

Works Mafel

**Inaugural Triennial
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Nicole Miller, *Underwater New York*

HETEROTOPIA: AT THE WATER'S EDGE

“The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.”

—Michel Foucault

A heterotopia, said Foucault, is a real place. It stands alongside and apart from the structures of everyday life. A heterotopia is a place of deviation or crisis or sacred order; exclusion, exception, or promiscuous mingling. In cities around the globe, heterotopias often spring up near the water. Think of the island prison of Alcatraz. Or the honeymoon capital of Niagara Falls. Cyber-spammers in the South Pacific or the water protectors at Standing Rock or Shanghai's Long Museum West—a *wunderkammer* built by a billionaire on the banks of the Huangpu River. Unlike a utopia, which represents the perfection of an ideal, a heterotopia provides a “mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live.”

Think of the *Works on Water* inaugural triennial, which convened in Lower Manhattan in June 2017. Consider this action-space as both a site of heterotopia and an invitation to other sites—perceived and imagined, contemporary, historical, or speculative—at the water's edge. At 80 Greenwich Street, 3LD Art & Technology Center provided the nerve center for a diverse set of activities and energies, including expeditions, conversations, video, performance, interactive installations, and urban mapping. The site is blocks from the Hudson River and steps from the old shoreline where, in 1609, the Lenape might have seen Henry Hudson's ship, the Half Moon, as it moved upstream. It sits deep in the present-day Financial District, near the New York Stock Exchange and Arturo di Modica's *Charging Bull*, a bronze tribute to commodity markets and aggressive economic growth. By both its proximity and its stance apart from these sites, *Works on Water* reimagined these spatial relations and their embedded histories.

Inside the entrance to the exhibition, visitors encountered *A Decade Platform* (2017), a flotilla of boats built over ten years by the boatbuilding and publishing collective Mare Liberum. In Latin, the group's name means The Free Seas. It recalls the book of that name by Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius. Published in 1609—the year Hudson entered New York Harbor under the flag of the Dutch East India Company—the book defended

the right to free trade on international waters. Though the precept once sanctioned imperialist expansion, today, *mare liberum* has been claimed by the Gowanus-based artist collective, whose open-source methods and “right to the city” ethos stress that our waters are the commons. *A Decade Platform*—boats used in performances, demonstrations, participatory actions—contests Wall Street values and the bullish expansion that benefits the few.

Artist Nancy Nowacek's work also claims the waterways as public space. *Citizen Bridge*, her proposal for a floating walkway between Red Hook, Brooklyn and Governors Island, questions the current borders of the city and its pedestrian pathways along an established grid. If walking on water seems like a utopian dream, it's no more fantastic than the grid itself, imposed by nineteenth-century city commissioners over glacial pathways, rolling hills, and outcroppings of Manhattan schist. Like the Commissioners' Plan, Nowacek's vision is shaped by the contingencies of modern bureaucracy. Her design and engineering require close collaboration with governing bodies from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to the Port Authority and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Presented in the exhibition as a two-person performance, *Walking on Water: The Play About the Bridge* framed her project as a demonstration of active citizenship. Fortunately, *Citizen*

Bridge retains a sense of the marvelous. Imagine standing on that threshold between land and water, between the bright sky and the riverbed, in the churning passage where tide and current collide.

Mare Liberum and Nowacek's work are both in dialogue with other forms of social practice presented by *WoW*, including *Tide and Current Taxi* (2005–17), a rowboat taxi built and operated by Marie Lorenz to take New Yorkers through the city's waterways, and Mary Mattingly's *Waterpod* (2008–10) and *WetLand* (2014–17) projects—mobile, floating experiments in sustainable living—commemorated in her 15-minute video, *Mittere* (2017). These projects traverse zones that are often restricted by law or environmental hazards. Like Nowacek, Lorenz and Mattingly navigate complex and changing terrain with amphibious skills—including, at times, the power of invisibility.

Similarly, Torkwase Dyson speaks of her ongoing work, *The Color of Crude*, as a clandestine operation. On oceanic dives in the Atlantic, the interdisciplinary artist contemplates the spatial histories of the slave trade and our current industrial economy. As the site of oil extraction, the ocean floor provides the hidden infrastructure for global trade. Slipping below the water's surface, Dyson captures moving images of this secret geography. "I mean to capture with my lens particles, light, air, refraction, value, motion and darkness to give the audience a visceral experience that is contemplative of the conditions our oceans host," she writes. Layered and filtered into a multi-channel video installation, the work's shifting patterns and colors become a field of abstraction embedded with the story of extraction. Like the encryptions of a secret agent or spy, Dyson's digital rendering encodes the immensity of the sea and its manifold economic, ecological, and social relations in a new, sensuous form.

Working at the boundary of the seen and the unseen, Floating Studio for Dark Ecologies (FSDE) aims to make visible the role and residue of human activity on the environment. In the exhibition, their sculptural installation, *A Field Guide to the Place Where You Are* (2017), translated their larger project, *A Field Guide to Newtown Creek*, into the gallery by mapping the relationships between the visitor and the built environment. A series of flags plotted fourteen items in the space, including infrastructure and artwork, within the historical topography of 80 Greenwich Street. From the top of a lifeguard ladder, the viewer could see the social, economic, and ecological systems that collided in the gallery and extended beyond it.

"Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time—which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies," writes Foucault. "The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time." We know this experience from libraries or museums, which enclose "all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes" in a single volume of space. In this exhibition, multiple temporalities converged and entangled: the linear rationality of the visitor on Eastern Standard Time; the overlapping historical geographies of Eve Mosher's *Liquid City: Desire* (2017), which invited visitors to map the pre-industrial waterfront; the webbed net of memory in *Building a Better Fishtrap* (2017), Paloma McGregor's interactive installation that collected visitors' written histories of water for use in future performances; the recursive cycle of tidal time in Sarah Cameron Sunde's video installation *36.5 / A Durational Performance with the Sea* (2017). In Sunde's iterative work, the artist stands in a tidal bay for the full duration of the tidal cycle. Performed at sites from Maine to the Netherlands and Bangladesh, the piece enacts a direct encounter with the water, where the artist's body hazards the ebb and flow of changing ecologies. In

the exhibition, Sunde projected video footage from her performances onto four screens enclosing modular, cushioned seating. Entering the panorama, we left behind the atomic clock for a place where the body keeps time. In the urban centers of late-capitalism, a heterochrony strikes at established protocols and markers of value. It reminds us of the imbrications of past, present, and future and—where diverse systems collide—implicates us in an ethos of interconnectedness.

Beyond the gallery, past, present, and future converged in the interactive expedition *Sunk Shore* (2017). Devised by the artist collective TRYST (Paul Benney, Carolyn Hall, and Clarinda Mac Low), *Sunk Shore* created an augmented reality through sensory engagement and cheap props. Our guides, dressed in the orange jumpsuits of municipal workers or inmates, steered us through the streets of Lower Manhattan, conjuring the porous borders of the pre-colonial shoreline and the hard edge of the modern city braced against the rising sea. We reached Mary Miss's South Cove in Battery Park City in the year 2080, where a construction barge was moored near the pier. "A floating home," our guides told us. "Here, in the future, this is how people live." As we moved along the walkway, someone on a park bench in the year 2017 said to her friend: "A floating home? I didn't know anyone was living there."

Does the illusion expose the illusory structures of "real" space and time? Here, our belief in endless growth or our own impermeable borders became insubstantial. So, in Foucault's telling: the boat, tracing a line between points on the map, its routes an invisible architecture standing alongside our own. "...if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and that, from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious

treasures they conceal in their gardens, you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development....but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination."