

Claudia Losi

Balena Project–Birmingham '08

24 September – 26 October 2008

I think my work simply comes from my desire to tell things which belong to everyone's life, even if in different ways... I think that I could tell a story about any of my creations and, in some cases, the meaning of the creation would be the story itself.

Claudia Losi

Claudia Losi was born in Piacenza, Italy in 1971, and she continues to live and work there. Since graduating from the Bologna Academy of Fine Arts and the Bologna University of Foreign Languages and Literature she has exhibited all over the world.

Balena Project–Birmingham '08 sees Losi return to Ikon following the presentation last spring of *Aria Mobile*, a small globe embroidered with threads flowing in the direction of high altitude winds. While this delicate work could be held in the palm of a human hand, Losi's current project centres around a life-sized representation of a whale. It is a dramatic shift of scale that relates not only to an individual living creature, a specimen, but also to the epic proportion of time evoked by a species that has survived for at least fifty million years.

This installation, featuring a fin whale made with cashmere, is a work in progress, started in Italy in 2002. The cloth is simply sewn, in a faithful reproduction of the anatomical characteristics of this cetacean, the largest and fastest in the Mediterranean Sea. It has travelled the world, becoming the catalyst for an extended collaborative art event, engaging thousands of people. At times it has been beached in a museum or a gallery, on the seaside or a riverbank, in an ancient city square and here in Birmingham it comes to rest in an undeveloped commercial property.

The *Balena Project* arose out of Losi's awareness that even the highest peaks around her home town were once covered by water in which whales swam, the traces of which are still evident today in local geology. This sense of the passage of time is elaborated in her practice through the traditional processes used, including sewing, embroidery and ceramics, as well as extended collaborations in which the whale is used as a trigger for other people's stories and memories. The animation on show has developed throughout the whale's

voyage around the world and records the creature's varied encounters and activities. A simple black line operates as a thread that connects the stories making up the life history of this colossal mammal.

Prior to the presentation of the whale in Birmingham, the artist worked with children from Erdington Hall Primary School to produce drawings of whales. These were then used by local residents, with the support of Erdington Arts Forum, in a temporary workshop in this inner city district in order to produce hundreds of small fabric whales, soft toys that now provide company for the large creature in its temporary home. Following a visit by the children who originally designed them, a series of photographs can also be seen, documentation of the process devised by Losi. In this way, more people become involved with the story of the whale, bringing it gifts as if in an act of worship.

Also shown here is *Brain* (2008), the cerebral mass of the largest of the fin whales, represented in bone clay. Next to nothing is known about the thought capacity of these animals, yet their brains can be up to seven times that of a human. They communicate with each other through tonal sequences at very low frequencies, audible for hundreds of kilometres, in the form of 'songs'. These can last for twenty minutes or more and may be repeated for hours or even days.

Mukat (2008), likewise rendered in bone clay, takes its name from an Amerindian tribe who hunted whales on the coasts of North America. The pieces of the dismembered whale body, its thick, fatty parts, share the same name, Mukat.

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