

## Artist in Focus: Petra Feriancová

Petra Feriancová's works are often research-based undertakings centred on objects, terrestrial images, cosmogonic content, texts and collections, such as historical and personal archives accumulated by her and her extended family members. Rather than creating original imagery, she often works with this pre-existing material: "My work involving the external world has become saturated to such an extent that I decided to focus on material already accumulated".

This makes manifest the act of affective interpretation, and open-ended reflection carried out by each person, which occurs independently of the original meaning of an object or image. This encourages a feeling of veneration and wonder towards the act of creation. Each new realisation leans towards an implied connection between the universe and at the same time personal experience conditioned by civilisation, history and culture.

We can see her work through a mythological lens exploring, among other ideas, eternal returns, continuous transformations, touching upon the religious, political, autobiographical references, corporeality as well as airy, intangible matters. Forms, images and vestiges of the fleeting past are embraced with the full awareness that their original meaning might have already been degraded or its state reversed.

The artist's handcrafted 'natural' objects, such as the pebbles, are a manifestation of her process of making. Rather than shaped over a lengthy period by natural forces, they are handmade by the artist in clay, itself a natural ingredient, but one that can be manipulated. This may be a surprise, especially after contemplating works such as *'Stone with Oysters'*, which imbues a sense of delicate natural dependency, a kind of personification or anthropomorphism, and *'Earth'*: leftovers of joints from wooden houses tied together creating a now unified presence; an object in its own right; an autonomous artwork.



*Stone with Oysters*, 2016, One stone and two oysters, 20x8x20cm



*Earth*, 2013-2016, Wood from leftovers of joints from wooden houses, 34x38x38cm

The smooth surfaces of the pebbles conjure up a host of connotations that are physical and even emotional due to their haptic qualities triggering memory. The therapeutic action of making involved the artist creating the pebbles for two hours a day, every day, and thus the work also acts as a record of her time.



Petra Feriancová, *Clay Stones*, 2014, Clay stones, white felt, diameter approx. 80cm

“Most of my work reflects my time, my being, my possibilities and also my limitations. They are ideas that I continuously work thus; for example, the small pebbles...they appear to be various sorts of stones, but, in reality, they are all out of clay. These pebbles manifest my attempt to appropriate the flawlessness of nature through the simplest of actions...on the other hand, the artificial stones are about the pressure a human exerts against the force of air and water. How much force would my hand have to apply to form a stone into a shape, not of soft clay, but out of actual stone?” – The artist



Her skins are obscure forms with a seemingly alive figure underneath; not its skin, but that of another. Has whatever is beneath commandeered a skin – if so, how? Material itself is an antagonising yet also existential part of thought. This materiality flows to corporeality. The Greek word ‘pneuma’ means breath, air, Spirit; ‘Pneumatikos’ were described as containers for the soul.



*Pneumaticos*, 2014, Two leather objects, First: 45x34x44cm Second: 33x29x34cm

“Oddly shaped, hollow sculptures made with animal skins, which lie on the ground, as in ‘Pneumaticos’, we discern the void inside them as the tension between air and matter unfolds” - Javier Hontoria, Critics' Picks, ARTFORUM

“I worked with raw animal skin, which I would immerse in water and leave to dry in a desired shape, which would then be exhibited. Some skins were pierced from a fatal wound and the spectator could either see right through the opening or see into the cavity within them, or rather that, which they were enclosing – air itself” – The artist

*'Hybridae and Hydridae/Immortal'* are delicate and intricate prints on artificial silk. Scientists recently discovered that there is a species of jellyfish that can live forever: *Turritopsis dohrnii* is officially known as the only immortal creature. Once they breed, they can revert to a sexually immature stage again. This small species is found in the Mediterranean Sea and the waters of Japan. The artist explores the forms of this mysterious and still relatively unknown creature, which holds the secret to eternal life. When exhibited from the ceiling, the rotating axes grant a sense of primeval existence; the centrality of the sphere, around which everything revolves: the life force.

