

KELP FOREST

Beneath the surface of the ocean lies a magical and necessary world.

Jules Verne writes in *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*:
'It was the kingdom of verticality'.

And perhaps there is no more precise image through which to approach the universe of kelp forests.

As we immerse ourselves in these mysterious marine landscapes, we discover that our way of relating to the space around us changes. We stop walking and begin to float; we stop moving in a straight line and begin to drift with the ocean currents; we stop being spectators and become part of the scene. The landscape surrounds us, carries us and transforms us. Perhaps this is why immersing oneself in a kelp forest produces a state remarkably close to meditation. During the dive, time seems to acquire a different pace. Breathing necessarily becomes conscious and calm.

The weightlessness of the body adapts to its surroundings, finding balance through the rhythmic interplay of inhalation and exhalation. Little by little, the eye becomes accustomed to different distances, and what we see appears enlarged in a new and unfamiliar way. Then something paradoxical happens: the further we move away from our everyday world, the more deeply we understand that we belong to it. Kelp forests remind us that the ocean is not a space separate from us. It is one of the great systems that make life on our planet possible.

To contemplate its movement is to contemplate a form of intelligence that needs no words. A living architecture. A collective organism. A breathing landscape. A place where light, water, carbon, animals and plants take part in the same dance. A world that is not merely a landscape, but a living structure that sustains and nourishes countless other forms of life. Kelp forests are among the most productive and biodiverse marine ecosystems on the planet. Their long fronds, which can reach between 45 and 60 metres in length, rising towards the surface to create true underwater forests, are anchored to the rocky seabed by an organ known as a holdfast. They also possess gas-filled bladders that help them float towards the sunlight. Within these forests, countless species find shelter, food and places to reproduce, from tiny invertebrates to fish, marine mammals and seabirds. The entire forest breathes and transforms. Under optimal conditions, these flexible fronds can grow at the astonishing rate of between 30 and 60 centimetres a day. From the depths of the ocean, these enormous plant structures reach towards the light. They rise, sway, intertwine and separate in rhythm with the ocean currents, creating sinuous underwater labyrinths. They never remain still: in their hypnotic dance, they play with light, creating ever-changing scenes. Kelp does not simply create a habitat; it also contributes to the balance of its surroundings. It absorbs nutrients, helps improve water quality, can locally mitigate ocean acidification, and its dense forests help protect coastlines from the force of waves and erosion. Its existence reaches far beyond the visible boundaries of the forest itself. And it is precisely this idea of interdependence that interests me. Nothing exists in isolation. The kelp leaf, the fish sheltering among its fronds, the current that moves them, the light passing through them, oxygen, carbon, microorganisms, the seabed and our own bodies are all part of the same system. The paintings I present arise from this observation of light and darkness, of movement — constant and harmonious — which transforms the landscape with every movement of the waves. Each current alters the position of the algae; each change in light transforms colour; each organism alters, however subtly, the space it shares with the others. Everything is connected. And perhaps it is precisely this underwater dance, this silent communion of all elements, that compels us to surrender to it. To return, for a moment, to that place where everything and nothing happen at once. To blue, to matter, to life.