

Fenja and Menja Moil at the Mill

A Visual Modern Interpretation of Female Role in Old Norse Mythology



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Introduction

The inspiration for my BFA video installation "Fenja and Menja Moil at the Mill" started with the painting "St. Eulalia," by John Waterhouse. I saw this painting many times when I lived in London. I was fascinated by the artist's ability to portray his subject projecting into the painting. This deep foreshortening had a specific affect on me. I was drawn into the picture and her story as a result of it. Waterhouse places the viewer at eye level with Eulalia and we along with the others facing us in the painting became spectators of her death. The scale of the painting gave me a sense of being there. Now many years later I used Waterhouse's painting as an example of how to draw viewers into a work of art by using large scale and extreme perspective at eye level. I used this painter's techniques to engage my audience, however I switched the perspective from a male to a female gaze in order to change the structure of influence.

Last summer I captured video and observed the distortions that occurred when shooting from my perspective and what happens to my form by showing my arms jutting strongly into the background (extreme perspective.) I thought the water suspending my body was the best way to experiment with this point of view. Then I planned to use the experimental footage as a way to engaging the viewer and submerge them in the installation. I envisioned the video to be projected in a way that would allow the audience to feel they were underwater and in my place. Later I would look at the footage to decipher the visual language that emerged. I thought to explore the connections between the female gaze and an Old Norse Mythological story of two powerful female characters. This connection to myth and feminine perspective is seen in the way Pippolotti Rist explores the relationship between Cupid and contemporary notions of female expectations of love generated by our culture and

media. I am completing a Scandinavian Studies minor along with my Bachelors of Fine Arts in sculpture and I look for Norwegian mythological feminine prototypes to develop the form and content of my video work.¹ However unlike Rist who often is the object being looked at in her videos I shifted the gaze from a male dominated one to my view and I immerse my audience as they adopt my perspective. I am showing my viewpoint as a woman and in doing that I shift the power position from being the object gazed upon to the one the gazing.

Once I sifted through all the video I had collected I focused on the footage of my hands and arms underwater. I researched Scandinavian mythology and found the story of the giantesses Fenja and Menja.



Saint Eulalia, by John William Waterhouse, 1888

¹ Weintraub, Linda. "In the Making." *New York: Distributed Art* (2003)

"Fenja and Menja Moil at the Mill"

I have aimed to explore the human form underwater to experiment with my reinvention of an Old Norse myth based in Snorri Sturluson's Eddic poetry. He compiled and possibly recorded some of the Norse oral traditions in Iceland in the early part of the thirteenth century. He was from a well-educated, Christian background, significant in that the stories passed down to us were seen through the lens of an outsider. Within this context I am investigating immersive video installations that engage the audience and create a visceral and empathetic experience.



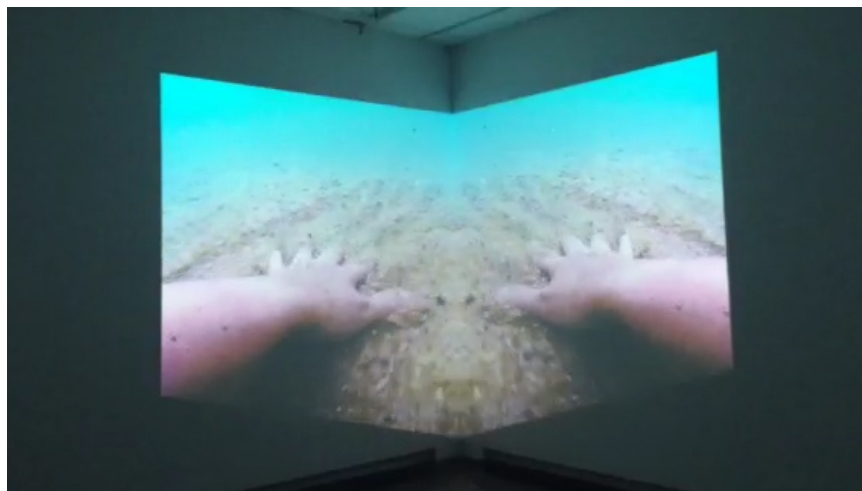
My video installation is large at ten feet high and eighteen feet wide and ten feet deep. I have modified the room by building two walls that come together to make a corner as



the viewer enters into what would normally be a rectangular shaped room. The underwater video work shows my hands as the tools. The imagery and the sound of dragging my hands on the surface of the sand is intended to be spellbinding, or terrifying depending on the viewer's

