



The Sea

A poetic experience

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“The Sea, a poetic experience”

Using my own set of artistic tools and literary references, I began a study of the sea as a poetic experience; this study is based on my personal background and a myriad of what author Virginia Woolf defined as “moments of being”, which have deeply affected my perception of this shifting space. Using the poetic element of water as a springboard for my imagination, I meditate about the sea, its ability to move us and to create a timeless oneiric experience.

In this project drawing is used as a visual tool for contemplation : an imperceptible dialogue opens between the lines and me, and a quiet visual language is spoken. A philosophy of the line develops, where the ephemeral beauty of the sea is translated through drawing. Taking a map as reference, I visualize a place that is very important to me: the family summer house, located near the coast in the southernmost part of Ostrobothnia.

The work is anchored in reality by examining the incidence of time and environmental change on the coastline. The coast has become a place where we can see nature’s work in process, and where we can meditate about mankind’s ambivalent relationship with nature.

March 2019, Eline A. Gaudé

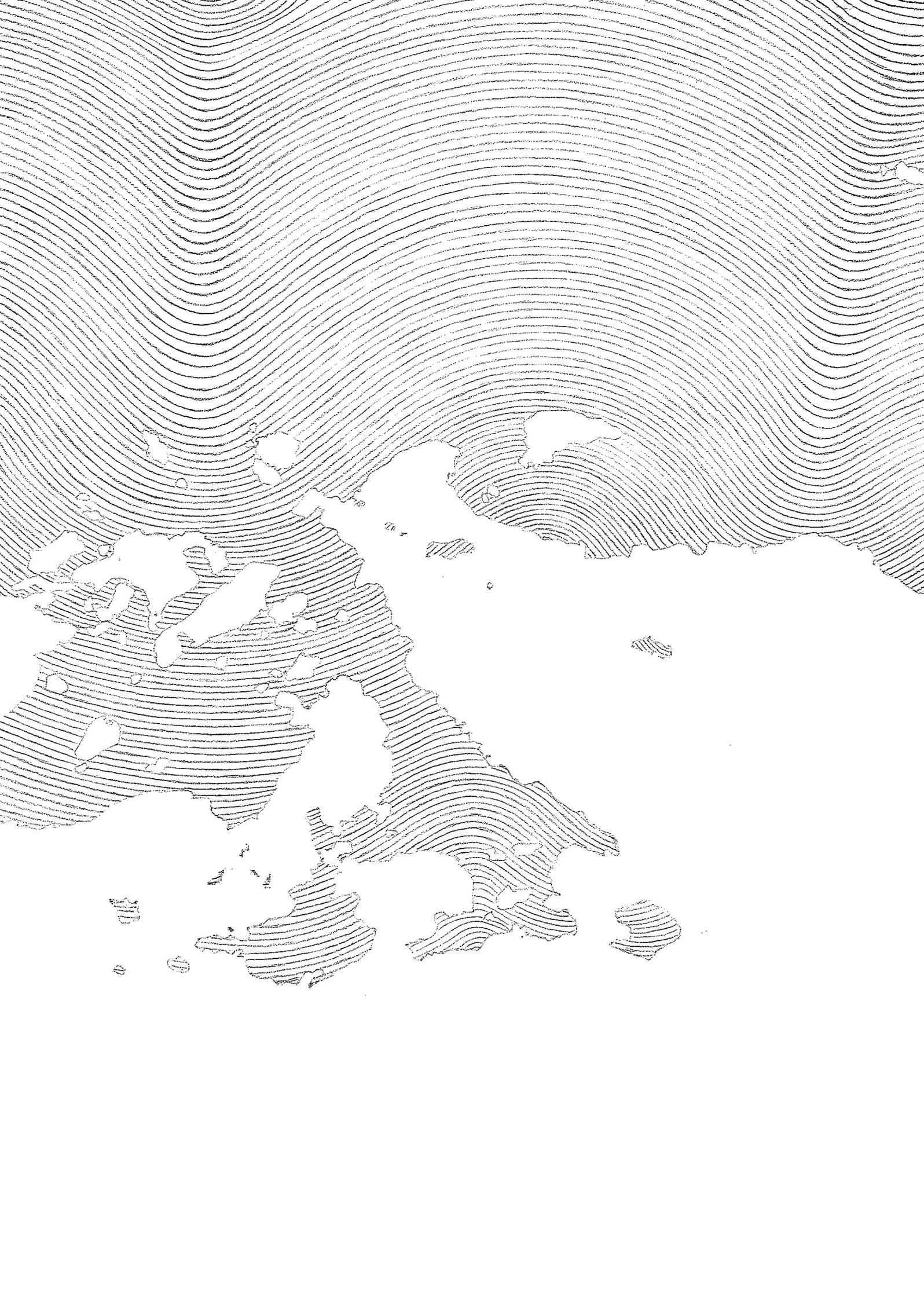
“Havet, en poetisk upplevelse”

