

## Light Waves: Abstract Photographs of Reflections from Lake Superior

**Daile Kaplan**

**Craig Blacklock, Photographer**

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*A work of photographic alchemy, Light Waves is an impressive collection that showcases the dramatic, shifting natural wonder that is Lake Superior.*

Years of kayaking along the shores of Lake Superior, sometimes for weeks at a time, are distilled in Craig Blacklock's latest collection of abstract landscape images. Published in conjunction with an exhibition of digital prints at the Palm Beach Photographic Centre, *Light Waves* features an emotive series of portraits of the lake's ever-changing surface.

In her introductory essay, photography historian and critic Daile Kaplan describes Blacklock's long career as a landscape photographer and environmental champion, setting his long and shifting career in the context of other iconic artists who feature natural landscapes in a variety of media and through other historical eras. She also chronicles his transitions between color photography, large-format black-and-white photography, and digital photography, highlighting his mastery at manipulating color, light, and form through "an artisanal approach to digital printing."

In previous collections Blacklock shot more descriptive depictions of wildlife, shorelines, and water, whereas *Light Waves* features "extracted images" that are abstractions of the interactions of atmosphere and water. They convey a range of powerful emotions. Some are calm and playful, while other photographs pulse with the nervous energy of angry colors and jagged patterns.

Kaplan notes that Lake Superior has the largest surface area of any lake in the world and that this watery leviathan contains huge amounts of the earth's freshwater reserves. But despite its vast volume, depths, and lengthy embrace of Minnesota, Michigan, and Ontario, Kaplan also says that this great body of water is showing the effects of climate change: its waters have warmed, and the winds over it have grown more fierce. Blacklock's photographs evince these dramatic changes. Some images radiate with volatile energy and unusual colors; many are streaked with slashes of neon orange and red, refracted from skies laden with ash from intensified local wildfires.

Many images form contrasting pairs, while others are featured as singles or in triptychs. There are softer patterns of closeup shots, and other images that display more intricate and dramatic compositions shot from a distance. Blacklock's exploration of how ripples on Lake Superior's watery skin can seem like other surfaces is photographic alchemy. Water becomes sky becomes earth and rock as the pages turn.

Reflections from shoreline greenery in some images make Superior's surface seem less like water than slices of agate or malachite. The electric blues and golds of another image are akin to the contents of a metallurgist's cauldron. A calming symphony of hazy gray stripes in one image contrasts with its neighbor—a torrid composition that appears like something solid, bathed in red lacquer. One could be forgiven for mistaking aqueous surfaces for textiles, light sculptures, or calligraphic scrolls.

The sleek book design and judicious use of white space that balances and frames each suite of images complement the subject matter. Some words from the artist describing these artworks and his new creative direction would be welcome, though.

*Light Waves* is an impressive photographic collection that showcases the dramatic, shifting natural wonder that is Lake Superior. It shows an artist at the height of his maturity, dazzling audiences with images of impressive skill and sensibility. Above all, it is a testament to Blacklock's lifelong "spiritual connection to the lake."

RACHEL JAGARESKI (October 31, 2022)

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