

H i g h
W a t e r
M a r k



Suzanne
H i l l

*Since the tide's full, you'll notice what sea claims of shore.
From high water mark to tide line, there's a between-place,*

*an uncontested corridor neither ocean's or ours,
empty as a tickertape before figures, and full of rumour.*

-Anne Compton
140 acres lying south from the water mark

SUZANNE HILL: HIGH WATER MARK

ITINERARY

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EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

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cover: jetsam (1 of 5)

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HIGH WATER MARK

List of works

Boundaries

line of high water: 5 pieces, 4 36" x 48", 1 piece 30" x 48", mixed, on canvas

imposed boundaries: 16 pieces, 10" x 10", mixed, on paper, laminated

natural boundaries: 9 pieces, 24" x 18", mixed, on canvas

Turning Point

winter solstice: 6 pieces, 60" x 12", mixed, on canvas

summer solstice: 6 pieces, 60" x 12", mixed, on canvas

turning point, winter: 45" x 45", mixed, on canvas

turning point, summer: 72" x 36", mixed, on canvas (private collection)

Flotsam/Jetsam

flotsam: 3 panels, 60" x 24", mixed, on plexi

jetsam: 5 pieces, 24" x 30", mixed, on canvas with affixed jetsam items

Markers

markers: 3 pieces, 69" x 48", mixed, on canvas (right side – private collection)
measures: 6 pieces, 12" x 23", mixed, on photocopy, laminated

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high-water mark

1. *the highest level reached by a body of water in tidal flow, flood, etc.*
2. *the mark left after high water has receded*
3. *a culminating point; highest point*

ARTIST STATEMENT:

The high water mark is a reminder of advance and retreat, ebb and flow, natural and sometimes unusual change.

Common in a maritime setting, yet distinctive and different in every location, this part of the "shorescape" was the starting point for a major exhibit that evolved over several years. Consisting of four sections, each presents the high water mark as paralleling or reflective of an aspect of the human condition. I suppose almost any natural process or element could work this way, but it seems to me that this recognizable piece of the coastal environment has a familiarity, a resonance that visually enhances/connects with a statement about how we live in the world.

The first group of works introduces the high water mark as itself, and leads into a consideration of natural and imposed boundaries. The second group is tied to the idea of a "turning point". The highest tides occur at the solstices, the high water mark indicating the point at which change takes place. Flotsam and jetsam, the third group, proposes a literal definition of society's jetsam - what is considered superfluous - and the meaningless repetitive words, phrases, images that "float" over our debris. The fourth group of works considers perceived goals, aspirations, levels of attainment. Is the high water mark a standard? A measure of worth?

I continue to discover how interesting it is that fragments of ordinary day to day experience can connect to larger questions of our individual existence, our community and our society.

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HIGH WATER MARK: BOUNDARIES, TURNING POINT, FLOTSAM & JETSAM AND MARKER

High Water Mark is a didactic quartet by Saint John artist, Suzanne Hill. Each separate piece contains within itself a meditation, arranged to set up a resonance with the one across and the one next to it. While the exhibit is structured and meticulously researched, the viewer is not led in a linear progression via a traditional gallery hanging. Rather, in this installation, the viewer is shown swatches – flashes of observation and facets of understanding carefully crafted by the artist as teacher, teacher as artist. She does not confound us with complicated argument, or drum it into us with numbing repetition; she wants us to get it. She shows us with subtle gesture and infinite patience how to pose our own questions and search for our own answers in what surrounds us.

At times the artist takes a panoramic approach to show the breadth and scope of her subject. At others she probes with a forensic interest the minute and microscopic details, the layers of material and meaning, the detritus washed onto the shore. The frugality of material and sparing use of colour throughout is sympathetic with the climate of the Fundy coast, chillingly bleak and overcast.

This exhibit is full of musings from a lifetime of living on the Fundy coast. Known for the drama of its Atlantic waters, the Fundy tides are the highest in the world, affected by gravity, topography, lunar cycles, and seasons. Over time, the artist patiently observes and records the predictable fluctuations of climate and temperature – the marks of repetitive and relentless tidal pressure on the familiar landscape of cliff, breakwater and pier.

Yet, it is the phenomenon of the high water mark made by a particular surge or storm that is of greatest interest here. It becomes the gauge to measure everything after. Suzanne Hill questions the meaning of this mark as it relates to society and its emphasis on measuring achievement and success. What of the space between?

