



LUKE ELWES

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*writing on water*

67 MORTIMER STREET LONDON W1W 7SE t: 0207 580 4360

13 JOHN STREET BATH BA1 2JL t: 01225 480406

e: [info@adamgallery.com](mailto:info@adamgallery.com) [www.adamgallery.com](http://www.adamgallery.com)





## Gihon: writing on water

What you see here is the result of a month spent in Vermont exploring and responding to the wild terrain of the Green Mountains, working each day by the flowing waters and cascading rapids of the Gihon river. It was a month that began in heavy snow and ended with the first signs of spring, as the ice flows slowly dissolved and the rivers rose up with the roar and rush of melt water.

Arriving from London with two large rolls of paper and a few drawing materials I set out to find a way of recording this parcel of time and space by interacting with the river's alchemy, pacing out the days – sometimes icily cold, sometimes warm and wet as the season changed – with images made both with the water and of the water. Responding to this fluid encounter, as well as to its vibrant sounds, both its pulsing rush and gentle whisper, was a way to reconcile (through marks on paper) the river's dark mercurial force and glittering surface with the mutating course of its submerged history.

'Gihon' – both the word and the sound – belongs not only to the physical flow of time through this passage of land (and the memories that once surrounded it) but also to a wider sea of stories, as one of the four rivers of Genesis issuing from the Garden of Eden. In the first century the historian Josephus associated the Gihon with the river Nile (the original Hebrew word may be interpreted as 'bursting forth, gushing'), and within the turbulent streams and creeks of its North American incarnation it also brought life of another kind with the trace of gold.

The cursory markings employed as a loosely flowing calligraphic undercurrent to the river-saturated colour washes are by way of rhythmic inscriptions, ghosted signs that evoke a now indecipherable meaning. The resulting series of images (28 in all), each made in one continuous sitting and on successive days, contain their own silent language (like the empty space between words) and what remains of the drawing process in the shadowy residue left on the surface becomes a kind of writing on water.

*Luke Elwes*



















4. Gihon 14 | Mixed media on paper | 87 x 114 cm











**Language of the River**

—Lines for Luke Elwes

Rippling silver water blurs  
gray and green stones below

A lone Mallard duck pecks  
for grubs among shore rocks  
flips its tail up in the shallows

A stick spins in an eddy  
where the river veers abruptly—  
moss-covered boulder

Storm swollen, the dam roars  
a three-foot murky arc  
white fins spraying

A white ice chunk  
as big as a briefcase  
stranded on a spar  
of flat brown stones

Opaque slush scuds  
clump and swirl  
in the clear cold water

*Todd McCarty*

















The River

Morning: a white haze and gentle flurries. A thin dusting coats everything, but vanishes as it touches the water.

The river steals each flake, turning crystal into stream.

A winterblue day, the sun's reflection skimming off the river. The river bends, brings with it: ice, a shoe, a branch broken in last night's storm.

A journey for all things lost in the deep snows of winter.

The snow dusts the riverbanks, a farewell benediction. A hawk kills a pigeon and eats it, opening a red cavity amidst the white.

The river tumbles past, nonchalant.

The river rushes under the bridge of the old mill, the timeless cacophony as water rumbles over stone.

The ground is wet from a good rain, and the clouds mean business.

The river carries on as if it was a summerblue August day.

No texture in the sky this morning, just one long blanket of gray.

The river flows higher, runs quicker, as if to escape the last lingering days of winter.

Crunch of frozen grass under feet, sting of the morning air, a sleepy lull in the pouring of the river; the cold creeps closer with each swell.

This morning the ground is thick with snow and sleet. The sky changing throughout the day: blue, grey, cloud-spotted, stormy.

The river shifting from a clear mountain melting to a churning, muddy tempest.

