

Instruments for Seeing

by Nic Wilson

For the exhibition *These Are The Edges*
by Larissa Tiggelers
at Christie Contemporary
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A Bathymetric globe is a tool developed to illustrate the marine topography of the Earth. Instead of the blue field used on traditional cartographic representations of the world's oceans, these globes use data collected and compiled by oceanic cartographers like Marie Tharp and Bruce Heezen to visualize the vast ranges and ridges of the world's oceans—a landscape often flattened into a surface because humans cannot see it and only glide across the surface of its depths. As you approach Larissa Tiggelers' paintings, similar hidden depths will materialize, offering a marker for the limits of looking and what might be obscured by what you think you are capable of seeing.

Looking at Tiggelers' work hanging on a wall reminds me of looking at satellite images of the Earth. They disrupt notions of looking 'at' and looking 'across.' I'm not sure if I am looking down on a surface or through a portal. They contort gravity and confound my perception. Their shifts, both slight and severe, reveal the dullness of my perception. As I hover above their edges and plateaus, I am reminded of the mountain ranges that loom under the surface of the oceans; a continuity of rock and dust obscured by the water and the sharp division between land and sea (a distinction based on the human capacity to survive in one space and drown in the other).

The Great Planes of Turtle Island are another landscape that is flattened by ideology. Critic and art historian Bruce Hugh Russell has written about this place as "perceived in terms of absence."¹ He stresses the subtlety of the prairie which opposes the Eurocentric expectation of a dramatic and sublime landscape bursting with jagged peaks and shimmering waterfalls. It is often by looking down at the landscape that its drama is revealed. In the grasslands, the action happens below the waist of most adults. The bright yellow flowers and needled pads of the Prickly Pear or the silvery leaves of White Sagebush

don't aspire to the verticality of Deciduous or Montane environments. The features of these landscapes are often flattened because of the comparatively slight topographies they inhabit.

Though I am often confused by where to ground myself in Tiggelers' images, they are not visual tricks but finely tuned instruments² of perception that help to problematise systems of seeing. Even in the most restrained, abstract settings, questions of focal point and composition rely on assumptions of origin to determine how an image is read and interpreted. Semiosis is a cultural intuition, an operation built on systems of looking that are inherited, internalized, and resisted in different ways. Tiggelers' instruments for seeing are played by contrasting modes of colour codification and by breaking continuity in places where it might be assumed.

¹ *Remembering to forget: Linda Duwall's pastoral videos* by Bruce Hugh Russell. Text for a video installation at Linder Art Space, Berlin, Germany. 2014.

² In both a scientific and musical sense.



Prickly Pear cactus. Photo Credit: Shane Weigand/USFWS