

Statements for *Water*
edited by Matthias Waschek and Camran Mani

Alvar Aalto (1898 – 1976)

...architecture and its details are in some way all part of biology. Perhaps they are, for instance, like some big salmon or trout. They are not born fully grown; they are not even born in the sea or water where they normally live. They are born hundreds of miles away from their home grounds, where the rivers narrow to tiny streams, in clear rivulets between the fells, in the first drops of water from the melting ice, as remote from their normal life as human emotion and instinct are from our everyday work.

Excerpted from "The Trout and the Stream" (1947) in Goran Schildt, ed., Alvar Aalto in His Own Words (New York: Rizzoli, 1997), trans. Timothy Binham, pp. 108-109.

Tadao Ando (b. 1941)

I seek to instill the presence of nature within architecture [that is] austerely constructed by means of transparent logic. The elements of nature – water, wind, light, and sky – bring architecture derived from ideological thought down to the ground level of reality and awaken manmade life within it.¹

The central courtyard [of the Pulitzer] is covered with water, so that it is in effect an exhibition room with water for its floor and the sky for its ceiling...The sunlight, reflected and softened by the water, plays over the surfaces of the gallery. This gallery is filled, not with even light, but with a light that suggests the movement of the sun and the clouds outside, the passing of time, and the changing seasons.²

Max Beckmann (1884 – 1950)

Regarding the trip to Pirano, Italy in 1924 that prompted him to paint Lido:

I spent two weeks in Italy by the Adriatic Sea and saw wonderful things there which I want to try to recreate. I am painting portraits, still lifes, landscapes, visions of towns rising up out of the sea, beautiful women, and grotesque monsters. People bathing and female nudes; in short a life – a life that simply exists. Without thoughts or ideas. Filled with colours and forms from nature and from out of myself. – As beautiful as possible.³

In response to a reporter asking why he puts fish into paintings such as Fisherwomen:

“Because I like fish, both to eat and to look at. Also they are symbols.” What do they symbolize? “Geist – spirit,” Beckmann replies positively. “But the man who looks at my pictures must figure them out for himself.”⁴

¹ Tadao Ando, “Beyond Horizons in Architecture” in Kenneth Frampton, *Tadao Ando* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1991), p. 76.

² Tadao Ando, Description of the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts, *GA Document 58* (Tokyo, April 1999): n.p.

³ Letter to I.B. Neumann of 9 August 1924 as reprinted in Nina Peter, “The Painter on the Beach: Beckmann’s Italian Paintings,” trans. Fiona Elliott, in Sean Rainbird, ed., *Max Beckmann* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2003), pp. 84, 90.

⁴ “Made in U.S.A.” *Time*, vol. 54, no. 17, (24 October 1949).

Robert Gober (b. 1954)

In conversation with Richard Flood

RF: I was obsessed by the cross in the bottom of the drain. That was what I went to immediately. I thought, “My God, I never realized a drain was Pentecostal.”

RG: Actually, the cross was not cast from an existing drain, now that you bring that up. I couldn’t find one with a cross. Old ones have them, like the one in my bathroom, but I couldn’t find one now, so actually that was constructed before the casting.

RF: That’s funny, because that was what I kept going willfully back to, how absolutely strange that in the end, as everything is sluicing down the drain, it’s also sluicing over this major, major symbol.

RG: Yeah, exactly...I thought of the drains as metaphors functioning in the same way as traditional paintings, as a window into another world. However, the world that you enter into through the metaphor of the drain would be something darker and unknown, like an ecological unconscious.

Excerpted from “Interview: Richard Flood and Robert Gober” (January 21, 1990) in Robert Gober: Sculpture + Drawing (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1999), pp. 122-23.

Roni Horn (b. 1955)

Some Thames is literally the idea of a finite thing having an infinite range of appearance or expression because of its inseparable relation to other things, which is what water is – its relation to other things.⁵

When I look at water I’m entering into an event of relation. Rather than an object, water becomes a form – of consciousness, or time, of physicality, of the human condition, of anything I desire to project on it, of anything I want it to be.⁶

This water exists in monolithic, indivisible continuity with all other waters. No water is separate from any other water.

In the River Thames, in an Arctic iceberg, in your drinking glass, in that drop of rain, on that frosty window pane, in your eyes, in every other microscopic part of you (and me), all waters converge.

Invisible continuity is intrinsic to water. This continuity exceeds us even while being the biggest part of us. It’s this continuity that makes our effect on water an effect on us. That is to say: “I am the Thames!” or “The Thames is me!”⁷

Bryan Hunt (b. 1947)

The subject of water came to me more or less as a “found object.” In the way primary structures informed Minimalism, I wanted to reintroduce image and representation into my art. I sought to capture the essence and the existence of water in nature, as if extracting autonomous shapes from the landscape. Water would function as a solid and become a form. The extracted shapes could be passive and reclining (like a lake), or wandering and serpentine (like a river), or standing in a state of suspension (like a waterfall). Interpreting the surface of these water forms allowed me a freedom to follow the course of gravity from liquid to solid.