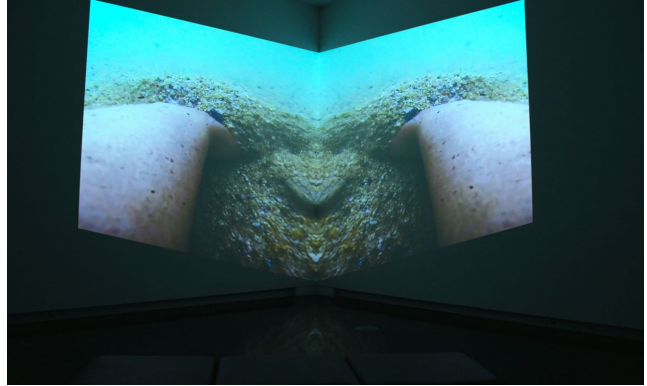
perception of the ocean. My hands brush the sand while being pushed forward and pulled back by the ocean waves. I took this imagery and mirrored it to create a Rorschach effect in the center of the screen. The imagery implied that there were two people and one at the same time. The same arm twice, indicating two people and one person with two arms the same.

This way I propose the viewer to think my arms are their arms and as they look again they may understand these are two arms mirrored, possibly two women acting as one. I anticipated projecting the image into a corner. This would act as the center for the Rorschach effect, giving the under water images an otherworldly feel. It was also important to transform the usual flat surface of video imagery to inhabit the space of the room, not just a time medium projected onto a wall. This would eventually make the video a part of the building and surround the audience promoting the feeling of being underwater and in another world. The extreme perspective of my arm pushing out into space distorted my forearm making it at times unrecognizable as an arm. My hands pushing and pulling the sand forward and backward in combination with the sound engaged the audience in a virtual experience by placing them in my stead. I designed the sound from the actual video footage. I took the raw audio and edited out the high frequency and pings that were distracting. I then enhanced the levels on the sound of my hand being dragged along the surface of the sand. I also reduced the levels of sound in the water to place them more in context of the whole picture, this way the water noises did not distract from the subject of the hands. The looped video seems like an endless constant action is taking place.



The Song of Grotti

Fenja and Menja were two large, strong giantesses from Sweden purchased as slaves by Danish King Fródi. Grotti was the name of a magic mill that produced whatever the women asked it to. No one was strong enough to work the mill but the slave women. Fródi commanded the women to grind at the magic mill and forced them to grind gold, peace and happiness.² He charged them to sing his household asleep. The giantesses were content to grind at the bottom of the ocean and sing until they asked Fródi to



released them once they ground enough gold to make him very wealthy. Fródi reveals that they will grind for eternity; his lust for wealth could not be satisfied. This news enraged Fenja and Menja and in turn they foretell his demise at the hands of the invaders.³ The women let it be known that Fródi did not know with whom he was dealing when he bought them as slaves.

In Snorri Sturlusson's Edda he introduces the giantesses and gives them a voice, so we can empathize with their experience as magical slaves on the floor of the ocean.

15 'We continued for seasons,
so that we became well known for our fighting deeds;
there we slices with sharp spears

² Krappe, Alexander Hagerty "The Song of Grotte," Modern Language Review 19 (1924).

