



# Judy Fox

## Out of Water





THE FOCUS OF JUDY FOX'S SIXTH SOLO SHOW IS EXPRESSIVE cephalopods and worms along with one nude mermaid. The artist told me that this show represents five years of work and her signature style of meticulously-crafted and casein-painted terracotta forms is evident in each work. This show is a shift from Fox's focus on psychologically suggestive nude children playing or children in postures that nod to art in history, such as one odalisque that brings to mind Manet's *Olympia* – whose stare and unidealised nude body shocked viewers in Manet's day.

Instead of modelling children, Fox is reviving her lifelong interest in biology. As Fox told Barbara Wally: "Well, I continued to take science courses for fun as an undergraduate, because I always liked evolution,

### A Review by Jan Garden Castro

developmental biology, mammology – the big biology, all of those things that explicated life. I still read science now.<sup>1</sup>

*Mermaid*, the largest work in the show, alludes to Botticelli's *Venus* emerging from the sea. The lower part of her body has a blue cast and there are blue streaks in her wave of dark hair. She seems frozen in place – an idealised half human/half sea creature incapable of independent thought or human feelings. She, perhaps, represents the degree to which

Facing page, top: Judy Fox: *Out of Water Installation View*.

Facing page, centre: *Cuttlefish 1 (Mimi)*. 2011. Terracotta and casin.

16 x 9 x 13 in.

Above: *Worm 1*. 2011. Terracotta and casin. 46 x 8 x 12 in.

Below: *Octopus 2 (Curly)*. 2011. Terracotta and casin.

12 x 18 x 16 in.





humans can never embody myths and, conversely, myths can never personify humans.

The other 15 terracotta and casein works are either cephalopods or worms. The mollusks (octopi, cuttlefish and one squid) suggest heads and the worms suggest bodies. To me, in addition, they all variously allude to sexual organs and/or positions. The twisting worms suggest legs, backs and buttocks and most have openings that resemble engorged reddish labia. From the back, *Large Octopus 1 (Elder)* has two rounded orbs that could be a human butt or balls; one greyish cuttlefish has a tall shaft on top with a penis-shaped tip. I am not familiar with the biological 'models' for these forms and can not speculate the degrees to which the sculptures are physically precise or enhanced by fantasy.

Fox may be fascinated with mollusks because they are among the oldest invertebrates. The Cephalopod class, including squid, octopus and cuttlefish, a) is neurologically advanced, b) the same organ serves multiple functions, c) some mollusks contain pearls, purple dye and shells that humans value; and d) the Cephalopod class dates back to the Cambrian period 541 to 485 years ago.<sup>2</sup>

As Nancy Princenthal notes in her brief catalogue essay, "the mollusks are faceless and 'alien'



except for their expressive eyes and: A tall, sagacious-looking octopus whom Fox calls the 'elder' is paired with a full-skirted 'dowager'; there is a cuttlefish 'butler', erect and tight-lipped and an octopus 'codger', its small eyes puffy-lidded and doleful. Like art critics, Fox says, the sly, predatory cephalopods will keep a sharp eye on the mermaid and her retinue."<sup>3</sup>

As Princenthal suggests, Fox personifies her mollusks both in surface treatments, coloration and features. *Large Octopus 1 (Elder)*, with narrow, closed tentacles and *Large Octopus 2 (Dowager)*, with a portly, balloon-like front, seem like opposite shapes. Possibly, they suggest that things and people mutate based on their behaviours or other factors. I am not sure how others will 'read' these forms. It is a psychologically-penetrating show.

#### ENDNOTES

1. "Conversation between Judy Fox and Barbara Wally", (NY, September 2004) in Judy Fox Skulpturen 1990-2005. Salzburg: Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, 2005:17.
2. Brief summary from Wikipedia online.
3. From essay "Out of Water", in *Judy Fox Out of Water*, October 27 – December 15, 2012. New York: PPOW Gallery, 2012: unpagged.

Jan Garden Castro ([jancastro.com](http://jancastro.com)) has a monthly "In the Studio" blog at [www.Sculpture.org](http://www.Sculpture.org) and she publishes frequently in print periodicals. Some of her books are rare and some are at Amazon.com.

Judy Fox ([judyfox.net](http://judyfox.net)) studied at Yale and Skowhegan and earned a Masters in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. She has received two National Endowment for the Arts grants and fellowships from Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

All images courtesy of the artist and the PPOW Gallery, New York.

Facing page, top left: *Worm 6*. 2011. Terracotta and casin. 24 x 9 x 15 in.

Facing page, top right: *Mermaid*. 2011. Terracotta and casin.

64 x 26 x 13 in.

Facing page, below: *Dowager*.

Above: *Octopus 1 (Codger)*. 2009–2011. Terracotta and casin.

13 x 18 x 18 in.

Below: *Cuttlefish 2 (Butter)*. 2011. Terracotta and casin. 17 x 10 x 12 in.

