

# Making a Splash: Mermaids and Modernity

8 SEPTEMBER – 13 NOVEMBER 2017

A Macquarie University Art Gallery exhibition  
in partnership with Cowra Regional Art Gallery



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### MAKING A SPLASH:

#### MERMAIDS AND MODERNIT

EFFY ALEXAKIS, ALAN BARLOW,  
EDDIE BLITNER, MEREDITH BRICE,  
MARIA CMIELEWSKI, DANIEL MUDIE  
CUNNINGHAM, KATE DOWNHILL,  
JACQUELENE DRINKALL,  
NIGEL HELYER, NOLA JONES AND  
MAURO ANSELMO OLIVOS CASTILLO

8 September – 13 November 2017

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Nola Jones and Mauro Anselmo  
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CURATORS: Philip Hayward, Rhonda Davis and Leonard Janiszewski

### COVER:

Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo

*Cuando se acaben los salmones*

series 2007–2016

Acrylic on canvas

92.5 x 149.5 cm

Collection the artist

Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite

# Introduction – Mermaids and Modernity

PHILIP HAYWARD

The mermaid has had particular longevity as a figure in western culture. Originally associated with classical mythology and regional European folklore, she has been exported to non-European locations by mariners, colonists and, more recently, through popular cultural media such as film and television. While there were a variety of forms of mermaids and the associated figures of sirens in medieval art (including winged and/or snake-tailed ones), the standard form of the mermaid that has emerged over the last two centuries is one that comprises the upper half of a (usually, young and attractive) human female and the lower half of a fish. As such, she is not a hybrid – *blending* aspects of fish and human – but might rather be identified as a portmanteau creature, combining heterogeneous halves that are abruptly delineated where flesh intersects with scales. Within a realist frame, such a creature is clearly ridiculous. Yet the repetition of her form in a series of representational contexts has resulted in an enduring cultural suspension of disbelief.

This factor has allowed the mermaid to be deployed in a wide range of fictional material in which the acknowledgement and negotiation of her duality is key to the narratives that develop around her. Broadly speaking, there have been two varieties of mermaid in 19th–21st century art and popular culture: the fixed-form mermaid and the transformative type. The former is immutably and definitively a mermaid. The latter has the ability to transform between mer- and human form, either through magical intervention (as in the case of Hans Christian Andersen’s famous *The Little Mermaid*) or as a result of moving from the aquatic to terrestrial realm; that is, from the wet to the dry. As I document and analyse in my 2017 volume *Making a Splash: mermaids (and mermen) in 20th and 21st century audiovisual media*, the mermaid has been a popular figure in cinema since its earliest phases and its representation in film and, more latterly, television has created a body of ‘media-lore’ that has refreshed the mermaid as cultural figure.

Beyond her amalgamation of mammalian and piscine elements, the most significant aspect of the mermaid is the manner in which her fully female upper half, which is often explicitly sexualised through bare or semi-obscured breasts and luxurious tresses, is combined with a lower one that lacks any suggestion of female genitalia. This creates a particular symbolic and erotic tension. The mermaid is demonstrably female – in her upper parts – but gender ambiguous in her tail. There is also considerable symbolic play here. The tail may be seen as a glittering, fetishistic sheath, symbolising all that is not evident through concealing and denying it. But, at the same time, the tail can also be understood to be proudly phallic. As I discuss in *Making a Splash*, in a chapter entitled ‘Flauntation and fascination’, this aspect is key to the appeal of the mermaid and creates the symbolic–erotic ‘charge’ that is able to be ‘discharged’ when transformative mermaids assume human form and interact with humans (usually, although not exclusively, males). The mermaid can thereby be regarded as having intersexual or

## BELOW:

Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo  
*Cuando se acaben los salmones*  
 series 2007-2016  
 Acrylic on canvas  
 92.5 x 149.5 cm  
 Collection the artist  
 Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite





transsexual aspects, and the acting out of a mermaid role by a human can be seen as a form of drag cosplay, where a role is enacted as a means of stepping away from a prescribed gender and/or sexuality position.

For non-transformative mermaids (and/or transformative ones in their fully mer-phases), their tails signify their power and their existence outside of the phallogentric norm of terrestrial-patriarchal society (to view things within a Freudian/Lacanian frame). In this context, they are much freer agents in the fluid realm than terrestrial women are. Drawing on this sense of power and the lack of prescription of a passive role in the symbolic order, the mermaid can also be deployed to variously champion, symbolise and/or be the tragic victim of a series of patriarchal and/or human disruptions of various realms or states of.

The works in this exhibition have been selected to represent a range of intriguing engagements with mermaid imagery in early 21st century art by Australian, Chilean and American artists. The work of Chilean artist Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo, who resides on Chiloé Island, in the country’s south, was a major inspiration for this exhibition. I first encountered Olivos’s work while researching in Chiloé in 2010. Walking into a restaurant in Chiloé’s capital of Castro one evening, I was transfixed by the painting hanging above the bar. In the work, a mermaid (known locally as a *sirena*) lies contorted on the shore, a hook piercing her upper torso, close to her neck. The sky, sand and light are dull and metallic, almost post-apocalyptic. The image resembles a freeze-frame from a narrative in which the *sirena* has been grievously wounded by human intervention. The painting’s title, *Cuando se acaben los salmones* (‘After the salmon are finished’), 2007, provides the context for the image.

As Olivos has detailed:

The *sirena* in the painting is a symbol of the impact of salmon aquaculture on Chiloé’s people and their beliefs, an expression of how they have forgotten their traditions and culture bewitched by the modern mirage of the salmon industries. The injured *sirena* is a symbol of the injury that has afflicted the totality of Chilote culture. It is not only local mythology and magical belief that has been abandoned, young people have also abandoned farms and traditional methods of cultivation in favour of employment in the salmon industry. When salmon aquaculture eventually collapses, Chiloé’s people will have to return to their traditions of fishing and cultivation instead, using tradition and magical belief thought to rebuild and re-invent their culture.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication, March 2010. For further discussion see Hayward (2011).

Olivos’s powerful deployment of mermaid imagery for eco-political purposes alerted me to similar uses of the folkloric figure in other art practices. More widely, it also attuned me to the deployment of mermaids within modern discourses that draw on previous folkloric ones to create powerful, new associations that connect contemporary issues with particular places and circumstances.

The works included in this exhibition, and introduced by the artists’ statements in following pages, both draw on and recontextualise earlier mermaid images and produce new interpretations of these that engage with their wide range of potential gender/sexuality positions and their capacity to symbolise an equally wide range of social, environmental and political issues. In all of these, the mermaid is far from a whimsical, folkloric figure haunting the stage of modernity. Instead, she appears as vital and as capable of expressing a range of aspects of contemporary identity politics and ecological activism.

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# Encountering Mermaids

In 1822, Captain Eades came to London with a mermaid to exhibit and was so sure of its authenticity that he sought an opinion from the prominent zoologist, Everard Home. Home sent William Clift to look at it and he immediately pronounced it a fake which crudely combined various bits and pieces of a baboon, an orangutan, a salmon and some man-made fragments stuck on by way of fingernails. But Eades was a sea captain and so not easily discouraged and he exhibited his treasure anyway for a shilling a look and, apparently, did good business. Why Eades hoped for a different outcome when he submitted his mermaid to scientific scrutiny is a mystery (in some ways more mysterious, people being what they are, than his decision to go ahead with the show even after being told his creature was a fake) as cobbled-together mermaids often from ‘Feejee’ or Bengal were not uncommon sights in London from the

18th century onwards and, indeed, it appears that the Japanese did a brisk trade in putting these animals together and selling them into Asia. These Japanese mermaids were often to be found in India and it was from there that they made their way back to London under the blazer-striped banner of the Honourable East India Company.

Of course, at a time when new animals were being discovered every day, it was hardly surprising that things like stuffed mermaids might carry conviction with some and, famously, early specimens of the duck-billed platypus were written off as fakes by people who had paid one too many shillings to see one too many mermaids.

But in the phenomenon of the stuffed mermaid, two things come together, both of which speak to the capacity of the artificial, the artful and the artistic to compound desire and to hold out fantasies – in this case, of both sex and immortality. Normally, these two things cancel each other out and erotic sublimation is a precondition for eluding death. However, in the wizened and ugly bricolage of the taxidermic mermaid, they briefly come together and hold out the possibility that entry into the world of physical desire is not paid for by entry into the world of death. The shilling you paid to see a mermaid in a London coffee house was money well spent as it enabled both participation in the voyeuristic spectacle of the mermaid as a long-time symbol of erotic desire – the sirens of Ulysses, the Lorelei – and visual confirmation that these things could survive the sex–death cycle and present themselves, there and then, to anyone who had the spare change.

