Hydro-Logic

January 18 - March 5, 2016

Closed February 10 - 14

IDEA Space
Edith Kinney Gaylord Fountain Arts Center, 825 N. Cascade Avenue, Colorado Springs

Curated by Holly Parker, MFA

Hydro-Logic is an art exhibition and series of events that address key issues surrounding water, specifically industrial and post-consumer pollution, access, and extreme climate-related conditions.

In the gallery, artists and designers demonstrate diverse approaches to and innovative solutions for these issues through technically and aesthetically outstanding work.

In the community, the project engages its audience to explore the dynamic ways in which artists and designers approach challenges surrounding water to instigate activism and advance innovative solutions.

The project also includes a series of lectures, talks, and films that consider various aspects of the current local and global water crisis. The inclusion of community-based, interactive components within the exhibition models opportunities for collaboration, and creates a forum for reflection and discussion that connects the Colorado College to the broader community.

Sponsored by
The Cultural Attractions Fund, the Art Department Stimson Fund for Exhibitions, The Hubert Center for Southwest Studies, State of the Rockies, The Innovation Institute, and The Environmental Program.

InterDisciplinary Experimental Arts at Colorado College
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COLORADO COLLEGE
Hydro-Logics: Ideo, Teleo and Onto
HADLEY ARNOLD
Executive Director, And Land's Institute at Woodbury University

boundless water . deep water . dark water . surging water
ocean water . sea water . salt water . marsh water
swamp water . atmospheric water . fog water . dew water
frozen water . melting water . rain water . surface water
river water . white water . flood water . still water
pond water . clear water . ground water . body water
well water . drinking water . boiling water . cooking water
bath water . irrigation water . running water . dish water
laundry water . hard water . soft water . heavy water
waste water . black water . grey water . storm water
lawn water . urban water . imported water . big water
bottled water . conserved water . captured water
apportioned water . adjudicated water . contested water
embodied water . recycled water . source water
new water . native water . local water . slow water
holy water . one water

Spend some time with a list of waters, this one or your own.
Chant it. Picture it. Position each water in a continuum of
geography and time. Picture every dimension of your life,
immaterial and external, that water touches, reaches, powers, nourishes.

How is it that with all our forms of "knowing" water—through
our metabolic needs and sensory experience, through our
creation myths and civil engineering; through the hard sciences,
regional politics, information overload and the poetry of visual
arts—we could be so water illiterate? So water wanton, water
ignorant, water blind, water impoverished? When is the last
time you touched water, and were touched by it?

At the scale of the continent, the story has been well told how
19th century public policy, Euclidean geometries, and
technological progressivism launched from the East and shaped
our contemporary Western waterscape. Raoul Steiger, Rickmer
Worsley and a host of 20th century trans of Western history to
understand this alternate Genesis: how men, in the form of
centralized authority, vast capital, and engineering know-how,
separated water from earth, moved it where economic and
population centers were wanted, and grew within it a public
landscape dependent on systems managed by specialists,
leading to a built environment and civil society devoid of water
sense, water cognition, a waterless public imagination.

The argument, in a nutshell, is that once Big Water delivered
reliable supplies from systems out of our sight and out of our
control, water disappeared from the lexicon of daily experience
for most of us, rendering all but water managers—whether
farmers or technocrats—water dependent, water ignorant,
and water incompetent. For most of us, the thinking goes, who
needs to understand, value, or manage water when it has
already been done, and done well, for you? The rest of us are
rendered mere "rate-payers," and gladly obligated the role.

In this century, we live in an age of water disruptions. With an
atmosphere of chemistry altered and a hydrologic sphere
misallocated, we awoke to the vulnerability of dependence on
water systems designed for a Holocene natural order. Dry
will be dryer. Wet will be wetter. Reliability, volume, access,
and quality of water dislocations assured by 19th-century thinking
and 20th-century engineering are no longer certain.

How then, if we were to address the epistemic challenges put
before us by the official hydrologists of the West, are we to adapt?

Evolve? Regain a measure of not only water, but self-management
of our destinies around water? Wouldn't we have to rebuild not
only pipes and pumps, but our capacity for water awareness,
water stewardship, water competence, water love?
To address water as a necessary and integral part of human life in the West, not everyone need to pursue an application to engineering or pure science. Art, a common expression for our time, will require an effective, direct, and intuitive understanding of water. Design, science, history, and the human experience are all interconnected. Understanding the impact of water on the environment is essential. It is not a matter of reducing the amount of water we use; it is a matter of understanding the impact of our actions on the environment.

Dedicated, stagnant, and woody, water is a common theme. Charles Bowden, Gary Nabhan, and Craig Childs, the co-authors of this essay, have written extensively on this topic. In 1995, Los Angeles was the only city in the United States without a comprehensive water conservation program. With the help of Bowden and Childs, the city developed a comprehensive plan to conserve water. As a result, Los Angeles is now one of the most water-efficient cities in the world.

The question of “How can we conserve water?” becomes “What can we do to improve our quality of life?” The arts, and their mother, nature herself, provide a template for water conservation. This template is called Hydro-Logic and it is a combination of understanding and design. Design is the business of integrating the numbers of science, art, and the environment to produce plausible, and hopefully compelling, paths forward, and to sell them visually to the public imagination.

