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MASTER OF FINE ARTS
2012
RESEARCH PAPER

THE TALE OF A MERMAID
A Discourse of Disharmony

by
Jane Godbold

December 2012

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Abstract

This research paper explores how undiagnosed Aspergers Syndrome can adversely effect personal relationships. Through my own experience I examine and identify many aspects of Aspergers Syndrome that are detrimental to the well being of the non Asperger partner in an intimate long-term relationship.

This paper uses the mythology and folklore attached to the symbol of the Mermaid from her origins to contemporary acceptance, and its relevance to my own life and current studio work. I draw on the feminine principal and philosophies of Carl Jung, Jaques Lacan, Plato and Aristotle as well as the artwork of Janet Beckhouse and Carole Windham as both these artists' works embody similar experiences to my own.

This paper is a record of how a series of artworks have been developed. It tells the tale of a personal struggle, the pain experienced reliving the past in order to come to terms with it in my own mind. Both the paper and body of work have been a cathartic healing process highlighting the value of an art practice in order to express emotions.

Description of Studio Work.

My body of work titled *Every Mermaid Has a Voice* was installed at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney in the Postgraduate Exhibition, from December 5, 2012 through to December 12, 2012. The nine artworks use the symbol of the Mermaid to depict myself in various emotional states as a result of being married to a person with Asperger's Syndrome. I articulate my personal narrative through the use of bones, rocks, Mermaids and a boat. These works have been made from stoneware clay that has been raku fired with surface treatments that emulate my emotional state at that time. This work is a reflection of my past, essential for moving on in the future.

Introduction

This paper and my body of work titled: *Every Mermaid has a Voice*, is based on the mythological symbol of the Mermaid. This flamboyant and chimerical heraldic creature, which first appeared in 1244¹ was believed to represent all that was beautiful and mysterious, and like the waters she was believed to rule, the Mermaid was a force that was both life-giving and death-dealing. According to ancient legend, mythology and the folklore renaissance of the 1800's,² the Mermaid was believed to have no beginning and no end. There was no limit to her power, and it was accepted that incomprehensible magic flowed through her veins. The Mermaid was irresistibly attractive to mortal men who succumbed to her seduction and as a result were forever estranged from all that made them human, 'for no door remained open between the worlds.'³

The following quote emanates from a village in Brittany, Pont-Aven which describes the dangerous magic of the Mermaid:

... mortal men and women were bound to the dust from which they were formed. They could not fly through green depths with the mermaids or sing in the coral caves of the sea. Those who chose water magic were estranged forever from all that made them human, for no door remained open between the worlds.⁴

The lyrical songs and extraordinary beauty of the Mermaid were said to drive men crazy with desire as they were lured into her deadly embrace.⁵ She is the Siren of ancient Greece, known as 'entangler' in Homers tale titled: *The Odyssey* (800 BCE). She is every little girl's fantasy, like that portrayed by Ariel the feature character of Walt Disney's highly popular, animated fairy tale: *The*

¹ Rodney Dennys, *The Heraldic Imagination* (London: James and Jenkins Ltd, 1975). p.49.

² Heidi Anne Heiner, ed. *Mermaid and Other Water Spirit Tales from around the World*, Surlalune Fairy Tale Series (USA: SurLaLune Press,2011). p.1.

³ Kit van Tulleken, ed. *The Enchanted World, Water Spirits*, The Enchanted World (Amsterdam: Time Life Books,1985). p.125.

⁴ Ibid. p.125.

⁵ Ibid. p.51.

Little Mermaid (1989).⁶ Not unlike the target audience sought by Disney, I too have been a victim of fantasy. As a young girl growing up I had ideals of a happy 'for-ever-after' marriage with a partner who would love and cherish me the way I had seen my father love and cherish, respect and support my mother. But my marriage has fallen short of these idealistic expectations. It has left me floundering, and struggling for breath as I search for answers that will explain so many years of confusion and questioning why things went so terribly wrong.

Initially, I was attracted to the watery depths of the Mermaid as I was consumed by her promise of freedom and escape. I longed to free myself from the sadness of the persistent misunderstandings in my marriage. The Mermaid offered to transport me to a state of 'Jouissance',⁷ as she set my mind reliving the memories of my carefree, teenage hitch-hiking adventures that took me traveling Australia with only a backpack and sleeping bag. Just as the Mermaid is said to have transported sailors into a state of euphoria by promising something much more than the mundane routine of the everyday, the Mermaid lured me with her promise of freedom, and escape from my current life, where my childhood dreams of a fulfilling marriage had been shattered. Just as a sailor is said to be lured by the excitement of an unpredictable sea, the thrill of adventure, anticipation of the unknown and escape from the mundane, I was lured to escape my predicament.

This paper explores the symbol of the Mermaid, her relationship with the feminine principle, and my married life with a partner with Asperger Syndrome (AS). Drawing on mythology, literature and the fairytale, I focus on the symbolic meaning of the archetypal Mermaid and her origins, through to her contemporary acceptance and relevance to my life and current studio work. My analogies are drawn from the 19th century French fairy tale *Undine*, Hans

⁶ The Little Mermaid is an eighty three minute adaptation of Han's Christian Andersen's original tale and became the most successful Disney film to that time. Raquel Polanco, "He's a Human, You're a Mermaid: Narrative Performance in Disney's the Little Mermaid" (University of North Texas, 2010). p.5. Mattel launched Mermaid Barbie in 1988 and continues to relaunch a new Mermaid Barbie each year.

⁷ The word Jouissance is French in origin it describes an ecstatic state of surrender, without calculation and without considering the consequences for oneself or for others. p.31. Jens De Dorfman Vleminick, Eran, ed. *Sexuality and Psychoanalysis: Philosophical Criticisms*. (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2011).

Christian Anderson's seminal fairy tale: *The Little Mermaid* (1837), and Disney's highly commercialised animated interpretation of Anderson's aforementioned tale. All these tales of Mermaids form the basis of my research and my body of studio work which is titled: *Every Mermaid has a Voice*.

Initially, heraldry and the origin of my married name was to be the focus of my research project. However, as I began researching I became enchanted by the symbol of the Mermaid, she seemed to embrace and bewitch me as if I were one of her sailors. She was a persistent diffusion of forces at work, and would not let go until she had swept me from heraldry, to another place, her place, the unfathomable space of the ocean. She was a powerful and unyielding distraction from heraldry, a force so strong I felt I was trying to swim against an invincible current. In the end I surrendered to her symbolism and dived into her watery realm.

Initially, I found my research into the Mermaid confronting as I was being transported to a place I did not wish to go, a place of darkness and injustice, a place where my life was controlled by the rules that govern the person with AS. Over time, I developed an intimate personal connection with the stories of the Mermaid, I surrendered to her perceived ideals as if she were real, and I trusted her as my metaphorical compass that would always inspire me to rise above the water's surface.

I now realise that the Mermaid has taken me on a journey of self discovery. My body of studio work titled *Every Mermaid has a Voice*, is a self portrait or personal narrative that illustrates the despair of how, after many years of confusion, 'the essential me' gradually disappeared in a relationship that lacked emotional reciprocation.

What is Asperger Syndrome? Asperger Syndrome (AS) was first described in 1938 by Hans Asperger and brought to the attention of the English speaking public in 1981 by Lorna Wing.⁸ It is a genetic disorder affecting approximately

⁸ Viktoria Fitzgerald Lyons, Michael, *Aspergers Syndrome a Gift or a Curse?* (New York: Nova Science Publishers Inc., 2005). p.1.

one in every two hundred and ten children, the majority being boys. Clinical descriptions of AS are not written in everyday language and therefore it is difficult to express how people with AS actually affect others in day to day real-life situations, particularly partners in long-term, intimate relationships. Asperger Syndrome is not a mental illness, but a life-long neurological difference that changes the way people experience and relate to the world and other people. AS affects many aspects of their lives including their ability to communicate, their social instincts, their planning and organisational skills, their self awareness, emotion and sensory management.⁹ People with AS are not able to garner an insight about what is happening for them and others simultaneously, yet they have higher IQs than other individuals in the autism spectrum, ranging from normal to highly superior.¹⁰ The non AS partner (neurotypical or NT) will often feel lonely, as people with AS can be content with their own company for long periods of time. Conversations are superficial as they are primarily conducted as an exchange of information rather than for the enjoyment of each other's company, experiences and shared opinions. Processing words, tone, volume, facial expression, body language and emotion simultaneously, is both confronting and overwhelming for the person with AS, who will often respond to these ways of communicating with behaviour that is deemed inappropriate. They are unaware of the negative impact their behaviour has on those around them. Asperger Syndrome adversely affects some of the fundamental ingredients required to form and maintain relationships. As a result, stress, confusion, bullying, abuse, victimisation, fear, anxiety, grief and depression can result in the people who live with a person with AS. I am one of these people.

