The background of the entire page is an abstract, high-contrast image of water ripples. The colors range from deep, dark blue to bright, almost white highlights, creating a sense of movement and depth. The ripples are irregular and organic in shape, with some larger, more prominent ones and many smaller, scattered ones.

Art and Water Research Laboratory

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Foreword

Éric Lengereau
Director

The Art and Water Laboratory is a research unit at the école supérieure d'arts & médias de Caen/Cherbourg.

It affiliates scientific and artistic skills and methods with the aim of creating projects that investigate the relationship between art and water.

The laboratory is organised around a collective project that encourages pioneering intellectual production at the crossroads of knowledge and creativity. The work of this research unit is by definition interdisciplinary. It is in harmony with the concerns of contemporary creation as it relates to the socioeconomic and cultural realities of art, in immediate contact with works of art and their production.

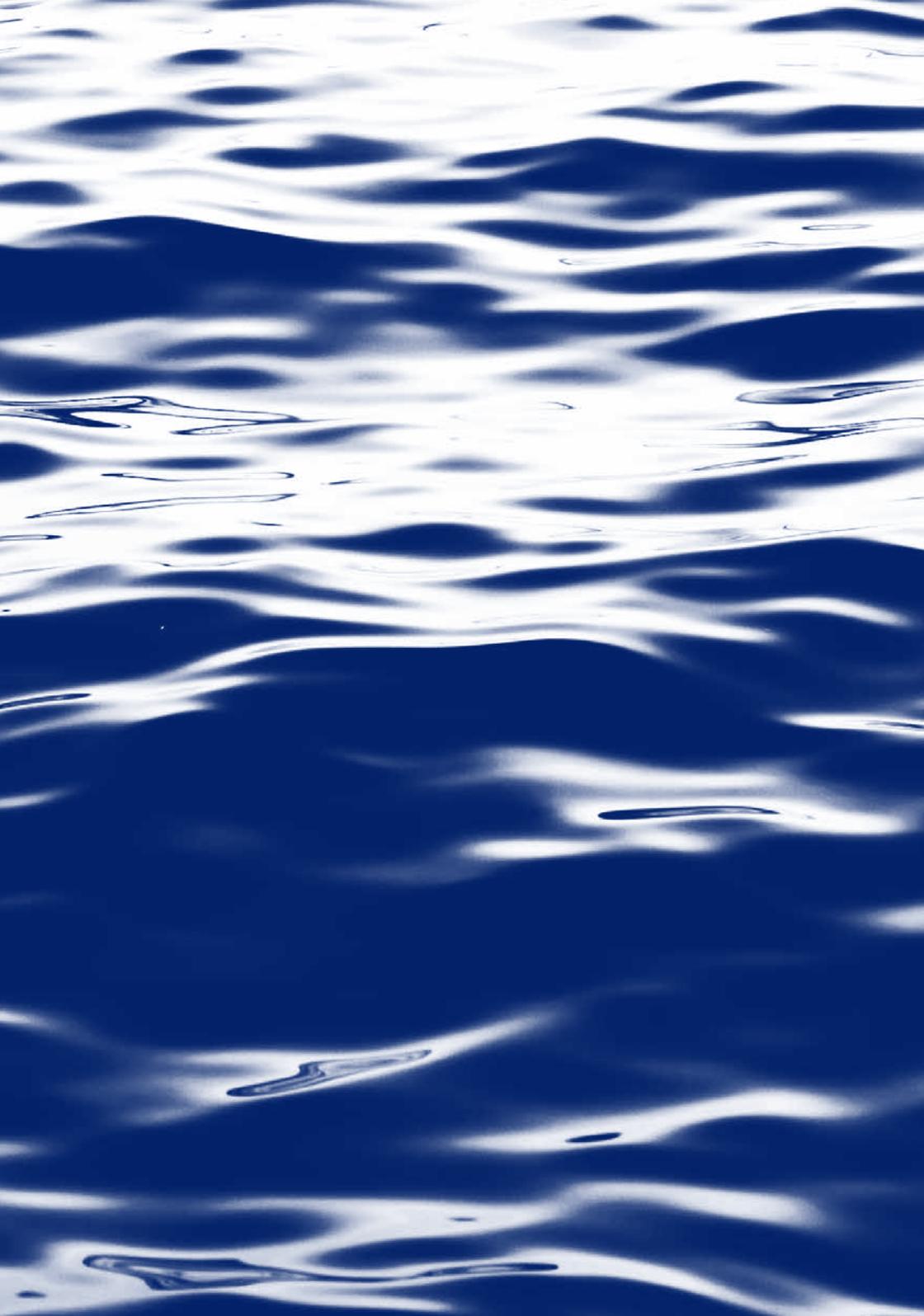
Water is a quotidian material as well as a source of dreams, as Bachelard so subtly puts it in his essay, "L'Eau et les rêves". Water is a source of life and of death. Even today, water suggests peace as it instigates war. It is a planetary economic vector with significant political stakes. In some cases, it can become a cultural enquiry bringing together knowledge and the imagination. It is at these crossroads that scientific and artistic practices coexist and where the energies of art school research are shaped, with both significant cultural and professional ramifications.

