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MUSÉE
VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE

EXHIBITION REVIEW: CLIFFORD ROSS “PRINTS ON WOOD”

By Emma Elizabeth Mathes | May 6, 2021



Clifford Ross, *Untitled*, 2020. © Clifford Ross; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.

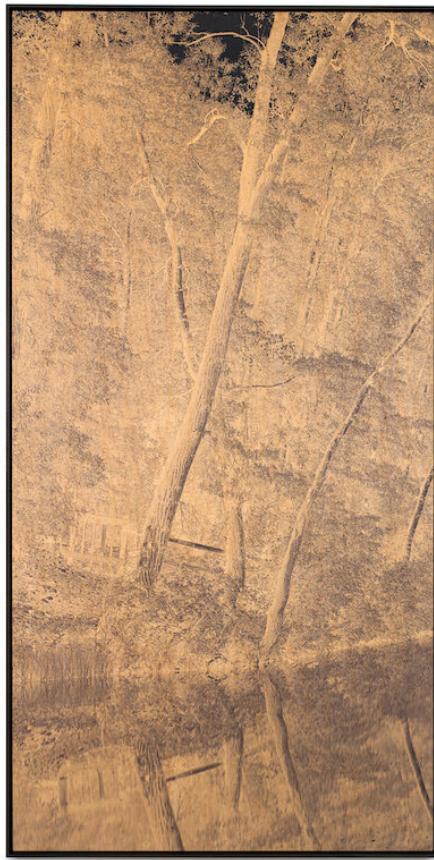
There is one week left to catch Clifford Ross's latest work of ecological grandeur, presented by Ryan Lee Gallery in Chelsea, Manhattan.

For his well-known *Hurricane* series, Clifford Ross tethered himself to the Long Island shore and waded out into the stormy surf, camera in hand. For his later Mountain series, Ross invented the R1, one of the highest resolution cameras in the world. Ross's work is nature-focused, and always imaginative. His latest exhibition, Clifford Ross: Prints on Wood is no exception. The work is an awe-inspiring introspection on nature's sublime.

On display in Chelsea are ten unique wood panel prints from Ross. Each image is a dramatic crop of Ross's previous works. This tightened focus calls attention to the magnitude and power of nature; it emphasizes the relevancy in even the smallest of details. And indeed, this is often Ross's intention with his art: to “recreate nature by virtue of its scale.” The daring multimedia creator is notable for his innovation and often spectacular techniques. He pursues new routes continuously to study the earth's majesty with fresh eyes.

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Clifford Ross, *Untitled*, 2020. © Clifford Ross; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.

For *Prints on Wood*, Ross hand-selected the wood panels for each image; the type of wood would determine each print's success. Each image was then refined, to perfectly complement their respective panel. Honoring the woods' singularity, Ross plays with light rather than color. He rearranges the negative and positive spaces, toying with shading, contrast, and tone. The result is more akin to a film negative than it is a photographic print.

Ross' images and their wood seem to fuse together into a homogenous, yet multi-textural landscape. From a distance, the ink can look like engraving, like the work's physicality is one manipulated substance. Ross' first mediums were substance-based [painting and sculpture.] Prints on Wood brought Clifford Ross back to that materiality.

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Clifford Ross, Untitled, 2019. © Clifford Ross; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE Gallery, New York.

The wood organically conveys an ecosystem's fluidity. The grain shows through the prints, imbuing fixed ink with texture and movement. And, the wood's natural patterning suggests changeability. Even the minute details of Ross's photographs dance, reminding one of the essential and persistent activity in a biome. Ross works to spotlight nature's complexity and singular strength at even its microbial level. The lack of varying color underscores its consistency; each element (water, air, earth) is part of a larger whole, all working together in congruence.

Our earth is majestic; Ross' expansive projects continue to honor this fact. "Nature affects me as much as art [does]," Ross says, and it's hard to disagree with him after experiencing his magnificent tributes.



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The Palm Beach Post

REAL NEWS STARTS HERE

Boca Museum's big 'Waves' show a wake-up call to climate change

By Larry Aydlette | January 7, 2020



Clifford Ross, *Hurricane LXIII*, 2009, Archival pigment print. © Clifford Ross. Courtesy of the artist and Ryan Lee Gallery.

Everybody with an iPhone and an Instagram account thinks they can take pictures of ocean waves. You won't feel that way after viewing the phenomenal, large-scale images of foamy, thundering surf that roll across the ground floor of the Boca Raton Museum of Art.

"Clifford Ross: Waves" shows how an artist can take a ubiquitous subject and make it seem vividly fresh and relevant, especially in an era of climate change.

Ross is the kind of guy who believes in getting close to his art: He lugged a camera directly into hurricane conditions off Long Island, while an assistant braced him with a tether line. He later took the black and white images, enlarged them and digitally enhanced or "painted" the details.

Recognized around the world, Ross' career has been a pursuit of art on a dramatic scale. "I wasn't looking for William Blake's 'world in a grain of sand,'" he said in an interview

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Ross, in the yellow jacket, shoots images while an assistant holds a tether line.

with Miami's WLRN radio. "I was enthralled from an early age with big nature – oceans and mountains."

The results are both cinematic and abstract. His monumental pictures serve as a kind of waterlogged Rorschach test: You see glassy waterfalls and rugged mountain scapes and Pollock-like explosions in Ross' manipulated pictures, which are rendered as precise as pencil drawings.

The fizz and frenzy of his super-sized photography is only one way Ross approaches his subject. He is fascinated by the Zen-like calm of the ocean, which he expresses in prints of crashing waves on large, triptych wood panels. Nature's fury seems arrested in time, while the format brings to mind the soothing elegance of Asian art.

He also has a wonderful series of vertical pictures in which a breaking wave is shown in a thin line at the top of the frame, with only a vast field of blackness beneath, resembling a kind of scroll. He carries that abstraction to its extreme in his "Grains" pictures, a series of square gray and white expanses that represent a blending of surf and sky.

Celebrating its 70th year, the museum is promoting the show as a wake-up call to climate change -- and the more extreme weather that threatens our coastline. While Ross says the exhibit primarily represents "a thorough survey of my working methods," it has also taken on another dimension.

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“When I started out, wanting to celebrate nature by creating bodies of work that were an homage to the sublime, I didn’t understand that the images were also capturing evidence – evidence of our negative impact on nature,” the New York-based artist said in a statement provided by the museum.

“When I first began photographing these hurricane waves 30 years ago, most of us were unaware that global warming was seriously damaging our oceans. Now, as I look back on my work, it takes on a whole new meaning.”

As art, that meaning is hard to resist. As a warning, it’s perilous to ignore.



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artdaily.org

Boca Raton Museum of Art kicks off bold new season

November 6, 2019



Clifford Ross, Maren Hassinger, Jody Harrison Grass (Chair of the Museum's Board), & Irvin Lippman (Executive Director, Boca Raton Museum of Art). Photo by Jose Lima of News Travels Fast.

BOCA RATON, FLA.- The power of nature was unleashed with the world premiere of two timely exhibitions at the Boca Raton Museum of Art for the new season. Both of these original shows Maren Hassinger: Tree of Knowledge and Clifford Ross: Waves launched the museum's 70th anniversary season and will remain on view through March 1st. The museum is presenting both exhibitions together because they sound a clarion call for environmental awareness. These two shows also remind viewers that the beauty and power of nature can still inspire us, despite the oversaturation of society by hand-held devices and screens.

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The two exhibitions are presented side-by-side in adjoining galleries. Clifford Ross: Waves features a new approach to his monumental depictions of ocean waves that the artist captures during extreme weather. The result is the most comprehensive survey of his process ever shown in a museum. Ross dramatically presents the monstrous power of the seas in his new exhibition at a crucial moment in time for our planet: the United Nations recently issued a major new report warning that the dangerous effects of climate change on our oceans is much worse than previously thought. The new findings warn about warming oceans and damaged ecosystems.

Sea levels are rising faster than previously predicted, glaciers and ice sheets melting more rapidly than expected, shrinking the fisheries that feed millions. "When I first began photographing these hurricane waves 30 years ago, most of us were unaware that global warming was seriously damaging our oceans," said Clifford Ross. "Now, as I look back on my work, it takes on a whole new meaning."

For her show, Maren Hassinger: Tree of Knowledge, the renowned sculptor and performance artist was commissioned by the museum for a residency that explored the staying power of nearby Pearl City, Boca Raton's historic AfricanAmerican neighborhood. This is the largest installation that Hassinger has ever created in her long and celebrated career. It is based on Pearl City's landmark, the "Tree of Knowledge." This majestic, 100-year-old banyan tree still stands today and is protected by the Historic Preservation laws.

Hassinger vigorously engaged the public to recreate the tree's aerial roots by gathering many groups over several months, twisting by hand thousands of recycled newspapers. "I want visitors to the museum to think about the endurance of the tree and the endurance of the people who live beside it," said Maren Hassinger. "I hope they realize it's possible to build a world in which, like this installation, people work together side by side. Both the tree and the residents have inspired me with their mutual endurance."

In new reports, the United Nations warns that fires such as those causing de-forestation in the Amazon elevate concerns for the planet's natural life support systems. This global call to action urges countries, companies and consumers to build a new relationship with nature. The destruction of the world's largest rainforest calls attention to the need to prevent ecosystems from declining to a point of no return, with dire consequences for humanity.

Hassinger's new installation is about nature as knowledge and about education. The twisted ropes of newspaper are made of words and stories. "I hope the community and all of the visitors to the museum take a moment to think about the materials used in the project, which are not traditional art materials, and realize that this giant project was made not by artists, but by the public, working together," adds Maren Hassinger.

"Following the theme of nature for our new season at the Museum, how appropriate that Maren Hassinger would choose this legendary tree, known as the Tree of Knowledge, as the subject for her site-specific installation," said Irvin Lippman, the executive director of the Boca Raton Museum of Art. "From its inception to its installation, this has involved audiences of all ages from every corner of our community to participate in the making of the aerial roots from streams of recycled newspapers. Much in the manner of the Banyan tree, we are all connected to one another." Hassinger's new exhibition will also feature the installation called Embrace Love - an experiential portal for visitors to walk through. As the entranceway into the museum's main

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galleries, it will surround visitors with hundreds of recycled pink plastic bags that will cover the walls around them. The shopping bags are filled with the air of human breath, and contain human love notes inside.

On the subject of Clifford Ross: Waves, Lippman adds: "It would seem obvious that a museum with a coastal address such as ours would naturally be ever fascinated by the subject of waves. The subject of Clifford's photographs in this new exhibition, however, goes deeper into the unpredictable shapes of waves, as much about abstraction as realism."

The effect of being engulfed in a room full of his work is profound, causing some viewers to claim they can actually hear the sound of the ocean waves although there is no sound component. Ross is celebrated worldwide for his Hurricane Waves series, monumental images that were photographed by the artist during storms and while hurricanes were off-shore, while he was attached by a tether to his assistant who remained on land as Ross braved the ocean surf. The size of these images is humbling. The angle of vision, from as low as possible, is calculated to inspire awe. The waves dominate us, framed or cropped; we feel their full force. These waves invoke the power of wind as well as the power of water, the great cyclical forces of nature that generate energy.

