

Press Release

BuBu de la Madeleine

A Mermaid's Territory – Flags and Internal Organs

9 Apr – 28 May 2022 11:00 - 19:00 Closed on Sun. Mon. and National Holidays



Sketch drawing of the exhibition

BuBu de la Madeleine came into renown through Dumb Type's performance piece *S/N* which toured to twenty cities in fifteen countries between 1994 and 1996. Especially notable was the last scene played to the sweet melody of "Amapola." In it, she reclined on a chair completely nude, slowly moving from the right to the left on the stage, while pulling the flags of all nations from her barely lit crotch. After leaving Dumb Type, BuBu started to work as a solo artist and a social activist confronting the issues of HIV/AIDS and sex work. "**A Mermaid's Territory - Flags and Internal Organs**" is her first solo exhibition at Ota Fine Arts since 2006, after a hiatus of sixteen years. She will show a new installation piece and drawings inspired by the project. Thematically, this body of new works can be called a sequel to her 2019 piece, *A Mermaid's Territory and Shedding of Old Skin*, which was presented at Arts Maebashi in the group exhibition, "The Ecology of Expression."

A Mermaid's Territory is a subject matter BuBu has pursued since 2004. In the aftermath of her best friend's death, she began to examine how a mermaid signified a being. For BuBu at this time, the mermaid resisted the rough waves in the space between the sea, the world of the dead, and the land. During the 2010s, BuBu became more aware of the boundary between her own body and those of the others through her everyday life as a sex worker. This was amplified by her experience as a domestic care giver for a family member. The initial transgression of an individual's physical body, the trespass of a personal boundary, can be defined as the moment of "touching or being touched." There are two ways for that to happen: as an expression of friendliness and care, or as the desire to conquer and attack. These trespasses are repeated on a larger scale at the borders of the national territories, against ethnic groups, genders, and sexualities, and we continue to be bombarded by these assaults on our daily lives. BuBu has come to think that "water," which is a den and a territory of a mermaid, can function as a metaphor for the world in which women and the other minorities who have been deprived of social power on the land can live.

BuBu had suffered a chronic psoriasis, a skin disease, for numerous years. Seeing her dry skin peel, she came up with an idea that perhaps a mermaid would molt. This evolved to her 2019 installation piece, *A Mermaid's Territory and Shedding of Old Skin*. Covering the structure made with wires were pieces of old fabric coming from the garments BuBu had worn for many years, her favorite linens, and the costumes for drag queens who performed at the clubs. The huge structure signified the "mermaid's skin" after molting. From the skin the scales, the pieces of cloth, had peeled and pattered. As the pieces of fabric directly touched the skin—the inner and outer boundary of the body which is the individual's territory—they had absorbed various memories of physical episodes which the mermaid's territory, their body, experienced. Those scales had departed from the mermaid's body, transformed into a line of flags and flew up into the sky.



A MERMAID'S TERRITORY AND SHEDDING OF OLD SKIN, 2019

Installation view: "The Ecology of Expression - Remaking Our Relations with the World", Arts Maebashi, Gunma, 2019-2020

Photo by Kogure Shinya

In the following year 2020, BuBu had her ovaries and uterus removed because she had cysts and fibroids. While the surgery brought physical pain to her, BuBu was astonished to find out that pre- and post-operation, her feelings and senses did not change at all. The ovaries and the uterus were simply colleagues to other internal organs that worked together within her. Nevertheless, they were burdened with the bigger and more complicated meanings. Having them extracted from inside of her body gave BuBu a refreshing sensation. Unlike BuBu's past work that dealt with the surface of the body, in her pieces in this exhibition the innards also molt. Because BuBu experienced not only pain and suffering from the surgery but also afterwards gained the solid belief that the body can be reborn anew from the inside, she decided to create this new work. The sense of regeneration that hit home with BuBu will guide us as people to rethink the nuances surrounding life and death, gender roles, and procreation. Furthermore, it will regain richness and complexity for a person, revitalizing within a greater being. We are proudly presenting this show in the hope that when the array of flags leaves the mermaid's body and reaches the destinations far beyond, that will function as a moment which will celebrate us, who have been unfettered from earthly restraints.



BuBu de la Madeleine, *A Mermaid's Territory - Parade #001*
2022 acrylic, pastel and colored pencil on paper, 27.4 x 19.5 cm

[BuBu de la Madeleine] BuBu was born in 1961 in Osaka. She completed her BA in Concept and Media Planning at Kyoto City University of Arts. BuBu joined the artist collective Dumb Type and appeared in their performance "S/N" (1994-96), subsequently releasing her own works in various media. Around the same time, she committed herself to civil movements related to health and human rights such as people living with HIV and AIDS, and sex workers. She has also performed as a drag queen in shows at clubs. In 2020, she undertook fibroid and ovarian cysts surgery to have total hysterectomy. The installation work in this exhibition was inspired by the surgical experience. Major solo exhibitions include "Territory of Mermaid", Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo (2004). She has also participated group exhibitions such as "Made in Occupied Japan" (a collaboration exhibition with Yoshiko Shimada), Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo (1997), "Donai yanen!: contemporary creation in Japan", Ecole nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, Paris (1998), "Sex and Consumerism: Contemporary Art in Japan", University of Brighton, Brighton (2001), "The Ecology of Expression: Remaking Our Relations with the World", Arts Maebashi, Gunma (2019) and "JAPAN UNLIMITED", frei_raum Q21 exhibition space, MuseumsQuartier Wien, Vienna (2019).

Installation view:



Photo: Kanichi Kanegae