

Kovats uses drawing to think with: 'I draw to find my way out. ... It's my mechanism for map-making and my search engine, even when I don't know what I'm looking for.' The book we have published to accompany this exhibition, *Drawing Water: Drawing as a Mechanism for Exploration*, takes us on a journey through the sea as an experience of place, as a space and as matter, as a thing that is known, and historically has always been known, through drawing. The book is a companion to the exhibition, not a catalogue for it. Like *All the Sea*, the book is a collection of images and stories – a 'sea of stories' – with drawings by artists including Botticelli, Louise Bourgeois, Vija Celmins, Paul Nash, Lucy Skaer, J.M.W. Turner and Auguste Rodin, and drawings and images made by map-makers, writers, shipbuilders, whalers, soldiers, sailors, archaeologists, cartographers, scientists, uranographers, engineers and dreamers. *Drawing Water* expands the horizon for historic and contemporary drawing as ways of making sense of the world.

Available from the bookshop priced £24.95 throughout the exhibition.

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Tania Kovats Oceans

15 March – 25 May 2014

The
Fruitmarket
Gallery

Tania Kovats (b.1966, Brighton) finds in the natural world both her subject and material. This exhibition, *Oceans*, presents a selection of the artist's existing work made between 1993 and 2004 in the larger context of new work, all of which explores landscape, how we think about it, and how we experience it. Kovats approaches the natural environment both in terms of identifiable places – sites that can be mapped, named, inhabited and scrutinised – and as matter with properties that can be subjected to external forces and potential transformations.

The exhibition begins with *All the Sea* (2012–14), a work made from sea water collected from around the world by individuals who responded to a public invitation to help assemble the world's sea water in one place. Decanted into 365 glass bottles, *All the Sea* takes the form of a library of bodies of water, from the Adriatic to the Yellow Sea. It also represents an archive of moments in time, recordings of 250 human experiences with – and most probably in – the sea, capturing in bottles a substance that otherwise slips through our fingers.

Exhibition supported by **LOUIS VUITTON**

Some of the water in *All the Sea* was collected by the artist, not only from her local sea, but from some seas to which she journeyed seeking out especially places where two or more seas meet. The geographical locations of seas and their boundaries are defined by the desire to pinpoint and limit geographical areas, to rationalize wilderness. *Where Seas Meet* (2013–14) explores the distinctions placed on the blurry borders between different seas. Like their situation on maps, sea water specimens from neighbouring seas inhabit separate communicating vessels. A photograph of seas meeting situates the vessels, reminding us that the geographical line of division between the two seas takes no visible or tangible physical form.

Only Blue (2013) addresses the seas' geographical locations and visual forms as mapped bodies of water. Five tables present groupings of obsolete atlases with the landmasses of Africa, Australasia, Europe and Russia, India and The Americas covered in white so that bodies of water, their names and forms, take precedence over places on land: the blue of seas and oceans prevails, and geological topographic features and nations recede. These works propose another kind of encounter with all of the sea.

Brilliant blue drawings extend the horizon of the ocean realm. Standing apart from these drawings is *Fatima* (1993), a resin madonna contained in resin. The Virgin is important to sailors who for centuries have associated her with the navigating star Polaris, calling it *Stella Maris*, the Star of the Sea. Impossible to fix in sharp focus, the barely visible figure hovers between hologram and shadow, an ethereal guide in celestial navigation, a foil to the atlases in *Only Blue*.

Upstairs, sea and land meet, beginning with *Basalt* (2004), a drawing that is both abstract (in that the polygonal shapes generate their own pattern) and figurative (in its reference to the igneous rock basalt). Many of the sculptures and drawings are at once abstract and figurative, as in works

such as *Tilted* (2002), with its contrast between architectural and natural surfaces, the meticulously cast sedimentary layers a surprise after the stark, flat sides. The sculptures are partly made from what they represent, crushed stone reconstituted and transformed into geological features such as the interlocking basalt columns in *Basalt* (2004).

To make the series of sculptures entitled *Schist* (2001), Kovats used *Mountain* (2001), the design of which she based on a machine invented around 1900. Kovats poured colours of molten wax into the machine, allowing it to cool and set like sedimentary layers. She placed lead shot on top of the layers to act like a gravitational force to contain the layers of wax, so that when she turned the mechanism's handle, the piston, moving forward with a force like a tectonic plate, compressed the wax into hulking folds and ripples. Time is as critical to these works as wax, paint and compression.

Time is also important to all of the drawings in the exhibition, along with the properties of the materials and their interactions. As Kovats writes, 'Dipping a brush into black ink and allowing it to flood a puddle of water on dry paper I let a drawing make itself. I am not drawing anything but the drawing. I watch the clouds condense and disperse, a small climate system on the page. The drawing marks time.' Some of the drawings mimic rock formations, with ink bleeding into the graph paper grids to echo sea stacks and sedimentary layers; in other drawings the ink retains its fluidity and floods the paper in rivulets, droplets and blobs, echoing the movements and forms of water in nature.

The extraordinary expanse of *Sea Mark* (2014) immerses the viewer in the broken surface of the sea which recedes to a remote horizon. The wet marks originally made on the tiles dried and were fired, and return to their fluid origins, glossy and liquid. Made of barnacles and gesso, *Reef 1* (2014) and *Reef 2* (2014) are our companions in this floating world.