Elizabeth Ogilvie: Bodies of Water
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Dundee Contemporary Arts

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[Logos and images]
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Acknowledgements

on a stretch of moor  Thomas A. Clark

Drawing with water  Wendy Gunn

Catalogue

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

It is therefore a timely moment for the work of Elizabeth Ogilvie, an artist who has so often drawn inspiration from various ‘bodies of water’, the title of her major exhibition of new work at Dundee Contemporary Arts in 2005. Living and working by the sea for much of her life, Ogilvie has long fostered an appreciation of its power, both physical and emotional. Her art does not seek to promote the fast emerging politics of water, but operates at a more essential level to encourage us to consider its worth: to marvel at its visual and physical effect, to appreciate its universal and sustaining properties. Moving on from two-dimensional and sculptural works in recent years to vast installations and environments, Ogilvie increasingly offers us experiences rather than images. Her work has turned to look at the uses or applications of water in architecture, in the creation of spaces – often conceived quite literally for reflection, both physical and mental.

In her stunning and dramatic transformation of DCA’s galleries, Ogilvie invited us to explore and reflect on water, the most fundamental of substances. She looked at patterns of change, movement and transformation in subtle and delicate plays between light and darkness, in both live and recorded ‘events’. In an ambitious
and technically challenging installation, DCA’s large main gallery was darkened and converted into two large pools, surrounded and connected by simple, walk-able paths. One remained still and utterly mirror-like, while the other was regularly animated by various mechanisms, effectively creating live drawings with light in the space of the viewer’s encounter. Abstract patterns and striking monochrome effects were created by water in its various states of movement.

Ogilvie’s work involves elements of art, architecture, science and music, the smaller gallery being occupied by a three-screen video installation made in collaboration with Joji Hirota, a ‘Taiko’ drummer and internationally renowned composer and performer. This documented an interplay between sound and light, between Hirota’s performance and Ogilvie’s parallel manipulation of a small pool of water. Together the installations evoked something of the wonder of natural phenomena, environmental concerns and the complexity of what can appear so simple. Dundee’s renowned river setting, with the Tay flowing beyond the gallery walls, the specific backdrop against which Ogilvie developed these works, served to echo the patterns of ripples and resonance that ran throughout the exhibition.

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

Katrina M. Brown Curator

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on a stretch of moor
Thomas A. Clark

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

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

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

no path leads down to
the edge of the lochan
a slight depression
or digression in grass
suggests you follow
ELIZABETH
OGILVIE
BODIES OF
WATER
Dundee
Contemporary
Arts
as you lean over
the fringed water margin
a specular form
rises to meet you through
long strands of crowfoot

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

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

dusk is to linger
in a collapse of thought
looking at looking
until a thrum of light
troubles reflection
all day you have gazed
out over distances
followed the traces
deep into forests where
you failed to appear

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

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

if you throw your voice
against the woods and rocks
your name will come back
from the woods and the rocks
sounding tired and strange
through all the long glens
a heron by water
  does not glimpse a form
half as transfixing as
  now swims through duckweed

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

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

  a forlorn water
cold in the spreading dusk
  a few daffodils
light and ingenuous
leaning over it
Haus Futura
Erdgeschoss
M 1:100
Stand: 08.03.05
According to the German water diviner Dirk Mross, when underground streams cross over, if people work or live above that point for example in an office building or block of flats; it is those situated furthest away from the water that suffer the greater negative effect on their health …

He continues to tell his story:
Of all the original elements, (archetypal, ancient elements), water is the most fluid one and is classified as the female principle. From a biological point of view, water permeates all life on earth. In spiritual and mythological terms, water is inhabited by beings known as Undines. These have been investigated using a divining rod [dowsing rod, dowser] just in the same way as underground watercourses are detected. This work is called ‘Muten’. Since the early Middle Ages people have practiced ‘Muten’ to trace watercourses and, later on, minerals and other natural resources. The phenomenon of water divining is based on finely tuned energies, not effectively demonstrable with today’s instruments. The ‘measuring or reading instrument’ which has been performing for centuries is, of course, the human being. We originate from water and our life is determined by water. Consequently, our ability to react sensitively to this element should not come as a surprise. Instincts among the animal kingdom also, are unfailing when focused on water. Camels, for example, are able to sense and position water from a distance of several kilometres.

