

Svalbard

This year I had the great pleasure of visiting twice the largest settlement of Svalbard – Longyearbyen.

My first visit in June was meant to be a research trip. Getting to know the environment, talk to people and help a local organization collecting trash on one of the remote beaches in the area. The idea was to use some of the rubbish when I return in October as stencils for a “mural” I have been commissioned to do in Longyearbyen by Artica Svalbard.

We headed out on a fast Zodiac on a beautiful sunny day with an extraordinary calm sea and made the trip in one and a half hours. The beach, located across Isfjorden is right next to the first headland that faces the open ocean. An ideal place to pick trash as the currents bring in plenty of jetsam and an area that hardly anyone has ever ventured to. So we had thought. But on our arrival we found the beach studded with hundreds of whale bones. Some vertebrae lay weathering in the sun on the pebbled beach, others half sunken into the sand and just a few steps ahead lower jaws were overgrown by Tundra vegetation, sometimes only discernable as soft features under a blanket of moss. This beach had clearly been used to process whales a few hundred years ago. After feasting my eyes and taking plenty of photos I did actually manage to help the others collect trash. On the way back to Longyearbyen on a milky white sea that glistened like silk in the evening sun, to our great joy we encountered a blue whale parting the sea with its mighty back.

On my second trip I held a workshop for the kids from the local Folkehøgskole. First I had them trace the outlines of their hands and arms on large sheets of paper and cut them out thus producing stencils for the “mural”. Strictly speaking it was not a mural but a large plywood board that I could be working on indoors and that later was installed in the center of Longyearbyen. Second we selected some of the rubbish I had picked in June, placing it on the board in different variations thinking and rethinking the composition. After this first stage of planning the kids went off on a field trip and I retreated to the studio for another five days to execute the painting.

Besides working I got the chance to explore the city, get to know some very nice locals and go on hikes around Longyearbyen. Hiking in the arctic means that you need to be with a guide carrying a gun for polar bear protection.

Before going to Svalbard, in between trips and right after I came back I have been doing paintings and watercolors that in some way relate to the experiences I was so lucky to gain in this extraordinary part of the world. Alongside with a few photos to illustrate the journey you will find images of these works here.

Please enjoy!

Kim Nekarda, November 2019



untitled, 2019, vinyl color & body print on cotton, 180 x 130 cm



untitled, 2018, vinyl color, crayon & body print on cotton, 130 x 100 cm



Svalbard, a few minutes before touchdown



a bird's eye view on Longyearbyen



across the street from the hostel



on our first hike along the beach I stumble into the lower jaw of a sperm whale



after one and a half hours in the zodiac we arrive at a truly remote beach and soon discover that it is studded with whale bones such as this vertebra



picking rubbish and exploring the whale cemetery



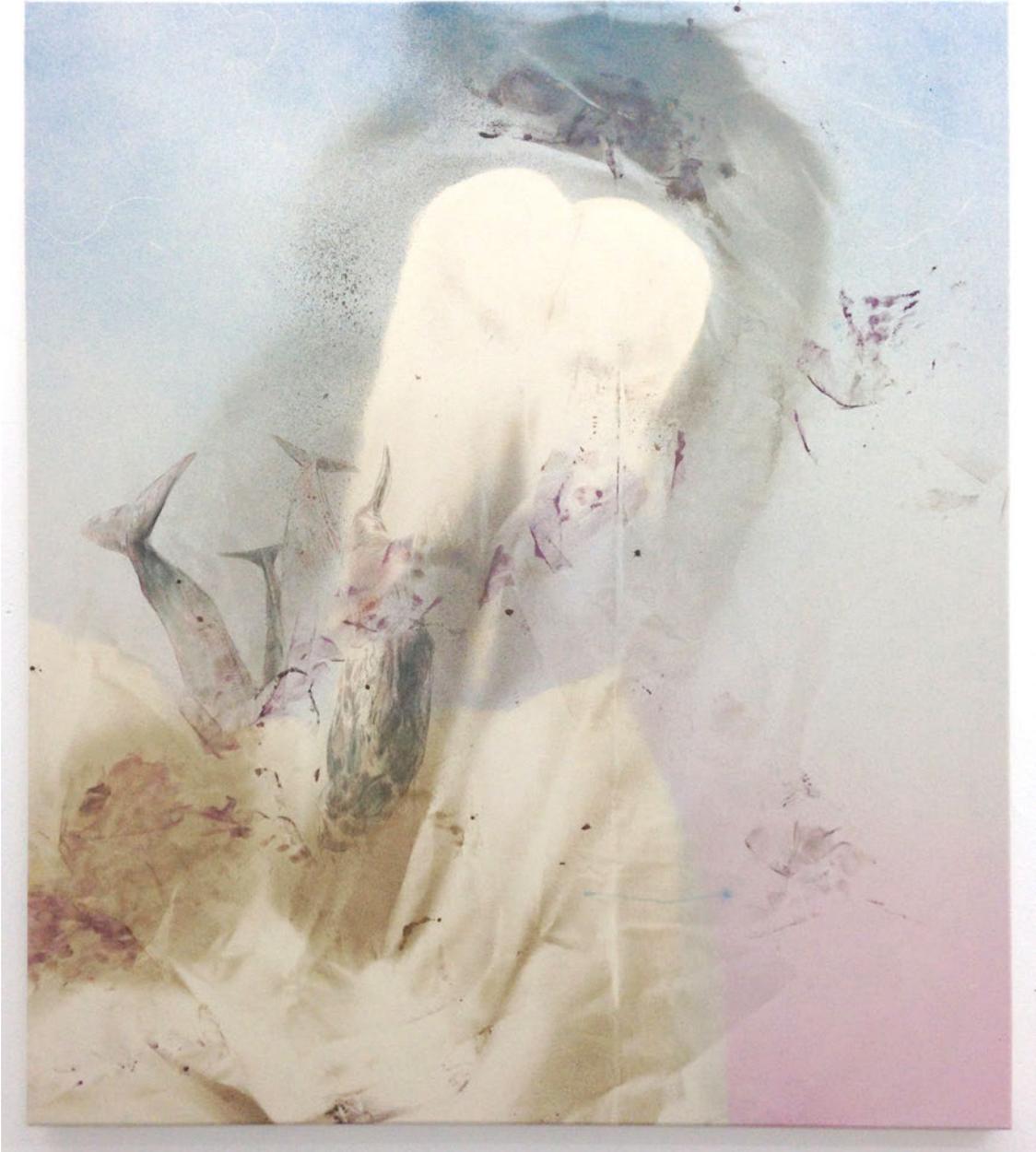
hiking with Eli in one of the valleys facing Isfjorden