My initial intention to embark on heraldry as a research area was to ensure a completely new, safe and diverse path for my Master's project, one that was distinct, and an opposing tangent to that of my Honours year. I thought that through my Honour's work titled: *How Do You Think I Feel?*, I had dealt with many of my feelings from the past, and that I had put them where they

⁹ Carol Grigg. *ASPIA's Handbook for Partner Support*. Lulu Enterprises NC 2012. p.40.

¹⁰Juanita. Ph.D. Lovett, *Solutions for Adults with Asperger Syndrome* (Gloucester, MA.: Fair Winds Press- Quayside Publishing Group., 2005). p.22.

belonged- in the past. But, now I can see that this is not the case. The past cannot be dealt with so easily. It needs a voice, it needs to rise to the surface and be heard like the Siren's¹¹ song. Unlike the Mermaid, whose afterlife as legend has it remains as foam on the water's surface, my past cannot continue drifting forever. Asperger Syndrome specialist and counsellor, Maxine Aston states in her book titled: *The Asperger Couple's Workbook* 'There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.'¹² I feel the Mermaid has been an integral part of my vocational calling. She has urged me to use my artistic practice and passion for ceramics in order to find my voice. She has encouraged me to come to terms with, and speak about all the years that I have internalised my feelings of sadness and despair, and the injustice that can occur when living with a person with undiagnosed AS.

The philosopher, psychologist and psychiatrist Carl Jung, has stated that the original meaning 'to have a vocation' is 'to be addressed by a voice'.¹³ Like Jung suggests I feel I have been summoned by the voice of the Mermaid and compelled to listen to her haunting song beckoning me to dive with her and delve deeper and deeper into myself, continually searching for what I have lost in the depths of the ocean. Those pieces of myself that lay scattered on the ocean floor: my self esteem, my sense of self and my voice, the result of never having been heard, believed, valued or respected.

Every Mermaid has a Voice, is symbolic of this loss. I see this journey of the Mermaid as my journey. She begins as beautiful and in-tact, but we can see she is drained just as I was from the confusion of undiagnosed AS. As the Mermaid continues her journey, like me, she degenerates slowly over time, to the point where she finally disappears into her rock as everything unique about her is

¹¹ In Greek mythology the Siren was a creature half bird and half woman who lured sailors to their doom with her sweet singing. In French the word for Mermaid is Siren where they were depicted as half fish and half woman. Both the Siren and Mermaid's personality and appearance is said to be that of a seductive temptress. Her beauty has been said to reflect the wondrous treasures and power of the sea itself. Aaron. J Atsma, "Seirenes." <http://www.theoi.com> (accessed October 1, 2012).

¹² Carol Grigg, *Aspia's Handbook for Partner Support*, 1 ed. (Raleigh NC: Lulu Enterprises, 2012). p.8.

¹³ Gillian Pothier, "The Submerged Feminine: The Symbol of the Mermaid in the Human Psyche," *Proquest* 3 (2011). p.8.

gone. She has been drained of all she was, her colour has faded, her form is lost, and her voice is never heard.

I use four elements in my work to illustrate this loss. These include blackened rocks with a smooth satin finish which beckon the viewers embrace. They stand as recognition of the innumerable, opposing and complex obstacles and sense of burden I have encountered, and have had to overcome while living with a person with AS. On the other hand, my rocks also serve to symbolise a refuge, providing stability that was previously lacking in my life. My inclusion of bones represents a part of myself that has been left behind with every emotional trauma, every injustice, the blame and criticism I have endured. I feel so much of myself has been lost over the years, that what remains is merely a shell of who I once was, the essential me has been eroded, unable to withstand the unyielding force of living in an AS dominated world. Likewise, only the shell has the strength to withstand the relentless ocean and remains intact long after the fish has gone. The resilience of the shell is a metaphor for my bones as they are all that remain when the flesh has long gone. I have included the bones in my work to symbolise my resilience, strength and inner soul. The boat serves as my beacon and my vehicle of rescue. It promises a future of hope, through its promise to keep me afloat. The connection of these four elements with each other symbolises my desperate cry for help and my inability to be heard.

My initial research explored a number of artists including John William Waterhouse (1849-1917) whose painting titled *A Mermaid* (1900) was a work created to gain membership of the Royal Academy of Arts, London in 1900. Edvard Munch's (1863-1944) painting titled *Mermaid* (1896) is described as beautiful and haunting; the painting is rich in tone, elegant in composition and contains Munch's customary psychological complexity. It remained in private hands until 2003 when it entered the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Rene Francois Ghislain Magritte (1898-1967) was a Belgian Surrealist artist whose work titled *Collective Invention* (1934) is a thought provoking play on the idea of the Mermaid. Magritte's Mermaid features the lower body of a female and the upper body of a fish and has been described as lacking the alluring outer body of the traditional sea temptress.

In addition to these artists I have also explored the work of Japanese sculptor Yoshimasa Tsuchiya (1977). Inspired by Japanese folk lore and myth Tsuchiya's stylistic and evocative carved wooden sculpture titled *Mermaid* (2009) is finished with plaster and paint creating a beautiful alluring Mermaid image.

After examining the above singular works I chose to explore the work of two contemporary ceramic artists Janet Beckhouse and Carole Windham who employ the Mermaid in a manner that symbolises their personal feelings and experiences. The sculptural works of Beckhouse often employs bones and skulls, and have been described as unsettling and macabre with a sinister edge. Arts writer and critic Inga Walton, describes the work of Janet Beckhouse in the following lines:

*A profusion of beautifully rendered handbuilt elements such as coral arms, tangles of vines and dense undergrowth, skulls, and a menagerie of exotic creatures are applied, which coalesce with hybrid and human forms.*¹⁴

Beckhouse expresses her emotions and feelings of wholeness within herself through her distorted female figures, as she attempts to reconnect them to the elements of the earth. She is inspired by the Mermaid and the mercurial nature of this mythological being. Beckhouse uses the Mermaid as a metaphor to express her personal feelings and experiences, just as I express my emotions and life challenges through the same evocative symbol. Similarly, Carole Windham also features the Mermaid in her body of work titled: *Souvenirs from the World of Windham* (2010). This work is based on the ceramics of English potter Thomas Toft (1660-1680) who, in the 17th century created large slip-trailed¹⁵ dishes of which thirty to forty are still known to exist. A cross-hatched rim was typical of Toft's style and he was well known for designs that included the symbol of both the Mermaid and the Unicorn.

¹⁴ Inga Walton, "Janet Beckhouse and the Nature of Extravagance," *The Journal of Australian Ceramics* April, no. 511 (2012). p.88.

¹⁵ Slip trailing is the application to a clay surface of lines of liquid clay (slip) using a fine pointed dispenser. It creates a raised surface that does not flatten in firing. It is much like piping icing in cake decorating. Judi Munn, "A Primer on a Great Ceramics Decorating Technique." <http://www.ceramicsdaily.org>. (accessed September 16th. 2012).

The use of these two symbols is an interesting dichotomy for in Toft's time the Mermaid was believed to represent all that was undesirable whereas the Unicorn symbolised all that was good and pure. Toft also employed the symbol of the dragon as the representation of power, wisdom and astuteness and also the lion to represent bravery, valour and strength.



Figure 1. Thomas Toft *Mermaid Dish* (1675 CE): Slip trailed, earthenware D46cm.

Using a technique similar to that of Toft, Windham's ceramics emulate the slipware tradition of commemorative chargers and the lineage of Staffordshire figures. The Staffordshire potters of the 19th century created cheap mass-produced ceramics that were affordable to everyone. These 19th century works have both a naivety and innocence that appeals to Windham as their decoration is about people and reveals much about the time and circumstances in which they were made. Windham draws upon this history and mythology to comment, more broadly, on contemporary feminist issues unlike Beckhouse and myself who have chosen the symbol of the Mermaid as a means of expressing individual and personal issues, not those of women as a whole. Windham's work titled *The Mermaid* is a plate made from a handbuilding clay known as earthstone and is decorated with slips and underglazes similar to those used by

the Staffordshire potters. The surface decoration of this work utilises the historical symbolism of the Mermaid however, Windham has recontextualised it by placing the Mermaid in a contemporary feminist context, addressing issues that women face today, such as body image and alcohol dependency. Windham employs the symbol of the Mermaid in her work to represent the idealised and unreachable female who exists only in fantasy and yet she still falls under the same scrutiny and judgement that most modern women face today. My work and the work of Janet Beckhouse takes Windham's ideals a step further by utilising the symbol of the Mermaid in a three dimensional form to comment on the dysfunctional relationships that many modern women are often forced to endure.