While it explores the limits of photography and abstraction, this exhibition is also a dramatic declaration about climate change. "This exhibition is a thorough survey of my working methods," said Ross. "an effort to show all the ways I have approached the subject of ocean waves. But there's also a deeper theme of addressing climate change – unavoidable in this day and age. Somehow the apocalyptic quality of the show does not erase the basic lyricism and beauty that I see in nature. When I started out, wanting to celebrate nature by creating bodies of work that were an homage to the sublime, I didn't understand that the images were also capturing evidence – evidence of our negative impact on nature. The ferocity, the forms of these waves were partially due to global warming. This project has come full circle, as much a meditation on the medium of photography as it is a photographic reflection of our world."



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Hurricanes Become Art In New Boca Museum Exhibit

By Madeline Fox • Oct 31, 2019



A woman stands in front of an earlier exhibition of Ross's Wood Wave LIV triptych.

In South Florida, hurricanes are a force of destruction, a driver of change and a fact of life.

All those qualities also make hurricanes a good catalyst for art. The power of hurricanes on the surf inspired the work of artist Clifford Ross, whose exhibit "Waves" will open at the Boca Raton Museum of Art on November 5th.

For more than 20 years, Ross has been capturing waves generated by hurricanes miles to hundreds of miles offshore from Georgica Beach in East Hampton, New York. The exhibit opens with 11 giant black-and-white photos of hurricane waves Ross took in 2008.

"It tracks a twenty year journey to express my passion for the ocean by pushing the boundaries of realism and abstraction," Ross said of the work.

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He favors “big nature” in his art.

“I wasn’t looking for William Blake’s ‘world in a grain of sand’ – some microscopic view or a photograph of a small bird,” he said. “I was enthralled from an early age with big nature – oceans and mountains.”

In early days, Ross said he would bundle up in a wetsuit, or layer after layer of clothing, to guard against the chill of the northern Atlantic. He’s since adapted, prioritizing safety as well as warmth to capture the sometimes violent waves. These days, he tethers himself to an assistant on shore and wades into the water to shoot.

“I’m a desperate man,” he said, “and I’ll try, by any means necessary, to share my experience with nature.”

Ross’s experience with that stretch of Long Island beach hasn’t always been so daring. When he visited the beach with his family as a young child, he said, he was “petrified” of the water.

“I had an older brother who would dive into waves with great abandon, and I had to screw up my courage to even get into the water,” he said.

He said he mastered the water over time, first becoming a strong swimmer, then returning to capture it on film.

“I think it’s a bit of vengeance,” he said. “I’m now controlling the waves that petrified me.”



Ross (in yellow) stands in the ocean photographing hurricane waves, tethered to an assistant onshore (in black).

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Irvin Lippman, the director of the museum, has been working to bring Ross to Boca Raton since he saw an exhibit of the artist's work at Mass MoCa several years ago. The hurricane waves, he thought, would resonate with the museum's coastal community. As he got to know Ross's work, though, he said he came to appreciate the more abstract works inspired by Ross's experience of ocean waves.

"Clifford is always imagining how he can use the subject in new ways," said Lippman. "He creates these new works that I think are so dramatic."

Beyond the large and more traditional wave photographs, there are wave photographs printed on large panels of maple formed into triptychs, the wood grain showing through and adding texture. There are framed pieces of solid blocks of color in grayscale shades. There are photographs of small, non-hurricane waves – calm portraits captured on a clear day.

"When I'm shooting, the world seems to go into slow motion and goes quiet," he said. "I needed something to represent that quiet – and the still sky above the horizon on a calm, clear summer day."

The museum also commissioned a piece that will remain after Ross's exhibit closes on March 1st. It's an 8 foot by 4 foot LED panel showing a video of entirely computer-generated waves – "no waves or oceans were harmed in making this artwork," he quips. Ross describes it as another attempt to bring the viewer closer to his own experience when he works with big nature.

Lippman sees the LED panel installation as the "culmination of the 'waves-equaling-energy'" idea.

"This electrical impulse is making these amazing shapes, the memory of the waves as he saw them," Lippman said.

Ross's Waves exhibit is being paired on the museum's ground floor with work by Maren Hassenger, who has been soliciting community involvement in twisting newspaper strands to form her "Tree of Knowledge" installation since July.

"It's a bit of serendipity that they're both dealing with nature but in very different ways," said Lippman. "Clifford's, of course, are very pristine works, beautifully printed; Maren's work, the twisting of the newspaper, is in many ways messy because newsprint is messy, but they're both extremely meditative."

Both artists talk about their concern for the environment, and the effect overall is an encapsulation of nature's value and its endangerment.

"The exhibition is a celebration of the beauty and sublime power of nature – and it's a wake up call to protect it," said Ross.

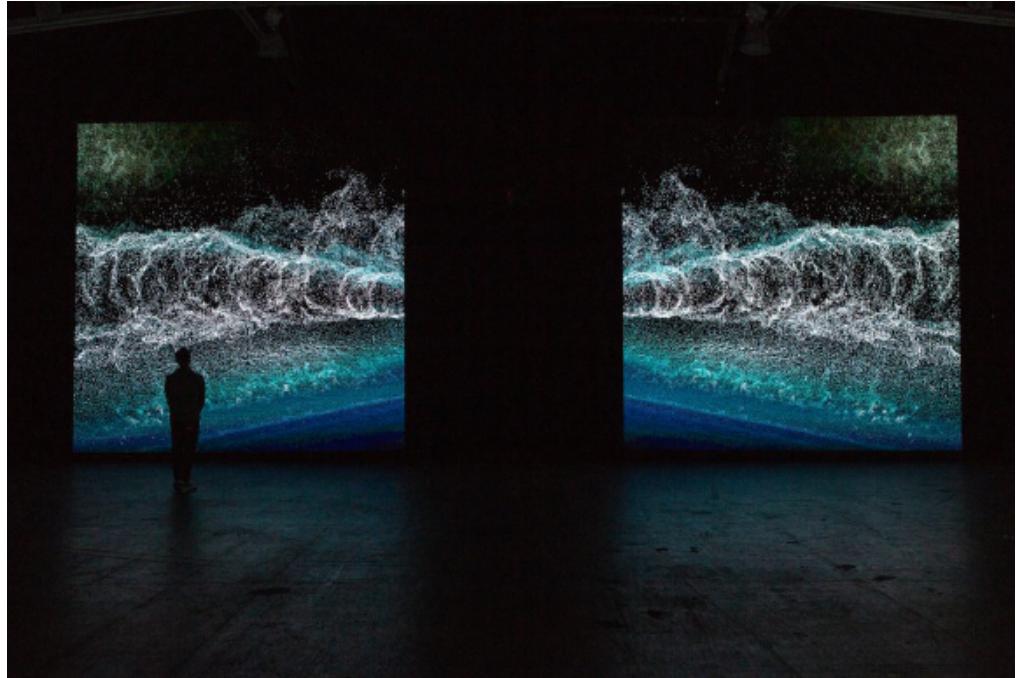


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A Guide to ‘Coal + Ice,’ the Climate Change Festival

by RYAN COST September 6, 2018



A visitor looks at “Light Waves II” by Clifford Ross, part of the “Coal + Ice” exhibition at the Fort Mason Center.

What is “Coal + Ice”?

“Coal + Ice” originally began as a documentary photography exhibition in Beijing in 2011. Since then, the show, co-curated by photographer Susan Meiselas and exhibition designer Jeroen de Vries, has been on display in Shanghai, other parts of China and Paris. Each time, it changes to fit the space it occupies.

The iteration coming to San Francisco, however, is the most expansive yet — and the first in the



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United States. The exhibition itself takes up an entire warehouse on San Francisco's waterfront at the Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture. There are large-scale photographs and videos of melting ice, Chinese coal miners and victims of climate-change-induced flooding.

But that's just the beginning.

Along with "Coal + Ice," the Asia Society, led by Orville Schell, has curated three weeks of events to get the public talking about climate change in accessible ways. The photography show and the events run through Sept. 23.

Why now?

"Coal + Ice," the exhibition and the festival, is considered one of many affiliate events of Gov. Jerry Brown's Global Climate Action Summit. Schell saw an opening when the summit was announced to both bring "Coal + Ice" to the U.S. for the first time and also to anchor the summit with a series of high-profile events. The hope, he has said, is that the general public will start having a robust conversation around these topics at the same time the governor is hosting his own high-level talks.

Where is it?

The visual exhibition is housed in the Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture Festival Pavilion at 2 Marina Blvd. on the easternmost jetty. Many of the festival's events take place in the same space, in and among the artwork. However, a couple are off site, such as the wrap-up conversation at the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive and a San Francisco Symphony performance at Davies Symphony Hall.

Be sure to double-check the venue for the event you want to attend at www.coalandice.org/events before heading out.

What are the other events?

The visual component will likely appeal to anybody, especially those with an interest in visual art, documentary work, photography and climate science. That said, there is, essentially, something for everyone. That's the point, Schell says. Organizers wanted the festival to appeal to as many people as possible.

"People need to have a little enjoyment and be able to participate in an issue more than just being scared," Schell said in April when the festival was announced.

For those who enjoy classical music, there are four events between Thursday, Sept. 13, and Sept. 17, at Davies Symphony Hall, where Michael Tilson Thomas is scheduled to conduct renowned pianist Yuja Wang in Maurice Ravel's "Piano Concerto for the Left Hand."

Those who like live storytelling will want to check out "The Fire Tapes" on Sept. 22, an event sponsored by "Snap Judgement" and KQED that drills deep into the state's wildfire crisis, specifically the October 2017 fires.



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For some levity, there's a comedy night planned for Sept. 19, as well, with Will Durst, Diane Amos, Nato Green and Johnny Steele all on hand to offer their "unique perspectives" on climate change.

There are also a number of events geared toward a younger audience, including a Youth Speaks-partnered evening on Sept. 21 that will include spoken word.

But the best way to plan out your "Coal + Ice" experience is to visit www.coalandice.org/events.

What's the vibe?

This will change depending on the event, of course. But by all appearances, "Coal + Ice" treats the topic at hand seriously, while making it more than doomsday-scenario charts and figures.

The vibe can also be whatever you make it. If you want something on the more serious side, consider "Spotlight on Climate Solutions," a two-day series of panels on Tuesday-Wednesday, Sept. 11-12 — on several different topics — featuring speakers such as former Vice President Al Gore, journalist Tom Friedman and economist Laura Tyson.

How much do the events cost?

Many of the events are free with registration at coalandice.org. If there is a fee, it will be noted.

How do I get there?

Driving is an option. But, being that the focus is on climate change, it's probably best to find a more eco-friendly way to get there. (Plus, on the busier nights, parking might be an issue.) Biking and walking are great options. Public transportation can also get you to your destination. If you take Muni to Fisherman's Wharf, it's a 20-minute walk to Fort Mason. You can also take the 43, which drops you off right in front of the complex.

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THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

Clifford Ross: Outside the Parrish, and In

"Light/Waves," installed both inside and outside the museum, is part of the Parrish's "Platform" series

By Jennifer Landes
August 31, 2017



The exterior south-facing wall of Water Mill's Parrish Art Museum is a blank canvas that few artists have attempted to fill. The surface is vast, and the primary audience, occupants of the cars passing at a significant distance on Montauk Highway, might not be able to make out the details in even a billboard-sized composition.

The visual field is also dominated by a deep meadow of native plants. Look how it swallows up Roy Lichtenstein's two "Tokyo Brushstroke" sculptures. One stands 33 feet high, the other 19 feet. Yet they are two stray reeds in the landscape.

