

HOLLY HUNT ART

ABOUT

JULIETTE DUMAS (b. 1987, LIVES AND WORKS IN THOMERY, FRANCE)

Juliette Dumas is an artist whose work is informed by a deep preoccupation about planet earth and our relationship to it. She is foremost a painter by formation hence her fascination with Cezanne. An important factor in her premise is that she subscribes to the “Rio Negro Manifesto” created in Brazil in 1978 by French art critic Pierre Restany while he travelled the Amazon river. The manifesto he wrote, with two other Brazilian artists, is all about “Art for Nature” and about raising Consciousness about Earth and the Natural World Through Art. In short, Dumas’s paintings are a study of the language of Nature, she is about raising consciousness. That is what drives her.

With the Whale Flukes, Dumas became very preoccupied with whales and she wanted to reveal their fragility, their enormous importance in our ecosystem – especially now when so few remain. She decided to create life-size whale flukes. The flukes are the tail part of the whales which records an individual’s history, age, scars and events, like fingerprints for humans. On the life-size whale flukes that Dumas created (like the one on view at the Neue House), you can poignantly see the marks from the fishing nets that scarred the whale.

The first time I saw the life-sized whale flukes, I was stunned by the force that they emanated. Not only were they visually magnificent, but Dumas had achieved something so rare that I was speechless. You have to see the work in person, because only then you can feel every scrap, every line that Dumas painstakingly forged in the clay with her own hands. It was an homage to a species she fell in love with and wanted us to feel the same.

Dumas used clay for the whale flukes because clay is related to the earth and has a primal feel to it, a decision she made after seeing the cave paintings of Lascaux in France. Dumas is very secretive on how she developed her technique; however, I can say that clay allowed her to sculpt creating layers by mixing pigments, water and earth, adding and subtracting in a process that was extremely physical, literally bathing with the canvases in the water. Dumas called those layers of clay “skins” referring to the skins of the mammals.

Dumas realized that installing ephemeral installations triggered by an anxiety and responsibility for the planet did not help enough to bring a higher level of consciousness. She started seeking ways to replace the feeling of fear by the feeling of love, resilience, hope for the future, gratitude, joy. She realized that human thought has the power to create, and that instead of fueling the already bad situation with ideas of collapse, she wanted her work to project strength and hope for the future. At that time, she also discovered the tradition of Ho’oponopono, the Hawaiian cleansing method to restore balance.

To embody this Hawaiian philosophy, Dumas wanted to find an “icon” image. She naturally gravitated to the Humpback Whale who embodies the energy of love and resilience. The Hawaiians call them Koholas, the guardians of sacred energy, and see them with a large sphere of energy all around them. They are regarded as deities. This is when Dumas started to work with smaller diptychs of the fluke of the humpback whale which evolved in 2018 to be life-sized. Dumas went multiple times to see whales in their natural habitats. She swam with them to feel their energy, in Iceland and Norway.

At the time Dumas started the series of Whale Fluke paintings in New York, actual whales were present in New York city harbor but Dumas was not aware of it yet. She discovered that fact long after she started her work. Hence the extraordinary relevance of her work presented now at the Neue House which was created in New York City when whales were starting to gather in NYC harbor and are now present in New York city harbor in numbers never seen before. Dumas search continues and she is presently back in her studio in France, working on her next solo exhibition with Silas von Morisse scheduled for fall 2020.

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Dumas was born in 1987 in Paris France. She completed her BA at Villa Arson in Nice France (the best contemporary art school in France) and she did her MFA at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in 2013. She has been awarded residencies at Festival Grandeur Nature, Ristolles, France in 2009 and La Station, Nice in 2015. She was nominated for Clare Rosen and Samuel Edes Foundation Prize for Emerging Artists by The Painting and Drawing Department of the School of the Arts Institute of Chicago. Dumas' work was featured in notable group and solo exhibitions including "Winter Studies" (2015), Kunstverein Gaestezimmer E. V., Stuttgart, Germany (curated by Alf Setzer), "Ad Hoc" (2015), La Station, Nice, France (curated by Collectif Culbuto). In 2017, she was seen at 2020 with Sara Mejia Kriendler at The Chimney, then in the group show "Les Silences de La Fumée" after an original work by Noel Dolla curated by Gustav Geir Bollason and David Zehla VerksmidJan A. Hjalteyri, Iceland. And again in "Unseen Hand" at the Knockdown Center curated by Nikita Vishnevskiy in Brooklyn New York. Dumas first (2016) and second (2018) solo exhibitions were held at Silas von Morisse in New York. Her work has been reviewed in Artcritical, Hyperallergic, Wall Street International, Blouin Art Info, Delicious Line, Vaihingen & Mohringen Germany.

The "Whale Fluke Paintings" were exhibited in 2018 at Silas von Morisse Gallery in the exhibition ANGELS then in 2019 and 2020 at The Neue House New York.

Juliette Dumas works are in important Private collections in the USA and France. Notably:

- The Collection in Temple University's New Charles Library, Philadelphia, PA, gift of alumnus Dennis Alter, November 2019.
- Collection of Paddy McKillen Owner of Chateau La Coste (France), April 2021.