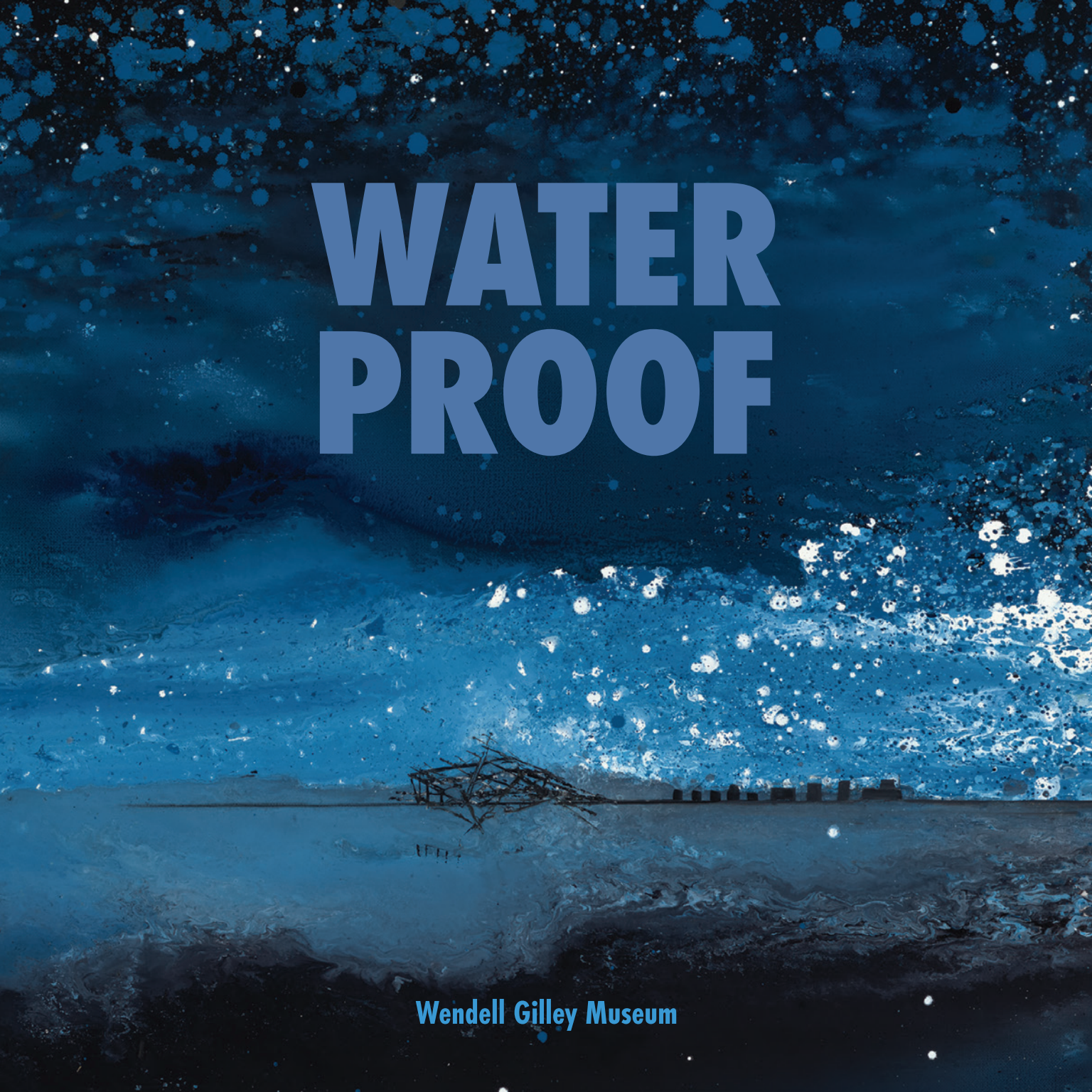


WATER PROOF

A blue-toned photograph of a body of water. In the foreground, there are dark, textured waves. In the middle ground, a wooden structure, possibly a pier or a small boat, is visible. In the background, a dark pier or structure extends into the water. The sky is dark with many small, bright white spots, resembling stars or distant galaxies.

