

## Artist Statement

September 2017 Exhibition, Abmeyer & Wood Fine Art  
Seattle, WA

### Continuance

In this exhibition, much of the work arose from an attempt to process the difficulties of our time by engaging with imagery that might be restorative: quieter meditations on harsh realities; reflections that might create a dark beauty.

The body of work goes back to 2014, and the pieces related to Diana/Artemis are the earliest. Diana is the Roman name, and Artemis the Greek name, for the same being: “the Huntress.” I was drawn to the imagery surrounding their associated myths: the paradoxes they hold are so much a part of human complexity. Diana represents both fertility and chastity; both wilderness and hunting; both deer and the hounds who hunt them. She is famed for being nurturing, but there are also stories of her wrath. When the hunter Actaeon spied upon her bathing with the nymphs, for example, she took revenge by turning him into a stag. His own hounds, not recognizing him, chased him down and tore him to pieces.

I felt drawn to combine some of these archetypal elements—especially Diana’s hounds and her fertility. I gave the fertility to the dogs with rows of engorged breasts, their bodies floating against her own chest like an intensified extension of herself. Strength and nurturing aren’t always held side by side, but perhaps they should be. There is a power in female images of strength *and* nurturing. In my experience the two qualities, linked, are one of the most positive forces in the world.

On a personal note, I have some history with this imagery. As a child traveling in Italy with my family, I was struck by the Fountain of Diana, at Villa d’Este in Tivoli, with her multitude of breasts spewing water. It made a deep and lasting impression on me as a preadolescent twelve year old, and now again at this much later phase of my life, the imagery is still compelling to me as a “post-fertility” woman, with the raising of two daughters behind me.

The other two bodies of work in this exhibition have arisen from more recent experiences. Most people, it seems to me, are so weighed down by the current state of the world that I want to find ways of addressing our collective distress without adding more weight. To work *around* the weight somehow allows the work to be more resonant.

It was from this state of mind that I found myself drawn back to images of Kuan Yin. There's a very beautiful sculpture of Kuan Yin at the Metropolitan Museum in New York that I've repeatedly visited, for years. It embodies such a peacefulness that it's comforting to sit in its presence. This past January I spent time at the Honolulu Museum of Art, and again was drawn to another powerful sculpture of Kuan Yin. Kuan Yin (also known as Avalokiteshvara in male or genderless form) is the Buddhist Bodhisattva of compassion.

The concept of compassion embodied in human form along with some of the associated stories/myths became one of the catalysts for a series of pieces. The other experience that contributed to the work was the cover photo of the February 2017 issue of *The Sun Magazine*. The photograph has the feeling of a Madonna, except that it's of a young girl, a Syrian refugee, holding a baby. The expression on her face is equally full of suffering and of dignity. She is only about eight, but appears ageless, in that her expression holds more experience and sorrow than any eight year old should know. The image stunned me, and I put it in my studio as a kind of icon, a reminder. From her gaze came the piece "Kuan Yin, Sleep".

Still pondering the feeling we call *compassion fatigue*, I made a second Kuan Yin with vines and buds enclosing her as if, perhaps, she's generating foliage to conceal herself. In another piece, the figure vanishes in foliage completely. I've been looking at Chinese porcelain figurines which depict Kuan Yin standing on a lotus flower base, with lotus leaves, pods and other plant life surrounding her. To my eye, it signifies her connection and inseparability from the world, and in a way reminds me of Diana/Artemis's close association with wilderness. The concept of "continuance" feels alive and resonant in these images that connect, over centuries, from different parts of the world.

Another variation in the series came from the story of how Kuan Yin's limitless compassion, in order to create enough eyes and ears to track all the suffering in the world, caused her head to explode into a multitude of heads. With my piece, the multi-headed bust is more Madonna-like and Western than Eastern, but the compassion of Kuan Yin and suffering of Mary feel connected to me, both embodying responses inseparable from the present.

The series of figures with small deer could be seen as relating to the earlier Diana/Artemis sculptures. They do have some overlapping content, but the catalyst for these pieces came from a specific event. In November, 2015 after the terrorist attacks on a big concert hall in Paris, the Parisians came together to show solidarity and reclaim their city. Their signs and songs said they would not be cowed, or afraid—this was their home. But during their gathering there was a sudden loud report, like a gunshot, perhaps from an engine backfire. The reaction was primal. The entire crowd took flight, like the flight animals we too are, out of the uncontrollable instinct to survive. I live in deer country and often see this response.

But as I began making the first piece called “Heard” the imagery became more tranquil. I found myself thinking of veterans, with PTSD, who can't sleep unless they have a dog with them. A dog, they feel, is a sentinel and protector; it allows them to be “off duty”. Though the “Heard” pieces were inspired by a moment of mass terror, and though deer are spring-loaded with the instinct to flee, these herds offer that sentinel role to the woman they enclose. They are watchful; evaluating the moment; embodying a tense tranquility; vigilant but not afraid.

For me these pieces, again, tie into my appreciation of the fact that we are not a separate entity from all of nature, in life or in death. Our fears might be eased, somewhat by that connection. We are not separate.