



Portfolio: Christine Matthäi Infuses Photography with Philosophy

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by Dakota Arkin Cafourek

[Christine Matthäi](#) loves islands: Manhattan Island, Long Island, and Grand Bahama Island. A native of Germany, Matthäi divides her time nowadays between residences in Berlin; Shelter Island, New York; and Freeport, Bahamas, with her creativity emerging from behind the lens wherever she is. She explores light, exposure, and time lapse in her photography, adding layers to develop her artworks using photo-editing software.

“I’m inspired by many things—cities, nature—but eventually nature was my main focus, meaning water and light,” Matthäi said in a recent interview. “I’m trying to use the pictures I take at the moment and combine them with my personal feelings.” Her works come to life in chromogenic prints on plexiglass.

Matthäi developed her camera skills and an adroitness for visual storytelling while working as a photojournalist in New York in the 1980s, and later as a foreign correspondent. “I got a pretty late start as an artist,” she said, first shifting her focus to digital art 15 years ago. Engaged with New York’s art community, she had long yearned to find her own creative outlet but noted, “I was too busy trying to survive.”

For Matthäi, art is a form of meditation. Works from her “Light and Sea” series examine the way light hits water. They’re pleasing to the eye, produced in calming color gradients that merge sky and sea in metallic silvers and blues, with occasional warmly tinted sunbeams. “I’m trying to convey my feeling, my inspiration into visuals,” she said, adding that light and water “became more abstract, shifting into formlessness like nature, birth, and death.”



“Om Beach” by Christine Matthäi, 2017. C-print on plexiglass, 40 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

She always works in series, putting her focus on a progression of a single subject before moving on. “I think all my series are connected in one way or another, though they look totally different,” Matthäi said. “Each series is a succession of the previous one.” Her most recent work turns its attention to mantra-like repetitions in nature. These repetitions reflect the influence of the Canadian-born abstract painter [Agnes Martin](#), whose serene grids and stripes are meant to conjure

a positive experience. "I'm a lover of philosophy," Matthäi said, "and while on this planet I am trying as much as I can with spare tools to find the secrets of nature and purpose of life."

Abstracting nature's intrinsic patterns and messages is prevalent in her series, "Echos," in which Matthäi's extraction of light on water resonates like a graph of sound waves. Interested in sacred spaces, Matthäi's research led her to the philosophical concept of the "labyrinth": a complex network meant to be followed from left to right. The labyrinth's centerpoint symbolizes the clearing of the being, and exiting at the right, the strengthened mind. As her work tends to reflect her own journey, her "Sacred Path" series presents evocative maze-like patterns, drawing the viewer into what Matthäi refers to as her "quest to quiet the mind and open the soul."



"Sacred Path II" by Christine Matthäi, 2017. C-print on plexiglass, 40 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Life's big questions beckon Matthäi in her current series, "Architecture of Sound." In it, she sets out to examine the universe in terms of frequency, energy, and vibration. In Shelter Island and the Bahamas, she said, "I started with photographing sand patterns which had been arranged by the wind or water and have different sound patterns." Referencing the conceptual *Solfeggio* six-tone frequency scale, each piece in the "Architecture of Sound" series depicts one of these Hz frequencies. Working from the assumption that everything in the universe has been formed by sound, Matthäi said she is exploring the spiritual implications of sound in this series.



"RE 417 Hz Undoing Situations and Facilitating Change" by Christine Matthäi, 2018. C-print on plexiglass, 50 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Dakota Arkin Cafourek of *Hamptons Art Hub* followed up with Christine Matthäi via email to further explore her current series, "Architecture of Sound."

DAC: What is your inspiration for your art?

CM: My inspiration derives from the Latin *inspiratus*, "to breathe in." It also refers to an influence on a person from a divine entity or force that gives an idea, the desire to create something that arouses the mind. The source of my artistic energy and creativity often arises from a certain discomfort or disequilibrium—a state of inner tension that calls for balance. My "Light and Sea"

series, for example, was mostly created and inspired by the East End of Long Island's beautiful shorelines and extraordinary light conditions working their magic as healing agents. After many years being part of a cacophonous city life, I found that living in nature close to the sea balanced my mind and spirit.