Through space as well as through time, water has proven exceedingly fruitful within the field of art. Many of Klaus Rinke's works demonstrate this, and they most significantly show how water is especially valid as

a subject for artistic research when it is anthropologically linked to the material. This suggests that numerous prospects and opportunities lie ahead for the Art and Water Laboratory. The following pages will show that the three chosen directions of research are at once inviting and stimulating. All projects are conceived and realised by team members, in collaboration with experienced and skilled external contributors from other disciplines. The new research unit is by necessity associated with the school's study program, as many of the team members are also professors at *ésam*.

With the Art and Water Laboratory's annual residency program, the school can welcome two foreign scientific or artistic researchers for the duration of a semester. Research projects will be selected according to their pertinence to the aforementioned intellectual challenges.

With the creation of this research unit, now recognised and supported by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication, the *école supérieure d'arts & médias de Caen/Cherbourg* holds a prime position in the European higher education landscape.



The relationship between art and water as a subject for research

Introduction

Introduction

Michèle Martel
Head of Research

The two campuses of the école supérieure d'arts & médias de Caen/Cherbourg have an obvious point in common: they are both surrounded by water. The Caen peninsula and the Cherbourg harbour are the expressions of a shared cultural reality that owes everything to their geographical context. The immediate closeness of water, as a traditional subject and a recurrent artistic material, is a topographical pretext for artistic and theoretical research dynamics. More than a pretext, this situation imposes itself, necessitating the creation of the Art and Water Research Laboratory.

The relationship between art and water has changed throughout the contemporary era. The sea has been a subject of pictorial representation for a long time, but it evolved new meaning with William Turner's 19th century watercolours. Turner was the first to understand subject and material together, most notably as the material itself and the way it was implemented became part of the very meaning of the representation. The intimate relationship between matter and pattern remains in today's contemporary production.

The investigations of the Art and Water Laboratory are organized around three areas of research. The first one deals with the relationship between art and water in the geographical sense of territories and landscape. Water draws borders, but it also makes them porous. It has been domesticated in order to serve human development, but it can also destroy it. Through accident or by design, water transforms the landscape and suggests a whole range of artistic approaches.

The second area deals with water as matter or material; as a substance or a component of the living environment. Its recurring presence in contemporary artworks often emphasizes its physical qualities, such as its impermanency. As well, the use of this medium coincides with a period when "all that is solid melts into air", to quote Marx and Engels (1848).

The third area of research treats the relationship that art and water have with movement and travel, from the perspective of a continuous mobility of goods and people through time and space; from the opening of foreign shores; from the resultant interest in alterity, and the socioeconomic realities of the modern world, with an oft-incumbent and necessary exile.

Despite very different scales, structures and natures, the research projects of the Art and Water Laboratory fit into these three areas. They are developed by members of the team who are either scientific or artistic researchers. These projects can take various shapes: meetings, workshops, symposiums, experimentations, exhibitions or publications.