one last look into Advent Valley before it is time to leave



untitled, 2019, watercolor & carbon on paper, 39 x 28 cm



untitled, 2019, vinyl color, crayon & body print on cotton, 130 x 110 cm



untitled, 2019, vinyl color & body print on cotton, 170 x 130 cm



looking out the back window at Artica just after arriving from the airport



in the studio working with students of the Svalbardfolkehogskole on the composition of my "mural"



at the end of town, looking down towards the city center



crossing Isfjorden on thin ice



a whale of a painting is leaving the studio



untitled, 2019, acrylic paint on plywood, 200 x 500 cm



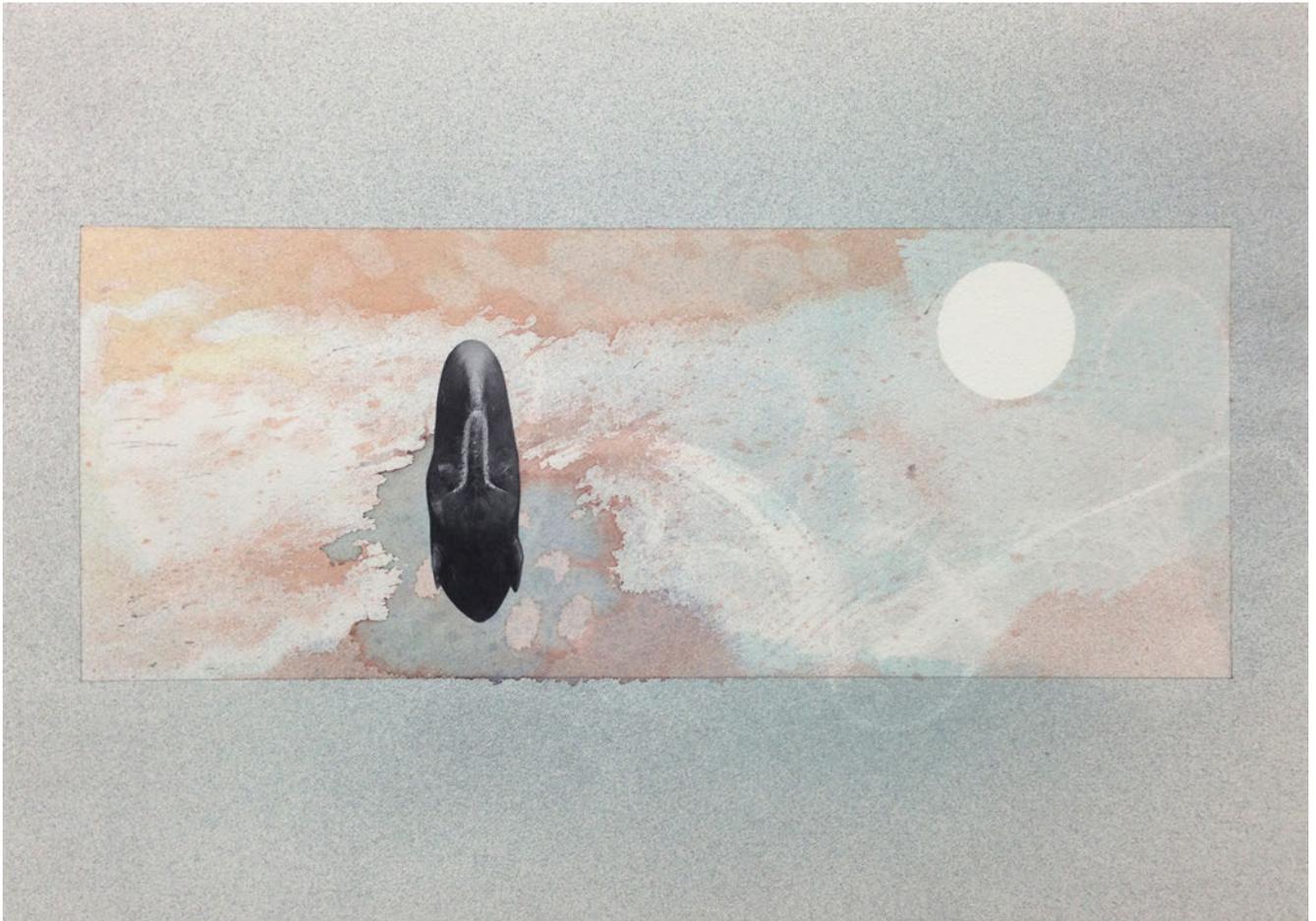
farewell hike in Advent Valley



untitled, 2019, watercolor, carbon & ballpen on paper, 41 x 57 cm



untitled, 2019, watercolor, carbon & pencil on paper, 41 x 59 cm



untitled, 2019, watercolor & photocopy on paper, 41 x 58 cm