Elijah Gowin > ***W a t e r i n g***

Statement

For thousands of years, people have used water to physically and spiritually cleanse their bodies as well as to nourish the land they live on. Our bodies and the land we inhabit often interconnect, each one a map of the other. In *Watering*, I have chosen the backdrop of contemporary Christian baptism to reflect upon the broader human condition at the turn of the 21st century.

The act of baptism with water symbolizes the death of a person's past life, a realization that an old way of life is flawed and a new life needed. While this need to wipe the slate clean and begin anew has long been a human desire, recent global changes have fostered a more emphatic quest for restitution and renewal. Although the digital revolution has empowered individuals by connecting them to the larger world, technology has at the same time made the individual more replaceable, replicatable and anxious about the future.

Disasters, both natural and man-made, reveal our human frailty and finitude. We can digitally predict, chart and track impending storms or ozone depletion and instantly share this information with the world. Yet we are shocked and confused when we find ourselves helpless to prevent tragedies that leave soil contaminated, buildings flooded and bodies drifting. As technology makes the world smaller, the psychological weight of the world has become heavier.

These photographic scenes, taking place in the aqueous landscapes of rivers, lakes and oceans, present the ritual of immersion baptism wherein a multiplicity of human dramas is played out. The constructed images survey a range of emotions on the faces of the reborn, from joy, serenity and gentle compassion to pain, insecurity and aggression. Stripped of their belongings, figures are immersed in a world that is both nourishing and potentially malevolent. We recognize in such contradictions the complexity and beauty of human experience, an experience that is both global and personal in its reach.

A note on process

The images in *Watering* are limited addition archival inkjet prints that vary in scale from 22"x26" to 21"x39"". I construct these images by collecting amateur photographs from the internet and combine them in Photoshop using multiple layers of backgrounds and figures. I print a small negative on inkjet paper and then scan it, so that the paper fibers becomes part of the final blurred image.