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ALLYSON MELLBERG



Born in 1977 in Racine, Wisconsin, USA. Lives and works in Charlottesville, Virginia, USA. Graduated from the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Allyson Mellberg is an Associate Professor of Art at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

In Allyson Mellberg's drawings, nature reclaims possession of humanity, in a "post-Louise Bourgeois/Kiki Smith pre-futurist neo-biological" style. Her work draws notably from the 1930s science fiction stories of Stanley Weinbaum, which have particularly influenced her. For instance, on a fog-covered planet, explored by the author's recurring characters (a married couple), they quickly find themselves having to solve issues of isolation, fear of the unknown, fear of being trapped in the place, difficulty interpreting the environment, or trusting their senses. For Mellberg, these stories are an interesting metaphor for the challenge of managing chronic illness and anxiety, themes she explores – among others – in her drawings.

Mellberg reflects on the notions of healing and spirituality, particularly through the invention of personal rituals and communion with nature, as opposed to spirituality organized by religion. Specifically, shells (like limpets), sea urchins, mushrooms, or coral, which often appear in her drawings, represent tranquility and meditation. They express the idea that one can be completely covered, immersed in and by an environment, having remained still for so long that these elements eventually grow over them—an idea that conveys the beauty of becoming one with nature, as deeply as possible, while paradoxically expressing the anxiety of being totally imprisoned in that way. This also gives her characters the ability to camouflage and in turn become observers of nature.

This mixed feeling, of the comfort of being hidden and the discomfort of suffocation, develops in parallel with Mellberg's interest in beauty contrasted with the grotesque. Thus, her characters sometimes seem to be surrounded by a translucent mass or an oppressive and heavy weight: this duality challenges the viewer's perspective.

Allyson Mellberg's approach to her work has always been meditative: she does not plan what she will draw in advance, only scheduling her work sessions. What emerges is therefore entirely spontaneous, at the moment and place it is produced. Through this kind of discipline, she seeks to channel a climate of peace and healing. Her characters appear androgynous because her desire for peace, healing, and connection with nature is not specifically gendered.

Private and public collections
Fogg Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
La Maison Rouge - Collection Antoine de Galbert, Paris, France
Sloan Art Library, Special Collections, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
University of Washington State, Special Collections, curator : Sandra Kroupa
Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI.
Prints and Drawings Room, curator : Kristen Mackholm
Baltimore Art Museum Library, Baltimore, MD

Selected exhibitions

2024

Art Athina, Athens - Represented by Galerie LJ
September Gallery, Kinderhook, NY - In the Pale Moonlight - Group show

2020

Ddessin, Paris - Represented by Galerie LJ

2019

Art On Paper, New York - Represented by Cinders Gallery

2018

Outsider Art Fair, Paris - Represented by Galerie LJ

2017

Galerie LJ, Paris - Paperworks #3 - Group show

2015

Galerie LJ, Paris - The Planet of Doubt - Solo show

Association for Visual Arts, Chattanooga - 'Spirit moves' - Double solo show with Jeremy Taylor

2014

Galerie LJ, Paris - Paperworks #2 - Group show

Drawing Now, Paris - Represented by Galerie LJ

Kaufhaus Jandorf - The Pictoplasma Portrait Gallery - Group show

2013

The Wall at In : Surgo ! Berlin - Dirty Fingers - Print Exhibition - Group show

2012

Galerie LJ, Paris - Endogenous - Solo show

2011

Galerie LJ, Paris - The Lotus Eaters - Solo show

Galerie Pecka, Prague

2010

An Unearthly Child, Cinders Gallery, Brooklyn
Marmot, Quirk Gallery, Richmond, VA - Solo show

Museo de la Ciudad de Mexico, Mexico - Draw - Group Show

Galerie LJ, Paris - Pen To Paper - Group show

The Bridge Gallery, Charlottesville, VA - Revel II - Group show

Sawhill Gallery, Harrisonburg, VA - James Madison University Faculty Show - Group show

2009

Marks On Paper, Visual Arts Center, Portsmouth, VA - Solo show

Cinders Gallery, Brooklyn, NY - The End Is Like The Beginning - Group show

Waiting Room Gallery, Tokyo - Spirit Assembly - Group show

Musée d'Art Contemporain de Bordeaux - Les Grandes Traversées - Group show

Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin - Pictopia - Group show

New York Art Book Fair, New York - Represented by Printed Matter

Stolen Space, London - Draw - Group show

2008

Do Little, Cinders Gallery, Brooklyn, NY - Solo show

2007

Handplant, Cinders Gallery, Brooklyn, NY - Solo show

Third Drawer Down, Victoria, Australia - Paper Swords - Group show

Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI - The Third Degree of Francis Bacon - Group show

2006

Coral Teef, Lump Gallery, Raleigh, NC - Solo show

New Works, UVA Off Grounds Gallery, Newcomb Hall Gallery, and Bayly Art Museum, Charlottesville, VA - Solo show

2005

Nohomebody, Cinders Gallery, Brooklyn, NY - Solo show

Hallway Bathroom Gallery, San Francisco - Yearning Lines Growing - Group show

Old Dominion University Gallery, Norfolk, VA - Row Boats Home - Group show

2004

Small Girl, T and L Gallery, Raleigh, NC - Solo show

Atlanta Museum of Contemporary Art, Atlanta - Goodbye Says It All - Group show

2003

Plus Ultra Gallery, Brooklyn - Beggars and Thieves - Group show

Studio 1300 Gallery, Cleveland - Unconscious - Group show

The Rose Museum, Boston - Bad Touch #5 - Group show

2002

Ghosts, Garfield Artworks Gallery, Pittsburgh, PA - Solo show

Mitten Gallery, Harrisonburg, VA - Stuffed - Group show

New Works, Atomix, Chicago, IL - Solo show

2000

Monsters, Beans and Barley, Milwaukee, WI - Solo show

2001

Remington-May Workshop Gallery, Racine, WI - Home Sanctuaries - Group show

2000

Adambomb Gallery, Milwaukee, WI - Serious Play - Group show curated by Columbia University