

## New horizons

**After photographing the trees at Goodwood, his family's estate in Sussex, Charles March has turned his gaze on the Atlantic Ocean, as seen from Eleuthera in the Bahamas. But his ultimate aim, he tells John Walsh, is abstraction**



At the start of Homer's *Iliad*, a wrathful Agamemnon dismisses the diplomatic Chryses before an army 'by the shore of the tumbling, clamorous, whispering sea'. In its clamour and whisper, the sea echoes the mood of the two men, the furious king and the murmurous priest, but Homer has no problem attributing contradictory qualities to the one element. As writers have demonstrated for centuries, the sea can embody a million states and feelings: wildness, calm, interconnectedness, solitude, familiarity, estrangement, a chasm of peril, a bosom of peace, that which buoys you up and that which drowns you.

Charles March's new collection of photographs, *Seascape*, captures the eternal trinity of sea, sky and sand in an array of formal identities. Sometimes, it's no more than a line in the sand; sometimes, the three rectangles suggest the flag of an unknown country. Some works capture a lazy liquidity, an unfolding serenity of movement; others threaten to engulf us.

March, 62, aka the Earl of March and Kinrara, began taking photographs at Eton, developed his talent while working for Stanley Kubrick on *Barry Lyndon*, and made it a career with shoots for fashion magazines and advertising campaigns. He gave up professional photography in 1991 to manage the family estate of Goodwood, whose famous horse- and motor-racing festivals draw multitudes every summer. But he refound his mojo after 2002, when

he began photographing the estate's trees. Without using the viewfinder, he'd press the shutter and, on a long exposure, shake the camera slowly up and down. The results were impressionistic, spooky and varied: the trees became ghostly sentinels, or dappled saplings half-glimpsed from a racing car.

Why seascapes? 'After the tree pictures, which were so very vertical,' he says, 'it was an obvious move to photograph the most horizontal thing around.' He chose a single location, Eleuthera in the Bahamas, 'where I've been going for 20 years. You look at the Atlantic on this empty beach and it feels primeval; you think it must look the same for ever...'

But it doesn't. March's effects are multifarious. He thrusts his Leica SL forward and back, agitates it up and down, or moves it slowly along the line of horizon. 'And you get the sea moving as well, so there's a synchronisation of things that will come together to make sense, or look a bloody mess. Then we fiddle with the skies, manipulate them to get them right. It's all about trying to keep the horizon sharp.'

Is his work moving towards abstraction? 'Yes, I'm keen to create an impression of what it felt like to be in that place, and abstraction leaves a lot to the imagination. I'm trying to say: here's a minimal exposure of how it looked and felt at that moment.' *'Charles March: Seascape' is at Hamiltons in London, 11-16 September. www.hamiltonsgallery.com*

Below and opposite, two seascapes from Charles March's September exhibition

