



WATER

Marit Berg, Margaret Coe, Matthew Dennison, Tallmadge Doyle, Heather Jacks, Hart James, Erik Sandgren, Craig Spilman, and Betsy Wolfston

April 2 - May 24, 2025

Opening Reception: Friday, April 4th, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

First Friday ArtWalk, May 2nd, 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.

Water, inexhaustible in its physical manifestations and symbolic potential, has featured in art across cultures since the earliest times. Simply titled

WATER, Karin Clarke Gallery's large invitational exhibit expands on the artistic exploration of this vital substance, with nine of the Pacific Northwest's finest artists celebrating its beauty and power: **Marit Berg, Margaret Coe, Matthew Dennison, Tallmadge Doyle, Heather Jacks, Hart James, Erik Sandgren, Craig Spilman, and Betsy Wolfston**. Their works range from small to large and include oils and watercolors, graphite drawings and prints, as well as multi-media pieces. Approaches to the subject matter vary: narrative or symbolic, leaning toward realism or abstraction, drawing from imagination or memory. Accordingly, each of these gifted artists showcases different aspects of water, this ever-changing but essential element, and each highlights some of the distinct ways in which we as human beings relate to it.

Printmaker and painter **Marit Berg**'s luminous *Swimmer* series of reduction prints is hand-painted using drawing fluid and screen filler. These images, created in very limited editions, often require as many as fifteen passes to build up. Originally inspired by tiny, blurry, black-and-white photographs in an old swimming manual, Berg, who refers to her style as expressive-realistic, was happily left free to interpret the colors. The mood here is meditative and serene, the female swimmers seemingly intent on the sensory delight of being immersed in water. Berg beautifully succeeds in conveying the bodily sensation of weightlessness and buoyancy, the sensuous contact of skin with water, and the quietness of an underwater landscape. The portrayal of the swimmers' peaceful surrender to their liquid environment contrasts with the visual depiction of the water itself, with its lively patterns of refracted light and cast shadows that help link together the figures, water, and ground. Berg is a tenured professor of printmaking at Tacoma Community College.

With *Continuous Creation With Intimations of Doom*, her latest grand-scale oil painting of the Calapooia River, Eugene painter **Margaret Coe** continues exploring formal contrasts imbued with symbolic and spiritual meaning. Incorporating into a single visual field multiple preliminary on-site drawings and photographs, it offers, in Coe's words, "the wonderful drama of the peaceful background and the very active foreground, that contrast between the calm water and the activated whitewater that you're very aware of when you're actually there." An awareness that we get to share as Coe conveys the kinesthetic feel of an abrupt change in velocity, the sense of turmoil as the water splits and suddenly dips toward the viewer, crashing between boulders. Meanwhile in the background, the wide river stream remains flowing unperturbed and serene. This opposition is heightened by a further contrast between the light illuminating the forested banks and river in the background and the darker boulders and pooling water in the foreground. Beneath the rapids, a little boat is caught. "The symbolism of it came out of the painting," says Coe. "It occurred to me that the word doom was appropriate, but it came out of the process." Coe's work has been widely exhibited and collected since the 1960s, and features in the collections of numerous museums and public institutions in the US and abroad.

All three of **Matthew Dennison**'s oil paintings represent action scenes involving mostly women characters interacting with the ocean along the Oregon coast. In *King Tide*, one of them succeeds in escaping from the tide while others remain caught on a jutting rock surrounded by waves, while *Orca* portrays a group of friends sailing past a friendly Orca. *Swimming*, inspired by the swimmers who dare cross the English Channel, conveys the pleasure of moving through water with a powerful stroke. "I've always done narrative work as well as animals," says Dennison. "I keep them separated but they're related. There's a unified element in both style-wise." These paintings feature stylistic elements that seem to hark back to illustrations from an earlier period, perhaps the 1950s,

but are used with an ironic, self-conscious twist. “They have a retro feel but it’s not about an earlier time,” says Dennison. “They’re very contemporaneous but in a way that provides a different interest in the work.” Dennison is based in Portland and Astoria. His work has been exhibited nationally and is in numerous Northwest collections.

Eugene printmaker and painter **Tallmadge Doyle**’s richly chromatic multimedia work involves intricate layers of relief and intaglio printmaking techniques, India ink, watercolor, color pencils and powder pigments in various combinations. The pieces belong to three series involving marine ecosystems. In *High Tides Rising and the Underwater Garden*, the artist imagines the evolution of ecosystems as sea levels rise and submerge the land. The *Algae Universe* is based on images of microscopic organisms: “I have always felt the beauty is in the details,” says Doyle. In *Celestial Ocean*, she vividly reimagines how stellar images and tiny aquatic life forms mirror each other. “I want people to see the wonder and the beauty, the relationship between the deep underwater and the deep space,” she says. While inspired by the sensory realities of the natural world, Doyle also allows her imagination to play a major creative role in her work. She is guided as well by her ongoing reflection on environmental issues related to climate change. Doyle taught printmaking for many years as a University of Oregon adjunct professor. Her work has been featured in over 150 national and international exhibitions.