Stones on the riverbed, polished until smooth, clearly demonstrate the tremendous power of shallow water. It is precisely this power in underground watercourses that deeply affects many forms of life, including human beings. The emergence of pressures, friction and erosion underground at the centre of gravity and in the vicinity of underground streams leads to radiation of fine matter. Assisted by the divining rod we can detect this effect. These fine emissions result in a
form of micro-stress inside our body, which can be clinically diagnosed. Micro-stress is a consequence of the exchange of energies between water in the human cell and the force created by water underground. The phenomenon is called resonance—or tuning fork principle. This emission causes a lasting, so called, depolarisation or split in the human cell membrane. The metabolism of the cell can be disturbed for an extended period, thereby causing the cell to lose its ability to heal and regenerate. Residing above an underground stream for a long period can lead to cancer invading the cells.

Animals react instinctively and are sensitive to these emissions from underground. Simultaneous progress of health in humans and animals can be studied. And, for example, when dogs choose places to rest, they avoid spots of higher emissions while cats, on the other hand, instinctively sleep in these sites, with no adverse effect on their health. However, when human beings sleep in or occupy this same location for a long time, they are affected, resulting in a clinically proven disorder and imbalance, which can lead to serious illness. These circumstances reveal once again water’s ambivalent nature. It is so extremely destructive, but so absolutely vital to our existence.

Dirk Mross, Cologne, July 2006

Introduction

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

Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1984

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

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

Playing with water is an important part of her investigations. One of the principal aims in her work is to create interactive environments, which enhance people’s understanding of non-
urban environments. Her training in sculpture led her towards a concern with the way light describes form. An education in learning how to see involved directly observing the body. Observing involved looking at and drawing with the same life-model for extended periods. The experience of repeatedly drawing and modelling with clay directly from the human figure developed her perceptual skills. Most of all this practice was a valuable learning experience, which she finds herself revisiting again and again. Revisiting involves discovering more and more – the more she looks, the more she is able to see.4 The practice of drawing from the human figure did not necessitate any need for analysis. Instead, the practices of drawing and modelling helped her to attune her senses to the human body within a continuously changing environment. Importantly, Ogilvie was not concerned with perfecting an imperfect translation. She was searching for an intuitive understanding through a simple act.5

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

Looking at looking at

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

Elizabeth Ogilvie, 2006

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

4. Quotes are from conversations the author instigated with Elizabeth Ogilvie about the preparation and installation of her exhibition Bodies of Water (2006).
given, experiment with alternatives, imagine how things might be otherwise, and so resolve obliquely and artificially that which cannot be resolved directly in the “real” world.6

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

In her investigations, she is searching for an equivalent of what she is learning from direct observation. This is an attempt to create an experience of seeing. Exploring new ideas and experimenting in the studio, she takes risks within the work and initiates new concepts, through making mistakes and discoveries. In order to understand what she is observing, she is anxious to learn from other people. How does water behave? What are the limitations of what could be done with it? Can I stretch the possibilities?

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

Experiments in the studio, observations outside, textual forms and notes help her communicate to others what she is trying to create. Her notes are not a drawing because it is not possible to draw an experience. Describing how she will affect others is easier in words than drawn form … And during this process, words are used to get you closer to what you want. By writing, by making a storyboard, all the senses are involved when it comes to water in particular. This process is generative and involves a special kind of writing.

