



Art in Focus: “Waves” by Lisa Tan

David Strand

May 22, 2015

[Vanguard Seattle](#)

Just as the sea shapes Seattle—and inspired Vanguard Seattle’s theme for May—so the sea anchors Lisa Tan’s short film, “Waves.” In the nineteen-minute video, Tan, an American artist who is currently completing a PhD at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, uses Virginia Woolf’s experimental novel, *The Waves* as a point of departure to reflect upon the mesh of relations between geographies, technologies and consciousness. As viewers, we follow Tan’s voice and thoughts as she links various locations, figures, sounds and images that range from Courbet’s painting “The Wave,” to her mother’s television on standby, to invisible jellyfish and transoceanic cables.

Correspondence is the key word here as Tan says in her video, “I use it as a term for strange but sisterly agreements between places, images, sounds and moments... It’s an interaction with something, somewhere, where you are not.” It is the threshold between land and sea, body and screen, here and there in which Tan places herself in “Waves” to rub against the limits of consciousness and understanding. The work follows a meditative rhythm, like the breaking of waves that Tan returns to repeatedly—seascapes from locations such as Ellwood Beach in Santa Monica or the Cliffs of Moher in Ireland.

Like Woolf, Tan is reaching for something beyond language, or as Tan says in the video, “whatever is lurking behind thought.” Despite the vastness of the ocean, the complexities of new technologies, the immense distances traversed and the array of images and ideas Tan presents, the video succeeds as it is grounded in the human through Tan’s idiosyncratic experiences. Despite the digital nature and array of screens the viewer travels through, Tan’s hand is present in every shot, her ideas present in each image as we follow her stream of consciousness just as we follow the six characters whose inner thoughts form the structure of Woolf’s *The Waves*. In its search for the imperceptible and intervening spaces, “Waves” offers a human perspective amidst forces far greater than the self, and the sublime feeling one has when they stand in the waves, and stare out into the endless ocean.

“Waves” is screening only for a short time (through this Sunday) as a part of [Black Box 2.0's](#) festival program “[Unlimited](#)” at Raisbeck Performance Hall. The screening marks the West Coast Premiere of the work that is simultaneously showing at the buzzworthy New Museum Triennial in New York City. That Seattle gets to see this thoughtful and extraordinary artwork is a rare treat and one that should not be missed. If you do happen to make it to Raisbeck Performance Hall to see “Waves,” make sure to pop around the corner the Cornish Main Gallery, and then down the street to the Black Box Hub to check out more of the festival.

Tickets are free, and may be reserved [here](#).

“Waves” is screening at Raisbeck Performance Hall May 21-24 from 12-5PM.

### Festival Installation Highlights

- control / shift / escape at Cornish College of the Arts (Main Gallery)
- Landscapes, Revisited at Olympic Sculpture Park, Alvord Art Lab
- Unlimited at Raisbeck Performance Hall
  - Gillian Weaing / WE ARE HERE / 2014 / West Coast Premiere
  - Phil Collins / TOMORROW IS ALWAYS TOO LONG / 2014
  - Lisa Tan / WAVES / 2014 / West Coast Premiere
  - Knut Asdam / EGRESS / 2013 / West Coast Premiere
  - Sue de Beer / THE GHOSTS / 2011 / West Coast Premiere
- Everywhere and Nowhere: Cinema Today in Container I / SIFF Film Center / Alki Courtyard
  - Wojtek Doroszuk
  - Kalup Linzy
  - Petra Cortright
  - Basim Magdy