Figure 2. Carole Windham *The Mermaid* (2009): Earthstone handbuilding clay W50cm x D8cm.

Windham says of her work:

*'...my Mermaid is a contemporary Mermaid concerned with the problems of women today. One of the main aspects I wanted to highlight was that of being visible, hence all the eyes watching her, also being judged as a woman, which is why she is looking in a mirror and has a designer handbag. The beer bottles floating in the water are a reference to the fact that woman are drinking a lot more than they used to.'*¹⁶

Like the aforementioned ceramic artists Beckhouse and Windham, my relationship with clay has existed for many years, and just as the symbol of the Mermaid chose me, so too did clay. Janet Beckhouse says she feels privileged to be able to express her feelings in such a tangible way through her use of clay,¹⁷ likewise, I am drawn to this wonderful material by its tactility and versatility, but one also needs to learn the 'rules' of clay for a successful outcome. Mastering clay requires years of experience, learning the rules and pushing the boundaries, but it will only let you push so far. Similarly, the person with AS is unconsciously governed by self imposed rules which are used as a protective screen they hide behind in order to avoid confronting their own issues of anxiety, anger, fear and pain.

Just as it takes years to master the rules of clay, it also takes years to learn the rules that govern the person with AS. It is believed clay has a memory. Just as I recall past experiences, I believe clay remembers if it has not been handled correctly from the outset of making. As a consequence, if it has not been respected, it will respond by cracking, shattering or repelling its glaze. Similarly, when I have not followed the rules that are set in place and dictated by my partner, like the clay that has been treated poorly I too have endured the sensation of cracking, shattering and loss of glaze. Like the Mermaid I have suffered the agony of soullessness. Both clay and AS have tested the resilience of my character, and as clay becomes stronger after each firing, I too have had to become stronger under fire from immeasurable emotional incidents.

¹⁶ Carole Windham, May 27th. 2012. carole.windham@virgin.net

¹⁷Annemarie Kiely, 'Freudian Slip,' *Vogue Living* 2012. p.90.

Chapter One

Mermaids -An Historical Underpinning

The Mermaid's origins can be traced back to the Middle Ages, where she symbolised the clash between Christianity and Paganism. The church of this era stated that the Mermaid was devoid of a soul, and therefore she could not choose the path of righteousness, and thus, could not choose God and Heaven. Without a soul, a Mermaid could never be human, so it became her quest to steal the soul of a man by tempting him away from his church and family. The Mermaid's desire to gain a soul has long been the subject of both myth and fairytale. Her origins within the framework of Mermaid literature date back as far as 1387, when historian, Jean d' Arras of France collected all information obtainable about a Mermaid called 'Melusina'. The story of Melusina became popular in France, Germany and Spain, and was reprinted many times from the original tale known as *The History of Melusina* (1456) by author Thuring von Ringoltingen.¹⁸ The history of Melusina narrates the story of Raymond, a man who falls in love with a woman who is a water sprite known as Melusina. She is seeking union with a mortal, solely that she may escape an enchantment placed upon her since childhood. Melusina consents to marry, but on one condition: that her husband not request her companionship on Saturdays. The curse she endures returns her to her original Mermaid state for that one day in the week, and if Raymond ventures to intrude upon her they must be separated for ever. But, Raymond breaks this condition, and consequently Melusina is swept away, wailing in agony leaving only the impression of her foot on the stone she last touched.¹⁹

Many similar counterparts have sprung from the root of this seminal tale, including the beautiful but tragic French legend of *Undine* (1867), by writer Friedrich de la Motte-Fouque. This is an archetypal story of the underworld, a

¹⁸ Heiner, ed. *Mermaid and Other Water Spirit Tales from around the World*. p.8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.7.

tale filled with love, alchemy, betrayal, dark spirit-laden forests and the death of a young knight known as Knight Huldbrand who marries a water sprite by the name of Undine. Undine wishes to become the Knight's bride in order to gain an immortal soul, but in order to gain Undine, Knight Huldbrand must promise never to be false to her, and never bring her close to a river. As this tale unfolds it becomes clear that it is Undine's father who wishes that she gain a mortal soul. However, it is not clear to us whether Undine also shares this desire, but she embraces it and accepts her father's will. Undine forsakes her life as a water sprite and fulfils the wishes of her father that his only daughter lives her life as he sees fit.²⁰

Similarly, Janet Beckhouse uses the symbol of the Mermaid when she discusses her exhibition titled *Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (2012). This series of twelve hand built works employ symbolic imagery to explore issues of life, death and human relationships. One work from this exhibition titled *Listening to My Heart* (2009) is a personal narrative which explores how relationships can often be taken at face value, and conclusions drawn based on this outward appearance, when often there is much that exists below the surface that others do not see. My work, like Janet Beckhouse is also a personal narrative that explores the depth of emotions in my relationship that others do not see. Beckhouse describes her works as metaphors for personal feelings and experiences that symbolically show the performance of being the person you are not. She talks about dancing to someone else's tune, and how destructive that can be to one's personal integrity.²¹

This performance of not being able to be yourself is also the story of my life living with a person with AS. As illustrated in my body of work: *Every Mermaid has a Voice*, my personality, like Undine's has had to change in order to cope with my AS partner's behaviour, as everything has to be as he sees fit.

²⁰ For more see *The Tale of Undine in Mermaid and Other Water Spirit Tales From Around the World* commencing page 538.

²¹ Vleminick, ed. *Sexuality and Psychoanalysis: Philosophical Criticisms*. p.93.



Figure 3. Janet Beckhouse *Listening to My Heart* (2009): Stoneware, glaze, lustre. H16cm x W15cm.

Asperger counsellor, Maxine Aston²² clarifies this aspect of AS by stating:

*It is likely to be the NT (neurotypical) partner who will spend most of the time trying to live in the AS partner's environment, as the AS partner does not have the necessary skills to live in the NT partners world. The longer the NT partner is outside of their environment, deprived of the food they need, the more likely the NT partner will start to lose their identity and become more like the AS partner.*²³

A similar tale, based on the story of Melusina and Undine, is the popular Danish Tale: *The Little Mermaid* (1837) by Hans Christian Andersen. Andersen's story is believed to be autobiographical, an expression or personal narrative

²² Maxine Aston is a qualified counsellor and supervisor and presents Asperger Syndrome awareness workshops to counsellors and professionals who may encounter clients affected by AS. Maxine Aston, *The Asperger Couple's Workbook* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009). p. Back Cover.

²³ Maxine Aston. *The Asperger Couple's Workbook*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers London. 2009. p.18.

regarding his lack of social acceptance into the aristocratic circles who patronised his writing.²⁴

Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, narrates the story of a powerful sea king, his six Princess daughters and his old mother who keeps house for him. The youngest and most beautiful of these daughters is obsessed with the world above the sea, but is only allowed to rise to the water's surface on her fifteenth birthday. When this day arrives, 'she rose as lightly as a bubble to the surface of the water'²⁵ and became besotted with a handsome Prince as she watched him celebrate his birthday on a nearby ship. A storm whips up across the ocean destroying the Prince's ship and leaving him to drown. The Little Mermaid rescues the handsome Prince from the wreckage of the ship and swims with him to a fine white sandy beach. Having rescued him she swims away from the shore, and from the safety of some rocks, watches as a young Princess approaches the Prince who is lying on the sand. Soon there are many people gathered around him, and as he looks up he smiles at the young Princess, believing she is the one who rescued him. The Little Mermaid feels enormously sad that the Prince's smile is not for her, and from this moment, becomes so obsessed with the handsome Prince, that she appeals to her Grandmother for advice about life on the land above the sea. Her Grandmother replies:

*'If human beings are not drowned, asked the Little Mermaid, can they live forever? do they never die as we do here in the sea? Yes replied the old lady, they must also die, and their term of life is even shorter than ours. We sometimes live to three hundred years, but when we cease to exist here we only become the foam on the surface of the water. We have not immortal souls. Human beings on the contrary, have a soul which lives forever, lives after the body has been turned to dust.'*²⁶

The Little Mermaid's Grandmother explains that in order for her to gain a mortal soul she had to be loved by a man and mean more to him than any other

²⁴Elizabeth. Bell, ed. *From Mouse to Mermaid, the Politics of Film Gender and Culture* (Indiana: Indiana University Press,1995). p.177.