³ Larrington, Carolyne. The Poetic Edda. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

blood from wound and made swords red.⁴

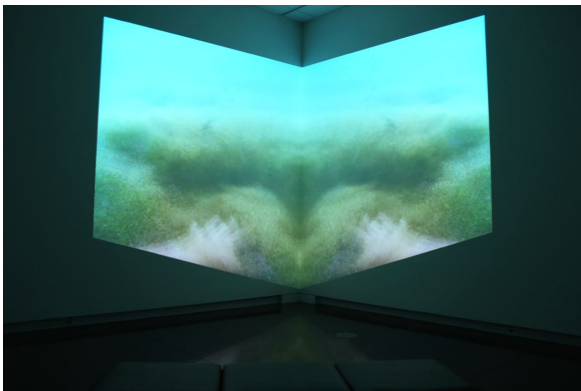
16 'Now we have come to the dwellings of the king without mercy, and live as slaves,
mud eats away at our feet, the rest of of us is chilled
through

we drag the calmer of strife; its dull at Frodi's house.'⁵

20 'You shan't hold onto the throne of Lejre,
the red-gold rings, not this magic grindstone.

Lets us seize the handle, girl, turn more swiftly!

We are not yet warmed by the blood of slaughtered men.'⁶



This last sentence indicates that the slave girls
ground out a large army lead by King Mysing
the sea king, who's defeats Frodi. His death
signals the end of "Fródi's Peace."⁷ This term
became known throughout the Danish region
at the time of his rule, there was such great

prosperity that King Fródi could leave large gold rings out around a pole in public and no one
would steal them. The rings left untouched signified that the region was so prosperous no one
needed steal the gold rings.⁸ Once King Mysing's army defeated Fródi, he also took the
giantesses along with the millstone. As a sea king would, he asked them to grind salt. Again

⁴ Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

⁵ Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

⁶ Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. Print.

⁷ Lindow, John. "Grottasöng." *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. 150-53. P. 152, Print.

⁸ Lindow, John. "Grottasöng." *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. 152. Print.

they asked if they had ground enough, the reply was no and again they ground until Mysing's ship sank. A giant whirlpool was created as water rushed through the millstone and the waters became salty.⁹ Again the women conquered the powerful kings. This leads me to question why they were willing to be taken as slaves in the first place, knowing they had the strength and power to conjure their subjugator's demise. It is also important to note that in our entire collection of Old Norse Mythological records there is no record of women doing extraordinary acts, only giantesses and goddesses. We can conclude that this portrayal of females was another way women were subject to patriarchal perspectives.¹⁰

Visually Participating in Mythological Tradition

As I read the translations of the Nordic mythologies in the Edda written by our primary source Snorri Sturlusson many questions arise. He interpreted these pagan myths from an oral tradition from his perspective as a Christian. This led me to the question, "what does it mean to reinterpret Old Norse mythology within a modern context?" To examine this question I will deconstruct some of the history, culture and natural settings that greatly influenced the origins of the story of "Fenja and Menja at the Mill" and their subsequent interpretations. This will shed some light on the use of myth throughout history and how I as



a woman have interpreted the myth visually through my video installation.

⁹ Krappe, Alexander Hagerty "The Song of Grotte," Modern Language Review 19 (1924).

¹⁰ Teitelbaum, Benjamin PhD. Lecture, Old Nordic Mythology, University of Colorado, Boulder, Co. Spring 2015.

The story of Fenja and Menja at the mill was not originally included in the Cōdex Rēgus (an Icelandic manuscript and origin of some Old Norse Poems.) However, it was in later editions in the *Gróttasöngur*, one of the Snorri Sturluson's Poetic Edda named Skáldskaparmál.¹¹ Like many Old Norse mythological stories, it has a complicated past. The majority of the information we have today on Old Norse mythology is from Snorri Sturluson's account.¹² There are not many poems that have a written source directly connected to the pagan tradition. We can conclude that we are left with the writer's "version" from his particular worldview at the time it was recorded.¹³ Interpretations are considered problematic; there is not a lot written about these mythologies so we do not know if they are historically accurate and the fact that there are many translations complicates matters even more. Despite this, these myths play a role in society throughout time. "By enacting and incorporating myths in their daily lives, humans are able to have a genuine religious experience. Indeed, it is through recalling and bringing back the gods of the past into the present that one becomes their contemporary and at the same time is transported into primordial or sacred time."¹⁴

These mythologies often gave reason for natural occurrences. Science as we know it today did not exist to explain the natural and social events in the thirteenth century. It is human nature to seek reasons for both good and bad experiences. People's lives were often brutally ruled by nature. Myth serves the purpose of bringing meaning and a way to view the

¹¹ Krappe, Alexander Hagerty "The Song of Grotte," *Modern Language Review* 19 (1924) p. 325.

