

About my research

For the past fifteen years I have started every painting with an imprint of my own naked body. This is not so much about leaving a mark but about making myself vulnerable. The body print sits in between abstraction and representation. It comes into existence in an instant, like a single gesture – a brushstroke. It is not laden with the history of painting. It does not mean to fool or comfort your eyes with illusion. It does not speak of technic or fashion or attitude. It comes as an entity. Its dimensions cannot be questioned. It appears on the canvas like a bird dropping its feathers.

Ten years ago I started to work with footage taken by Remote Operated Vehicles of sea floor dwelling animals such as deep-water corals or Riftia tubeworms. Their very existence challenges our understanding of the origin of life on the planet yet these habitats will forever remain inaccessible to the human body.

We stem from the oceans, 65 percent of our body weight is water. Seawater is so close to the blood in our veins that it has been used in blood transfusions.

Three years ago I managed to see my first whale. Since then I have been working on a series of sperm whale paintings. These whales are among the most intelligent beings, living in social structures that some scientists call culture, communicating in their own complex language and passing information and knowledge from one generation to another. Apart from humans and Orcas they are the only species in which females experiences a menopause. Yet the true shape of these mammals had long been a mystery and was only revealed to a broader audience in the mid 20th Century when camera technology made it possible to film under water. Today we take it for granted that remote operated cameras are recording habitats that no human being can witness with the naked eye but we tend to forget that this footage shows only a fraction of a vast environment that is still in most parts unknown to us. Despite our lack of knowledge our impact on whale societies has had devastating consequences for the animals. Today, an overwhelming longing to encounter these animals has reshaped their status as commodity and brought into being a whole new branch of the tourism industry.

Choosing the sea as a topic comes, I believe with a responsibility. The destruction and annihilation the human race inflicts upon those who live in the oceans is monstrous. In the process of painting this tragedy can hardly be ignored.

In the long history of the western painting tradition whales have hardly ever been the subject of a painting. When they do - when whales enter this highly artificial realm I believe they need to do it as the fellow inhabitants of planet earth they have always been. The Ocean and all of its residents need to be on display in ways they have never been before. As an artist I want to utilize painting to sound out the possibilities of discarding alienation and embracing incorporation by trying to somehow blur the boundaries between our species.

Kim Nekarda, April 2020