²⁵ Heiner, ed. *Mermaid and Other Water Spirit Tales from around the World*. p.425.

²⁶ Ibid. p.429.

person in his life. If the handsome Prince were to marry the Little Mermaid with the promise of being true to her for ever more, 'then his soul would glide into your body and you would obtain a share in the future happiness of mankind.'²⁷ Just as my mother meant more to my father than anyone else in his life, like the Little Mermaid, I had assumed these same ideals for myself.

The Little Mermaid, now desperate to gain the love of the handsome Prince and thus achieve an immortal soul, embarked on a journey to the Sea Witch for whom she held great fear. The Sea Witch obliges the Little Mermaid with a potion that transforms her beautiful fish tail into a pair of human legs. But this magical transformation came at a high cost causing the Little Mermaid great pain, similar to that of a sword passing through her. Every step she took felt as if she was walking on sharp knives. Similarly, this pain endured by the Little Mermaid reflects my own pain through feeling unloved and rejected. The Little Mermaid, having sacrificed her beautiful, sinuous fish tail for a pair of human legs, was also no longer allowed to return as a Mermaid to her sisters or father. Furthermore, if she did not win the love of the handsome Prince, she would become foam on the crest of the waves the morning after her Prince marries another. The Sea Witch must also be paid for her services and says:

*You have the sweetest voice of any who dwell here in the depths of the sea...this voice you must give to me...Put out your little tongue that I may cut it off as my payment.*²⁸

The Little Mermaid, (like me), forsakes all for the love of her Prince and swims to the steps of the Prince's palace and takes the magic potion. She falls into a swoon. The next morning when the sun rises she awakes to find the Prince standing over her. He asks: 'Who are you?' But like me she cannot speak, as her tongue has been removed and her voice is lost as a consequence of her desperate longing to be part of a world where she does not belong. The handsome Prince takes the Little Mermaid back to the palace and with every day that passes she grows to love the Prince more deeply. But the Prince has

²⁷ Ibid. p.429.

²⁸ Ibid. p.431.

feelings only for the Princess who he believes has rescued him from the shipwreck. Sadly, the Little Mermaid, who has sacrificed her voice for the handsome Prince is unable to advise him otherwise. Tragically, she knows that if he marries the Princess it will bring about her death, and her afterlife will be rendered as foam on the sea. She will lose herself just as I lost my sense of self. The Little Mermaid's efforts to win her Prince went unnoticed. Similarly, the effort I was constantly contributing to sustain my relationship was never recognised. Janet Beckhouse also expresses similar feelings in her work, as she describes one of her bloodied female figurines impaled on a shard of porcelain: 'This poor girl is all about the mystery of love and how we keep sacrificing ourselves to it...'²⁹

On the night of the Prince's marriage to the Princess, the Little Mermaid stares out to sea, awaiting the dawn that will bring her death and return her to foam on the ocean. Suddenly, she sees her sisters rising from the water. They have sacrificed their long flowing hair to the Sea Witch in order to spare the Little Mermaid's life. The Sea Witch has given the sisters a knife for the Little Mermaid to plunge into the Prince's heart, so that when his blood falls upon her feet they will grow together again and form a fish's tail so she will be, once more a Mermaid. As the Prince sleeps, the Little Mermaid leans over him with the knife in her hand, but she cannot thrust it into him. Instead, she throws the knife into the waves where the water turns red, like blood. She has forsaken her voice, her kindred and her home for the promise of an immortal soul that she will never gain. She then throws herself into the sea and instead of dissolving into foam she is rescued by the Daughters of the Air for her good deed. The Daughters of the Air offer the Little Mermaid a second chance to gain an immortal soul. She looks towards the sun, and for the first time, as her tears fall, she feels what it is to cry like a human.

Disney's subsequent animated adaptation of Andersen's tale titled *The Little Mermaid* (1989) features 'Ariel' portrayed as a tempestuous, rebellious adolescent Mermaid who yearns for the opportunity to participate in human life.

²⁹ Kiely, "Freudian Slip." p.90.

Ariel's opening song: *Part of Your World*³⁰ intones this desire to run, walk and dance, as well as expressing her desire for knowledge. She is the youngest of King Triton's daughters, and was more beautiful than any other Mermaid, with a singing voice to match. Ariel falls in love with Prince Eric, but is forbidden by her father to have any contact with him or indeed contact with anything human. Just as Andersen's character The Little Mermaid sought help from the Sea Witch, Ariel seeks the help of Ursula, a grotesque octopus, that resembles the ancient Greek mythological creature, Medusa. Ursula transforms Ariel into a human for three days, in exchange for her voice. But sadly, this is not the only condition. If, after three days, Ariel has won the affection of Prince Eric in the form of a kiss, she will remain human forever. If not, she will be transformed back into a Mermaid and remain the property of Ursula. This Disney film is based around Ariel and her animal protagonists racing against time to win Prince Eric's kiss. But they are foiled at the last moment by Ursula who seizes control of Ariel, her father King Triton, and his kingdom. Prince Eric rescues the situation by impaling Ursula on the broken mast of his ship, thus restoring power to King Triton who, realising the error of his ways, permits Ariel to marry her true love. Like me, Ariel was once a lively and tempestuous personality who surrendered herself in order to marry the Prince of her dreams, and live happily ever after, but unlike my parents relationship my desire for a happy-ever-after conclusion never materialised.

Melusina, Undine, the Little Mermaid and Ariel all sought union with a mortal; Melusina's desire is to escape enchantment, whilst Undine, the Little Mermaid and Ariel wish to become mortal brides so that they may obtain an immortal soul. The common thread discovered throughout each of these tales featuring the Mermaid is one of betrayal, a life lived for someone else and a loss of voice. These issues are what resonate with me, and form the basis of my body of work: *Every Mermaid has a Voice*. It is this feeling of an overwhelming sense of sadness and loss that I wish to express through the body language of my Mermaids.

³⁰Up where they walk, up where they run. Up where they stay all day in the sun. Wanderin' free wish I could be 'Part of that world'. <http://www.stylyrics.com>. (accessed October 1, 2012).

Similarly, Janet Beckhouse speaks of her travels to Italy and Greece in 1988 where she encountered all manner of bones and skulls, from elaborately decorated sarcophagi in the Vatican, to crypts containing all manner of skeletal decoration. For Beckhouse, these bones were a poignant reminder of the fragility of the flesh; that life should not be frittered away but valued for its ability to exist and create.³¹ Beckhouse features bones and skeletons in a number of her works including *The Four Elements* (2007) where bones are distorted and appear to grow back into the earth expressing the desire to reconnect with the elements and appease the gods.



Figure 4. Janet Beckhouse *The Four Elements* (2007): Stoneware.

³¹Walton, "Janet Beckhouse and the Nature of Extravagance." p.90.

Chapter Two.

The Mermaid and Her Rock

My journey with the symbol of the Mermaid is recent, not one that I grew up with as a child. My instinctual connection and attraction to her was a certain desire for *joie de vivre*³² or *jouissance* that her symbol embodies. The Mermaid seemed to beckon me as if she had something very special to reveal. As my journey with the Mermaid progressed and became more intimate, I began to realise that there are many facets to this mercurial being. She is a symbol of escape, but more than that, it is her grief that is revealed in her song of timeless sorrow and longing that resonates with me. It resembles an aspect of myself the result of a heartbreaking relationship. Having spent almost two years researching the symbolism behind the Mermaid, she has caused me to reflect and delve inwards, to 're-search' myself in the hope I would find some semblance of who I once was, and what was still lying within my inner depths. In order to move forward, I had to look backward to my past so I could let it go, and leave it where it belonged- in the past. As Phenomenologist Robert Romanyshyn states in his book: *The Wounded Researcher*:

Research as re-search has, therefore, a different orientation. As a work of mourning, its first direction is not forward into new areas of knowledge. Rather, its first move is backwards, towards what has been lost, forgotten, or left behind. As a work of mourning, research as re-search is a work of anamnesis, which advances by remembering. It moves forward by stepping backwards to regard, recover, redeem and renew what has been left behind, and in this orientation it opens a space for a new beginning. Re-search with soul in mind thus transforms what we uncritically take for granted by returning to origins for the sake of an other beginning.³³

³² *joie de vivre* is a French term used to describe a hearty or carefree enjoyment of life. Bill Morris, *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. Houghton Mifflin Company, Fourth ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2009).

