



51° 30' 28" N 04° 32' 77" W

Late Evening SAT OCT.19, 2013

## **Time and Water - Chronos and Kairos**

There is no mysterious essence we can call a 'place'. Place is change. It is motion killed by the mind, and preserved in the amber of memory.

- J. A. Baker

In 1988, Jacques Benveniste published a controversial study in the journal *Nature*, suggesting that water has memory. It was accompanied by an editorial from John Maddox urging readers to 'suspend judgement', because it defied conventional scientific understanding. The paper outlined how water retains the 'imprint' of an object, even after it has completely dissolved (which is the basis for homeopathy). Whilst hypothetical, it highlights an important aspect of our relationship to water: that it is contingent on memory and time.

Covering 70% of the planet, the ocean is both a material presence and a canvas to our cultural imagination. When we return to the ocean we experience its immediate, visceral tug, but also recall other times, multiple shorelines, and the many stories water brings to mind. We experience the past and present, something the Ancient Greeks described as the

confluence of 'Chronos' and 'Kairos'. Chronos is deep time; the chronological and geological baseline to our existence. Kairos is this time; the sudden, mutable and seasonal moment. Together, like major and minor chords, they shape our key experiences and define life's formative events, namely our memories. "Like circulating water, shifting tides, Chronos and Kairos time are the ebb and flow of our sensory experiences through life, shaping ourselves and marking out the events which define who we are and how we live with others," states Mary Geary in *Chronos and Kairos: Time, Water, Memory and the Wayfaring Riverbank* (2019).

Most human beings are profoundly affected by the sea. As a young girl living in Mexico, I was carried away by a strong current. Before I lost consciousness, I remember clearly the blissful feeling of looking up through the sea and the light. After this event, I would dream about being a mermaid. I also have a profound fear of the sea: its crashing waves, its power, its danger. Later, when my mother had terminal cancer and we would take long walks on the beach, she would say to me, 'This is what matters in life... not the material things, but what we smell like this salty air, the crystalline blue of the ocean on a warm sunny day.' Since then, a great deal of my photographic practice has been connected to landscape photography and the sea.

- Andrea Hamilton

As Wassily Kandinsky once wrote, "Those [things] that we encounter for the first time immediately have a spiritual effect upon us." This formative sense of wonder drew the artist back to the ocean repeatedly, and over two decades Hamilton created a document to a momentary event and the deep sense of oceanic time. Choosing a minimal composition, Hamilton focuses on the two elements which interact to create colour: sea and sky. All taken from exactly the same height, with the horizon as a central line to plane, Hamilton fictionalises the topographical facts, blurring the boundary between document and illustration. The photographs in this library act as a window into the phenomenological theatre of colour. Thus abstracted, the image could be anywhere; its power lies in the representation of a single Kairos - a slice out of time. "Repetition is a potent means of heightening the inner vibration and is, at the same time, a source of elementary rhythm which, in turn, is a means to the attainment of elementary harmony in every form of art," stated Kandinsky in *Line to Plane*.

In privileging colour in the composition, Hamilton preserves the essence of a moment, distilled like Philippe Claudel's parfums (*Parfums: A Catalogue of Remembered Smells*, 2012). The photograph is the catalyst to a memory, which echoes Benveniste's thesis about water's capacity to hold the image of a thing after it has gone. Hamilton's library, *Colour of Time*, comprises of epiphanies in colour, like musical notes, which punctuate the passage of time: vivid summer crimson sunset, pale oyster winter night, or a bruised autumn dawn. We see Kairos – E.C. White's, "Tunnel-like aperture through which the arrow has to pass" – and are reminded that the ocean – and life – is in a perpetual state of flux. A place of transition and transmutation, as T.S. Eliot noted, "The sea has many voices / Many gods and many voices... We cannot think of a time that is ocean-less."

*Time and Water* is a series from within *Colour of Time* where Hamilton has returned to her roots as a black and white darkroom printer. In these, our focus shifts from the light reflected to light out of darkness. Photography is all about light, it is the river that runs through photochemistry. In the first pair of images we see light bouncing off the waves, its glittering luminosity in contrast to the flat stillness of the ocean in the next image. Day and night; light and dark. In the absence of hue, we notice the flux, the silence, and how water interacts with light to absorb, reflect and contrast. The images carry an aura of mystery, capturing a sense of Chronos. This might be the ocean from the beginning of time, a facsimile of its primordial state, a world before the light was understood to be divided into its constituent colours. It is also relevant to note that Hamilton was first trained in black and white photography and dark room printing, so the images offer a return to the origin of her practice.

