

# Breakwater

## A Manifesto for Weak Images, Version 3 (2023)

Imagine an art historian gathering materials for a case-study on Calais, where legal deregulation grows profusely. Remarkably few artworks engage with the gated city. After each visit, crossing the border at *de schreve* [West-Flemish for scratch], Leonard Cohen's voice echoes inside her head: "I wish there was a treaty we could sign." The border cuts like a blade. Gradually, however, memories of extreme destitution transform into *pense-bêtes*. She starts doodling, and weaves images and text fragments together. In this wild gamble, she fancies these doodles to be potentially as powerful as only mollusks can be [*weekdieren* in Dutch]—made up of two corresponding halves and blessed with the striking harmony of double forms, as Jules Michelet explained in *The sea* (1861).

Eventually, a prehistoric harpoon will serve as the metaphorical shuttle for weaving together pages from her *kliederboek* [mess book], photographs, and text quotations into a seven hundred pages-long letter. Still, she finds no way to understand why the City of Calais decided to replace lush shrubs of rustling white poplars with parched fields, and to willfully submerge fertile land. A once vibrant town blessed by natural breakwaters (the Ridens) has become so exhausted that it accepts fences as ransom. Attempts to reduce the Calaisis to *terra nullius* date back to at least Roman times. How, then, is one to represent the invisible, deep geological time of once empty lands (a void) nowadays turned into a standing-reserve of the technological age? One does so by circumnavigating the zone as if it were an amphidromic node: rotating clockwise, as well as, subsequently, counterclockwise. By looking for what is hidden in plain sight, or left out of the debate. This is bound to generate surprises—unexpected moments of the past flickering through in the present, such as marsh samphire (*passee-pierre*) at Grand-Fort-Philippe or somber submerged tree trunks, resembling the *Octopus tetricus*, stumbled upon in an English antiquarian book.

This archaeological work of first excavating the elements and then reassembling them into a meshwork imbues the area with a performative character of becoming visible—as when the sun manages to break through the opacity of the clouds. Further alignments and crossovers allow us to see the place as engaging in a dialogue—perhaps the onset of its own act of resistance. "Migration" is a question of ecology negotiated between both human and non-human agents. In the *Calaisis*, social impurity and geopolitical issues are a knot tied much too tightly. A dismantling of the belonging/non-belonging binarism imposes itself upon us. Non-normative bodies, submitted to a systemic denial of their existence, are requesting to lift blockades. They have come to claim a shared state of *unbelonging*. From there, multifaceted views will flourish. In their wake, natural systems formerly subjected to a decades-long ecocide as well will regain their right to be reborn—a fundamental right that imperialist plunder managed to disable for much too long already.

Hilde Van Gelder

Isolated rocks,  
dry at Mean Low Water Springs,  
or at the level of the datum  
of the chart.

Drise 2 ft. Dr 3 ft.  
© Drise 5 ft.

of the chart.

\* Sand & Gravel or Stones,  
dry at Mean Low Water Springs,  
or at the level of the datum  
of the chart.

\* Sandy Beach & Banks,  
dry at Mean Low Water  
Springs, or at the level  
of the datum of the chart.

Drise 1 ft.

\* Sand & Mud, dry  
at Mean Low Water Springs,  
or at the level of the datum of the chart.

\* The Underlined Figures, on the Beaches & Banks which  
uncover, express the heights in feet above the  
datum of the chart, unless otherwise stated.