



JUNE 09 ~ AUGUST 19

INTERRELATIONS:

a third perspective

Abdi Osman

curated by Ellyn Walker

Inspired by the tides of/in Campbell River, Somali-Canadian artist Abdi Osman explores questions of place and place-making in this new work through a focus on water as a living, shared relation.

Ellyn Walker

A mesh of roots makes slow haste!

the gaping sea beckons and breaks you. the impotence the imploring the inured. the inexact. the crisis. the crease. port is increasingly distant. you ache for a semblance of, the vantage of this one. the proliferation. they are out of sight until they are a sightline. .2

– Asiya Wadud

I recall waking up each day to discover what it had brought us, and what it had carried away. The word gaze only applies to water. To look into this water was to look into the world, or what I thought was the world, because the sea gave one an immediate sense of how large the world was, how magnificent and how terrifying. The sea was its own country, its own sovereignty.³

– Dionne Brand



Abdi Osman, panoramic study, 2022

What is in view when we look at, into, or out from the shore?

Habitable and uninhabitable realms.⁴

Artist Abdi Osman's panoramic photograph that looks out to the sea begs this question, and more. The triadic image is a study and provocation for the exhibition, which explores the constellatory acts of looking, seeing, and siting. *Can there be, besides two, a third perspective?*⁵ asks cultural theorist Sylwia Wynter. What she is referring to with this question is the need to regard and understand history always as *histories*--that our very existence and ongoing realities are bound up in each others', in multiple, not binaried, ways. A potent symbol of this/these interrelationship(s) is water, which brings with it complex histories of local and global Indigeneity and diasporas, enslavement and indentureship, (im)migration and freedom-seeking; where, with every turn of the tide these histories come to the fore.

The order of the earth.⁶

Osman's new work, a large-scale multi-media installation that comprises the exhibition *Interrelations: A Third Perspective*, forefronts the idea of interrelations using water as its focus, where inside the gallery, lush larger-than-life video projections take over the walls and spill onto the floor, showing stunning oceanic views that visitors walk directly into. The central mechanism at work here is that of representation: the immersive nature of the installation's massive shimmering projections lends itself to the presentation space in particularly haunting ways, what scholar Christina Sharpe describes as "in the wake."⁷ The Campbell River Art Gallery features a series of vertical pillars that interrupt the room, reminiscent of hull architecture such as the load-bearing beams that would have been found in the belly of slave ships. This reference is made concrete through the physical representation of a historic slave ship, gently raised on a rectangular platform off the floor, in the middle of the room. Visitors can easily recall the sounds of the waters' rolling waves while enveloped in an audio soundtrack that steadily resounds throughout the space and features a noticeably African cadence. At once the speaker's accent conjures the Middle Passage and echoes distant and diverse geographies and their respective and interconnected histories. The speaker posits statements about decolonizing how we understand colonial settlement in the West, in North America, reciting select parts of Wynter's essay "1492: A New World View" (1991) that inspired the artistic and curatorial thinking around this project as a whole. These statements intersperse this essay as poetic anchors, too, creating a citational lineage of conceptual interrelations. These correlations.⁸

The notion of a third perspective beckons critical and intersectional thinking that every human is capable of. We are not simply Black and White, settler and Indigenous, man and woman, and so on. Binaries do not accurately reflect the complexities of our histories and of our present lives. Instead, we are interrelated, we are complex; wherein water reminds us of this through its ongoing-ness as a force that has brought and continues to bring diverse peoples to these territories. Diverse voices and sounds contribute to the exhibition to further demonstrate this inter-relationality--the aforementioned audio installation fills the gallery space; quiet field recordings of shorelines play aloud in the accompanying Reading Room; and in public space, two commissioned texts by poet Cecily Nicholson and scholar Rinaldo Walcott appear on bus shelters. Within the gallery, objects collected from Campbell River's shore dot the room, including metal buckets full of water, pots of freshwater--things we all have relations to. The territories from which we present these works are the unceded lands of the Ligwílda'xw people, where the We Wai Kai, Wei Wai Kum, and Kwíakah First Nations, have lived for thousands of years, in addition to many other Indigenous groups. Today, what is commonly known as Campbell River is home to diverse Indigenous people, settlers, and arrivants, all who have found themselves at these shores for various reasons and by differing means.

A human history as the history of how we represent the life that we live to ourselves.⁹

However, too many Indigenous nations across what we today call Canada have yet to achieve true sovereignty in cultural, legal and material ways; and Black people still continue to live under the continued logics of white supremacy, including the constant threat of violence and death by the state. White supremacy affects all of our lives, and so, we must all contribute to its dismantling in order for every living being to live more livable lives. In this way, the contours of your freedom are also undeniably bound up in mine, wherein, "freedom marks an individual and a collective desire to be in common and in difference in a world that is nonhierarchichal and nonviolent,"¹⁰ writes Walcott. Walcott importantly reminds us that "the ways that human beings share common experiences of the world we inhabit do not have to erase individual wants, desires, and needs."¹¹ This means that one's truths do not have to elide others' sovereignty. With this erasure of the line.¹²

In our urgent moment of environmental crises, we share this: water. Water is a lifesource that unites us all -- in Campbell River, and beyond. Water as both sight and site: sight of beauty, expansiveness, movement to other worlds: site of shared relation, contestation, in need of urgent care.

As Walcott posits,

"water is the foundation of the encounter and water is the language of the possible. We meet at the water's edge, its waves, its sands, its lands -- we meet to begin anew.¹³

A world created for us.¹⁴

Let us meet in this moment, in this room, at the shore, to re-commit to caring for water as our shared and sacred relation.



Abdi Osman, boats study, 2022.

¹ Cecily Nicholson, glacial drifts, in Harrowings, Vancouver: Talon Books, 2022.

² Asiya Wadud, No Knowledge is Complete Until it Passes Through My Body, Brooklyn: Nightboat Books, 2021: 48.

³ Dionne Brand, A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging, Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2001.

⁴ Sylwia Wynter, "1492: A New World View," in Race, Discourse, and the Origins of the Americas: A New World View, Vera Laurence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (eds.), Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991: 25.

⁵ Ibid, 7. | ⁶ Ibid, 50.

⁷ Christina Sharpe, In the Wake: On Blackness and Being, Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

⁸ Ibid, 49. | ⁹ Ibid, 48.

¹⁰ Rinaldo Walcott, The Long Emancipation: Moving Towards Black Freedom, Durham: Duke University Press, 2021: 2.

¹¹ Ibid, 2. | ¹² Ibid, 49.

¹³ Rinaldo Walcott, Untitled, Campbell River: Campbell River Art Gallery, 2023.

¹⁴ Wynter, 27.