³³ R.D Romanyshyn, *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind* (New Orleans: Spring Journal Books, 2007). p.75.

Not unlike my own experience with the allurement of the Mermaid, Janet Beckhouse seems to have been lured by the same sense of freedom. Her work: *Siren-Come to Me* (2011), is both intriguing and enthralling, as it expresses a sense of liberation and freedom. This work depicts a Mermaid who appears to be struggling with her life, her flame red hair gives a feeling of violence and torment, something we would not connect with the watery world of the Mermaid.



Figure 5. Janet Beckhouse *Siren Come to Me* (2011): Stoneware, glaze, lustre. H26cm x W32cm x D22cm.

Beckhouse articulates her utilisation of the Mermaids' symbolism in the following way:

I was thinking about the mercurial nature of these mythical beings, the freedom of the ocean, and what it might be like to live in such a wild environment.³⁴

After many years of living in my controlled and manipulated environment I can now see that I was also yearning for freedom and escape. I was vulnerable, and I succumbed to the boundless ecstatic state of surrender (jouissance) that the Mermaid offered. A person with AS needs to control his environment in order to reduce his anxiety levels, an environment that I also share. Control is so critical, that the person with AS can apply dysfunctional strategies to maintain this control, such as: escape, blackmail or manipulation. Author and AS psychologist, Maxine Aston³⁵ states the following:

many people affected by AS find safety in being able to control their environment. An AS partner may not appreciate that their routines impinge detrimentally upon their partner.³⁶

In her book: *Solutions for Adults with Aspergers Syndrome*, AS psychologist, Juanita Lovett³⁷ articulates the need for control in the person with AS stating: 'People with AS usually cannot tolerate conflict, and will not talk about the issue directly, and so they find controlling money a satisfactory way to express their displeasure.'³⁸ I felt that money was also used by the family members of my partner to express their displeasure with me. If I received a birthday card, I had done well in following the rules that govern people with AS. If my card contained money I knew I had done exceptionally well. However, if a card did not arrive at all, I knew I had not followed the rules correctly. Over the years I came to value

³⁴ Inga Walton, "Janet Beckhouse and the Nature of Extravagance," *The Journal of Australian Ceramics* no. 511, April 2012. p.91.

³⁵ Maxine Aston is a qualified counsellor and supervisor and presents Asperger Syndrome awareness workshops to counsellors and professionals who may encounter clients affected by AS. *The Asperger Couple's Workbook*. p.Back Cover.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p.100.

³⁷ Juanita P. Lovett, Ph.D., has been a practicing clinical psychologist for twenty-five years. Her work is with adult individuals with AS and their spouse and families.

³⁸ Lovett, *Solutions for Adults with Asperger Syndrome*. p.259.

my birthday cards as my annual benchmark performance rater. At least I knew where I stood in the eyes of these family members.

My need to escape the criticism and judgement that engulfed my life left me with an increasing desire for pleasure (jouissance). This desire for pleasure has also preoccupied Western philosophers since ancient times. According to Plato, pleasure is the fulfilment of a lack of or the satisfaction of a need; while Aristotle believed pleasure to be the unhindered and unfolding expression of an activity.³⁹ For these Philosophers, the most important metaphysical nature of being is related to the moral value of pleasure. They posed these questions: Is pleasure for its own sake good, or is it only good under certain conditions? Is pleasure the most valuable thing in life, making all else subordinate? Certainly a life without pleasure has little attraction, but exactly how important is this element in life as a whole?

Aristotle suggested that enjoyment was the self expression of an unhindered activity. However, philosopher Jacques Lacan believed pleasure always risked excess, and had something to do with a loss of control, or surrender. In surrender, the activity takes over and takes possession, drawing on sources of power that are not entirely under your control. Lacan distinguishes pleasure by dividing it into two distinct components: 'plaisir' and 'jouissance'. Plaisir keeps within the limits of what is good for the self and for the other. Jouissance is boundless, an ecstatic state of surrender without calculation or consideration of consequences for oneself or for others.⁴⁰ Lacan describes jouissance in the following way:

'this fathomless thing capable of experiencing something between birth and death, capable of covering the whole spectrum of pain and pleasure in a word, what in French we call the sujet de la jouissance. When I came here this evening I saw on the little neon sign the motto 'Enjoy Coca-Cola.' It reminded me that in English, I think, there is no term to designate precisely this enormous weight of meaning which is in the French word jouissance- or in the Latin fruor. In the

³⁹ Jens De Vleminck, Eran, ed. *Sexuality and Psycholanalysis: Philosophical Criticisms*. (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2011). p.31.

⁴⁰ Jaques Lacan, "Of Structure as the Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject.," ed. Jaques Lacan (Baltimore, 2005). p.31.

dictionary I looked up jouir and found 'to possess, to use' but it is not that at all. If the living being is something at all thinkable, it will be above all as subject of the jouissance; but this psychological law that we call the pleasure principle (and which is only the principle of displeasure) is very soon to create a barrier to all jouissance. If I am enjoying myself a little too much, I begin to feel pain and I moderate my pleasures. The organism seems made to avoid too much jouissance...'⁴¹

Every Mermaid has a Voice, employs the symbol of the Mermaid to represent my long-term confusion and loss of power in an intimate relationship affected by undiagnosed Asperger Syndrome. My work consists of a series of separate pieces, these include a boat and many different rocks featuring Mermaids in various poses whose body language and surface treatment show an entangled myriad of complex emotions and feelings. As my Mermaid's journey is one of continual, unrelenting obstacles the Mermaid gradually relies more and more heavily on the rock for support, comfort and protection. My rocks are variable and inconsistent, each rock differing in size, shape and ruggedness, with no pattern, no regularity, and no predictability. They are a metaphor for my life, living with the daily inconsistency of fluctuating mood swings that govern the person with AS. I find nothing more inspiring than the wild and rugged architecture of the rock, especially when massed together. The rocks in my work are connected as a mass with scattered bones that form a monstrous monument highlighting all that the Mermaid has lost and left behind throughout her journey. Just as the Little Mermaid struggled with every step she took, so I struggle from rock to rock, leaving behind a trail of bones that serve to symbolise all of me that has been lost along the way, yet it is the underlying strength of these bones that sustain my marriage. Whilst the upper part of the rocks stand above the sea and offer support, warmth, comfort and sanctuary, this support is not reliable or dependable. It can be withdrawn in a moment, like a single wave on a rising tide, only the bones are steadfast and unyielding. Likewise, my partner is seen by those around him as a rock, some one who is reliable, desirable and strong, but the support, comfort and warmth I long for in my relationship is constantly washed away despite his apparent strength. The bones also symbolise fragility, representing a piece of me that was left behind

⁴¹ Ibid. p.6.

with every emotional trauma. I am the rock in our relationship, and these are my bones the essential, solid part of the body, the core of our relationship and the mark of endurance. These works also illustrate my progressive loss of self and of my voice over many years. This loss comes from initially coping in an AS dominated world, through to depression and the trauma of mental and physical breakdown, and from suffering a condition recognised as Cassandra.⁴² This is described by Carol Grigg ⁴³ the co-founder of ASPIA, a support group for people with partners who have AS:

The concept of Cassandra has been useful to describe the voiceless and powerless existence of non-Asperger partners prior to the identification of Aspergers Syndrome.⁴⁴

The Cassandra phenomenon, now known as CADD (Cassandra affective deprivation disorder)⁴⁵, is a consequence of the AS relationship's lack of emotional reciprocity, love and belonging; all essential human needs. CADD is used as a starting point of validation for, the journey of recovery, self-discovery and healing which is the catalyst requiring a diagnosis of AS. AS Psychologist Juanita Lovett explains the importance of a diagnosis in the following lines:

Not knowing about AS and the role it is playing in the relationship the NT partner cannot explain why there are so many problems, but she knows the problems keep continuing to happen. She turns to others for validation, support or help in understanding. But because others usually only see the partner on his best behaviour, her problems and prediction of future problems are not believed.⁴⁶

⁴² Cassandra is a recognised term that refers to the NT (neuro typical) partner of a person affected by Asperger Syndrome. Cassandra comes from Greek mythology, she was a mortal who became the focus of Apollo's romantic intentions. In order to win her love Apollo gave Cassandra the gift of foresight. When Cassandra rejected Apollo's romantic intentions he cursed her by making it so that no one would ever believe the things she told them. This feeling of not being believed is typical of how many NT's feel when living with a person with undiagnosed AS. Grigg, *Aspia's Handbook for Partner Support*. p.121.