But as a transient from the humid East, and as a visual and intuitive being, scaffolded in the imagination by the force of huge water supply challenges in the West, the concept of water as a direct, scientific, and intuitive thinking as well as a scientific and intuitive thinking as well as science thinking, revealing history as well as the future, qualitative exploration as well as quantitative.

For example, the work of Butterfield, Sibill, the Lagers, and even Vitol operate. In a conversion moment, I enjoy looking at the objects included in the exhibition: the abstraction in Butterfield’s scale-less monumentality; the Lagers’ playful compositions and child-like palette; the de-gendered water streams of globalized consumerism; the iridescent and luminous treatments from water paintings by John Sibill; and the lonely sentry form of the Wanka Water vigil in its eastern landscape, watching and silently participating in its unique evolution.

But it’s not just the viewing, the consuming of the experience of water, that I value most about these works. It’s the empathy I feel for their making.
Edward Burtynsky

Represented in the Hydro-Logic exhibition are three images from Burtynsky’s Water series. Phosphor Tailings, Greenhouses, and Glacial Runoff imply a connected circle by demonstrating the associated effects of industrial and agricultural pollution on natural stores of ancient water found in glaciers.

I began to think about water as a subject for my work in 2007, while on a production tour photographing gold mines in Australia—the first continent in this era to begin drying up. Stories about farmers leaving their land desultorily were everywhere in the news. While there I met a photojournalist who recounted a story about an incident he had experienced in a bar in Adelaide. He ordered a beer and a glass of water. Finished his beer, paid the bill and was about to leave when the bartender stopped him and instructed him to finish his glass of water. Suddenly water took on a new meaning for me. I realized water, unlike oil, is not optional. Without it we perish.

In 2008 my research started in earnest. I wanted to find ways to make compelling photographs about the human systems employed to redirect and control water. I soon realized that views from ground level could not show the enormous scale of activity. I had to get up high, into the air, to see it from a bird’s eye perspective. Determined by the specifics of each location, I would find a way to depict the most telling viewpoints.

The ensuing four years found me at work in nine countries: employing location crews, using man-lifts, small fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters (both remote and piloted) and a specially designed fifty-foot pneumatic mast with camera mounted and fibre-optic remote. This pulling away from the earth has allowed me to see the world in ways once unavailable to artists. In addition, the evolution of high-quality digital camera equipment has allowed me to create crisp, finely detailed images from moving aircraft — something that could not be easily accomplished with older, analogue film systems.

As production on the Water project began to roll out, I categorized the images into: distress, control, agriculture, aquaculture, waterfront, and finally, source.

Distress included landscapes such as the Colorado River Delta, that has not seen a drop of water from that river in over forty years, and is now a desert. Or Owens Lake that saw its water diverted to Los Angeles in 1913 and is now a dry toxic lakebed.

Agriculture represents—by far—the largest human activity upon the planet. Approximately seventy percent of all fresh water under our control is dedicated to this activity. I went to China and Spain to see the process of farming fish and seafood. The section, Aquaculture provides a glimpse into a quickly growing and increasingly important food source.

Waterfront looks at the way we shape land to create manufactured waterfront properties, and speaks to me about the human need and desire to be near water—even if it is artificial. I went to India to witness the largest pilgrimage on the planet with thirty-five million people arriving on the holiest day to bathe in the Ganges and release them of their sins – an ancient spiritual belief in the cleansing power and sacredness of water.

Source comes from my journey to those places where a critical stage in the hydrological cycle takes place; in the mountains, containing glaciers and pure fresh snow. I went to northern British Columbia and Iceland to capture these images. They are the first landscapes in over thirty years I have taken that focus specifically on pristine wilderness, instead of the imposition of human systems upon it.
I feel this project encompasses some of the most poetic and abstract work of my career. While executing the Water project, I was pleased to see images emerging that referenced iconic images from my favorite painters, including Caspar David Friedrich, Joan Dubuffet, David Shapiro, and Richard Diebenkorn. The unique perspective that I adopted for this project, as well as its subject matter, allowed these influences to seep into my photographs.

Over the past five years I have learned a few things about water. When disrupted from its natural course there are always winners and losers. The moment water cannot find its way back to the ocean or be absorbed by the ground, we are changing the landscape. When a stream or river is diverted, all life downstream is affected and remains altered until water returns. Insects, plants, frogs, salamanders and countless other creatures—including people—have paid an enormous price because of our voracious appetite for water—and what we do to the earth while getting at it.

Human ingenuity and the development of its industries have allowed us to control the Earth’s water in ways that were unimaginable even just a century ago. While trying to accommodate the growing needs of an expanding, and very thirsty civilization, we are remaking the Earth in colossal ways. In this new and powerful role over the planet, we are also capable of engineering our own demise. We have to learn to think more long-term about the consequences of what we are doing, while we are doing it. My hope is that these pictures will stimulate a process of thinking about something essential to our survival, something we often take for granted—until it’s gone.

—Edward Burtynsky
Excerpted from the book Burtynsky: Water

About Edward Burtynsky

Edward Burtynsky’s remarkable photographic depictions of industrialized landscapes are included in the collections of over fifty museums around the world, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Tate Modern, London, National Gallery of Art, and Library of Congress, Washington, DC, the Reina Sofia, Madrid, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Burtynsky’s distinctions include the TED Prize, The Outreach Award at the Rencontres d’Arles, The Flying Elephant Fellowship, and the Robert Gernert Book Award. In 2006 he was awarded the title Officer of the Order of Canada and is the recipient of six honorary doctorate degrees.