



MYTH & MEANING BENEATH THE SURFACE

A VISIONARY COLLABORATION ACROSS SCIENCE & STORYTELLING

Benton Jones, Director of Art for the Cape Cod Museum of Art, feels that the digital world is here to stay as a way that we will receive arts; that it can cut across boundaries to be a social, economic and cultural equalizer by providing access to a wide community. To that end the museum digitized its collection of over 2000 pieces in 2022 and is upgrading its brick-and-mortar performance space to allow for more digital art.

That space is now exhibiting “Mariniana, The Interrupted Wave: Techspressionist moving image works,” created by Karen LaFleur and Renata Janiszewska. This cutting-edge digital exhibition rides its own exciting wave of the avant-garde, using “Myth” and “Science” to explore the world of “Ocean.” The two year-long collaboration is an outgrowth of an exhibition in 2020 called “Pixels,” when Jones began to talk to Karen, who he said is one of digital art’s pioneers, about a larger project.

LaFleur said the theme of the ocean fit the museum’s mission, “and it seemed right because the ocean is so global and we are global artists, and the ocean touches people’s lives in so many different ways... how do people actually experience the ocean to understand the world? And that’s how we came up with science and myth.” Too, humanity impacts the oceans that LaFleur said is a major reason for the show: getting people to fall in love with the ocean through the artists’ imagery.

Janiszewska grew up in Toronto, LaFleur is a “Boston kid.” But ocean is in both creators’ blood. Janiszewska and her husband live in Lion’s Head, Canada on Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. “I can’t see the other side; it is like an ocean.” And Karen summered as a kid in Dennis, Mass., “before people came.” Given a tiny boat of her own she adored exploring the marshes, navigating the nearshore currents. “I’d look at the ocean and wonder what’s out there.” She and her late husband ran Pieper Gallery in Dennis for 30 years, near Cape Cod Bay and after a 16-year stint in the New York art scene, LaFleur returned to Yarmouth Port, where she’s been for six years. Both artists credit their rural/urban perspectives and their world travels for influencing their eclectic and global artistic gestalt.

Both are born artists. LaFleur said, at six or eight years old, “I’d build little villages of stone and straw and hide them in the dunes and behind rocks so people could find these ancient, abandoned villages.” Janiszewska’s father was a graphic designer in a family of architects and engineers: “He’d put a paint brush in my hand and say ‘Draw what you saw at the Santa Claus parade.’” Both trained formally as artists — Janiszewska with multiple disciplines, and experimental art, especially installations — and LaFleur focusing on drawing, in love with pencil on vellum.

COVER STORY

MARINIANA: THE INTERRUPTED WAVE: TECHSPRESSIONIST MOVING IMAGE WORKS
BY KAREN LAFLEUR AND RENATA JANISZEWSKA

CAPE COD MUSEUM OF ART

60 HOPE LANE

DENNIS, MASSACHUSETTS

THROUGH FEBRUARY 9

Karen LaFleur, *Aqua Columna* (6aa), 2024, Techspressionist moving image. Courtesy of the artist.



They came to digital in their own ways. LaFleur got a computer in 1981 for work in the gallery, then realized that the worlds she had created over the years, drawing, or building “three-foot tall characters with porcelain faces, in conversation with each other,” could translate to this new realm whose sophistication allowed a whole universe of possibilities.

Janiszewska got her first large iPad in 2010 and fell in love — the touch screen liberated her. “It’s magical,” she said. She never looked back, eschewing traditional art for her own experimental digital techniques.

They both are self-taught in digital, both growing with its ever-changing and expanding attributes. Janiszewska said that it’s an advantage that she did not take any courses but was hands-on and taught herself. Same for LaFleur, who said that it’s exhilarating to have a “machine which is your own spaceship” to explore formerly unknown realms of creativity.

What skill set does this new art take? “A stylus and a brain,” Janiszewska said — “and an impulse which runs between the brain and the hand.” LaFleur added that there is a diversity of tech art, it doesn’t have to be with a stylus, some make beautiful art with code — there are many ways for the creative sensibility and technology to link.

Eventually they found their way to the Techspressionist movement, where they met each other at an online monthly salon, joining with what is now a global community of 350 digital artists with a hashtag garnering 85,000 hits on Instagram. The movement which has deep roots dating from the 1960s bloomed when four prominent artists founded it: Patrick Lichty (who





TOP LEFT: Renata Janiszewska, Still from *In Bangor*, 2023, digital media. Courtesy of the artist.