"Silence" by Christine Matthäi, 2016. C-print on plexiglass, 40 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Using my camera as a tool, I capture the poetic dimensions of my immediate surroundings. Then, I digitally create abstract meditative images with the intention of helping the viewer lose their sense of time and place. Each of my series is a continuation of the previous one. They are all connected through my inner quest of seeking the core of our existence.

My series, "Sacred Path" and "Architecture of Sound" were inspired by my studies of ancient symbols and historical imprints, the forgotten knowledge of our ancestors. My inspiration is fueled by trying to discover the meaning of life, if there is any, and uncovering the secrets of nature that we are part of.



"SOL 852 Hz The Return to Spiritual Order" by Christine Matthäi, 2018. C-print on plexiglass, 50 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

DAC: Why digital art and photography versus another medium?

CM: I like the camera as my artistic tool of choice because it captures moments in time already gone, and the computer to further work on and finalize the images. There is an instant gratification, convenience, and cost efficiency in working with digital techniques. I can take as many pictures as I want with enough chip memory, which can be used over again. Also, with the camera and computer, I travel lightly with no need for a darkroom and chemicals.

DAC: How did this series begin?

CM: The "Architecture of Sound" series developed from my previous series, "Sacred Path," as a natural evolution in my spiritual growth. I am curious about the secrets of the universe, our existence as part of the all, and the meaning of god. Quoting Nikola Tesla, who pointed out that if we want to find the secrets of the universe, we should think in terms of energy, frequency, and vibration, I was led me to the exploration of Cymatics. Cymatics is explained as the study of visible

sound vibrations and shows the transformational nature of sound and matter, and how sound affects us. With the “Architecture of Sound” images, I am trying to establish a bridge connecting the visual to the ancient Solfeggio frequencies, which consist of a six-tone scale. Each tone carries different meanings and healing properties, meant to balance the cells in our body.



“Sacred Path V” by Christine Matthäi, 2017. C-print on plexiglass, 40 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

It is also believed that the Solfeggio frequencies and their healing power correlate to our chakras, which, according to Eastern spiritual teachings, channel the vital energy in the human body. Each piece in “Architecture of Sound” is composed of several layers, involving photography, typography, and digital processing. The initial layer, symbolic of the natural world, consists of photographed sand patterns, created by wind and water. On the next layer, these images are inscribed with circles of mantra-like repetitive numbers of the frequencies of the musical tones and their spiritual implications. The final layer consists of digitally altered images of sun rays, which unify all the underlying elements in a square geometric form, which represents the four elements of water, fire, earth, and air. The circle of inscription represents infinity. The color of each piece is meant to correspond to the color of one of the chakras.

DAC: How did making this body of work impact you as an artist?

CM: These images in “Architecture of Sound” are a work in progress and will hopefully at some point turn into three-dimensional pieces with touch sound frequencies. So far, the images are the result of an inner dialogue between matter and spirit. By exploring the ancient forgotten knowledge of our ancestors, I was brought closer to the belief that god is sound. Sound is rotation, is vibration, is structure, is ornament. Sound is the invisible choreographer behind the dance of life.

DAC: Do you have a favorite piece?

CM: The “Architecture of Sound” series works together as a body of work. But, because of its implication, I like the 528 Hz frequency piece. The 528 Hz frequency is believed to be central to the “musical mathematical matrix of creation.” The LOVE frequency resonates in the heart and everything else.



“MI 528 Hz Transformation and Miracles” by Christine Matthäi, 2018. C-print on plexiglass, 50 x 50 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

BASIC FACTS: Art works from Christine Matthäi's "Architecture of Sound" series will be exhibited in new construction sites in Berlin, Germany, and in partnership with Folio East on the East End of Long Island. Select pieces from her full body of work will be available for auction at the The Second Annual Hamptons Artists for Haiti event at The Watermill Center on Saturday, June 30th which will take place at 39 Water Mill Towd Rd, Water Mill, NY 11976. www.christinematthai.com.

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