

WATER LINES ARTIST BOOK

Interview with the artists - Boston, December 2014

by *Damien Boutillon*

1- How did your collaboration start?

Christine Arveil

We are a small group of Boston-based artists with a good dynamic around music, painting and photography.

Sal Lopes

Our collaboration was the result of years of conversation about art in general, writing, painting, and photography. I was interested in working with Christine. It would be poetry and photography in this case.

2- Tell us about the project.

Sal Lopes

I started photographing water as a project maybe... 4 years ago with isolated pictures taken as far back as the year 2000.

Christine Arveil

Sal and I talked freely about his images of water, long before we thought of making a book together; their emotional density intrigued me. They establish the double presence of the water and of the spectator's emotional response to it. It looks abstract, but it is not.

Sal Lopes

Yes, but contrary to some of my previous bodies of work, water brings the component of movement. What I see in the moment will likely disappear quickly because of this movement. This presents a significant technical challenge. Because of this, the image is seen more in the mind's eye.

3- Sal, what was your motivation for photographing water?

Well, water is life, isn't it? It is more important than oil. Global warming has made water a major issue so my interest is in the preservation of water and its many uses. The images may be of a glacial lake or a water fountain covering uses from aesthetics to life supporting.

Water makes people feel a certain way. It is strong. We were born into water! When people look at water images, there is more into it than just looking at a landscape: there is an intimate reaction. Water somehow ignites passion.

When I am taking the photographs, I focus on my own perception. I am not interested in anticipating how my images might be perceived, later, when they are viewed.

4- Christine, how did your actual collaboration with Sal started, on Water Lines?

I was still in my Volcano Project, a project that is all about fire, when Sal asked whether I would write poems about the water pictures. I was surprised but soon the words started assembling in my mind, over recollections of his images. These initial memories gave ten condensed poems. Our conversations had happened over the actual photos; the exquisite details of Sal's prints triggered these first poems. The *Water Lines* book is akin to the sophisticated Chinese art form that associates a painting, a poem and a spontaneous calligraphy.

I have often embedded words, or fragments of poems, into visuals. You'll find words in my early paper inlays, then into lacquers, and stage sets. Words are never illustrative, they are a complementary art form.

5- You both talked about abstraction. Could you define it for us?

Sal Lopes

A strict interpretation of abstract art is the use of visual tools to illustrate form, shape, and color. Generally, the subject is not recognizable. The images in the Water Project fall somewhere in between as I still want to preserve the visual representation of the water.

I photographed images of widely different scales, sometimes playing within one same frame. I sometimes operate in the macro-space: it can be a 10 inch square area but I shoot it so it renders a sensation of space that gives a sense of immensity. With the camera, I am free to design a new space and to abstract the image from its local references. This sense of space, that designs the way I take the pictures, is what makes it abstract.

6- Realism?

Sal Lopes

Unlike most abstraction where one does not necessarily know what they are looking at, it's important for me to retain some literal visual translation of the water. With this work, there is a difficult balance between abstract and realism. Because I often use light and wind in making the photographs, this creates abstraction that can be controlled to preserve the realism of the water. It's a fine balance.

Christine Arveil

I constantly question realism, be it in painting or writing. Classic representational art can be an expression of power that standardizes how we see and feel, while reality is multiform, unreachable.

7- Sal, your images are originally printed in large size, which we saw, for instance, in your exhibit at the Telfair Museum, in Savannah. What is the technical process in the Water Project?

I shoot with Sony and Canon digital cameras. I try to keep my equipment simple and light weight because I am often in precarious positions. I do most of the image adjustments in the camera with settings on Manual and Aperture Priority. I also manual focus and meter the exposure of all images. I guess I'm just not comfortable

with the camera making the decisions. My choices in the field depth are crucial to the making of the water pictures: it is where I construct their meaning and how they feel.

I generally print 20"x30" image size making full size proof prints as studies. The exhibition prints and the *Water Lines* book are printed on Hahnemuhle 100% Rag Pearl finish paper using archival pigment inks on an Epson 7900 printer.

8- *Christine, what of your writing process?*

My writing process is painting with words.

What Sal captures in the water images is what triggers his emotions; my text responds to the question: what emotion is it? The poem encapsulates in a minimalist manner a specific emotion, without limiting the reader's freedom. I look for a minimalism that renders the energy of life. If a cloud and the wind brushing over green water, brings: "*A smooth jade swell entangled in an absinthe dream nurses the abyss*", I open doors rather than label the image. I bring in an evocation of sound, too. I play with themes that are often treated in art: childhood, love stories, music, gypsies, war, Monet, Rembrandt, cave painting, humor and photography of course.

While writing, I discovered that there was no language boundary in my poetry, no translation either: metaphors form themselves in either French or English.

I spent a month in Provence with over a hundred digital water images and some test-prints as reference, and came back with the texts. I need the freedom of solitude to write.

9- *The pages of the book are unbound but numbered: does that mean that you intended a progression?*

Sal Lopes

The book should stay together as it is. If people want to display an image, they should buy a larger print. Looking at prints in book form is a different visual experience from those in an exhibition or on display in a home.

I am a collector and I understand living with a collectible item, the story that goes with an art object. 35 pages is a rich ensemble and seemed just the right number to immerse in the work.

Christine Arveil

Absolutely. The sequence imposed itself in the form of a *Lieder Fantasy* type of wandering – through places and moods. This is a voyage through places, time, art, and feelings.

10- *What of the design of the book itself? What part plays Water Lines, the artist book, in the Water Project?*

Sal Lopes

I've always liked the concept of an artist book. I wanted to see how the Water Project would work as a hand-made book and was interested in a collaboration with Christine using her poetry. The artist book was the best way to use the writing and the materials we had discussed.

I enjoyed the material conception of the book, choosing this alternate format for my prints. I played with the idea of transparency and layering. The very high quality of all the materials we used greatly matter.

Christine Arveil

Layering & transparency are fundamental to my painting process. The “poems over pictures” layering slows down the viewing experience, which we deemed important. It also alludes to the masking and “revealing” of old photographic processes. Sal came up with the vellum and floating pages concept, while I designed the transparent binder-case with a silk and suede cover -water and sand. A couture designer in Paris hand made the covers for us. Each book is slightly different, due to the hand-painting and Sal’s printing process.

11- Just the process of actually making each book seems quite involving!

Christine Arveil

We left nothing unquestioned. Sal goes through a number of print tests to satisfy his standards. I hand paint initial letters on each vellum page to render an emotional intensity. We sought an early Bauhaus font and specific ink tone for the printed text.

Sal Lopes

The vellum and other materials serve several purposes. We wanted to replicate somehow the experience of water and of creating the water images. So we chose plexiglas and vellum to suggest layers of transparency. Seeing the book first through the Plexiglas, the vellum and writing, and finally the image, is similar to the process of making the pictures. You have the surface of the water, what may be on the surface, and finally, what is beneath.

Thank you both for this insight into the Water Lines Artist Book