¹² Snorri Sturluson, Jesse Byock, *The Prose Edda*, Penguin Group (USA) Incorporated, (2006) Print, p.xxi.

¹³ Teitelbaum, Benjamin PhD., Old Norse Mythology Class, University of Colorado, Boulder, January 2015.

¹³ Zipes, Jack, *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*. Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1994.

Creative Storytelling: Building Community/Changing Lives. New York: Routledge, 1995.

world by giving reasons for naturally occurring events. If we can explain why something happens maybe we will feel more in control of the uncontrollable. The origin of the mythology comes from Nordic pagan oral tradition, retold countless times and eventually recorded from a Christian perspective with a specific agenda. This highlights the fluidity of mythological storytelling, through time archetypes and storylines change based on the storyteller's perspective. It sets a precedent that these myths are stories that have been and should be reinterpreted through time. We understand that their purpose was to set ideas of social conformity and they were intended for this reason.

The myth of the giantesses grinding "Frodi's flour" (a kenning/metaphor for gold) at the bottom of the ocean explains a time of prosperity under the reign of King Frodi, a direct descendant of Odin according to Skjöld (Frodi's grandfather and founder of the royal Danish house). Sturluson also claims Frodi was a contemporary of Rome's Emperor Augustus who, ". . . imposed peace on the entire world when Christ was born." This mention of Augustus also reveals Sturluson's Christian worldview. This could have been Sturluson's way to humanize and therefore diminish the godhood of Odin and simultaneously legitimize King Frodi's reign. This is an odd perspective in the light of pagan gods and the drama that unfolds in their stories as they interact with each other and humans. Fenja and Menja also ground out "Frodi's peace," explaining the end of a golden age once Frodi met his demise.¹⁵

The giantesses ceaseless grinding would eventually explain to Nordic peoples the saltiness of the ocean and the mysteries of maelstroms. There is a lot of room for conjecture and creative interpretation because we simply do not have enough evidence to prove otherwise. This problem of interpreting Nordic mythology is the very same reason why I felt

¹⁵ Lindow, John. "Grottasöng." *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002. p. 152, Print.

free to give this story a visual representation within a modern context. Perhaps I am merely a participant in the evolution of this story as I reimagine a vision of the giantess's perspective at the bottom of the ocean in the twenty first century. By creating art from a feminine perspective about powerful female mythological creatures I aim to engage people to place themselves in the position of these women. By doing this maybe they will ask themselves, who are these women? As I did when I saw "Eulalia." By drawing attention to powerful women I intend to empower others.

From Old Mythology to New Technology

"Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths." Joseph Campbell ¹⁶

"To enter one of the carefully prepared darkened spaces of a Viola video



installation, and to encounter there his conjunction of distilled and deeply evocative images and objects and sound, is an experience that registers as being intensely private, as if it were an encounter or dream unique to oneself." ¹⁷

Research is a central aspect to my work. Bill Viola, Olafur Eliasson and Pippolotti Rist are three modern artist that have had an impact on ideas I have developed using

Bill Viola, Ascension, 2000, video/sound installation

¹⁶ Campbell, *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*, edited by Betty Sue Flowers. Doubleday and Co., 1988.

¹⁷ Judson, William D. Bill Viola: *Allegories in Subjective Perception* Art Journal, Vol. 54, No. 4, Video Art (Winter, 1995), p. 30.

human interaction with elemental forces, to interpret space as well as using saturated colors to engage my audience visually.