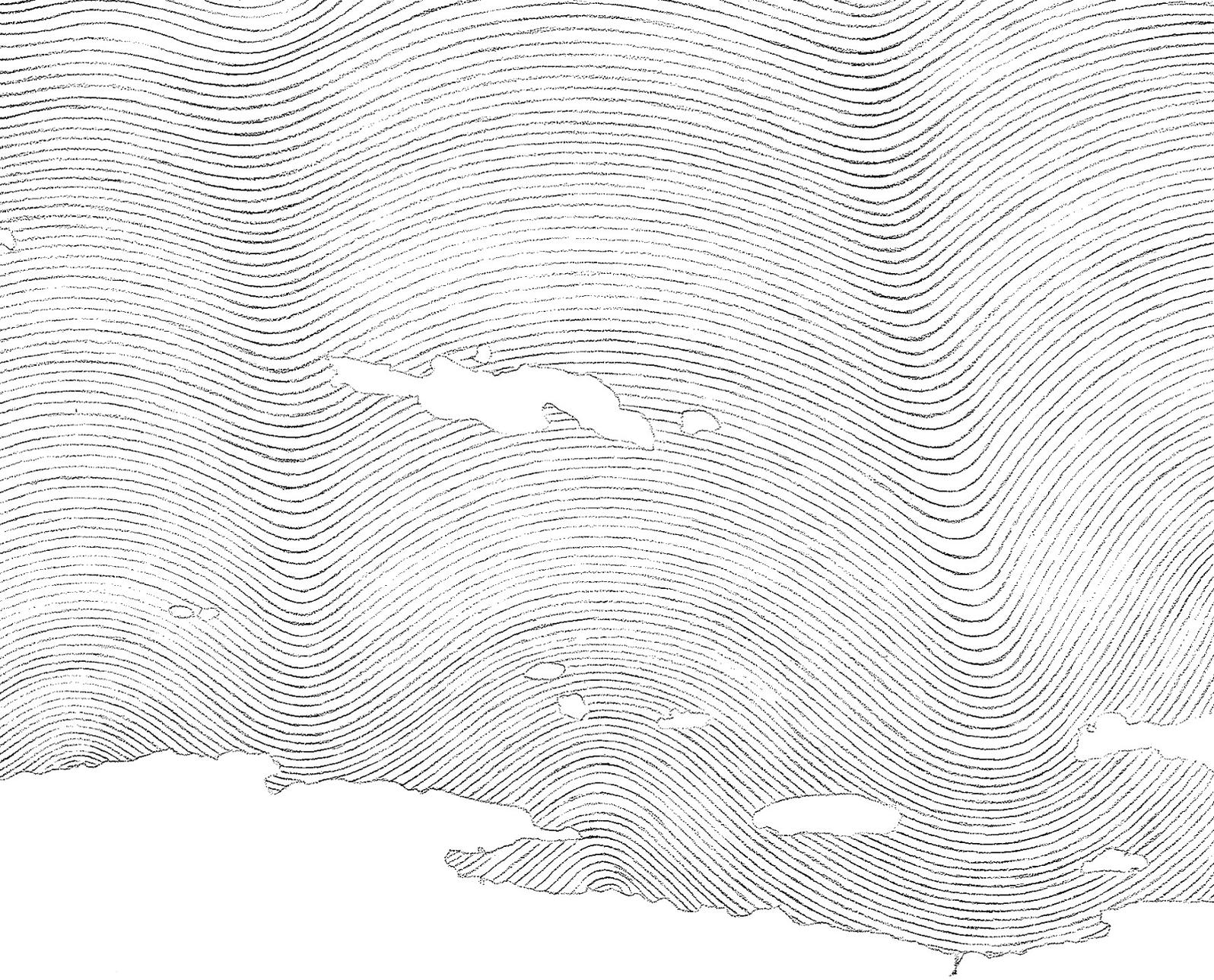
Genom att använda mig av mina egna konstnärliga verktyg, såväl som visuella och litterära referenser, började jag en studie av havet som en poetisk upplevelse; denna studie baseras på min personliga bakgrund och en myriad av vad författare Virginia Woolf definierade som “ögonblick av ren existens”, som har djupt påverkat min uppfattning om detta skiftande utrymme. Med hjälp av det poetiska elementet av vatten som ett springbräda för min fantasi, mediterar jag om havet, dess förmåga att beröra oss och skapa en tidslös enirisk upplevelse.

I detta projekt används teckning som ett visuellt verktyg för kontemplation: en dialog öppnas mellan linjerna och mig, och ett tyst visuellt språk talas. En filosofi av linjen utvecklas, där den efemiska skönheten av havet tolkas genom teckning. Med en karta som referens visualiserar jag en plats som är mycket viktig för mig: familjens sommarstuga, beläget nära kusten i den sydligaste delen av Österbotten.

Arbetet förankras i verkligheten genom att undersöka förekomsten av tidens gång och miljöförändringar på kusten. Kusten har blivit en plats där man kan se naturens arbete på gång och där man kan meditera om mänsklighetens ambivalenta förhållande till naturen.

Mars 2019, Eline A. Gaudé





Ce toit tranquille, où marchent des colombes,
Entre les pins palpite, entre les tombes ;
Midi le juste y compose de feux
La mer, la mer, toujours recommencée !
O récompense après une pensée
Qu'un long regard sur le calme des dieux !

Quel pur travail de fins éclairs consume
Maint diamant d'imperceptible écume,
Et quelle paix semble se concevoir!
Quand sur l'abîme un soleil se repose,
Ouvrages purs d'une éternelle cause,
Le temps scintille et le songe est savoir.

Paul Valéry, Le Cimetière marin



Water

At the very beginning

It is night and the sky is dark, the air beyond the dimly lit highway impenetrable. I am on a bus heading towards Helsinki. Earlier this morning I downloaded a podcast about Virginia Woolf; I am listening to it now. Looking outside the window, flurries of snow chasing us through the darkness, I listen to her. The minimal music of Philip Glass mingles with the words, its repetitive structure mesmerizing. And suddenly, comes the first image of water: words, words flowing, endlessly, rushing and gushing throughout written pages, drenching her prose in water. Stream of consciousness. I am changed.

My first introduction to the body of work of Virginia Woolf took place about three years ago and it has deeply marked me. Her novels have had a tremendous impact on my work, and even today they continue to offer me an abundant source of inspiration. Her prose struck my imagination and sparked my interest for the representation of water in art and literature; it awakened in me the need to take up my pencil and start drawing a multitude of wavelike patterns. She has become an essential catalyst of my work, and is part of the reason why I decided to dedicate my final project to the study of the sea as a poetic experience, a “moment of being” such as the ones she describes in her work. Literature long ago became one of my greatest influences. I have always been fascinated by illustrated texts, tales being one of my favorite types of literature.

For a while I considered becoming an illustrator, before focusing on Fine Arts. I found it enthralling that words and images could be so intrinsically linked, and would marvel at detailed illustrations while fervently diving into the stories that they told. To illustrate is to make something more clear, or visible; but our understanding of certain texts is often quite subjective and can be translated into very personal visual interpretations. The same could be said about images, and here the example of American visual artist Man Ray and French surrealist poet Paul Éluard’s collective work *Les Mains Libres* (1937) springs to my mind: Man Ray composed 54 drawings which Éluard then illustrated with short but powerful poems.

Images take precedence over words, yet the two are freely and playfully combined through the artist's hand and the poet's mind. Almost without realizing it, I too began incorporating words and poems into my artistic practice, pushing the boundaries between these two worlds.

This leads me to discuss the idea of borderless disciplines, as tools to examine the world that surrounds us: where does it originate from, and how can it inspire our artistic sensibilities?