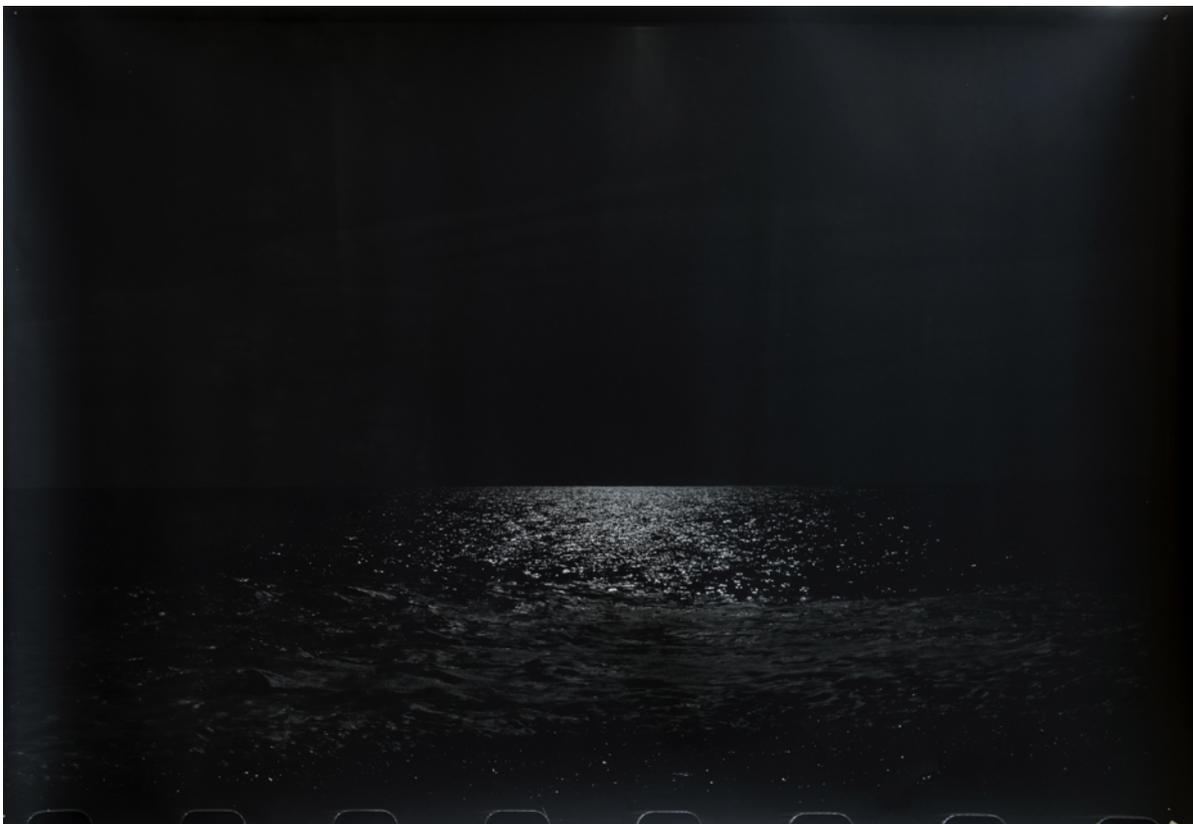


*Hybridae and Hydridae/Immortal*, 2015, Print on artificial silk, 3.95x2m

“Repetition and returns remain important themes in my work, which I also deal with in relation to the archive, collecting and a recurring summarisation of older works. This relates to the fact that I work with limits and with a restricted amount of material, which I keep evaluating and post-producing. A return disputes the idea of moving forward and opposes narration” – The artist

The artist works with an extensive archive of photographs: a collection of images taken by various family members, often from places she has never been to, as well as her own photographs.

“I generally work with found, already existing images. I believe an image is meant to be found, observed and associated with some literal, historic, or political reference. I am essentially playing with the possibility of sharing the same feeling that I experienced when I found it. I am also exploring the possibility of people seeing as if through my eyes, even though I often work with quite complex or intimate topics” - The artist



*Untitled* (From the series *Medusa's Shields*), 2009-ongoing, One large photograph, silver print on Baryta paper, 98x162cm

The collection is explored in ongoing projects, such as '*Medusa's Shields*'. The artist often carefully selects an image for redeveloping and printing in a large format, or multiple images in single and double sizes exhibited together. The non-linear manner presents an alternative structure and possibility for meaning through contemplation and association. One reading is that the images are rendered and juxtaposed as universal and even eternal symbols: objects and displays from museums; creatures once alive as well as models; natural elements in

various forms and captured in different states; symbolic places, statues or monuments from world history, including the Sphinx. Their introduction is through their surfacing, but the images are resounding, and the echoes in our collective minds are even louder. Through their concatenation and resonation, an indomitable force is created.



*Untitled (From the series Medusa's Shields)*, 2009-ongoing (2016 arrangement), silver prints on Baryta paper, 8 double photographs 36x98cm and 21 single photographs 33x51cm

"I pondered the idea of the immortality of an object. There is a myth, according to which people are made of rock, or more precisely inorganic matter, which makes them immobile, but also allows them to live eternally. The material of vegetation is different – it moves only during growth, and it too endures. In the myth, it is also written that people were formed of rock and tears" - The artist

Feriancová lives and works between Bratislava and Milan. She studied at the famed Accademia di Belle Arti Rome and undertook her PhD at the Academy of Fine Arts Bratislava. She has exhibited at Frieze London, Venice Biennale, Courtauld Institute of Art, The Association of Visual Artists Vienna Secession, Garage Museum Moscow, PyeongChang Biennale, Slovak National Gallery, National Museum Warsaw and Prague Biennale for instance. Her work is in the Siemens, Telekom, Slovak National Gallery, APT Institute and Mario Testino Collections for example.