As someone who immerses himself up to his neck in hurricane-size ocean waves, Clifford Ross is not one to back away from a challenge. Rather, he seems to take limitations as a point of departure. In so many ways, he has taken his residency at the Parrish as an invitation and opportunity to push his art and the museum's structure to their furthermost boundaries.

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His mixed-media installation “Light/Waves,” installed both inside and outside the museum, is part of the Parrish’s “Platform” series. Each year, the museum invites one or more artists to respond to the site, including the building, the property, and the regional environment, depending on their interpretation.

Mr. Ross’s installation includes two 50-foot-wide LED walls on the outside of the building facing the highway, and an 18-by-18-foot LED wall inside, as well as a set of photographs of hurricane waves, printed on multi-panel maple surfaces to form 12-by-19-foot triptychs of a single image.

Each exterior screen is about five feet longer than a school bus. Together they occupy a significant swath of the architectural “eye wash” of the Parrish’s concrete cladding without overwhelming it. A third LED wall would have fit easily, but the multiple changing images might have become confusing. In its current state, it is easy to recognize what the lights are communicating, and there is enough time to take in both panels, even constantly in flux.

Each light is a component that makes up a rather abstract image once close enough to see them at work. Viewed in motion from the highway, the waves look like real projections, reminiscent of the Hollister clothing company’s New York City store, with its facade broadcasting a feed of California surfers.

Up close the dots are visible as entities in formation, not even as components of an image but individual marks that just happen to flow together at times, forming patterns we can interpret as waves, like colored sand or some other seemingly random set of elements that combine to produce something recognizable. It is when this trick is revealed that the work becomes really interesting.

Mr. Ross has always played with the duality of abstraction and realism. He devised a special camera, modifying an aerial camera used by the military, to take exceptionally high-resolution images of a mountain he fancied in Colorado. Their resolution is so exact that a thumbnail-size section of a 6-by-10- foot image can be blown up essentially to the size of its parent without losing clarity. Later, he broke down some of these images into fragments, turning them into monochromatic blocks and reuniting them into a nonobjective whole. Then he animated some of them and put the result to music composed by Philip Glass.

It is that kind of medium-bending approach that has been employed here. Light is used in a dynamic format to communicate information that is read as waves by the eye and brain. Post-formalist in intent, the resulting piece asks questions similar to those Picasso raised when he composed an object out of shaped pieces of sheet metal, which we recognize as a guitar but which has no direct resemblance to one. Or when Chuck Close trusts his viewers to make the same leap as they process his blips and blobs of paint on a grid into something that can be read as a portrait.

Although the LED pieces are probably the sexier of the two, the gigantic wood-grain photo prints are magnificent and formidable. Mr. Ross takes the images while he is in the surf, tethered to someone on shore so he is not carried out to sea. The resulting perspective is immersive and intimidating, much greater than human scale. Looking at someone looking at the artwork, the

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urge to say “Watch out!” as a giant wave barrels overhead can be hard to control. What helps is that the maple grain shows through the black-and-white print, underpinning its status as an art object. That the grain “talks to” the very visible grain in the museum’s architectural wooden benches is a delightful byproduct, a way of tying the work even more closely to its environment. It also doesn’t hurt that the real ocean is just a mile away.

The artist told *The Star* in 2011 that his photographs in this series were printed in black and white because “form is the essential truth of a wave, not color, and in photography form is best expressed with the absence of color. Color was a distraction with the hurricane wave images.” In contrast, the LED images are in color, but in their abstraction they are completely about what form they take. It appears he discovered how to have it both ways.

The installations are on view through Oct. 15, and will be missed when they are gone. The Parrish is presenting several related programs, including an interdisciplinary symposium on water-related themes on Sept. 22. Panels, talks, and workshops will address the inspirational and natural qualities of water, in addition to the perils created by climate change.

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modern

MAGAZINE

Catching the Perfect Wave: Clifford Ross at the Parrish

By Sammy Dalati
August 28, 2017



A couple of months ago, I paid a visit to artist Clifford Ross's studio to see the work in progress for his show *Light | Waves* on view until October 15 at the Parrish Art Museum on Long Island. Waves are Ross's inspiration, and for more than twenty years, he's been gripping his camera and wading into the ocean foam off the East End to photograph the breakers hurling themselves onto the beach during hurricane season. "Ultimately, I realized that I was reflecting on memories from my childhood—being slammed by the waves off the coast of Long Island when I was body surfing," Ross has said.

When it comes to standing in the surf—along with everything else—there's nothing quite like "being there." But that hasn't stopped Ross from trying to convey that visceral experience through visual means. A 1974 graduate of Yale, he made his way as a sculptor and Color Field painter until, as he describes it, he realized that his scene was "like an orange that has had the juice squeezed out of it," and decided he needed to "get back to the world." For him, that meant turning to photography. His series of detailed portraits of Colorado's Mount Sopris, for which he is best known, was recorded on the nine by eighteen-inch negatives of the R1, his patented large-format view camera (the "R" stands for "Ross"). In photo after photo the double-domed

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mountain rises majestically, the details of surrounding vegetation coming out crisply even if miles from the camera's lens. Printed big—about five by ten feet at the largest—one gets the impression that Ross hopes you'll mistake his pictures of the mountain for the real thing.

But to Ross these trompe l'oeils aren't entirely satisfying. "My memories of mountains are always more vivid and alive than my photographs of them are," he says. Hurricane Waves on Wood, one of the wave series on view at the Parrish—comprising photographs printed on maple-veneered plywood panels—is meant to recover some of the tactile charm of real life. In his studio, Ross

encouraged us to touch a trio of panels he'd mounted on the wall, to feel their grain. Each sheet of the warm maple veneer was specially chosen for its figure, which interacts gracefully as well as jarringly with the dancing form of a wave splashed across it. Six pieces from Hurricane Waves on Wood are on view in the Parrish's Harriet and Esteban Vincente Gallery, printed with sun damage-resistant UV-cured ink—the kind of ink used for billboards.

To create the second series on view at the Parrish, Digital Waves, Ross and his team used mathematics and computer rendering software. Ross wanted to understand and illustrate what's really going on, physics-wise, when a wave is crashing. What they've created looks something like what you'd see in a Hollywood studio during post-production for a film set at sea: an animated "wave" made up of countless tiny digital balls rebounding chaotically off a virtual wall. The viewing angle can be swiveled and zoomed so that the blooms of "liquid light"—as a studio assistant put it—are abstracted, looking like the frantic, fractal splatterings of Jackson Pollock, one of Ross's Long Island influences.

Two iterations of Digital Waves play on huge LED screens like the ones that light up Times Square. One screen, a roughly seventeen-by-seventeen-foot square illuminates the museum's lobby, and a diptych of approximately fifty-foot strips is sited outside under the building's deep eaves, visible to passing cars on the Montauk Highway. The videos are silent, but Ross hopes "people will hear by watching the waves."

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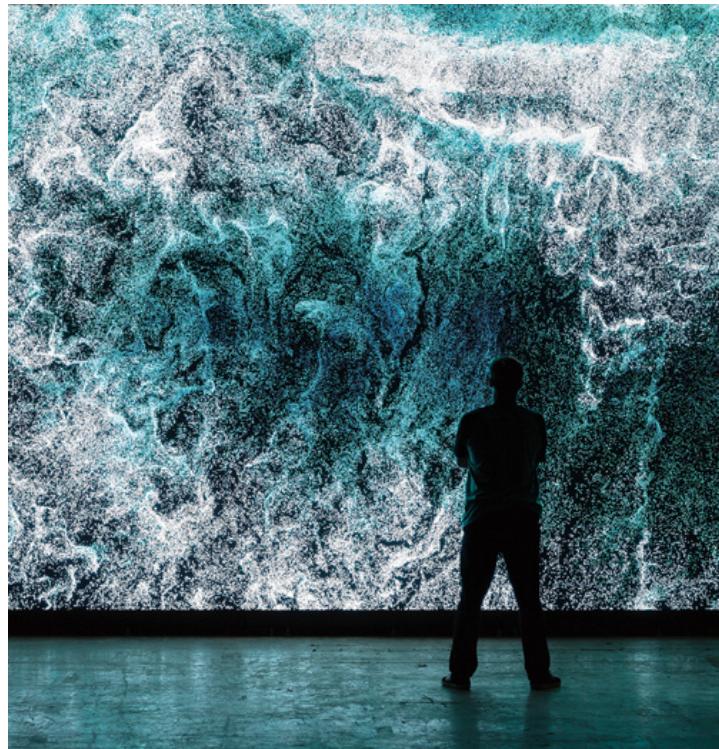
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photograph

IN THE STUDIO

Clifford Ross

By Jordan G. Teicher



Clifford Ross, Still from Digital Wave 2.9, 2015. Courtesy Parrish Art Museum.

"You have just stepped into the sorcerer's workshop," says Terrie Sultan, director of the Parrish Art Museum. We're standing on the ground floor of the West Village, three-story studio of the multimedia artist Clifford Ross, who stands nearby, dressed in black, grinning.

All around us – and on the floors above and below us – are samples of Ross's magic, versions of which will soon be casting their spell on the Parrish. From July 16 to October 15, Ross will be featured as part of the Parrish's *Platform Series*, an ongoing initiative that invites a single artist to consider the entire museum as a site for mounting work. Ross has gleefully taken advantage of the opportunity, bringing works to the museum that are massive in scale and displaying them in locations that are impossible to ignore.

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Not surprising, perhaps, for an artist whose signature subject matter is extreme by nature. Ross, the nephew of the painter Helen Frankenthaler, began his artistic career as a painter and sculptor. But in 1996, when he embarked on his *Hurricane Waves* series, he became known as a photographer. Over the years, tethered to an assistant on shore, he's entered the ocean on a stretch of beach in the Hamptons and photographed the impressive waves that come ashore during heavy storms.

For his *Waves on Wood* series, Ross used a commercial ink-jet printer to reproduce six of those photographs on maple veneer. Each work is a triptych, ultimately measuring 12 x 18 feet. Upstairs, Ross shows early versions of the work that will adorn the walls of the museum on Long Island's East End. "I get hungry for touch. The wood is a very physical thing," he says, running his hand over the grain.

Ross's appreciation of the tactile is just one of the things that makes him, as he puts it, "an old-fashioned guy." Nonetheless, Ross says, he's been "reluctantly pulled into the digital world." There's abundant proof of that on the studio's lower level, where a team of five designers sit behind computers, tinkering with the technology behind Ross's work, *Digital Waves*, a virtual ocean made up of more than three million dots whose movement simulates an endless flow of waves.

At the Parrish, *Digital Waves* will appear on three large LED screens – one inside the museum, and two more, each measuring 50 feet wide, on an outside wall facing the highway. Though there's no audio accompanying the crashing digital waves, Ross hopes sight alone will give passing drivers a powerful experience of the ocean. "Our prayer is people will hear it by looking," Ross says.

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BROOKLYN RAIL

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

CLIFFORD ROSS: *Wood Waves*

by Hovey Brock

RYAN LEE GALLERY | JULY 12 – AUGUST 11, 2017



Clifford Ross, *Wood Wave LXXX*, 2015. Cured inkjet on wood, 74 x 114 in. © Clifford Ross; Courtesy of the artist and RYAN LEE, New York.

