

# THE GESTURE OF WATER

METTE TOMMERUP

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THE PHOTO CREDIT FOR  
THE PHOTOS AND VIDEO  
IS PEDRO WAZZAN.

Within this practice, water is not representation or metaphor but co-creator — an active intelligence shaping form, rhythm, and surface. The studio becomes less of a site of authorship and more of a site of attunement. I think of this as diffused agency, where intention and chance intermingle. I may determine scale, pigment, or substrate, but the processes of erosion, absorption, and reflection move beyond my control. This condition resonates with broader art-historical trajectories that question the singularity of the author — from Surrealist automatism to the radical materiality of Yves Klein or the elemental threads of Ana Mendieta. Yet, my work does not seek to dissolve authorship entirely. Rather, it repositions it as relational: a choreography between human gestures and elemental will. The tide guides as much as it is guided. Authorship becomes a shared consciousness — a dialogue enacted through material, time, and breath.

Art, perhaps, has found its way back to its source — to the horizon where reflection began. Yet the tide keeps speaking. The sea remains both mirror and messenger, offering not answers but continuations. When water asks to speak through us, the question is not whether it will choose gratitude or reckoning, but how we might learn to inhabit both at once. The language of water is cyclical, not declarative — it moves between generosity and erasure. Gratitude acknowledges our dependency, our smallness within vast systems of material exchange. Reckoning names the rupture between human agency and ecological consequence. To make art with water is to participate in both: to thank, to listen, and to account.

In this way, my murals and installations shimmer between permanence and dissolution. They are engineered to withstand hurricanes yet remain alive to change. Survival, in this sense, is no longer synonymous with endurance. It is a condition of responsiveness — the capacity to remain open to transformation without losing integrity. The modernist pursuit of permanence yields to a post-human awareness of art as system: open, temporal, and contingent. My public works are not monuments but living structures, designed to exist in conversation with weather, architecture, and the human body that encounters them.

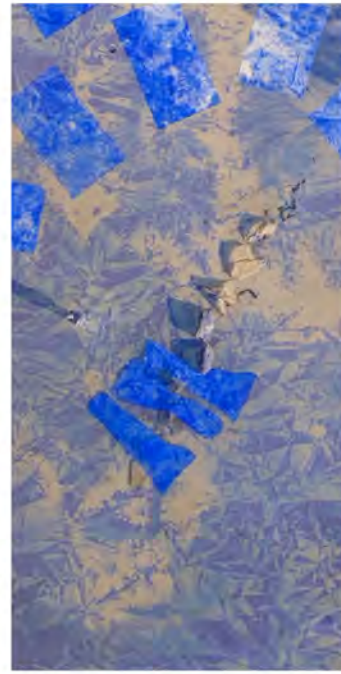
Survival, then, is an aesthetic and ethical act. It resists the illusion of finality. It mirrors the ecological balance we seek yet continually disturb — a dynamic poise between fragility and resilience. Within the phenomenological space of encounter, each shift of light or tide becomes a new iteration of the work. To survive is to continue becoming visible. For both art and artist, survival may mean relinquishing the fantasy of permanence and embracing transformation as our most vital form of continuity.

The first artist might have watched the horizon and recognized a mirror: the beginning of reflection, the origin of art. From that moment, water has guided us: shaping life, purpose, tools, and imagination. Every artistic gesture, in some way, remembers that first tide. Mette Tomerup's work returns us to that origin. Her paintings, installations, and rituals are not representations of water but collaborations with it. The sea is not her subject matter; it is co-creator. Her surfaces hold the memory of contact, pigment mingled with salt, gesture absorbed into current, color carried by light. The result is not a static image but continuous becoming. In this collaboration, the destruction of the past formalised is explored. Yet, in her hands, destruction becomes renewal. The rigid frame of painting, the tyranny of the rectangle, the illusion of depth, the confinement of meaning - dissolves. What remains is elemental: canvas, gravity, breath, and time. The ocean

becomes the brush, the horizon becomes an edge of the composition. The engagement with work is to step into an active ritual, a rite for water. The installation and public work - Ocean Contour at Port Miami; Sky of The First Water in Coconut Grove, and the series of liberated canvases that are released to tide and wind function as gestures of gratitude towards the element that sustains and shapes us. They are not objects to be viewed but experiences to be entered. The viewer stands between two sides: the literal water of the site and the symbolic water of pigment and reflection.



In this meeting point, water reveals its agency. It dictates the rhythm, pattern, and ornament. It determines how the light bends and how the form breathes. Art listens. The gesture of the artist becomes inseparable from the gesture of the tide - one surrendering to the other. At the intersection arises a second current - mythology and spirituality flowing into contemporary practice. Yama-ya - The Goddess of the Sea is the protector of others, the origin of life, the embodiment of both tenderness and power. Her presence within the work is not imposed but discovered, as though the image appeared on its own drawn out by material.

