

Artist's Statement

The natural world is the core of my work, as subject and as process. I research the ocean and climate change, and it is the knowledge of how these elements work that fuels my imagery. I draw with a hyper-saturated sea salt solution, and when the water evaporates, sea salt crystals grow in seemingly random patterns.

Yet these patterns are not so random. I prefer working outside on many of these works. The elements affect the color and forms of the crystal's growth: temperature, humidity, wind, clouds, the shadow of the driveway fence, and the angle of the sun. At 95 degrees at noon, the crystals dry one way. At 95 degrees at 4 pm, the crystals dry another. While the formation of the patterns may not be so random, responding as they do to the atmosphere they were made in, the sea salt crystals are chance configurations that represent moments in time.

Among other things, the salt crystals represent the metaphysical oceans, a thin skin on the surface of the planet covering 70% of the globe. Like skin, it controls the 'health' of the natural world as we now know it.

Recent works represent mangrove forest roots, which live in ocean water half the day. Mangroves are extremely adaptable, primeval trees. They absorb 10 times more carbon than terrestrial trees, and may even have a local effect on the ocean's acidity. They build land by trapping soil and sand, and take the brunt of any tsunami or other storm waves that come their way. They are one of three 'buffer' zones that moderate the force of the ocean on the shore.

These buffer zones – coral reefs, giant kelp forests and the mangrove forests – feed much of the marine life that populates the ocean. In turn, fish feed human beings and provide a livelihood for people around the world. Coral reefs and giant kelp forests are endangered around the world, and mangroves are threatened by sea rise caused by climate change.

Nature follows its own set of rules. While we may try to keep things the way we like it, change is fundamental. Whether we want it or not, whether we choose to see it or not, here it comes. What we do now will determine how that change unfolds, what the natural world of the future will become, and what species survive.

-- Madeline Irvine