I have been greatly influenced by Bill Viola, a pioneer of video installation. His subjects are humans and his themes; their interaction with elemental forces such as water, fire, earth, and air. Intrigued by the sacred aspects of nature, his work encompasses a holistic observation of human belief from Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Judeo-Christian mysticism, and Sufism. "Bill Viola is constantly searching for greater understanding of the spiritual heritage of humankind, looking beyond individual limitations toward a more collective, universal mind."¹⁸ His work also reflects a curiosity for myth across cultural and geographic boundaries.¹⁹ This examination of ritual and literature makes his work have a style that is unmistakably his own. His perspective is about the subject and connection to the human experience. He is from the generation of artists who began experimenting with new ways to engage their audience and challenge the entrenched ideas of the white cube. It is his subject matter and ability to give his viewers immersive experiences that has had the greatest impact on my work. I share Viola's curiosity about human spirituality, which also seems to have a connection to human interaction with natural forces. Historically this is also a common theme in Scandinavian art.



Bill Viola, *Ascension*, 2000, video/sound installation, photo Kira Perov

¹⁸ London, Barbara, Bill Viola: *Installation and Videotapes the Poetics of Light and Time*, The Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY (1987)

¹⁹ London, Barbara, Bill Viola: *Installation and Videotapes the Poetics of Light and Time*, The Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY (1987)

A Modern Nordic view on Nature

"Through your eyes the nature is perceiving itself."-- Olafur Eliasson

Olafur Eliasson, the internationally renowned Danish-Icelandic artist has also influenced my thinking about nature and human interaction and how that affects our ideas about art spaces. He says, "Perception and physical experience are cornerstones in art."²⁰ His work is often monumental in scale; they have been sculptures, installations or ephemeral art. Usually he works in conjunction with organizations and public art funds, which then facilitate the monumental scale. I recognize this is a strategic way to accomplish large-scale works, which I intend to continue making. Recently he worked with natural themes like waterfalls, ice melting, rain, and sun. He has created large man made waterfalls sponsored by the city of New York.²¹ He used light and atmospheric changes for an installation at the Tate Modern in London.²² Recently he worked with another artist in cooperation with Greenland as a reaction to the latest scientific reports on the polar ice melting. As an artist he felt it part of his responsibility to use his art to promote awareness and be a catalyst for change. He said, "As an artist, I am interested in how we give knowledge a body. What does a thought feel like, and how can *felt* knowledge encourage action . . . I hope that people will touch the inland ice at City Hall Square and be touched by it."²³ He is known for his large-scale installations, which emphasize the importance of embodied space by using natural elements to create immersive experiences. He also experiments with, "How space is perceived and

²⁰ Arterritory.com, Baltic, Russian and Scandinavian Art Territory, http://www.artterritory.com/en/news/4130-olafur_eliasson_is_melting_100_tonnes_of_ice_in_copenhagen/ accessed January 20th, 2015.

²¹ Vogel, Carol. Olafur Eliasson, *From Master of Weather, 4 Waterfalls for New York*, The New York Times, Published: June 2, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/02/arts/design/02wate.html>

²² Eliasson, Olafur. "The Future is Curved." *Architectural Design* 84.5 (2014): 86-93.

²³ Arterritory.com, Baltic, Russian and Scandinavian Art Territory, http://www.artterritory.com/en/news/4130-olafur_eliasson_is_melting_100_tonnes_of_ice_in_copenhagen/ accessed January 20th, 2015.

created through the presence and movement of the human body." ²⁴ His analytical view of how humans respond to space influenced my choice to use human forms submerged in elemental forces. This imagery inside an installation displayed in a three dimensional format would mean another layer of insight and interpretation of that space for my audience as the arms moved through the video and virtually through the room.

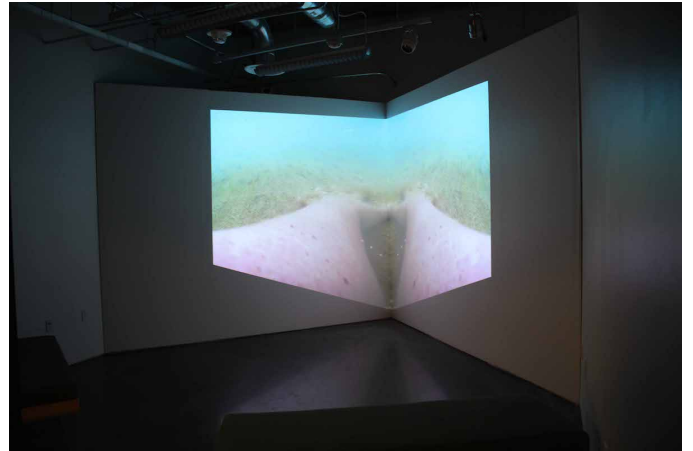


Michelle Sparks, *Fenja and Menja Moil at the Mill*, 2014, video/sound installation

²⁴ Eliasson, Olafur. "The Future is Curved." *Architectural Design* 84.5 (2014): 86-93.