⁴³ Carol Grigg is the Co-founder and Co-Ordinator of ASPIA (Asperger Syndrome Partner Information Australia Inc). Ibid. Front Cover.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.32.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p.33.

⁴⁶ Lovett, *Solutions for Adults with Asperger Syndrome*. p.262.

My own self discovery and recovery began with an encounter with the Mermaid. She has required a descent that has made me face the forces of my own self-doubt, self-hate, indecisiveness, paralysis and fear. Like my partner, the Mermaid has left me, at times, gasping for breath as I delve more deeply into her watery underworld listening, as I witness her story, and as her symbol demands; to be attentive to the whole, something I have neglected in myself. I think of Andersen's Little Mermaid, who effortlessly and gladly sacrificed her voice, and endured physical discomfort with every step she took for a Prince who did not fully appreciate her worth. In the following quote folklorist Jack Zipes critiques the Little Mermaid's situation: 'Voiceless and tortured, deprived physically and psychologically, the mermaid serves a prince who never fully appreciates her worth.'⁴⁷

Similarly, my partner does not recognise the contribution I have made to our relationship. This is quite common in people with AS, as described by Asperger Syndrome Partner Information Australia's (ASPIA) co-founder Carol Grigg, who states: 'The partner with AS may not recognise the effort the non AS partner is constantly contributing to the relationship to try to sustain it.'⁴⁸ In the real life situation that is my own I found a large sum of money in my partner's wallet. I questioned him about this, and was told it was for a surprise for our forthcoming twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. My instinctive reaction was that of scepticism, but I wanted so much to believe it was true, that after all these years he recognised and appreciated my enormous efforts in maintaining our relationship. However, on the day of our anniversary nothing happened, later I learned from my son that the large amount of money in my partner's wallet had been spent on his business partner. She had been bought an expensive gift and treated to an exclusive restaurant because of her invaluable contribution to my partner's business. I was told how smart and intelligent she was, and that without her we would have nothing, and be nowhere. I felt a sense of the sorrow like the Little Mermaid whose Prince did not have a smile for her despite all her efforts to save him. As an afterthought, I was given a gift worth a third of that of

⁴⁷ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge New York, 1991). p.84.

⁴⁸ Grigg, *Aspia's Handbook for Partner Support*. p.16.

the business partner's, and unlike the Mermaid who cannot shed tears, mine were uncontrollable.

As a reaction to this event and many others like them, I have created a work included in *Every Mermaid has a Voice*, entitled: *Entanglers*. Disney's version of the Entangler is embodied in the character Ursula, who is thoroughly bad. She is a black, obese, slippery octopus wearing too much make-up, who seduces, destroys and collects 'poor unfortunate souls' for sport. Likewise, Andersen's evil counterpart featured in *The Little Mermaid* is known as the Sea Witch who is described as grotesque, scary, and living in a home made of human bones.

I portray my Entanglers as two darkly glazed, ominous horned Mermaids, who do not reside on top of their rock, but rather they are one with it as they stand aloft and overshadow all that is around them. This rock, with its razor sharp points, steep sides and summits has been fashioned and perfected by a dangerous and snarling sea that renders it dark and treacherous. Its inhabitants, the Entanglers, (The Birthday Card Controllers)⁴⁹ constantly instill fear and terror at all times into the Mermaid below. This two-headed Mermaid serves to symbolise two separate people who are constantly united as one against me, the other Entangler serves to symbolise my husband's business partner. However, like my partner all three Entanglers are blind to the destruction they have caused the Mermaid below, hence their covered eyes, but these Entangler's mouths are wide open, their voices loud and unyielding. They converge from all points full of savage unanimity.⁵⁰

For the Mermaid these Entanglers are a hostile, ever-present force that is constantly working against her. They take hold of her, overpower her, and try to deprive her of breath in order to subdue her. She has no means of escape. The Entanglers are invisible persecutors.

⁴⁹ The Birthday Card Controllers, for more details see page 18.

⁵⁰ Victor Hugo, "Toilers of the Sea," ed Ernest Rhys. (London: JM Dent and Sons, 2010). p.235.



Figure 6. Jane Godbold *The Entanglers* (2012): Stoneware, raku fired.
H46cm x D90cm.

The person with AS is loyal to them and unable to see the Mermaid being slowly destroyed. He hears, listens to, and has respect only for the Entanglers. As a consequence of many situations like this I learned to sacrifice my voice and be silent to my pain. My voicelessness is illustrated in my work via the omission of

the Mermaid's facial features. Her face has been erased, as if she has never had the opportunity to speak let alone ever be listened to or heard.



Figure 7. Janet Beckhouse *Grows Fins* (2011): Porcelaneous Stoneware, lustre, glaze. H18cm x W12cm x D14cm.

Similarly, Janet Beckhouse's work titled: *Grows Fins* (2011) from her *Dissident Daughter* Collection (2012) which is part autobiographical and part fantastical dreaming expresses these feelings. Beckhouse's Mermaids mouth is open wide as she sings of leaving her partner if he does not treat her with more respect. As the Mermaid leans back on her rock she threatens to disappear and dissolve into the water below. Beckhouse describes the duality in her work as showing your inside on the outside.

I feel that *Every Mermaid has a Voice*, also reveals my innermost feelings through my Mermaid's body language. Beckhouse creates a sense of wonderment in her work by piercing its surface to create hollows allowing the viewer to ponder what lies beneath. She also uses glazes in a layered 'painterly' manner brought about by a number of consecutive firings.

I have used the 'raku'⁵¹ method of firing for my work as I enjoy the sense of anticipation and unpredictability it entails. The results can vary rendering each 'raku' piece unique, as its glazes craze in an array of fascinating patterns and metallic oxides used in reduction⁵² transform to deliver a variety of luminous colours. For this project I have created my own Mermaid glaze which is lustrous and metallic, with only a hint of colour that intertwines with the tarnished, crackled, lustre of its surface, symbolising the depletion, loss and constant drain of shine and colour in my own personality.

The unpredictable nature of 'raku' is also a metaphor for that aspect of my nature that has been suffocated and compromised. It is my rebellious reaction to the inflexibility of the AS person a trait that leaves me feeling manipulated or rail-roaded in order to satisfy the AS need for things to be done in a prescribed way as the following quote from ASPIA's co-founder, Carol Grigg explains:

A key characteristic affecting relationships with AS is rigidity of thought and behaviour. This often results in a tendency to make and enforce rules for ordinary, everyday things without an inbuilt flexibility or adaptability that provides for 'on the spot' change, deviation or spontaneous alternative that life may demand or require. They may insist on predictability in others.⁵³

⁵¹ Raku is a low firing process originating in Japan around the 16th century. It involves removing pottery from the kiln while at bright red heat and placing it into containers with combustible materials. Once the materials ignite, the containers are closed. An intense reduction atmosphere is created effecting colours in glazes and clay bodies. The drastic thermal shock also produces cracking, known as crackling since it is deliberate. Steven Branfman, 'Raku Faqs.' <http://www.ceramicstoday.com>. (accessed September 16th. 2012).

⁵² Reduction refers to a kiln atmosphere that does not have enough oxygen in it to completely consume the fuel as it burns. As a result the flame pulls oxygen molecules out of the clay bodies and glazes, changing their character. Beth Peterson, 'About.Com Pottery,' New York times Company. <http://www.pottery.about.com/bio/Beth-Peterson>. (accessed September 16th. 2012).

⁵³ Grigg, *Aspia's Handbook for Partner Support*. p.27.

In conjunction with the surface effects brought about by my 'raku' firing and glazing technique, I employ my Mermaid's body language to illustrate my emotions, and the progressive decline in my ability to deal with the situations that constantly arise in my relationship. The first two pieces in my body of work are titled: *Exhaustion 1* and *2*. *Exhaustion 1* illustrates the languid body of an exhausted Mermaid as she lies face down embracing her rock, she is confused but can not communicate her confusion with her partner as her explanations are twisted, misunderstood and turned into something that was never intended or meant to be. She is blamed and held solely responsible for every mishap in the relationship.

The second work titled *Exhaustion 2* shows the Mermaid clinging limply to a rocky out crop. This work illustrates how desperate the toll on the Mermaid is becoming. The Mermaid is doubled over in emotional pain as she alone holds the relationship together, continuously giving and compromising without recognition.

