



# We Are All Connected Through *water*

By Karen Kopacz

Artist Annie Hejny's solo exhibition "Waterlines" will be on display this fall at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum in Winona, MN.

Water has been a muse to artists as long as water has been around, but Saint Paul-based painter Annie Hejny's approach is distinctive in that it focuses on people's relationship to water. By encouraging others to share their water stories and collecting water from specific bodies of water to use in her paintings, Hejny's work emphasizes the agency water holds in our lives.

#### Painting with Local Waters

Hejny intentionally connects with a shoreline before she begins a painting about that specific place. She honorably harvests water and sediment, which become the foundation for her paintings. "It's the land and water that already know each other," she says.

She incorporates an intentional practice around her harvesting process, taking only what she needs, and leaves offerings at the river. She labels each bucket of water with words of gratitude along with the location from where it was gathered, to assure the water that it has not lost its identity or its place in the world.

The painting begins when Hejny writes an intention on the blank canvas and then pours the sediment, water, and paint to create the base layer.

"Every time I dip my brush, it's in that same water. Each layer is saturated with the river and my intentionality. The paintings speak on behalf of the waters and open up space for conversations."



Hejny's colorful paintings are radiant with blues and their subtle complements, textured with moments of graphic relief. Deep ultramarines, cobalts, and cyans flow into thin wisps of lavender, greens, and teals.

The calm flow and rushes of energy that are brought to life in her work are enough to inspire a kinship with water. And, there is another dimension to Hejny's work, a desire to facilitate conversations by encouraging people to share their water stories.

#### **An Invitation to Connect**

In the past year, Hejny's work as an artist has expanded to include more public artist talks, workshops, and conversations about water issues. "Water connects everyone, and I have learned from collab-

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orative events that it is important to remember that we are more alike than we are different. When we speak our water stories, we are reminded of our connections to each other and the Earth.” Last fall, Hejny was invited by the Summit Hill Association to lead an art-based water stewardship project, sponsored by the Capitol Region Watershed District Grant (CRWD). In May, the Linwood Elementary Rain Garden Field Day event engaged 90 second-grade students in educational ecology activities at the Linwood Community Center. Classes rotated through three activity stations: Rain Garden, Adopt-A-Drain Demo, and Waterstories Art Activity. Art supplies were donated or discounted by Wet Paint and Art Force.

At Hejny’s station, students were asked how the water made them feel. Their responses ranged from positive to extreme enthusiasm. One student said, “I love swimming in the lake,” while another shook with excitement, “The water makes me insane! I go crazy for water!”

Blending water gathered from the Mississippi River and the community center’s rain garden created an opportunity to talk about water cycles. As Hejny led the second graders through the initial steps of her painting technique, she encouraged them to think creatively about how to tell their water stories.

“I want young students to see and meet a working artist so that they know that being an artist is a real option for them in the future. We will need the next generation of creative thinkers and water advocates.”

Some students were invited to write their water words like “happy,” “calm,” and “love” on the three canvases. They mixed rainwater with acrylic paint by shaking Mason jars and painted over the words to create a base layer of color. Then, all of the students lined up in a processional line with a handful of sediment from the Mississippi to toss on the canvases and said “thank you” to the land and water.

The paintings were completed at Hejny’s studio at the Casket Arts Building in Northeast Minneapolis. In June, the students, their parents, and representatives from each organization were invited to a presentation night at the community center to encourage water awareness and view the finished work.

The three paintings are on loan for one year at the Linwood Community Center, the Capitol Region Watershed District, and the Linwood Monroe Arts School.

**“Waterlines” Solo Exhibition at Minnesota Marine Art Museum**  
Annie Hejny’s latest work can be viewed at her upcoming solo exhibition “Waterlines” at the Minnesota Marine Art Museum in Winona, Minnesota. The title “Waterlines” highlights the idea that water is our lifeline and that we need the water.

The show features more than 25 paintings using water gathered from the upper Midwest, primarily focused on the Mississippi River. Be sure to leave time to explore, as the museum has an impressive collection of works, including Monet, O’Keeffe, Kandinsky, and countless other influential, well-known artists.



Join Hejny at the opening reception Thursday, August 30, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The Water Bar, an artist-led social project, will be serving fresh water and engaging the public in educational conversations about water. Public events will occur throughout the exhibition, including a gallery walk and talk with the artist on September 15 from 11 a.m. to 12 p.m. and a texture demonstration for Second Saturday on October 13.

“Waterlines” runs from August 30, 2018, through January 6, 2019, open to the public during museum hours. Artwork is available for sale directly through the artist and can be contacted at her website [www.annie-hejny.com](http://www.annie-hejny.com).



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