



HUDSON RIVER MUSEUM

Ellen Kozak and Scott D. Miller  
**riverthatflowsbothways**

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2018

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The physical properties of water, atmosphere, and environment are reliably engaging sources. I work with these components in an empirically responsive and experimental way. –Ellen Kozak

Ellen Kozak (American, b. 1955) and Scott D. Miller (American, b. 1956) draw our attention to the Hudson River in *riverthatflowsbothways* (2016), a 4-channel video installation presented at the Hudson River Museum this summer. 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. Helen Frankenthaler's landscapes closely attended to the surface of water in the 20th century, underscoring its abstract qualities.

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. Kozak's earliest depictions of water date from her time living in Japan from 1982 to 1984. She 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.”

Ellen Kozak and Scott D. Miller.  
**riverthatflowsbothways**, 2016.  
HDTV four-channel video installation.  
Courtesy of the artists.

*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 pure notes and Protestant hymnals. 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 begin 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.”

Quotes from the artists are excerpted  
from a March 30, 2018, interview.

There are moments in some of the chords where each instrument has a separate dynamic profile...there’s a blending, and it has a bit of that ebb and flow of water sounds. There is a kind of gleaming to it. —Scott D. Miller

Sponsored in part by Sound Associates, Inc.



**Ellen Kozak** has had one previous solo exhibition at the Hudson River Museum, in 2001, and has shown more recently at Cross Contemporary Art, the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, and the Katonah Museum of Art. The artist has taught at Bennington College, Princeton University, and Pratt Institute, and her work is in the permanent collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Art, Japan, and the Hudson River Museum.

**Scott D. Miller** is a New York City-based composer and Artistic Director of the Tilted Head Ensemble, which he founded in 2016. Miller's works have been performed at La MaMa, Symphony Space, Roulette, CBGB, P.S. 122, Lincoln Center Library, The DiMenna Center, and many other venues. His music has been premiered by Miranda Cuckson, Blair McMillen, Ryan Muncy, Eric Huebner, and other notable performers.



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#EllenKozak #ScottDMiller #HRMAbstraction

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