



Kate van der Drift

by Jamie Hanton

Taped to the wall above the desk in Kate van der Drift's studio is an intricate watercolour rendition of a map of Helensville showing the consequences of a 1-2m rise in sea level. Much of the historic township is submerged. On the same wall is a printed photo of Helensville Bakery – the eponymous sign above the door is reflected in the water lapping at its entrance. There is a sense of bathos in the juxtaposition of these images. The emotional distance of the scientific forecast – just another illustration of an inevitable global phenomenon – and the almost comic absurdity of the very local results on the most unassuming of businesses. Water is the core generative focus of van der Drift's art, however it is difficult to reduce her work to a simple message or function. While her chosen subject could be described as 'serious', van der Drift has opted for a poetic approach where the image remains the primary concern.

Her working process begins at the site, photographing landscapes that she will then print and work into by hand, subtracting landscape features by adding atmospheric elements and painting thin layers of white wash onto the surfaces. These modifications are then repeated during digital manipulation. The result is a dreamlike aesthetic that mixes awe and melancholy; a combination which has its roots in the romantic sublime of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where ideals of beauty were tied to re-invigorated notions of Nature running wild and asserting its dominance over the relative insignificance and futility of humanity. In van der Drift's latest photographic series the world is softened – visually dampened by a ubiquitous mist. Dense mist veils the moon in *There Will Be New Life (But Not In This Sea)* (2013); blanketed and unable to see ahead, the world shrinks around the viewer, who is at the mercy of the enveloping environmental conditions.

Van der Drift's photographs are just one part of a rich multi-disciplinary practice which includes drawing, writing, and performance. Underwritten by thorough research and critical self-reflexivity these threads all inform and influence one another. In 2010 van der Drift undertook a collaborative project

OPPOSITE:
Everything Dissolves Eventually 2014
Giclée photograph on matte paper
(ed. 5) 870 x 1220mm.



exploring the utopic potential of islands – metaphorically and tangibly. *The Patriarchy Free Zone* created a physical space to explore and discuss what a world free of the systemic injustices of patriarchy might look like. Images from the series *They Could Have Stayed Forever* were taken while the artist was working on a superyacht, encountering other systems of power and observing the ability of a handful of people to temporarily flee or escape land for periods of time, and, perhaps in the longer-term, build islands, retreats, or havens – tax or otherwise. The consistent prophetic titling of van der Drift's works and series – *There Will Come Soft Rains* (2013), *Everything Dissolves Eventually* (2014) – including her most recent exhibition, *Changing Shores of Shadow*, implies a future where these privileged modes of egress will be impotent.

JMW Turner's *The Temple of Poseidon at Sunium (Cape Colonna)* (1834) does not depict the grandiose place of worship at its prime, but the ruins scattered across a peninsula cast in ominous cloud approximately 2000 years later. These ruins and others like them became the focus of contemplation in the Romantic mind; setting the viewer loose in time, to hover amongst places in the past, present and future.¹ In Kate van der Drift's scenes the landscapes are people-less but ruins are everywhere. However, rather than the conspicuous temples and castles of the Romantics, the everyday bears witness to an unspecified period of time passed: umbrellas dot the landscape, deck chairs speak to a precarious situation as black clouds roll in overhead threatening to sweep away the flimsy structures, and vivid red dashes mark the raised white curbs of a cracked and dusty carpark no longer in use.

Despite the banality of the subject matter there is genuine pathos and beauty in these images. The poetic frisson of the potential apocalypse – or whatever event has left these places seemingly frozen in time – is captured in a certain light and by careful compositional framing. As philosopher Jacques Rancière has stated, creating new perceptions of the world is dependent on the production of a sensory form of 'strangeness', it is this rare feeling that pervades the work of Kate van der Drift.²

OPPOSITE (LEFT TO RIGHT):

Everything Dissolves Eventually 2014
Giclée photograph on matte paper
(ed. 5) 870 x 1220mm.

Everything Returns to the Sea 2014
Giclée photograph on matte paper
(ed. 5) 870 x 1220mm.

1. Brian Dillon, *Ruin Lust*, London: Tate Publishing, 2014, pg 6.

2. Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, London: Continuum, 2010, pg 142.







LEFT TO RIGHT:

They Could Have Stayed Forever 2013

Giclée photograph on matte paper

(ed. 5) 655 x 655mm.

Mornings Are Bright And The Night,

Gloriously Black 2013

Giclée photograph on matte paper

(ed. 5) 655 x 655mm.



LEFT TO RIGHT:

Here or There 2013

Giclée photograph on matte paper
(ed. 5) 655 x 655mm.

There Will Come Soft Rains 2013

Giclée photograph on matte paper
(ed. 5) 655 x 655mm.



Artist's studio 2015.

OPPOSITE:
Gallery installation 2015.



BORN: 1985, Hamilton

LIVES: Auckland

EDUCATION: Bachelor of Fine Arts, Otago

Polytechnic

AWARDS/DISTINCTIONS: Best Installation, OUSA

Art Week (2010); Project Drawing Award, Otago

Polytechnic (2009)

PUBLIC EXHIBITIONS: *From Now On (No Garden of Eden)*, Wallace Gallery, Morrinsville (2013); *Push To Talk* (with collective We Are Optimistic), One Day

Wonder Series, Pearce Gallery, Auckland (2013);

Push To Talk (with collective We Are Optimistic),

Qubit - A Weekend of Contemporary Performance

Art, The Anteroom, Dunedin (2011); *Patriarchy Free*

Zone Imagination Station (with collective We Are

Optimistic), Otago University Art Week (2010);

Domestic Terror, Centre of Contemporary Art,

Christchurch (2010); *Let's Roar Loudly! Symposium*,

Pioneering Women's Memorial Hall, Dunedin (2010)

PUBLICATIONS/ARTICLES: 'Van der Drift Photos'

by Hana Aoake, *eyecontactsite.com*, Jun 2015; 'A

subtle sense of identity' by Terry McNamara, *The*

New Zealand Herald, Jun 2015; 'Kate van der Drift:

Waterlogged' by Rebekah White, *Pro Photographer*,

Jun/Jul 2015, pg 7; 'Art Seen' by James Dignan,

Otago Daily Times, Dec 2013; 'Art Seen' by Julie

Jopp, *Otago Daily Times*, Dec 2012; Lonie, Bridie and

Sandra Müller, *Qubit: a weekend of contemporary*

performance art, Port Chalmers: Anteroom

Publishing, 2011; 'Thought Provoking Art. Another

World Is Possible' by Bell Murphy, *Marrow Magazine*,

Oct 2010; 'Domestic Terror', *coca.org.nz*, 2010; 'SITE

in Dunedin' by Jodie Dalgleish, *eyecontactartforum.*

blogspot.com, Nov 2009