Art and literature, a dialogue

There exists an ancient bond between the arts and the humanistic fields. The Ancient Greeks did not make a distinction between philosophy and science, nor did they recognize the range of disciplines such as physics, mathematics, astronomy, etc. such as we do today. There simply was not the depth of knowledge and range of information that later made separate disciplines practical. In the Greek era, one individual could be an expert in several fields. Nowadays, with the tendency of specialists to know more and more about less and less (i.e. intensive knowledge about a rather limited field) the ability to pursue detailed research in more than one area becomes almost impossible. But in those days people expected an individual knowledgeable in one area to also be proficient in others. Later on, the rediscovery of classical Greek philosophy during the Renaissance triggered the development of a humanistic movement, which encouraged Man to seek knowledge and proficiency in various disciplines through the study of the humanities : grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy. In art this theory was seen through the development of linear perspective and other techniques of rendering more realism in painting. It was an idealistic and optimistic current of thought that placed man at the center of the world and honored human values. The notions of free will, tolerance, independence, openmindedness, and curiosity have since then become inseparable of humanism. Polymaths such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo personified this humanist universalist spirit, and inspired the term "Renaissance man" . (Gombrich, 2001, 81, 293-296)

I grew up in France, where oral and written proficiency in multiple subjects is highly valued. France possesses a rich culture and prides itself in knowing it well. In high school, I studied in a so-called literary section; this meant that more emphasis was put on philosophy and French literature, I studied languages more closely, as well as history and geography. Similarly to the humanistic movement, this section encouraged us to keep our eyes and minds open, and become citizens of the world. When I think of art mingling with literature, the example of Polish artist Ewa Partum springs to my mind. Since 1969 her work has been centered around linguistic activities in an effort to discover a new artistic language. One example is her meta-poetry, the spilling and spreading of letters through existent or non-existent texts from the history of literature (referencing to the likes of Goethe and Proust); and since the early 1970s she has been creating *Poems By Ewa*, “conceptual poetry” in the shape of poetic objects on which she imprints her lips while articulating sounds. In her work, language becomes an artistic tool.

It is my belief that crossing the boundaries between disciplines encourages us to challenge our abilities and imagination, as creative matter can be found in more than one place. It is through research and reading, and examining all that surrounds us that we find artistic and poetic inspiration. Labeling art, literature and science “different categories” strikes me as being too reductive; they are like branches stemming from one single tree, offering the mind a greater scope for reflection and broadening our horizons. It is with this ideal in mind that I turned to philosophical sources and began researching water as a poetic element; a trigger for our aesthetic emotions and source of artistic creation.

A poetic element

Water has long been present in our literatures and plays an intrinsic part in many spiritual beliefs and mythologies. It is a common element in most creation myths; in the Book of Genesis for instance, after creating the heaven and the earth “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters”, Genesis 1:1-1:2 (American Standard Version). Often a source of life,

sometimes a death bringer, it is multifaceted and inspires artistic and literary minds alike. But ever since I became enraptured with the work of Virginia Woolf, the imagery of water has haunted me and regularly appeared in my work. This led me to wonder about the creative potential of this element. Why has water become such an important trigger for my imagination?

Gaston Bachelard was a French philosopher who illustrated himself in an analysis of the forms of the imagination. Judging that pure scientific research provided too narrow interpretations, he renewed the philosophical and literary approach to imagination. He set on a research of rational understanding through poetry – if any could be found –, and began interrogating the relationship between literature and science (namely between imagination and rationality, as it can be conflicting or complementary). Based on the symbolism of the four classical elements – air, water earth, fire –, he examined the process of the creative imagination that leads us to poetical inspiration. He suggested that all poetic images have their matter, and classified these material imaginations according to a law which he proposed to name the law of the four elements. He wrote that “Dreams come before contemplation. Before becoming a conscious sight, every landscape is an oneiric experience. Only those scenes that have already appeared in dreams can be viewed with an aesthetic passion.” (Bachelard, 1983, 4). By saying that, the author asserts that every dreamlike universe is thus dependent of a fundamental element, and that our material reveries precede our aesthetic emotions.

Here we will take a closer look at his essay *L’Eau et les rêves* (in French, *Water and dreams*), in which the author focuses on the dreamlike evocations of water. In this essay, Bachelard leads his reader into a reflection, or rather a meditation on the imagination of matter associated with the imagery of water. He suggests that the evocations of water often go back to childhood and are deeply rooted in ancestral traditions. Where does this election of a particular element by the imagination come from? Bachelard does not hesitate to speak of a “fundamental oneiric temperament”: rather than an innate component of the personality, it seems that this attachment to a primordial element is the product of an ancient history, of singular and extraordinary impressions experienced in the frame of what was our “native land”. I chose to illustrate this idea with the example of video artist Bill Viola. In an interview he gave in 2011 to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art (Denmark), Viola spoke of a near-death experience he had as a child: when he was six years old he fell into a lake, and experienced this moment with acute aesthetic awareness. He realized later on that this event was the reason why he had been using water in his

work, such as in *Five Angels for the Millennium*, a video installation made in 2001. Bill Viola's recurrent use of water in his work illustrates the idea that creative matter can be found in our history and throughout the impressions that have etched themselves in our young minds.

Gaston Bachelard is guided in his essay by the images of poets and abandons himself to his own reverie by following a progression towards the depth: from clear waters to dark abyss. He examines the myths of Narcissus, Charon and the Styx, and even speaks of reveries bearing the "feminine mark", as seen through the image of Ophelia. In his conclusion, he gives water a privileged place among the elemental matters because, according to him, liquidity constitutes the essence of language. It is in the elemental matters that the material imagination finds the seeds of its images. The sea, the river, the brook provide sounds to express these images.

For my part, it has become clear that my own poetical reveries find their matter in the manifold imagery of water. I have always felt an attraction towards water; already as a child, I was fascinated by all the mythical creatures emerging from bodies of water, such as nymphs, selkies, sirens... Today still, my favorite H. C. Andersen tale is *The Little Mermaid*. Nevertheless, it is a fascination mingled with repulsion, as deep waters have always been a great source of angst for me. But I believe that spending most of my childhood summers by the sea has cemented my personal bond with the coastal landscape.

Water has quite naturally become the fuel of my artistic practice; what has given it depth and reflection, intimacy and ingenuity, timelessness and a fragile sense of beauty. It is like an ostinato in my work, a short melodic phrase repeated throughout a greater composition.

*Water is the substance of my dreams:
it is the flickering echo of Time.*



Experiencing the sea

Moments of being

I know of a place, where the sea meets the sky; where warm rocks cradle your back; where the wind gives the reeds a tongue of their own, and their hushed speech lulls you to sleep; where white sails vanish in the distance, and seagulls sing a song of glee. There, a little red cottage emerges from the protective shade of the woods. A nostalgic echo resounds in my chest: it is a place that I have known for a long time.