Heather Jacks, a painter and photographer based in Eugene, focuses on seascapes whose immense skies are dominated by cloud formations, their impressive masses softened, quite often, by a gentle light. What seems to be invoked is a vast yet self-contained expanse existing just for itself, a fugitive yet timeless moment. Sky, ocean and land meet gently, imperceptibly, their edges uncertain. A sense of unity among the elements of air, water and earth is achieved through a rich palette of greys and whites, while a hint of sunlight tinged with a coral hue introduces a fourth element. Jacks’ oil paintings elicit a contemplative feeling, much as the ocean itself does. And while their realism is striking, and surely stems from close observation, Jacks actually paints strictly from memory, a process she describes as “very expressive and meditative,” qualities she has imbued her work with, and which viewers may in turn experience as they pause and look.

In **Hart James**’ oil paintings of the Pacific Northwest, even flowing water acquires a kind of solidity. Known for her stylized, slightly abstract landscape paintings, James works quickly, using a palette knife, rag, and charcoal in order to capture the essence of the moment and to express the raw energy of nature. Her bold mark-making constructs a chiseled look that applies to moving water as much as to rocks and trees. In this series of paintings, James creates a vivid value contrast between the dark greens of the forest, the lighter earth tones of rocks and boulders, and the whiteness of the water whose flow dynamically intersects the picture plane in a series of diagonals as it meanders down the slopes of the Pacific Northwest mountains. James says of her work that it “speaks of the energy of nature.” She studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, the San Francisco Art Institute. Her work has been exhibited nationally.

Oregon painter and printmaker **Erik Sandgren** presents several hand-pulled artist impressions belonging to his *River Story* series of twelve non-editioned linocuts. Sandgren thinks of these complex narrative pieces as “remembered landscapes” that “tell a tale of the Pacific Northwest.” It is a tale bequeathed by a river, based on the artist’s experience of walking for many years along the Chehalis River, where nature and industry collide. With bold carving marks, Sandgren creates a landscape dominated by movement: of the shimmering river and its currents, of roiling clouds, blowing winds, billowing smoke. All of nature vibrates, its energy flamelike in *Coming into Being*. “Even the most placid day in nature is shimmering,” says Sandgren. Combining oneiric and social commentary elements, these pieces bring together nature (the river, ravens and cormorants), native American and Asian mythology (the trickster figure of the Raven, a Chinese dragon), traditional labor practices (gillnetting on the river) and the newer extraction economy of the mills and clearcutting industry, presenting us with a striking visual rendering of the complexities of the Northwest landscape. Sandgren taught art for several decades at Grays Harbor College in Aberdeen, Wash. His work is to be found in numerous public and private collections.

For his masterful *Seascape Series* of graphite drawings on paper, **Craig Spilman** has chosen an unusual large-scale format perfectly suited to his endeavor, offering us as wide and open a view of the ocean and sky as if we stood at the edge of the land, perhaps on a slight promontory, simultaneously gazing down at the waves meeting the shore

and straight ahead at the distant horizon line. With a simple graphite pencil Spilman recreates the subtle luminosity of a sky heavy with clouds, the complex range of values and tonal contrasts of waves spilling toward the shore or a storm brewing at sea. Water and sky are alive, the rhythms of the waves and of the cloud formations echoing each other – so much so that these pieces can be turned upside down and still make perfect sense. Texture abounds, while the peculiar atmospheric softness of an overcast day is retained. These seascapes, so true to our sensory experience of the ocean, are nonetheless created in the studio out of memory. Spilman taught drawing, painting and printmaking at Lane Community College for over thirty years. He has shown extensively throughout Oregon and in several international exhibits.

Best-known as a ceramic artist and commissioned public artist, **Betsy Wolfston** recently turned to exploring watercolor and graphite on clayboard. Her new *Water Lines* series might be construed as the most abstract work in the show, yet her approach is a concrete demonstration of water at work on a flat surface, how it flows and spreads its pigments across the clayboard, forming patterns and networks, bleeding and interacting randomly, eluding control from the artist. The process requires a measure of surrender, a give-and-take reciprocity between the artist and the water medium. As Wolfston herself states: “The process embraced both allowing and receiving.” Her imagery, she says, is “reminiscent of complex symbiotic relationships between earth and water” and of “mycorrhizal systems.” Wolfston further expands these networks with graphite lines and contours, adding her own deliberate marks to those of the water and pigments.

Sylvie Pederson