

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW

At Simmons, 'Like Water' for spirit

By Mark Feeney | GLOBE STAFF MARCH 26, 2014



KINGSTON GALLERY

Mary Lang's "Near the Pump House, Auburndale, MA."

Water dominates this planet. Light dominates photography. So what's the relationship between water and light? Well, it's ambiguous. Water can't quite make up its mind about light. It reflects light. It also lets light in. It's mirror and lens, and to at least some degree a distorting lens, to boot. Back and forth, up and down, in and out: From that duality, all sorts of arresting visual effects arise.

For a decade, Mary Lang has been photographing water: as river, ocean, puddle, cloud, droplet; between banks, along beaches, in parking lots, on windows; in Auburndale, on the Cape, by the Oregon coast, in the Andes. Variety of type and location is one of the

attractions of water as camera subject. It's not quite as ubiquitous as light, but it's found in numerous forms all over the Earth even as it always remains the same: good old H₂O.

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There are 18 color images in "Like Water: Photographs by Mary Lang." The show runs at Simmons College's Trustman Gallery through April 17. The pictures vary in size from 7½ inches by 9 inches to 30 inches by 40 inches. Regardless of size, they're all about immersion — not the immersion that gets you wet (a pertinent concern), but the immersion that leaves boundaries behind. The only thing that locates these photographs is their captions. Few cartographic aids are as distinctive, or beautiful, as water: the shape of a lake, a curve of coast. The geography that interests Lang, though, is the kind found in the title of a famous collection of Guy Davenport essays: "The Geography of the Imagination."

In photographing water, Lang has said, she seeks "something intangible, impermanent, and luminous." Those qualities are all evident in "Like Water." These are quiet pictures. Lang's waves don't crash; they flow. One can more easily imagine her water evaporate than cascade or inundate. The power of water is there, but it has no need to call attention to itself.

It's up to each viewer to decide whether those qualities Lang seeks take a form that's more spiritual or strictly visual. Lang's consistent ability to present color in a handsome, unemphatic way conduces to either interpretation. The images create their own sense of reality, not so much flirting with abstraction as inviting it in for a chat. Attractive as these photographs are, they are anything but pretty. Don't expect to find them on a calendar or postcard. Not that there's anything wrong with calendars or postcards.



LIKE WATER: Photographs by Mary Lang

Trustman Gallery, Simmons College,
300 The Fenway, 617-521-2268.

<http://www.simmons.edu/trustman>

Closing date: April 17

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- **Photos: Lang pours her heart out**

But staying up to date and tracking road trips are the furthest thing from Lang's mind. That old putdown, "Hey, you're all wet"? Lang shows that it might also be considered a compliment.

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