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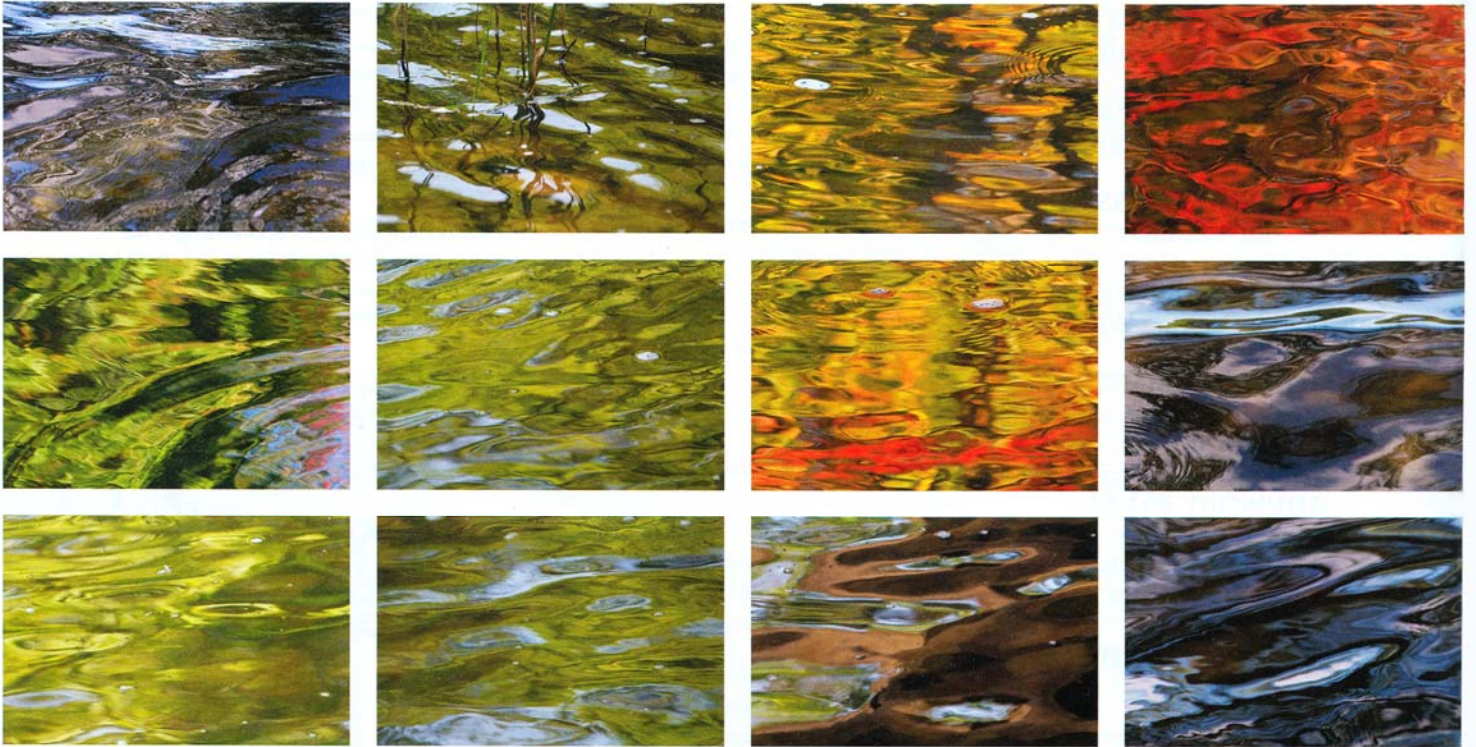
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