Territories & Landscapes

Research area #1

Territories & Landscapes



Water is an element. Through its many paradoxes, it is fundamental for the transformation of territories and the landscape. It is subject to domestication and exploitation in the interest of human economical and political expansion, as it is also a constant threat (climate, economy, ecology). So it is both a conquest and an uncontrollable and even destructive natural element. Yet water is also space: an aquatic space that can be conceived as an unlimited expanse, a symbol of liberty. In this context, it questions territorial limits and the truth of landscapes.

This combination of paradoxes raises stakes that are linked to the very concept of territoriality. Because water changes landscapes and ways of life, it influences the architectural and urban space. How are experience and the representation of territories modified through water?

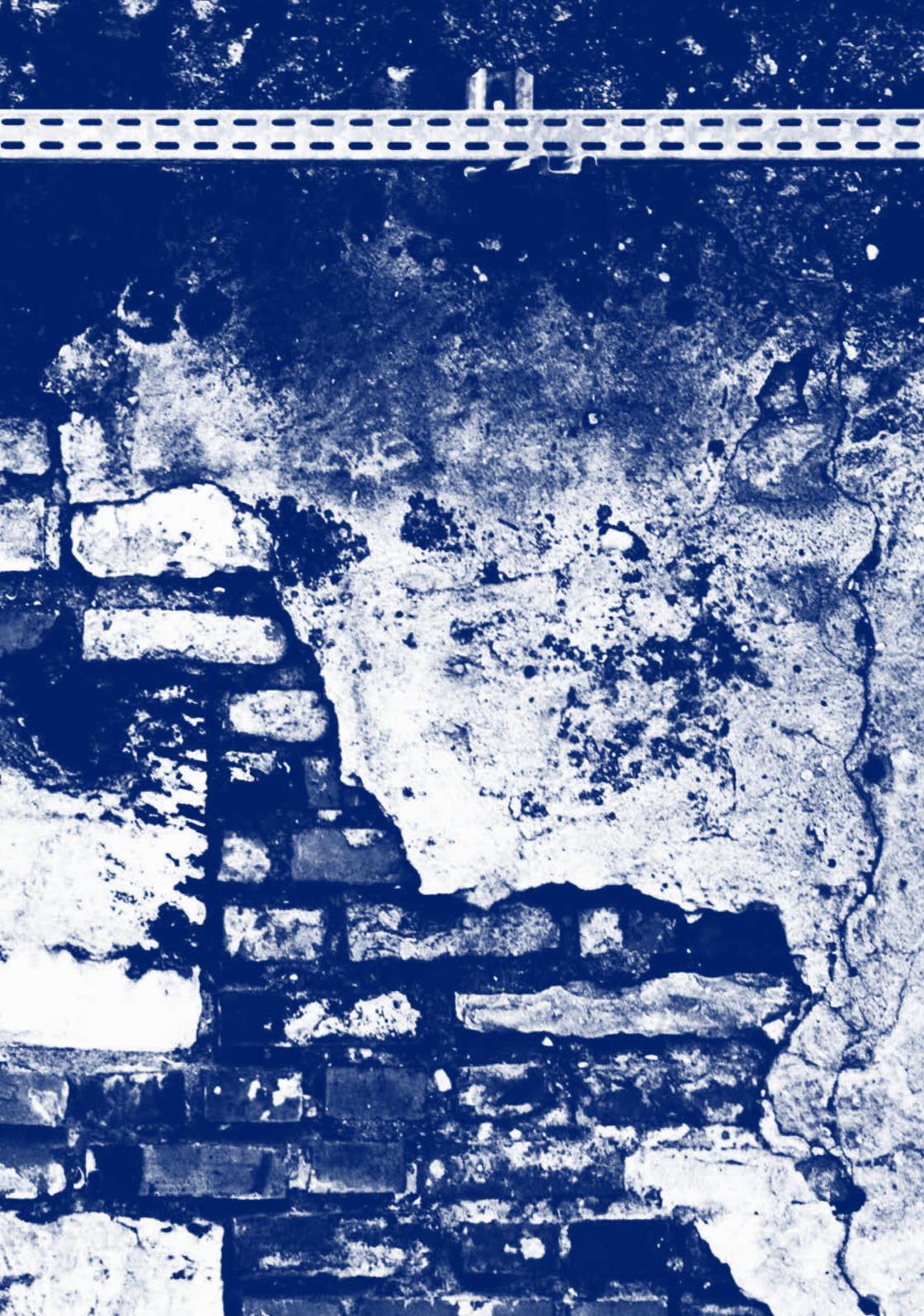
The creation of intermediary spaces is an opportunity to focus on the territories that are shaped by humans, oscillating between appearance and disappearance, artificial and natural, heaven and earth. This is the case with fluvial geography. Given the historical importance of the social and spatial changes, the river is an endless source of encounter for arts and knowledge.