In the southernmost part of Ostrobothnia, facing the Bothnian Sea, lies the small village of Sideby. Sideby appears as early as 1479 in written sources under the name of Sijdaby. Part of my history finds its roots there, as it is the place where my grandfather was born and grew up. The summer cottage was built by my grandparents in the early seventies, on a patch of land by the sea. It has been the stage of much laughter and tears over the years. Growing up, I spent most of my summers in Sideby; there, my siblings and I would meet up with our cousins, go on adventures in the woods, plan expeditions to the nearest islands and read lazily throughout the rest of the summer. To put it simply: summer without Sideby is not summer.

The first moments upon arriving at the cottage always hit me with blinding clarity: salty air fills my nostrils and I find myself submerged under a myriad of impressions; they seize my heart, and it feels as though my chest was about to burst under a flood of emotions. I breathe in, and breathe out, filling my lungs and senses with the sea. It lives and breathes only a few feet away from me, and my evenings and mornings become swayed by the sound of the waves lapping on the rocks. Sometimes the mere memory of it fills me with pure, unadulterated joy. In a similar manner Virginia Woolf recalls one of her earliest memories in her essay *A Sketch of the Past*, which was to be the beginning of her memoir:

“If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills and fills— then my bowl without a doubt stands upon this memory. It is of lying half asleep, half awake, in bed in the nursery at St. Ives. It is of hearing the waves breaking, one, two, one two, and sending a splash of water over the beach; and then breaking, one, two, one, two, behind a

yellow blind. It is of hearing the blind draw its little acorn across the floor as the wind blows the blind out. It is of lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive.” (Woolf, 1985, 64-65)

The reminiscence of the nursery in St. Ives leads Virginia Woolf to wonder why some events will easily be forgotten, while other – seemingly unimportant – moments will unconsciously impress us and be vividly recalled later on. She suggests that “things we have felt with great intensity have an existence independent of our minds” (Woolf, 1985, 67), which would explain why our recollection of a particular event can be so vivid and life-like. It is in this essay that we first find the mention of what she describes as moments of being.

She never explicitly defines what they are, but instead provides us with examples of these moments and contrasts them with what she calls moments of non-being. These moments of non-being appear to be unremembered events embedded in the “nondescript cotton wool of the day” (Woolf, 1985, 70). The author proposes that “a great part of every day is not lived consciously” (Woolf, 1985, 70), referring to moments when one eats, walks, or performs mundane tasks. As Nicole Urquhart writes in her essay about moments of being in Virginia Woolf’s fiction “[...] for Woolf a moment of being is a moment when an individual is fully conscious of his experience [...]. Unlike moments of non-being, when the individual lives and acts without awareness, performing acts as if asleep, the moment of being opens up a hidden reality.” It seems to be the intensity of feeling, one’s consciousness of the event, that separates the two moments. After examining these moments of being, Woolf appears to reach some sort of a philosophy: that behind the triviality of our daily existence lies a hidden pattern, that “we – I mean all human beings – are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are parts of the work of art” (Woolf, 1985, 72). She suggests that when an individual experiences a moment of being, he or she becomes consciously aware for an instant of his or her connection to a larger scheme hidden behind the opaque surface of reality. Moments of being can be found throughout Virginia Woolf’s fiction, and are often depicted as moments of intense power and beauty.

In my final project I hope to capture the quintessence of the sea through my personal experience and memories of the sea. I have a very clear picture of the time I spent in Sideby as a child: unconcerned by the rest of the world, I spent blissful days under the sign of an eternal sun. But was it always so? Can childhood memories be trusted to tell the truth? We shape them, polish them like a stream would polish pebbles, and all that

remains are stainless images of what once was. We tend to look back on our childhood with blinding fondness, ignoring the elements that could muddle our remembrance of the past. But memory is not bound by truth: it is an unreliable and sometimes deceitful thing, fabricating a shifting narrative of the past. Our perception of space and time is greatly influenced by our memories, and these are subject to constant change. I am aware that the visual image I have of the sea is greatly influenced and even sublimated by my recollection of the times I have spent in Sideby; but I embrace this sublimation, as I believe it conveys a timeless sense of beauty to the work. Like the characters of Woolf's fiction, I too remember experiencing moments of energy and awareness: these moments have allowed me to see life more clearly, and more fully, if only briefly. The way I perceive the sea has become embedded in a multitude of moments of being: they impromptuously offer me the sudden and elusive realization that I am part of a greater whole.

The Finnish experience

Wherever you go in Finland, water is never too far.

According to *The Official Travel Guide of Finland* “drive through Finland in the summer and you’ll find two colors dominating the scenery: green and blue. The forested landscape is dotted with patches of water – or, in some areas, vice versa – so numerous that they have earned Finland the nickname “the land of the thousand lakes”.” (*Land of a thousand lakes*)

Finnish summers play an important part in Finnish culture. The very concept of the Finnish summer by the sea is highly romanticized, and is understood to have been created by artists and writers during the nineteenth century. The Romanticism movement was then in full bloom and artists sought ways to express their states of mind and affirm the primacy of feeling over reason, through the exaltation of the – often uncontrollable – forces of nature. In Finland, Romantic nationalism came to play a major part in the construction of Finnish identity: as a nationalistic branch of Romanticism, it sought to praise the land's nature and countryside and focused on the development of national languages and folklore. The fine

arts as well as the applied arts were used consciously in constructing the Finnish national identity. They certainly molded the outsider's image of Finland: apart from the cold weather and dreary winters, what one often hears about Finland is the beauty of its iconic natural phenomena, the Midnight Sun, its breathtaking forests and landscapes, its archipelago... It is the contributions of painters such as Akseli Gallen-Kallela and Albert Edelfelt, with paintings like *Lekande pojkar på stranden* (1884) that participated in shaping the vision of an idyllic summer by the sea. This vision still endures today and attracts thousands of tourists and visitors to Finland every year.