⁵ Horn (23 February 2000) in Kathleen Merrill Campagnolo, *Still Water (The River Thames, for Example)* (Santa Fe: SITE Santa Fe, 2000), n.p.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Horn (1999) in Ibid., Plate 7, n. 24, 25, 26.

The shift in *Shift Falls* is a directional change of course in the falls created by an imaginary shelf or shoulder in a mountainous landscape. The proportions and posture of the piece were intended to create a figurative presence with the head being the upper falls. The desire was to convey a larger-than life figure and, at the same time, falls that was released from an earthly mold.

When I first came to New York in 1972, one of the most powerful and transformative sculptures I encountered was Rodin's *Balzac*. As you walk around the piece, it becomes many things. It is an expressionistic portrait of a literary giant with the posture and pose of monumentality, but it also becomes a cliff, a megalith, a torqued tree trunk, and a waterfall – all seeming to be a container of life. Even the tool markings and the artist's hand looked fresh.

The other precedents that appeared most relevant when I began working with water were conceptually based artworks such as Barnett Newman's sculpture *Here I* and Richard Serra's splashed lead pieces. The Earthwork artists were breaking all the boundaries of sculpture while using photography and drawings to convey concepts and scale. I wanted to correlate process, earth-referenced forms, and sculpture making along with casting methods.

I am still attracted to water as a motif, but in different ways. There is more diversity in the references and meaning. It can carve, pour, erode, drip, float, divide, flow, shape, and go to unexpected places.

Excerpted from a response to a questionnaire submitted by the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts

Ellsworth Kelly (b. 1923)

In Paris, in 1951, I was using a grid to draw the reflected light of the Seine River in a chance process. During that time I did a number of drawings that take water as their theme. I've always been fascinated by reflections of light on water.

A few years ago I was staying at the Drei Könige Hotel in Basel. The Rhine River was in flood with enormous currents flowing very fast. Young people were floating down the river on rafts or relaxing on triangular cement piers facing upstream. I could hear them yelling to one another as a weird storm came up, obscuring my view. Later that night I couldn't sleep, went out onto the balcony, and looked at the river below. I could see lights reflecting from the other side of the river onto the turbulent water.

It was only when seeing connections between earlier work and one of the prints I had been working on that I decided to call the print *The River*. It consists of four lithographs printed with two plates each. Later I would print all eight individual states and call it *States of the River*.

In earlier prints related to water, specifically my series of lithographs named after places on Saint Martin (1983-84), I created textures somewhat by chance. I didn't want markings that evinced a conscious effort, like calligraphy or filling-in, so I covered a surface in random brushwork and then placed over it shapes that would "frame" a particular part.

The River derives from these textured lithographs. At the print workshop Gemini G.E.L., it is customary for rejected impressions to be cut up into 6 x 4-inch note cards. In 1984, when Gemini sent me some cards made from my *Saint Martin Triptych*, I began playing with them, putting them together in different combinations. One of these combinations, a 6 x 16-inch horizontal composition, was enlarged to 40 x 109 inches, and later became *The River*.

Following my trip to Basel, I realized it not only related to my 1951 paintings like *Cité* and *Meschers*, based on brushstrokes cut up and arranged by chance; it was also a continuation of my first experiments with reflected light on the Seine.

It was in the process of proofing *The River* that *River II* came about. While considering impressions of four of the eight original plates of *The River* on different white papers, one pinned

on the wall over the other, I created a new print measuring 80 x 109 inches. I liked another accident: on the lower sheet the left-most image was printed upside down. *River II* preserves this accidental reflection.

Statement by Ellsworth Kelly based on notes from a telephone conversation between Ellsworth Kelly and Emily Rauh Pulitzer, 6 July 2007.

Roy Lichtenstein (1923 – 1997)

In the *Drowning Girl* the water is [...] Art Nouveau, but it can also be seen as [a reference to the artist] Hokusai.* I don't do it because it is another reference. Cartooning itself resembles other periods in art – perhaps unknowingly...I saw [the resemblance] and then I pushed it a little further until it was a reference that most people will get. I don't think it is terribly significant, but it is a way of crystallizing the style by exaggeration.

*Katsushika Hokusai (Japan, 1760 – 1849), best known in the West for his woodblock prints, such as *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*.

Excerpted from John Coplans, "Talking with Roy Lichtenstein," Artforum 5, no. 9 (May 1967); reprinted in Coplans, ed., Roy Lichtenstein (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 91.

Richard Long (b. 1945)

Asks to have his work presented without comment.

Henri Matisse (1869 – 1954)

This panel, printed on linen – white for the motifs and beige for the background – forms, together with a second panel, a wall tapestry composed during reveries that came fifteen years after a voyage to Oceania.

From the first, the enchantments of the sky there, the sea, the fish, and the coral in the lagoons plunged me into the inaction of total ecstasy. The local tones of things hadn't changed, but their effect in the light of the Pacific gave me the same feeling as I had when I looked into a large golden chalice.

With my eyes wide open I absorbed everything as a sponge absorbs liquid.

It is only now that these wonders have returned to me, with tenderness and clarity, and have permitted me, with protracted pleasure, to execute these two panels.