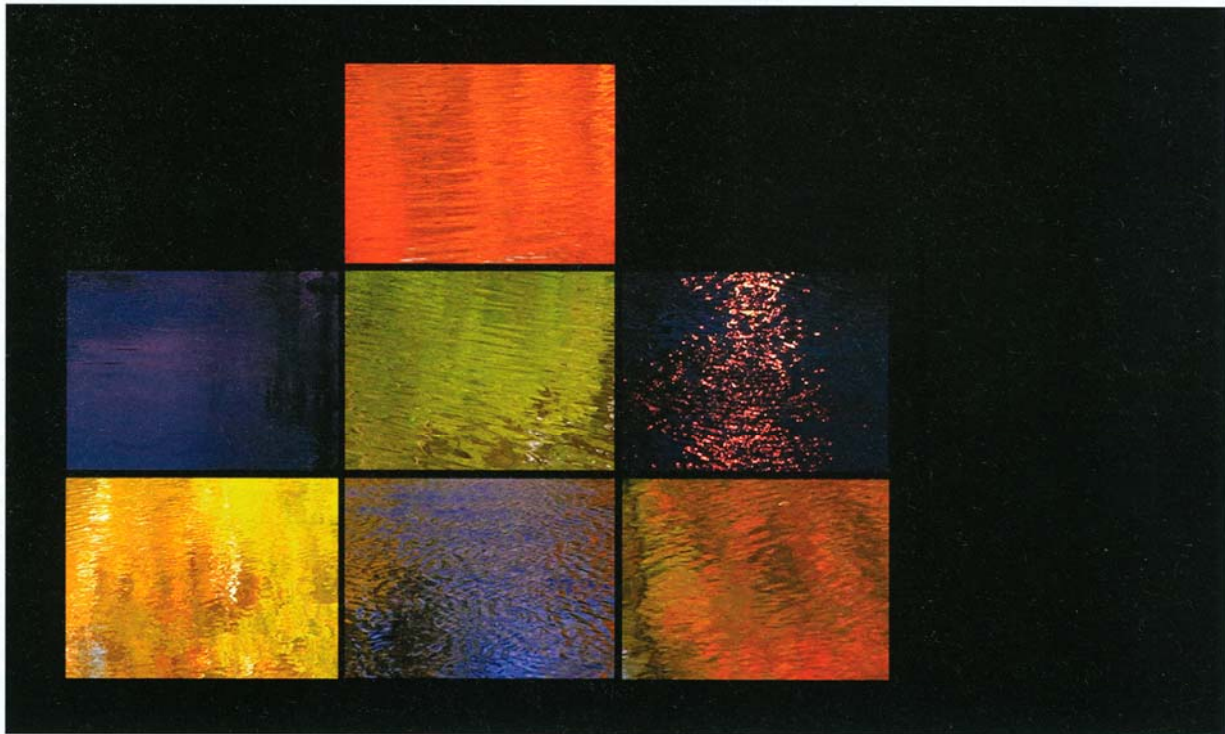
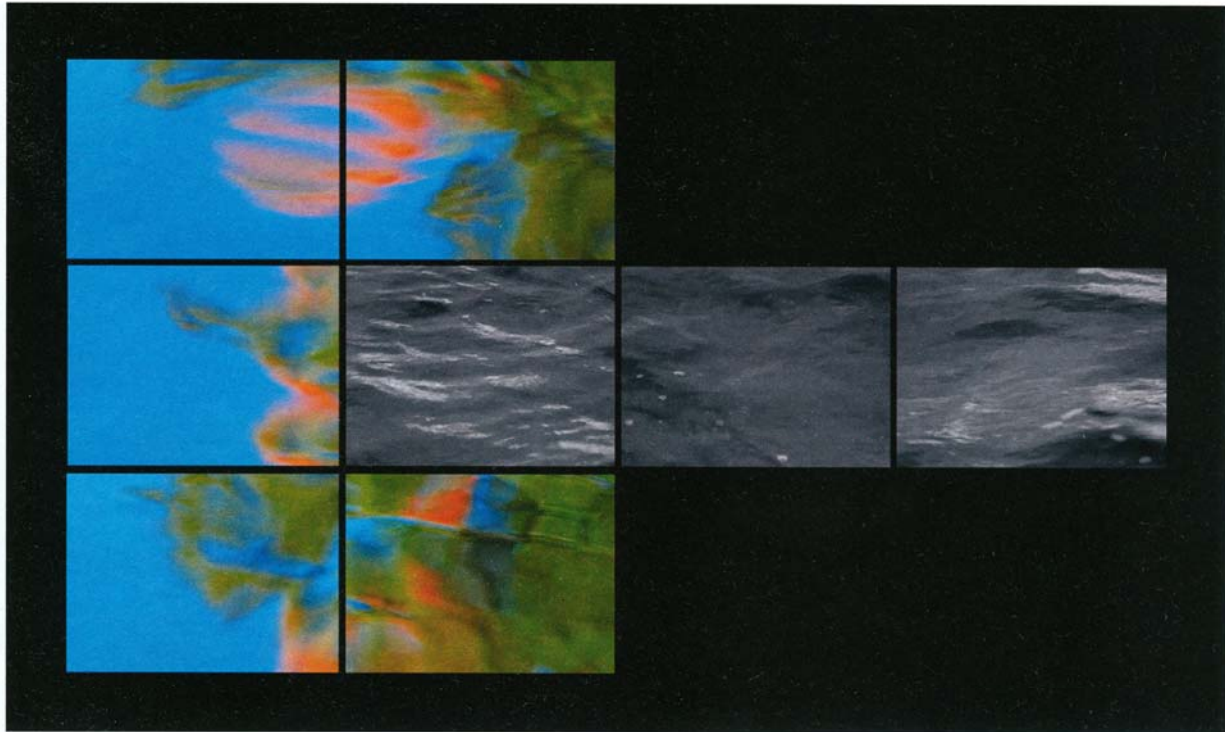
State of Flux

