

I remember impatiently waiting for summer to arrive as a child. Growing up in the Pacific Northwest of the United States, we endured consistent rainy weather that slowly faded into the final stretch of spring colloquially known as June Gloom. I still feel myself shivering on the dock at the lake, looking at the distant view of a snow-capped Mt Tahoma (Mt Rainer) that was the source of the glacial body of water where I stood. Rain sprinkled on my bare skin, but I was desperate to enjoy the long daylight hours of summer. I excitedly jumped back into the chilly lake.

Snorkelling off the coast of Tasmania many years later, I felt the same rush as I skimmed into the ocean. This time I wore a wetsuit, but rain still delicately pattered on my head, and I smiled just the same as when I was a child. My body was submerged in different waters and in opposite hemispheres, but the sensation was familiar.

Each moment of life is touched by water. It's on our skin as vapour, sweat, tears, and rain. We feel it in extremes: Its temperature can soothe or numb; its movement a forceful current or ebbing ripple. Its scarcity is perhaps more noticeable than its abundance. Water is an omnipresent entity larger than what is comprehensible in one form, and we rely on this hyperobject (Morton, 2013) for more than physiological survival. It offers us a sense of place and helps us form memories, like my nostalgic experiences swimming in cold waters. But does water rely on us?

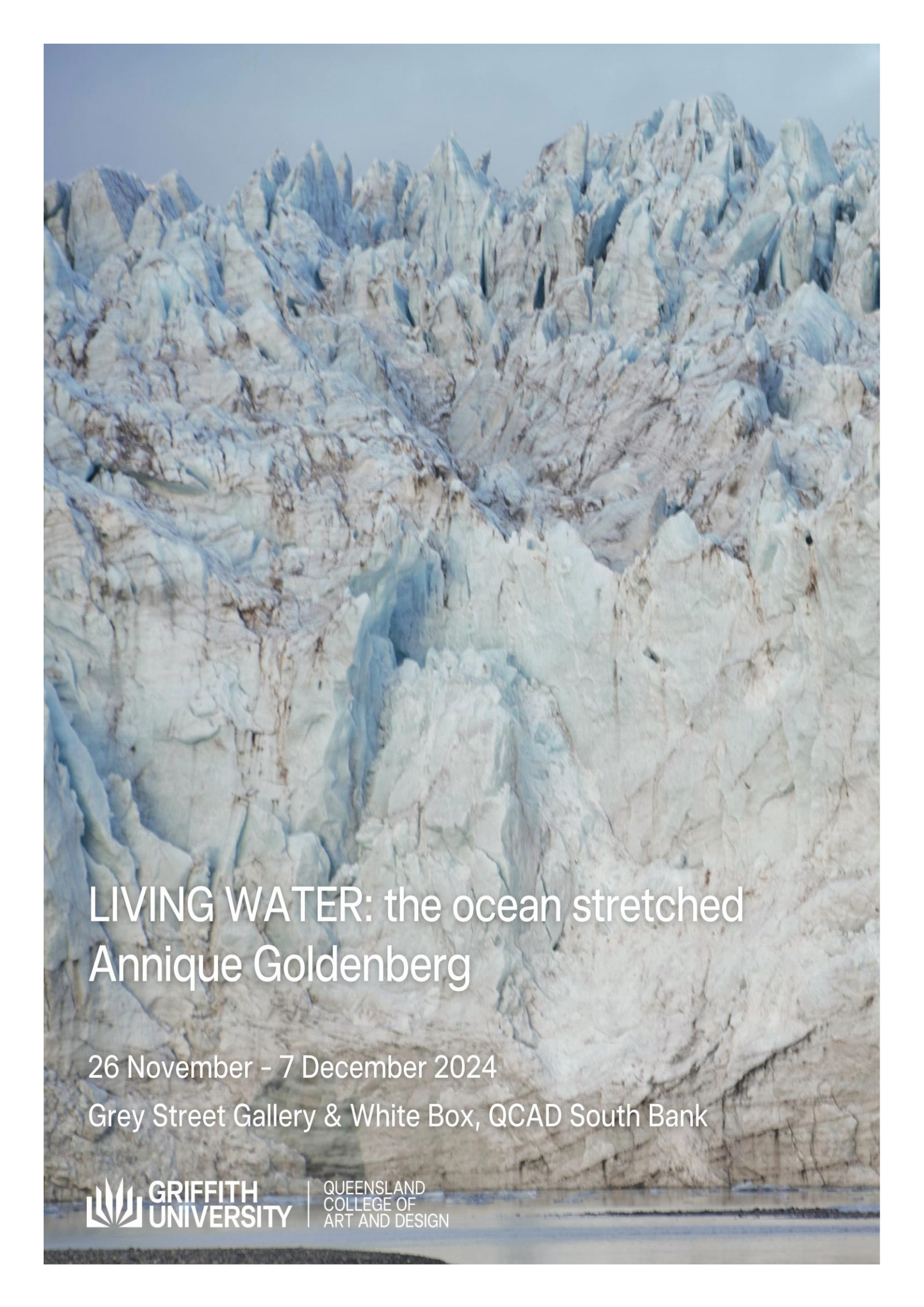
We are in company with water.

Companionship is a commitment: An acknowledgement of interdependent existence where we contribute to a dynamic and infinitely evolving dialogue between human, non-human, and more-than-human. Companion thinkers stay response-able to the present, reflect on the past, and honour the possibilities of shared futures. It is an opportunity to set down rigid anthropocentric systems of knowledge and instead experience the physical and intangible world through our bodies as well as our minds.

How can we participate in companionship with water?

Rebecca Solnit (2013) describes the interdependence of life, suggesting that we are “crowds of others ... as leaky as a vessel was ever made” (p. 248). We must stay accountable to what impurities may leak from our own vessels; we are complicit in contamination (Reardon-Smith, 2021) as much as purification. Language choice may also be a pathway to changing our behaviour with water. Instead of using or wasting, we can sense-with water (Bisshop, 2021) and learn to communicate through play, observation, and artistic expression. Creativity is a pathway through which we can communicate with our nonhuman companions. What new systems of knowing may emerge as we think in-company with the nonhuman?

Water is just one of infinite companions.



LIVING WATER: the ocean stretched
Annique Goldenberg

26 November - 7 December 2024

Grey Street Gallery & White Box, QCAD South Bank

 GRIFFITH
UNIVERSITY

QUEENSLAND
COLLEGE OF
ART AND DESIGN