As reflected in painting and poetry, the port, in the founding of urban civilizations, has been the place of the most fruitful of aesthetic initiatives. What about their sometimes ambiguous relationship with contemporary art practices? Both the landscapes of the river and the coastal space are involved in this question. But what is the relationship between works of art (design, production and reception) and the harbour,

on this territory in flux, where the trade in ideas, people and goods is at the foundation of the historical evolution of humans?

Seen as a place of memory for the marine and submarine worlds, reflecting the past, seas and oceans are also present and forward-looking. They are of course global solutions for the survival of species; but above all they are places and non-places for contemporary art.

A closer look reveals that the relationship between art and water often comes from a pluralist perception of the territory as it is built and shaped into its own political, economical and cultural identity. Works belonging to this area of research can naturally consider territories and landscapes in the broadest sense, in a speculative vision of water's spaciousness through visual, literary, architectural and cinematographic investigations.

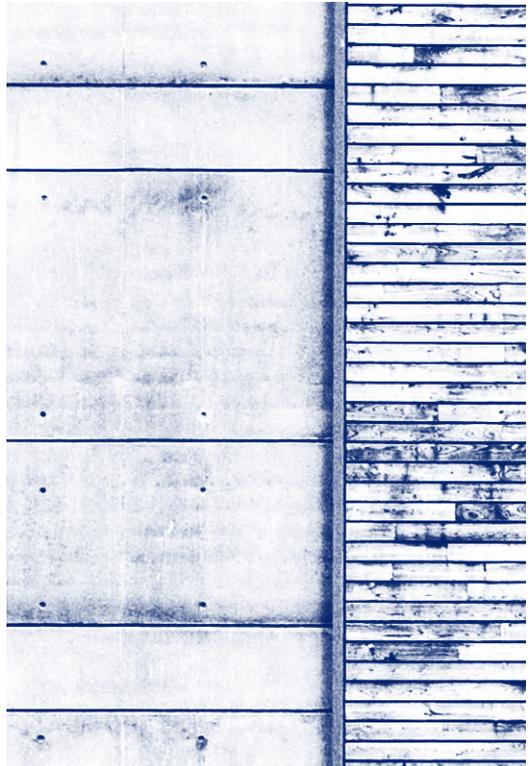


Matter & Material

Research area #2

Matter & Material

In a different and complementary register of investigation, the laboratory's second area of research is focused on the organic and physical dimensions of the relationship between art and water. Organic because the realm of the living is here invoked; physical because the permanency of water in art is often addressed through the means of images and sound.



In places such as Lower Normandy, landscape and weather undulate and change at the pace of water. Which kind of visual, textual or acoustic shape can water-based artwork take? What imaginative relationship do artists have with this natural or artificial element as they read it, listen to it, feel it? But beyond the desire to understand artists' approach and the quality of their work, the researches of the Art and Water Laboratory concentrate on the conceptual proximity that organizes a fertile dependence on the artworks inception and the knowledge of water as matter and a material.