Over time, the bourgeois villa owners in Finland, often the Swedish-speaking elite of the country, focused their interest on the archipelago and coastal regions inhabited by Swedish-speaking communities. I find that to be true as the Finnish part of my family is Swedish speaking and our cottage is located near the coast. However, during the national romantic search for such Finnishness that could be described as original and pure led to expeditions into the inland and eastern Finland. Since then, owning a summer cottage has become the epitome of Finnishness. In an article she wrote about summer cottages in Finland, Karoliina Periäinen (a researcher at the Helsinki University of Technology) suggests that:

“[...] having a cottage is [...] said to entail nostalgia for one's own or past generation's former rural home region, as well as a wish to be lord of one's own manor, away from oppressing city life and the suburbs. [...] It is tempting to claim that the summer cottage has been used as a means to construct Finnish national identity. The unique Finnish environment, with a summer cottage in the very heart of it, has become part of the national landscape.” (Periäinen, 2004, 43-44)

The vast forest wilderness, “the land of a thousand lakes”, was to become the essential Finnish environment and encompass the national landscape. “Finnishness” was indicated by the villa's location beside a “wilderness” lake or the seaside, the lack of neighbors and other people, the preservation of the “woody” appearance of the plot, and the preference for a bare log exterior. What finally led to the notion of a classical Finnish summer cottage was the development of functionalism in the 20th century. This entailed the simplification and popularization of the cottage after the Second World War, as well as situating it very close to the shoreline. Simplicity and practicality were just as much design principles as moral values, and they suited the nationalistic ideas of Finnish architecture very well. Nowadays you might see more luxurious cottages scattered across the country, but oftentimes many people prefer smaller cabins that offer minimal amenities, and a more traditional approach to living. We have be-

come rather accustomed to the many comforts of modernity; it sometimes seems difficult to escape from the daily routine of our lives, and perhaps we might even formulate the wish to free ourselves from an urbanized existence but for a moment. This innate longing for nature can be linked all the way back to the search for the original human state, which emerged with Jean Jacques Rousseau's writings. I suspect that the summer cottage answers our desire to escape urbanization, and has become a way to feed our primitive longing for nature.

The nostalgic gaze towards tradition inspired the idea of the summer cottage: it has become an essential part of the Finnish national identity, and it also expresses a modern world view. It is interesting to see how such a "recent" concept could so quickly anchor itself in Finnish culture; I on the other hand simply happen to have roots in Ostrobothnia because of my family, but our summer cottage is so completely connected in my mind to the idea of summer and spending some quiet time by the seaside that it has become practically necessary to my experience in Finland. At times I find myself longing to be there, so that I could breathe in the old familiar smells and open the closets to find my worn-out clothes where I last left them. To me the summer cottage takes on a very personal meaning: I have developed a great deal of attachment towards it over the years and it has become a place where I can always be certain to find peace of mind and a soothing proximity to the sea.

A changing coastline

Finland has been confronted to the phenomenon of land uplift – or Post-glacial rebound – for some time now. Unlike the rest of the world where the sea levels are rising due to global warming and the consequent melting of the ice cap, this phenomenon has long been known all over the coast of the Gulf of Bothnia, and has had a great impact on the surrounding nature and landscape. The land uplift was initially perplexing to the people in the coastal region and mistaken for water reduction. But although the melting glaciers raise the sea level, this rise has so far been smaller than the uplift rate near the Finnish coast, and the sea still gives way to new land every year.

The land uplift is just one consequence of past global glaciations: when the ice retreated from Fennoscandia (which is the region including the Scandinavian Peninsula, Finland, Karelia, and the Kola Peninsula) more than 10,000 years ago, the Earth's crust was depressed half a kilometer due to the weight of the ice which was 2 kilometers thick. When the ice melted, the crust began to rise, and the recovery still continues. Near the Gulf of Bothnia, where the ice was thickest, the current uplift rate is about 2 centimeters per year, and there is still some 100 meters to rise. It has been noted that in the Quark area – or Kvarken in Swedish – , which is the narrow region in the Gulf of Bothnia separating the Bothnian Bay (the inner part of the gulf) from the Bothnian Sea, the land uplift is fastest with nearly 1 cm per year. Calculations indicate that the land mass will have reformed and risen, to such an extent that in 2000 years there might even be a land connection between Sweden and Finland (Poutanen, Steffen, 2014).

Land uplift has practical consequences, especially at the shallow shorelines of Finland, where harbors, even cities, have to be moved because of the retreat of the coastline. The land uplift and subsequent marine regression results in large areas of emerged virgin land, also profoundly affecting plant and wildlife along the shores. This phenomenon has been studied by the Finnish photographer Eero Murtomäki, and shows up in the publication of a volume of pictures portraying the nature of the archipelago near Kvarken, *Land ur havet* (“land from the sea”). The volume presents photographs spanning nearly two decades, focusing on the changes brought on by the seasons and the constant land uplift which creates new life opportunities for the flora and fauna of the archipelago. Little remains of the nature captured by the photographer in his early shots; the land uplift brings about significant changes in the landscape which can be perceived during a man's lifetime. Small islands spread out and unite into greater stretches of land that are slowly covered by forest, the bays become shallower and the beaches are ever more densely lined with leisure buildings. Future projects are also casting their shadow on the peaceful seascape: an embankment over Kvarken, a nuclear power plant, the relocation of a large harbor which would affect the entire surrounding nature...

Because of the unique phenomenon of land uplift, the coastline is not fixed in time and space, and for that reason the sea map of the Gulf of Bothnia often needs to be altered. The coast has become a place where one can see nature's work in process; change can be perceived during a man's lifetime. Change can be ambivalent, as it is not always welcome; it is not inherently good or bad, but it is something inevitable. As one of life's constants we must learn to embrace it; for time marches on, always.



Finding my medium

Material impermanence

Although I occasionally try my hand at installation and photography, traditional mediums such as watercolor, drawing, and ink wash feel more familiar to me. I find these mediums very liberating, as they allow me to experience a proximity with my chosen material that cannot be replicated with digital tools. I love the fact that you can choose to work with a variety of supports, and that mistakes can be made. It is an essential part of the process and what makes it so alluring to me. In a world where digital tools are omnipresent in our lives, writing and drawing by hand have become precious practices.

I tiptoe on the edge of Minimalism yet enjoy lingering over details. In my eyes, art allows us to explore the little cracks in time and space, study the small details that draw our attention and visually bring them to light; I decided to do so through the prism of poetry. It is the poetic potential of a work of art that draws me to it. I in turn wish to seek my own delicate, subtle answers, and translate them into aesthetic experiences. Japanese art and philosophy have been huge inspirations to me in that regard. I strongly identify with the wabi-sabi aesthetic, which seeks beauty in things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. An example of this aesthetic is the traditional Japanese repair technique called kintsugi (kin : gold, tsugi : repair). It is used when mending broken objects made of china or ceramic. I have been inspired to use this technique in my own project, as a way to delineate the coast, fix it on the background and make it more visible to the naked eye. It is used as a method to reclaim the transient coastline and form a bridge between past and present, soothing the harsh passage of time.