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

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

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


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

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


above
A Poetics of Water
Installation in progress, water, organic pigment paste, aluminium, polyplastic, timber, paint
1800 x 1800 cm
Hangar, Deephaven, Cromarty Firth, commission, Another Space Ltd, 1999

below
Into the Oceanic
Water, roofing materials, timber, paint, aluminium, perspex, fans, pumps, benches
1500 x 1300 cm
Odapark Foundation, Netherlands, 2000
Drawing with water

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

It was however the late Joop Wismans at Odapark in the Netherlands, who gave Ogilvie one of her first opportunities to contain large volumes of water within a gallery interior. Again it was the scale of experience of playing in the extended territories from her childhood environments, which led her towards surrounding herself and others with drawings. Drawings soon became installations. By the end of the ’90s, she began describing the way water moved and became interested in the potential to realise its limitless possibilities. Throughout this time experimentation with materials was as it still is central to her working process.

The Liquid Room (2001) was a major work and an important development in Ogilvie’s practice as an artist. In this large scale installation she created a number of interaction areas which allowed people to contemplate large planes of water and create their own wave patterns. Observing the quality of water during the exhibition, Ogilvie became aware of water’s ability to act as a carrier of light revealing the detail of how it behaves. Seeing in this instance as Ingold intones, **is the experience of light, what you see is in the light.** Living by the sea she is aware that reflective light on the water changes all the time. This constant movement and rhythm made her dissatisfied with two-dimensional drawing. After exploring drawing with different media including light and shadow, she began drawing with water – both still and moving.

above

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

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

Visitors to *Bodies of Water* were encouraged to spend time with the installation in order to directly experience the patterns of water movement. Comparing her own experience of non-urban landscapes, Ogilvie was particularly interested in what long-term effects this body of water would have on the public. To create certain types of wave pattern is to show the pattern of water over time. Water keeps on moving, you just enable it. Through experimenting and collaborating with water, she knows the kind of movement she wants to make. Collaboration involves standing back; allowing the water to behave and seeing how it moves through the situations you have created for it. This movement was connected to the rhythm of fluids moving within the body. Interaction with water occurred by making small gestures, bringing attention to fluids in the body that allow us to move and act in this way. Water was used to describe the way fluid moves.

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

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

Learning from reflections

*Bodies of Water: Large Gallery*

The public enter from the smaller gallery onto a deck immediately adjacent to a still pool. This deck continues throughout the gallery enabling the viewer to walk around two large pools of water: one still, one moving. A video projection on the large east wall sits above the still pool and shows details of different rhythms found in water. This projected image is reflected on the surface of the pool magnifying its scale and depth. The central deck which divides the space and vast area of water in two, leads to a wide deck on the north wall. This provides quiet viewing areas. In the second pool, technological mechanisms, invisible to the public, provide a cycle of water events which disturb the water’s surface. Small, scattered drops gently fall followed by more persistent rain, a series of water drips, resembling moderate rainfall moves across the pool in a seemingly random pattern. Each drop creates a distinct form as it displaces the water. These events are projected
onto the surrounding walls by a series of theatre lights installed in the roof and directed at the water’s surface. The array of water forms displayed is infinite and each water cycle produces unique variations. Further narrow decks offer access to other views and immerse the audience in the wave patterns themselves.

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

Extract from artist’s descriptions of the exhibition 2005

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

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

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

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

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Welsh myth. *A woman made of flowers,* the poet Thomas A. Clark said of the relation between perceiving and inhabiting, *if wild flowers are our perceptions then it is precisely how we are made.*\(^{18}\)

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

By creating an artificial environment inside, Ogilvie’s intention is to bring other’s attention to the distance between their everyday life practices and elemental resources. As one visitor commented after visiting the exhibition: *Bodies of Water* was like a laboratory experiment, which offered a way of observing water. When confronted by water within such an environment, the viewer could encounter a much wider range of subtle variations than one might notice outwith the gallery context.

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

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

\(^{19}\) Ogilvie (2006).

\(^{20}\) Ogilvie (2006).