Since 1996, when he began his Hurricane series, Clifford Ross has been reproducing digital photographs and videos of waves in a number of formats. *Wood Waves* consists of two triptychs made of plywood panels facing each other across the exhibition space. Wood is not a support generally associated with prints, but Ross has made a career of pushing the envelope of digitally produced art. Here, he has cleverly used the languid patterns of maple veneer plywood, not unlike water silk, as a counterpoint to the implicit speed and force of the wave images. In another paradoxical pairing, the spare installation and the plywood veneer bring to mind the lean look of Minimalism, in contrast to the rich detail of the images and the understated sensuality of the printed surfaces. However, these contrasts emerge slowly, as Ross has balanced the object

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and image aspects of these artworks with such precision that grasping the tensions within them requires sustained attention. The wave images harbor their own contradictions, or rather multiplicities, as they speak to the double edge of nature's power—its majesty and its destructive potential, now exacerbated by climate change. In other words, the triptychs make for bracing company, as each attempt at interpreting them crests, and then breaks, dissolving on the sands of a new insight.

One of the many rewards in this show is contemplating the differences between the two works, as they stand in such stark contrast. *Wood Wave LXXX* (2015) looks at first blush a great deal like its gallery mate, *Wood Wave LXXXI* (2015). In fact, *Wood Wave LXXX*, at 74 by 114 inches is more compact, giving the image—a cresting wave—greater lateral compression. *Wood Wave LXXXI*, 74 by 144 inches, shows a long, smooth, roller of a wave after it has already broken, in keeping with its comparatively more expansive framing. The rhythms in the two images are quite different as well. *Wood Wave LXXX* has a three-part structure: sky, wave, and water, moving in a near geometric progression from narrowest to widest, so as to emphasize the movement of the wave coming at us. *Wood Wave LXXX*'s structure is more balanced, with the sky and rolling wave at top occupying the same area and proportions as the foam from the broken crest and the water below, which occupy the lower portions, giving a more static feel to the overall composition.

What both triptychs share is a massive physical presence that seems oddly weightless, like catching sight of a muscular acrobat in mid-flight. Ross accomplishes this through the implicit weight of the plywood sheets dissolving under the all-over patterns of the wave images, as well as the dematerializing quality of the colors that perpetually shift between the warmth of the wood and the coolness of the printer ink. It stands to reason that Ross began his career in painting and sculpture, as these objects, while keeping a conceptual edge by pushing at the limits of image production, have a powerfully expressive sensual register. Ross's triptychs capture a wildness that certainly mirrors the inexorable power of the tides, but also bring to mind the promise of release hidden within Pollock's quip "I am nature."

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Clifford Ross: *Landscape Seen & Imagined*
MASS MoCA

By CAIA HAGEL, AUG. 2015



When I was a little girl, my brother and I used to make drawings together. One day he was drawing particularly ferociously beside me, crumpling the paper up in frustration and starting over, and over. After a while I asked him what was a wrong—and he told me, “I'M TRYING TO DRAW GOD BUT THE PAPER'S TOO SMALL!”

I was reminded of this particular flavour of the hero's quest while wandering the extensive spaces of the MASS MoCA—the transformed industrial complex, now home of some of the most exciting art in America, which looms soulfully over the quiet working class town of North Adams, Massachusetts—where *Landscape Seen & Imagined*, the mid-career retrospective of the artist Clifford Ross, blasts its large-scale photographic ode to nature with the same zeal: the desire to capture the sublime.

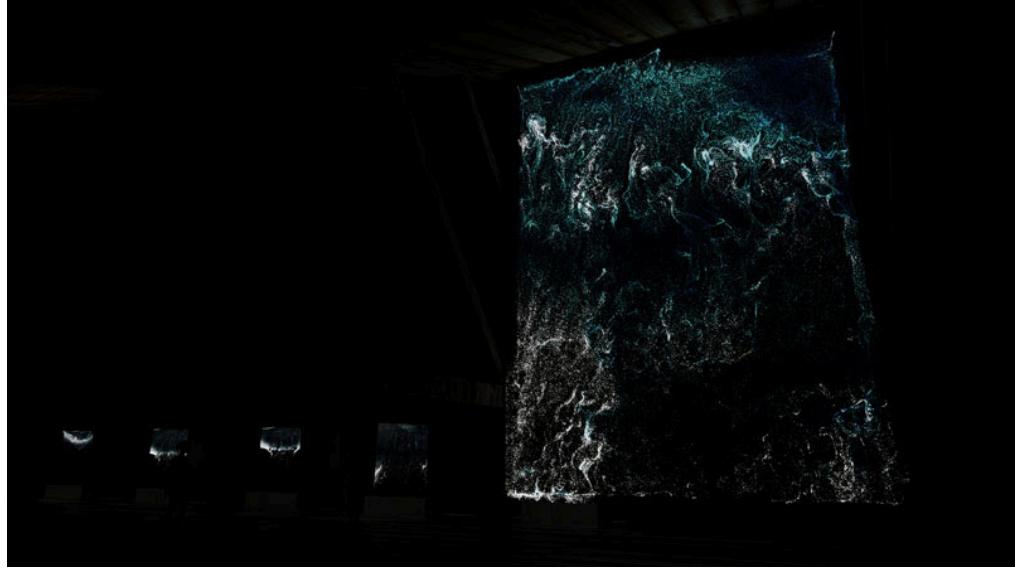
Ross may reference Ansel Adams as a forefather of his heroic journey but Ross's own recording of nature is no such pastoral jaunt. Its enormous photographs, many created on the R1 camera (a machine he's invented with innovative scientists that is the highest resolution camera on earth with a viewfinder much more sophisticated than the human eye), splash energetically across the grandiose rooms. In the opening section of the main MASS MoCA building, we see *Harmonium Mountain* in several harmonic incarnations. These are studies of a mountain first in hyper-

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realism, then in variations on abstractions that include several colour washes through a detail of this mountain scene, a 3-panel digital recreation of the several colour washed mountainscape details—a decomposition that collapses further into a pixelized story via the phone app he's created—as well as Sopris Wall I, a 24' high x 114' long sepia study of this abstraction printed onto raw wood that takes up the entire wall of MASS MoCA's tallest gallery.

In an adjacent building, a whole upper floor space specially renovated for this exhibition is devoted to a similar study of the hurricane waves he's been recording since 1996—a space appropriately titled Wave Cathedral. Here, the thrill of the blown-up black and white wave images, mounted and framed in white in this airy white expanse, make the violence of hurricanes seem sensual and alluring. These photographs give way to two ceiling-high LED panels whose millions of lights simulate the movement and feeling of large bodies of water. Standing by them under the low rafters of a vaulted ceiling, we get a visceral sense of water's wild, mercurial spirit, a vertiginous feeling that we're left drowning in for several moments of pitch black before the loop begins again.



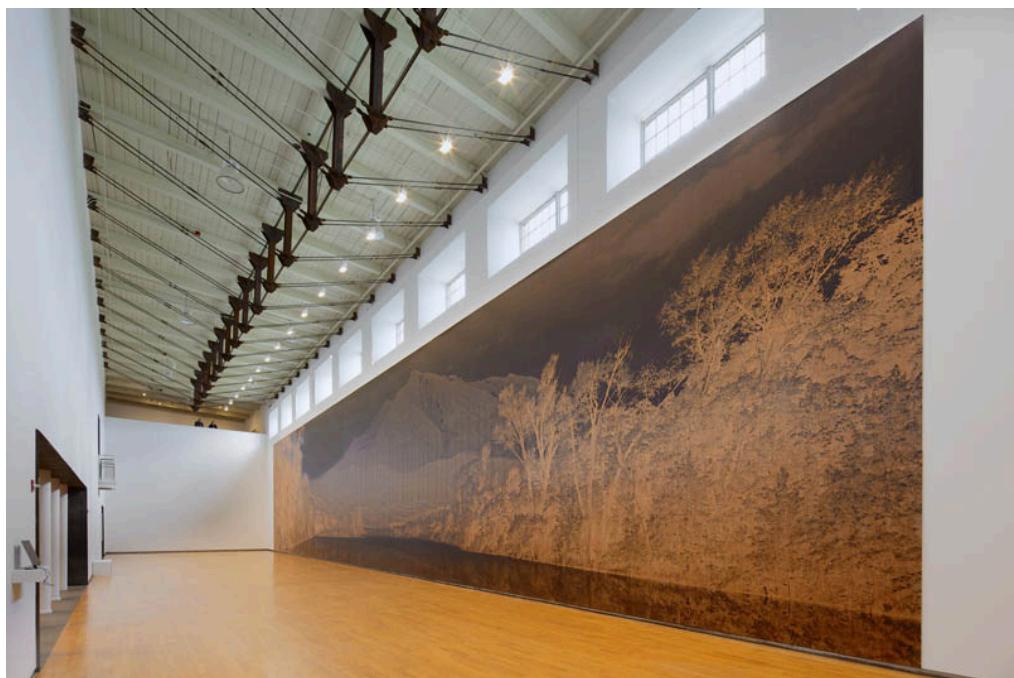
Water is a powerful metaphor for the alchemy that Ross subjects reality to. In both exhibition spaces, his signature hyper-realistically rendered nature scenes, so hard-won, are juxtaposed with his abstractions of these same nature scenes, a creation and destruction opus that mimics what only God can do: Life and Death. It is by being moistened and entering the dissolution that Ross's realism becomes more psychisized, made into soul, by its sinking away from fixations in literalized concerns—for water, real and metaphorical, is the special element of reverie, reflective images, hints of the invisible intrinsic signature of Life and its ceaseless ungraspable flow. Far from serene, these tangos with landscape are awe-inspiring with a feeling, somewhere, of Herculean labour.

When I sit down with Ross over homemade lemonade in the museum's café, he tells me more

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about the alchemy at work in his oeuvre. The realism studies, he says, so satisfying for their sharp precision and minute detail, fail to capture the aura of the scene; the thing that makes it spiritual. Realism must be broken down to deliver a higher experience, he says. Ross works at this decreation in many ways; by moving from small to large and back to small scale again, by doing intimate isolated visual and digital studies, by using printing, colouring and other Photoshop and dark room techniques, by adding music and pixelating scenes with LED lights and phone apps. These experimental deaths must go on until the perfect original natural setting begins to release its mystical essence. "When I go abstract, I go into fiction," the artist reflects, "But this fiction is meant to explore reality, to clean up the things I missed with reality. In fact I'm not really interested in the photograph, it's not even about the camera. It's about giving the viewer a very moving experience, which they can't have if they aren't using their imagination and through that, believing in the vision". Between the seen and the imagined, remembering and forgetting, nightworld and dayworld; the creation and decreation of 'the real' that we are poetically subjected to in this work engages us to receive 'the sublime'.



For all this romanticism, Ross has an avatarsim about him as well. He fingers the screen of his iPhone 6 and tells me what a magical invention he believes the iPhone to be. "I fell totally in love with it at first sight", he gushes, "I watch movies on it and the resolution is so high that I can see Lawrence of Arabia appearing in the distance at exactly the same time my friends, who are watching the movie at the same time on an HD home movie screen, can". We talk about Augmented Reality, 3D and Oculus, and Ross confesses that while he's fascinated with these advents in technology, he is not a believer in them in the form they're currently in. He explains this with a concrete example. "We only feel comfortable sitting here at our table in the museum's café because we've already spatially assessed the room and know what's going

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on behind us, even if we can't see it," and though I would never have thought of this, I know that he's right. "Rembrandt painted the back of the head. You don't see it but it's there, which is part of what makes his paintings so realistic and believable. There have been so many beautiful attempts to create a believable digital world but ultimately, head sets isolate people from their environment and their existential reality, and digital aesthetics are fake. Digital worlds aren't satisfying yet because they aren't believable". This dissatisfaction only intrigues Ross more. "The things I criticize the most are the same things I end up embracing," and before we get up to join the dinner party, where we'll play an identity game that degenerates reality even further, he states, "I'm going to break down the code of Oculus".