When I first began working on my final project I was a little unsure about my primary support, whether I should use paper or some other material. It is quite naturally in fact that I began considering the walls of my studio as perfect canvases for what I had in mind: three large boards, made of plywood; some of them have been used by other students before me and developed a history of their own. Their backs are covered in doodles and graffiti, which seem to have become part of the project itself. Nails, staples and other dents have left their marks on the walls, and have turned into a silent reminder of the passage of time. Assuming that these walls will be used again after me once I graduate, the work itself takes on an impermanent aspect: unless photographed, in which case it will be permanently frozen in time, the drawing that stretches across the surface of these walls might very well disappear in time. Drawing on a larger format has been a highly liberating experience, as I have been more accustomed to working on smaller scales. A different kind of fluidity seems to emerge, the patterns vary slightly, and the action of drawing takes on a more physical dimension. The walls are quite large and heavy and bring a different sense of physicality to the work than if it had been drawn on paper. Working on paper for so long gave my drawings a sense of immateriality; on the contrary, using something as tangible as these walls seems to anchor the work in reality. It becomes less fragile, quietly materializing into its defined space.









Two vastly different artistic languages weave themselves onto my canvas, creating two distinctive spaces: one beautiful, harmonious in its conception, almost frozen in its aesthetic; the other crude, rougher, sketched onto the back of the walls, yet delicate and almost ghostly in appearance. What the audience encounters first is a past space, one where our nostalgic gaze may linger for a moment. The other one forebodes the future, imagining its outlines: it is full of possibilities.



A Philosophy of the line

I have recently begun to use ink as my core medium for drawing, as it allows to work with delicate color scales and soft lines. To me drawing feels sharper, more accurate, less likely to spin out of control than painting. It is truthful and straightforward, like an arrow shot in the clear sky. I have been more and more drawn to artists who use this medium as their visual language. One striking example would be Japanese self-taught artist Hiroyuki Doi, who's work features clusters of tiny circles that create organic, galaxy-like forms on the paper. His meticulous and slow working process induces a meditative state of mind, a state that I have often reached myself while drawing. Knowing that you have the possibility of losing yourself in the drawing is thrilling and instills the experience with a sense of spirituality.

When my fascination for water arose, I began picturing complex and delicate flowing patterns of lines, or "rivers", as I used to call them back then. I would draw these rivers over and over again, on varying scales and supports, mainly using graphite because of its subtlety. Early on these drawings were made in an attempt to symbolize the notion of "stream of consciousness". Stream of consciousness is a literary method of narration used to render the conscious flow of thoughts, feelings, and impressions of a character by incorporating "snatches of incoherent thought, ungrammatical constructions, and free association of ideas, images, and words at the pre-speech level" (Britannica). At the time I was very interested in the depiction of the female psyche in literature (mainly as portrayed in Virginia Woolf's prose), and questioning my own identity as a woman within the artistic field. But the meaning attached to these drawings has evolved over the years, metamorphosing into a reminder of the passage of time.

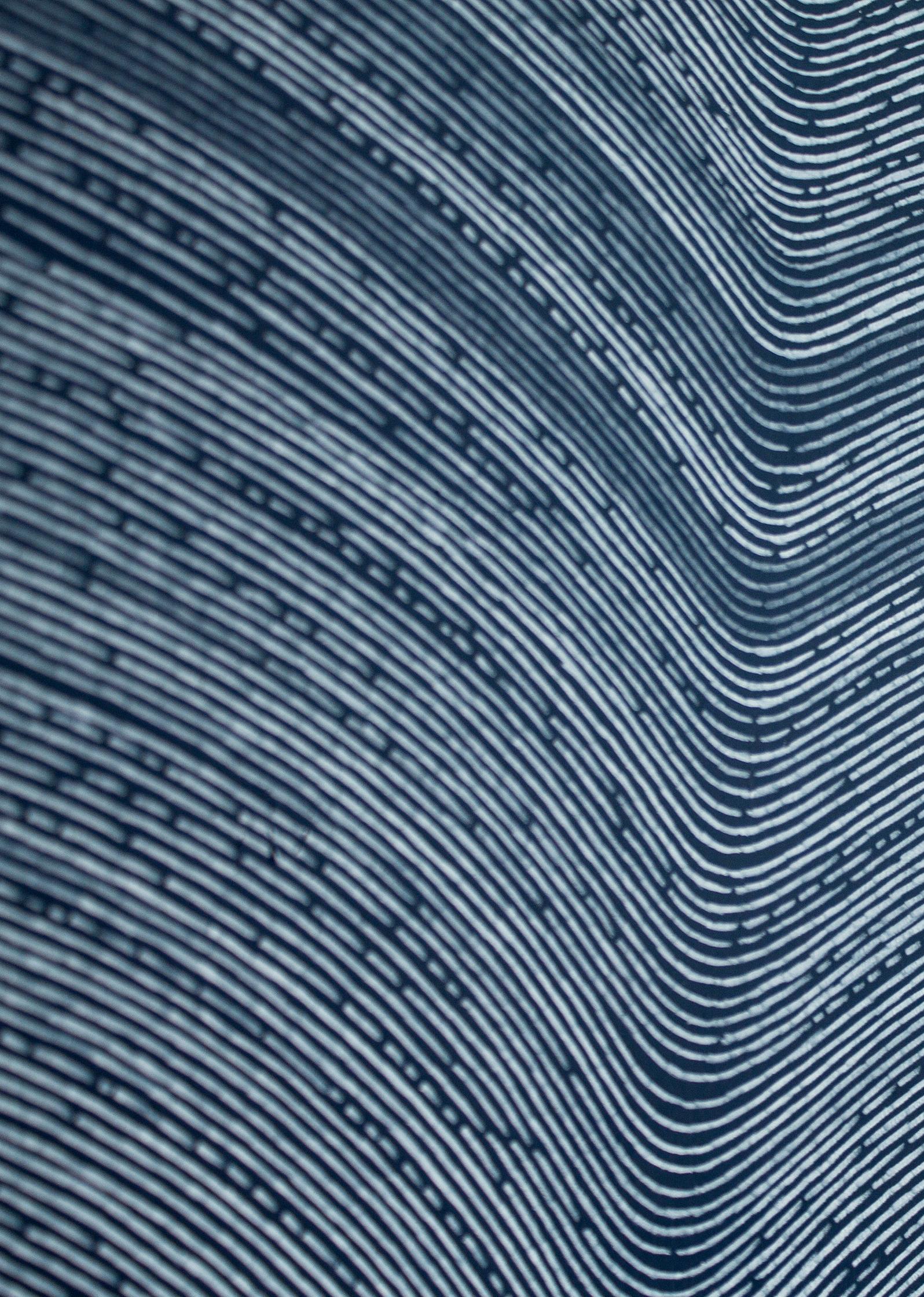
As I begin working I often experience this incredible feeling of losing myself in the drawing; the only thing that matters is the movement, the act of making, rushing from the elbow, coursing through my arm, hand, fingers, and finally reaching the tip of my pencil. All my nerves and muscles tense up, it becomes crucially important that I focus my wavering mind on what is in front of me. Sometimes I even forget to breathe. At last, I fall into a meditative state, which cannot last too long. Finding the focus which allows me to "be in the moment" is what matters most. The line is restrained, controlled, its practice develops into what I like to call a philosophy of the line. This philosophy of the line can in essence be linked to Japanese cal-

