

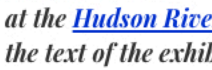
## River That Flows Both Ways

About Ellen Kozak &amp; Scott D. Miller; Text by Ted Barrow

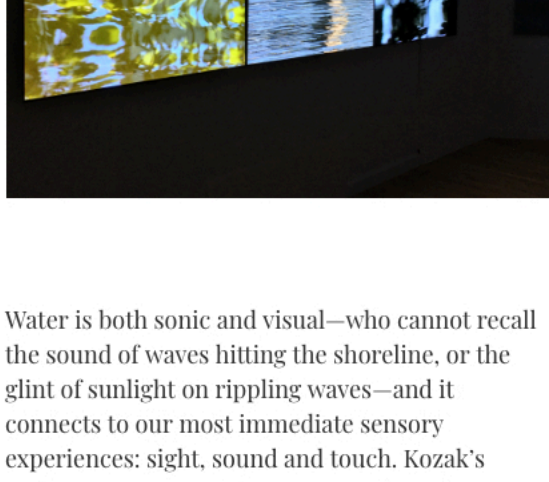
June, 2018



A studio overlooking the Hudson River shapes Ellen Kozak's paintings and video



[riverthatflowsbothways](#)—a 3-channel video installation by artist [Ellen Kozak](#) and composer [Scott D. Miller](#)—is featured June 1 to September 9 at the [Hudson River Museum](#) in Yonkers. [This is the text of the exhibit brochure.](#)



Water is both sonic and visual—who cannot recall the sound of waves hitting the shoreline, or the glint of sunlight on rippling waves—and it connects to our most immediate sensory experiences: sight, sound and touch. Kozak's earliest memories with water were learning to swim with her father in Maine. As she recalls, "My father...had this kind of *joie de vivre* that came out in the water... and something of my emotional connection with water began at that early age."

Anyone who has gazed at moving water and noticed the ever-changing, dazzling optical effects of shimmering light, can understand its artistic appeal. John Constable's clouds, J.M.W. Turner's vaporous mists, Claude Monet's waterlilies, and the waterways that articulate the American landscapes of Thomas Cole, Frederic Edwin Church, and Samuel Colman would not be as poignant without an extended focus on water itself.

Kozak and Miller titled their piece with the translation of the Lenape word for the Hudson, *Muhheakantuck*, which means "the river that flows both ways." The piece reframes the environment of the river as a primary site of sensory and perceptual experience. *riverthatflowsbothways* is comprised of intimately observed and gradually changing still images that together create an immersive experience. It creates a contemplative space that lengthens one's sense of time and evokes feelings of wonderment and comfort but also conjures presentiments of destabilizing undercurrents.



After graduating from The Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT, Kozak continued experimenting with video early in her career. Her graduate thesis at MIT was, in fact, a 4-channel video installation. Her earliest depictions of water date from her time living in Japan from 1982 to 1984. Kozak lived in a rural setting, surrounded by rice fields, where the surface of the flooded fields made a strong visual impression. As she states, "I began photographing and drawing from reflections of seedlings growing in the rice fields. I also continued working in video however the limitations of video at the time were such that my focus turned more towards painting. I wanted to work in a medium that could be interrupted at any stage of the process."

"Looking at the surface of bodies of water is an interesting way of indirectly observing the world through reflection. This can create collisions and magnify attributes by imposing distance, both perceptual and psychological. Mediated observation can suggest metaphor and render what is known equivocal," she explains.



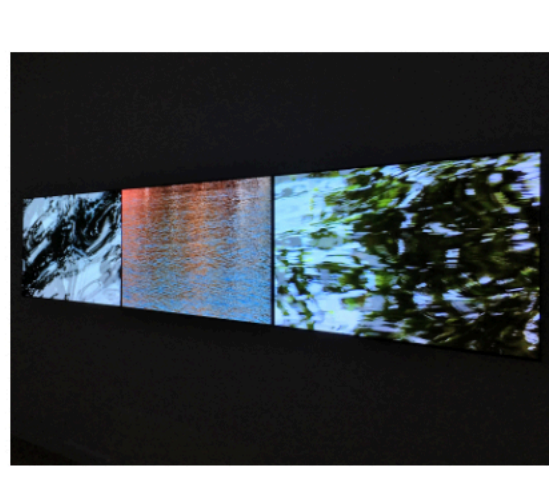
*riverthatflowsbothways* explores abstract and psychological connections to water through a collaboration with Kozak's husband, composer Scott D. Miller. This is the first time that Kozak and Miller have worked together. After completing studies at Oberlin Conservatory, Princeton University and Columbia University, Miller has explored many diverse genres including chamber music, experimental jazz and electroacoustic composition. For this work, he was inspired by Protestant hymnody and the pure tones of Shape-Note singing. As he describes, "for me, it's primordial because I grew up experiencing that music in church – from time to time, it will recur in my music, often when I least expect it."

Both video and music rely on time to unfold, but in fundamentally different ways. Within a few minutes of watching the images on three screens, patterns emerge. Each screen, offers shifting and evolving images of the river's surface, revealing an underlying order over sustained viewing.

Curvilinear, horizontal, grid-like: the seemingly random assortment of images begins to coalesce in purely formal terms. Similarly, Miller's score of a little more than 13 minutes has a finite end, but it begins, and is looped, in such a way that the repeat is imperceptible.

