

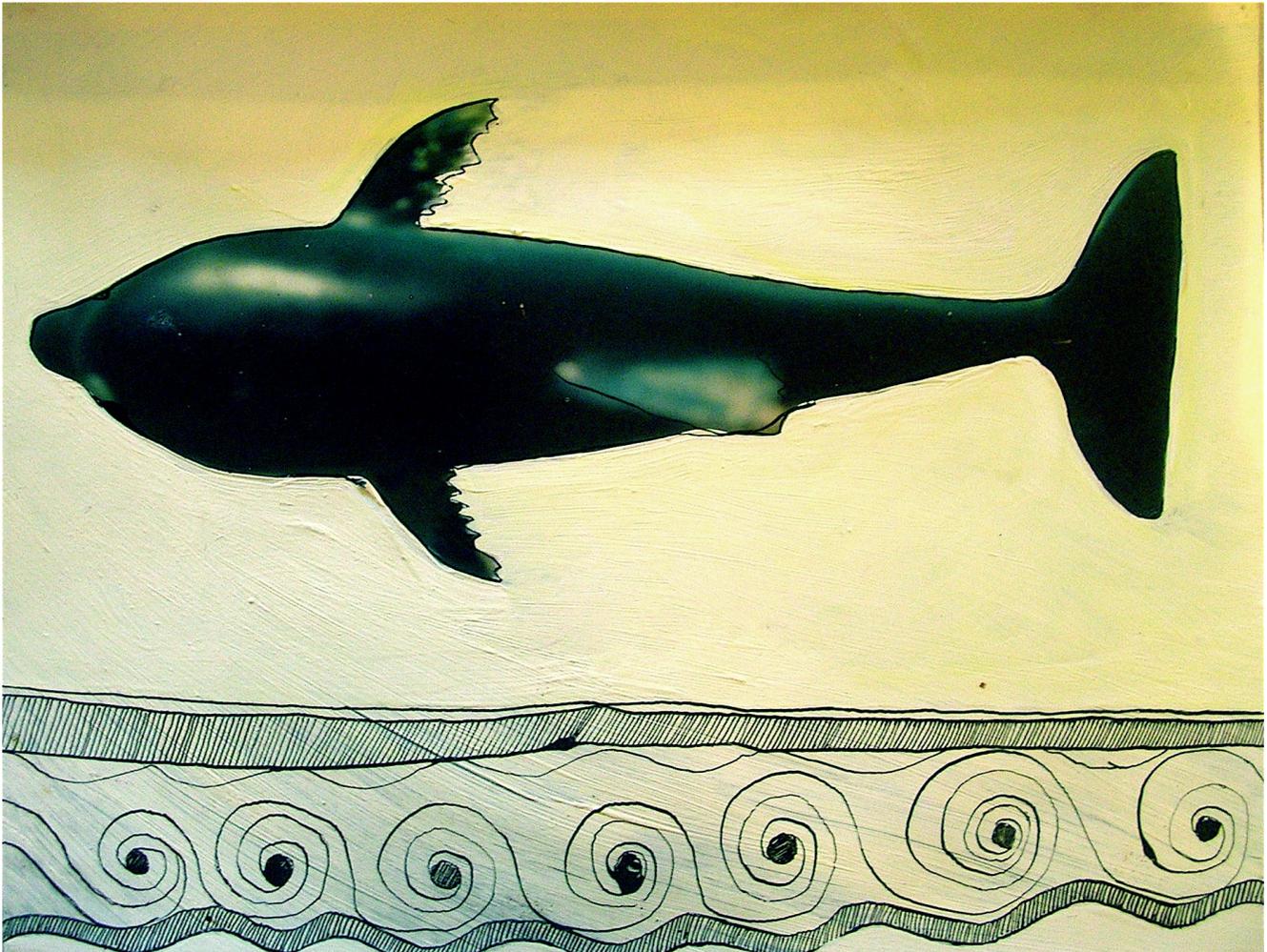
Chemical Crabs and other Play Things



"Chemical Crabs" series , painted photographs

A proposal for exhibition
By Barbara Benish

This body of work is a mix of two-dimensional collage and painted photographs, and installation. The work follows on some similar themes with the "Bruno" dolphin images from nearly a decade ago. They are addressing the destruction of our marine life, from vast habitat devastation, pollution, over fishing and chemical runoff into our oceans and rivers. And the human history that has put us here.



The main model for each photographic series are various children's toys, made of plastic; dolphins, crabs, ducks.

