



CENTRE A

Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art

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Ed Pien: Tracing Water

September 16 – November 12, 2022

Curated by Henry Heng Lu

Tracing Water presents an extensive assembly of work by Toronto-based artist **Ed Pien**. Ranging from drawing to lithography to prints and video, the works span over 20 years and explore and incorporate water in these artistic creations.

Two Worlds, for instance, comprises 12 drawings excerpted from a large series of narrative-based drawings. This suite of drawings imagines a future where humans battle watery beings to gain domination and control. The war wages on for centuries, and amidst destruction, suffering and death, hybridized, part water and part humans are born. The epic war finally comes to a halt as the two originating factions can no longer be distinguished.

Recent works by Pien included in the exhibition delve more deeply into exploring the sentience of water, that water has co-agency, liveliness, and creativity. According to Pien, water is a material that is highly process-based and plays a significant role in how a drawing can unfold. These explorations include photographs entitled *Breath* that capture ephemeral drawings made by the artist's breath in minus 45 degrees.

Other works, such as *Ocean Water Drawing*, involve the participation of captured salty ocean water and how it makes and leaves its marks as it intervenes with white ink. The subsequent marks and images made are in direct response to the trace residuals marked up on the surface of the black-coloured papers as ocean water makes its inevitable escape.

Artist Biography:

Ed Pien is a Canadian artist based in Toronto. He has been making art for nearly 40 years. Born in Taipei, Taiwan, he immigrated to Canada with his family at an early age. Pien divides his time between Toronto and Havana. Pien has shown extensively, both nationally and internationally, in venues that include the Drawing Center, NYC; The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; The Canadian Culture Centre in Paris; The Goethe-Institut in Berlin; The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; The Art Gallery of Ontario; The Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal; The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; Songzhuang Art Centre, Beijing; The National Gallery of Canada. He has participated in the 2000 and 2002 Montréal Biennales; the 18th Edition of the Sydney Biennale; "Oh Canada", at MASS MoCA. Pien also presented work at the 5th Edition of the Moscow Biennale, and the Beijing International Art Biennale. He has also participated in the Curitiba Biennial, in Brazil and the Bienal Internacional de Asunción, in Paraguay. His project, in the form of photographs, videos and an installation, involving a small group of Cuban Elders exploring the notion of time, is currently being presented at the Art Gallery of Ontario until June 2023.

His work is collected widely and includes FRAC Lorraine, Metz, France; The Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; The National Gallery of Canada; The Art Gallery of Ontario; The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; The Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal; The Mendel Art Gallery; The Weatherspoon Art Museum, University of North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina; as well as other institutions and private collections.



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"During this time of climate crisis, Pien's use of water is an intentional gesture to lessen the perceived division between 'humankind' and 'nature', at a time when we are seeing the visceral effects of this division; our behaviours are affecting the entire biosphere. His print advocates for a shift in material culture: towards thinking of all matter as sentient, storied, and agentic. Pien's collaboration with water allows for narrative emergences that highlight humankind's interdependency with ecological systems we often render invisible in a time when our gaze must be fundamentally shifted." (Brody Weaver)

Artist Statement:

"Lee Maracle's contribution to the book Downstream: Reimagining Water is poignant and powerful. Through reading her essay entitled Water, I strive to be humble to water, appreciate my smallness before it, and that water doesn't need me nor have to abide by my wishes. My relationship with water must be one of gratitude and respect.

Water is in me, and I am part of it. As much as I try to define water, water will never be entirely knowable. I revel in its mysteries as well as embrace moments of wonder and enchantment water offers.

Through art making, I celebrate diversity and attempt to champion those having less autonomy, agency and voice. What interests me is how, as individuals, we can negotiate and act in the world in responsible, respectful, and empathetic ways. With these ideas in mind, I have also been exploring the sentience of nature, in particular, water. I have come to understand the more-than-human world as one having co-agency, liveliness, creativity and storied lives. These practices of knowing and empathy were initiated through learning the efforts of the Kichwa People of Sarayuku, indigenous to the Ecuadorian Amazon. The Kichwa risked their lives to fight against deforestation. In 2012 they won a ground-breaking trial to gain the recognition of their cosmology: that forests are sentient beings and deserve the same rights and respect as people

This is not a usual exhibition in which the main intention would be to share what I have made. Instead, the assembled pieces in the gallery present the occasion for me to experience the different bodies of work I have realized since 1999. This looking back allows me to continue my contemplation on strategies that could be used to engage with water; and to envision where I could go from here, to more impactfully acknowledge and convey the sentience of water in making art.

Part of the Centre A exhibition includes taking up a 6-week residency at the Historic Joy Kogawa House. During this time, I have the opportunity to focus and make art inspired by water's sentience, a reality not quite shared by all.

Somewhere within the text, Material Ecocriticism: Materiality, Agency, and Models of Narrativity by Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann, I recall reading a line that states, "matter and language constitute each other." This idea is really key in my attempt to articulate and champion that water does have sentience.