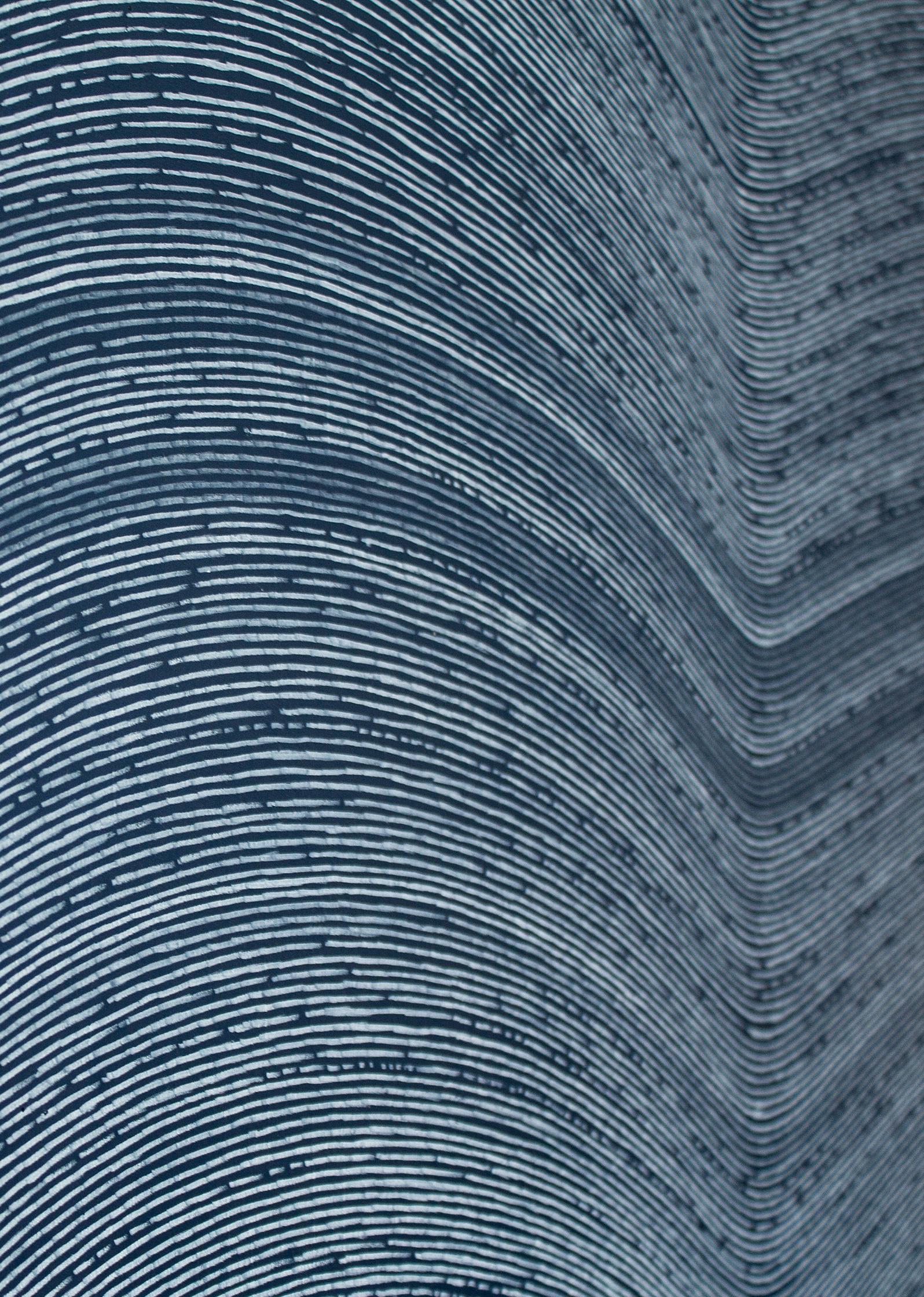
igraphy, or shodo. It is a form of calligraphy, or artistic writing, of the Japanese language. Shodo was influenced by Zen thought: it seeks a fluidity in execution, a sincerity of emotions transpiring in the brush strokes. Such fluidity and earnestness can for instance be seen in the monumental works of calligraphy of contemporary artist Tomoko Kawao. The brush strokes cannot be corrected, and even a lack of confidence will show up in the work. Each brush stroke writes a statement about the calligrapher at a moment in time, just like my undulating lines write a statement about me: they flow out of myself and express the truth of the moments I have experienced by the sea.

Lines have traditionally been used to draw the outline of shapes and objects. Here, it takes on a more abstract role as it becomes movement rather than shape, a form of narrative of the sea. The chosen work area is evenly divided between land and sea; the large body of water is slowly covered in wavering lines, drawn with thin white permanent markers, whereas the terrestrial parts – which consist of the mainland and a handful of islands – remain empty. It creates intervals, empty spaces where the eye can linger and rest for a moment before continuing its journey. There is much emphasis put on negative space (or Ma) in Japanese art. The empty space is as important as the one filled with detail: it becomes a promise yet to be fulfilled, an emptiness full of possibilities. With my use of lines I approach the systematic repetition of Minimalism, but with a certain freedom of form. Drawing becomes a tool for contemplation: an imperceptible dialogue opens between the lines and me, and a quiet visual language is spoken.

Through the repeatedness of the pattern, I develop an interaction with my surrounding landscape.