**Bringing the outside inside**

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

Thomas A. Clark, 2006

In *Bodies of Water* visitors were asked to spend time within experience itself. The installation was designed to *draw people in through the senses.* *Drawing people in* is another way of bringing their lives into the work; it is another way of learning new things.\(^{19}\) People visiting the exhibition brought their own observations. As an artist, Ogilvie wanted to grasp this opportunity in order to understand the work better. So she draws people in and then steps back. This ability to step back is central to her way of looking. *Taking one’s time* allows the creative practitioner to step back from direct observation. By stepping back you allow other influences to enter the designing and planning phases of the work.\(^{20}\)
In contemporary society, we are continually talking to other people or ourselves. Ogilvie’s intention was to share her ability to wake up and look beyond the self. In order to encourage visitors to move beyond their immediate experience, she juxtaposed still and moving water. The still plane of water was frightening to some visitors because by looking you are always meeting yourself. Whereas the moving water encouraged visitors to look outside themselves.

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

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

Working with Joji Hirota
[1] 20 secs. Close up of Hirota surrounded with instruments and large metal symbols. He is watching the water to his left.
[2] 1 min 40 secs. He starts making minimal sounds.
[3] 1 min 10 secs. Build up of sound, first bells and then a long abstract screeching noise. The drums begin.
[4] 5 mins 30 secs. The sound builds up further on the drums and symbols. A very strong sound accompanies a fire like water pattern which fills the whole screen. Hirota watches the screen and as the fire pattern dies down and turns into sharp, bouncing vertical patterns resembling sound waves, Hirota uses his drumsticks, the sound echoing the patterns on the wall.
[5] 1 min 20 secs. Hirota quietens his instruments; their sound and vibrations gradually die down. The water patterns diminish and finally come to a halt. He watches the water then stops playing.

Storyboard of Joji Hirota performing Bodies of Water, 2005
While developing *Bodies of Water* Ogilvie wanted to make something less passive and controlled than her previous work. To achieve this, she was aware she would have to be less reliant on a pre-planned design. Instead, the first part of *Bodies of Water* took the form of a three screen video installation documenting a live performance between Ogilvie and Joji Hirota, a Taiko drummer, which allowed her to explore improvisation as a potential source of creativity.

Hirota, based in London, composes for international orchestras using classical notational systems but also continues to play traditional Japanese instruments independent of any system of notation.

Their understanding of each other’s work comes from an empathy with their shared childhood experiences of mountain streams, the sea and hills. Hirota visited Ogilvie at her studio to take part in the performance and together they experimented extensively before producing the final work. As Ogilvie commented on their working process, *we have experimented so many times, out of the corner of his eye he knew what to expect from me.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Storyboard of Elizabeth Ogilvie performing *Bodies of Water*, 2005
Changes within the surface

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

Elizabeth Ogilvie, 2006

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

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

Until recently, scientists have been concerned with studying the content of water rather than its behaviour. Influenced by ‘sensitive’ chaos theory, scientists at the Herrischried Institut für Strömungswissenschaften, Germany, have been focusing on the importance of observational skills as a way of understanding water. They argue that observing the way water behaves is a legitimate scientific method towards understanding water. While evaluating their data, judgements are not based on subjective impressions; rather they are made on the basis of empirical experimental findings. When a drop is applied to the waters surface, scientists studying waters behaviour know what the pattern means. As is evident from the image shown below, the pronounced pattern indicates a low level of pollution.
Engineering water

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

While preparing for Bodies of Water, she worked with Kenneth Pithouse, a chemical engineer. Ogilvie collaborated with Pithouse because of his specialised knowledge and problem solving expertise in mechanics and electronics. Pithouse did not feel comfortable with Ogilvie’s writings about the emotional content of water and instead their investigations centred on water and rhythm, the largest rhythm being the water cycle. They also looked at a number of smaller more commonly observed movements in water such as meanders and vortices. Vortices are easy to see in cloudy water but difficult to understand and meanders, a classic movement of water are most visible when seen moving across the sand. Their challenge was to create an ideal environment in which water could perform. Pithouse’s main concern was to make sure the installation worked whereas Ogilvie was concerned with how things would become.24

