

Like water we ebb and flow across time and space

i) *aqueous, fluid layers*

The mostly watery composition of my body is not just a human thing. From the almost imperceptible jellies in the benthos of the Pacific, to the Namibian desert catfish hibernating in the mud; from mangrove to ragweed; from culvert to billabong to the roaring Niagara; cushioned between fractocumulus cloud and deep earth aquifer, we are all bodies of water.¹

Water is vital for life, fundamental for all organic matter to grow, develop and change. Water flows and connects us through oceans, rivers and our breath, while fluidy substances move through our bodies and through the natural world hosting minerals, viruses, proteins, bacteria, hormones and blood cells, all necessary to facilitate the processes of life.

The thin silvery film left by a slug forms a very visible manifestation of the thread that holds us together and to the planet, but this slimy layer that envelops the slug's body also envelops us—from our beginnings in the intimate combining of cells we spend nine months growing in a watery, amniotic sack until the water breaks and we emerge into the world.

Honey Long and Prue Stent's photographic works come about through a performative encounter between a figure, often female and often the artists themselves (although this has more recently grown to include people whom the duo are intimately related to including family and friends) and the natural environment (for *Touching Pool* the images have been taken in both Australia and in Vanuatu). These still

moments in time born out of extended performative interactions bring seemingly disparate materials into new contexts and highlight the interconnectedness of body and environment. A tension is created between the materials used by the artists, in *Touching Pool* this includes shimmering and transparent fabrics, broken glass and netting, and the natural environment, primarily bodies of water. The materials selected often mimic or contrast with the setting and are responsive to the other elements at play in the environment, for example in *Bask* (2019) there is an interaction between the sparkling glomesh-like material, the water and the sunlight.

ii) *A breeze blows a wet sheet against my body, it gently clings to my raised knee, my elbow and against my chest cooling me as it dries*

The coarse polyester lace rubs against my nipples all day, so now all I can see when I look at that bra is the scratching feeling

Feeling-seeing² occurs when our senses overlap with our thoughts and experiences. It is a bodily, felt way of viewing the world, a smooching together of sensations that are often seen as distinct. This concept of feeling-seeing is present in the work of Long and Stent. In *Wax* (2019) a figure bobs in water beneath a thin, almost transparent material, their knees and breasts press against the material while the rest of their body dissolves down into the water. In the paired image, *Mud Cake* (2019), a once bone-dry red earth riverbed, cracked and peeling, has once again seen water. Its shape holds but the mud looks soft and thick, it calls out to be squished through your fingers. The viscosity of the image is felt in the relationship of the body to these materials—the sheet gently

¹ Neimanis, Astrida. "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water." in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*, eds. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. p. 105

² Feeling-seeing is a term I am exploring to express the sometimes simultaneous and inseparable quality of seeing from how something acts upon the body on a more visceral level, it is where these senses melt together.

touches the body as it floats, adding intensity to the feeling of water alone on your skin. This sensorial, felt dimension charges the images, so that you feel them whilst you see them.

Long and Stent have returned frequently to the use of materials and fabrics to screen or camouflage the body in their work. These screens or coverings abstract the body as a sculptural form, foregrounding the shape and acting to dissipate the sexualised projections frequently made onto naked female bodies. In Long and Stent's work these bodies are not part of the scenery, they are not there simply for the viewer's pleasure. Although there is an inherent eroticism in the work, it stands in contrast to more classical, essentialist depictions of the female form in the natural environment as Long and Stent have created these images themselves and on their own terms.

iii) *from the inside to the outside*

We ebb and flow across time and space—body, to body, to body, to body.³

We ourselves are sea, sands, corals, seaweeds, beaches, tides, swimmers, children, waves . . . seas and mothers.⁴

The boundaries between bodies melt and meld. Morphing and connecting, aquatic creatures become indistinguishable from human forms. There are slippages between states, between bodies and in our perception revealing commonalities and connections. The Ouroboros is a symbol of eternal cyclical renewal, it is depicted by a snake eating its own tail. It references the endless chain of interconnectedness or a digital loop that links back on itself without beginning or end.

As my eye scans across *Manta* (2019) the submerged female figure becomes a manta ray for a second, the stretched fabric creating webbed fins as the creature glides through the water. But then it looks more like a squid, definitely a squid. The body is wrapped in a semi-sparkling material that bunches in places and stretches tight in others, her breasts could form the eyes of the squid, her legs the tentacles as this ambiguous animal analogue emerges.

There is always inside in the outside and outside on the inside, especially when it comes to our bodies. We take in the world and also send it flooding back out again, creating a crossover between inside and outside that blurs these divisions and questions the sharpness of these categories. *Sun Sip* (2019) plays with our perceptions of our bodies within a luminous, rainbow hue.

The highly sensual and tantalising images in *Touching Pool* are zoomed-in and tightly cropped portraying only sections of the body or environment. They feel very personal and intimate, as if a private moment has been magnified and we have been invited in and set adrift in a watery pool, uncentered and uncertain.

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³ Neimanis, Astrida. "Hydrofeminism: Or, On Becoming a Body of Water." in *Undutiful Daughters: Mobilizing Future Concepts, Bodies and Subjectivities in Feminist Thought and Practice*, eds. Henriette Gunkel, Chrysanthi Nigianni and Fanny Söderbäck. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012. p. 99

⁴ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément via. *Ibid.* P. 99