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I. Boundaries: Imposed Boundaries, High Water Mark and Natural Boundaries

Maps, navigational charts, and geological surveys are generally used to indicate relationships of distance and measure. They organize the environment into parcels of land for tax assessment, travel, military reconnaissance, and communications. They may also define political borders. Sections of map are lifted from their source and transferred arbitrarily onto the 16 small panels. Fragments of text interrupt this particular ordering system with a different system. Both require agreed upon conventions, symbolic systems and specialized knowledge to interpret, but presented here, their meaning is obscure and fragmentary. The overlay of longitudinal and latitudinal gridlines imposes an artificial intersection of systems of knowledge. It is merely another layer of abstraction.

In contrast, the organic boundaries of the other panels show shifting and mutable boundaries that behave according to the laws of nature. These boundaries are expressed by a heavy impasto collage that takes on the character of sludge or seaweed composting on the shore, pushed up by tides and storms and left to rot and return in the never-ending ebb and flow of the sea.

II. Turning Point : Summer Solstice, Winter Solstice

Solstice is part of the seasonal cycle of the earth rotating on its axis. It occurs when the earth is oriented furthest or nearest to the sun. It is during summer and

winter solstice that the Fundy tides are at their peak. The gravitational pull of the moon is reinforced and affects the relative levels of the high water mark. It is the inevitable and relentless cyclic nature of the earth caught in its cosmic progress. It is also the most dangerous time. The figures are lost at sea, caught in their watery element. It is a familiar Maritime tragedy. The figures struggle in the dank and merciless water, subject to the same laws as the water that surrounds them.

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The end is contained in the beginning.

III. Flotsam & Jetsam

Flotsam and Jetsam are more closely linked to the processes of civilization. It is a commentary on our throw-away society. Jetsam is the part of the ship's cargo, considered unnecessary for survival, jettisoned in the face of crashing waves, gale-force winds and certain death. A series of collages features a single found object that stands in for several related themes: Children, Homelessness, Military Defense, Women, and Garbage. Each collage portrays a continuous landscape of extreme light and dark, strongly delineated by a maché of torn up newspapers in which catch phrases, current events, and popular icons surface. What was important one day is discarded the next.

Flotsam is the debris that floats to the surface. The acrylic panels provide a transparent scrim, another filter clogged with refuse.

IV. Marker

While the figure is only briefly shown or implied in the other parts of this exhibition, it is here the prominent subject. Above these forms are the high water marks on pilings and piers. Their unequivocal measurements contrast the organic figural forms with their relentless geometry. Yet both are markers. It is as though the artist has finally provided the real index for the *High Water Mark*. The figure is a more typical element of the artist's previous work. However, in this series, it takes on a fully developed and independent 3-dimensionality not seen before. The forms spilled into the sea are buoyant and gracefully tumbling in their liquid ballet.

These figures provoke more questions than they do conclusions.

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Are they drowning figures narrating a tragic tale at sea, trapped forever in their watery grave? Are they shipwrecked survivors rising to the surface? Are they simply Jetsam, the unwanted remains of our civilization? Do they represent the pinnacle of creation, landlocked and clumsy, thrashing about in an alien and hostile

environment? Will they grow gills and webbed feet and adapt to their new environment? Are they the beginning or the end? This is the space between.

- Marie E. Maltais,
Director, UNB Art Centre

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SUZANNE HILL: AN ARTIST AND HER METAPHORS

Picasso has said that all artists are thieves, and, of course, they are. Who among us is not a thief in some fashion? We are all influenced by those who have come before us and who have done the kinds of things we do. Often we see in the work of particular artists, the influences of their masters. Occasionally, an artist produces work that is not merely repetitious, and that transcends the sum of the influences of those artists who have come before. The work of a truly great artist, while acknowledging a debt to others, is work that is distinctly the creation of that individual artist. Suzanne Hill is one of these artists.

The work of Suzanne Hill, like much very good work, does not fall neatly into a particular slot, ready-made for the categories of art history. This is, of course, what contributes to its strength. Her works are unique creations, and quite consistent in their uniqueness: consistent and thoughtful, well-conceived and well-executed, beautiful and terrifying.

