

Coral Beliefs as a Philosophy By Jill Krutick

800 miles southeast of Mogadishu, Somalia sits one of the most pristine and magnificent remaining island chains in the world. Largely protected from human exploitation by their utter remoteness, these islands were first visited by humans in the 1500s. Their isolation has created an Indian Ocean-like Galapagos filled with unique endemic species of flora and fauna including the world's only other giant tortoises and the largest nut in the world – the giant coco de mer – weighing up to 50 pounds. Still, this veritable Garden of Eden has not been able to completely withstand the ravages of man from climate change, invasive species and pollution.

In April of 2022 I had the great fortune to travel for two weeks to this collection of islands. I spent my time scuba diving on the pure coral reefs on the remote Alphonse Atoll, a rarely explored location. The underwater fantasy world was like none that I had seen before - despite having dived in many locations around the world. The water clarity, vibrancy of color, varied species of fish and coral were unmatched. And yet, even here, above the high tide mark on the atoll we find tons of plastic garbage including Nike and Adidas sandals, fishing nets, plastic bottles and debris. Ocean currents bring this garbage thousands of miles from Thailand and Indonesian populations, despoiling the perfection of this Shangri La.

This trip became a key source of inspiration for "Coral Beliefs," a momentous piece to celebrate the beauty and fragility of our undersea world.

The creation of "Coral Beliefs" comes at an interesting juncture in my art career. My thoughts and dreams come together with a renewed sense of purpose. This transformation is evident in both my art work as well as how I manage my art practice.

I began as an artist confined by the financial world I came from using rigid, tapestry-like movements to create geometric patterns and boxes. [1] Then I progressed to explore peaceful, imaginary fantasy worlds, like my Dreamscape, Shangri La and Aurora Borealis Series. Eventually, with the Swirl Series my work opened up and became more musical and jazzier, reflecting my love for music, conducting and playing the piano.

The only constant through the evolution of my abstract expressionist styles was exploring color and texture. Oil paint and a palette knife got me started, but over time my tool kit expanded to include acrylic paint and different acrylic mediums. It wasn't until I tried watercolor that everything shifted for me as an artist. Watercolors required patience and "belief" in the process. The most challenging part of watercolors was walking away from the work after applying the color and letting nature take its course. This extemporaneous approach helped to train me to become a better artist. I developed a deeper understanding for how to simulate depth and honor "white space" on the canvas.

The importance of watercolor went even further for me. It better aligned my materials to my philosophical spirit. I had become very concerned about the environment through my eco travels, diving and time spent exploring the ocean. Using new applications and drying techniques I could negotiate an "alliance" between my materials and the subject that had become so important to

me. Through my “Contours of the Earth” series, I examine post-apocalyptic imagined shapes of the world after the effects of climate change. This watercolor-based series imagines the impact of melting ice caps or “The Big Thaw,” “Rising Sea Levels,” and the drying of the land/sea through “Aridification.”

“Coral Beliefs” takes my discovery to a much higher level. This 84.5-foot long continuous work of art is immersive and monumental. I wove together a story across 25 panels, each 30 x 40 inches (except for the middle panel, which measures 30 x 45 inches) to fit like a puzzle around the perimeter of the Pyramid Hill Sculpture Park & Museum large gallery. Each panel is named for one of the 25 “beliefs” I imagine when creating my story about coral reefs. These include: Networking, Fury, Blooming, Tranquility among many others. I not only try to portray the elation and poetry I feel and see when exploring the reef, but also the harsh reality of the suffocating, bleaching and pollution that is destroying it. The center of the piece is like a “Big Bang” or whirlwind of debris that explodes and ultimately gives way to a quest for a harmonious, labyrinth of enchantment.

I explore the world's largest organism and complementary biosphere, coral reefs, through a complex interplay of watercolor, oil paint, and acrylic mediums, together with various paper collage and plastic materials. Beauty and debris live in our oceans and it is not sustainable. Without coral reefs, fish die and the ecosystem unravels. This delicate structure literally builds and maintains itself once all the correct conditions exist. We need to nurture and cooperate as we address these fundamental concerns.

Coral reefs have become the language in which I communicate not only as an artist but as an artist/gallerist entrepreneur. Over the past couple of years, I have opened my studio space to other artists, recognizing the limitations of the traditional gallery model. It is through my developing sense of inclusion and collaboration that I have grown my network of artists, expanded my global reach, and continued on the path of artistic discovery. I have hosted over a dozen events in my gallery-style studio space located in Westchester, New York (town of Mamaroneck) for hundreds of artists over the past year or so including MFA students, photographers, printers, painters, sculptors, watercolorists and eco-warriors. I have become a resource for other artists and a facilitator for new exhibition opportunities. These efforts underscore the necessity for artists to come together to realize their own dreams. Very much like a coral reef, we are all interdependent on each other... together we bloom or perish.

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[1] Jill Krutick was a managing director and equity analyst specializing in entertainment and leisure companies at Citigroup for about two decades before helping take public Warner Music Group and running their investor relations and corporate strategy group for six years.