Wendell Gilley Museum



Above: *Rotund Seaweed Vessel*, Jeannet Leendertse; rockweed, waxed linen, beeswax, and tree resin, 2024
Cover: *Stormy Night*, Anne Neely; oil on linen, 2025

WATER PROOF

MAINE ARTISTS REFLECT ON THEIR ENVIRONMENT

May 27 – August 22
2026

Curator: Elizabeth Awalt

Museum Director: Sean Charette



Wendell Gilley Museum, Southwest Harbor, Maine

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

Elizabeth Awalt

Krisanne Baker

Daisy Braun

Michel Droge

Sarah Haskell

Alison Hildreth

Jeannet Leendertse

Nancy Manter

Posey Moulton

Anne Neely

Celeste Roberge

Ian Trask

WATER PROOF: MAINE ARTISTS REFLECT ON THEIR ENVIRONMENT

The artists featured in *Water Proof* have lived and worked extensively in Maine, cultivating a profound appreciation for the state's natural landscape. Throughout their careers they have witnessed the decline of ocean species, endured severe storm surges, and experienced the effects of overdevelopment. As attentive observers these artists serve as valuable witnesses to environmental transformation and loss.

Several participants in the exhibition employ sustainable materials thoughtfully selected from nature to minimize ecological impact. Sarah Haskell incorporates natural dyes, such as indigo, madder, and iron, to color linen in her weavings. Jeannet Leendertse and Celeste Roberge responsibly harvest local seaweed for their three-dimensional works. Elizabeth Awalt integrates kelp and saltwater into her abstract paper-based paintings. Sculptors Posey Moulton and Ian Trask repurpose found objects and materials that might otherwise enter the waste stream; their sculptures and installations are designed for ongoing transformation and recycling.

A commitment to science-based climate research is evident in the work of Krisanne Baker, Michel Droge, Daisy Braun, and Anne Neely. Baker, Braun, and Droge have participated as resident artists on research vessels, engaging in research, education, and artistic creation while aboard. These experiences have profoundly influenced their work. Painters Neely and Droge explore themes of environmental loss, beauty, and foreboding through expressive oil paintings.

Rivers shape both Maine's small towns and the creative practices of Nancy Manter and Alison Hildreth. Manter, raised near the Penobscot River during periods of industrial pollution, draws inspiration from these landscapes for her abstract compositions of shifting planes and atmospheric spaces. Hildreth's refined drawings evoke maps of river systems and cardiovascular networks, underscoring the fragility of both our planet and ourselves.

—Elizabeth Awalt, Curator



Ebb and Flow
Ink and acrylic on paper, 2025
Courtesy of Caldbeck Gallery

ELIZABETH AWALT

Whenever I am near a body of water, I can hear the Sirens calling to me. Their whispers, “Come in!” are hard to ignore, and I rarely resist their invitation. When I first visited Swans Island in Maine forty years ago, the water was ice cold and painful to enter, yet I fell in love with it. Today, I swim in the island coves because the Gulf of Maine is warming faster than any other body of water in the world. Like many artists whose work is rooted in landscapes, I return again and again to beloved locations, where environmental changes become undeniably visible.

Ebb and Flow is part of a series of paintings created on paper, directly integrating local kelp and salt water into the artistic process. These works envelop viewers in vibrant colors and light, with fluid brushstrokes that evoke the organic life found in tidal environments. The interaction between kelp and pigment is distinctive; the alginate in the kelp repels the paint, resulting in unique patterns when the kelp is removed. Relinquishing control during the painting process allows the painting to expand, creating a balance between what is seen and what is felt.