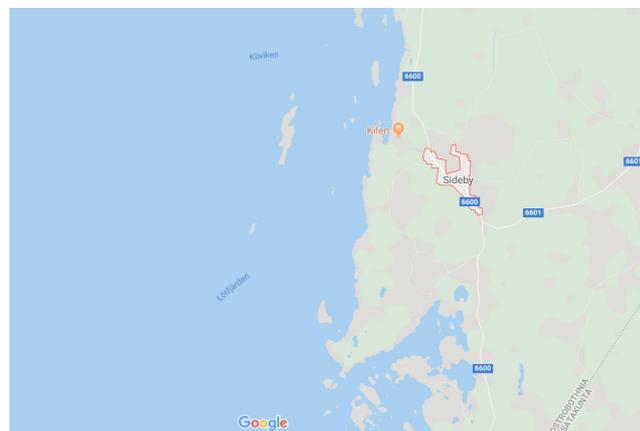






Drawing the coastline

In December I found myself in an impasse and needed to bring some clarity to my ideas. I discussed the practical realization of my project with Ingela Bodbacka-Rak (lecturer in art history and art theory at Novia), and as the terms sea, coastline, and space kept coming up in our conversation she suggested that I use maps as a starting point. Maps are nowadays mostly seen as scientific tools, meant to guide us and inform us about our surroundings. In a world where GPS and Google Maps exist, paper maps have become almost obsolete. We tend to forget that not too long ago these maps were our sole source of information about what lay beyond the horizon, and that they were not always accurate depictions of the world. In medieval cartography, the Latin expression *Hic sunt leones* (“here be lions”) was used to designate dangerous or uncharted territory. It was also a common practice to adorn virgin areas of the maps with sea monsters and various mythological creatures, as a way to warn voyagers of the dangers that lay ahead. Such monsters can for instance be found on the *Carta marina et descriptio septentrionalium terrarum* (Marine map and description of the Northern lands); initially published in 1539, it was designed by Sweden’s last Catholic archbishop, Olaus Magnus, and is the first map of the Nordic countries to give details and name places (Maillefer, Schnakenbourg, 2010, 46). Maps became for a time complex and beautifully decorated objects, not only meant to be used for orientation purposes but also to be looked at. It is in this perspective that I began working on a large map depicting a specific area of Ostrobothnia: Sideby, of course (and parts of the surrounding localities).



The fragment of the Finnish map that I have chosen to work with is presented horizontally and not vertically, as you would normally look at it. It creates a more intense association to the sea and to the sensation of staring at the horizon. I have always found a soothing quality in the horizon: it naturally draws the gaze and appeases the eye. In this regard I have drawn much inspiration from Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto's work on seascapes. In *Seascapes*, Sugimoto suggests that the sea acts as a link between the past, present, and future. The artist captured hundreds of black and white photographs of the motionless ocean from all around the world. Repetition is used as a tool, and the calm simplicity of the images becomes meditative. In this series, Sugimoto speaks of the "shared vision" that the seascape offers us, unlike the ever-changing landscape of the world. In an interview given in 2018 at the Enoura Observatory in Odawa, Japan, Sugimoto argues that seascapes are pivotal in that they are the only scenery that we, in our modern world, still share with the ancients: "I imagined their vision of the world, and compared it to my own vision as a modern person. I wondered what kind of scenery we could all share. I thought it could be seascapes." Urbanization, global warming, and the over exploitation of natural resources are deeply affecting our planet and irremediably changing its landscape. Coastal areas may be subject to change, as coastlines advance or recede in time, but ultimately the place where the sea meets the sky remains unfazed by the years. When we gaze at the horizon and stand where our ancestors have once stood, we may for an instant share their vision of the world.

The map over Sideby was drawn freely, without the aid of a projector or some mathematical calculations, but with a simple screen shot from GoogleMaps as a reference. By choosing a more intuitive approach to drawing it felt as if I was coming closer to the cartographers of old, who had to rely on their empirical knowledge of the world, and when their knowledge proved insufficient they would simply use their imagination to complete the map. The walls are covered with layers of deep blue paint; blue, a color that I strongly associate with nostalgia, seemed to be the perfect choice for the background. Sea and land are seen, almost equally dividing the space. Similarly to portolans or portulan charts (ancient nautical charts which appeared towards the end of the thirteenth century), this map does not detail the inland: it remains void, empty of all patterns, whereas the sea is riddled with pale white lines that seem to extend ever further beyond the horizon. The coastline, drawn out with bronze pigment, shimmers as gold in the sunlight or swiftly disappears into the shadowy background. I think the reason why I chose to picture a map of the area is because I wanted to distance myself from the traditional romanticized vision of the sea: no idyllic landscape painting bathed in fading light, but rather a different kind of approach to the seascape, where beauty is found

in simplicity.

Alongside mapping the unknown, the point of cartography has also been to find your way home, your “home port”. It was an insurance of safety: the safety of knowing your location at sea and find the way to your destination. This map probably suggests vastly different things to different people and its meaning will change accordingly. Perhaps some will recognize the area while others will only see a terra incognita, an unknown land of no particular significance to them. That is when the map becomes a simple thing of beauty, a purely aesthetic object that is only meant to be looked at and enjoyed for what it is. But when I look at it, I see a place that I know; a place that I have come to love, and that I can call “home”.



Reflections

The sea is a space where myths and imagination meet, and where one can ponder about the origin of cultures, the origin of our world, and the journey it took to get where we are now. However, it is also a physical environment facing very real and concerning threats. It has been shown time and again that climate change will fundamentally alter the structure of oceans and directly impact marine ecosystems and human societies. These ecosystems are centrally important to the biology of the planet, and recent studies indicate that rapidly rising greenhouse gas concentrations are steadily increasing the risk of fundamental and irreversible ecological transformation. Denial of these risks by governmental authorities only adds another layer of threat by encouraging public mistrust in scientific research (for e.g. Trump government in the USA). There is a constant ambivalence between what we want to see and what is actually happening. Even today, our vision of the sea remains very romanticized – as seen through the ideal of the Finnish summer. But it only allows the harsher realities of life to be hidden away behind a deceitful veil of beauty and tradition. Man created all the myths and poetic notions surrounding the sea, yet he is actively contributing to the abuse and destruction of the resources it has to offer.

While writing my thesis I realized that my work process was deeply anchored in nostalgia. I have come to see that this feeling can be somewhat problematic: nostalgia is associated with a yearning for the past, and induces a sentimentality which can hinder objectivity – especially while examining one's own past and memories. The sea has always felt like a very nostalgic place to me, and I have found it difficult to distance myself from this feeling. It is a bittersweet sensation, and can be quite pleasant; but I do not believe that it should be indulged, lest we should drown in it.

I realize now that my position as an artist is ambiguous: it strikes me as quite easy to fall into the vacuum of one's own work and forget about everything else. The relevance of my work outside of my personal circles is questionable; this project is clearly important to me and translates into a very personal visual interpretation, yet others might not find it as compelling as I do. This project reminded me that what I do as an artist raises philosophical, and even moral issues: can one simply make art for art's sake, in mindless pursuit of the aesthetic without challenging one's position as a human, as an active element of this world? As it progressed I became more and more aware of my surroundings and of how very actual my work is, in light of today's environmental challenges. The ambivalence of the traces we leave behind us has come to my attention, and I wish to explore this aspect more in future projects.

Our lives may be fleeting, but the evidence of our presence remains.

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