There are whole worlds of time and space between the back room of a Georgian coffee house and the gallery of a modern University. But perhaps when that gallery is offering an exhibition of works about mermaids the distance between those worlds is diminished. Images of mermaids and the idea of mermaids are, ontologically, the same as mermaids themselves. Any image of a mermaid is the image of an image. Any idea of a mermaid is the idea of an idea. This is because both the image and idea are tied back into the world only through the chains of fantasy and desire.

In viewing works of art concerning mermaids we become like the customers of the Turf coffee house where Eades put his specimen on show; we become like the owners of cabinets of curiosity perusing our wonders and lingering longingly over a mermaid’s rib. But we are not being fooled, any more than Eades’s clients were being fooled. What is on offer here is a vision of the impossible, a glimpse of a thing which never existed come into being, and which brings together the things we crave most and the things we fear the most. All contained within the artefacts and the images and all made safe within an ordered and regulated space which manages the savagery of the mermaid world where Eros and Thanatos impossibly but desirably coexist.

PROFESSOR JOHN SIMONS

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Harriet Ritvo 1997, *The Platypus and the Mermaid, and Other Figments of the Classifying Imagination*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.

Alexis Turner 2013, *Taxidermy*, Thames and Hudson, London.

**RIGHT:**

Meredith Brice

*MER Island*

2017

Casting plaster, enamel paint, Derivan acrylic

Yin Min blue

72 x 39 x 12 cm

Collection the artist

Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite

**FAR RIGHT:**

Effy Alexakis

*Gorgona shop, Plaka, Athens*

2017

Digital photograph; Lambda prints

20 x 25 cm; 27 x 32 cm framed

Collection the artist



# “You’re swimming like a Gorgona”

During a recent trip to Greece I overheard a young girl who was swimming at a beach in the Peloponnese: “Look, *Baba* [father]! I’m swimming!” Her father’s immediate response was, “You’re swimming like a *Gorgona*”. In contemporary Greek folklore, the *Gorgona*, or mermaid, pervades the everyday – she is an integral element of Greece’s modern popular culture. Her image appears on calendars, taverna and restaurant signs, fishmonger signs, on fishing vessels, as company logos, on posters, postcards, as dolls, fridge magnets, beach and tea towels, swimwear, in paintings, as sculptures, on and as ceramics, as part of jewellery and tourist trinkets, as tattoos, on glassware and clothing, as traditional shadow puppets, in song, film, theatre and, of course, in literature – there is even a shop bursting with *Gorgona* paraphernalia in the Plaka, the tourist centre of Athens.

In this shop, appropriately called *Gorgona*,<sup>1</sup> religious icons (referencing Orthodoxy and Byzantium) and diverse tourist trinkets are submerged by the siren’s image – it was difficult to focus on specifics as floor to ceiling was covered. Odysseus’s sirens had bird-like torsos and female heads and chests, which, during the Roman period, were transformed into half-fish, half-female forms. I was entranced, and kept going back to take more photographs. Here was the *Gorgona*, Thessalonike – the sister of Alexander the Great – immortalised by the spilling of a flask of liquid from the Fountain of Immortality onto her hair and transformed into a mermaid when she threw herself, grief-stricken, into the sea – in this form she roamed the Aegean for centuries asking sailors if Alexander was alive. If they reassured her that he still lived and ruled, she provided them with safe passage; if not, she turned into a *Gorgona* and sent their vessel to the sea’s bottom.

As I returned to photograph objects in the shop, I quickly found myself making several purchases of mermaid items; I continued to purchase items at similar shops throughout my subsequent travels in the Greek Peloponnese. A selection of objects are presented as elements in my contribution to this exhibition – reminders of the strong, ongoing presence of the mermaid in modern Greek culture.

The *Gorgona*’s beguiling was such, however, that my main aim was to capture her image photographically as I travelled along the coast to ancient sites – not only through the contemporary visual references to her on land, but also in her traditional environment, the sea. And in the sea, the *Gorgona* only shows herself when she wants to. However, she did appear – possibly sensing my anxiety at being bitterly disappointed and consequently lessening the grip of the spell she had cast upon me, had she not revealed herself. I found her at Plitra (Asopos), the site of a sunken Roman and Byzantine city; at Monemvasia, a Byzantine fortress perched upon an enormous rock-island; at Old Monemvasia, a rocky coast facing the Byzantine fortress; at Nafplion, modern Greece’s initial capital; and at Xifias, a sandy beach.

One of the most renowned of modern Greek writers, Nikos Kazantzakis, also could not resist the siren’s call and composed a short poem about her:

*It was not an island  
It was a beast lying  
on the sea  
It was the Mermai  
The sister of Alexander the Great  
Who mourned  
and made the sea rough*<sup>2</sup>

**EFFY ALEXAKIS**

**NEXT PAGE LEFT:**  
Effy Alexakis  
*Pottery shop, Nafplion*  
2017  
Digital photograph; Lambda prints  
20 x 25 cm; 27 x 32 cm framed  
Collection the artist

**ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> Gorgona is at 114 Adrianou Street in the Plaka, Athens. I am very grateful to Alekos Bellas, who gave me permission to photograph. He believes that the owners have had the business for more than 30 years. Many of the wooden panels are from original shop displays and are rare and unique artworks.
- <sup>2</sup> Nikos Kazantzakis’s poem is reproduced (in translation) in: Philip Jepsen, ‘On the Origin of Mermaids by means of Folklore, Legends & Mythology’, Mermaids of Earth. Available at: <http://mermaidsofearth.com/on-the-origin-of-mermaids/> Accessed 8 August 2017.

**NEXT PAGE RIGHT:**  
Effy Alexakis  
*Gorgona shop, Plaka, Athens*  
2017  
Digital photograph; Lambda prints  
20 x 25 cm; 27 x 32 cm framed  
Collection the artist









**FAR LEFT:**  
Effy Alexakis  
Gorgona at Ancient Sites series  
*Gorgona at Monemvasia*  
2017  
Metallic print; printed on Kodak Endura paper  
50.8 x 61 cm; 79 x 68.5 cm framed  
Collection the artist

**LEFT:**  
Effy Alexakis  
Gorgona at Ancient Sites series  
*Gorgona at Nafplion*  
2017  
Metallic print; printed on Kodak Endura paper  
50.8 x 61 cm; 79 x 68.5 cm framed  
Collection the artist