KRISANNE BAKER

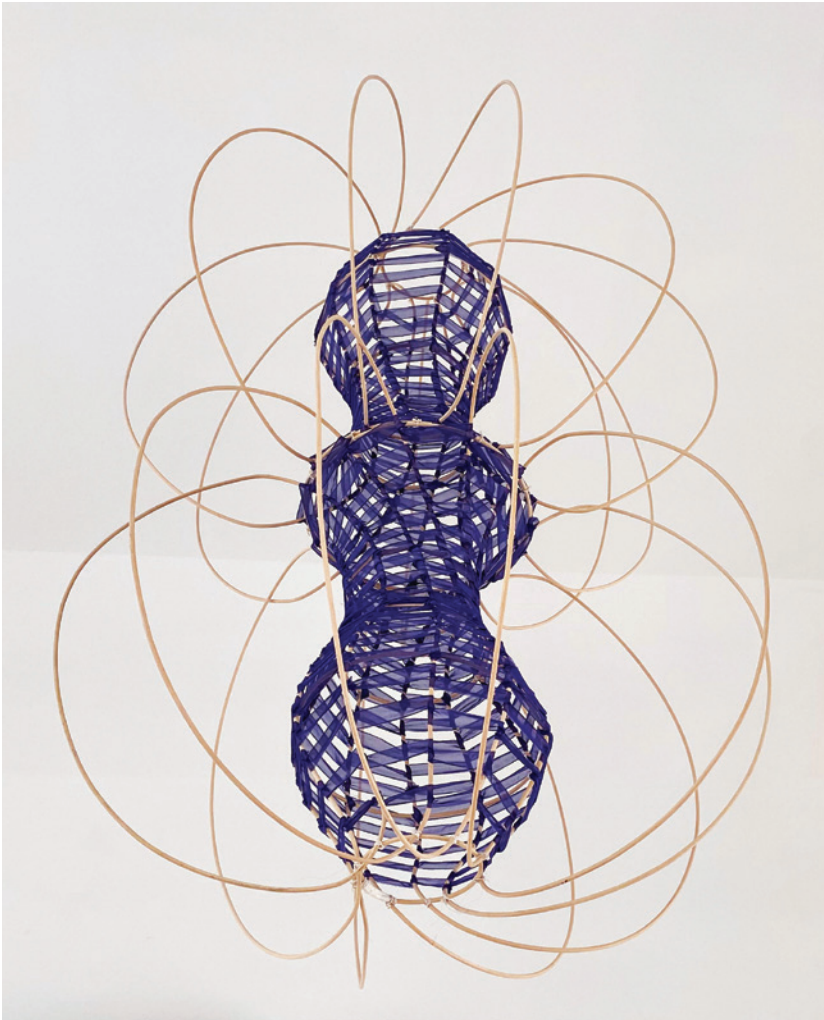
Besides Maine, one of my favorite places to snorkel and observe the symbiotic relationships of underwater life is on the Mesoamerican Reef which stretches 700 miles south from Caribbean Mexico to Honduras. The Mesoamerican Reef is the second largest barrier reef system in the



world. My research is focused on the planktonic base of the food chain in the oceans and the effects of ocean acidification, ocean fevers, and pollution.

In this painting, I've focused on the critically endangered elkhorn coral and its guardians—black-tipped reef sharks. Many ask, “Why are sharks so important?” and “How are sharks guarding the reef?” The relationship between the coral and the sharks is critical to the overall health of the reef and the ocean. Sharks are the apex predators of reef systems and are an integral part of maintaining the delicate balance of the food web; without them, the reefs cannot thrive.

Our health on land is inherently linked to the health of the ocean and all of its inhabitants. Coral reefs are the nurseries of the seas, providing protection to microscopic and small creatures until the time that many of these creatures are large enough to venture into the vast deeper blue. Rising temperatures and pollution-born viruses are causing these once-majestic elkhorn forests to succumb to bleaching and illnesses. Through awe, research and stewardship, my work strives to bring a voice to the voiceless, and a deeper understanding of our place on Earth.



Lonely Clione
Reed, silk and string, 2025

DAISY BRAUN

I have been thinking about plankton through sculpture for seven years. Plankton are a collection of plants and animals grouped together by their movement, rather than their anatomy. They drift through the world's oceans, carried by the current. Plankton have lived this way for millennia. They inhabited the sea before the continents held life, when the winds blew over bare rock. They floated as the world developed language, myth, agriculture, and machinery. Plankton quietly sustain life. They uphold the food web and produce over half of earth's oxygen. Every other breath we take is owed to them.

