

Kate Teale – The Sea is All Around Us at Studio 10 in Bushwick, Brooklyn

By [elizabeth johnson](#)

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Kate Teale's *The Sea Is All Around Us* opened March 8 at Studio 10 Gallery during Armory Arts Week in Bushwick. Amidst the splash of other high quality work emerging from the exciting Bushwick/Brooklyn scene, her exhibit offers slowly unfolding, quiet riches.

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A woman sat at her table on a straight-backed chair. The table was spread with a white cloth that reached to the bright horizon. She smoothed the cloth flat with her hands, sat back down and fixed her eyes on the horizon. Every now and again she would be distracted by a wrinkle and get up to pull or smooth it flat. As she focused her intense concentration across the flat surface, the light gradually faded. She heard something give. Story fragment by Kate Teale.

Crucial to the exhibit, this fragment was part dream, part imagination. Kate wanted to develop this image into a short story but instead found it working its way into drawings of the 2011 Japanese Tsunami and paintings of her bed. I hear the word “bed” and think of [Tracy Emin](#)’s messy, provocative *My Bed* (1998).

Both Tracy Emin and Kate Teale are British and they each fold their personal responses to tragedy and horror into their art. Both allow us to share the shock, yet the two artists diverge completely in tone and method for conveying such shock. Imagine yourself in Margate, Tracy Emin’s hometown, steeped in her brutally honest and self-absorbed statements such as: “I Do Not Expect To Be A Mother But I Do Expect To Die Alone” and “It Doesn’t Have To Be Like This.” Then turn seaward; tune yourself to the heroes, deeds and language of *Moby Dick*, *Heart of Darkness*, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” *The Tempest* and *To the Lighthouse*, and soon you’ll pull alongside Kate’s sensibility that both fears and loves the sea so much that she sees it in bed sheets.



“Dead Calm,” 2011, oil on canvas, 18” x 24”

From blurry stills of tsunami video footage, Kate draws in graphite a simple, brute, almost animal presence, a wave-like shape against flatter, calmer surfaces. Her titles, “Repossession,” “Underwater,” and “Overpowered,” make me think that there were people in the original image but they were swept away just moments before. She told me that she finds it too gruesome to include figures in these works; but, I still sense human struggle in the careful balance of white water with still patches. Taking in the scene from a dreamy, safe remove partially masks the water’s ferocity, making it in the end all the more terrifying.

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“Repossession,” 2012, graphite on paper, 12.5” x 19”

Teale photographs her bed then continues her investigation of agitated watery surfaces juxtaposed with moments of calm by making paintings of fabric. Instead of water we’re given the look, weight and feel of sheets bunching, folding, wrinkling, and hanging down from the edge of the bed. She paints her most private refuge, navigating by stripe patterns and wallowed areas where someone has slept, always keeping sight of the front edge of the bed, the one nearest us. In Teale’s story fragment, a woman smooths “a white cloth that reached to the bright horizon,” while the tsunami drawings, at most, employ an indistinct distant edge of a fogbank. With the bed paintings we never see the opposite side of the bed, transforming it into an infinite space.



“Sea Change,” 2013, oil on canvas, 18” x 24”

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Through Teale’s eyes, paper and fabric are as naturally restless and fluid as water. Kate pastes her canvases with rice paper that produces small wrinkles, tears and bubbles. She mixes blue, yellow, and red oils to arrive at muddy grays that can be warm or cool but retain only a memory of color. She quickly renders the bed images before the fragile rice paper dissolves, rubbing and burnishing the paint into the paper as much as building it up. Her technique mirrors her subject: destruction and accumulation, taking away and building back, ebb and flow. In terms of scale I compare the giant curling waves, the edge of the bed, and even the most minute wrinkles or surface disturbances as different amplifications of the change from horizontal to vertical. Then I link them to the woman in Teale’s story tensely waiting for “something to give.” Combining the physical gestures of her story (spreading, smoothing, pulling the tablecloth) with the physicality of her painting binds me to Kate’s vision. And just as her character “fixed her eyes on the horizon” and waits “for something to give,” Kate focuses my attention on an empty and potentially dangerous space that I resist yet welcome: the plunge or fall, the moment when nature overpowers us.



“Run-Off,” 2013, oil on canvas, 18” x 24”

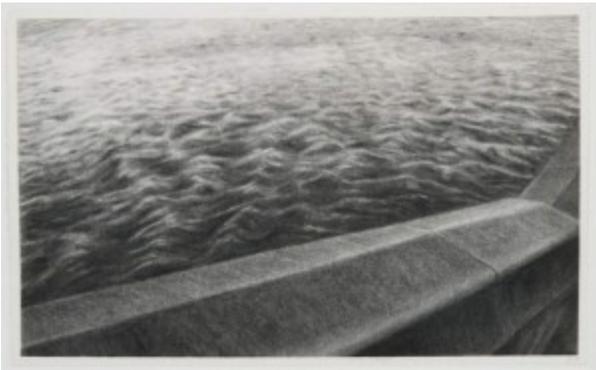
Thoughtfully installed and hanging together like a series of interlocking and ever-narrowing funnels, the show presents horror without being horrible. The tsunami drawings, though more frightening, prepare me for the understated drama of the bed paintings. These are installed so that the title piece for the show, the modest “The Sea Is All Around Us,” rises above its more anxious neighbors, leading me to conclude that Kate has found resolve with her most simple work.





“The Sea Is All Around Us,” 2011, oil on canvas, 18" x 24"

To her credit, she does not stop here. We are treated to postscript drawings, perhaps the start of work to come. “Surge,” “Roiled” and “Foundering” take a step back from the drama by framing the action in a wider but smaller rectangle, a dainty kind of CinemaScope. “Surge” and “Foundering” introduce a new, oblique-angle view over solid stone buttresses, and plant my feet on solid ground.



“Foundering,” 2012, Graphite on Paper, 12" x 18"

[Kate Teale](#): *The Sea Is All Around Us* is at [Studio 10](#), 56 Bogart St., Brooklyn March 8- April 7th.