Keeping in mind that "matter and language constitute each other" (matter, in this case, is water), one strategy for conveying water's sentience is to find commonalities between water and humans (looking for relatables). First was noting words we have been using to describe the sound that both water and humans make, for instance, babbling, gurgling, hissing, hollering, roaring, wailing, etc. This was followed by finding action words such as beguiling, consuming, enlivening, mystifying, revitalizing, seducing, etc. Next were words used to describe states of being and descriptions of personalities that both humans and water share: audacious, brooding, brutal, capricious, enigmatic, enraged, enticing, ephemeral, forceful, gentle, graceful,



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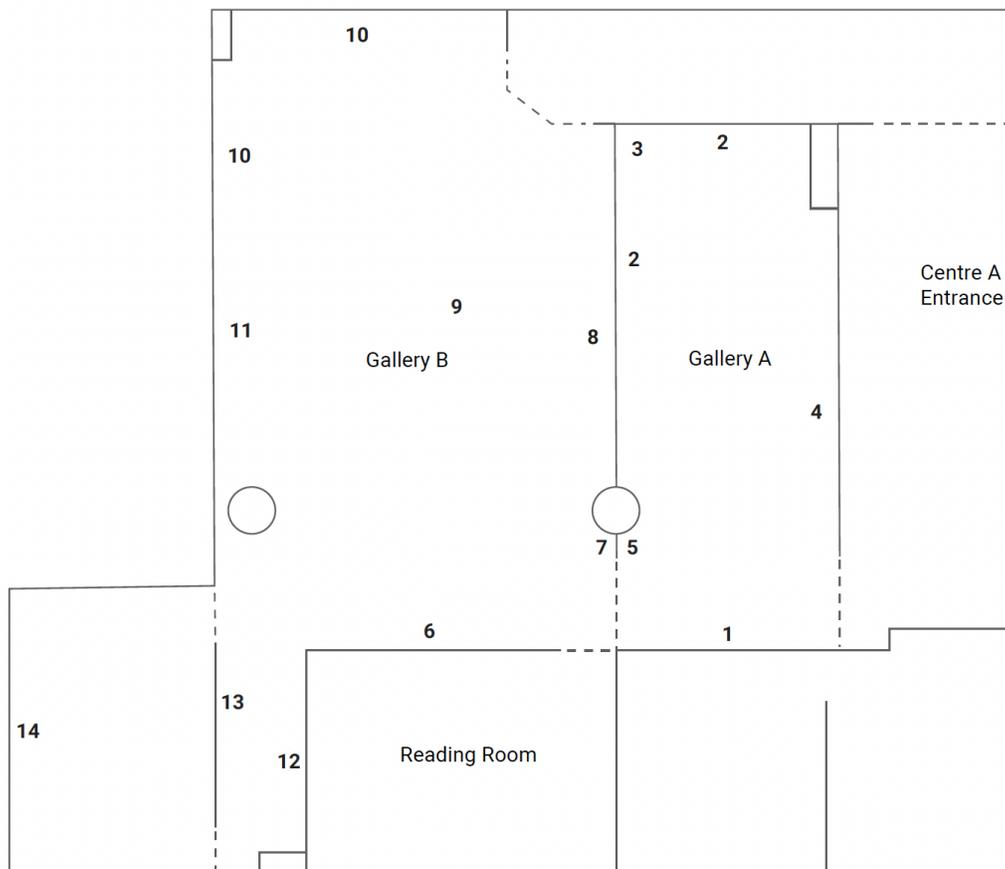
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hazardous, moody, mysterious, rhythmic, seductive, sensual, sentient, spirited, uncertain, unfathomable, unforgiving, unknown, unpredictable. The list of words is long.

*Giuseppe Penone presented a pair of identical river boulders in an exhibition that Johannes and I saw at the National Gallery of Canada in the late 80s. One boulder has been taken from a river, and the other has been skillfully rendered to look uncannily like the one found. This work, entitled *Essere Fiume (To Be a River)*, was made because Penone believed the river to be the greatest living sculptor. He aspired to become one just like it by learning and copying from the master.” (Ed Pien)*

Floor Plan:



Gallery A

1. **Splash** (2012–current), video, 2:39 minutes
2. **Diane's Soaked Cod Fish Water Drawing** (2021), salted cod water intervention, gems, glitters, and natural fixative on 3M reflective film, various sizes
3. **The Hungry Sea** (2018), Halifax Harbour Water, lithograph, state proof, 29 x 22 inches
4. **Ocean Water Drawing** (2016–2019), excerpt from a suite of 6 drawings Ink with Atlantic Ocean Water intervention, 16 x 11 inches



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5. **Salar Drawings** (2017), highly salinated Chilean Desert sea water farm intervention, 16.5 x 11.75 inches

Gallery B:

6. **RainForest** (2016), digital print on archival cotton paper, 44 x 29 inches
7. **St Lawrence River spring ice/snow melt intervention** (2020), ink on paper, 16.5 x 14 inches each
8. **Making River, Making Lakes** (2022), ink, Kogawa House rain water intervention, 10 x 8 feet
9. **Ghosts** (2017–current), sediments on clear mylar abandoned by escaped water, various sizes
Case 1: Toronto tap water and Smart Water (2017), escaped water on clear mylar, 35 x 22 inches
Case 2: Kainai Reservation Water (not potable) and St. Mary's River Water (2017), escaped water on clear mylar, 35 x 22 inches
Top of case 1: Fraser River Water Making **Ghost** drawing (2022), clear mylar sheet temporarily holds kidnapped Fraser River Water, 28 x 61 inches
Top of case 2: Salish Sea Water Making Ghost drawing (2022), clear mylar sheet temporarily holds kidnapped Fraser River Water, 28 x 61 inches
10. **Breath** (2013), digital prints, 22 ½ x 16 ⅞ inches & **Suspension** (2013), digital prints, 22 ½ x 16 ⅞ inches
11. **Runoff 1** (2022), fluorescent textile dye, ink, Kainai Water intervention, 10 x 8 feet
12. **RainForest** (2018), video, 12:07 minutes

New Media Gallery

13. **Two Worlds** (1998), excerpt from a suite of drawings, Amsterdam tap water, ink, acrylic and Flashe on paper, 8.5 x 11 inches
14. **The Living Sea** (2017–2022), video projection over crystal gems, text by Merrell-Ann S. Phare, 14:20 minutes

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Centre A is situated on the unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh peoples. We honour, respect, and give thanks to our hosts.

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