Plankton are acutely sensitive to their surroundings, and their responses to change ripple throughout the world. Collectively, plankton weave the foundation for life's shifting web. Each part depends on all others. The resulting tension is a creative force.

In the web, boundaries we've grown accustomed to no longer hold. The insides flow into the outsides. Over time, even the land swells and dissolves, fluid as the tide.

Could a person become a plankton?

MICHEL DROGE

Pour Your Heart In, *Cephalopod Limelight*, and *Sub Photic Celebration* are part of a larger body of work that emerged from a five-year exploration of the deep sea alongside scientists in Maine and in Costa Rica. This experience has deepened my commitment to protecting these fragile ecosystems. It is my belief that durational attention fosters connection, care, and ultimately, love. And I hope to share that awe.

As global demand for rare earth metals grows, pressure for deep-sea mining continues to intensify. Too often, what remains unseen is neither understood nor protected. The invisible and marginalized are easily overlooked and exploited, and that same danger threatens our oceans as mining interests move into the deep sea.

Through painting and drawing, I weave together the beauty of these mysterious underwater worlds with the mythology and literature of the sea, inviting viewers to join me in these dark, luminous, pulsing environments while advocating for the protection of these vital ecosystems and the creatures that inhabit them.



Sub Photic Celebration
Oil on canvas, 2022



SARAH HASKELL

Using naturally dyed threads, I weave, embroider and crochet, illustrating stories of love, loss, and longing. Through a deeply personal yet universal narrative, I explore the heartache of the ephemeral, the tender beauty of the natural world, and the astonishing gift of being human.

Water, especially salt water, is the tonic that inspires my art and revives my body and spirit. Never the same but always consistent, the dependable rhythm of the tides reminds me that all things exist in a constant state of flux.

As I witness the impact of human activity on this precious resource, I am moved by the ceaseless resilience and grace with which Mother Earth and her waters endure. While nature has the ability to absorb and recover from pollution and habitat fragmentation, it is our responsibility to support this healing.

My work honors this principle: that our human family and planet will only survive if we turn again and again to compassion, to empathy, to gratitude and love for one another and our home.

Calling in the Birds

Linen, rayon dyed with indigo, acorns, clutch, madder, iron and hand-spun paper, 2024

ALISON HILDRETH

The river is a highway to the ocean. Often starting in a crystal clear spring which flows into a stream, which can flow through swamps or forests or meadows before eventually emptying into a river.

As the river makes its journey to the sea it is disheartening to observe the many cases in which it is used as a dumping ground for everything from garbage, to old car parts and tires. Dams have also been harmful by widening the river and trapping swept-away trees and other debris. When one dam was removed, a man recounted taking 118 tires out of the exposed riverbed. Also, much of what goes over the dam is carried to the ocean adding to the trash already accumulated on the shorefront.

Over the years this has become more and more of a case of we humans fouling our own nest. However when the dams and the pollution are removed and the rivers can flush themselves out, fish and vegetation return. It is not only the beauty of the Earth at issue but our health and the health of all the other animals and plant life we share the planet with. We have a choice.

River 1

Pen and ink and color wash on Kitakata paper



WATER PROOF (WORRY AND WONDER)

We are reminded almost every day about what's going on with the waters of the world. It may be an uplifting story on NPR about a choir in England harmonizing with whale song, a disheartening report on how climate change is ravaging coral, or an urgent request for support from a conservation organization.* The messages are a mix of worry and wonder.

No matter how much we hear and learn, much of the time we don't see what is actually happening. Which is where the artists in this exhibition come in; they have snorkeled and scuba'd, spent time in research labs, studied seaweed, gathered flotsam and jetsam, or simply responded to the ways of water. Each in their own way provides the "water proof."