Although, they will no doubt push their way into the artistic annals somewhere down the line, because Suzanne Hill's work has been so persistently good for so many years, just how much attention these works will receive in years to come is difficult to say. They will, no doubt, struggle against the prejudices of gender and of regionalism, as well as our seeming need for categorization. But we are here with these works today, and it is in this moment that we will acknowledge the strong visual presence, combined with a metaphorical richness, that makes up the *High Water Mark* series.

Suzanne Hill is a tenacious artist. This *High Water Mark* series is the product of approximately five years of work, years of researching, thinking, sketching, experimenting with various images and materials. In fairness, during this time, the artist has created other work and has participated in other exhibitions. However, this work is the result of the persistent and steady construction, and at times deconstruction of artwork, as it has been subjected to a stringent and critical vetting by the artist herself during the course of its making.

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Suzanne Hill has stories to tell, and while she most definitely has a point of view, the work in no way pushes us, in the particular, to believe what the artist believes or to feel what the artist feels. That we are to be touched at an emotional level and to be prodded intellectually is clear. But, there is no specific moral to be taken away from this work, no neat ending to her story, just the presence of very powerful questions. The artist has stated:

"I work in various media, making series of images around a powerful idea or theme that I feel has the potential to connect with the viewer on a number of levels.

Ideally, the artworks are visual triggers that draw a variety of responses, depending on an individual's own experiences.”

Suzanne Hill's work through the years has often spoken of our vulnerability to forces in this world, the pervasive natural forces that shape our world, and at times even those forces arising from human intervention. But, what we, the viewers, are to do with this information, if there is anything to be done, rests entirely with us. Suzanne Hill's work is, in this sense, simply a beautiful, terrifying, erotic, sublime vehicle of confrontation. We are confronted by this work, we are affected by this work, and it is we that decide what we will take away with us. The one thing I believe we must agree upon is that we will come away from her work feeling that we are richer for having visited with it.

The *High Water Mark* series with its representation of the patterns that shape our existence, with its inherent gains and losses is simply an outstanding chapter within the book of Suzanne Hill's work. With this series she continues her exploration of those forces that give to our lives its ebb and flow. We recognize those forces that are immutable, powerful forces that have brought us to our current state of existence and that will as quickly and assuredly take us away from it.

-Peter Buckland, Saint John, NB (2008)

The Peter Buckland Gallery is pleased to play a small role in helping to bring the work of Suzanne Hill to the people of New Brunswick.

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BIOGRAPHY:

Suzanne Hill lives in Rothesay, NB and is an active professional artist, art educator, and arts consultant. She is a graduate of Mount Allison's BFA program and a graduate of McGill University's Education program. She has had a long and successful teaching career until her retirement in 1998.

She has been a practicing artist exhibiting since the early 1970's. Her works are included in many public and private collections, including the Canada Council and New Brunswick Art Banks, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, the New Brunswick Museum, the University of New Brunswick and the University of Maine.

Her works can also be found in the collections of Moosehead Breweries, Aliant, the Canadian Red Cross Society, Brunswick Data Limited, the Barbara Ring Memorial Collection and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and the collection of the Rt. Honourable Adrienne Clarkson, the former Governor General of Canada. She regularly exhibits with and is represented by the Peter Buckland Gallery in Saint John and Ingrid Mueller's Art + Concepts in Fredericton.

She has received numerous grants from the New Brunswick Arts Board/ArtsNB including a Creation Grant for the *High Water Mark* series, an Arts-by-Invitation grant, as well as promotional and travel grants. Suzanne Hill was a recipient of the prestigious Strathbutler Award for Excellence in the Arts in 1999. Her work has been reviewed in Arts Atlantic and C Magazine. She was a featured artist in the CBC Artspots series.

Suzanne Hill remains involved with arts development and education. In 2003 she was instrumental in creating the NB Visual Art Education Association. She has been a juror for the New Brunswick Art Bank, Strathbutler Awards, and NB Art Board/ArtsNB. She has been a board member of Gallery Connexion in Fredericton, the Third Space Gallery in Saint John and she is currently on the Board of Directors for the New Brunswick Museum. She has been an active voice on the New

Brunswick Cultural Policy Task Force, the New Brunswick Arts Board/ArtsNB, and remains active in organizing community arts events within the city of Saint John.

