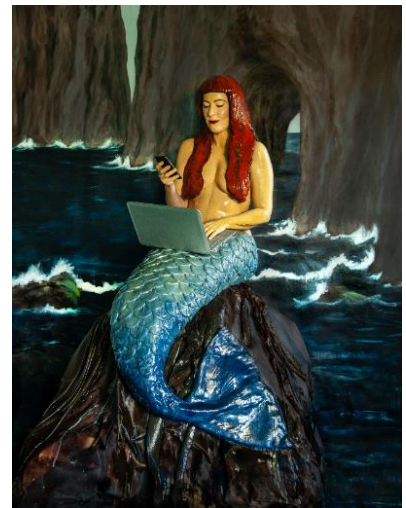




5 October 2022

Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery launches *The Mermaid Chronicles*



Images: [Left] Brett Stanley, *Hannah in the Kelp*, 2020, digital colour print, 3.65m x 2.45m (approx), courtesy of the artist. [Centre] Video still from *MeduSirena, The Wreck Bar, Fort Lauderdale, Florida*, 2021–22, video, colour, sound, 2 mins 37 secs, Courtesy of Wendy Marina Anderson. [Right] Julia Holden, *Megan Dunn, Mermaid (after John W Waterhouse)*, 2021, Colour photograph, Collection of Megan Dunn.

Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery's upcoming exhibition, *The Mermaid Chronicles*, is the first exhibition to showcase the rise of the professional mermaid and to track the mythical figure through high and popular culture.

The Mermaid Chronicles features art works, photographs, videos, stories and artefacts selected and written by Megan Dunn, the current Writer in Residence at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington's International Institute of Modern Letters.

Megan's fascination with mermaids began in 1984, when she watched *Splash* and fell head over heels for the actress Daryl Hannah swimming as the mermaid Madison, in a 'realistic' orange fish tail. "I've wanted to be a mermaid ever since," Megan says. "And now, I know it is a career option."

Megan is now an expert on the subject, having Skyped mermaid performers worldwide for two years for her next book.

“Interviewing mermaids, I have learnt about everything from climate change to the personalities of fish,” Megan says.

“An art exhibition is a no-brainer. The world of the professional mermaid is so visual, full of bespoke mermaid tails and amazing underwater photos.” The show will even include Megan’s own neoprene mermaid tail, ‘The Madison.’

Director of the Adam Art Gallery Christina Barton says: “When we heard Megan was the next Writer in Residence on campus we felt it was the perfect opportunity to bring the two trajectories of her career—visual art and writing—together. This is a new venture for her and for us. Megan has embarked on an autobiographical mode of curating which means the show is filtered through her voice, at the same time it opens a window to a world we knew nothing about.”

The Mermaid Chronicles showcases underwater footage of ‘real life’ performers working in porthole bars, saltwater aquariums, and the ocean, presented alongside contemporary artworks that explore the enduring mythos of the mermaid.

Olivia Erlanger’s *Pergusa (Gris)* is an installation of a mermaid tail protruding from the door of a front-loader industrial washing machine. First presented at a laundromat in Los Angeles, Erlanger’s work became a viral sensation on Instagram. The show also includes a portrait by artist Julia Holden of Megan Dunn, painted to resemble John William Waterhouse’s *A Mermaid*.

One of the highlights is a vintage mermaid tail from the early 1900s that belonged to the Australian swimmer and silent film star Annette Kellerman, considered by many to be the first professional mermaid. Kellerman was the first woman to perform in a feature film as a mermaid and popularised the one-piece swimsuit for women at the turn of the century.

The Mermaid Chronicles links Kellerman’s legacy to current professional mermaids, such as Hannah Mermaid, who uses her profile as a mermaid for environmental activism. Hannah also saw *Splash* as a child, and afterwards she made her first tail out of an orange tablecloth and swam in it until it disintegrated. Hannah says, “I got to live my dream. Feminine empowerment is rising and so is the icon of the mermaid.”

The exhibition also features a number of video installations. Attendees are invited into the world of MeduSirena and her cast of aquaticats, who perform underwater burlesque at The Wreck, a vintage porthole bar in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

They will also learn about Merman Jax, one of the highest-profile merman performers in Los Angeles. “In the right niche category, a merman gets more work than a mermaid,” Jax says. Jax runs his own event company Dark Tide Entertainment, “inspiring a workforce disenchanted by emotionless work”.

“When people hear the word mermaids, they usually think of either children’s parties or strip clubs,” Megan says. “The association of the mermaid with sexuality is ancient; pagan mermaids were represented in churches to warn worshippers not to give in to their appetites.

“The show is for everyone who has heard the mermaids calling, and everyone else besides,” Megan says.

The Mermaid Chronicles will be on show at the Adam Art Gallery from 21 October–18 December 2022.

Exhibition details

Megan Dunn: The Mermaid Chronicles
Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery
21 October–18 December 2022

Opening hours

Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery
Tuesday–Sunday 11 am–5 pm

Group visits are welcome. If your group is larger than five people and you would like a tour or introduction to the shows, contact the Gallery Administrator, Ann Gale, ann.gale@vuw.ac.nz or 04-463 5229.

Address

Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington
Gate 3, Kelburn Parade
Wellington 6140

Megan Dunn is available for interviews. For more information, high resolution images, or to arrange an interview with artists or the curators, contact:

Kate Lepper, Public Programmes and Communications Coordinator,
kate.lepper@vuw.ac.nz, 04 886 5455.

Issued by Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington

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