Cheryl Pagurek

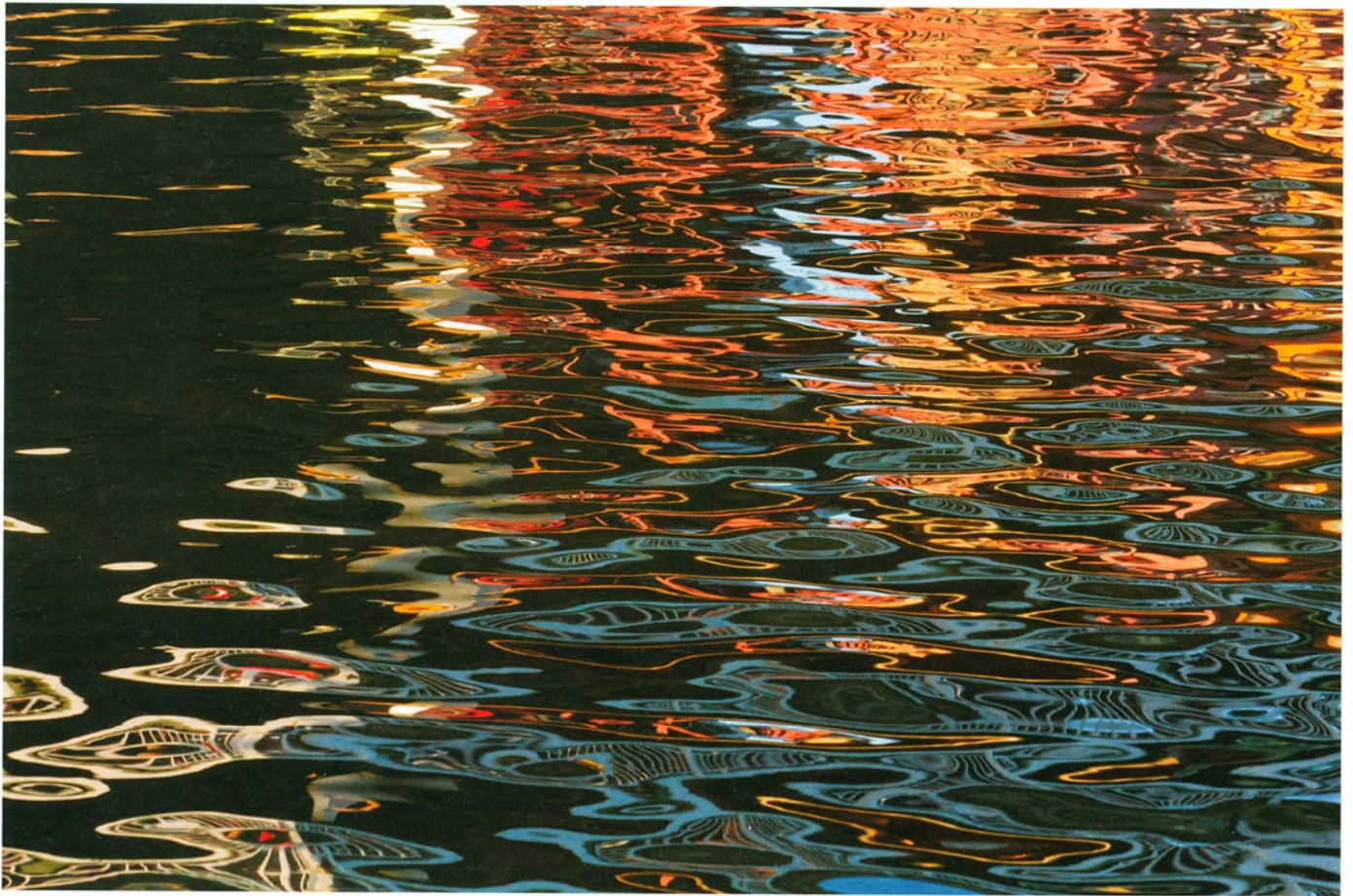
By Michael Davidge

The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus's most famous maxim says that you cannot step into the same river twice. The observation is especially relevant upon viewing Cheryl Pagurek's latest body of work in *State of Flux*, an exhibition of pictures of rivers that dramatically vary in colour, form, and movement. Installed at the Patrick Mikhail Gallery, the exhibition comprised a sequence of three components: *State of Flux* (2012), a series of digital prints featuring close-ups of the variegated surfaces of rivers as they ripple

and flow; *River Suite* (2012), a print that presents twelve selected close-up views of the waters in a gridded composition; and *Wave Patterns* (2012), a dynamic video that activates a variation on *River Suite* with motion and sound. A lens-based artist living in Ottawa, Pagurek has been dealing with themes of change, the passage of time



Opposite: *River Suite*, 2012, Ultrachrome digital print on photo paper, 91.4 x 160 cm. **This page:** Video stills from *Wave Patterns*, 2012. Images courtesy of the artist.



and the impact of an increasingly urbanized environment on the natural world through the exploration of images of flowing rivers.

Though Pagurek's technique seems relatively straightforward in the work on display, the images themselves are complex and suggest there is more than one layer to them. Pagurek's choice of water imagery is intended to fluidly dissolve boundaries between opposed elements, blurring distinctions between natural and built environments, between abstraction and representation, nature and culture, even between photography and painting.

It is ultimately her medium, digital photography, which allows her to confound such static categories with ease. Unmoored from the anchor of analogue photography's index, the world of digital photography is analogous to the Heraclitean worldview of perpetual change, where "Everything flows."

Selections from the *State of Flux* series were the first works you encountered in the gallery. Each of the digital prints presented displayed the wide variety of effects and results Pagurek achieves by simply shooting close-ups of rivers at diverse locations, cropped to push the subject matter towards abstraction. Each work bears the title of the series and a number, such as *State of Flux 4* (the first work to the left as you enter) and *State of Flux 15* (the fourth if you continued clockwise through the space) designating perhaps the order in which they were printed, or more likely the order in which they were completed and saved as finished files.