A visitor stands in Olafur Eliasson's installation, Beauty1993



Michelle Sparks, Fenja and Menja Moil at the Mill, 2014



Pippolotti Rist, Pour Your Body Out, 2004

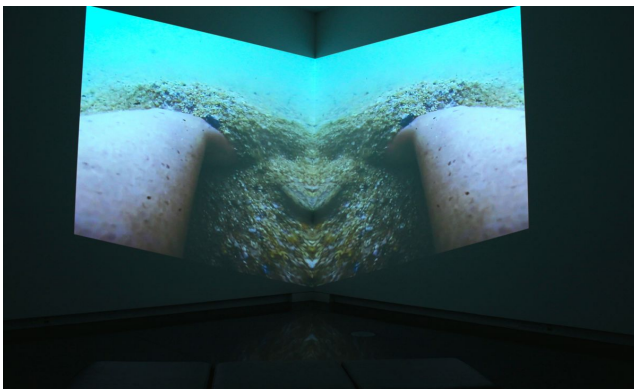


Pippolotti Rist, Sip My Ocean, 1996

Enchanted by Women

"Our finding ourselves is how the other watches...One of the classic aims of cultural expression is to uncover something for each other, to see how someone else is perceiving the world-because we are so extremely alone. And then, if we watch something together, it might bring us closer to understanding each other." -Pipilotti Rist

Rist is another video artist that has made an impact on some of my aesthetic choices. She also incorporates mythological female archetypes in her fantastical videos. She portrays herself as Mother Nature in her video work they are hyper saturated in color and filled with reverie set in nature. I too use the notion of female mythological characters and highly saturated colors in my video work. In "Sip My Ocean" (1996) she swims through the screen alongside collaged images of sumptuous nature that surround her. She uses her own voice to sing her version of Chris Isaak's ballad, *Wicked Game*. She sings the line " I don't wanna fall in love ... with you."²⁵ Over and over she sings this and her voice becomes wretched and comical the more she repeats these lyrics. It is clear she means " I do not want to fall in love with you, as it has only brought me grief this far." Her installation acts like a mock MTV video with



undercurrents of female perspective on romance and disappointment, perpetuated and fueled by popular culture and media.²⁶ "Pour Your Body Out (7354 Cubic Meters)," "The concept was not to destroy or be provocative to the

²⁵ Weintraub, Linda. "In the Making." *New York: Distributed Art* (2003).

²⁶ Weintraub, Linda. "In the Making." *New York: Distributed Art* (2003).

architecture, but to melt in — as if I would kiss Taniguchi.”²⁷(The architect who designed the building) She utilizes written instruction to promote her audience's participation. An introductory text encourages: “Please feel as liberated as possible, and move as freely as you can or want to! Watch the videos and listen to the sound in any position or movement. Practice stretching: pour your body out of your hips or watch through your legs. Rolling around and singing is also allowed!”²⁸ Her work being particularly feminine and hyper saturated has had a significant impact on what I do. In "Fenja and Menja Moil at the Mill," similar to Rist I saturated the color to compel my audience to linger with the work, in the same way they linger with Rist's work.

Unlike Rist my work is not about objectifying the female form and thereby reinforcing sexism.²⁹ My video is about becoming the viewer and presenting my gaze as the perspective. I subvert the power of the male gaze and I become the one gazing, in doing this I also place the viewer in my stead and they become the female gazing. By placing the audience in this position as viewer, I capture them so they stay in the room with the work, inhabiting the space. Even this lingering would change the meaning of the space; people bring the meaning to the artwork by their experience with it.

