

Artist Statement

Tide Charts: Ebb and Flow

At the outset of this series I had been thinking about the manner in which the continuous churning, pull and upheaval of the tide has a profound impact on the interstitial environment – that ever-changing, liminal space between the land and sea – teeming with both, life and the remnants of death as evidenced by the marine detritus along its shore. This got me thinking about how constant tidal action results in the deposition or exposure of previously buried material that has no real stratigraphic hierarchy (though we have a tendency to think in terms of a layering of time in which materials appearing in a deeper layer are older and objects and materials appearing in an upper strata are newer or younger). For a while I mused that this series would be a meditation on aging since artists seem to dread the idea of dealing with this conceptual thought in their practice as if the theme associates them or their work somehow with the kiss of death.

As Simon Winchester writes in his book, *The Perfectionists* (pp. 348-349), “How we arrange – and how in history we have arranged – the accumulations of time is a matter of choice. On the matters of minutes and hours and days most generally agree – after all, the sun’s rising and setting have long dictated the nature of time, creating a top-down arrangement that was made for convenience of human society, and allowed for the notion, even as recently as the 1950s when the second, at the bottom of this top-down arrangement, was defined as 1/86,400th of the passage of a single day.” Nevertheless, I am well aware of the fact that the tide was a measure of days until the concept of time supplanted this. This series of artworks consumed my time and in the very midst of creating this body of work, I was diagnosed with Mesothelioma – a type of malignant cancer for which there is no cure. Then, the series took on an altogether different significance for me and began to come together in terms of the possibilities of how we mark time as memories flood our present and inform our future as we face both, the constant changes of aging and death. The metaphor of the eternal tide continually ebbing and flowing really resonated with me as I contemplated the incoming flood of life and the outgoing, receding, last chance of the ebb cycle of the tide littering the strand of my remaining time with materials, memories and fragments revealed from every period of my enriched life in no hierarchical order as I faced my own inevitable death.

I thought of how tide charts are utilized in nautical plotting for seafaring travel and then I played with the idea of charting the deposition of materiality – what the tide brings in, uncovers or leaves behind during its dramatic shifts – with a gridded set of charts depicting remnants all on the same level as they appear on the shore before the next turning of the tide. Natural material elements of sand, driftwood, rounded pebbles, cork, kelp, sea grasses, marine life, and shell remnants are suggested in these works alongside fragments of reproduced nautical charts for those navigating their lives in estuaries, in coastal regions or alongside shorelines where their measure of time is still dictated by the tide. I would like to think that these works played a role in tiding me over as I paused before heading for the next shore.

James B. Thompson