In her nearly 40 seasons on Swans Island, artist and guest curator **ELIZABETH AWALT** has witnessed the transformation of the sea in front of her coastal home. There are fewer crabs, mussels, periwinkles, and even barnacles in the tide pools she once studied and painted.

While she can testify to the changes wrought by climate shifts, Awalt can also highlight the splendor that remains. She and fellow diver **KRISANNE BAKER** go underwater to find that beauty, drawn by the colors and movements of the sea and its creatures. Their paintings bring to the surface the light of a precious and threatened world.

Thanks to the arts/science initiative at the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences in East Boothbay, **MICHEL DROGE** accessed footage of the ocean depths from studies undertaken by Dr. Beth Orcutt of the devastating effects of deep-sea mining. Despite those dire findings, Droge's paintings paradoxically reflect the sublime and mysterious.

DAISY BRAUN has also benefitted from working with researchers. In February 2023, Braun took a turn as the Hatfield Marine Science Center's resident "artist at sea," joining a team studying zooplankton off the Oregon and Washington coasts. That trip led to a new body of work that includes the delicate *Lonely Clione*, which honors a marine mollusk known as a sea angel.

Two artists, **CELESTE ROBERGE** and **JEANNET LEENDERTSE**, integrate seaweed into their sculptural work. In her cast bronze "Women of the Gulf of Maine" series, Roberge creates mythical female beings out of different kinds of seaweed—oceanic forms born of primordial chaos.

Leendertse constructs her vessels out of rockweed, linen, and wax. She pays tribute to the common and hardy rockweed, which, she writes, "provides a habitat for countless marine creatures, cleans the ocean, locks in carbon, and protects the beleaguered shoreline from erosion."

IAN TRASK and **POSEY MOULTON** use recycled materials in their sculptural work. Trask conjures jellyfish and water molecules in a brilliant repurposing of colorful odds and ends. Likewise, Moulton transforms a mix of salvaged items into *Neptune's Garden*, a remarkable makeover of the god's undersea kingdom.

In her abstract Flashe paintings, **NANCY MANTER** makes manifest her fascination with "radically shifting atmospheres, tides, geological surfaces above and below the waterline, wind circulation, plate tectonics, and satellite imagery." Her "swipes" reflect a "precarious and rapidly shifting world."

In the National Gallery of Art's video portrait of **ANNE NEELY**, part of its "Artists West to East" series celebrating America's 250th anniversary, the artist notes how "beauty and foreboding have been bedfellows" in her work. Among other urgent issues, she has addressed climate change and water loss. With titles like *Water Burst* and *Stormy Night*, the work here addresses the potency—and beauty—of extreme weather.

ALISON HILDRETH turns our attention to another source of water in her river series. With pen and ink and various washes on Japanese paper, she traces the course of twisting and turning waterways through imaginary terrain. Rivers are the life-giving arteries of the land.

SARAH HASKELL's embroidered linen wall work, *Calling in the Birds*, is the sole avian image in the show. The artist uses textiles to create, in her words, "universal stories of love, loss and longing, the heartache of the ephemeral, the tender beauty of the natural world and the astonishing gift of being human."

Among the most out-of-the-box shows the Wendell Gilley Museum has ever mounted, "Water Proof" highlights the Gilley's ongoing mission to connect people to nature through art, with a focus on the pressing need to care for the environment. What is on view now at the museum are representations of the struggles but also the glories of our blue planet. As Awalt noted in a recent interview, "Artists are some of the best witnesses for what is happening in the environment." Their work, she says, brings her in and makes her curious. Same here.

—Carl Little

Poet and art writer Carl Little lives in Somesville. His most recent books are *Blanket of the Night: Poems* and *John Moore: Portals*.

*Many organizations in Maine are devoted to preserving the ocean. A short list would include the Gulf of Maine Institute, Ocean Observatory, Shaw Institute, and the Bigelow Lab. At the same time, our institutions of higher education devote resources to important marine research.



JEANNET LEENDERTSE

I grew up on the Dutch shore, but my fiber work now responds to the rugged coast of Maine where I find sculptural form in its biome. Exploring the concept of belonging, I develop work that feels at home in this environment.

