

Wild rivers, lost oceans, shallow seas

The works here are all linked by water, water both liquid and solid, creating and carving landforms and engendering life itself. Groves treats water abstractly, suggesting it in flowing undulations across works installed on two floors, naming its varied forms in many of her titles and signalling it in particular palettes within individual series. More fundamentally, she understands water as the engine and incubator of geomorphic and evolutionary processes shaping earth and life upon it, processes that leave evidence—sediments, fossils, rocks—traced in deep geological time.

Groves has long made work with aquatic references, frequently in response to specific sites she's visited around the world. In 2010 she travelled to Finland, her mother's birthplace, to research and traverse the course of the Tornio River which borders Finland and Sweden, and one of Europe's last remaining wild rivers. The three paintings in the *Wild Rivers* series were made in response to the recent rewilding—a process of restoration that encourages the return of native species—of a number of ecologically degraded Finnish rivers and the gift of a book on Finnish women's handcrafts from 1952. The works share a similar form: horizontal bands of predominantly blue and violet, painted in several layers of iridescent paint over traditional Finnish hemstitch patterns typically used on the edges of textiles. These she had transferred to the canvas by means of graphite pencil. She notes that just as the colour of water is influenced by atmospheric light, these works' embedded pigmented surfaces reflect the ambient light of their surroundings.

Three glistening works of woven fishing line revisit a format Groves used earlier in her career. *Atmospheric Rivers* comprises vertical bands of greens, blue, and purple which appear to ripple or undulate, most particularly in a side view. This results from the different thicknesses of fishing line used and the resulting variation in tension. This mutable, rippled surface evokes the title—atmospheric rivers are long flowing corridors or filaments of atmospheric moisture and their heightened activity contributed to the recent accelerated melting of the Greenland Ice Sheet and ended the decade-long California drought in spectacular flooding. The water here might be metaphoric and the vertical orientation of the colours an analogue for the fall of rain; its effects are nonetheless real.

Finland is often called the land of a thousand lakes. *A Thousand Lakes* here shows wide woven horizontal bands of blues/grey/white, an indicator of the glacial process that formed Finnish lakes and indeed the country's landscape in a southward movement and pattern of retreat ten thousand years ago. Many, many eons older in geological reference is *Lost Oceans #4*, the fourth in a series

of weavings made for the artist's *Early Earth (Abstractions of Time)* exhibition in 2021. The palette of narrow horizontal bands—green, aqua, ochre—relates to the geological timeframe of early earth, more than 4 billion years ago when the planet was vastly different. In the words of geologist and astrobiologist Professor Martin Van Kranendonk, earth “had an orange sky from a rich carbon dioxide atmosphere, there was no oxygen, (and) the seas would have been green, rich in dissolved iron.”

In August 2022 Groves visited the Pilbara in Western Australia, part of a scientific expedition led by Van Kranendonk. The Pilbara is home to the oldest rocks on earth, offering the most ancient and best-preserved signs of life on the planet in fossilized stromatolites which were formed by bacteria that were among the earth's earliest photosynthesizers. Stromatolites grow in a microbial mat, depositing layers of sand and calcium carbonate precipitated from seawater. The photosynthetic action of these “growing stones” transformed earth's atmosphere, dramatically increasing the amount of available oxygen it contained and consequently, the range of life it could support. Groves' response to the expedition, worked in a variety of formats, is on display upstairs.

Three acetate collages replicate the form of pre-digital field maps and surveys in their pinned and overlapping format. *Field Map Study (Pilbara Series)* shows sections of fossilized stromatolites from the Pilbara; *Shaped by Water (Pilbara Series)* shows details of Banded Iron Formation rock which was found in Western Australia's Karijini National Park and formed as a result of the oxygenation of the earth's oceans some 240 million years ago. As in *Micro Universe (Pilbara Series) #2*, and despite what looks like their photographic verisimilitude, the collages are animated by questions of scale and orientation: what is it we see—an aerial view, a cross section, a micro or a macro view?

Lithic Elements (Pilbara Series) #2 is based on a photomicrograph of thin sections of fossilized Pilbara stromatolites around 3.5 billion years old, displaying a distinctive wavelike formation. From this Groves produced a detailed drawing which was then digitally etched onto Perspex—a new technique for the artist—and replicated horizontally to emphasize its undulation. It sits over a layer of dark grey Perspex, the lot bounded by an orange-red, the colour of iron oxide. A more recent stromatolite specimen, only 5,000 years old, from Shark Bay in Western Australia, is the source for *From Shallow Waters #1*, another wall sculpture comprised of layered laser-cut Perspex. This structure suggests processes of sedimentation and its blue base, the shallow marine conditions in which so-called modern stromatolites grow. (Shark Bay is still home to living stromatolites today.) Groves calls this work “an abstract version of the real thing.”

Storm Deposit and the animation *Earth Time* are both based on remarkable draftsmanship, an exacting process that seems far from abstraction. But drawing, along with the other procedures Groves uses, whether of transcription or translation, entails abstraction, along with selection and summation. Rendering these ancient rocks, all stromatolites birthed in water, she practices the kind of slow, intense scrutiny that a geologist might employ. Animated, the depicted rocks turn in the viewer's time, turn in what might be called the time of seeing.

Groves isn't daunted by the abstractions of geological time, its inconceivable numbers against which our hominid recentness is but a blip. Her work, with its careful transcription and attentive detail is the fruit of long, slow looking. It asks viewers to do the same.

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