

Divining Water

The eternal being lives in what is liquid.

Juan Paulo Huirimilla Oyarzo, Kula Troy, Part Four¹

Helga Groves' paintings in *Divining water* are electric, charged with a liquid energy. Her careful selection and application of tonal layers – fields of colour capped with a decisive geometrically patterned meniscus – stimulate the eye with registers of horizontally and vertically rippling colour and light. While convincing the senses of their emissions into the atmosphere, Groves' paintings also inventively evoke interior perspectives. Indigo oceanic depths, surging streams of fresh water, the silvery grays of groundwater and washed sedimentary crystalline rock potentially await within the their illusionary realms.

Groves' curiosity for the natural world – an intellectual and aesthetic inquisitiveness stimulated and enlightened by her experiences of different landscapes and physical environments – informs a practice where creative and cerebral research goes hand in hand. The range of Groves' felt responses to the particulars of place and the continual advance of her geographic, historical and related knowledge provides a conduit to her most current works.

As the title *Divining water* suggests, the new paintings continue the evolution of Groves' passionate visual and conceptual exploration of the possibilities held by the phenomenon of hidden or buried water. Watery territories and liquid sensibilities have held a long fascination; however, even though Groves responds to the features of locations and these and related experiences provide much of the inspiration for certain bodies of work, her art is not literal or reactionary. Interpretations and meanings are opened out far beyond the specifics of geographic facts or associations.

Titles clearly reference the subjects inferred in Groves works, new and old, yet their description comprises only part of the experience these paintings offer. *Divining water* follows the legacy of previous works such as *Stream Passage Cave* (2004), *Correlating curve—Ocean floor* or *Earth Tides* (2006), in which Groves' innovative pursuit of the creation of subterranean sensibilities unfold. After several decades of vast ranging creative engagements with the land – bringing materials from glacier ice to botany indoors to documentation of actions or pictorial representations – the significance of Groves' paintings is the specifics of their subject matter. Their power lies in the potential these images have to permeate the senses, minds and memories of viewers. In this instance, to incite sensations and meanings derived from ideas of the sub aqueous.

Fluvial, the title of one work in *Divining Water* is scientific terminology appointed to define all aspects of flowing water. In Groves' hands, fluvial expands to its full imaginary potential of percolation, flood and oceanic overflow. While technically referring to a section through stratified layers, *Water Column* pictorially enacts the shifting of biological or physical substances – changes in chemistry or surges in energy due to heating, cooling and by association, other even bodily conditions.

Geophysical science and art share a genesis in being created as intellectual systems, their principles, concepts and languages predicated on the constructs of knowledge and intuition. It may be this shared humanity that allows the notion of sea level to be both an academic definition (as the mean level halfway between high and low tide), as well as in Groves' hands *Below Sea Level* being a membrane rich with potential: a cellular cross section or graphic mapping. In her hands, precipitation not only invokes condensed moisture, it can be a metaphor of time, movement and feeling. The varied progress of watercourses flows from the temporal actions of her brush strokes. Unconscious memories of bottomless depths dwell in the underpainting, and the staccato rhythm of surface marks affects the eye with the impact of sunlight sparkling on the sea's surface.

Groves' works take on the fluidity of her subject matter, with all its opticality and potential for slippage between micro and macro narrative. The paintings in *Divining water* provide links between our personal experience of the changing physical world and timeless histories, reacquainting us with an often forgotten but mysteriously intimate knowledge of the natural world.

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1. From a poem by Chilean indigenous Mapuche poet, Juan Paulo Huirimilla Oyarzo, 'Kula Troy', Part Four in *Espejo de Tierra/ Earth Mirror*, University of Sydney and Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Melbourne, 2008, p. 36.