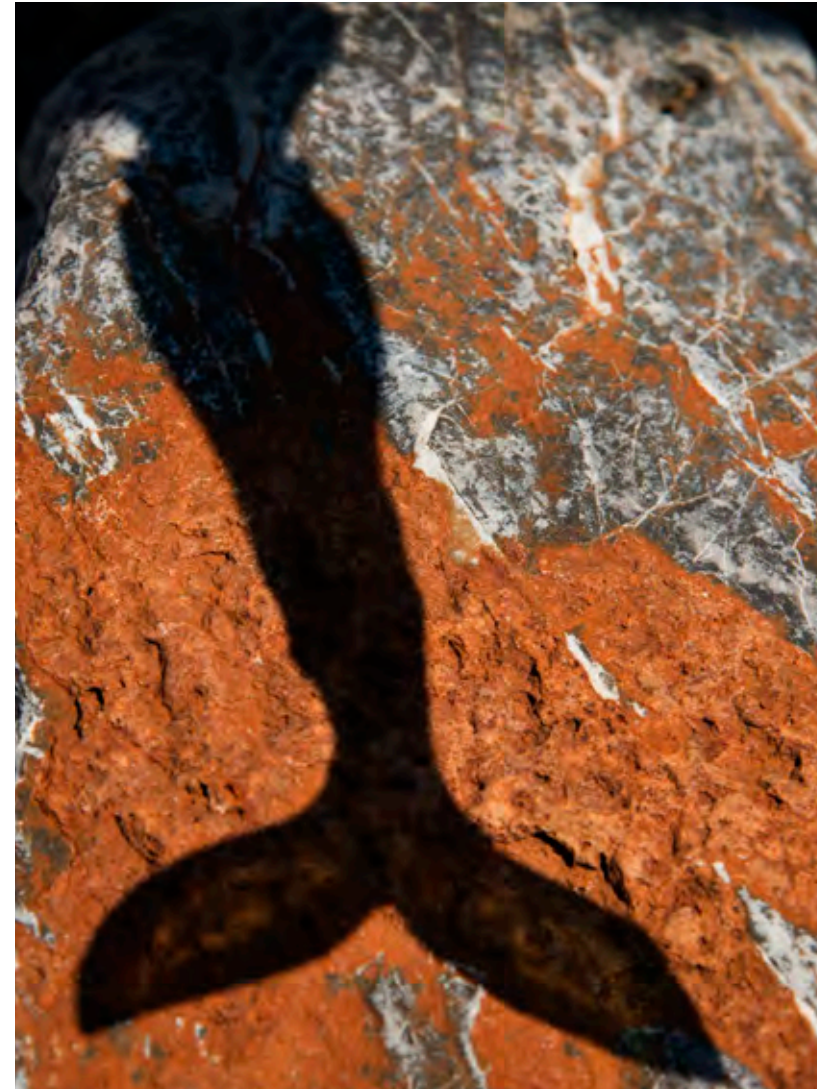




**FAR LEFT:**  
Effy Alexakis  
Gorgona at Ancient  
Sites series  
*Gorgona at Xifas Beach #1*  
2017  
Metallic print; printed  
on Kodak Endura paper  
50.8 x 61 cm; 79 x 68.5 cm  
framed  
Collection the artist

**LEFT:**  
Effy Alexakis  
Gorgona at Ancient  
Sites series  
*Gorgona at Plitra (Asopos)*  
2017  
Metallic print; printed  
on Kodak Endura paper  
50.8 x 61 cm; 79 x 68.5 cm  
framed  
Collection the artist





**FAR LEFT:**

Effy Alexakis  
Gorgona at Ancient Sites series  
*Gorgona at Xifas Beach #2*  
2017  
Metallic print; printed on Kodak Endura paper  
50.8 x 61 cm; 79 x 68.5 cm framed  
Collection the artist

**LEFT:**

Effy Alexakis  
Gorgona at Ancient Sites series  
*Gorgona at Old Monemvasia*  
2017  
Metallic print; printed on Kodak Endura paper  
50.8 x 61 cm; 79 x 68.5 cm framed  
Collection the artist



# Alan Barlow

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The *Casino Mermaid* is located above the theatre box office in the atrium of the Catalina Casino building, on Catalina Island off the coast of California. It is a 10 foot by 20 foot (3m x 6m) work of art in tile by John Gabriel Beckman and Richard T Keit. The original design is that of John Gabriel Beckman and, in collaboration with Beckman, Keit created the tile for that design.

The atrium has three large art-deco chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, and one of them is directly in front of the mermaid. My motivation was to create a photographic record of the mural so that we could see what it looked like straight on without the chandelier blocking the view. This was accomplished by using a view camera. The shift features of the view camera were used in both the vertical and horizontal to keep the film plane parallel to the mural. This was done to minimise perspective convergence, and is the key to a final photo free from no more than minor perspective and lens distortion. Three photos were taken from separate positions to capture all parts of the mural. They were processed, scanned, and then painstakingly merged together through 20 hours of work in Photoshop, eliminating the chandelier and appearing as one continuous photo.

**ALAN BARLOW**

[catalinapublications.com/index.htm](http://catalinapublications.com/index.htm)



**LEFT:**  
Alan Barlow  
*Casino Mermaids*  
2002  
Photograph  
Courtesy the artist





# Eddie Blitner

Eddie Blitner comes from the Yugul Mangl Community in Naijarlindji Country in the Roper River region of the Northern Territory.

Blitner has acquired a significant representation as a painter over the last two decades and his work has been widely exhibited in Australia. He has painted a number of representations of the mermaid-like, freshwater entity that his community traditionally terms *gilijjirring*, in interaction with other mythological characters. His 2015 painting *Lightning Fisherman, the Mermaid + the Mimi* represents the lightning spirit who lives in a billabong (a small oxbow lake) and generates violent, tropical storms in the wet season (centre of image), flanked by a net and a tall, thin Mimi (to the left) and with a *gilijjirring* figure identified by him in the painting's title as a mermaid (to the right), with a woven fish trap hanging around her neck.

PHILIP HAYWARD

## LEFT:

Eddie Blitner, *Lightning Fisherman, The Mermaid + The Mimi*  
2015, Acrylic on canvas, 102.5 x 113 cm  
Collection Philip Hayward, Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite

# MER-quarium of the Seven Seas

The *MER-quarium of the Seven Seas* installation assembles a collection of whimsical, mermaid-inspired artefacts exploring the mysterious, mercurial allure of the mermaid, beauty and the human desire to make imaginative connections with an aquatic being embodied within a curious dichotomy: a human torso and fishtail body.

Mermaids and mer-creatures prompt reflections on why this aetiology has enduringly evolved in the human imagination; the fascination with phenomenon of a humanoid aquatic presence that has prevailed over the course of maritime history. Mirroring the mythologies and tropes of human characteristics, proportions and fishy form, combined from antiquity to the present, reveals a sustained record of magical thinking to create mythologies and cultural narratives inspired by and embodied within this mysterious, otherworldly duality across time, space and culture(s) in the popular imagination.

In the contemporaneous, the installation expresses concepts of a mermaid revamped in the personification of MER, initially introduced in *The Birth of MER* video. Aspects of this mer-tale are revealed through a range of mixed media works; sculptural forms portraying the duality of aquatic and terrestrial – a beguiling and powerful presence, with power to destroy. As the protagonist finds herself immersed in terrestrial and aquatic environments laid waste by environmental degradation – the warming oceans, pollution, storm surge and rising sea levels – this mer-creature, threatened to potential extinction, is propelled to focus energies on survival. She becomes productive, a positive transformer of worlds (rather than narrowly being defined as a capricious siren capable of dispatching seafarers to their destruction). Although cognisant of her legacy identities and mythological origins, this contemporary portrait reframes the mermaid as one who transforms to reinvent with creative energies and powers as protectress/nurturer of the Seven Seas.

In the role of eco-warrior, nano-inspired capacities found in natural structures – including those intrinsic nano-scale materialities found in aquatic nano-materialities – equip her with an arsenal of nature-inspired, invisible tools sourced from new molecular assemblies, designed for hyperfunctional affect in the 21st century age of nanotechnology. Intuition is enhanced by telekinesis coupled with instantaneous teleportation and telematics to surveil and range across aquatic sites under destruction and remediation throughout the Arctic, North Atlantic, South Atlantic, North Pacific, South Pacific, Indian and Southern oceans, so the story goes.

**MEREDITH BRICE**

**BELOW:**  
Meredith Brice  
*Great Barrier [G]reef*  
2017  
Primed 12 oz artist canvas, cotton thread, PVA  
two pieces: body 163 x 32 x 23 cm; fin – dimensions variable  
Collection the artist  
Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite

**LURE – SONG. LYRICS: THE ARTIST. MUSIC COMPOSED AND PERFORMED BY SKYE MEAD**

Slip in a line, feel free  
Melt the distance between you and me  
Take me down  
Take me down

If you slip me a line  
Melt the distance between me and you  
Take me down  
Take me down

Down to ocean deep  
Watery domains  
Like Jonah  
Place of plankton, leviathan

Take me down  
Take me down

Should you slip a line  
To the roll of the tide  
And the swell?

Take me down  
Down

South Sea pearl  
The world is your oyster  
Poseidon, Neptune – protector

*Figment of my imagination*  
Take me down  
Down. Remain.







