

# WORLD RECORD



MICHAEL LOWE GALLERY

Tony Oursler: Crossing Neptune

September 29–October 31, 2022

Water remains our most elemental unknown. It is a trans-cultural and historical symbol of mythologies ranging from childbirth, miracles, purification and healing rituals, to mysterious sea creatures, falling icicles, and invisible toxins. Belief in water is strong and its powers both benevolent and deadly. Water can wash away sins, cure disease, and offer eternal youth. Or it can harbor “blobsters,” freeze explorers, and swamp cities, depending on the teller and the listener, the fraudster and the rube.

*Crossing Neptune* is an exhibition featuring archival works on the theme of water from the personal collection of artist Tony Oursler—photographs, mostly anonymous, of baptisms, “blob monsters,” ice formations, and actual vessels of holy water—plus original installation works by Oursler on water as a transformative element embodying a long list of inherited, paranormal mythologies. The exhibition takes its name from a longstanding maritime tradition in which sailors, crossing the equator for the first time, were subjected to a hazing ritual, often involving someone dressed as the sea god Neptune and others as a variety of personae—women, most commonly, but also babies, policemen, or priests. Crossing Neptune became a cross-dressing rite of passage for younger sailors as well as a fantasy occasion for the more seasoned on the lonely, monotonous seas. The term is borrowed here to suggest the allure of passage to other realms and water as a conduit.

Based on an unpublished text, “On Water and Magical Thinking,” a compilation of historic water mythologies created by Oursler over time, *Crossing Neptune* explores aquatic belief systems, ranging from the most common to the outlandishly bizarre, and their sustained echoes in contemporary culture, where historic tropes now morph into politicized commentary on evolution, climate science, and more. As water resources become scarcer, the challenges presented to scientists begin to rub against mass cultural fantasies, delivering us to a zone of magical thinking—a place of both political friction and potential generation.

*Tony Oursler: Crossing Neptune* is a curated exhibition for the 2022 FotoFocus Biennial: *World Record*. Now in its sixth iteration, the 2022 FotoFocus Biennial encompasses more than 100 projects at Participating Venues across Greater Cincinnati, Northern Kentucky, Dayton, and Columbus, and features more than 600 artists, curators, and participants—the largest of its kind in America. The *World Record* theme considers photography’s extensive record of life on earth, humankind’s impact on the natural world, and the choices we now face as a global community.

**CURATOR:** Kevin Moore, FotoFocus Artistic Director and Curator, and Tony Oursler, Multimedia Artist

Michael Lowe Gallery

905 Vine St, Cincinnati, OH 45202

(513) 288-5014

Thu–Sat Noon–5pm

Free to the Public

FOTOFOCUS

Neptune Crossing Ritual Postcard. 5¾ × 3¼ inches



Tony Oursler  
*Merma*, 2022  
Aqua resin, acrylic paint, metal flake, polyester, gemstones, mirror, video projection, sound  
36 × 24¼ × 58 inches



Photograph of Margaret Howe with Peter the dolphin, October 6, 1967  
7¼ × 9 inches



Cuyahoga River Fire



Tony Oursler  
*Wi\$ Well*, 2022  
Fiberglass, resin, acrylic paint, wood, dichroic plexiglass, water, ultrasonic mister, video projection, sound  
40½ × 42 × 81¾ inches



Elements Attack. Lake Erie, Madison township, Ohio, March 26, 1973  
8 × 10 inches



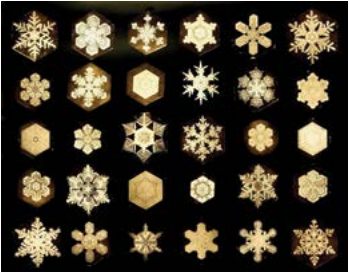
A blob monster (whale carcass) being removed from the beach



Tony Oursler  
*Ev0.3*, 2022  
Acrylic paint, Inkjet print on canvas mounted on wood panel, video projection, sound  
76 × 43 × 2½ inches



Beastly Day. A priest imparts the traditional blessing to a plethora of pets, Rome, January 22, 1958



