oceans of the unknown

Vanessa Lucieer

Through the models, sculptures and etchings in this exhibition, I wish to share with scientists, artists and the public my curiosity about the ocean and its wonders. The ocean is vast, remote and largely unfamiliar. Our efforts to define it test our ability to capture data using sound, vision or light with robotic technologies that spread our sensory reach hundreds or thousands of meters below the surface. In my work as a marine spatial analyst, I use these data to draw seafloor landscapes, often revealing their contours and structure for the first time. I try to see what the patterns of seafloor shapes and textures can tell me about the habitats and lifeforms they embrace. A perpetual challenge is to understand the scale of mapping I must choose for this relationship between the seafloor and its biology to come into focus. To explore this challenge, each of my artworks plays on the concept of scale. The 'Kerguelen Kaleidoscope' lends a riot of colour to divinely shaped seafloor features that emerge at different magnifications: some up close, others far away. 'Tiny Captains in Southern Ice' are made so small to visualise the immensity of its mission to collect ocean data. The 3-D printed models of robotic underwater vehicles highlight our growing capacity to sample the seafloor in finer detail than has ever been possible beyond depths reached by divers. Through my artworks I have tried to show how complex, dynamic and unique this environment can be. Each artwork has accompanying text, video or graphics to put the work into a scientific context and answer an important question. Why is collecting this data important for society?

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Jan Hogan

Floating on the ocean surface, my body rises and falls with the swell, the rocks below appearing to breathe as the watery environment sways my perceptions. Buoyant in my wetsuit I follow pathways of sand that are revealed between the submerged archipelagos of rock formations. The Oceans of the Unknown project has drawn me underwater, to imagine and empathize with a world I can only glimpse. My skills as an artist that rely on observation, visual analysis and a haptic sensitivity are dulled in this environment dominated by sound. The liquid atmosphere distorts sight but transmits sonar so that sound becomes the language below the surface of the sea. Sound becomes as physical as touch in the ocean, a profound sensitivity in the life forms who reside here. In this porous realm, science enters into this sonic language to decipher the environment and understand the complexities of the formation of habitats. Clouds of sonar dots are sent out, rebounding off rock, sediment and grasses, following their rhythms and currents in systems we are attempting to fathom.

To understand these multiple transformations of material systems I work closer to home, swimming and drawing the rocks and reef systems in the Derwent estuary. I work directly on rocks exposed by tides, in the water, and along the tidal edges to engage with a material understanding of what the scientific data from the submerged underwater vehicle references. The saltwater transforms my artistic materials, revealing new behaviours as inks separate and congeals and paper collapses. Sand infiltrates everything, its coarseness revealing another aspect that ocean habitats contend with. This project has opened up another world, taking me below the surface, awakening other senses and artistic possibilities. Science has given reference to systems, their formations and actualizations in order to predict behaviours and habitats. Art's role is to imagine these systems as creative forces, composing them to see what they are capable of. Both art and science are creative modes of thought that attempt to bring order to chaos, to fathom the depths of the unknown.

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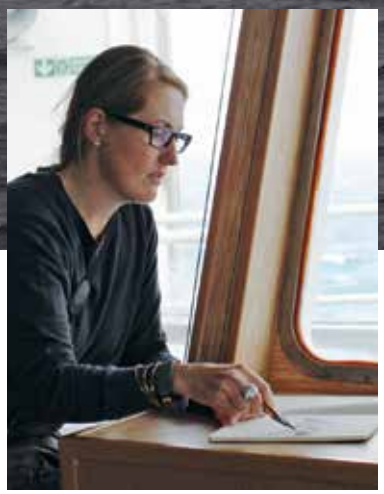

Annalise Rees

Drawing is an intrinsically human activity that traces our interactions with the world, allowing us to project, construct, imagine, describe and make sense. It is a way of thinking and doing. This occurs in many ways with the use of a range of technologies, from the humble pencil to highly sophisticated satellites and automated tracking devices. In this collaboration I have been most interested in the use of both manual and digital drawing tools used to describe the unknown maritime environment.

For me, drawing usually begins with direct observation, allowing for a very specific type of engagement and paying attention. It is an embodied process, a participation in the environment enacted through the act of making marks on a surface. It is drawing as an attempt to make sense. This project has posed a problem: how do you draw something you can't see, such as the world beneath the waves?

My investigation began by spending time at sea, focusing on the surface and the waves as a threshold between the real and the imagined, the known and unknown. Observed, abstracted and re-presented views of the ocean both above and below the surface have been explored. Digital drawing tools such as Google Maps and 3D drawing models examine the speculative nature of our drawn understanding. The virtual and conceptualised influence of the Cartesian grid and digital interfaces present an assumed distanced and objective view. These interject with the embodied, personally experienced immediacy of the hand drawn. Both ways of knowing and drawing present ambiguity, uncertainty and the unknown to remind us that drawing is an inherent human way of making sense of the world and our place within it.

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