

ENRIQUE LEAL

Amplitude Modulation IV, 2017
Silkscreen, 22 x 30 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

CATHERINE SEGURSON

From the Clouds to the Bottom of the Sea

An interview
with *Catamaran's*
Winter 2018 cover
artist Enrique Leal

CATHERINE SEGURSON: We were thrilled to feature your work on the cover of the winter 2018 issue of *Catamaran*. Our readers were intrigued with the cover, and several asked about what it represented. This cover image is part of a particular series of yours, "Abyssalia". What does the title of this series mean?

ENRIQUE LEAL: The title refers to the abyssal plain of the ocean, what is known to be the deepest region of the ocean floor. Sunlight never reaches these areas inhabited by bioluminescent life forms that have particularly strange shapes. In many cases, their bodies are translucent as well luminescent.

The title also references a unique printing technique known as silk mezzotint. The evocative, biomorphic shapes that surface in this type of printing process have a very luminous quality in themselves. As the printed forms emerge from the deep darkness of the inked field, they emanate their own light just as the abyssal bioluminescent creatures.

CS: How does the process with silk mezzotint work? Do you experiment with pressing different shapes to create these forms?

EL: The compositions are made by pressing objects onto painted shapes. The pressing action creates cellular shapes and reticulated release patterns in the acrylic paint. This is a process of forming images that goes back to the surrealists, back to artists such as Oscar Dominguez and the technique he developed known as Decalcomania. It also references the work of Max Ernst who used this process in his oil paintings.

CS: People who've seen the cover ask me what it is. They ask me is it plankton? And in a sense they're intrigued because it could be a plankton shape but it feels out of scale or mysteriously unrecognizable so they're interested, they're trying to define it, but they're interested because it's not quite defined. Are you playing with that morphology of it's not exactly the shape you think it is but it's suggestive?

EL: Yes, it is similar to the ink blot, in that the the ink blot are ambiguous shapes suggesting forms we can recognize