Maureen C. Ewing







12. Gihon 1 | Mixed media on paper | 57 x 76 cm

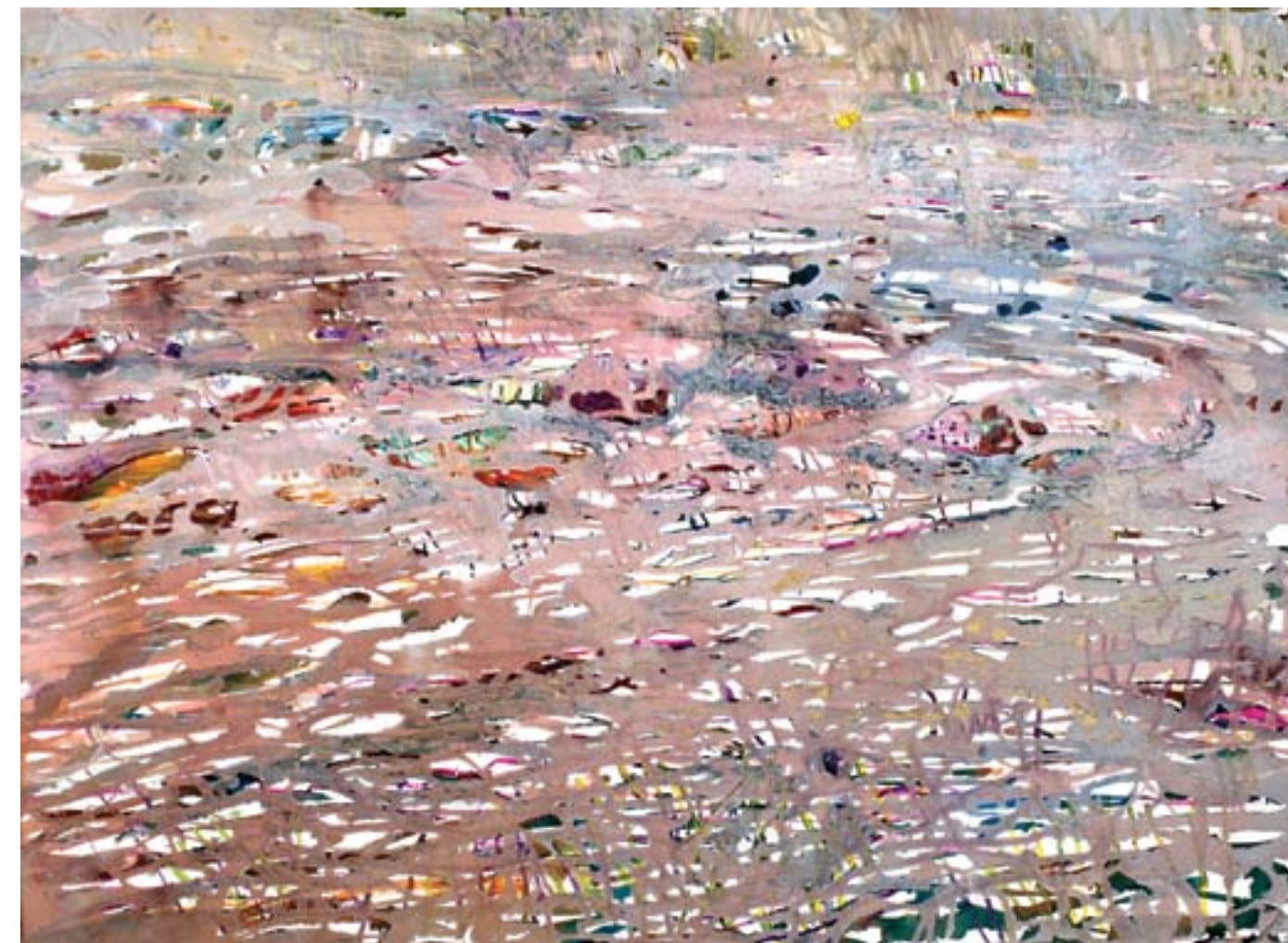


13. Gihon 3 | Mixed media on paper | 57 x 76 cm





14. Gihon 5 | Mixed media on paper | 57 x 76 cm



15. Gihon 13 | Mixed media on paper | 57 x 76 cm



Luke Elwes

Luke Elwes was born in 1961 in London, where he now lives and works. His early years were spent in Iran, where the light and space of the desert were a formative influence. He studied at Camberwell School of Art and Bristol University between 1979 and 1985, and completed his postgraduate studies in Art History at Birkbeck College, London University in 2007.

While working at Christies he began to travel and write, and after meeting Bruce Chatwin in 1987 he went to the central Australian desert to explore the landscape and its use in aboriginal storytelling and art forms. Since then he has continued to travel extensively, discovering and revisiting remote locations in India, Asia Minor and North Africa. He was artist in residence on expeditions to Mount Kailash in Tibet in 1998 and to the kingdom of Mustang in 2008. Since 2000 he has also worked for extensive periods on an island off the East Coast of the UK. In 2011 he gave an 'Artist's Eye' talk at the National Gallery and in 2012 was writer in residence at Abstractcritical.com. In 2013 he was awarded a grant to study at the Vermont Studio Center.