The works recall the monochrome seascapes of Sugimoto ("Taking a photograph, I realize, is to fossilize the present day"). Among his most enigmatic images, depicting only air, water and light, the series rests on the idea that views of the horizon at sea today are timeless and harking back to what the first men saw. "It seems to me that seascapes have the latent power to reawaken an awareness of the origins of consciousness in this present day". This observation takes us back to the first colour theorist Aristotle, who suggested that all hues came from white and black (lightness and darkness) and related them to the four elements – water, air, earth, and fire.

Central to each composition is the horizon line, dividing sea and sky, but also now and then, black and white. The horizon, like time, is not a straight line, but a segment from the great arc of the world (originally the word horizon meant 'to be encircled'). For Hamilton, the horizon is co-opted by the imagination, which searches what lies beyond, and a line to the spiritual.

What intrigued me is what is represented by this perfect balance, yin and yang, this dualism that pervades our being. The theory of yin and yang tells us that everything that surrounds us is made up of two opposite forces that harmoniously unify to favour movement and, in turn, change. So, while yin symbolises darkness, water, intuition and the ability to nurture life, yang constitutes momentum, luminosity, expansion, and fire. This concept ingrained in Taoism constitutes in itself a framework of undeniable reflection and, at the same time, wonder. We are all moved by the sea as if it had some control of our feelings. We are calm when it is. When it is agitated, so are we.

- Andrea Hamilton

Whilst Sugimoto abstracts to unify images from different places, Hamilton's images are taken from one viewpoint (51° 30" 28' N 04° 32" 77' W). She describes the individual works as, "One small view of time into the portal of nature's wonders, observing and recording the prismatic effect of light on the seascape". Each image captured can both trigger the feelings experienced, and elicit new sensations. This confluence of present and remembered is what underscores her attachment to place. "It was in reading Kandinsky that I set off on this 20-year colour study, looking for this link between the natural and the spiritual", Hamilton explains. What the series began to reveal was that by appreciating the infinitely mutable and nuanced beauty of one location, we also become attuned to the passage of time. Now and then: Kairos and Chronos.

For Hamilton, the process of long-term observation is transformative. Over time, our perception of tiny shifts and dramatic transfers accumulates; these are the memories that form our relationship to place. Going back we find it is similar, but not precisely as we remember. It changes, and we change. This is particularly true of the sea and sky, about which Aristotle observed: "When the body has no definite boundary of its own, it has no fixed colour". The more you look, the more you see, and soon patterns – like octaves or scales – begin to emerge. As Sugimoto said of his 10-year project *Colours of Shadow*, "While the entire project constituted a kind of observational apparatus, the observations only began once the apparatus was completed". One day reminds you of another, or throws it into relief, and you start to build a picture.

In returning to what she remembers, Hamilton finds the sea and sky dressed in different *Colour of Time*. In capturing, archiving and printing individual moments, like notes, the

project becomes a metaphor for the passage of time, which the artist also refers to as 'chords' and 'scores' of time. Each series, like Time and Water, is then presented to the viewer in its purest state; elegant slices from life's infinite tapestry. A nanosecond of time frozen from a never-ending flow, they represent both a portrait and a memory of place. Like a eulogy, those images printed from the archive are Hamilton's serenade to the ocean. Hamilton says, "The notion of 'the serial' capturing the changing mood of nature from a single constant standpoint has been an established concept in art history since Claude Monet painted his Haystacks and Rouen Cathedral series. Monet's identical views reflecting one motif in varying light and weather conditions, became one of the triumphs of art. An artist had dared to create a series of different images that started with only one motif. And Monet was less interested in the motif than in the sudden moment, the shifting sensory impressions and perceptions in the human eye. Influenced by scientific discoveries and by photographs, Monet tried to record 'what I sense I perceive'.

And here we come to the heart of the project, and the artist's compulsion to share her response to what was seen. To look deeply into the world, but also to be seen in return through the work: to make something out of this time for all time. Like memories, these images evoke a spiritual sense of place: moments of colour which touched the artist's soul. Looking at them, we share her understanding of nature's epic magnificence and we experience awe. Moments, flashing before our eyes, before the light disappears.

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<https://www.andreahamilton.com/projects/time-and-water/#image-0>