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

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

Collaboration requires other’s respect. According to Ogilvie, collaboration occurs when you do not know what the outcome is going to be. You meet and through discussion discover what feeds into your own concerns. You go away, come back, meet and go away again. As you go your separate ways, you have the other in mind.25 This approach plays out as a kind of melody. It is not just a matter of referring to each other, instead it is related to John Cage’s notion of the relation between chance and order. It is not a matter of reacting, referring to or illustrating another’s work. It is unsaid in many ways. The unsaid things are the collaboration. Referring to her collaborative work with Hirota, Ogilvie commented; We look, observe and listen but do not speak about the work. Instead we share formative experiences.
together and these experiences are from the same family. You could hear this in the sounds made. Each person involved in such a collaboration brings a story that touches, reinforces and enriches the others telling. During this process, freshness is very important for generating and suggesting new directions in the work.

Shared understandings

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

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

Although contained water can have negative effects and affects, as has been illustrated by Dirk Mross’s story and some of the visitors’ responses when visiting Bodies of Water, water has a tremendous reach and energy even when contained within restricted spaces. However, people do not experience a space, they engage within an unfolding environment. Sounds, stories, images and designs created within the galleries at Dundee Contemporary Arts served to conduct the observer as Ingold says, ... into the world, deeper and deeper, as one proceeds from outward appearances to an ever more intense poetic involvement. At its most intense, the boundaries between person and place, or between the self and the landscape, dissolve altogether. It is at this point that, as the people say, they become their ancestors, and discover the real meaning of water.

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

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

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through such an approach as having no scientific value.

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

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

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Bodies of Water
16 December 2005 – 12 February 2006
Dundee Contemporary Arts

Small gallery

**Bodies of Water**
Three screen video installation of performance with Joji Hirota
Filmed in the artist’s studio, 2005

Large gallery

**Bodies of Water**
Two pools of water formed with pvc and timber, electronic controls, plumbing, theatre lights, decking, video projection, benches
5 m × 23.5 m × 15.5 m

Side Gallery North
Housing electronic controls, plumbing, lighting control table

Side Gallery South
Pool of water, pvc, timber, pole, theatre light
2.35 m × 4.55 m × 3.5 m
Elizabeth Ogilvie

1946 Born Aberdeen
Lives and works in Fife, Scotland

Solo Exhibitions
2006 Nozome Project, Kyoto
Streams of Time, Weissraum, Kyoto

2005 Bodies of Water, Dundee Contemporary Arts, Dundee
Die Tiefgrundigkeit des Wassers, Kulturamt, art2b, Cologne

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

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

2001 The Liquid Room, Forth Ports Warehouse, Kirkcaldy, Fife
Fluss, Galerie Ruth Walter, Basel
Fluss, IAAB Atelier, Riehen, Basel

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

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

2000 Into the Oceanic, Odapark Contemporary Arts, Netherlands
The Nameless Waters, Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth

1999 A Poetics of Water, Stephen Lacey Gallery, London
Guernica, Another Space Ltd, Deephaven Hangar, Cromarty Firth

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

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

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

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

1995 Island Within, Arnolfini, Bristol

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

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

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

Sea Papers, DLI Art Centre, Durham

1981 Sea Papers, Serpentine Gallery, London

Watermarks, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow

Watermarks, Ceolfrith Art Gallery, Sunderland,

Watermarks, New Art Centre, Stoke on Trent

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

Watermarks, Aberdeen Art Gallery, Aberdeen

Selected Group Exhibitions
2006 Daegu International New Media Arts Festival, South Korea

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

1999 Artists and the Sea, Kirkcaldy Museum, Fife

1998 Hirta, Gallery & Museum, Kelvingrove, Glasgow

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

1995 ECA, Pontevedra, Spain

1993 The Art Machine, Nikolai Gallery, Copenhagen

Contemporary Painting in Scotland, Flowers East, London

Making Waves, Merseyside Maritime Museum, Liverpool

1990 The Art Machine, McLellan Gallery, Glasgow
Scottish Art Since 1900, Barbican Art Gallery, London

1989 Open, Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

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

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

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

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