Selected shows

2014	Writing on water, Adam Gallery, London & Bath	2003	Look Stranger! Art First, Cork Street, London
2013	The Water Diaries 2000 – 2013, Young Gallery, Salisbury	2002	The Osea Paintings, Art First, Cork Street, London
2012	Constellation, Adam Gallery, London & Bath		Luke Elwes, Art First New York
	Cross country, Broadbent Gallery, London	2000	Five British Artists, Galerie Vieille du Temple, Paris
	Celestial Confetti: work on paper, North House Gallery, Essex		Sanctuary, Art First, Cork Street, London
	Threadneedle Prize for Painting 2012, London 1999	1999	The Hunting Group Art Prizes, London and Bath
2011	Silent Kingdom, Adam Gallery, London & Bath 1998	1998	Pilgrim, Art First, Cork Street, London
	Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, London	1997	14th Annual Open, Royal Overseas League, London & Edinburgh
	(also in 2009, 2007 2005, 2003, 1998, 1995)	1996	Endangered Spaces, Council for the Protection of Rural England, Christies, London
2010	Another Country, The Estorick Collection, London		Bayer Earth Art Prize, Highly Commended.
	Critics Choice, Browse & Darby, London	1995	Centenary, Contemporary British Art, Christie's, London
2009	Luke Elwes: Peintures Recente, Galerie Marceau Bastille, Paris		President's choice, RA Summer Exhibition, London
	Secret Water, works on paper, Broadbent Gallery, London	1993	Luke Elwes, Galerie Vieille du Temple, Paris
	L'Isle Joyeuse, Falle Fine Art, St.Helier, Jersey,	1992	Spring, Barbican, London (chosen by The Spectator)
	Five London Painters, Hester Gallery, Leeds.	1991	Il Sud Del Mondo, L'Altra Arte Contemporanea,
2008	Genius Loci, Galleria Ceribelli, Bergamo, Italy		Marsala, Sicily, and touring (Italy)
2007	Refugia, Art First, Cork Street, London		Earthscape, Hastings & Southampton City Art Gallery
	Mapping, Bury Art Gallery, Manchester		Songlines, Barbican Gallery, London
	Gli Amici Pittori Di Londra, Galleria Ceribelli, Bergamo,	1990	The Broad Horizon, Agnews, London
	& Galleria Ghelfi, Vicenza, Italy.		
2006	Translations, Work from the National Gallery, Art First London		
	Celeste Art Prize, London		
2005	Flowing Ground, works on paper, Broadbent Gallery, London		
2004	Compass, Art First, Cork Street, London		
	Slow Art, Broadbent Gallery, London		



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Andrew Lambirth: 'Another Country', Spectator, 12 June 2010  
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Andrew Lambirth: 'Along the Waterline', exhibition essay, May 2002  
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Luke Elwes: 'Look before you think', Modern Painters, Winter 1997  
Fiona Sturges:'Whatever your art desires', The Independent, 10 August 1997  
Mark Tully: 'Something Understood', interview with the artist, BBC Radio Four, 22.5.1997  
Iain Gale: 'Endangered Spaces', The Independent, 6 September 1996  
Natalie Wheen: 'Artists Et the Sea', BBC Radio Four interview, 28 August 1996  
Ian McKay: 'Luke Elwes', Time Out, 21 June 1995  
Iain Gale: 'Luke Elwes', The Week, 3 June 1995  
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Luke Elwes: Beaux Arts Magazine, Paris, July 1993  
Dalya Alberge:' Joining the dots on the landscape', The Independent, 20 July 1993  
Anthony Gardner: 'A Brush with Elwes', Evening Standard, 11 May 1993  
Nick Tite, RA Magazine, Spring 1993  
Giles Auty, The Spectator, 24 April 1993  
Natalie Wheen: 'Vox Pop', Modern Painters, Winter 1992  
Jane Norrie: 'Luke Elwes', Arts Review, 18 October 1991  
Sister Wendy Beckett: 'Landcross', exhibition catalogue, August 1991  
Giles Auty, The Spectator, 20 April 1991  
Sue Hubbard: 'Luke Elwes', Time Out, 2 May 1990  
Emma Burn: 'Luke Elwes: Australian Paintings', Arts Review, 18 May 1990  
William Packer: Luke Elwes: Bungle Bungle', The Financial Times, 8 May 1990  
Giles Auty: 'The Lure of Down Under', The Spectator, 14 April 1990  
Colin Gleadell: 'Bungle Bungle', exhibition catalogue, March 1990



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*My thanks also to Howard Romero for his photographs.*

Luke Elwes