In order to create new subjects for research on art and water, we must consider the modification of living things through biotechnologies. Their impact on aquatic spaces is fundamental. They generate a new imaginary that can be related to the fear of the monsters and the monstrous, and sometimes to a delicate perception of the notions of alteration and pollution.

Water isn't immaterial, but most of the time our perception of its liquid and fluctuating state is imaginative and aural. The gaseous, liquid and solid states of water make us question the present state of the material as well as its resistance, its resonance, its shape.

Water is protean and moving, and is by nature experienced as movement through time. This linear unfolding can also be found in the very nature of sound and cinematographic works. The art of sound recording rose during the 20th century and at least since the fifties, flaneurs and strolling individuals attentive to sound, and equipped with a "sonograph", can record and make music with these sounds. The never-ending motion that water and sound share leads to concerns of flux, in connection with the idea of movement and territories.



Movement & Travel

Research area #3

Movement & Travel



At the crossroads of the various possible disciplines within the Art and Water Laboratory, and as the field and methods evolve, new objects of research are appearing, evoking the delicate relationships existing between reality and imagination, the rational and the felt, closeness and distance. These are the orientations of the third area of research.

The geographical situation of Lower Normandy, with the Cotentin peninsula pointing towards England and beyond that towards the New World, has often been seen as a chosen maritime starting point for exile. Even today, the Lower Norman coast is a jumping-off place where stowaways escaping from war, misery or oppressive regimes are waiting to cross the Channel, hoping to find a better life on the other side. Mobility is related to the life of trade and migration. While being subject to this local situation and linking it to the contemporary process of globalization, the Art and Water Laboratory questions ideas of movement, sailing, extraterritoriality, myth, story-telling and poetry by using water as a reference. The oceanic space builds some of the dividing lines between territories and humans. But it also exists above any geographical identity, in the international zones. To what

extent do the itinerant practices of contemporary art echo questions of the political, the social and of identity? How do the movements of contemporary artists contribute to the drawing of a new artistic geography and imaginary? The crossing point and invisible world that is the ocean reflects the reality of contemporary history, while opening new imaginary and even utopian prospects. It makes us wonder about the fictional and poetic spaces that travel and water can create. In a globalized world, how do we reinvent features from elsewhere – or how do we acknowledge that they are impossible? In contact with the humanities, these questions are an opportunity to consider the links between artists and water as a surface for traffic and as a living space.



Members of the team

Biographies

— Laurent Buffet

is a philosopher and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. He often publishes articles in specialized journals, and has written texts for several books and exhibition catalogues.

— Paul Collins

is an artist and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. His work is related to the inherent characteristics of the many media that he uses and combines deliberately: painting, photography, video, music, editions.

— Céline Duval

is an artist and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. She uses the name "documentation céline duval" to explore the photographic complexity of the social landscape.

— Benjamin Hochart

is an artist and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. He practices drawing in the expanded field, from wall and installed drawings to printed works.

— Alice Laguarda

is a philosopher and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. She has written several texts about art, architecture and cities for specialized journals and books.

— Éric Lengereau

is an urban architect and an architecture historian, and has a PhD in art history. He is the current director of ésam Caen/Cherbourg.

— Michèle Martel

is an art historian and professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. She is a specialist on Hans Arp and her articles have been published in catalogues, magazines and books.

— Camille Prunet

is a researcher and a PhD student at Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle University, and she coordinates the research activities of ésam Caen/Cherbourg. She works on the links between art, life and the uses of new technologies.

— Maxence Rifflet

is an artist and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. He is a photographer and a member of the RADO group.

— Maxime Thieffine

is an artist and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. He has participated in several collective exhibitions in France and in Europe.

— Thierry Weyd

is an artist and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. He explores popular imagery and storytelling through audiovisual performance, somewhere between poetry and acting.

— Emmanuel Zwenger

is a researcher and a professor at ésam Caen/Cherbourg. He is a PhD student in comparative Literature at the Caen Basse-Normandie University. His work is about the reconstruction of memory through the use of documents within the literary context.



Art and Water Research Laboratory

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