A Sculptors Problem with the White Cube

Sculptors are slaves to space, they must always think about a particular three-dimensional space and how it changes or has a different meaning if their work is in that place. It is no longer acceptable to make things and place it in the public arena with no

²⁷ Rosenberg, Karen Pipilotti Rist, *Tiptoe by the Tulips*. New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/arts/design/21rist.html?_r=0, Accessed September 12, 2014.

²⁸ Rosenberg, Karen Pipilotti Rist, *Tiptoe by the Tulips*. New York Times, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/21/arts/design/21rist.html?_r=0, Accessed September 12, 2014.

²⁹ Erens, Patricia. "Introduction", *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*. Patricia Erens, ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. pp. xvii.

consideration for the space. In this way sculptors are slaves to the space their work occupies. I have been trying to find solutions to this problem of slavery to space. For the past three years I have been experimenting with different ways to engage audiences with my work, to interact on varying levels with my art. This way of thinking is not new since the 1960's, "Standard art materials and venues were being challenged, and for many artists the act of experiencing art took precedence over the production of tangible, salable art objects."³⁰ I have been researching ways to encourage the audience to break the rules of the white cube, this idea that you cannot touch or interact something in an art gallery. This tenet is strongly embedded in our minds. It is nearly impossible to achieve a level of audience participation without some form of written instructions beside the work in the gallery setting. The dilemma of the white cube continues to pose limitations on sculptors nearly sixty-five years later. Most artists like myself find the prestige and context of the white cube to be the desired destination for our work as it gives a broadly accepted legitimacy to the work. This idea is similar to an aspiring writer who wants to become published. This is the magical place that elevates and signals the work to the world as somehow important. However it also presents many limitations to the sculptor, as three-dimensional spaces are both context and content, not merely a place to show off art. As a student of sculpture I am always aware of the space my work is destined to reside. If all the art I make is fated to live in a white cube then I must consider this before I create the work and my art must also conform to the guidelines of the white cube. In order to subvert those rules artists are becoming more aware of involving their audience in their work. Some artists try to circumvent the white cube all together, however the system of the white cube in the art world is strong and not many viable alternatives have

³⁰ London, Barbara, Bill Viola: *Installation and Videotapes the Poetics of Light and Time*, The Museum of Modern Art, NY, NY (1987)

been implemented that operate on the same level. That said, this also means I am confined by the context of this space as well.

My aim is to transcend the white cube reality and broaden the rules, this way I create more options for my art. The goal is to encourage my audience to engage with the work, to realize it by virtually participating as I create a sympathetic experience. I wrap my imagery around the audience in order that they would walk into the video even when they were casting a shadow on the walls. I could imagine using this idea of pulling my audience into the work by utilizing Waterhouse's tactics of large scale at eye level with the subject in extreme perspective. My intention was to experiment with these aspects as methods of engagement.

Waterhouse achieved captivating his audience, pulling them into his painting. Of course he did not want his audience to actually break the rules of the museum and literally try to step through the painting. However, he did give them the illusion they were stepping through a door into a scene suspended in time. In contrast to the typical painting of the Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was like peering voyeuristically through a window, leaving the viewer feeling like an outsider. I was inspired by how Waterhouse engaged me in his painting of Eulalia. I could not help but want to know about this girl. I felt I was standing there watching this tragedy unfold before me. I imagined I became a part of her story as a spectator in her death. Eulalia was a young woman age 12 martyred. I theorize that Waterhouse utilized this approach to pique our curiosity about his subject. I aspired to do the same.

"Prudentius says that the body of St. Eulalia was shrouded ' by the miraculous fall of snow when lying in the forum after her martyrdom.' St Eulalia was martyred in 304AD for refusing to make sacrifices to the Roman gods. The method of her death was particularly gruesome: two executioners

tore her body with iron hooks, then lighted torches were applied to her breasts and sides until finally, as the fire caught her hair, she was suffocated. Given the horrific circumstances of her death, and Eulalia's tender age (she is said to have been twelve years old), Waterhouse demonstrates little concern for realism. The setting for the picture is supposed to be Merida in Spain, which was then under the rule of the Roman Emperor Diocletian, but has been transferred to the Forum in Rome. Eulalia's body appears totally unharmed, her exposed breasts and flowing hair giving her a seductive rather than pathetic appearance."³¹