**LEFT AND RIGHT:**

Meredith Brice

*[in]visible-icecap, atoll, island*

2017

Palm fibre, cotton, woven kuta sedge,  
nanofil fishing line, marine fossil, Keshi and  
South Sea pearls, found seashells, plastic,  
PVA, nanofil fishing line, pop rivets  
two pieces: bodice 56 x 43 x 20; fishtail 90 x 21 cm  
Collection the artist

Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite





**LEFT PAGE:**

Meredith Brice

*On the back of [in]visible-icecap, atoll, island*

2017

Palm fibre, cotton, woven kuta sedge, nanofil fishing line, marine fossil, Keshi and South Sea pearls, found seashells, plastic, PVA, nanofil fishing line, pop rivets

two pieces: bodice 56 x 43 x 20; fishtail 90 x 21 cm

Collection the artist

Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite

**LEFT:**

Meredith Brice

*Strange creature: Nantucket whalesong*

2017

Plywood, PVA, straw, metal tacks

147 x 44 x 23 cm

Collection the artist

Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite



**LEFT AND BELOW:**

Meredith Brice

*Lure*

2017

Polyester, Keshi and South Sea pearls, cotton thread, plastic and metal parts

two pieces: bodice 56 x 40 x 34 cm; fishtail 176 x 41 cm

'Lure' wearables – two pieces: hand fins 73 x 16 cm x 4 mm; neck and shoulder piece 52 x 15 x 6 cm

Polyester, vylene, South Sea and Keshi pearls, metal parts, magnetised plastic, polyester thread, PVA, pop rivets

Collection the artist

Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite





# Maria Cmielewski

The Warsaw mermaid (*Syrenka Warszawska*) has derivations in various stories. One popular legend is of the mermaid's rescue from imprisonment by the son of a local fisherman. To show her gratitude, the mermaid vowed to protect and defend the family's village, which later grew into the city of Warsaw. She started to wear the sword and shield to be ready whenever she was needed.

The mermaid manifested itself in the continual struggle against the Nazis during World War II. This culminated in the Uprising of 1944, which resulted in the city almost being destroyed and tens of thousands dead.

Cmielewski family, *Polonia soccer club memorabilia* (from 1950) Paper, enamel, various metals.

The symbol of the mermaid was very strong throughout our childhood. Our Polish-born father, Alek Cmielewski, who co-founded the Polonia Adelaide Sports Club in 1950, designed the club crest as a mermaid because it was the coat of arms of Warsaw and the symbol for the WWII Polish resistance, in which he was a partisan. The club, now known as the Croydon Kings, still uses this design on its pennants, badges, lapel pins, membership cards and publicity material.

## MARIA CMIELEWSKI

Maria Cmielewski is a clinical nurse in anaesthetics at Flinders Medical Centre and is part of the simulation teaching team at Flinders University in South Australia. Prior to nursing, she studied design and printmaking and has recently commenced studying visual arts at the Adelaide College of the Arts, specialising in ceramics.

Maria enjoys contributing positively to the community as a nurse and gains personal pleasure from creating art. She is inspired and influenced by her late Polish father Alek, and her late mother Pat's Cornish and Irish heritage.



**LEFT:**  
Maria Cmielewski  
*Warsaw Mermaid*  
2011  
Beer can, dead shells, ballerina, desk, LED  
On loan from Cecelia Cmielewski



# Daniel Mudie Cunningham

**NO ORDINARY LOVE 2017**

Single-channel video with found sound, 4:3 aspect ratio, 4.43 min

**EDITOR:** Vera Hong

**MUSIC:** Sade, *No Ordinary Love*, 1992 (karaoke version sourced from YouTube)  
Songwriters: Helen Folasade Adu, Stuart Matthewman

**THANKS:** Craig Bender, Sarah Contos, Rhonda Davis, Elliott Bryce Foulkes, Elizabeth Reidy

*No Ordinary Love* is a requiem to two Bondi histories: iconic mermaid sculptures once mounted to a boulder at the northern headland cast in the same conceptual net as the scores of men murdered on the southern headland, a cliffside gay beat. Drawing on the glitch of VHS and the kitsch of karaoke lyric videos, Sade’s *No Ordinary Love* is reinvented as an ode to those lost to sea. Released in 1992, Sophie Muller’s music video saw Sade dressed as a mermaid and bride, a poignant marriage of tails and veils. As marriage equality debates rage in Australia, these visual cues are reimagined as a melancholy karaoke poem to Bondi Beach as a site of fantasy and trauma – a sea of love and loss. This video performance, in which I dance alone to a song stripped of words, recuperates voices long surrendered to the sea.

<https://vimeo.com/231257402>  
Password: nolove2017

**LEFT:**  
Daniel Mudie Cunningham  
*No Ordinary Love*  
2017  
Still from single-channel video with found sound, 4:3 aspect ratio, 4.43 min





**ABOVE AND RIGHT:**  
Daniel Mudie Cunningham  
*No Ordinary Love*  
2017  
Still from single-channel video with found sound,  
4:3 aspect ratio, 4.43 min

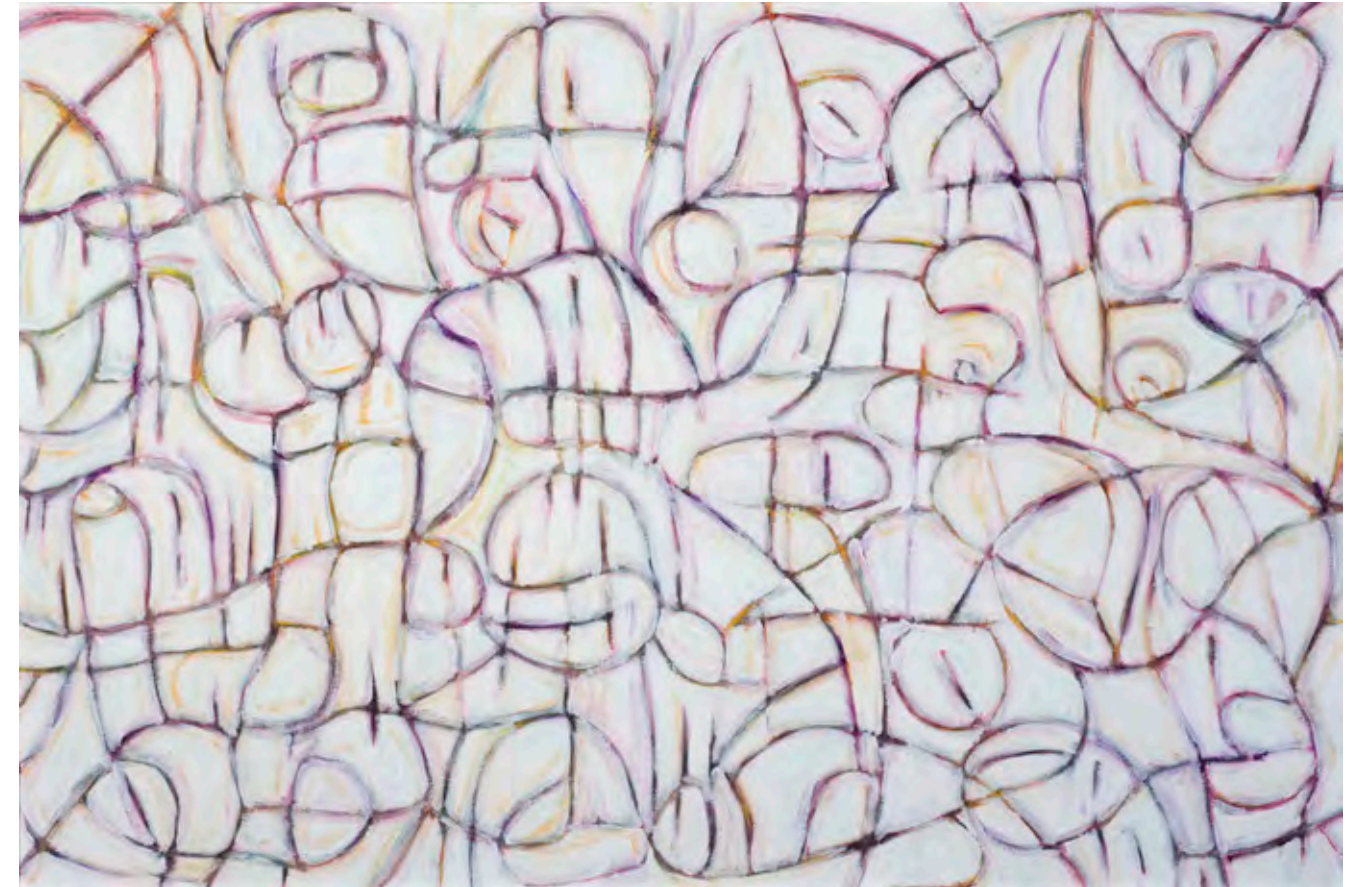


# Kate Downhill

I've long been interested in the iconography of mermaids, since I read the disturbing story of *The Little Mermaid* when I was a child. I was aware of even then, but did not yet understand, the gothic oddness of that tale/tail with its connotation of fishy female otherness and of pain and bleeding associated with love and longing. And in those innocent days of childhood I also believed that the foam at the shore's edge truly was the remains of dead mermaids. Well, why not? I lived at a seaside fishing town and saw every day the cast-off remains of gutted fish washed onto the sand.