A selection of Wilson Bentley's snowflakes





ADE-651 bomb-detecting dowsing rod



Bigfoot photograph  
5 × 7 inches



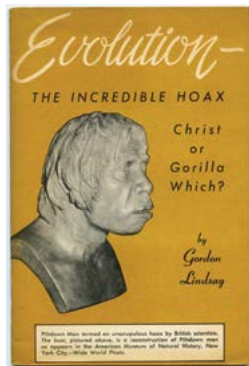
Spirit photograph of St. Bernadette,  
 Lourdes, France



Ganges River rites, February 13, 1938  
10 × 8 inches



Few visitors to the shrine leave without a supply of blessed  
 holy water, designated as a "sacramental" for Catholics, July  
 22, 1950  
8 × 10 inches



Evolution- The Incredible Hoax. Christ  
 or Gorilla Which? Anti-evolution  
 pamphlet  
5 3/8 × 8 inches



Another 'Monkey Trial'? Susan  
 Epperson, a biology teacher in Little  
 Rock's Central High School, has begun  
 a legal assault on Arkansas' anti-  
 evolution law, January 2, 1966  
8 × 10 inches



Cuyahoga River pollution



A sensory deprivation float tank



'Respirator Girl' Rebuilds In Water  
 Gymnasium. They thought Frances  
 Gleason would never leave a respirator  
 alive. Now she is out of the respirator  
 six to eight hours at a time. On a cot  
 she is lowered into a warm water pool,  
 where the youngster is slowly regaining  
 the use of her emaciated lower limbs.  
 San Francisco Hospital "Under Water"  
 Gym, April 16, 1935  
6 × 8 inches



A pretty and talented Weeki Wachee mermaid checks her hairdo before descending  
 117 feet into Florida's Underwater Grand Canyon  
5 1/2 × 3 1/2 inches





Ice Fountain  
8 × 11 inches

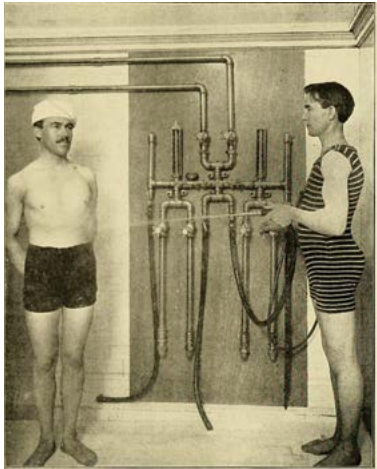


Illustration from *Rational Hydrotherapy: A manual of the psychological and therapeutic effects of hydriatic procedures and the technique of their application in the treatment of disease*, 1902



Pregnant woman and man baptism in rushing river  
2½ × 3½ inches



Wilson Bentley photographing snowflakes



An eternal Ponce de Leon presides over St. Petersburgs famed fountain of youth, July 22, 1967  
10 × 8 inches



Woman being treated in a hydrotherapeutic float tank  
10 × 8 inches



Air And Water Pollution Slide, *Pollution Engineering* magazine



Dying Whale. More than 40 sperm whales beached themselves at Florence Saturday night in what was described as the third largest whale beaching ever recorded  
11 × 8 ¼ inches



Air And Water Pollution Slide, *Pollution Engineering* magazine



Ritual In The Water, April 4, 1969.  
8 × 10 inches



Health Advisory: Eat No Fish From This Water. Onondaga Lake, New York, May 15, 1986  
11 × 7 inches



Neptune Crossing Ritual Postcard  
5¾ × 3¼ inches



Slowing Down. As she nears the bottom of her dive and her speed slackens, the air cushion breaks into thousands of bubbles. An arm appears and the outline of her figure may be seen  
7 × 5 inches

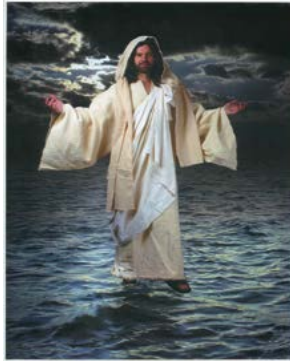


Billy Wilson reaches up for an icicle hanging on one of the fruit trees coated with ice from the sprinkler in the yard of his suburban Sierra Nevada home here. Los Angeles, January 14, 1963





Neptune Crossing Ritual  
4 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 3 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches



Jesus walking on stormy water  
8 × 10 inches



Man with wishing well  
6 × 4 inches



A Loch Ness Monster photograph  
5 $\frac{5}{8}$  × 3 $\frac{3}{8}$  inches



Mates and Hamilton as a wild man and hula maiden at the Neptune Party onboard USS Marblehead while crossing the equator  
5 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 3 $\frac{5}{8}$  inches