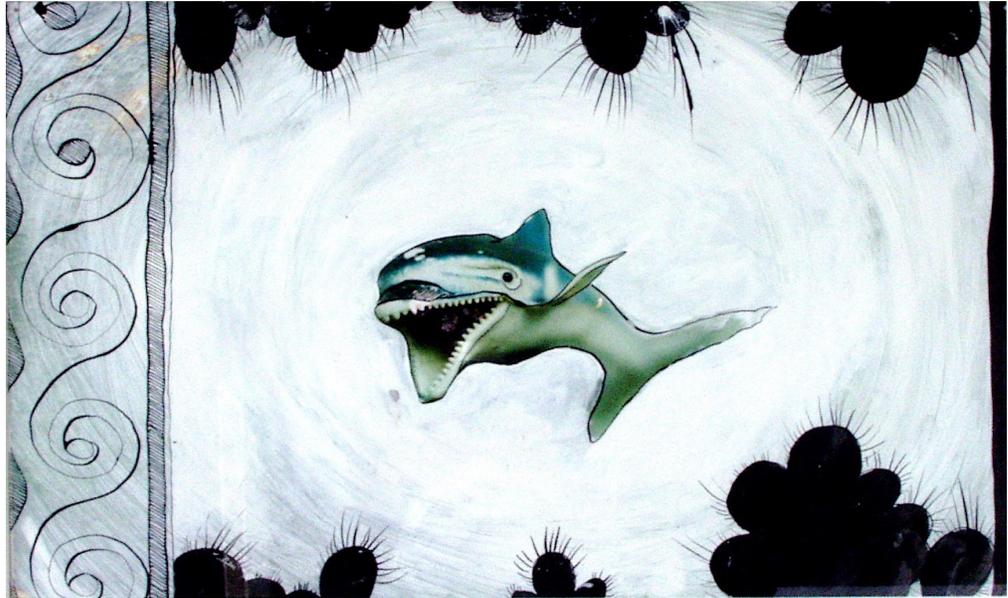
Depicting the danger of chemicals in our world is challenging, since so much of it is unseen. The colors I have chosen in this series are meant to depict the hot and unnaturally attractive residues we have all seen, seeping into our lakes, along shores, or under the microscope. It is an attempt to make the invisible visible. The attractive, outrageous neon brights, that are seen increasingly on the worlds

beaches and in the bellies of animals and fish we eat, have seeped into the food chain and are poisoning us. Ironically, many of the artist's pigments and printing dyes are made from Benzidine, one of the worst. The photo chemical process itself is toxic.



They are also used as reagents and biological stains in laboratories, used in the food industries, and have more recent uses in laser, liquid crystal displays, ink-jet printers, and electro-optical devices." They are carcinogenic.