The painting *Slits (Hanivers)* is one of a series of abstract and gestural images which sprang from some shoreline walks, when I was looking through rock pools (mermaids' gardens, of course) and sketching the marks that rays had made as they flipped through the shallow water. I'm familiar with the old curiosities of fake 'mermaids' which used to be exhibited and sold to the gullible. In fact, they were manufactured from dried-out rays and sometimes stitched together with other animal parts or had the addition of long, human hair. The port of Anvers (Antwerp) was once famous for its trade in dead and desiccated 'mermaids'. They were known as *jeune d'Anvers* – young woman of Anvers. This name became anglicised as Jenny Hanivers, at one time an alternative name for mermaids.

KATE DOWNHILL



**ABOVE:**

Kate Downhill  
*Slits (Hanivers)*  
2016  
Oil on canvas  
54 x 79 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite





# Jacqueline Drinkall

I have worked with telepathy, performance and fantastical appendages made from woven telecommunications wire transformed into netting-mesh for the last three decades. Perhaps my work has manifested oceanic sea-elf mermaid signals through the over/under of wriggly, wavy lines of weaving, underwater ficto-activist adventures, and the manifestation of queer serpentine distortions of the body as it sheds a plastic and copper skin from my fingertips. My woven telecommunications wire objects facilitate a lightly knotted and lace-like telephonic connection between human and non-human forms, technology and oceanic meditative process. If my forms attempt to seduce the viewer with oceanic curves, it is to address issues of gender, environment, cyberspace, and in the case of *Weather Underwater*, 2010 – my most obvious underwater art adventure – I wish to highlight global warming and the death of the Great Barrier Reef as a precursor to monstrous ecocide in the age of Chthulucene Anthropocene.

My most obvious work as a mermaid or, rather, sea-elf character, must be *Weather Underwater*, in which I wear a telepathic balaclava headpiece, nicknamed ‘dark DNA’ after its occultish black colour and DNA spiral formation, and a dress made from men’s neckties. I use the word ‘elf’ to describe the character with a pointy-tip hat and jagged-edged hem, as I am aware that structuring wires into a coil creates extremely low frequency (ELF) radio waves. Just as I cut and weave telecommunications wire to make wave-formed creatures, I also cut, tuck and stitch up men’s neckties to make an army of 20 omnisexual (available to all genders) dresses for activist performers. The transformation of thick, underground cables, which may easily be phallic in form if they were not so long, and men’s neckties is in keeping with the mermaid sensibility of an elongated and extra-curvy feminised and elf-like phallus-tail.

**LEFT:**  
Jacqueline Drinkall  
*Ecosexual Evidence*  
2017  
Found snake roadkill and condoms  
33.5 x 48.8 cm framed  
Collection the artist  
Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite

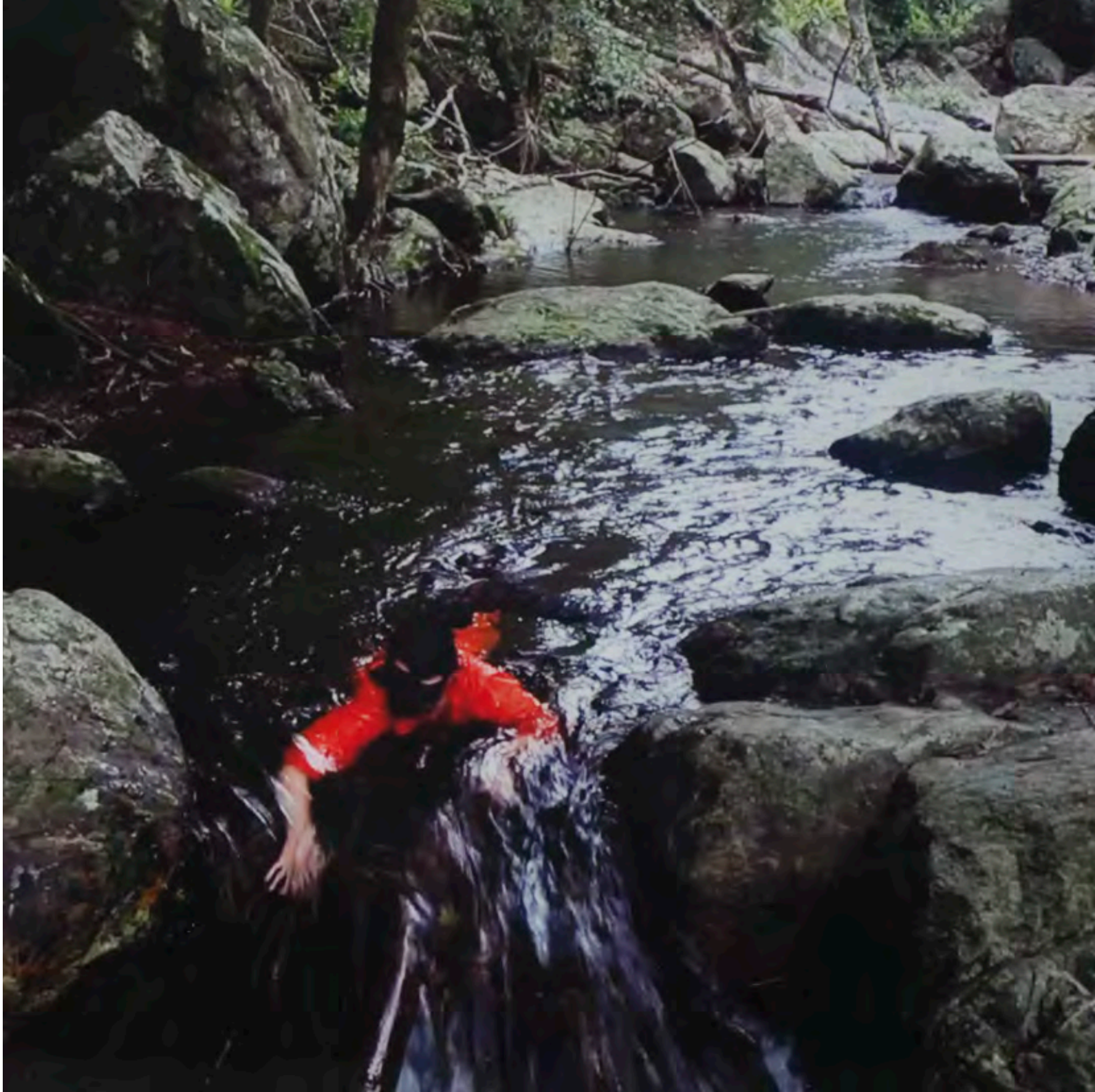


In *Weather Underwater*, two performers and myself each wear a flowing elf-like tie dress. *Weather Underwater* and its activist avatars, loosely based on the idea of Weatherman/Weather Underground and Earth Liberation Front (ELF), explore the death of the Great Barrier Reef. The activist mermaids witness and commune telepathically with the skeletal remains of both bleached coral and a human skeleton. To swim deep into the ocean while wearing dresses, flippers were required, and these add a mermaid-like quality to the bodies of the performers in certain light. Mermaids traditionally have long hair and, in my queer take on the mermaid stereotype, the long, wavy hair is also a serpentine, tentacular extension of the spinal column from the upper torso and head instead of the lower torso, legs and feet. My DNA spiral form evokes an elf-like, serpentine extension of the spinal column. I have a rare and largely invisible, painless anatomical deformity, in that I was born with six sacrum vertebrae instead of five, giving me an extra tailbone. We probably all have some elf, unicorn and mermaid resonances regardless of the limits of our flesh and bone.

Recent research supports the idea that fish may also feel pain and emotion like us humans in that they have something like our limbic system in their forebrain, the telencephalon. Maybe we have some kind of distant, telepathic interspecies ability to feel pain in common with our fish ancestors?