The glacial pacing, and the glistening, ambiguous harmonies are reflected and enhanced through Kozak's imagery. "Music, of all the arts," says Kozak, "goes straight to one's nervous system. It has the most immediate effect on one's emotion."

—By Ted Barrow, assistant curator at the Hudson River Museum, who adds: "Kozak's diurnal commitment to riverine views, whether in painting, collage, or, as here, video, reminds all of us of the transcendent potential in the everyday phenomena. Especially here, at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers where we overlook the Hudson River, her radiant work underscores the central place of nature in our lives."

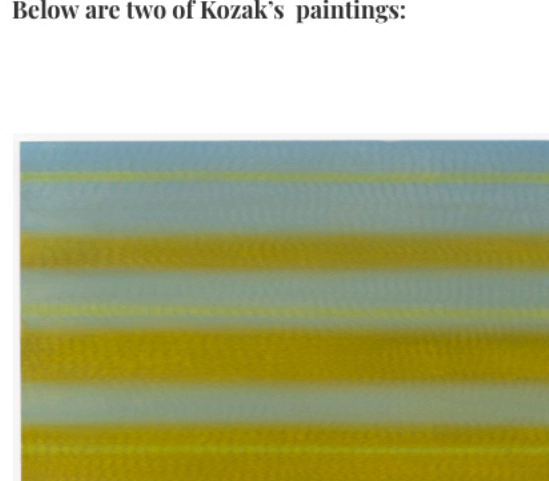


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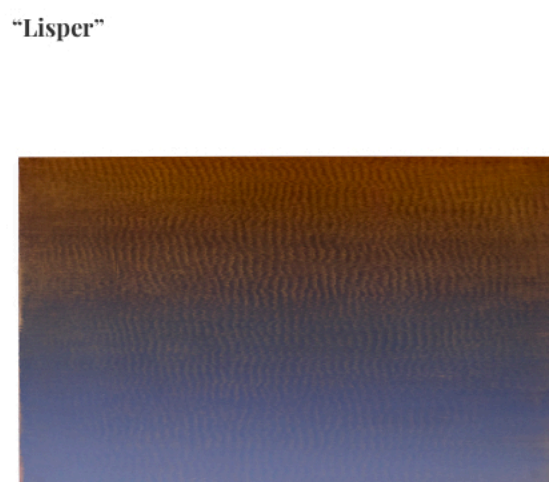
Since 1994, Kozak's artist studio has been on the west bank of the Hudson River, providing a view of the river in all seasons. She works directly on the banks of the river, sometimes even in the river, where her visual ideas are guided by direct observation. "The evanescence of light on bodies of water entrances me with compelling associations between color and movement," she says. "A glimpse of fleeting hues will spark a complete proposition for a painting. Intimacy and close physical contact with my surroundings reveals subtly shifting phenomena, both natural and man-made. I am motivated by properties that attend to things rather than by the things themselves: properties such as color, luminosity, and reflectivity."

"Recently I've noticed an inverse relationship between my paintings and video work," Kozak continues. "While my paintings of the river collapse hours of observation into ostensibly still surfaces, my video pieces are typically composed from still images of that same subject which, by nature, is in constant motion. Subverting expected characteristics of each medium creates unexpected paradoxical disjunctions that continue to fascinate me."

Below are two of Kozak's paintings:



"Lisper"



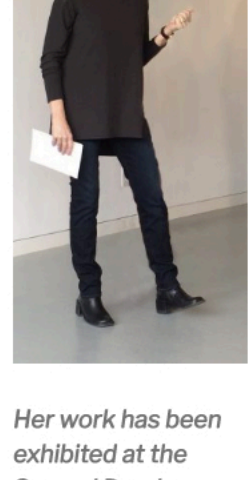
"Sky Throne"

#### ABOUT ELLEN KOZAK

[Ellen Kozak's](#) paintings, video work and artists' books have appeared in national and international exhibitions.

Her artistic influences draw from a diverse background. She was an early explorer of video as a graduate student and fellow at The Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT. Her video works have been shown in the States and abroad, including on WGBH's Artists' Showcase; at the Koelnischer Kunstverein in Cologne; the American Center for Students and Artists in Paris; the Osaka Center for Contemporary Art; and at BF/VF (Boston Film Video Foundation).

Between 1982 and 1984, Kozak lived and worked in Japan where she was a lecturer at Seian University of Art and Design. While in Japan she worked on video projects with support from JVC and she studied shodô. This was an experience that proved transformative and influenced a shift in her means of expression towards painting.



Her work has been exhibited at the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at SUNY New Paltz, NY; the Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, NY; ODETTA Gallery in Brooklyn, NY; and Katharina Rich Perlow Gallery in New York City. Collections in which her works are found include the Brooklyn Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, the New York Public Library, and the Yale University Sterling Memorial Library.

Her solo show at the Katonah Museum of Art in 2009-2010, included paintings as well as her video, "Notations on A River", commissioned by the Museum. Kozak became a founding member of [Riverkeeper's](#) Leadership Council in 2015 and was elected to Riverkeeper's Board of Directors this year.

"My 1988 residency at the Blue Mountain Center came at a vital time," Kozak recalls, "shortly after I moved to New York City, when the BMC's support of my work was critically meaningful."