Rockweed (*Ascophyllum nodosum*) is native to both the North Sea and the northern Atlantic. The Blue Hill Peninsula beaches are simply covered with it. This common, hardy, seaweed provides a habitat for countless marine species, cleans the ocean, locks in carbon, and protects the beleaguered shoreline from erosion. Seaweed forms our underwater forests.

Rockweed has long had a use as mulch and fertilizer, and as packing material for bait and lobster. Responsible foraging, however, is key. Increasingly, this slow-growing seaweed is aggressively harvested by large corporations in order to produce nutritional additives for pets, livestock feed, thickeners for food, cosmetics, and paints. Specialized vessels cut and remove large quantities of rockweed, disrupting its natural growth pattern. It can take years for these areas to recover.

My slow-stitched rockweed vessels are meant to show the beauty of this ancient alga, while drawing attention to its environmental value.

NANCY MANTER

Growing up near the Penobscot River in Veazie, Maine, I witnessed the environmental impact of logging and the paper mill across the river—polluted waters, poor air quality, and the disappearance of fish. Over time, logging ceased, the mill closed, and the dam was removed, leading to a remarkable restoration of the river and surrounding ecosystem. Today, fishing and recreation once again thrive along the Penobscot.

Since childhood, I have been deeply inspired by natural phenomena and the radically shifting atmospheres of both fresh and salt waters in Maine and beyond. I now divide my time between the Hudson Valley and Bernard, Maine, where my abstract paintings continue to draw inspiration from these natural and industrial landscapes.

My ongoing observations of dynamic waterways—their beauty and toxicity, flooding and drought, calm and inclement weather—serve as metaphors for the human experience within an increasingly unstable world.

I work primarily in Flashe, a deeply pigmented vinyl paint that allows for flat, matte surfaces alongside translucent, watery layers of color. These contrasts inform my ongoing exploration of light, spatial ambiguity, and shifting atmospheric conditions within the paintings.



Dividing Ghosts #2
Flashe paint on wood panel, 2022



POSEY MOULTON

I am a Maine-based artist and environmental activist. My work explores the realm of eco-mythology, telling tales of nature's superheroes. My practice consists of sculpture, public art, performance, and installation focused on climate issues, including rising sea levels, drowning marshes and sinking lighthouses. The sculptures resist categorization, relying on material transformation to inform and amuse, weaving together landbound synthetic materials recovered from the manufacturing waste stream and salvaged ocean detritus. To date, my work has rescued more than 15 tons of ghost gear from the ocean. I encourage viewers to consider their responsibility as we face environmental reckonings.

Neptune's Garden is a story of hope and growth. It is a celebration of discarded materials that have undergone a transformation by many hands. A modular design, many of the textile elements can be reshaped and reordered, reminiscent of storm surges and rising waters that reshape our landscape.

Neptune's Garden

Modular installation with recycled materials including synthetic flooring, plastic stuffing, rope fiber, salvaged fishing gear, Velcro, recycled objects and textiles, 2025

Photo by Ben Troutman

These nets and ropes are manufactured from a lethal blend of synthetic polyester and nylon plastics. Designed to withstand extreme ocean gales and brutal storms, they take hundreds of years to break down. They entangle marine life and harm habitats and coral reefs, causing economic losses to fisheries and other maritime industries. The collaborative efforts of local fishermen, the Marine Debris and Plastics program in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and the Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation, to rescue ghost gear from our ocean give me hope.

ANNE NEELY

An increasing number of catastrophes are created by weather and water, affecting towns and coastlines, and it's changing not only those towns and coastlines, but the way we think of the water around us. No longer do we feel safe to turn our backs to the weather. *Stormy Night* reflects the intense beauty and foreboding magnified in this imaginary storm.

It was just four o'clock and the sky had already darkened. The wind started to pick up, the roots of the fir trees tenuously holding on at the shore's edge.