**JACQUELENE DRINKALL**

**RIGHT AND NEXT PAGES LEFT AND RIGHT:**  
Jacqueline Drinkall  
*Department of Corrections*  
2010  
Digital prints on archival aluminium on Perspex  
21.5 x 41.5 cm image size; 25 x 43 cm framed  
Collection the artist











**ABOVE:**  
Jacqueline Drinkall  
*Weather Underwater*  
2010  
Digital print on archival aluminium on Perspex  
21.5 x 41.5 cm image size; 25 x 43 cm framed  
Collection the artist



**ABOVE:**  
*Weather Underwater*  
2010  
Still from high definition colour with audio, 5 min  
Installation view Blindside Gallery, Melbourne  
Collection the artist



# Nigel Helyer

*We were just offshore as far as a man's shout can carry, scudding close when the Sirens sensed at once a ship was racing past and burst into their high, thrilling song.*

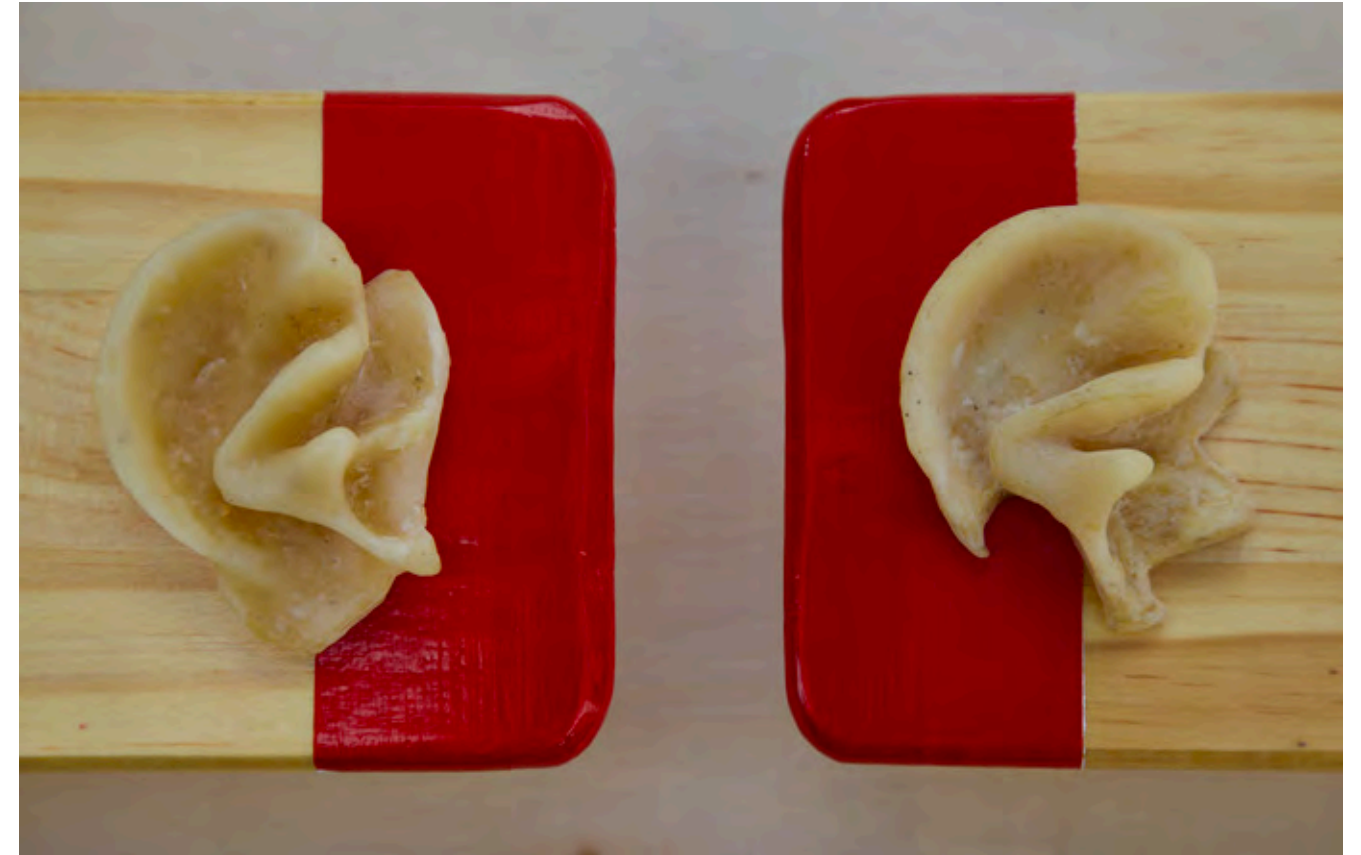
(Homer, *The Odyssey*)

Forewarned by tales of Jason's voyage in the Argo, when Orpheus saved the day, Odysseus took his sharp, short sword and sliced an ample wheel of beeswax, moulding it in his two strong hands under Helios's burning rays, making it pliable. One by one, he stopped the ears of his crew with the moulded wax.

The job done, two crewmen lash him tightly to the mast then return to their benches to row in silence, their waxen plugs reproducing the labyrinth of their pinnae, harbingers of the spirals of Edison's phonography inscribed into wax cylinders. In the silence, each man replays the rhythms of his pulse, syncopated with oar strokes, to evade the deadly intoxication of the Siren's song.

Entranced, Odysseus yells roughly at his men, demanding that they untie him and row ashore to the Sirens but the crew row on, oblivious to his rant. Danger past, Odysseus scowls at his men, who have steadfastly refused to release him to follow the Siren's hypnotic call.

**DR NIGEL HELYER**



**ABOVE:**

Nigel Helyer

*Syren*

2017

Wood, paint, beeswax, audio resonators, digital audio

400 x 15 x 10 cm

Collection the artist

# Nola Jones

Nola Jones's sculptures express a dialogue between land and water. Their undulating shapes interlock, creating in each a statuesque presence. Suffused with the vibrancy of primary colours interconnected with the texture, line and shape of bold oranges, purples and greens, the works are seemingly marked by the mermaid's efficacy. The visual configuration of the anthropomorphic shapes stacked in a carousel-like formation submit a depth of feeling to the mysterious enclaves of the mermaid's natural underwater environment.

The overall installation conjures the metaphysical presence of the mermaid; the veritable flow and movement capturing the essence of her journeys across the vast oceans of the globe.

Jones has retraced the latest developments in her work from the singular to the multifaceted, culminating in the production of this current environmental series:

*During the last several years I have gradually moved away from my monolithic and monochromatic structures; the works are now spreading in every direction and with diverse changes of form and colour happening throughout them. This multicoloured, multidirectional realm presents new and interesting challenges in the making and invites the eye to wander up, down and across the forms.*

**RHONDA DAVIS**

**RIGHT:**

Nola Jones  
*Mermaids*  
 2017  
 Aluminium armature, wood, papier-mâché, acrylic paint  
 74 x 86 x 22 cm  
 Collection the artist  
 Photography Michel Brouet





