this place of crossing and drift and we see Searle floating in this zone of entanglement and dispersal. She gives herself over to the rhythm of the sea. Submerging herself and becoming fluid, she surrenders to the pull and release of the currents and the tides, Searle embodies the tidalectics of migration and displacement, invoking the lives and bodies that have crossed and been lost in ocean voyages. Her figure appears to vanish into the sea, slowly dissolving to form a new body of water that, with the breaking of each wave, resurfaces memories from the deep.

Andrew Verster (1937–2020, Johannesburg, GP)
Homage to Seferis, 1987

Silkscreen portfolio with ten poems by George Seferis
Courtesy UWC Art Collection

This suite of ten serigraphs by Andrew Verster is both a tribute to and a collaboration with the Greek poet-diplomat George Seferis, whose verses speak of exile, drift, and the trace of memory left in salt and stone. Each print is paired with a poem, anchoring word and image in a shared hydrography of longing. Created in 1987 in collaboration with Caversham Press, *Homage to Seferis* stages a quiet encounter between two artists. Verster's lines ripple with lyricism. Known for his vivid palette and symbolic density, Verster is a renowned Durban artist and queer activist who lived as an openly gay man during the apartheid-era's criminalisation of homosexuality. In the portfolio, his forms are translucent and suggestive, inviting slower navigation. He presents a layered meditation on identity, myth, displacement, and longing, with the ocean as a recurring motif, at times indifferent — as it is to a mournful old man gazing across a bay — at other times, vitally connective — as in a psychedelic scene of a man swept away into a colourful current amid fish and shells. This recalls the Mediterranean of mythic antiquity in Seferis' writing, and the Indian and Atlantic Oceans that shaped Verster's world. These are waters that both separate and bind, bearing bodies and stories along their mutable tides. As if writing back across time, Verster does not so much illustrate the poems as echo them. Each print is an offering, a message in a bottle. What emerges is a quiet dialogue across oceans, a work that calls us to read between tides, and to feel the distance that makes relation possible.



Who swims behind/under/through the exhibition

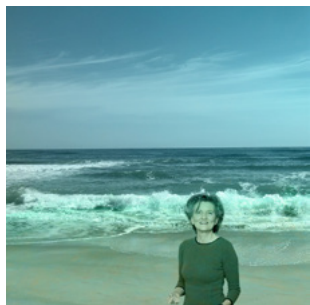


Rory Tsapayi

(Curator of the exhibition)

Rory Tsapayi is a Zimbabwean-Irish cultural worker based in Cape Town. He is currently a curatorial researcher at Zeitz MOCAA and an alumnus of the Zeitz MOCAA and University of

the Western Cape Museum Fellowship (2022). Rory is completing the MA Fellowship in Visual History and Theory at the CHR where he has been swimming through the aesthetics, materialities, and politics of water in his MA research which focuses on an Italian 'pirate' photographer's record of the Kariba Hydroelectric Dam on the Zambezi River. His independent curatorial projects in Cape Town include Midas Touch – Khanyi Mawhayi at CHURCH Projects and The SADC* Biennale with Raul Jorge Gourgel at the Association for Visual Arts.



Rosemarie Buikema

(Advisor on the exhibitions and RE-WIRING work package)

Rosemarie Buikema is professor emeritus of Art, Culture and Diversity at Utrecht University, where she chaired the Gender Studies Programme until 2023. She is currently the project leader

of the online museum of Equality and Difference Moed.online. Among her recent publications are *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture* (Routledge 2026), *Revolts in Cultural Critique* (Rowman & Littlefield 2021) and *Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights* (Routledge 2020).

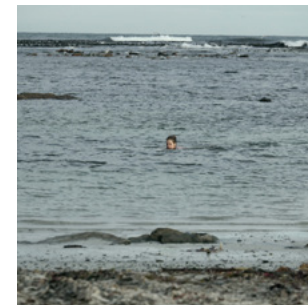


Lwando Scott

(Senior researcher on RE-WIRING Work Package 5: media and representation & advisor on the exhibition)

Lwando Scott holds a PhD in Sociology, and is a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape. They are an interdisciplinary

scholar with a focus on gender and sexualities, and on how these categories must be linked to ideas of freedom in post-apartheid South Africa. Their scholarship is engaged in the complex ways gender and sexuality are omitted in discussions on the legacies of colonialism and apartheid. Working with the concept of "queering the postcolony," they have published on the intersections of sexuality, gender, and African cultural practices in post-apartheid South Africa. Lwando is interested in expansive ideas and practices of freedom that go beyond normative, nationalist and racialised boundaries. Their work echoes the call issued by Fahmida Riaz in her epic poem, "come let us create a new lexicon."



Tamara Shefer

(Lead researcher on RE-WIRING Work Package 5: media and representation & advisor on the exhibition)

Tamara Shefer is professor of Women's and Gender Studies, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of the Western Cape, and the lead researcher on the

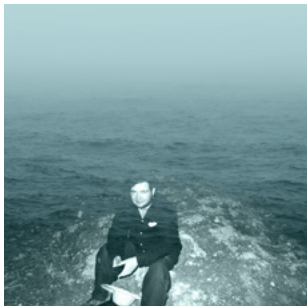
RE-WIRING work package on media and representation. Her scholarship has primarily focused on sexuality and young people towards gender and sexual justice. She has been swimming and thinking in/with/through oceans for entangled justice for some years, and is a co-editor of the volume, *Hydrofeminist thinking with oceans: Political and scholarly possibilities* (Routledge, 2024), amongst other publications in this area. Much of her scholarship has thought with art and activism for intersectional gender justice.



Janine Hannibal
(Administrative coordinator)

Janine Hannibal is a dedicated project manager with a strong focus on empowering women's voices through in-depth law and policy mapping. She has led logistics, coordination,

fellowship management, and communications, while overseeing financial operations, budget reporting, and cost-efficiency strategies for the RE-WIRING team at UWC, and on other research projects. She is also a researcher exploring pilgrimage walking as a pathway to spiritual well-being. Her doctoral and ongoing study, conducted on a personalised Covid-19 trail in Cape Town, uses innovative digital ethnography to investigate the role of walking in promoting mental, physical, and spiritual health. Her work contributes to discussions on well-being and sustainable development, particularly within the context of SDG 3.



Seth Deacon
(Designer)

Seth Deacon is a queer artist, designer and educational materials developer. He completed a Masters in Fine Arts with a focus on the gendered gaze in 2009. He has since worked as

an artist, educator, designer and writer specialising in projects dedicated to social justice, gender, and LGBTQIA+ issues. Highlights include the project, Communion, exhibited at the Spier Light Art Festival and the Kopano conference, and the Pocket Queerpedia: an illustrated glossary of LGBTQIA+ terms. He currently practices at a studio in Woodstock, Cape Town.

AdS: What does a newly evolved fish look like, do, eat? Where does it appear? Maybe a newly evolved fish doesn't even swim?

RT: And what happened in the water to necessitate evolution?

AdS: Microplastics became unbearable? Underwater volcanos erupted? Humans moved in, the fish moved out?

RT: The coastal cities flooded, new space opened up...

WhatsApp conversation with Rory Tsapayi and Abri de Swardt, September 2024