We took the docks out of the water, covered the windows, put all the outdoor gear inside the barn. The ocean was so beautiful as NOAA encouraged us to evacuate. The worst of it would hit at midnight, they said. And with no moon, only the random stars would give light. Torrential downpours were predicted along with high winds. Electrical power lines were the first to go. We lit candles, took out our flashlights, and listened to the sound of the wind and sea. A cell phone rang. The bridge was down. We were an island now.



Stormy Night
Oil on linen, 2025

CELESTE ROBERGE

It may be that the *Women of the Gulf of Maine* began germinating deep in my subconscious the minute I learned of the reproductive cycle of *Fucus vesiculosus*. On a research trip in 2014 with Jessica Muhlin, a marine biologist at Maine Maritime Academy, to the Downeast Institute in Beals, I was stunned by the revelation that this intertidal species with the common name “bladder wrack” reproduces from separate male and female organisms that simultaneously release sperm and eggs into the ocean at slack tide, under calm, sunny conditions, during a full moon.



How poetic: Ships sailing above, microscopic sperm fertilizing eggs below.

I visualize an analogue between the female form and the sensuous forms of seaweed. The figures create themselves through chance and the principle of self-organization. The morphology of each seaweed is determined by its environmental conditions in the ocean. Likewise, the figures appear in my studio riding on their own slick and slippery wave, emerging from the ever-changing morphology of the drying seaweed. They come from *mundus suboceanus*, the underworld, the sea cave. Now they live on land that is surrounded by the sea and salt air of the Gulf of Maine.

Like selkies, they may one day return to their origins.

Women of the Gulf of Maine – Sculpture #19
Cast bronze, 2022

IAN TRASK

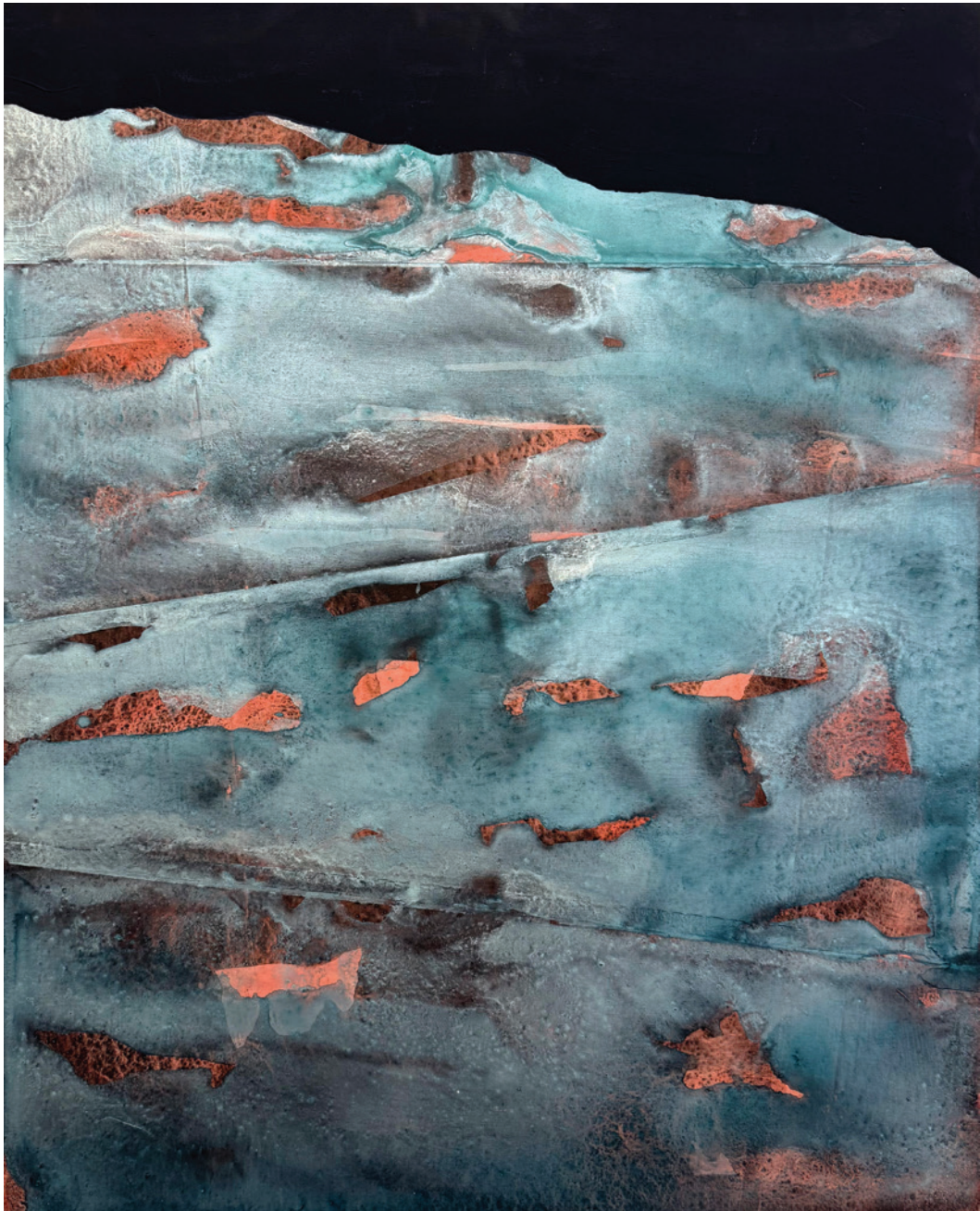
I am a sculptor and multimedia artist who transforms waste materials into objects and installations with new purpose and integrity. The direction of my work is heavily influenced by the waste streams that surround me. My art practice reflects on society's unsustainable attitudes toward material things and the destructive impacts those attitudes have on our communities and environment. What started as a personal exploration into trash as an artistic medium gradually evolved into an expansive collaboration with an engaged community eager to donate their discards to a symbiotic process that fosters connection through creative reuse.