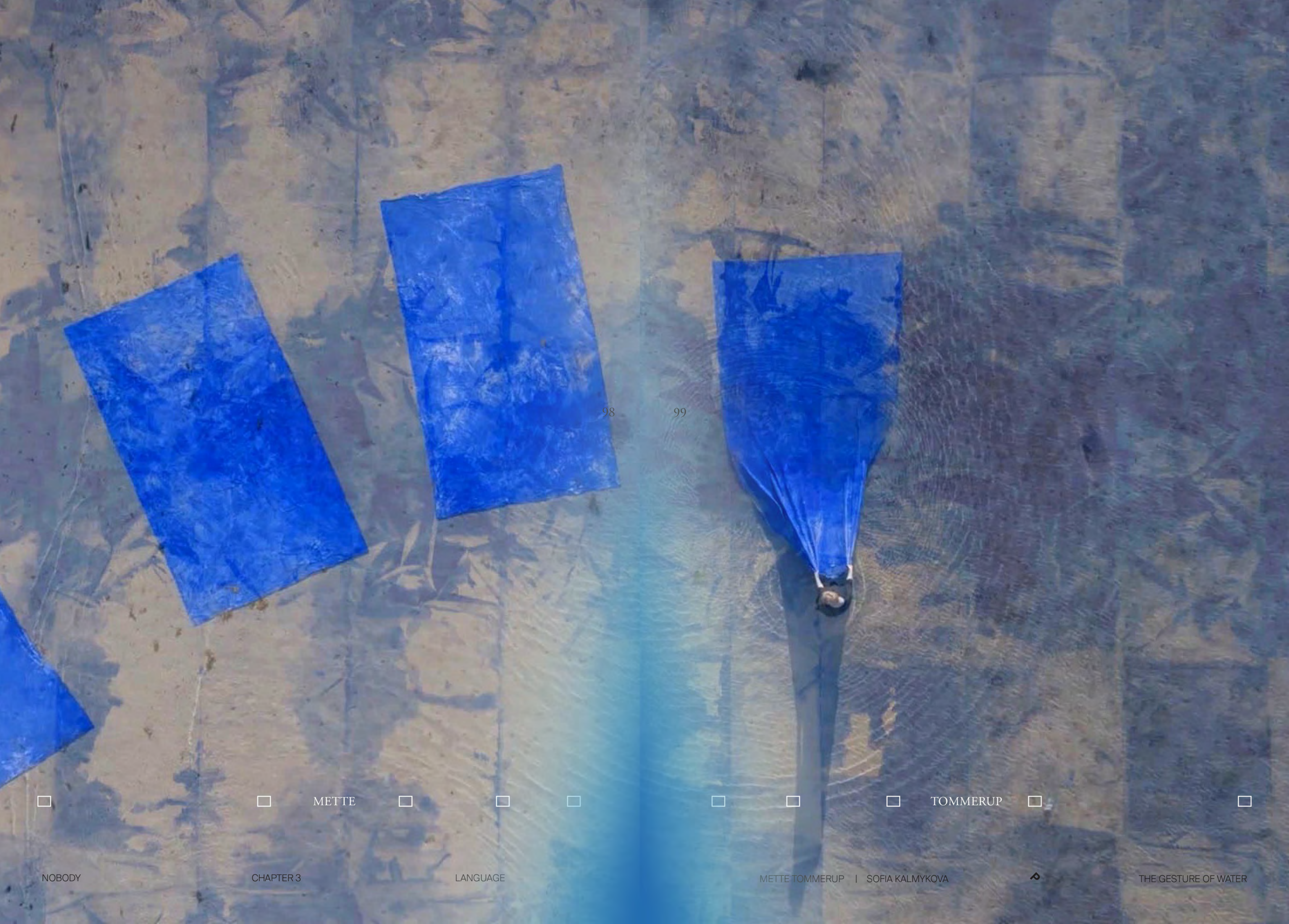


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Here, myth replaces formalism as structure. The narrative of painting is no longer linear or academic but cyclical, tidal, and spiritual. It breathes through repetition, erosion, and renewal. Every wave that touches her work rewrites its surface; every light shift completes a new version of the piece. Tommerup's art therefore exists between gratitude and reckoning. It thanks the sea for its endless collaboration yet acknowledges the imbalance between humanity and nature; our history of extraction, imitation, and control. These works are both hymns and warnings. Their beauty is radical because it carries awareness: every act of creation is also an act of taking, and water, in its vast patience, remembers everything.

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**S** When the water finally asks to speak through us, what language will it choose—gratitude, or reckoning?

**M** Perhaps both, because the language of the elemental is always dual. Water's grammar is cyclical, not declarative—it moves between generosity and erasure. To speak with water is to acknowledge our embeddedness in material systems that predate authorship.

Gratitude arises from recognizing that dependence; reckoning emerges when we confront the imbalance between human desire and ecological consequence. In that sense, the “language” of water is performative—it acts upon us. Within the framework of new materialism, water is not passive matter but an active interlocutor. It shapes the ethics of making, insisting that the studio is no longer an isolated site of production but a shared field of exchange with the natural world.

**S** If water is no longer a subject but a co-creator, how does authorship survive in your work? Does the artist guide the tide, or has the tide begun to guide the artist?



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**S** Your murals shimmer between permanence and dissolution, engineered to survive hurricanes yet alive with change. When art resists destruction but still surrenders to transformation, what does survival mean—for work, and for us?

**M** Survival in art is no longer measured by endurance but by adaptability—the capacity to remain responsive. The modernist ideal of the autonomous, self-contained object gives way to a post-human understanding of the artwork as system: open, temporal, and contingent. My public projects, engineered for both resilience and permeability, embody that paradox. They are designed to withstand physical destruction while remaining conceptually fluid.

In this sense, “survival” mirrors ecological equilibrium—a dynamic balance rather than a static preservation. Philosophically, this aligns with a phenomenological approach: the work exists fully only in the encounter, renewed each time light shifts or perception recalibrates. To survive is to continue becoming visible. For us, as for the work, survival may mean relinquishing permanence as an ideal and embracing transformation as an ethical and aesthetic necessity.

