

## **“LIFE’S TOO SHORT NOT TO CHERISH ITS MOMENTS”**

**REVIEW OF ‘EVAPORATIONS’ ON [WWW.ARTMOSCOW.WORDPRESS.COM](http://www.artmoscow.wordpress.com)**  
**(<http://wp.me/p2SuQi-1bO>)**

**by**  
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We stare at ocean waves, get mesmerized by fire, gaze on mountains, and trace the silver lining of fancy clouds as if God left there calligraphic answers to questions we feel awkward to ask of other people, like “When are you going to get married?” or “Does your job pay well?”

Why do we love watching the elements?

Simple, I guess. While any of the elements in too much quantity is deadly, life is impossible without any one of them. We love watching them as long as we are in control, just as we crowd around tigers in a cage, and tend to run away when meeting them in person under less restricted circumstances for the dangerous species.

Water is especially...interesting. Air or fire are always the same except for pollution levels and intensity. Earth, as an element, offers a degree of variation, of course, but ultimately it is the proverbial dust from which Nature (or physics) builds everything from sand particles to mountain ridges. Water is more...fluid. It freezes into ice or evaporates; it stands still, runs or crushes its waves against the shore. It seems to have a temperament that it passes over to the spectator: a beach bum in Thailand is very different from its lake counterpart in Switzerland; an Eskimo skiing through tundra and a Courchevel vacationer are two worlds apart.

Water is life beyond its literal sense. A Buddhist monk will use water to illustrate soul immortality: he will break the cup holding it, explaining that when the body (the cup) is smashed into pieces, the soul (water inside it) is still there, albeit in a changed form.

An atheist may rebuff the Buddhist metaphor by pointing out water ultimately evaporates until there’s no water.

Which the Buddhist monk would perhaps counteract by noting that any water we drink has already been drunk at some point of its molecular history, and it’s the transformation of evaporation that makes it possible.

Unless you are a chemistry teacher or a swamp enthusiast, you are bound to notice evaporation more often in its metaphorical meaning. Your anger boils and evaporates. People evaporate from your life to condense into dew on someone else’s Facebook page. Happy and sad moments sparkle, twinkle and dissipate into the mist of memories. And ultimately, we evaporate too, hoping next time we liquefy in a smarter lifeform.

All these evaporations make life what it is, an improbable combination of zillions of soulless atoms unaware and uncaring of each other’s existence.

[Evaporations](#) is also a book. An album of photographs by John R Pepper, who is more of

a graphic artist employing a camera rather than a pencil to make his images. And just as water can be about life, death, and everything in-between, Evaporations is a book of life moments that make up life, but tend to evaporate as life goes on.

John is exclusively black and white, and grainy, at that. If photography is about capturing a moment in life, John's art is about delivering it to you well-peppered to accentuate its taste. Because if a moment is bound to evaporate, let it be at least a moment of truth, when your thoughts are jolted into travelling beyond the boundaries of that split second of time that we call a "moment". This is also why his photographs come undated, and without a place reference. These photographs are not meant to illustrate someone else's life, they are intended to make the observer think of his own. If you've been with this blog for some time, you know I am well-prepared to talk about paintings or sculpture, but not photography. I know precious little about this branch of art, so I will just share a few of John's images that weave a story for me – and then, off you go, finding your own favourites on [John's website](#), OK?



*It is clickable, and worth clicking on. Size does matter in photography!*

That's a lone man given a stretch of asphalt and sand as a take-off strip squeezed between two elements. Sea and the city. For me, this picture is an icon of the urban isolation of a hive member. The man will not take off. We know it is physically improbable. This is Alberto Giacometti's walking man that keeps going until he is almost gone.



*Alberto Giacometti Walking Man, 1960*

It might be true that men are shuffling about this meaningless universe in pointless ways, as Giacometti was made to believe by his friend Jean Paul Sartre, but life would be unbearable were it devoid of hope for a more cheerful arrangement of human affairs. This is one of the reasons we are drawn to seas and oceans.

Seas used to be a major source of new stuff in people's lives for millennia. Seas carried over ships full of new people, exotic goods, and colourful gossip from foreign places. All together it was a promise there might be meaning and purpose in life, if not here and then, than at least somewhere out there, in the future.

When urban isolation first appeared as a concept, Romantic artists were putting their characters facing out the sea, which, with all its waves, storms, and changing moods and colours could be a metaphor for virtually anything a man might face in his life, the future journeys, storms, and challenges.



*Caspar David Friedrich – Wanderer above the sea of fog. It's not an actual sea, of course, but rather a view over imaginary mountains*

I never liked this painting. For my taste, it is as artificial and visibly staged as a fighting scene in a Class B action movie. That “stageness” kills the truth.

The kind of truth I find in this work of John Pepper:



It is not important who these people are. You, the observer, can be one of them, peacefully contemplating or actively engaging with the sea.

Not in the romantic mood? Yeah, I can understand that. As much as we like romanticism, we tend to prefer people who know how to get the max out of life here and now. There is no big difference between a man consumed by the romantic dreaming of happiness and a eunuch subscribing to a porno site.

Life happens now, and if we can't show Death the middle finger, we can at least show it to Death's sister: procrastination.

