

**Essay for *Tidemark* catalogue: Greenaway Art Gallery 2004**

***Tidemark***

**Alasdair Foster** –Director (Australian Center for Photography, Sydney)

The works in James Geurts' *Tidemark* may inhabit the visual, but they are the heirs to other senses and experiences: touch, smell, taste, the aural, the flow of time and the wholeness of paradox.

The water's edge holds a particular resonance and fascination for Australians – at least those of immigrant heritage. We cling to the coast. Our backs to the alien and inhospitable enormity of the interior, we gaze out across the ocean from whence we, or our ancestors came.

The tidal coastline is a place of curious, and at times terrible, contradiction. The sea's constant ebb and flow in the thrall of the moon forever redefines the border between wet and dry. The pellucid body of the water can insinuate itself around you or tear you apart. It corrodes our machinery, our signs and demarcations, mocking our hubris – and yet caresses a simple pebble into an object of perfection.

An experienced surfer himself, James Geurts knows something of the power and allure of the sea. But he eschews the clichés of tube riding or sun worship. The social (the human) appears here only by implication – a fleeting presence before the eternal vastness of the sea. Layered and limpid, his subtly attenuated images evoke the inconstant nature of the ocean's edge in a complex visual dance across time and space. Each work is made over an extended period, in the camera. He exposes a section of film and winds on – one image overlaps the next, melding into a continuous whole. The result is presented on a transparent plastic substrate. It is as much something seen through as looked at – felt more than known. Gazing into the extended horizon of his images, I am less aware of what I see than the smell of the breeze, the sound of distant surf pounding the beach, the taste of salt, the haptic intensity of tons of water as it passes around me and beneath me, gently but forcefully reminding me of my own infinite frailty.

James Geurts speaks of the "intimacy of water" and his desire to "recreate the subliminal experience of the ocean's perpetual motion". His images are not a catalogue of the elements that make up the Australian coastline, neither are they a romantic celebration of the clichés of light and water. They are less constrained and more serene than that – an immersion in the experience of the ocean's edge that embraces the senses. Here, the individual becomes lost in the vastness of time and tide and simultaneously, deliciously, self-aware.