



PRESS RELEASE
MaryBeth Thielhelm
Waterscapes
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“A crooked house on the edge of the sea” is how MaryBeth Thielhelm describes her studio on an island off the coast of Maine where she lives and paints a quarter of the year. The transforming power of light is what influences her masterful paintings of water—as well as tide, time of day and weather.

This house on stilts in the ocean is where the *Waterscapes* came to be. Prior to this work, Thielhelm, a New York-based painter focused primarily on landscape. But painting water was something she always wanted to do. So two summer's ago—after reading an article about Emily Nelligan, a painter she admires who lives and works on a Maine island—Thielhelm went to Maine for the first time and spent solitary days observing the dramatic play of light on water. There the paintings—with names like *Emerald Sea*, *Wake* and *Celestial Sea*—were born.

Thielhelm, who was born in Connecticut, spent much of her childhood in Saudi Arabia, where she developed a love of light and an appreciation for the vastness of the desert. “The desert is really like the ocean,” she says.

Thielhelm's painting process begins with a square wood panel that she primes to a chalkboard finish. She then spreads the oil paint, which she reveres for its rich color and wetness, onto the wood and wipes it away. The initial process is loose—more like sculpting than painting. Thielhelm then “pulls the image out of the paint” and begins to build it up applying many more layers of paint.

Working in her ocean studio with her back to the window, Thielhelm paints from memory—not photographs—as she conjures up what she has seen the water do. “So much of it is just ingrained in me now. And when I turn my head, the water is right there.” In a way, the paintings are a mnemonic for light, sky and water.

In the final stage of the process, Thielhelm covers the paintings with a thick wax veneer. The seductive quality of the surface wax give the paintings a lushness that viewers respond to and want to touch. The paintings are evocative of standing in water—as though you are looking out at the horizon as it fades into the sky. While quite realistic, they also seem to dwell in the realm of imagination and metaphor. Some viewers have likened the *Waterscapes* to places they've read about in books. Others see something completely imaginary. “There isn't one meaning I attach to the work,” says Thielhelm. “As long as the viewer gets caught in it, and it moves them in some way.”



In a sense, Thielhelm's paintings stand at the intersections of solid and liquid, surface and depth, image and object, air and water, as well as movement and stillness.

The paintings seduce the viewer with their emotional and intellectual paradoxes: they are solid representations of the liquid sea—where the image of the sea is revealed beneath the veil of the wax surface of the paintings. In the same way, the surface of the sea reflects the sky and reveals the otherwise invisible wind and air while hiding what is underneath the surface of the water.

Thielhelm's paintings capture and express the timeless churning of the water by freezing it in a single idealized moment —almost as though the paintings were the platonic form of “ocean in middle distance.” The strength of Thielhelm's paintings come from containing the contradictions that are at their essence.

For Thielhelm, a painting is done when it suddenly exists on its own. “It speaks to me and is not part of me anymore. It becomes its own creation.”