Waterhouse was equally limited by his worldview at the time of his portrayal of this young woman. He could only imply a horrific death through the red robes that wrap around the young woman's body. He could not actually show what had happened as recorded in history, which would make his portrait of her taboo for that time. It is his treatment of the female form that I am most concerned about. His particularly male view as voyeur that seems to be the most out of place when contemplating a young woman who was brave enough to die for what she believed in. This type of bravery was more in line with a masculine picture of a warrior than a young maiden. Her death was depicted as valiant and honorable through the snow and doves. I am not sure Waterhouse treated her form in the same manner. Her power seemed to come from the "seductive" aspect of her portrayal not the feat of bravery she

³¹ Hobson, Anthony *J.W. Waterhouse*, Oxford 1988, pp.34-7, reproduced p.35, in colour

endured. Her representation is the same as all images rendered by a patriarchal system of subjugation of the female, as she is the object consumed.³²

A Feminist Perspective on How to Handle the Female Perspective

As a woman, I have done work that is from a feminist perspective that attempts to deconstruct and question the idea of women being taught to view themselves through the lens of men. Like Fenja and Menja who were not always happy to be told what to do, however they still ground away at another's request. They only revealed what they were capable of once they had gone far beyond their ideas of accommodation. The giantesses were powerful figures of women, and unlike mortal women they could possess supernatural powers. They took their destiny in their own hands when they were denied rest from King Fródi. Menja sang an incantation that called invaders to come, Fródi did not listen to this warning song and he died from battle wounds. I perceive they were the ones in control even though they are introduced as slaves.

Waterhouse's perception of a young female martyr, as much as I appreciate his ability to find ways to engage his audience, his treatment of the female form is salacious and in my opinion made too beautiful to represent the girl who died such a horrific death. He was bound by his cultural ideals as a male to only imply the tragedy. As I filmed Fenja and Menja it never occurred to me to film an actual female grinding at the bottom of the sea. I intended to show the disembodied action of caressing the ocean floor and create a sympathetic experience by employing hands and arms. I aimed to depict both peaceful actions with repeated motion, which to some may indicate drudgery or may evoke a sense of being

³² Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833-44.

captivated by motion and sound. By showing my arms outstretched and looking out, the viewer is placed in my perspective, that of a woman. I am not the object for the gaze but I am the one gazing. I shift the power position from the usual male gaze to my perspective. My video challenges the usual ideas of female objectification and becomes a source of female empowerment. Like the giantesses that were called slaves, they held the fate of the king.

Conclusion

I was able to spend time with my installation and observe people's reaction to it. I was pleased to find that people would often be drawn into the room and stand staring, often for twenty minutes or more. Posing as an observer, I asked people what they thought about it. Many said they felt relaxed and glad to have a break from the chaos of their day, while others felt claustrophobic by the sensation of feeling submerged underwater. Many wondered what was the thing pushing and pulling the arms back and forth. Some children ran up to the walls and put their hands up like they were inside the large arms, others lay down on the chairs provided so they could just relax.

Art for me is an experimental process. I have determined that I cannot manipulate an audience as much as I can create something that has a language and observe what others gather from it. My goal with this piece was to make a large-scale work at eye level with the audience, paired with movement-associated sounds enhancing the sense of simulated touch, utilizing sound and visual cues only. My intention was to engage my audience. These giantess characters, according to Nordic myth, were doomed by their king to endlessly mill gold on a magic millstone at the bottom of the ocean. The myth is of exploitation and drudgery or is it? These women possessed the power to change their circumstances but only did so when pushed to their wits end. By combining hands in natural elements in extreme

perspective at eye level, I created a meditative atmosphere and an illusion of interactivity. From ancient to modern worldviews, the myth experiences paradigm shifts alongside social paradigms. By creating a visual representation of an ancient myth within a modern context I explore the reasons of how and why myth is so important in our everyday lives and how the meaning behind a myth is fluid and changes through time.

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