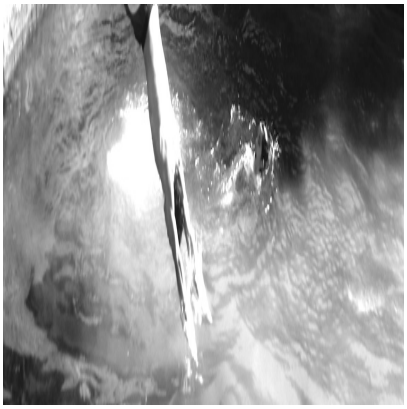


Gathered round the bath

Description

default watermark

The proto-architect Vitruvius described the importance of a clearing in the forest and the establishment of a fire around which people would gather for warmth and communion. The â??hearthâ?• established the siting and meaning of the â??dwelling house,â?• and hence settlements and eventually towns and cities. I revisited that proposition in the recent post Life by the fire.

If the hearth has become an emblem of home, family, community, comfort and nurture, then is there a watery equivalent? My post of 8 March 2014 Wet and wild (#186) explored human attitudes to water. Views over water command attention. People pay high prices to have a view of water.

As I explain in that post, in studies into the therapeutic benefits of natural landscapes, researchers avoid showing pictures of rivers, lakes, beaches and ponds. The presence of a water view tends to override all other preferences.

Vitruvius accorded no such generative importance to places where there is water. Wells, ponds, pools, canals, riversides, beaches, laundries, washing places, and hydraulic power plants are caught up in networks of supply and distribution that seem to exclude them from the homey functions of warmth and gathering â?? at least for the Roman mind.

Our relationship with water holds significance outside of the Vitruvian preoccupation with utility. Not least is the practice of immersing oneself in water; followed importantly by a return from that condition. Symbolically and practically, immersion in water and then withdrawal implies cleansing, purification, and transition. See post Betwixt and between.

The following AI video starts with a photograph I took of a pool at the Siwa Oasis in Egyptâ??s Western Desert. It is fed by a fresh water spring and bears the name â??Cleopatraâ??s bath,â?• reputed to be 10 m deep in parts.

Iâ??m not in the frame here, but I did immerse myself in the poolâ??s clear waters. Our guide said the way you descend to the bottom is to empty your lungs so that you can sink to the bottom. Then propel yourself to the surface by pushing hard against the poolâ??s rocky base. He demonstrated, but I declined his offer to follow.

This short synthetic video demonstrates some typical AI discontinuities. The diver appears to take on a diaphanous shirt once he enters the water. Suddenly heâ??s in feet first. On the ascent, two divers emerge, not one. I asked ChatGPT to explain these discontinuities.

> â??These discontinuities arise because the video is not generated from a stable, persistent 3D model of the scene, but from frame-to-frame predictions guided by probabilistic associations. As the figure enters the water, the model reinterprets the visual field according to learned correlations between bodies, water, and submerged textures; garments and surface effects are therefore introduced or transformed to maintain local plausibility. On ascent, the system struggles to preserve object identity over time, and the diver is effectively re-sampled from multiple plausible continuations, resulting in duplication. Such artefacts reveal that continuity of objects, bodies, and materials is not guaranteed; it is continually renegotiated at each moment of generation.â?•

I follow that with another sequence derived from a still photograph I took of a harbour-side pool in Helsinki. On occasion, people really do gather round the bath.

default watermark

Category

1. Architecture
2. Artificial Intelligence
3. Podcast

Tags

1. bathing
2. fire
3. immersion
4. water

Date Created
April 18, 2026
Author
rcoyne99