A similar feeling to that articulated by Carol Grigg, ASPIA's co-founder, is explained in the following:

*Partners of an adult with AS often have awareness early in the relationship that something is not right but they can not work out what. They often speak of being aware that something, like a piece of a puzzle is missing.*⁵⁴

Andersen's Little Mermaid was attracted to a class of people who could never accept her on her own terms. She fell in love with royalty and all her future actions involved self-denial and a process of rationalising self-denial.⁵⁵ Not unlike the plight of the Little Mermaid, I fell in love with a man who could not accept me on my terms. I had to adjust to his way of thinking and as my relationship with him progressed, I deteriorated, as I continued to give and compromise without acknowledgement, respect or appreciation.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.15.

⁵⁵ Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*. p.85.



Figure 8. Jane Godbold *Exhaustion 1* (2012): Stoneware, raku fired.
H27cm x D90cm.



Figure 9. Jane Godbold *Exhaustion 2* (2012): Stoneware, raku fired.
H28cm x D79cm

The Mermaids featured in my work reflect these emotions of confusion, frustration, powerlessness, isolation and entrapment as each progressive tableau reveals the Mermaid deteriorating as she relies more and more heavily upon her rock for support, comfort and protection. Her desperate journey continues until she collapses in a state of depression, reflecting my diagnosis of clinical depression. Like the cowering Mermaid featured in my work titled: *Narrawallee*.⁵⁶ I too would spend days curled in a foetal position. *Narrawallee* is the Mermaid's secret rock, she makes herself a cave, it is her sanctuary and palace, the home of my parents. She hides from all the terrible things 'in the twilight of her deeps.'⁵⁷ She is isolated in her cave, there are no eyes watching over her, and no one to dictate her movements. It is a place inaccessible to the person with AS. This place is where she regains her strength and ponders all the strange, unknown complexities that govern the person with AS.



Figure 10. Jane Godbold *Narrawallee* (2012): Stoneware, raku fired H24cm x W25cm x L42cm.

⁵⁶ Narrawalle is a small town on the South Coast of NSW. It is the home of my parents and a short stroll to the beach, both places of refuge when things were really tough.

⁵⁷ Hugo, 'Toilers of the Sea.' p.215.

In the following paragraph AS Psychologist, Tony Attwood explains these feelings of depression in his book *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*:

...the overwhelming majority of non-Asperger's syndrome partners stated that their mental health had significantly deteriorated due to the relationship. They felt emotionally exhausted and neglected, and many reported signs of a clinical depression. A majority of respondents in the survey also stated that the relationship had contributed to deterioration in physical health.⁵⁸

This feeling of utter despair and exhaustion is encapsulated in my work titled: *My Soul Melteth Away*. This work symbolises the long term effect of living in what felt like the presence of an unsubduable power, with no limit to its will. What remains of the Mermaid in this work is nothing more than a single coloured outline on the rock's surface, all her inner beauty and lustre has dissipated, her inner strength sapped as she is draped on this rock.



Figure 11. Jane Godbold *My Soul Melteth Away*. (2012): Stoneware, raku fired. H20cm x D90cm.

⁵⁸ Tony Attwood, *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome* (London, UK: Jessica Kinglsey Publishers, 2007). p.310.

She appears like the scattered remains of a shipwreck and like a shipwreck her whole body seems to have dissolved in cold, fatigue and powerlessness. Just like Andersen's Little Mermaid who was rescued by the Daughters of the Air and given a second chance to gain an immortal soul, so too this Mermaid prays that she will be rescued from this life living with the repercussions of Asperger Syndrome. She feels that all is against her; isolated, abandoned, sapped of all she once was and forgotten. The vitality that has been gradually leaving her is now completely gone. She has endured all this suffering on her own and is now only a semblance of a once beautiful, alluring and lustre glazed⁵⁹ Mermaid. What remains of her glaze flows from her body and seeps into both rock and ocean, leaving the viewer to ponder what might once have been, or what may, one day, return. Without awareness of AS, no one knows how to respond to the circumstances they find themselves in and the essential 'me' disappears. She can only reappear when a diagnosis of AS is accepted by the person who has the syndrome as stated by AS Psychologist, Tony Attwood:

Clinical counselling experience suggests that a diagnosis is needed for successful relationships and both parties acknowledge the diagnosis. The non-Aspergers's syndrome partners (NT) may be the first of the two to accomplish this and no longer feel self-blame or insane. Their circumstances are finally validated and eventually understood by family and friends. They also feel better able to cope on a day to day basis. The acceptance of the diagnosis for the AS person is important in enabling them to recognise their relationship strengths and weaknesses. There can be a dawn of realisation of how their behaviour and attitudes affect their partners.⁶⁰

I think about Undine, and the Little Mermaid and how they had to venture outside themselves in search of a soul. I feel an empathy with the Mermaid's search, as I have been estranged, or indeed detached, from my own feelings and self, always concerned for those around me, suffering for the sake of others. The Mermaid is a hybrid creature, her upper half belonging to one world whilst her lower half remains submerged, hidden under the surface in another

⁵⁹ Lustre glazes are metallic, reflective shiny glazed surfaces created by including metals in the glaze mix. My Research has lead me to develop my own lustre glaze as I wanted an imperfect result to symbolise my loss of shine and colour via my Mermaids.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.310.

world. She inhabits two different worlds, just as I do, her duality relating to my duality as I divide myself between the world governed by AS and my own world. I illustrate this divide in my work titled: *Wrenched*. This work shows the beautiful sinuous tail of the Mermaid split in two and clinging to opposing worlds: Her world and the world of the person with AS.

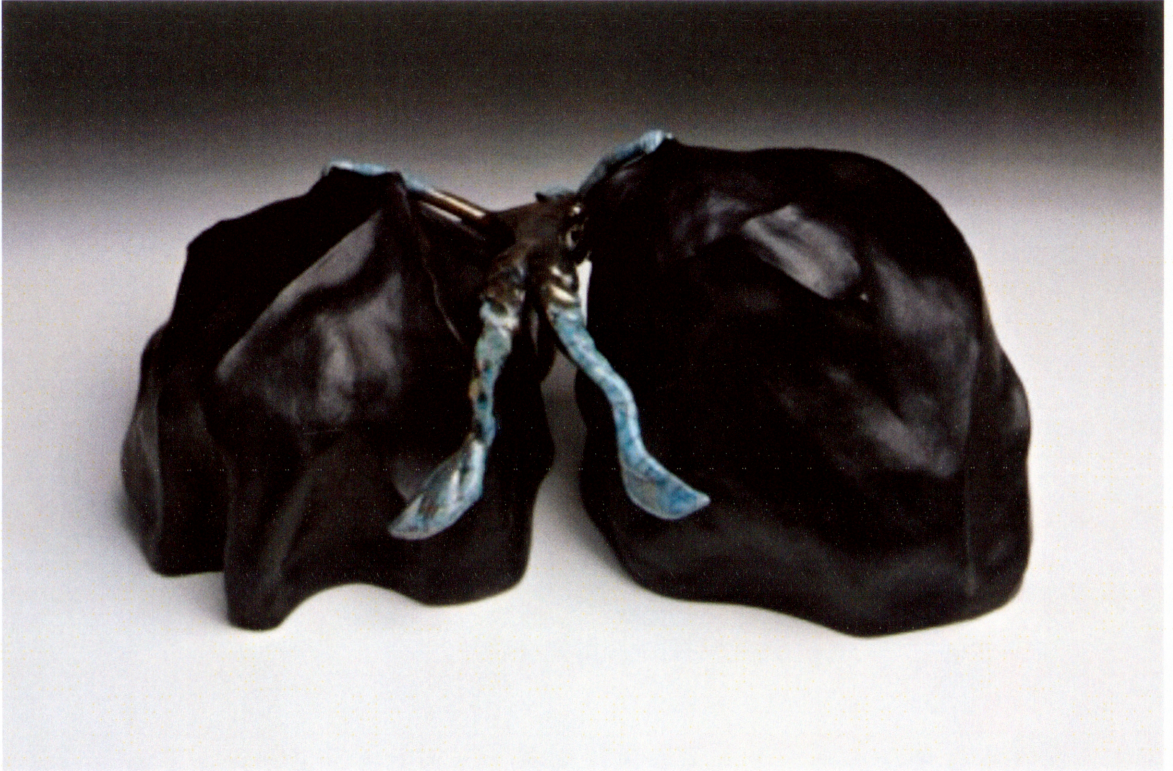


Figure 12. Jane Godbold *Wrenched* (2012): Stoneware, raku fired.H18cm x W25cm x L42cm.

Her world is comfortable and familiar where emotions abound, are felt and recognised. The AS world is controlled, retaliatory, devoid of empathy where recognition of feelings is not instinctive, but requires learning. These opposing worlds are symbolised by the construction of an edifice or passage between the two rocks, a passage that is treacherous and full of angles. One rock symbolises the Mermaid's world and the other the world, of her partner.