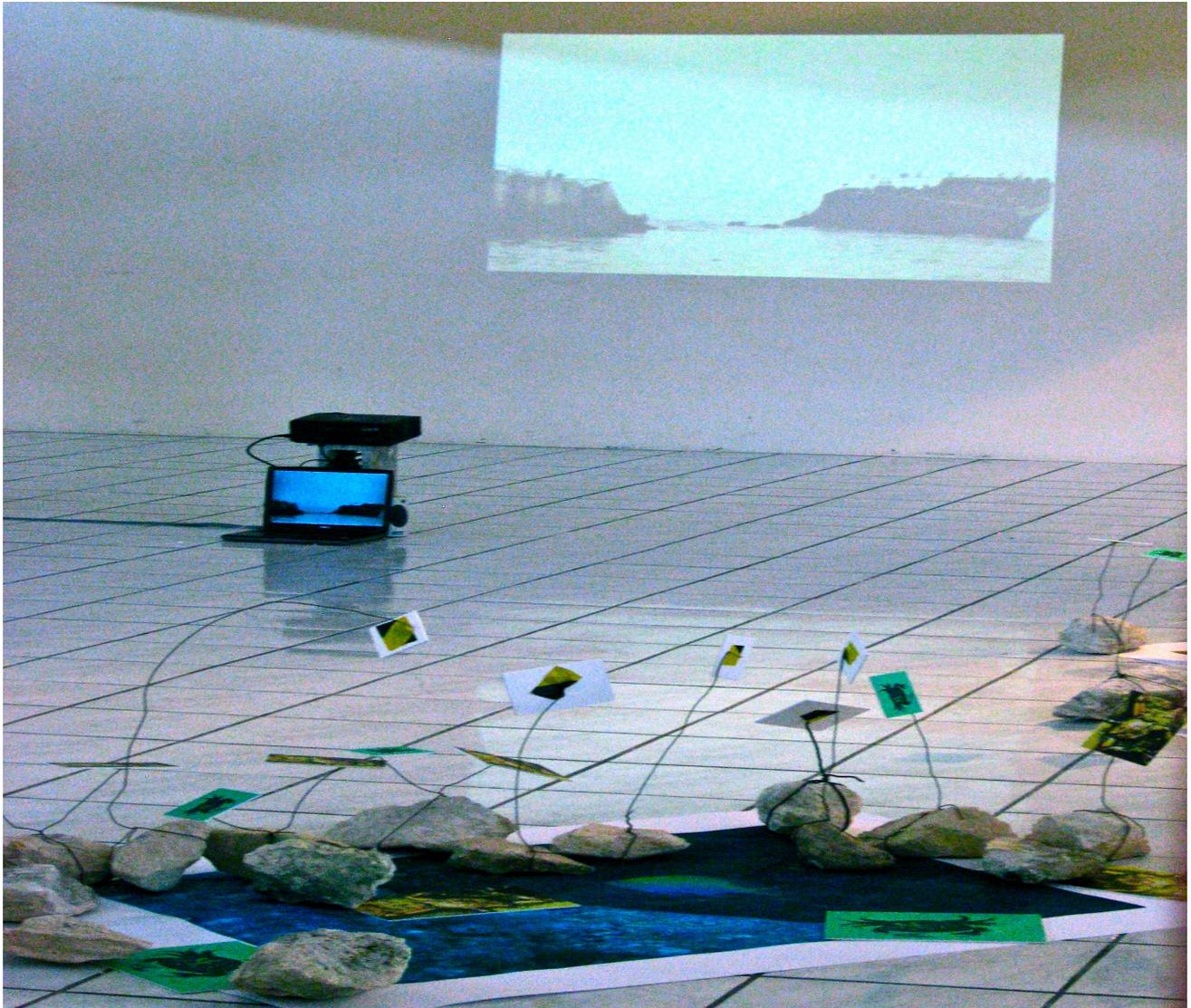
Starting with the "Bruno" dolphins series in 2000-01, the images are all of photographed plastic toys that I have found. These are what we give our children to play with and put in their mouths. Eight out of ten babies have phthalates in their bodies, and nearly all adults do. It is a plasticizer used in manufacturing of everything from vinyl flooring to food packaging to wall coverings. And toys.



The crab, in western mythology was the heroic little creature who bit Herakles' foot in the second battle of Hercules thereby enabling the serpent Hydra to win. She is the symbol of motherhood, nourishment, perseverance, and cleansing. In astrology, the crab represents the sign of Cancer, which comes from the Greek word, Karkinos (or Carcinus).

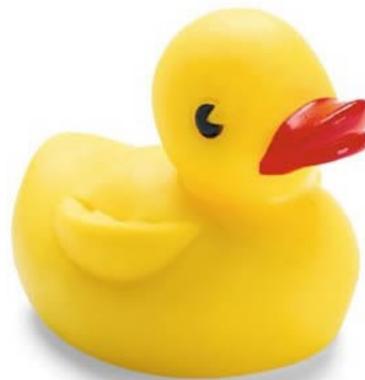


Quintana Roo, Mexico, December, 2010. Universidad Tecnologica.



It is visible in the crab, struggling to survive in order to renew the shores. She is a bottom feeder who cleanses the water for other species to survive. An integral part of the marine and sweet water eco-system. "Two thirds of all different species of freshwater crabs are at risk of becoming extinct, says a new survey. That means that freshwater crabs are some of the most endangered of all groups of animals reviewed thus far. This research is the first worldwide evaluation of the extinction danger of any collection of freshwater invertebrates." (red Orbit)

Formally, and symbolically, the crab's shape resembles female breasts, recalling feminine attributes of nurturing , protection and motherhood. The crab also schematizes the form of female reproductive organs when viewed from above. Regeneration, which means survival, at this point, is questionable.



In progress:

NOW & THEN

carved wooden ducks
of native Hawai'ian woods, photographed next to traditional rubber ducks. Inspired by the story of the huge shipment of plastic toys from China that was dumped accidentally into the Pacific on it's way to Tacoma, Washington in 1992.. In the subsequent years the duckies were found washed ashore in Alaska, Japan, and it is theorized, are now passing through the Bering Strait. This type of plastic takes 500 years to break down, forming before then into the plastic nodules that are digested by sea life- posing an extreme threat globally to all forms of marine life as we know it. Including the fish we now digest.