The original referent is closer to the surface in some, such as *State of Flux 1* where the blue tops of waves are discernible, though they look like they might be solarized by a software filter. Because of their cropping and their saturated colours, all of the images appear highly mediated, but Pagurek specifies that she has done little to manipulate them. All of her results were achieved in camera by shooting the waters in varying states of agitation, as they reflect a multitude of colours and distorted forms. Pagurek often photographs waters at the edge of urban developments in order to capture greater variation in the details that are reflected. Some images are impressionistic, reflecting golden hues, or deep reds, bringing to mind fall landscape colours.

In some the surface completely breaks down into pulsating psychedelic pools. *State of Flux 11*, in another area of the gallery, looks like a screen capture of a glitch in the transfer of videotape to digital. As the works are not presented in a sequential manner, and there are gaps in the sequence, the suggestion is that they come from a greater number of images that were captured but not printed, framed, and presented.

Altogether, the series is indicative of what Marc Steinberg has called the "new seriality" (in *Parachute* 110) a mode of production characteristic of the information age instead of the industrial era. In the industrial model, the mass production of a commodity repeats what is essentially the same form. The information-capitalist model of seriality claims no fixed point of origin and proliferates through metamorphosis and mutation. It is the repetition of difference within the series that distinguishes the series.

In her water imagery, Pagurek finds the perfect vehicle to not only encapsulate the idea of continual change and intermixing but also to generate it. Rather than seeing the images as photographs or as abstract paintings, I'd like to view them as more akin to computer generated images.

There is not one "decisive moment" present but rather an infinite series of moments that a computer can recall and render at any given point.

These are discrete stills of global liquidity in the information age, where everything has an algorithm that is subject to manipulation and "innovation" is a word used to describe slight permutations of form.

The fact that there is no original or foundational moment to the series, or at least that such a moment is not necessary, was underscored by the remaining works in the exhibition. In addition to further prints from the *State of Flux* series, a second area of the gallery displayed *River Suite* and *Wave Patterns*. *River Suite* is a print that presents multiple viewpoints in a grid comprised of twelve selected close-up views of the water. Each view within the grid is reminiscent of images within the *State of Flux* series, here a series, or suite, in itself. While the grid might offer ballast against the fluidity of the waters, it also flattens twelve distinct moments of flux into one composition, reinforcing my feeling that there must be a multitude of images from which these are drawn, and that each can be reconfigured in any number of compositions, no one taking precedence over the other.

The surface of the photograph and its decisive moment becomes as malleable and mercurial as the surface of a flowing river. *Wave Patterns* takes the composition of *River Suite* one step further and lets you see not only the movement of the flowing waters but also the ongoing construction of a similar gridded composition, as views within a grid of twelve video images are shuffled and pop or fade in and out.

The rise of digital non-linear editing and advances in communications technology has bolstered an observation made by Fredric Jameson, in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, that video is the dominant form of the current era. With reference to Raymond Williams's notion of "whole flow," Jameson describes the never-ending flow of television and video images as symptomatic of postmodern culture: an undifferentiated recycling of styles, images and fashions from different moments in time that has led to a lack of historical awareness and critical distance in its consumers. What are the ramifications of the cultural logic of late capitalism when its "total flow" as decried by Jameson is even more pervasive and everything that is captured in a digital file can be accessed and "streamed" almost instantaneously and at once?

Crucially, the audio track for Pagurek's *Wave Patterns* keeps us from slipping down a soporific stream: sounds of perpetual and frantic construction, blows of hammers and squeals of saws, accompany the succession of clips and reverberate with the rest of the still images that comprise the exhibition.

By foregrounding the constructed nature of her work, Pagurek offers the rejoinder that while we may be affected by change, we also actively effect it.

Michael Davidge is an artist, curator and writer who lives in Ottawa, Ontario. He holds degrees in both English Literature and the Fine Arts. Intertextuality is a major component of his work. His writing on art and culture has appeared in *BlackFlash*, *C magazine*, *Matrix*, and *Parachute* among other publications.