I slip out of this contemporary cathedral feeling strangely altered. Inspired by a mosaic of creative predecessors and works, including Henry Fox Talbot, the British photography pioneer, Kant and his philosophies of the sublime, Kurt Vonnegut's 1959 sci-fi masterpiece *Sirens of Titan*, symphonic music and radical technology, Ross attacks his art with the well-rounded spirit of the Renaissance, where visual artists were also physicians, philosophers and inventors—ambitious, provocative polymaths only a finger stretch from God. WM

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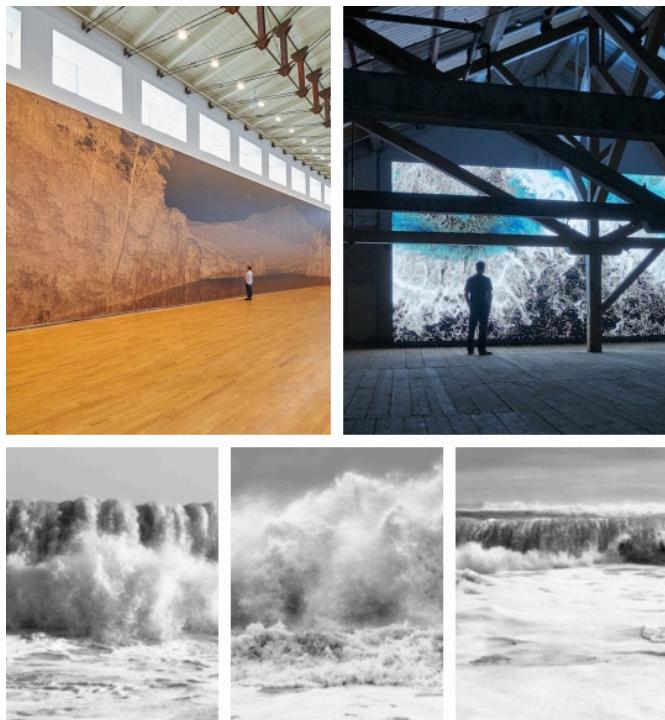
Interview

ART

CLIFFORD ROSS'S NATURAL STATE

By RACHEL SMALL

Published 08/13/15



In contemporary art, much of the attention is on artists who use technology to make art about technology. So, it certainly gives pause that artist Clifford Ross's practice is inspired by an obsessive and sincere love for unadulterated nature, while technology for him is auxiliary, simply a means to an end. For his survey at MASS MoCA, Ross, 62, presents recent and new pieces in "Landscapes Seen & Imagined," which at its core is twofold and straightforward: a mountain panorama and rolling ocean waves. Well-versed in art history, Ross is wary of seeming staid when embracing classic portrayals of nature in art. To build on the Western tradition, he experiments with technology to enhance his artwork, and has come upon ways to depict nature that are fresh and vivid. (He was extensively lauded in the early 2000s after inventing a high-resolution camera specifically meant to capture landscapes.) Often relying on scale, simplicity, and basic forms, the resulting art seduces viewers by conveying Ross's own awe for his subject matter.

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At MASS MoCA, the series “Mountain” revolves around a photograph of Mount Sopris in Colorado. For one part of the show, Ross superimposed the negative of the image on a 114-foot tall wooden panel. Separately, he rendered it in 65 different colors, titled *Harmoniums*, which serve as the basis of *Harmonium Mountain I*, an animated video displayed in one gallery. *Harmonium Mountain*, a second video work that debuted in late June, is occasionally projected onto a dozen 24-foot-high screens in MASS MoCA’s courtyard, and every screening is accompanied by a live musical performance. In a separate building, a series of black-and-white photographs of waves, collectively called *Hurricane*, line a dimly lit wall. An adjacent space is dark, save for two large vertical LED screens showing bird’s eye view animations of waves that shine blue light on weathered wood rafters.

Earlier this summer, we toured the museum with Ross in time for the premiere of *Harmonium Mountain*. This past Saturday, August 8, Oneida and Sonic Youth’s Lee Ranaldo performed the soundtrack. We recently spoke with Ross on the phone.

RACHEL SMALL: I’d love to hear about where “Landscapes Seen & Imagined” began.

CLIFFORD ROSS: I pay attention to nature. I feel something or I see something, and basically, I want to share that. I like to see if I can get other people to experience something that I think is extraordinary. And where my process started, in relation to Mount Sopris in Colorado, were the feelings I had looking at it. I tried to figure out what elements gave me that feeling. The first path I took was trying to figure out, “Could I *show* people the mountain?” And that’s what resulted in the high-resolution photographs.

RACHEL SMALL: What do you think made this scene different or special to you?

ROSS: I think there are several elements, in no particular order. It’s a classic scene of nature’s grandeur. When I say “classic,” it’s in and of itself beautiful and grand and powerful. It’s a simple, almost pyramidal mountain surrounded by trees and water. In the Western and European tradition, the most obvious sources of this are German Romanticism, in particular the Hudson River School. Those painters, you know, drew on the great Romantic tradition from Europe. But it’s a particularly American scene and I think when I saw it, it struck a chord in me—both as a guy looking at nature, but also because it was a classic composition, something that I love in other art.

The other thing that I only realized well after my love affair with the mountain started, is that it is actually very subtly a twin peak mountain. And since my hero is Paul Cézanne, somewhere in the back [of my mind] was lurking Mont Sainte-Victoire because he was obsessed with that mountain and painted it endlessly.

SMALL: It’s funny because Cézanne almost had this sort of technology-related approach as well. He broke his paintings down into planes of color, which is very mechanical, and perhaps related to the rise of industry at the time.

ROSS: You’re quite right—I was referring to something very simplistic in the sense of simple shaped mountain, twin peaks, somewhat—one major, one minor. But you hit on the theme that,

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in a way, leaps us to the video. When he was trying to analyze the mountain and what it meant to him, he literally broke down the elements and that was the path that eventually led to Cubism.

My breaking down of the mountain into elements was, of course, a quite different one in the beginning. My breaking it down was the realization that traditional cameras and traditional methods of printing did not [communicate] the grandeur for me, [which involved] my eye sort of wandering and becoming overwhelmed with all of the details. In effect, my breaking down of the mountain and reconstituting it was the opposite of what Cézanne did. It was a reassembling of the facts, as accurately as I could, so that people could stare at a print and I could very directly evoke the feelings by giving people the mountain.

Eventually, I fell madly in love with the actual process of making animation. I began to think about building an animated world. I wanted color, movement. I wanted abstract forms to elicit the response in people that the mountain did. When you bring up Cézanne, I actually never made such a direct connection, but the late paintings of Mont Saint-Victoire, he really broke up the foreground and the sky and the mountain into those facets. And those facets truly are the facets of my *Harmonium* video.

SMALL: During the tour on-site, I mentioned that the waves reminded me of pointillism. I feel that, in a lot of your work, there are parallels with visual art and the technology around modernizing and industry that was developing towards the beginning of the 20th century.

ROSS: That [reference] really caught me. Although I'm very aware of art history as a generating force in my own work, I reflect on my own experiences with older art, the things that I adore, or the things that intrigue me, drive me—[pointillist George Seurat's] *La Grand Jatte*, of course, is a staggering picture. But Seurat has never had as big an influence on me directly as Cézanne. But you hit on something that I think is sort of critical—the interesting thing about the wave cathedral is that the wave cathedral is made up, first and foremost, of two sculptures: massive blocks of LED screens. Originally, I hadn't thought of them as having weight and mass and sculptural power. In fact, I reconfigured them when we were installing, so you could feel their weight pushing against the beams. And on those screens, it's a grid—it's not Seurat, it's not late Monet, it's a grid, which is birthed out of a digital attitude towards imaging. I never lined up the pixels of the digital world—though in this case not just pixels, because we created some proprietary software so each pixel would be a LED light. It never dawned on me that, in a way, it was a reflection back to pointillism.

I'll throw in one last thing because it related both to the wave cathedral and the courtyard: Immersion is a key element of how we experience the world. As abstract as they are, the way they're actually functioning involves immersing the viewer. That act alone, as a gesture, is an embrace with my imagery that I think is very connected to feeling when we're experiencing the real world. The great thing about immersive [art] is that you've freed the human mind, I think, to imagine an experience more like what happens day to day.

SMALL: That also has to do with one's subjective experience and memories with certain natural scenes, maybe?

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ROSS: Oh sure. None of this was conscious with me, but as I began working on those abstract videos of waves, I had not yet envisioned at all that they were going to be part of an immersive experience. But, of course, I realized that the wave cathedral, even if it's abstract, it may be closer to how I feel in the middle of the water, shooting those wave [photographs].

SMALL: It's interesting that you are using technology to portray nature in a new way.

ROSS: It's very odd because this moniker that got dumped on me is sort of "Mr. Technology." It's almost laughable because, five and 10 and 20 years from now, what seems like fancy technology today will look old fashioned. What I did up at MASS MoCA in 10 years will seem as old fashioned as oil painting. There's a feeling I want to get from my own world of experience, and it's always based on nature. That's what has captured my imagination. All of it is at that service. People talk to me about fractals, [but] I'm not even sure I know what a fractal is.

SMALL: I don't think I know what a fractal is either...

ROSS: Well, we can both Google it! It has something to do with shapes which, I don't know never repeat or repeat endlessly or...some such. The surprise is not just seeing what I've made; the best surprise is finding other creative people who want to come play. And you know, it's beautiful to watch people's faces. I never take it for granted. I'm *always* surprised watching people's eyes grow big when something happens on the screen—because that's how I am! And the thrill is based on surprise. No matter how many times I see that thing, I *literally* can't hold it in my head. So I sort of am amazed that it has become something separate from me at this point.

SMALL I feel like good art never stays with the artist in any form. It can be a sign that it is really great if it takes on lives of its own in different people's minds.

ROSS: I think any piece only begins to live once a viewer is interacting with it. They bring in their own past, their own baggage, their dreams, and then if you've made a good piece of art, what you've tried to do is part of the package. But the takeaway for anyone, looking at art, to some extent, is that a good piece of art will also work as a mirror. And they end up looking back at themselves.

"CLIFFORD ROSS: LANDSCAPE SEEN & IMAGINED" IS ON VIEW AT MASS MoCA THROUGH MARCH 2016.



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BLOUINARTINFO

VISUAL ARTS / FEATURES / ARTICLE

VIDEO: 25 Questions With Clifford Ross

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | JULY 15, 2015



NORTH ADAMS, Mass. — Multimedia artist Clifford Ross is having a monumental moment in his career. In “Landscape Seen & Imagined,” a major survey of his work at MASS MoCA, Ross takes over two buildings, six galleries, and a performing arts courtyard, presenting two major arcs of his career and a series of new video installations that are among his most ambitious in scale to date.