Before I ever considered becoming an artist, I got a degree in biology from Bowdoin College. While also exploring the range of a liberal arts education, I studied hydrology, intertidal ecosystems, marine invertebrates, marine mammals, organic chemistry, cellular biology, and ecology. The foundational ideas I learned during that time continue to shape my views and my art practice.

I watch in horror as the EPA under this administration attempts to roll back environmental regulations, including proposed changes to the Clean Water Act that would remove federal protections for vast regions of groundwater, non-tidal wetlands, and streams in Maine.



Comb Jelly
Mixed media, recycled materials, 2026



Water Table, Nancy Manter; Flashe paint on wood panel, 2022

A NOTE FROM THE MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Water Proof is an extraordinary showcase of talent and creativity that explores the beauty and change in the world around us. Each of the twelve artists fully commits to their vision of Maine's waters – immersing us in an environment rich with different materials and forms, and playing with scale, from the microscopic to the wild underwater macro world. The result is a show that is, by turns, surprising, compelling, and beautiful.

“Artists are some of the best witnesses for what is happening in the environment,” says guest curator Elizabeth Awalt.

We thank her for bringing these important voices (including her own) together at the Gilley, in the service of our mission to connect people, nature, and art.

A thank you, also, to author and poet Carl Little for sharing his way with words. His essay *Water Proof (Worry and Wonder)* runs deep and inspires reflection. He notes of the artists that, “Each in their own way provides the ‘water proof.’”

Thank you to Maria Charette, Melinda Rice-Schoon, Tessa Sanborn, Jason Therrien, and Z Studio Design.

Last, a thank you to Alice and David Bullwinkle, for making the connection that brought these currents together.

—Sean Charette



The Wendell Gilley Museum inspires artistic creativity and engagement with the natural world on Mount Desert Island and in Downeast Maine for current and future generations through education, exhibitions, and programs, while honoring the legacy of noted bird carver Wendell Gilley.

It is our goal to bring People closer to Nature through Art.

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Hold Me Like a Mother, Sarah Haskell; Maine beach stones and linen dyed with madder, 2023