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SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2008-9 *High Water Mark*, touring exhibition curated by Marie Maltais, UNB Art Centre, Fredericton, NB; Galerie d'art Louise-et-Reuben Cohen, Université de Moncton, NB; Galerie Colline, Edmunston, NB; Buckland Gallery, Saint John, NB
- 1999 *Weir*, curated by Ray Cronin; The Space, Saint John, NB
- 1997- 8 *Scarecrow*, curated by Roslyn Rosenfeld; Acadia University Art Gallery, Wolfville, NS; Galerie de l'Université de Moncton, NB; UNB Art Centre, Fredericton, NB; City Hall Gallery, Saint John, NB.
- 1994 *Carapaces*, Galerie de l'Université de Moncton, NB; Aitken Bicentennial Exhibition Centre (ABEC), Saint John, NB; Restigouche Art Gallery, Campbellton, NB; the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
- 1991 *Mini-show*, Touring exhibition organized by NB Arts Branch
- 1990 *Realignment*, Gallery Connexion, Fredericton, NB
- 1987 *Two Gardens*, Ring Gallery, Saint John, NB
- 1986 *Collages ABEC*, Gallery Connexion, Fredericton, NB
- 1985 *Figureheads*, Restigouche Art Gallery, NB; Art Gallery of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nfld; *Earthworks*, Galerie de l'Université de Moncton, NB; Sunbury Shores, Saint Andrews, NB; National Exhibition Centre, Fredericton, NB
- 1984 *Masks*, New Brunswick Craft School, Fredericton, NB
- 1983 *Swim Swim*, Galerie de l'Université de Moncton, NB; UNB Art Centre, Fredericton, NB
- 1982 *Falling Flags*, National Exhibition Centre, Fredericton, NB
Games, University of New Brunswick, Saint John, NB
- 1976 *Works in Egg Tempera*, New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, NB; Rothman's Centre, Moncton, NB

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SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2010 *Suzanne Hill, Toby Graser and Kathy Hooper*, curator Terry Graff, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery,

- Fredericton, NB
- 2005 *Caught in the Presence of Dreams*, Strathbutler Award Exhibition 1996-200, touring exhibition
curated by Tom Smart, Sheila Hugh MacKay Foundation
- 2002 *Work in Progress*, Gallery Connexion, Fredericton, NB
- 2001 *Weir*, Galeria Olimpo, Merida, Mexico
- 2000 *Marion McCain Exhibition*, touring exhibition curated by Tom Smart, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery
Beaverbrook Art Gallery Maritime Acquisitions, curated by Curtis Collins, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery
- 2000-9 *Dialogue*, Juried exhibition celebrating Francophonie
- 1998 *Delta*, New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, NB; Galerie de l'Université de Moncton, NB
- 1996 *Eye Level-Gallery Connexion Exchange*, Eye Level Gallery, Halifax, NS; Gallery Connexion,
Fredericton, NB
- 1996-7 *New Brunswick Artbank Selections*, touring exhibition
- 1993 *Exquisite Corpse*, curated by Tom Smart, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
- 1989-91 *Marion McCain Juried Art Exhibition*, the Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
- 1988 *5 ans déjà/5 years after*, curated by Roslyn Rosenfeld, Gallery Connexion, Fredericton, NB;
Galerie de l'Université de Moncton, NB

POEM LAST 2 PAGES

140 acres lying south from the water mark

Past the high water mark, the land rises to dunes, tussocky with marram grass,
slopes on the south side to marsh one that succumbs inland to scrub and spruce.

Through the woods, there's a conifer-needled path that yields to yard and house.

Walk with me, back the way we came, to the water-wear boundary marked by
mallet-driven stake, registered on deeds – the place possession begins from.

Since the tide's full, you'll notice what sea claims of shore.
From high water mark to tide line, there's a between-place,

an uncontested corridor neither ocean's or ours,
empty as a tickertape before figures, and full of rumour.

Terra firma, the sailors said backwhen, but we know better.
Thin place, elliptical and visible, in-firm to the feet, air of distance:

Wind current off the water, definite in direction,
assertively meeting the stillness molded over mowed fields. Clover-under-brine smell.

And that waul coming off the water: Sound, not of our world, hollow and percussive.

A further sense, neither common nor single, possessing you wholly, prickling
as sound recedes. Insensible, the image that occurs: A house where rooms waver.

Birds, there and there, but not here, not in this tenuity of ground, isotherm off the map.

Stilt-legged sandpipers, feet in the water, headbent to the chop,
and bank swallows, up there in the dunes, their rattly *bjjt* a caution, avoiding the air between.

- Anne Compton