Ross’s photography and new media works are inspired by his love of nature. He goes to extreme lengths to portray nature with accuracy, while also capturing its poetry. For his “Mountain” series, he spent six years creating 14 photographs of Mount Sopris near Aspen, Colorado.

“At the end of the day, the photograph for me is a matrix,” said Ross, who also invented and patented his R1 camera, which he used to take some of the highest-resolution single shot landscape photographs found within the exhibition. “I’m very interested in the sublime.”

Ross also experiments with abstraction, which led him to create a 24-foot-high, 114-foot-wide photograph on raw wood that spans the length of MASS MoCA’s tallest gallery.

“This is a piece of architecture,” said Ross. “It’s a sculpture way before it has anything to do with image.”

Another part of the survey is housed in the Wave Cathedral, a 12,000-square-foot loft space where new prints from Ross’s “Hurricane” series and a digital video installation are displayed. Using computer-generated renderings, Ross creates the feeling of standing in front of a hurricane wave with two 24-foot LED screens. He constructs an architectural dialogue between the beams within the trussed gallery and the fluidity of the digital waves on the screen.



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ART

IN CONVERSATION

CLIFFORD ROSS with Phong Bui

JULY 13TH, 2015



On the occasion of the artist's multiple exhibits, "The Abstract Edge: Photographs, 1996–2001" at Ryan Lee (May 14–June 27, 2015); "Landscape Seen and Imagined" a major mid-career survey at MASS MoCA (May 23, 2015 – March 30, 2016), which occupies two buildings, six galleries, and an exterior performing arts courtyard flooded with his harmonium video, along with a soundscape, curated with his musical collaborator John Colpitts (aka Kid Millions) every Thursday and Friday since June 26th as part of the Solid Sound Festival; and "Water/Waves/Wood" at BRIC House (July 9 – August 16, 2015), Clifford Ross welcomed Rail publisher Phong Bui to his West Village studio to discuss his life, work, and more.

Phong Bui (Brooklyn Rail): Orville [Schell] has referred to you as Peer Gynt, the protagonist of Ibsen's five-act play, peeling away his proverbial onion while trying to unlock the mystery of his own being. I'd like to do the same because I first knew you as the editor of *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics: An Anthology* (published by Abrams in 1990), then a few years later I saw a show of your work at Salander-O'Reilly (in 1993) which revealed your simultaneous interest in abstraction and representation. Then, all of a sudden, your first hurricane pictures appeared at Sonnabend, which must have been in 2002. But the truth is that I didn't know it was the same person until you came to the Sandy show ["Come Together: Surviving Sandy, Year 1"] and we were formally introduced by our mutual friend Jack Flam. And it would have been so fitting had some of your hurricane pictures been included in the show. But it's all right since we are getting our chance to know one another.

Clifford Ross: A blessing in disguise.

Rail: Now if I were to ask you, what were you like as a child? What was the first thing that you saw that may have filled you with a desire to become an artist when you grew up?

Ross: There was no such moment—except that I generally remember liking to work with my hands, and make strange things—in all kinds of ways. When I was seven, I announced to my family before dinner one night that I had made cookies with my chemistry set. That was some batch of cookies! Eventually, my older brother took out a chisel and a hammer, to see if he could break one. [Laughs.] I spent a lot of time playing with an Erector set, which was sort of a 1950s version of Legos, but a little bit more complex. I just liked building things and making things. But there was an element of my

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childhood I also think fits the pattern of how I behave and function today: in school at age fifteen, I befriended both the cool quarterback from the football team and the class geek, a brilliant kid named David Kanof. Each one was suspicious of my friendship with the other. I refused to give either up.

Rail: Naturally! [Laughs.]

Ross: I'm inconsistent and inclusive. I became interested in electronics through David, and we formed a company, at the absurd age of sixteen, which we called Custom Electronics, Communication and Control. We started making things together for our own use—low-voltage relay systems that turned lights and showers on and off in our bedrooms and scared our parents more than a little bit. Soon, we convinced people to let us design and install hi-fidelity audio systems, and, eventually, in our senior year, we convinced the school to let us build an entire lighting system for the theater.

Rail: What!

Ross: For a school to allow two seventeen-year-olds to build that kind of advanced electrical system—they must have been out of their minds. [Laughs.] The reason I mention this is that it has a lot to do with my tendencies as an artist—to move in a creative direction without any of the necessary knowledge or experience required, and then collaborate or learn from others to accomplish my goal.

Rail: I can relate to what you're saying.

Ross: I should say that both David and I were oblivious to the issue of risk. We were sort of fearless. It's an early childhood version of my present behavior. I had a vision. He had capability. And we were off on an adventure.

Rail: Vision and action combined are perfect. What about growing up with Helen Frankenthaler as your aunt?

Ross: I was very aware of Helen when I was a child. In spite of her Upper East Side existence, she was a model of eccentricity, freedom, and a certain Bohemian attitude. She loved breaking rules.

Rail: One of my uncles in the family had that same appeal, and I was very attracted to him as a child, but his influence wasn't felt until I was in my twenties. Anyway, you wrote in the introduction of your Abstract Expressionism anthology about Emerson's call for a specifically American culture, completely free from European influence, which certainly paved the way for Hawthorne, Thoreau, Whitman, certainly Melville, in literature; while in painting you mention Albert Pinkham Ryder and Ralph Blakelock, who made intimate and modest-sized paintings. My question is, given the fact that you also admire artists of the Hudson River School like Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, and Frederic Church, who made the opposite huge-scaled paintings that were heavily informed by European paintings, as well as admiring Ryder and Blakelock, how do you mediate between the two tendencies, American and European, which I feel quite present in Pilgrim's Progress (1992)?

Ross: Some of the Abstract Expressionists wrestled their way to a profoundly American art with a boost from the School of Paris. They learned from the European tradition and wedded it to American sensibility. The best American art is often awkward and when European refinement enters the American art stream, it is not its essence, it's an important tributary. Look at Helen [Frankenthaler]. She was certainly a very elegant painter, but underneath the elegance there's a roughness and

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a rumble. She admired Ryder and Blakelock. Which brings us back to Pilgrim's Progress and the group of paintings I made from '84 – '94. It was an important picture for me in that it reveals my indebtedness to the Americanism of Ryder and Blakelock, and also to the European tradition as it was transmitted to me.

Rail: Can you explain further?

Ross: I'd grown very close to Helen during college, and spent a lot of time at her home in Connecticut, not far from Yale. My first pictures when I left college at the age of twenty-one were indebted mainly to Brice Marden. But within a month and a half of landing in New York, and two particularly notable visits to Jules Olitski's studio with Clem [Clement Greenberg], I found myself working with acrylic gel, paint rollers, trowels, and the like—all following Jules's lead—via Clem. I was enthralled. In retrospect, it seems I was in an aesthetic ghetto from 1974 until 1979–80—a ghetto of Greenbergian academicism that was ultimately a dead end, although painters like Jules and Larry Poons slipped in under the wire. In looking around now, I feel like Ishmael surviving a trip with Ahab. Even though Clem wrote monumentally important criticism, by the 1970s he had become a polemicist. But I began to feel that I had no right to be making abstract paintings until I had grasped the real world in the way that Mondrian, de Kooning, Pollock, and others had done before me. In 1979 I saw Goya's great painting The Colossus at the Prado and it just pulled me out of Clem's ghetto. It was like being hit with a lightning bolt. So I quit painting in the abstract manner that I had been, and I began to paint a series called "Landscapes for the Colossus." They were crude evocations of landscapes, painted with a rudimentary understanding of traditional painting techniques—but they were still sort of abstract. They were clearly attempts to address the real world in some way—attached more to de Kooning's Clamdiggers than a painting like his completely abstract Excavation. The Colossus was the real handle with which I started to pull myself towards realism.

Ross: In part because most of the abstract painting I admired was, by its nature, more related to landscape than still life or portraiture. And I was keenly obsessed with the dramatic landscape the Colossus was striding through. I spent a year making pictures based on my dreams about what landscapes he might belong in. I just didn't know how to paint realistically. So finally I decided to take some basic, academic courses at the National Academy of Design in order to learn to paint and sculpt realistically.

Rail: For how long did you study there?

Ross: A year—from 1980–81. The next two to three years I was self-taught—but rigorously. After studying at the Academy, I went out into the landscape with a straw hat on my head, a French easel, an oval wooden palette, oil paints, and sable brushes. To think about it makes me laugh. Such a cliché! And I spent most of 1983 working on one sculpture, a life-sized reclining nude. Essentially I put myself through a three-year apprenticeship. I did a show in 1984, which was strange—and appalling. [Laughs.] I had run right off the deep end, running away from everything I had been born into as an artist. I had very little sense of what my contemporaries were doing—David Salle, Eric Fischl, Julian Schnabel, Ross Bleckner, and others. But starting in 1984, when I felt I had gotten a grip on the real world, my natural tendencies toward abstraction began to reemerge. Basically, Pilgrim's Progress, along with other pictures made between 1984 and 1994, were at the divide between realism and abstraction, and the product of the basic roughness of American culture and my affinity for European tendencies. But I felt completely out of the New York mainstream. I think it was David Salle who asked me, a few years ago, "Where were you in the '80s?" It took me a relatively long time to mature

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as an artist—and I'm still going. In the '80s and '90s, I was showing at Salander-O'Reilly, an Upper East Side gallery, not in SoHo where everyone else was showing.

Rail: What was your relationship with Bill O'Reilly and Larry Salander?

Ross: Both Larry and Bill taught me a lot about American painting. They were the ones who really helped me appreciate Dove, Hartley, Ryder, Blakelock, and strange contemporaries like Albert York. They never spoke kindly about the hot artists of the '80s.

Rail: Most of us still treasure those wonderful shows of late paintings by Turner, Corot, Courbet, and so on. Oh, I almost forgot Louis Eilshemius!

Ross: And mixing them in with contemporaries like myself, Darryl Hughto, Kikuo Saito, Don Gummer, and a few of the older generation including Leland Bell, Paul Resika, and Robert De Niro, Sr. It was a very strange gallery relative to the contemporary art scene. I admired their stubbornness, but it was clearly a strategic problem for their contemporary artists. I think they hated all curators of contemporary art—and the feeling was mutual. Bill and Larry were always close to Clem and the young Color Field artists, but they stuck with me when I bolted from the fold.

Rail: Right. Since Jay Clark, in her essay for the first catalogue, Hurricane Waves, mentioned that, in spite of "sameness" and "monochromatic palette," a great range of color composition was achieved with these images, almost in a portrait-like manner, I would like to ask you whether having sculpted heads in the early '80s had some effect on the way you render each wave through Photoshop, which can be seen as sculpting the image?

Ross: Yes, in that I am obsessed with expressing the form of the waves.

Rail: Because as you told A.M. Homes in one interview (2005) that printing, which requires endless revision I'm sure, represents ninety-five percent of the work.

Ross: Exactly. The enormous amount of post-production work I do, in the darkroom or with a computer, is very natural coming from my background as a painter and sculptor. I make things. I don't just capture them. Fundamentally, yes, I'm a painter and sculptor who is making images using photography.

Rail: Similar to the relationship that lies between the painted image and the sculpted image that is evident in the work of Picasso, Matisse, and Giacometti.

Ross: Right. When I am working either on an image of a mountain or a wave, I think about how, in Rembrandt's portraits, you can feel he would be considering the entire 360 degrees of the sitter's head, even if he didn't paint the back of it. Picasso got to paint the whole view through Cubism. I'm convinced that any flat image, be it a painting or a photograph, won't be as compelling and real unless there's a three-dimensional reality built into the two-dimensional plane. And that goes for abstraction and realism.

