

PIPPY HOULDSWORTH GALLERY

Press Release

TANIA KOVATS

The Box

10 October – 15 November 2014



Tania Kovats, *Thames: Head in Mouth*, 2014
water, glass, rubber, The Box, LED lights, unique 45 x 45 x 45 cm

Pippy Houldsworth Gallery is delighted to present a new commission for *The Box* by renowned British artist Tania Kovats, continuing her ongoing exploration of rivers by focusing on The Thames as a body of water. Kovats' practice encompasses sculpture, installation, drawing and time-based works which explore our experience and understanding of landscape.

Recent major projects have included *Meadow* (2007), a transported wildflower meadow; *The Museum of the White Horse* (2007), a travelling landscape museum; *TREE* (2009), a permanent installation for the Natural History Museum; *Rivers* (2012), installed in the landscape of Jupiter Artland outside Edinburgh; and *Oceans* (2014), a major solo exhibition at The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh, accompanied by a new publication by the artist called *Drawing Water*.

Thames: Head in Mouth (2014) consists of two glass flasks. Placed one inside the other, the outer, bulbous vessel contains water from the mouth of the Thames, whilst the inner vial holds water from the source. From its source to the sea, the river measures a total of 346 kilometres, rising at Thames Head in the Cotswolds and flowing in an easterly direction to Southend-On-Sea. Bringing these two bodies of water together, Kovats condenses the vast distance which separates them into one small flask of liquid.

Presenting the work within the confines of *The Box*, Kovats arrests the relentless motion of the Thames; like a 'liquid photograph,' moving water becomes momentarily still. Lit with a diffused light, the sense of purity which pervades the work mirrors the act of pilgrimage the artist undertook when collecting both of the units.

Inserting one vial into the other, Kovats' mode of presentation lends the work an erotic sensibility. Experimenting with the way in which light is refracted, the artist engages with a visual phenomenon whereby refraction occurs at the boundary between water and glass. As a result, one is unable to differentiate between the two vials. Seemingly merged as one body of water, this optical distortion enhances the work's sexual undertone.

Using a laboratory flask, and distilling the liquid into H₂O, the artist preserves the water like a scientific sample. In this sense, the work takes on an archival quality, acknowledging the Thames' wider historical and geographical significance. This work draws upon two recent projects whereby the artist has also similarly collected specimens of water; for instance, *All the Seas* (2014) is comprised of hundreds of flasks of water collected from all of the world's oceans.

Tania Kovats (b. 1966) was awarded the Henry Moore Drawing Fellowship in 2004 to 2005 and was Visiting Fellow at the School of Archaeology, Oxford University in 2006. Her 'Tree' was selected from 9 other short-listed artists in the Darwin's Canopy project at the Natural History Museum and was commissioned to celebrate Darwin's bicentenary in 2009. She has recently completed a residency in the Astronomy Department at the University of Cambridge and is Course Director for MA Drawing at Wimbledon College of Art, London.

Kovats first came to prominence when she won the Barclays Young Artist Award at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 1991, with fellow nominees including Peter Doig and Douglas Gordon. She has shown extensively in the UK and abroad, including one-person shows at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield (2008) and The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh (2014). The artist has received numerous commissions in the public realm, including *Plinth* (Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1997-8) and *ROOT* (Docklands Light Railway at Shadwell Station, 2008). Kovats' project in *The Box* will run concurrently with a solo exhibition at Hestercombe Gallery in Somerset.