

Elizabeth Ogilvie
Dundee Contemporary Arts
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Written by Mick Peter

In the current Audi billboard advert a gleaming black car leaps towards the camera out of a black background. The wheels send up water in a Rorschach shaped pair of wings behind it turning the car with its twinkling grill and angry headlights into the head of some demented Teutonic eagle. The slick staginess of the image makes you think about where this photograph was taken and subsequently manipulated. You can imagine the untidy industry that would surround such an undertaking.

In this sprawling solo show at Dundee Contemporary Arts the initial response is one of similar eighties style advert awe. The main body of the space looks like a recently vacated set, rigs for lighting and water pipes dangle above two equally sized pools of water. The technicians and helpers have finished and left an impressive array of equipment behind. Such seemingly prosaic machinery of artistic illusion gives you a strong feeling of unease, unease in imagining that the object of this set is missing. It means that responding to the work requires some unpacking of the integration of the various parts.

What emerges from this rather eerie hall filled with sounds of dripping and trickling is something altogether more unexpected. There is an internal rigour in these works that seems to inhabit a different world to the technological battles that have had to be overcome to stage this cataloguing of watery processes. Ogilvie manages to play with our capacity to underestimate the value of naturally occurring phenomena; suddenly looking into water sets a chain of events in motion that generate a disjointed and remarkable story. Disjointed is used quite positively here, the gaps in the narrative evade any attempts to explicate the whole picture as this would be in danger of destroying the naturally occurring illusion. The brashness of the black plastic and the regularity of the walkways around the ponds are at odds with this curious visual haiku. Like Ezra Pound's jaw-droppingly reductive poetic success, 'faces in a crowd, petals on a wet black bough', looking at the associative nature of the minimal sounds and projected images brings reward in excess of the parts. Ogilvie's artistic language really is this distilled.

Attempting to reflect the monumentality of the natural world drives the work, something that cannot bear too much description. A conjuring trick is the central conceit; the journey of water from slow drizzle to deluge and the resultant streams and cascades it forms as it cuts and shapes the surfaces it innocently negotiates. It is also about a disappearing act. Not for nothing is it mentioned that Ogilvie has ties to St. Kilda, an island famously abandoned en masse by 1930. Like Ogilvie's meandering water a whole people filtered into and were reabsorbed by the population of the main land. The initial feeling one has had in the gallery now helps to dissipate any over reliance on the sentimental. Perhaps the enforced distance that comes from using multiple synchronised

projections and a number of water pumps and lights is a way for Ogilvie to apply what would appear to be a healthy distinction between personal history and proto scientific investigation.

Rhythm gets further explored in a work in collaboration with Japanese Taiko drummer, Joji Hirota. Ogilvie appears in one of a pair of facing projections impassively and dreamily prodding and poking a pool of water in a studio setting. It provides parallels between the musician and the artist by demonstrating the mechanics of the process, the tools of the trade. Hirota's armoury of cymbals and chimes are used to keep us on our toes, he eschews any expected nasty shimmery effects opting instead for a responsive musical sophistication derived from free and improvised music. It's undoubtedly interesting but its disclosure sits strangely with the mood of the main space.

Something that might be summarily dismissed as a very minor element of the show goes some way to summing how difficult it is to avoid a conflict of approaches. In an end room we get an odd addendum; a miniature pool with a stick with which the visitor can splish and splash and watch the reflected interference patterns pulsing across the wall. A concession to a big public space's audience remit, this lack of separation unbalances the illusion that most people, whatever their age, would want to preserve. This sense is reinforced when you're forced to turn back from this antechamber and the odd bubbles and drips again transfix you across the gloom. These are the details that have you bending down to look into the matter that Ogilvie makes so compelling, water. Whilst the workings of the whole operation may be painfully exposed in parts she is careful to balance this with moments of rapture, allowing beautiful things to be just that.