**RIGHT:**

Nola Jones

*Dialogue*

2016

Steel and aluminium armature,  
papier-mâché, oil paint

75 x 70 x 35 cm

Collection the artist

Photography Michel Brouet

**MIDDLE IMAGE:***Helen*

2012

Aluminium armature, papier-  
mâché, lead, oil paint, gold leaf

86 x 20 x 12 cm

Collection the artist

Photography Michel Brouet

**FAR RIGHT:**

Nola Jones

*Belerion*

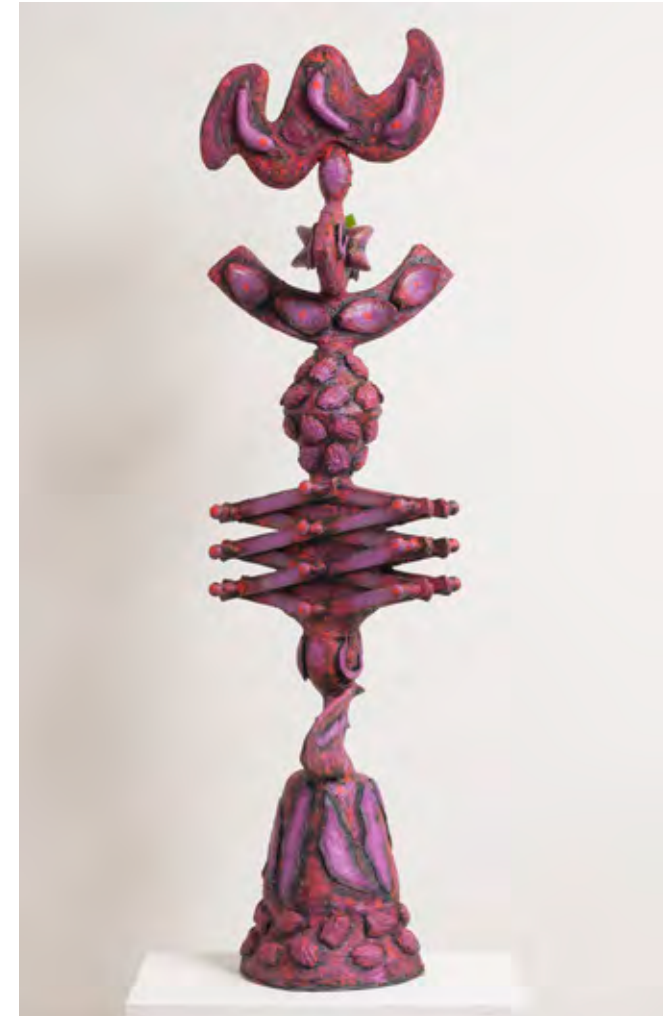
2015

Steel and aluminium armature,  
papier-mâché, oil paint

82 x 37 x 30 cm

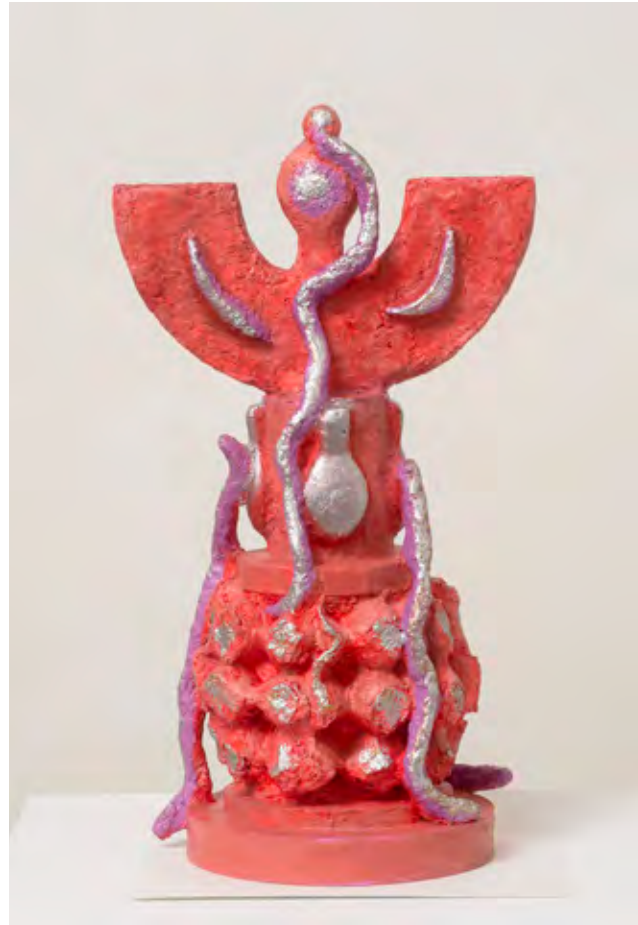
Collection the artist

Photography Michel Brouet





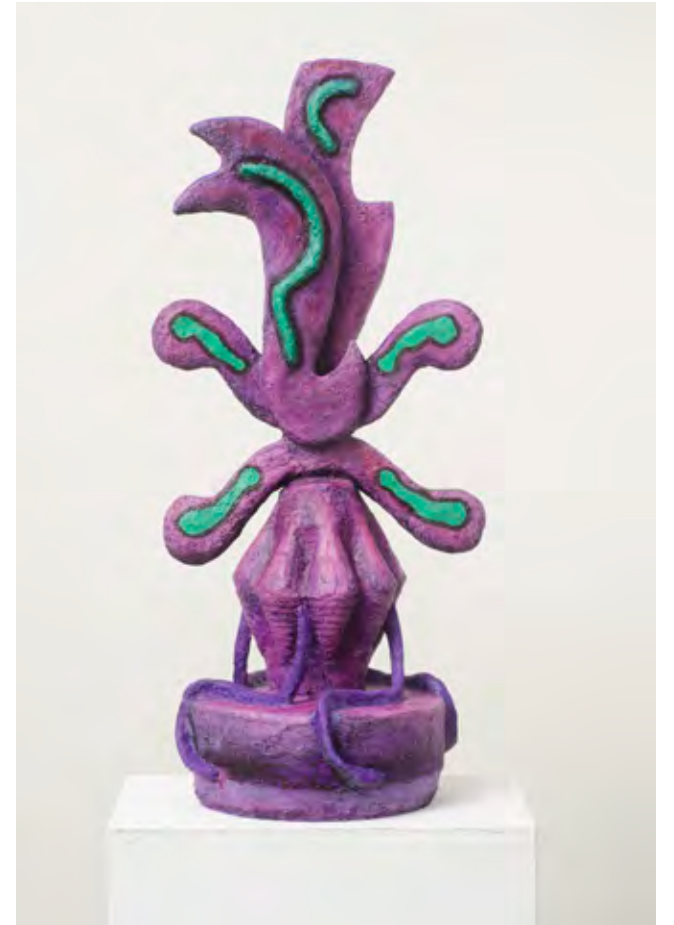
**ABOVE:**  
*Sarasvati*  
2009  
Aluminium armature, papier-mâché, wood, lead, found objects, oil paint  
112 x 32 x 30 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Michel Brouet



**ABOVE:**  
Nola Jones  
*Sirens*  
2017  
Aluminium armature, papier-mâché, found objects, oil paint  
55 x 30 x 22 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Michel Brouet



**ABOVE AND RIGHT:**  
*Homage to Tissot*  
2016  
Steel and aluminium armature, papier-mâché, oil paint, found objects  
94 x 28 x 25 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Michel Brouet





# The Sirena series (2007–2017)

The *sirena* is a figure present in the folklore of the Chiloé archipelago in southern Chile. As her name suggests, she combines aspects of the *sirena* introduced by Spanish colonists with similar indigenous water spirits in the indigenous cultures of the region. In the series of paintings displayed in the exhibition, the *sirena* is interpreted in various ways to express the adverse impact of aquaculture on the waterways around the archipelago (represented by images of the *sirena* in distress), the projected – and highly contentious – construction of a bridge to the mainland, and a variety of other topics.

DR PHILIP HAYWARD



**ABOVE:**  
Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo  
*Marea roja*  
de la serie 'Sirenas de alarma'  
series 2007–2016  
Acrylic on canvas  
149 x 91.5 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite



**LEFT:**  
Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo  
*Fuga de salmones*  
de la serie 'Sirenas de alarma'  
series 2007–2016  
Acrylic on canvas  
149 x 91.5 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite



**RIGHT:**  
Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo  
*Sirena y cultivos*  
series 2007–2016  
Acrylic on canvas  
70 x 50 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite



**FAR RIGHT:**  
Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo  
*Sirena en Ten-ten*  
de la serie 'Sirenas de alarma'  
series 2007–2016  
Acrylic on canvas  
92 x 149 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite







**LEFT:**  
Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo  
*Sirena en Chacao*  
de la serie 'Sirenas de alarma'  
series 2007–2016  
Acrylic on canvas  
84.5 x 139 cm  
Collection the artist  
Photography Effy Alexakis, Photowrite



# List of works

Effy Alexakis  
Gorgona at Ancient Sites series  
*Gorgona at Monemvasia*  
*Gorgona at Xifas Beach #1*  
*Gorgona at Xifas Beach #2*  
*Gorgona at Old Monemvasia*  
*Gorgona at Nafplion*  
*Gorgona at Plitra (Asopos)*  
2017  
6 metallic prints; printed on Kodak Endura paper  
50.8 x 61 cm; 79 x 68.5 cm framed  
Collection the artist

Effy Alexakis  
*Gorgona shop, Plaka, Athens*  
*Gorgona shop, Plaka, Athens*  
*Gorgona shop, Plaka, Athens*  
*Gorgona shop, Plaka, Athens*  
*Gorgona shop, Plaka, Athens*  
*Fish shop, Monemvasia*  
*Pottery shop, Nafplion*  
*Gift shop, Gytheion*  
2017  
8 digital photographs; Lambda prints  
20 x 25 cm; 27 x 32 cm framed  
Collection the artist

Effy Alexakis  
*Cabinets of Curios*  
2017  
Various found objects  
Collection the artist

