



JOHAN  
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editore

Claudia Losi

# The Whale Theory

An Animal Imagery

*Press release*

**Claudia Losi has long centred her artistic research on whales, that most majestic and mysterious of mammals, around which have accumulated glorious stories and distant geographies, ancient myths and contemporary accounts. Her artist's book is like a magnet holding strange, marvellous secrets and a compass accompanying readers on a poetic voyage through a rich collection of illustrations, photographs and texts.**

In the open sea, the whale's enormity is partially hidden from view, like the underwater portion of an iceberg, calling for an additional effort of imagination. Not least for this reason, the whale has become a collector of stories, a mystery that accommodates and transforms, a paradigm for humanity. The ultimate mythic animal, the whale has been seen over the centuries as an emanation of the divine, an incarnation of evil, a source of subsistence, a literary creature and a monstrous fairground attraction.

Claudia Losi was captured by the lure of this awesome mammal and, in 2004, made it one of the centrepieces of her work. Since then, the *Balena Project* has been a long journey, materializing in a variety of forms and actions centred around an itinerant life-size reconstruction of a fin whale. This massive grey wool animal was escorted around Italy and abroad, made to run ashore in a museum, on the banks of a river, in a historic square, on the outskirts of town or in a school courtyard, until, in the end, it was transformed definitively to allow for new pursuits. This book represents the final landing place of the journey.

The book is structured as a polyphonic narrative, an encounter of expertise and perspectives ranging from artistic performance to natural science, from anthropology and zoology to environmental protection. The pages are alive with cetaceans who delineate a fantastic, yet real, marine geography, made of words and visions that have nurtured the mystery of whales in the imagination of the individual artist as in that of the collective.

Losi's fated encounter took place in the Apennines, not far from her hometown, where fragments of ancient whale bones were discovered in the sand gullies, first in the 19th century and then again in the 20th. The remains date back to the Pliocene era, when the plain was covered with salt water and vast expanses of algae occupied the territory of today's vineyards and alfalfa fields. Then there was the whale Goliath, its carcass preserved in formaldehyde, taken on tour like a circus sideshow in the 1980s through western Europe and behind the Iron Curtain, its smell even more shocking than its size. These images and memories were joined by others over time to create an obsession, a creative impetus and an ecological concern.

In fact, the unrestrained exploitation of our natural resources endangers not only the physical survival of whales, but even the survival of certain unconscious archetypes at the root of human experience. The transformation of the gargantuan down to a human scale achieved by Losi and the *post mortem* phase of the huge fabric animal – reborn in a multitude of smaller fin whales, in bags made from the air pockets that animated it, and especially, in jackets based on original designs by Antonio Marras – are all responses to our need to comprehend the very idea of the gigantic, the awesome, the extraordinary and to help this very particular creature to survive, and indeed, to reinvigorate and multiply its power.



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Texts by: Christopher Collins, Matteo Meschiari, Vinicio Capossela, Jean Rezzonico, Jean D'Yvoire, Gianni Pavan, Silvia Bottani, Tore Teglbjaerg, Mauro Sargiani, Petra Aprile, Sunaura Taylor, Gioia Laura Iannilli, Jurg Slabbert, Kate Pocklington, Philip Hoare.

"Everything you will read and see in this book comes from a tale twenty years in the making. An archipelago of islands, straits, and continents in motion, like the passing currents of different times and voices.

My Whale is an animal that has lived with the help of many people and many temporary communities.

For a long time, it swallowed me up and protected me."

**Claudia Losi** (b. 1971) is a visual artist who never loses sight of the natural sciences and humanities, or of mankind's interactions with its environment, during her explorations, which she expresses through a wide range of art forms, including sculpture, photography, drawing, performance art and site-specific projects. Her works have been exhibited in numerous settings and museums, both in Italy and abroad.

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