TOP RIGHT: Renata Janiszewska, Still from *Sirens*, 2024, digital media. Courtesy of the artist.

BOTTOM: Renata Janiszewska, *Zeus, Reflected*, 2024, digital media. Courtesy of the artist.

PREVIOUS PAGE TOP: Karen LaFleur, *Aqua Columna (9a)*, 2024, Techspressionist moving image. Courtesy of the artist.

PREVIOUS PAGE BOTTOM: Karen LaFleur, *Aqua Planeta*, 2024, Techspressionist moving image. Courtesy of the artist.

forwarded the idea of technology as a viable new artistic medium), Steve Miller (who made silkscreens for Andy Warhol) and Oz Van Rosen with Colin Goldberg, who coined the word Techspressionism in 2011 — with Helen Harrison, former director of the Pollock Krasner House, advising.

Universally, art seeks to move people intellectually or emotionally. Techspressionism seeks to use technology — electronic, digital media, in an artistic expression to express emotion, and to enlarge an artist's voice. This is a new wave of abstract expressionism — a form of fine art, a new medium in a category cited by museum curators. It is not animation, not Pixar, not Disney.

To “paint on an electronic canvas,” Janiszewska uses an iPad Pro with an Apple pencil. She edits with MacBook Pro and on Luma Fusion. But it all starts as a still painting she makes using Adobe Fresco to design 100s of paint brushes specific to her

needs which give her work, “Its unusual look.” Tech allows her to draw with shapes and colors, to mix paints, to erase — all with a range of tools, no clean up and instantaneous results.

LaFleur said, “I love seeing my drawings come to life. My computer screen is my stage.” She scans drawings into her MacBook Pro, taking it to various small studios in her house where she can see images on various screens. Then she uses Photoshop to break up the drawings she creates into hundreds of pieces, layering and coloring them — then putting them in Apple Motion to create moving images, from whence those clips’ final assemblage occurs with Final Cut Pro. She sometimes uses 3D and other special effects like Blender, Cinema 4D and After Effects.

Both score their artworks. LaFleur has worked with composer Nancy Tucker for years on many projects. Janiszewska crafts her own music, mixing works in her husband's recording studio — a former CBC producer, he is now a full-time musician on piano and keyboard — and also uses GarageBand.

Part of the glory of the digital world is its portability. They need not be in the same room, they can meet, as they did once a month to work. You can work on your phone, anywhere — outdoors, in a museum.



For “Mariniana,” Janiszewska said, “I don’t want a narrative structure. I want to create something people will feel, which will touch your humanity. If you see a story in it, fine” but the intention is a visceral reaction. Her section, “Myth,” is inspired by an “emotional response to legends, myths and fairytales.”

She explores archetypes, the sirens of the “Odyssey,” mermaids, even Sedna whom she filters through her own soul subjectively as a white woman though it is originally an Inupiat, Inuit figure, saying, “I had a Sedna experience in my life.” There are digital collages, mauve sea creatures and abstracted objects kaleidoscoping; the quintessential storm at sea bringing ships down, drowning husbands; women trapped and metamorphosing; women with Botticelli hair and sea merging to one being, all scored to a foot-tapping surging beat.

LaFleur worked with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and M.I.T oceanographer Lukas Taenzer for her segments reflecting sea science, interpreting Taenzer’s focus on the interaction of coastal and open ocean waters, and examining the ocean’s five layers from the hadalpelagic to the epipelagic zone in non-literal impressions.

There is first a look at this water column from the bottom of the ocean, seaweed and plankton to higher life forms resembling anemones and larvae, their cilia and pincers swimming amongst strings of Siphonophores. Small horseshoe crabs. Creatures with suckers on the bottom. Becoming other creatures: odd legged whales, fish and dolphins, a history of upward evolution combined with the vertical water column.

The next segment is the horizontal water body, ocean eddy circulation and Taenzer’s robot collecting data; swirling netlike eddies which emulate graphics in his data charts, spirals, equations. Harp changes to a bass playing beneath the third segment of ocean currents, a globe connected by the forces on and around it, sun-in-water, rain drops, water drops, eels, fish, plankton. Never literal or “real,” always abstract.

Someday perhaps all we will have left of the ocean is the art and film which captured its likeness. Let’s hope that these two women’s stunning, almost hallucinatory images and mesmerizing evocations might prevent that from happening.

Lee Roscoe

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DONNA BASSIN:

Portraits of the Precarious Earth

ON VIEW
JAN 29
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2025



Donna Bassin, *Environmental Melancholia. Precarious Places. 71*, photograph, mixed media collage

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