Alan Barlow  
*Casino Mermaids*  
2002  
Photograph  
Courtesy the artist

Eddie Blitner  
*Lightning Fisherman, The Mermaid + The Mimi*  
2015  
Acrylic on canvas  
102.5 x 113 cm  
Collection Philip Hayward

Meredith Brice  
*Great Barrier [G]reef*  
2017  
Primed 12 oz artist canvas, cotton thread, PVA  
two pieces: body 163 x 32 x 23 cm;  
fin – dimensions variable  
Collection the artist

Meredith Brice  
*Havfrue*  
2001  
Found timber, bronze, PVA  
three pieces: sculpture 39 x 29 x 6 cm;  
mounted with bronze wires on timber stand  
Collection the artist

Meredith Brice  
*[in]visible – icecap, atoll, island*  
2017  
Palm fibre, cotton, woven kuta sedge,  
nanofil fishing line, marine fossil, Keshi and  
South Sea pearls, found seashells, plastic, PVA,  
nanofil fishing line, pop rivets  
two pieces: bodice 56 x 43 x 20; fishtail 90 x 21 cm  
Collection the artist

Meredith Brice  
*Lure*  
2017  
Polyester, Keshi and South Sea pearls, cotton thread,  
plastic and metal parts  
two pieces: bodice 56 x 40 x 34 cm; fishtail 176 x 41 cm  
sound: ‘Lure’ song  
‘Lure’ wearables – two pieces: hand fins 73 x 16 cm  
x 4 mm; neck and shoulder piece 52 x 15 x 6 cm  
Polyester, vylene, South Sea and Keshi pearls,  
metal parts, magnetised plastic, polyester thread,  
PVA, pop rivets  
Collection the artist

Meredith Brice  
*MER cocoon*  
2017  
Casting plaster  
two pieces: body 126 x 38 x 18 cm; fin 72 x 48 x 10 cm  
Collection the artist

Meredith Brice  
*MER Island*  
2017  
Casting plaster, enamel paint, Derivan acrylic  
Yin Min blue  
72 x 39 x 12 cm  
Collection the artist

Meredith Brice  
*Strait of Hormuz*  
2017  
Kentia palm, acrylic and enamel paint, metal  
and plastic screws  
six pieces: bodice 76 x 41 x 24 cm;  
fishtail 121 x 28 x 27 cm; tailfin 50 x 37 x 15 cm;  
headdress – dimensions variable  
Collection the artist

Meredith Brice  
*Strange creature: Nantucket whalesong*  
2017  
Plywood, PVA, straw, metal tacks  
147 x 44 x 23 cm  
Collection the artist

Meredith Brice  
*The birth of MER*  
2017  
Video, format: QuickTime movie  
Photography: the artist.  
Technical editor: Pierre Laba Sarkis  
Duration: 3 min  
Collection the artist

Maria Cmielewski  
*Warsaw Mermaid*  
2011  
Beer can, dead shells, ballerina, desk, LED  
On loan from Cecelia Cmielewski

Cmielewski family  
*Polonia soccer club memorabilia* (from 1950)  
2017  
Paper, enamel, various metals  
30 x 42 cm framed  
Collection Cmielewski family

Daniel Mudie Cunningham  
*No Ordinary Love*  
2017  
Single-channel video with found sound,  
4:3 aspect ratio, 4.43 min  
Editor: Vera Hong  
Music: Sade, *No Ordinary Love*, 1992  
(karaoke version sourced from YouTube)  
Songwriters: Helen Folasade Adu,  
Stuart Matthewman  
Thanks: Craig Bender, Sarah Contos, Rhonda Davis,  
Elliott Bryce Foulkes, Elizabeth Reidy  
Collection the artist

Kate Downhill  
*Slits (Hanivers)*  
2016  
Oil on canvas  
54 x 79 cm  
Collection the artist

Jacqueline Drinkall  
*Ecosexual Evidence*  
2017  
Found snake roadkill and condoms  
33.5 x 48.8 cm framed  
Collection the artist



<div>Jacqueline Drinkall</div> <div><i>Department of Corrections</i></div> <div>2010</div> <div>High definition colour, 5 min</div> <div>Video stills</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Jacqueline Drinkall</div> <div><i>Weather Underwater</i></div> <div>2010</div> <div>4 digital prints on archival aluminium on Perspex</div> <div>21.5 x 41.5 cm image size; 25 x 43 cm framed</div> <div>2 digital prints on archival aluminium on Perspex</div> <div>21.5 x 41.5 cm image size</div> <div>4 digital prints; printed on Kodak Endura paper</div> <div>23.5 x 24 cm image size; 29.5 x 42 cm sheet size</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Nola Jones</div> <div><i>Mermaids</i></div> <div>2017</div> <div>Aluminium armature, wood, papier-mâché,</div> <div>acrylic paint</div> <div>74 x 86 x 22 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Nola Jones</div> <div><i>Helen</i></div> <div>2012</div> <div>Aluminium armature, papier-mâché, lead,</div> <div>oil paint, gold leaf</div> <div>86 x 20 x 12 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo</div> <div><i>Cuando se acaben los salmones</i></div> <div>series 2007–2016</div> <div>Acrylic on canvas</div> <div>92.5 x 149.5 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo</div> <div><i>Sirena en Chacao</i></div> <div>de la serie ‘Sirenas de alarma’</div> <div>series 2007–2016</div> <div>Acrylic on canvas</div> <div>84.5 x 139 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>
<div>Jacqueline Drinkall</div> <div><i>Department of Corrections</i></div> <div>2010</div> <div>3 digital prints on archival aluminium on Perspex</div> <div>21.5 x 41.5 cm image size; 25 x 43 cm framed</div> <div>6 digital prints; printed on Kodak Endura paper</div> <div>23.5 x 24 cm image size; 29.5 x 42 cm sheet size</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Jacqueline Drinkall</div> <div><i>Wirxli2. Telepathic Balaclava Fascinator: Meshwork with Dolphin</i></div> <div>2012</div> <div>4 digital prints on paper with plastic adhesive</div> <div>21 x 29.5 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Nola Jones</div> <div><i>Belerion</i></div> <div>2015</div> <div>Steel and aluminium armature, papier-mâché,</div> <div>oil paint</div> <div>82 x 37 x 30 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Nola Jones</div> <div><i>Homage to Tissot</i></div> <div>2016</div> <div>Steel and aluminium armature, papier-mâché,</div> <div>oil paint, found objects</div> <div>94 x 28 x 25 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo</div> <div><i>Fuga de salmones</i></div> <div>de la serie ‘Sirenas de alarma’</div> <div>series 2007–2016</div> <div>Acrylic on canvas</div> <div>149 x 91.5 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo</div> <div><i>Sirena y cultivos</i></div> <div>series 2007–2016</div> <div>Acrylic on canvas</div> <div>70 x 50 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>
<div>Jacqueline Drinkall</div> <div><i>Elf Telepathetic Balaclava Fascinator</i></div> <div>2010</div> <div>Handwoven telecommunications wire</div> <div>83 x 27 x 23 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Nigel Helyer</div> <div><i>Syren</i></div> <div>2017</div> <div>Wood, paint, beeswax, audio resonators, digital audio</div> <div>400 x 15 x 10 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Nola Jones</div> <div><i>Dialogue</i></div> <div>2016</div> <div>Steel and aluminium armature, papier-mâché,</div> <div>oil paint</div> <div>75 x 70 x 35 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Nola Jones</div> <div><i>Sarasvati</i></div> <div>2009</div> <div>Aluminium armature, papier-mâché, wood, lead,</div> <div>found objects, oil paint</div> <div>112 x 32 x 30 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo</div> <div><i>Marea roja</i></div> <div>de la serie ‘Sirenas de alarma’</div> <div>series 2007–2016</div> <div>Acrylic on canvas</div> <div>149 x 91.5 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>	<div>Mauro Anselmo Olivos Castillo</div> <div><i>Sirena en Ten-ten</i></div> <div>de la serie ‘Sirenas de alarma’</div> <div>series 2007–2016</div> <div>Acrylic on canvas</div> <div>92 x 149 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>
<div>Jacqueline Drinkall</div> <div><i>Weather Underwater</i></div> <div>2010</div> <div>High definition colour with audio, 5 min</div> <div>Video stills</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>		<div>Nola Jones</div> <div><i>Sirens</i></div> <div>2017</div> <div>Aluminium armature, papier-mâché, found objects,</div> <div>oil paint</div> <div>55 x 30 x 22 cm</div> <div>Collection the artist</div>			



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