Daughter of Neptune. Adele Kupiec of Brooklyn N.Y., delighted thousands of spectators, as she perched on her float as "King Neptune's Daughter" during the 41st Annual Baby Parade at Asbury Park N.J., August 31, 1932  
9 × 7 inches



Flood St., Cincinnati, February 12, 1937  
9 × 7 inches



Two women posing with a false wishing well  
3 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 5 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches



P.W. Hamilton, "Water Witch" of Kansas City, January 22, 1931  
8 × 10 inches



Jehovah's Witness Baptism, June 17, 1978  
10 × 8 inches



Chelsea Arts Ball Preparations. A group of mermaids in the "Sunken Treasure Ship" tableau which is being presented by the girls of the Hornsey Art School at the Chelsea Arts Ball at the Albert Hall, August 29, 1929  
8 $\frac{1}{2}$  × 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  inches





The Thing. Mermaid as seen at Ye Olde Curiosity Shop. Seattle, Washington  
5½ × 3½ inches



“Demon.” Photograph of water after speaking the word “demon” to it. By Masaru Emoto, late 20th century



I would rather drink beer (close up of the lake)  
14 × 11½ inches



“You are beautiful.” Photograph of water after speaking the phrase “you are beautiful” to it. By Masaru Emoto, late 20th century

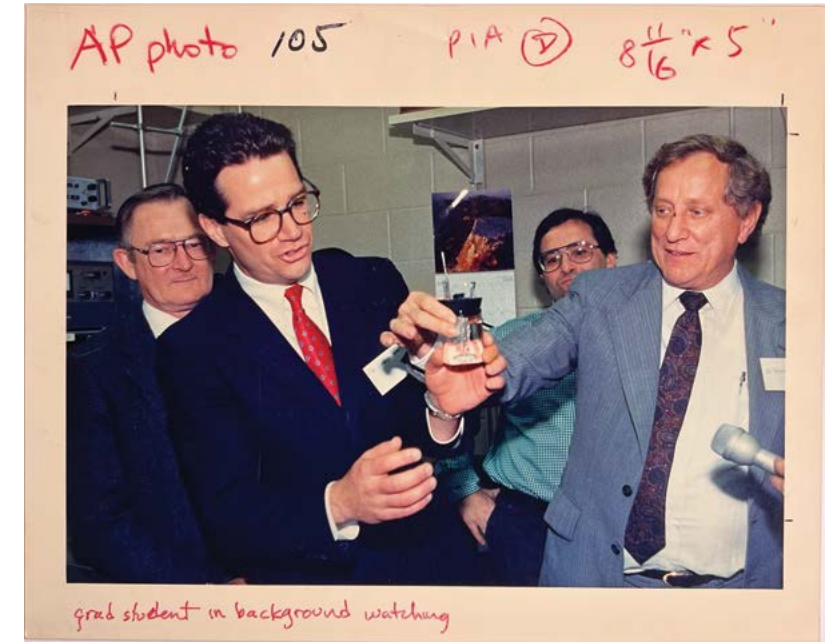


Water Carrying slides



Photograph of a water crystal by Masaru Emoto, late 20th century

Texas A&M University scientists Dr. Kenneth Marsh, left rear, Dr. Charles Martin, center, and Bruce Gammon explain how, using a glass of water at room temperature, they confirmed part of a controversial nuclear fusion experiment done recently in Utah. The breakthrough in Utah may be the first step in providing a cheap, long-lasting source of electrical energy  
8 × 1¼ × 5 inches



An early float tank experiment

## GUIDE TO VITRINES

1. Holy Water / Floods
2. Fountain of Youth / Water Carriers
3. Springs / Fountain of Youth II
4. Walking on Water
5. Baptisms
6. Mermaids / Mermen
7. Water Pollution
8. Dowsing
9. “Little Animals,” Leeuwenhoek
10. Snowflakes / Water Memory / Cold Fusion
11. Neptune Ritual
12. Loch Ness Monster
13. (Anti) Evolution / Cryptozoology
14. Ice
15. Blob Monsters / Dolphins
16. Hydrotherapy / Floatation Tanks / Dolphins II



# TONY OURSLER

## CROSSING NEPTUNE

MICHAEL LOWE  
COLLECTION