Henri Matisse, "Océanie, tenture murale," Labyrinthe, II, 3, pp. 22-23, December 1946; reprinted as translated in Jack D. Flam, Matisse on Art (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1978), p. 110.

Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929)

The *Soft Bathtub (Model) – Ghost Version* is a painted three-dimensional work which departs from its subject mainly through a substitution of materials. It is not involved with water: in fact it looks as if hung out to dry. It completely ignores the subject's function for its own purposes.

If a representation of water appears in the work it is usually contained or agitated by some human-made device to give it limits and form, and acts as the energy within that subject, for example a glass of melting ice, a drainpipe, a shower, or a hose. The formlessness of water requires invention on the artist's part. I also like what gravity does, making whorls and drops.

Actual water becomes part of certain large outdoor works done since 1976 with Coosje van Bruggen, such as the *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, for the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the *Gartenschlauch (Garden Hose)* in Freiburg-im-Breisgau, and the *Dropped Bowl with Scattered Slices and Peels* in Miami, Florida.

Excerpted from a response to a questionnaire submitted by the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts

Richard Serra (b. 1939)

One of my earliest recollections is that of driving with my father, as the sun was coming up, across the Golden Gate Bridge. We were going to Marine Shipyard, where my father worked as a pipe fitter, to watch the launching of a ship. It was on my birthday in the fall of 1943. I was four.

When we arrived, the black, blue, and orange steel-plated tanker was in way, balanced up on a perch. It was disproportionately horizontal, and to a four-year-old it was like a skyscraper on its side. I remember walking the arc of the hull with my father, looking at the huge brass propeller, peering through the stays. Then, in a sudden flurry of activity, the shoring props, beams, planks, poles, bars, keel blocks, all the dunnage was removed, the cables released, shackles dismantled, the come-alongs unlocked. There was a total incongruity between the displacement of this enormous tonnage and the quickness and agility with which it was carried out. As the scaffolding was torn apart, the ship moved down the chute towards the sea; there were the accompanying sounds of celebration, screams, foghorns, shouts, whistles. Freed from its stays, the logs rolling, the ship slid off its cradle with an ever-increasing motion. It was a moment of tremendous anxiety as the oiler en route rattled, swayed, tipped, and bounced into the sea, half submerged, to then raise and lift itself and find its balance. Not only had the tanker collected itself, but so did the witnessing crowd as the ship went through a transformation from an enormous obdurate weight to a buoyant structure, free, afloat, and adrift. My awe and wonder of that moment remain. All the raw material that I needed is contained in the reserve of this memory.

Excerpted from "Questions, Contradictions, Solutions: Early Work" (January 2004) in Richard Serra: The Matter of Time (Bilbao, Spain: Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, 2005), p. 47.

Richard Tuttle (b. 1941)

An artwork is actually an accounting of all four elements, though no artist, no matter how hard they try, can bring them in perfect balance. They are arranged subjectively, finally.

When I think of the particular similarity between my work and that of Matisse, I like to think that in both you see water washing away the tears of life, but in his case that brings you to earth; in mine, to the air.

Excerpted from a response to a questionnaire submitted by the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts

Cy Twombly (b. 1928)

...the sea is white three quarters of the time, just white – early morning. Only in the fall does it get blue, because the haze is gone. The Mediterranean, at least – the Atlantic is brown – is always just white, white, white. And then, even when the sun comes up, it becomes a lighter white. Only in the fall is the Mediterranean this beautiful blue colour, as in Greece. Not because I paint it white; I'd have painted it white even if it wasn't, but I'm always happy that I might have. It's something that has other consciousness behind it.⁸

⁸ Interview with David Sylvester (June 2000) in David Sylvester, *Interviews with American Artists* (New Haven & London: Yale, 2001), p. 175.

The reality of whiteness may exist in the duality of sensation (as the multiple anxiety of desire and fear).

Whiteness can be the classic state of the intellect, or a neo-romantic area of remembrance – or as the symbolic whiteness of Mallarmé.

The exact implication may never be analyzed, but in that it persists as the landscape of my actions, it must imply more than selection.⁹

Rachel Whiteread (b. 1963)

The way I've been working over the years has to do with space that was once inhabited by, for instance, water. It has to do with marks that are left and memories that are left from those marks. If you think of the drawings I've made based on floors, which have relevance to a particular place like a bathroom or kitchen, that has to do with the passage of time and movement and spillage, I suppose.

Some of the earlier bath pieces were cast straight from an actual bathtub. The Pulitzer piece is slightly different because it came from a mold. When objects actually contain liquid in the real world, it becomes another issue because realizing the piece involves casting a liquid into a form to create a solid object. Whether it ends up being an enormous architectural piece or an intimate piece that looks quite ritualistic, the process from liquid to solid is always one of my primary concerns.

Excerpted from a response to a questionnaire submitted by the Pulitzer Foundation for the Arts

⁹ “Documenti di una nuova figurazione: Toti Scialoja, Gastone Novelli, Pierre Alechinsky, Achille Perilli, Cy Twombly,” *L'Esperienza moderna* (August – September 1957), p. 32; reprinted and translated in Kirk Varnedoe, *Cy Twombly: A Retrospective* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1994), p. 27.