



Follow the Water Home

Tucked underground at Galatea Fine Art in the South End is a calming artistic oasis, or as artist Justin Freed would call it, a refuge. *The Waters of Life: A Refuge* is showing until November 29, and it's a must-see. Three walls wrapped in dark blue envelope you, showcasing film shots of water in all its forms, gushing waterfalls, placid lakes, and sweet streams. The *rush rush rush* of the waves pulses through speakers, mimicking the powerful movement of the rivers and oceans around you. "The moving image has taken over for me," says Freed, "it's about creating an atmosphere, an ambience."

This is Freed's first solo show in Boston and his enthusiasm is contagious. Sitting in the gallery in a dark wool sweater, he excitedly reads from a list of water facts. The soft wrinkles around his eyes bloom into an infectious smile. "Water is originally from rocks," he says, "isn't that just delightful?" Undoubtedly one of Freed's biggest influences was his 25-year term as the owner of the Coolidge Corner Theater. It was during that time that he began experimenting with film.

In between two of the larger screens fit four smaller ones showing still images. These close-ups dissect the water into its bare parts - color and light. The vivid blues, greens, and reds look at close range like pieces of an impressionist oil painting. "Something else is going on with water on an abstract level," says Freed. His interest in more abstract visualizations comes from filmmakers like Tarkovsky, who's famous for his metaphysical themes and lack of conventional structure. Contrasting these

abstractions are representations of humans and animals taking refuge in this life force. One shot features a girl in a brilliant blue swimsuit jumping from a cliff into the welcoming waterfall below. A series of stills follows showing each stage of her jump. For Freed this girl represents a return to the natural, a true communion with that which sustains us.

Not all of the film clips and stills are merely displayed on screens. One is projected onto a row of wooden slats that have been molded into a wave shape, protruding and receding in real space. This further emphasizes the movement of the film on it, a shot of calm ocean waves. Created in collaboration with set designer Peter Watson, the piece takes one step further in creating an atmospheric oasis to calm the harried minds of today's ever-busy society. Ultimately Freed would like these works to be put to practical use. His dream is to have the artwork displayed in hospital waiting rooms, where they can assuage nervous patients and family members.

Underneath it all, *Waters of Life* is about the connection humans have to water of all kinds. Freed explains that we all came from water and are still largely composed of the substance. He believes mammals are drawn to water on a cellular level, a kind of primal desire to go back to the ocean. In this way, the exhibit feels very familiar. Whether it's the calming sound of the river, the waves breaking across a beach, or the splash of the blue-clad girl's cannonball, the artworks speak of home. "I was here once," says Freed, "we were all here once."