The Mermaid's head hangs low as she stares into the edifice between the rocks, an edifice that is filled with traces of all her futile efforts to be heard,

understood and loved. Just as the Little Mermaid experienced pain with every step she took, so too does my Mermaid.

She cannot be heard, so her pain is internalised as she desperately attempts to cling to both rocks, believing that if she works harder, performs better, tries to please by being someone 'better' than herself, then like the Little Mermaid, she too will regain her soul and be 'happy'.

I understand now that my needs are quite normal. I am not being demanding, needy or dependent and yet it took a great deal of counselling and courage for me to pursue activities that would fulfill my needs and help me regain my soul.

For many years I have been expected to anticipate and take care of other's needs, but when my needs were not considered, I felt that something was wrong with me. I felt shame that I had needs, so I pretended I didn't have them. I think I had become so chronically and emotionally wounded I did not dare make contact with my deepest emotions, feelings or sentiments the most vital, rational and sensitive part of any human being. This feeling of utter despair resonates in my aforementioned work titled: *Narrawallee*, where my Mermaid desperately craving her partners embrace, feels abandoned and is left to hold herself tightly and curl into a foetal position as she nestles into the sanctuary of her rock.

Janet Beckhouse's exhibition titled: *Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (2012), is a collection of works she describes as a metaphor of her personal feelings and experiences as a woman and her re-connection with them. Just as my Mermaids reflect the torment of living in another's world similarly, Beckhouse uses her works to illustrate the experience of dancing to someone else's tune and the performance of being someone you are not. Her work has been described as bristling with a sense of unease, ambivalence and impending drama that illustrates how destructive this dance can be to the self.⁶¹ Beckhouse goes on to describe the re-connection to herself as a liberated expression that she was denied over a period of time, and she is now showing

⁶¹ Walton, 'Janet Beckhouse and the Nature of Extravagance.' p.93.

who she is. Similarly, Carole Windham's plate titled: *The Mermaid*, highlights the visibility of the feminine, as she depicts the Mermaid with a series of eyes watching her. These eyes are those of the masculine gaze judging the Mermaid as a woman. This judgement is further emphasised as the Mermaid looks into her mirror whilst clutching a designer handbag. The feminist theories of jouissance helps us understand the metaphors of voice, body and language. Feminist jouissance displaces the dualistic order of the white male system as it encompasses not only women's bodily pleasure, but connotes sensual enjoyment, the enjoyment of rights and the enjoyment of language. Feminine jouissance implies total access, participation, as well as ecstasy.⁶²

This idea of feminine jouissance and enjoyment of rights and language is the basis of the final work in my series titled: *The Dawn of Realisation*. This work symbolises my longing for acknowledgement, validation and a realisation that I have the power to regain my life. This work also embraces the feeling of finally being freed from the clutches of another as the Mermaid rises from her watery depths, her arms are outstretched as she overcomes the obstacles of the past and embraces the thought of a fulfilling future. Her colour is returning and her confidence also slowly returns, she is hopeful of leaving her past behind. Just as Andersen's Little Mermaid was rescued by the Daughter's of the Air this Mermaid longs for the boat that beckons her forward, with the option of sailing into a world of her choosing.

My final work titled *The Boat* has been raku fired so its outer surface resembles that of my rocks, but this is not simply another obstacle, the gold inner surface of the boat offers the Mermaid something more. The brilliant shine of the gold interior symbolises reflection. It encourages the Mermaid to reflect on her past in order to see her future. She finally understands she is not to blame for all that has happened within her relationship and that nothing will ever change until her partner accepts his diagnosis of AS and is prepared to seek help, she has done all she can.

⁶² Bell, ed. *From Mouse to Mermaid, the Politics of Film Gender and Culture*. p.184.

Professor of English, Dr. Roberta Trites⁶³ argues that Andersen's message offered women a choice towards self-realisation as his Little Mermaid earned her soul, unlike Disney's Ariel whose soul was gained as an attachment to someone else. The soul was that part of a human for which the Mermaid longed. According to classical Jungian psychology, loss of soul occurs at mid-life, but feminist views see a woman in danger of losing her soul every day.⁶⁴

This feminist view of a woman's loss of soul is embodied in the bones that lay scattered between the rocks in my work. These bones connect each rock and symbolise the subtle, but continual loss of my inner soul as everyday I faced yet another obstacle. Similarly Windham and Beckhouse illustrate a woman's loss of soul by attaching issues such as alcohol and domestic violence to the symbol of the Mermaid, a creature who exists only in fantasy.

⁶³ From her article 1990/91 Disney's sub/version of The Little Mermaid. *Journal of Popular Television and Film*. No.18 p.145.

⁶⁴ Clarissa Pinkola Ph.D. Estes, *Women Who Run with the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992). p.242.



Figure 13. Jane Godbold *Dawn of Realisation* (2012): Stoneware, raku fired.
H28cm x D99cm.

Conclusion

During my childhood many holidays were spent at the beach. I have always loved the sound of the ocean, it lures me, enticing me to its shores, urging me to embrace its water, lulling me into a state that allowed me to drift away. Similarly, Janet Beckhouse describes the feeling of the sea as being always comforting, and in conflict with the urban environment where she feels alone and alienated. I have walked many times along the beach and listened over and over to the pulse of the waves and to the sound of my crying, the tears of despair for what could never be, tears that like the Mermaid's, evaporated without being noticed. Walking along the beach brings back childhood memories of fishing trips with my father. I still recall his pride and excitement when I would so unexpectedly catch a fish, the same pride I longed for from my partner.

This is why the final piece in my body of work is the boat. I remember the boat as a vehicle of escape and personal happiness it is a symbol of pride and excitement relating to my achievements. The boat offers me the chance of hope, healing, justice, and the recognition of my voice, in fact my life that has been previously unrecognised, disbelieved and unheard. It is this Mermaid's shining beacon. The glimmer of its lustrous interior spreads out across the water like a fan; its shine reflecting on the rocks of past darkness. The Mermaid is mesmerised and cannot imagine anything more beautiful, as it is a magnificent living fire offering the promise of passage to a wondrous place filling her with joyous expectations of what may be realised if she is freed of her burden of living with AS. 'A ray of happiness is visible upon her face. Never has she appeared more beautiful.'⁶⁵

It was medical advice that brought me to university, in an attempt to regain myself. I recall my endless hours of diligence and hard work during my undergraduate studies that was finally rewarded with a 'Distinction'. There was one person whose praise mattered. But, it was not forthcoming as I had not

⁶⁵ Hugo, 'Toilers of the Sea.' p.358.

achieved a 'High Distinction'. So I worked even harder, only to be told by my partner my 'High Distinction' did not rate in his eyes as it was achieved only by assessment and not examination.



Figure 14. Jane Godbold *The Boat* (2012): Stoneware, raku fired, gold leaf.
H18cm x W200cm x L56cm.

My work evokes a rebirth of the emotions and challenges I have battled for many years. However, my journey is not yet over. For as yet there is no conclusion. I long to reach that boat, but I have no idea where it will take me. I have learned from the Mermaid's story that I need freedom from the expectations of others and should embrace the knowledge that I must be true to my inner self and my quest to have a voice and be heard.⁶⁶ Like Carol Windham's Mermaid, I must be visible, unlike the many Mermaids depicted in my body of work: *Every Mermaid has a Voice*.

⁶⁶ Maureen Murdoch, *The Heroine's Journey: Women's Quest for Wholeness* (Boston, MA: Shambala, 1990). p.83.

It is the sweet, alluring song of the waves and my Mermaids that is indeed the music of my soul, the music that has awakened me, kept me searching, and kept me afloat for many years. The Mermaid has inspired my art practice and helped me work through my innermost feelings. Without her, I doubt I would have been able to come to terms with my past. Whilst the symbol of the Mermaid has paradoxical qualities of upper versus lower and chthonic versus civilised, the more time I spend in her waters the more I begin to appreciate that rather than a dichotomy of opposing forces, the Mermaid is in fact a psychic totality. It is her conflictual nature that has lead me to a wholeness, my inner self united, a state of being that Jung would call a 'hieros gamos' 'the inner union of opposites whereby splits are healed.'⁶⁷

Like my Mermaid, my boat glitters, beckoning me to a new life, a new beginning and a renewed happiness and fulfillment.

⁶⁷ Monika PhD Wikman, *The Pregnant Darkness. Alchemy and the Rebirth of Consciousness* (Berwick: Nicholas-Hays, 2005). p.19.

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