Rail: What about the early works, say the "Water" series from 1999, in which different kinds of light reflect on the water's surfaces? While in some, if there is less movement, they appear like Mark Tobey's paintings, in others; where the surfaces are more broken up by the wind, they look like Sam

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Francis's paintings! Not to mention the early "Wave" series (1998), made in square configurations that evoke minimalist sculpture! There are endless references to paintings. Do you think it relates to your previous career as a painter and sculptor?

Ross: My modernist tendencies were not the modernist tendencies of photography. They were the modernist tendencies of Pollock, Rothko, Noland, Stella, Serra, and so on. It had everything to do with an assertion of objectness, of color, of materiality.

Rail: Are you referring to the use of tondos, diamonds, and squares in the "Morocco" series (1995)?

Ross: Those strange shape works were one way for a photograph to declare, "I'm an object, and then I'm an image." It's the dance that I've been doing ever since, like making a photographic image bond with the materiality of wood. I don't even know if these new works are photographs. I feel they're almost back to sculpture. I'm trying to reconcile my interest in materiality with photography and they don't fit together very neatly. That's what I do—thrive on the impossible.

Rail: I certainly can relate to that drive. Anyway, in the same introduction of the anthology, at the end of it in fact, you wrote, "The Abstract Expressionists, through various stylistic methods, had turned their art into a heroic, one-on-one confrontation with the subconscious. [They] fulfilled Emerson's dream of a great, indigenous art based on the individual." The key phrase here is one-on-one, confrontation with the subconscious. It seems as though there are two operations that are required to make each of the wave pictures: one is the operation of an avowed and fearless materialist/romantic/pragmatist who wants to experience the sublime, the unknown, while the other is the operation of someone who thrives to relive the experience through the editing process in order to turn "the wave into object," "moment to things." One wouldn't exist without the other, no?

Ross: Sure. Artists, by and large, are desperate people pursuing a form of expression that is unique to their vision—and always just out of their reach. But it's always connected to all the art that came before. Artists are forced to invent new ways to make art, ways that fit their own vision. Van Eyck, in his desperate need to express flesh, invented oil paint. Cubism was an invention. And Pollock, in the skeins of paint that he poured, was also an inventor.

Rail: You're referring to your invention of the R1 camera of course!

Ross: That would certainly count.

Rail: This seems to echo the nerdy fifteen-year-old Clifford and his friend.

Ross: You're right. In some ways, nothing's changed. I've even had to find new David Kanofs! With the R1 I was trying to capture a far distant mountain, a palpable atmosphere, and great detail. It was an attempt to up the "reality quotient" in photography. I really wanted to make photographs look more realistic than before. And once I realized that traditional cameras couldn't do what I wanted, I went right off the deep end. [Laughs.] I decided to try and build a new kind of camera. I loved the idea of getting people with more knowledge than me to help, just like I did with David Kanof when I was fifteen. And it wasn't just in building the camera that I needed help. I eventually needed people who understood the inner workings of Photoshop to almost reinvent digital post-production, because the amount of digital data that was being scanned from my oversize negatives was off the charts.

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It's not that different from my present obsession with veneer and printing on wood, which has taken a lot of collaboration. This phase is the flip side of my work with the R1. The idea of printing on wood involves the destruction of realism and the emergence of materiality in the finished work. I know the wood grain is at war with the image. I don't know exactly what it is in the last few years, but my craving for physicality and abstraction has become more intense. And, as a result, there has been some confusion about my intentions as an artist. I'm used to it now. I can certainly relate to how Pollock must have felt when Greenberg condemned him for sliding "back" into figuration—the exact opposite of my present situation where I am sliding "back" into abstraction. And think of the time when Picasso was making those great synthetic Cubist paintings like Three Musicians and simultaneously painting his neoclassical Three Women at the Spring. It keeps you more alive as an artist to keep changing, even if it confuses people around you. In my case, I'm moving back and forth from black and white to color, from realism to abstraction, from moving images to still. I don't have a choice; it's curiosity and the work process itself that drives me. I'm following an urge and a curiosity I don't control.

Rail: I guess you're not afraid of confronting the subconscious. [Laughs.] Can you talk about how the group of hurricane wave pictures at MASS MoCA share the same height?

Ross: They're more or less about six feet in height—some are nine feet long, others are eleven feet. They're installed alternately, creating a rhythmic quality in the room. The large scale addresses the viewer in a very dramatic way. They put the viewer in the water with me.

Rail: They fit perfectly between the beams in the first gallery as I first walk in, and I feel like I'm having a cinematic experience because of their sequential presentation.

Ross: It's a perfect space for the work. And I agree that they do look as though they're moving, especially when you're standing in the middle of the space looking at them all at once.

Rail: What about the monumental 24-foot high by 114-foot long Sopris Wall I? How did it come about and how long have you worked on it?

Ross: I've spent about six years working on a method to successfully print on wood. I hadn't really wanted to show any of it until it was ready.

Rail: Quite an introduction in such a modest scale. [Laughs.]

Ross: As soon as Joe [Thompson] and I established Seen and Imagined as the theme for the exhibition, with an idea for a massive work as a centerpiece, I felt compelled to create a proof of concept for him. It was roughly a quarter-scale work, installed in my potato barn on Long Island. When Joe came to see it, I think he was emboldened and sort of inspired, so he began to expand the scope of what we were going to show. He embraced the "Hurricane Waves" and my "Digital Waves." I had an idea to build an immersive, abstract video Wave Cathedral designed to compliment the realism and stillness of the black-and-white photographs. The Cathedral is made up of two 14- by 24-foot LED screens facing each other across a wildly beamed room, sort of like a Piranesi Carceri, with each screen looping its own, very complex 63-second video that evokes the movement of a breaking wave. It's like a lightning storm and a dance. And you're caught in the middle. It's like being in the surf during a hurricane.

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Rail: I also feel as though the Wave Cathedral has roots in Harmonium Mountain.

Ross: Well, it's related in that I've been working in the world of 3D computer animation since 2005, and it's a medium that allows my abstract impulses to blossom in unusual ways. As is typical with me, the advanced work with computer animation got started in a significant way by a 19th-century British photographer named John Murray. He triggered that 2005 move toward abstraction. I discovered his paper negatives of the Taj Mahal. I believed the work. I could feel the Taj Mahal! They shattered my notion of how to present the real world. They invited me back into abstraction. Shoved me really. I broke down the realism of my "Mountain" images into black-and-white negatives, printed them on handmade paper made to replicate John Murray's paper, eventually leapt into an abstract world of color, and then into movement with animation. At first, I was using animation to make complex images, freezing a choice frame, and with a lot of trial and error devised a method to print those low-res images at a high resolution—up to eighteen feet long. Then, of course, I fell in love with the process itself—with the animation. The first time I showed the animation as an artwork was years after I had been working with it. Sarah Lewis, who was co-curating SITE Santa Fe's 8th Biennial, asked me to submit a short video work, so I created Harmonium Mountain I—and was very lucky to get an original score from Philip Glass in time for show.

Rail: Which was a wonderful show because it mixed the old and new technology: moving images along with older and younger, as well as more established and emerging artists together. This world of computer has roots in your love of experimental film when you were at Yale studying with Stan Lander, who we talked about when we first met.

Ross: That's right. I took his classes in my sophomore year, and my life was changed forever. Stan was the figure who summoned me to jump off the cliff—to take risks that were foolish by normal standards. By the time I finished with his two classes, the history of cinema and the history of experimental cinema, I was making experimental films myself in his basement. We built optical printers out of Chock Full O' Nuts coffee cans. We created the New Cinema Seminar as an excuse to invite the best experimental filmmakers to visit our little group of fanatics at Yale. We would all hang out in Stan's basement screening room until 1 or 2 a.m., watching and talking about experimental films. It was fabulous. Stan had the creative impulses of an anarchist.

Rail: They're the two aspiring attributes for sure. But initially you didn't go to Yale with the intention of becoming an artist!

Ross: That's right. I was on track to study philosophy and political science in preparation for law school. The idea of working in the public sector, making a difference in the world, was very appealing to me. But having taken classes in art history with Ann Hanson (Post-Impressionism) and Richard Barnhart (Northern Sung landscape painting), William Bailey's life drawing class, and various other art-related classes, in addition to working with Stan, well, that was it. I never looked back.

It particularly resonates in my "Mountain" and "Mountain Redux" series, and certainly with a work like Sopris Wall I. The sublime came to mean a lot to me through various sources, Chinese landscape painting being one of them. I can trace Barnhart's teachings all the way to the "Digital Waves" and the Wave Cathedral—the desire to place a viewer in front of an awe-inspiring picture or event.

Rail: One of the wonderful things I felt immediately about the Wave Cathedral was first the sensation of being swallowed by the water, but then I was confronted with what Leibniz observed: when you



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hear the roaring sound of the ocean, the big sound is made up of an endless number of tiny sounds of each tiny wave. But if you only listen to each tiny sound, you'll lose the sensation of the big sound. This would apply to an aesthetic experience: if you look at only specific details of a painting you lose the sensation of the painting as a whole; and inversely: if you look at a painting as a total image you lose its details. What you have done with your work is allow the two experiences or perceptions to exist simultaneously, which hasn't been done before, especially with photography.

Ross: There is a long history of art for an artist to draw on—and then to try and add something uniquely his or her own. We've talked before about Serra, Marden, Rothko, Cézanne, on back to Rembrandt, and Giotto, among others. The works of these artists and others are one of three crucial ingredients in my own art making. Another is nature. And the third is who I am as a person. If you force a collision between art history, nature, and the individual, you've got the fundamental brew for making art.

Rail: A triad.

Ross: A perfect triad, like a tripod. Very strong. Three is a powerful number. It's no accident that there are three sections to the MASS MoCA exhibition. One centers on the "Mountain," which travels from high realism to abstraction; another is focused on "Waves," the still photographs and the abstract "Digital Waves"; and the last is the outdoor twelve-screen immersive video that comes alive at dusk—with musical accompaniment. That immersive video work is birthed from the worlds of the "Mountain" and the "Waves," but has its own life.

Rail: Absolutely. One last question: in the same essay Orville wrote, he mentioned that climate change has impacted the frequency and the intensity of hurricanes in the recent years. What I mean to say is, given the fact that these hurricane images have been shown in different places around the world, which means greater visibility, do you think, based on what you have heard from a variety of responses, that the viewers are both aware of nature's indescribable beauty and man's destructive tendencies toward her?

Ross: The viewer activates any work of art with his or her own values, ideas, and concerns. I don't see any reason that someone can't see these images as both beautiful and as reminders of our destructive attitude to the planet. It's no problem to me that these wave photographs are now becoming symbols of climate change—as well as pictures of a sublime element of nature. I don't think art is pure. Consistency is not an artistic necessity, but multiplicity is.

