

Art in the social space. The Nordic Center of Contemporary Art in Xiamen 2024.



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THE MERMAID AS A COMMON MYTHICAL SYMBOL.

As an artist, I stand on the shoulders of other contemporary witnesses and mediators from all eras. We have inherited symbols that express insight and emotions - and that enable shared understanding across cultures. One thing I am very concerned with as an artist is to provide keys to people who are not initiated into the language of art. Therefore, I have often used universally applicable and simple symbols that have been used in art history, in religious contexts, but also in fairy tales and fantasy narratives - in a way that connects people and hopefully opens doors to multiple layers.

One of the symbols is the mermaid - which has thousands of years of history behind it - and which exists in all cultures. She is mythical and mysterious, but also overused in pop culture and sentimental, romantic depictions. Nevertheless, I have chosen to use this symbol because I have a daughter who has been chronically ill after a tick bite. Lyme disease - ME, terrible diseases that have caused her to identify with the mermaid and being in another world, in order to endure and survive so much pain and suffering.

Also in Chinese culture, there are several stories from all times where the mermaid symbol is important. Jiao ren; a Chinese mermaid weaves silk that cannot get wet, and her tears turn into pearls. Pearls are export goods in Xiamen where we are going to exhibit. I want to further develop the collaboration with my daughter, composer Tonje, who writes and creates music around the mermaid. We created a project together for Vejle Art Museum; Floating Art, which we have expanded in several stages. Now I want to see if the beloved symbol, which these days is spreading widely in major film productions based on HC Andersen in the Western world and on Chinese mermaid myths in China, can create a common understanding of emotional and disease-related situations between our different parts of the world.

More specifically, I have selected sketches and drawings I have created over several years with the mermaid theme. They are an attempt by me as a mother to visualize and accommodate the condition of my daughter - where she is underwater much of the time, but where hope and belief that there is something above water is available. I will use the sketches as a basis for modeling reliefs - (in self-drying paperclay) -, while I am in China. They will be displayed in their own small "aquariums" - boxes that will be created in Xiamen, where you can see the figures behind glass. They will also contain local pearls. They will be exhibited as a complete installation, where perhaps also with some of Tonje's music to play along with them.

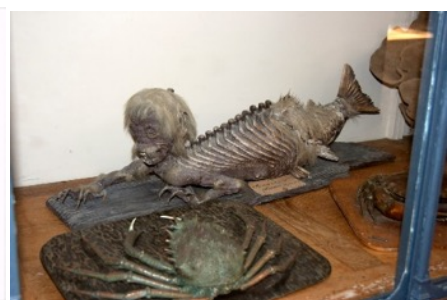
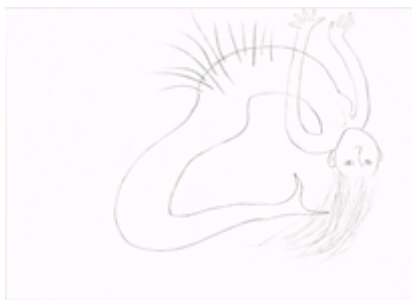
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Here are some experiments with drawings and photos of what will become a series of small reliefs in the Aquarium-like tableaus at The Nordic Art Center of Contemporary Art in Xiamen.



The unknown sea has contributed to animism among all peoples - the belief that nature is animated and populated with good and evil beings, often in animal form. The figure of the mermaid has changed over millennia, so that today one cannot draw a clear line between ancient times and the present. She is known all over the world and is depicted as a woman who from the waist down is provided with a - sometimes bifurcated - fish tail. The mermaid can be perceived as a personification of the whimsical nature of water, the changing sea, which both gives and takes, which contains both joys and dangers.

<https://faktalink.dk/titelliste/havf/havfrhis>



Mummified mermaid, also seen in Xiamen. One of my mermaid sketches.

A Fiji Mermaid, Monaco Ocean. Museum