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Siân Cann – Artist Statement



I am an artist and photographer as well as an environmental educator. My creative work mainly focuses on instant and analogue fine art photography, and incorporates many experimental techniques, including film manipulation and destruction, Polaroid emulsion lift, and most recently cameraless

photography.

I am continuously uplifted and inspired by the beauty and resilience of nature, and I am particularly drawn to things that I perceive to be both tough and tender, and hardy yet fragile. This fascination perhaps reflects my own challenges of living with type 1 diabetes since the age of three and then being diagnosed with proliferative diabetic retinopathy in 2020, which has severely impacted my eyesight. My practice now relies on my intuition with experimental photographic processes, my love for the beauty of the environment, and my ability to 'see' in a different way. Using alternative photography, and almost

'painting' with light sensitive materials, I create artworks that are as unique, wild, and visceral as the subjects that inspire me. The fluid dynamics of such photography also helps me to accept and embrace my own condition, for the movement of fluid in my photographic process directly reflects the changes in my ocular biofluids, as well as the ebb and flow of my own inner turmoil.

In May and June of this year, following a successful application to Arts Council 'Develop Your Creative Practice' fund, I travelled to Los Angeles to study at an experimental photography school called 'The School of Light'. Many of the works in Ripples Run Deep were created in the darkroom at the experimental school, and many of the techniques and thought processes were developed there and then consolidated in the waterways of Somerset.

It is my on-going mission to explore our deepest connections with Nature, and to give others the opportunity to immerse themselves in the whimsy and wonder of the world.

Watergrams



The watergrams in this show are a form of cameraless photography – literally, photographs made without the use of a camera lens.

This is an experimental analogue process that allows me to capture the movement of water over light-sensitive paper, essentially imprinting the flowing patterns onto silver gelatin, which I can then reveal using darkroom chemicals. This is photography but not as you know it, and what you see in these watergrams is the unedited and organic shape of water!

This elemental process has allowed me to tell visual stories of the world around us, and in doing so I have been surprised by the connections revealed between different forms and processes in nature – the patterns created by the

water often resemble other environmental textures and shapes.

Immersion in Nature has always been fundamental to my creative approach, but this technique takes it to a whole new level, as I work with (and within!) the water to find and reveal the stories it has to tell. In the dark, guided by the flux of the water and its subtle susurrations, I feel privy to an unseen beauty in this everyday element that we so often take for granted. I hope that in these images you too will find something unexpected and yet familiar, a new way of thinking about water. Ultimately, I hope these images provide a peaceful place to dive into and refresh your senses.

F(oiled)

This triptych was made in a waterway that was polluted with oil and chemical run-off. The flow of water has been completely blocked by the pollutants on the surface, as seen when you compare the results of these watergrams to those created in pure, flowing water. The cameraless process allows me to capture this change in the water directly onto the photo-sensitive paper, giving us a whole new view and understanding of the health of our waterways.

Emulsion Lift Shells

These shells were collected on visits to the Somerset coast, both from beaches and in local antique shops. I took a series of Polaroid photographs of the watergrams I had made for Ripples Run Deep, and then put those photographs through the Polaroid emulsion lift process. This is a manipulation technique to remove the middle emulsion layer (the actual Polaroid image) away from the plastic

and chemical layer encased within the Polaroid frame. This tricky and delicate process eventually enables the image to float free - it has the texture of wet tissue paper, ethereal and unruly. In a vat of water, I was able to painstakingly transfer these Polaroid images onto the shells, swaddling them forevermore in the ripples of water.

Cymatic watergrams

Cymatics is the study of visible sound and wave phenomena. The word comes from the Ancient Greek word *kîma*, which means 'wave'. These small, experimental watergrams were made in a shallow dish of water which was then vibrated at different frequencies, with the light-sensitive paper capturing the surface pattern created by that particular frequency, allowing us to 'see' the sound.

Ferrofluid

Ferrofluid is a liquid that contains tiny magnetic particles suspended in a liquid carrier, and is often called a 'magnetic liquid'. It was designed by NASA in 1963 as a way to move fuel in the weightlessness of space. Ferrofluid reacts to the attraction of magnetic fields, and so for these images I moved a powerful neodymium magnet under the Ferrofluid, and the interaction makes visible the magnetic field – so in these images you are looking at magnetism! Inks applied directly to the Ferrofluid solution enabled me to capture these stunning blues to really highlight the intricate and fascinating process, so reminiscent of many other shapes, patterns and organisms within Nature.