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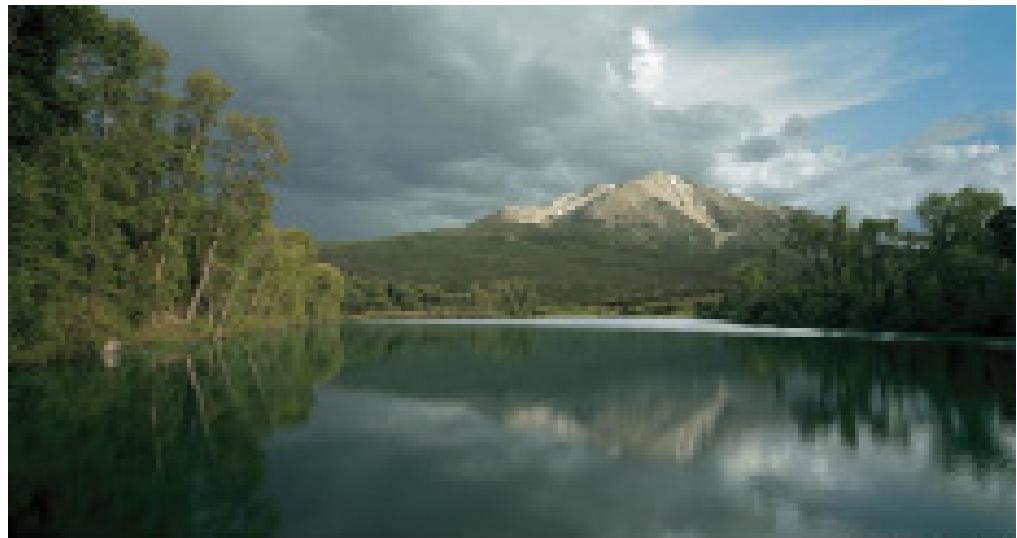
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The Boston Globe

Photography Review

At Mass MoCA, reimagining photography

By Mark Feeney | GLOBE STAFF JUNE 18, 2015



NORTH ADAMS — Familiarity may or may not breed contempt. It can certainly breed lack of imagination. Photography has never been more ubiquitous. A chicken in every pot never happened — thanks to cellphones, a digital camera in every pocket or purse pretty much has. Why would anyone, including artists, feel a need to rethink anything so common and useful? Yet that very ubiquity makes fresh responses to the medium all the more useful, and fresh responses are what three shows at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art offer.

“Clifford Ross: Landscape Seen & Imagined” reminds us that photography involves seeing by two parties: the photographer, and the viewer of the photographs taken. There’s nothing remarkable about this fact, except that Ross makes it so through his use of scale. Much of the show runs through March. Another portion, the “Hurricane Wave” series, runs through Aug. 30. In addition, an “immersive outdoor video installation,” as Mass MoCA describes it, will be on display most Thursday and Friday evenings between June 26 and Sept. 4.

That video display isn’t the only thing immersive about Ross’s work. Simply described, “Sopris Wall I” is a photograph of Mount Sopris, in the Colorado Rockies, flanked by trees, with a small body of water in the foreground. That description, while accurate enough so far as it goes, goes nowhere near far enough to give any sense of the experience of seeing “Sopris Wall I” in person.

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“Wall” is in the title, rather than “mountain,” for an excellent reason. The displayed image — a photographic negative printed on wood panels — fills the entire wall of a double-height gallery. The image is 24 feet high and 114 feet wide. Its being a negative rather than positive, and the textural effect of the wood, make the image appear more like curtain than photograph, with the world behind it as stage. The sheer fact of the image existing as a physical thing may be the single most impressive thing about it. Materiality, as well as scale, encourages rethinking of what photography is — or can be.

By comparison, “Mountain IV,” a positive print of Mount Sopris, looks demure at a “mere” 6 feet by nearly 11 feet. It’s like one of the enormous 19th-century landscape paintings of the American sublime by Albert Bierstadt or Frederic Edwin Church. There’s a key difference, though. Ross takes his photographs with an ultra-high-resolution camera of his own design. It’s able to capture detail with an ability surpassing that of the human eye — or “mere” human eye, to use again a word that comes in handy when writing about Ross’s work.

Such detailing raises questions about the relationship between reality and abstraction. Those questions are underscored in Ross’s “Harmonium” series, where he presents a small portion of the larger image of Mount Sopris on a far more manageable scale. “Harmonium VII,” for example, is roughly 4 feet by 3½ feet. Ross also prints them with a single dominant color superimposed — red or green or yellow — so the relationship is as much between unreality and abstraction. Divorced from standard perspective and context, they resemble Chinese painting.

Ross’s “Hurricane” series consists of large black-and-white images of surf. It emphasizes the interplay of reality and abstraction even more powerfully. The intensity of detailing — Ross’s apparatus almost functions as part camera, part microscope — makes the images seem less oceanic than Abstract Expressionist. Turbulence becomes stasis, creating a Zen urgency — or should that be frenetic stillness? The photographs are shown apart from the rest of the show, in an old attic space, with a low wooden ceiling. Its wonderfully expressive rafters and beams are to driftwood, one might say, as Ross’s photographs are to actual surf.

“If [these] ‘Hurricane’ images are successful,” Ross writes, “there should be a feeling of both anxiety and wonder instilled in the viewer. The still image should have the same effect on the viewer that the actual waves had on me.” That’s a very tall order for a mere (that word again) two dimensions to fill. It’s impressive how close these extraordinary images come to doing so.

PHOTOGRAPHY REVIEW:
CLIFFORD ROSS: Landscape Seen & Imagined
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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

CULTURE + LIFESTYLE

Photographer Clifford Ross Gets The Spotlight This Summer



TEXT BY STEPHEN WALLIS

It's hard to believe that, as a child, artist Clifford Ross was terrified of going into the ocean. Numerous times over the past two decades, he has ventured chest-deep into roiling surf off East Hampton, New York, camera in hand, to create his mesmerizing black-and-white photographs of hurricane waves. "I realized the only way to convey that power and lyricism was to put the audience closer," says Ross, who began the series in the late '90s. "You don't fight that ocean, you just become part of it."

The uncompromising Ross—whose work is the subject of multiple shows this summer, most notably a midcareer survey at MASS MoCA in North Adams, Massachusetts—thrives on

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tackling challenges both creative and technical. Starting in 2002, he engineered and patented his own camera, which uses military aerial film, to capture Colorado's Mount Sopris, producing some of the highest-resolution landscape images ever. "I spent a year and a half building the camera and another year figuring out how to get the prints right," he says. "In the end it took about five years to make 14 photographs."

As is typical for Ross, those pictures seeded new, related bodies of work. In recent years he has consulted endlessly with veneer experts on the elaborate process of printing a 114-foot-long version of a mountain photograph on wood, and fragments of that same image have found their way into Ross's ongoing experiments with augmented-reality digital animation. "I like exploring," remarks the artist. "It keeps me in a restless state."

Ross's growing interest in "creating immersive experiences with moving images," as he puts it, eventually led him back to his great muse, the sea. Initially he tried shooting video of waves but couldn't get the high-frame-rate, high-definition camera into the water. So Ross began collaborating with animators at his New York City studio to devise computer-generated waves with "movement as eccentric as I remember it in nature," he explains.

The result of these efforts will be shown for the first time at MASS MoCA, on two 23-foot-wide LED walls conjuring crashing surf. "We've created something genuinely visceral," Ross says. "Each video is made up of 1.6 million moving dots of light, and we're firing them off at a furious rate. It's almost like you're being shotgunned with beauty."

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ON VIEW

Clifford Ross's Wave Mechanics

CULTURE | BY KURT MCVEY | May 13, 2015 5:10PM



This year, May 14 marks the beginning of summer — that is, the summer of Clifford Ross. This Thursday at Ryan Lee Gallery, the noble and light-footed nephew of the late Helen Frankenthaler will showcase two series of silver gelatin photographs from the late '90s in "The Abstract Edge," beginning with his "Grain Series," perhaps the most abstract and spare photographic works in Ross' expansive but underappreciated catalogue. Evoking the minimal but potent energy of an Ad Reinhardt painting, the photographs display tone and emulsion only, embodying the pure essence of a tumultuous swell while simultaneously dissembling the photographic process. The second and "edgier" half, the "Wave Series," presents only the whisper of a wave crest and is deeply indebted to Richard Serra. "My aunt created a masterpiece at age 23. I'm on the flip side of that," says a relaxed Ross in his West Village studio. "She had to live down staggering success. For me, it was a gradual climb to things that were better or more meaningful."

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On May 23, just nine days after the Ryan Lee opening, Ross will unveil the first and largest phase of his ambitious summer show at MASS MoCA, “Clifford Ross: Landscape Seen & Imagined,” an immersive multi-media exhibition that takes place across two buildings, six galleries, two courtyards and two beer gardens. The show functions as a cumulative retrospective for the 62-year-old artist, built on the foundation of two conjoined 20-year chapters as a working artist: first as a painter, and then as an increasingly tech-savvy photographer. “Technology is binary,” Ross says. “Give me the crumbs, and that’s where my art lives.”

The show begins with the “Hurricane Series,” a collection of 14 large-scale, 6-by-11-foot ultra-high-resolution photographs of magnificently violent storm waves shot by the artist himself while perilously tethered out to sea. It will mark the first time the works have been shown together Stateside, all in a previously unused room provided by The Clark Art Institute of Williamstown. Guests will then move through the “Wave Cathedral,” a room comprised of two 13-by-23-foot, inward-facing LED screens firing continuously on each side of the viewer. Each screen will feature a unique algorithm, essentially a one-minute loop comprised of roughly 1,600,000 dots of light, capturing all the lyricism, truth of movement and eccentricity of a breaking wave.

Next up is the “Gateway of Realism,” two 6-by-11-foot, high-resolution mountain landscape images featured in the same room as three vertical screens playing an original, silent video piece called “Harmonium Mountain.” The short film is a festive, balletic, and at times meditative celebration of the same landscape, reproduced 65 times over in various colors and scattered like sentient confetti. Each frame is a “Harmonium”: a serendipitous word culled collectively from the works of Kurt Vonnegut, Wallace Stevens and Allen Ginsberg. The same video will be featured prominently on multiple screens in MASS MoCA’s courtyard and will be accompanied throughout the summer by live music curated by John Colpitts of the experimental rock band Oneida — who will be following in the daunting footsteps of Philip Glass and the Japanese musician Wu Tong, who both previously provided unique scores for the film. “The music is the equivalent of the wood grain,” Ross says. “You take something that’s not you, and if you can whet it properly, you’ve created something bigger than yourself.”

The exhibition’s feature attraction is a gargantuan 114-by-24-foot reproduction of the mountain image, which Ross turned into a black-and-white negative and printed onto a custom veneer — more specifically, 90 four-by-eight-foot panels of wood locked and bolted together into one relatively seamless wall. It took Ross six years, the help of multiple experts and much trial and error, to create and perfect the printing process. In late June, the artist will launch his “Invisible Art Project,” which will allow guests to interact with the massive wood installation via a free custom augmented-reality app (the most advanced yet of its kind), which will create completely three-dimensional, real-time virtual “Harmoniums” between the massive wood image and the viewer. “There’s a sense that I was the first version of that Harmonium and this project reflects who I was becoming,” Ross says. “It had its qualities, and like me working on me over time, it gives the impression that one has made progress.”

“Clifford Ross: The Abstract Edge: Photographs, 1996 – 2001” is on view May 14 through June 27 at Ryan Lee Gallery, 515 W. 26th St., New York, ryanleegallery.com. “Clifford Ross: Landscape Seen & Imagined” is on view starting May 23, with a second phase beginning June 26, at MASS MoCA, 1040 MASS MoCA Way, North Adams, Mass., massmoca.org.