This photograph offers you a chance to start living now:

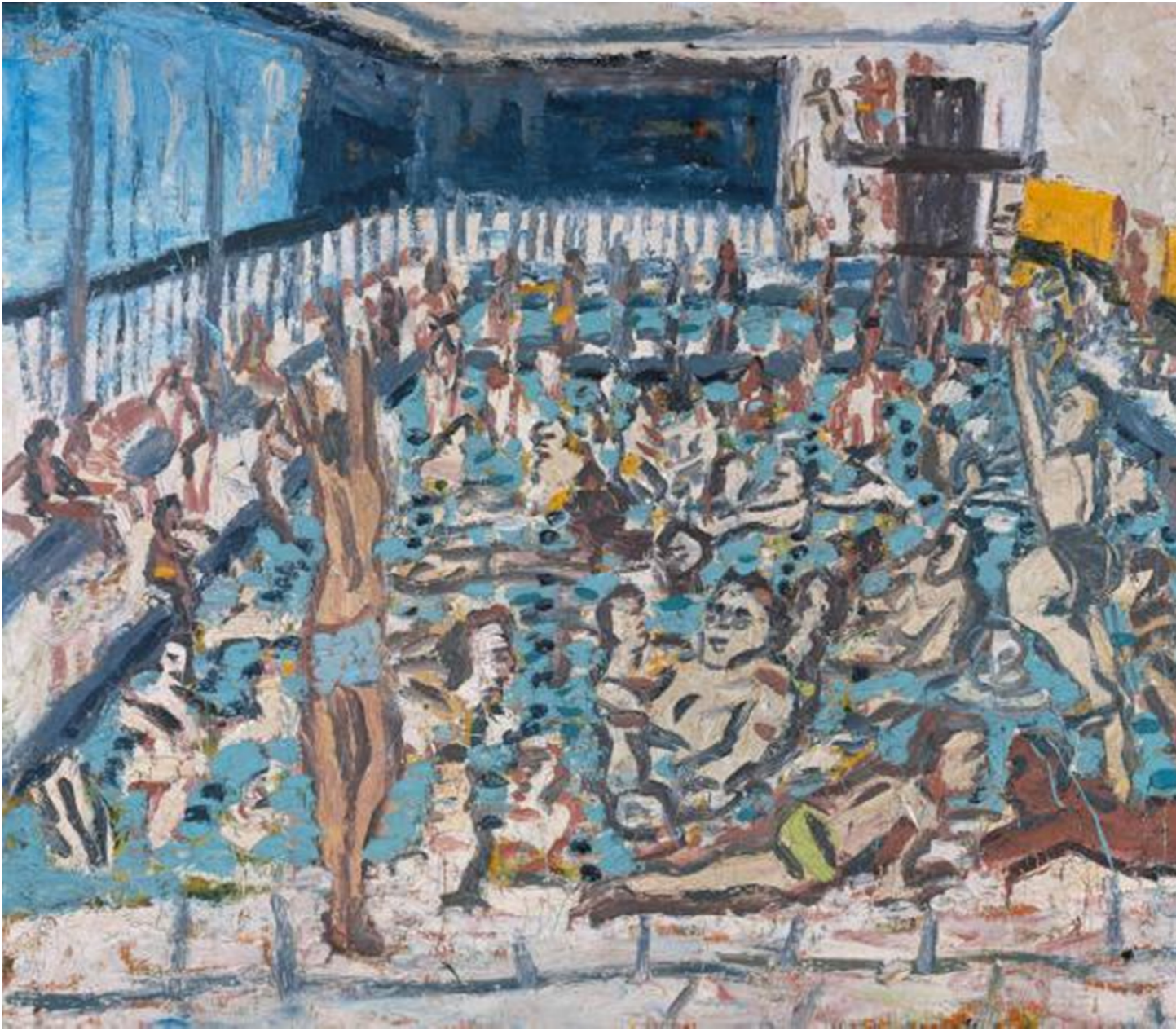


Urban isolation sufferers, hardcore losers, philosophers, and members of other post-modern species, UNITE in this reservation of rhythmic fun, physical effort, and the pure colour white (which is a sum of all colours)! Yes, it is a temporary refuge from the grim and cold waters surrounding you, metaphorically, on all sides, but life is temporary too, so don't lose this momentous opportunity to feel that the absence of meaning or purpose in communal skating is not necessarily a bad thing.

If you like a play of images going in ways similar to a play of words, note that ice is also water, and wonder at the difference of emotional atmosphere created by the grim bay, and the merry ice rink.

The idea of emotional and physical reservations of happiness in an otherwise dull modern city is not a new one: park planners know all about it, especially the ones designing parks that charge an entry fee.

This concept is also shared by pool aficionados, as one of my favourite artists, Leon Kossoff testified in his 1971 work, *Children's Swimming Pool, Autumn Afternoon*.



There's so much human energy generated in the pool that it bursts upward as blue lightning. You can't see it in the photograph, but in the real painting the blue streaks of paint stand out:



You won't find energy bursts in John's photograph, but you can feel them, can't you? Now, don't procrastinate, go over to [John's site](#). Life's too short to miss its "peppered moments".