On Analogy

A moiré pattern is created when two regular visual sequences, such as grids or stripes, are visually superimposed. Interference patterns create an apparent ‘watered’ or wavelike effect. These are one of the many poetic analogies for water to be found in Isobel Clement’s imagery, analogies which speak to each other creating both iconographic and formal linkages. The variety of materials used include corrugated polycarbonate, fabrics, enamel paint, inkjet print, felt appliqué, monoprint and linocut. Photography is used as direct trace or imprint of reality, capturing the momentary formation of the wave and the micro-wave across the restless surfaces of water. These are objects which question the material substance of representation, blurring the boundary between index and icon. In Isobel Clement’s work washes of meaning can be glimpsed in the space between images.

On Reverie

“There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seem to speak of some hidden soul beneath... And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters’ Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness.”
Herman Melville Moby Dick 1851

On Genealogy

Isobel Clement is descended from seafarers, a people tied to the ocean and the coast. In 1879 Frederick Beaumont of Glasgow, Clement’s mother’s grandfather, captained a ship that sailed to Australia with the sand dredger “Melbourne” used to clear the shipping lanes of Port Phillip Bay, enabling large ships to reach the city docks. We hear of him next as harbour master at Portland on the grim coast of Western Victoria. Later he moves to the Gippsland Lakes, where he pilots the Lakes steamers “Dargo” and “J.C.D.” He ends his days, dying in 1915, lighthouse keeper on Sunday Island, one of the low islands formed in the muddy estuaries to the lee of Wilson’s Promontory. Clement’s mother’s other grandfather was John Avery, a shipwright from Glasgow. All the men of the family for at least three generations were professional fishers, and some still continue
this tradition, working out of Port Franklin, South Gippsland and Coffin Bay, South Australia.

On Geometry
See the surface of water, mobile, full of change. Always varying in its precise detail, yet always acting like water. Imagine we are observing the dynamic action of a body of water—breaking waves or a flowing river. This water has smooth areas and rough areas. However many we observe, however we try to predict, there is no way to tell exactly where the rough and the smooth will occur next. This is true on every scale from the micro-scale of one millimeter up to the very largest wave formations. The forms of water are ‘self-similar’; the turbulence of water expresses fractal geometry. From a distance, rough areas may look smooth; up close, the smooth areas may be rough. The mathematics of unpredictability applies in every case.

On the Liminal
Edges are places of intense interest. Boundaries between land and water and air are where life evolved and exists in the greatest abundance, on coasts and shores. Heat, water vapour, atmospheric gases, kinetic energy are constantly in flux across these borders. Clement focuses on these liminal zones, capturing their interactions of light and water and energy. But they are more than physical boundaries; they are metaphoric thresholds, where alchemy takes place. Light to dark, liquid to solid, hot to cold; are not these magical transformations? In Clement’s work, hyle, brute matter, crosses the boundary to poesis, human working.

On Fascination
from Neither out far nor in deep

[...] The land may vary more;  
But wherever the truth may be—  
The water comes ashore,  
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.  
They cannot look in deep.  
But when was that ever a bar  
To any watch they keep?

Robert Frost 1936

On Optics
Pellucid, murky, limpid, azure, turbid, shimmering. When light hits water, three things happen. Reflection is light bouncing from the surface. The amount of reflection from a
water surface is precisely in proportion to wind speed. The colour of the sky is the main determinant of the apparent colour of water. Light can pass through water; this is refraction. Light entering water at an angle will bend away from the perpendicular. When it enters water, light slows down; the speed of light in water is three-quarters that in air. Absorption; water stops light. First the red part of the spectrum, then the green, then the blue is absorbed. At a depth of two kilometres there is no light.

With her rich variety of materials, Clement makes a simulacrum of these properties of water—reflection, refraction, absorption. The text of water is written in a photograph of drops of rain on glass, modelled in opaque paint, carved in linocut. The close examination of water reveals the beauty of its motile surfaces; its metallic blues and greens, the micro-waves which decorate larger waves, a yellow and red scribble of light. We become aware of the fragility, the mutability of the visible.

**On the Oceanic**

“Originally the ego included everything, later it detached itself from the external world. The ego-feeling that we are aware of now is thus only a shrunken vestige of a far more extensive feeling—a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the ego with the external world. If we may suppose that this primary ego-feeling has been preserved in the minds of many people—to a greater or lesser extent—it would co-exist like a sort of counterpart with the narrower and more sharply outlined ego-feeling of maturity, and the ideational content belonging to it would be precisely the notion of limitless extension and oneness with the universe—the same feeling as that described by my friend as ‘oceanic’.” Sigmund Freud *Civilisation and its discontents* 1930

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