

With the “Mermaid’s Tale”, Marta Jovanović introduces a figure of ancient mythology into technology of the 21st century. In doing so, the artist addresses a variety of issues ranging from cultural codes, investigations into her own history as well as her present situation as a performance artist, to ontological questions about the discipline of performance art.

In a “Mermaid’s Tale,” the fabled creature that signifies female beauty and seduction on the one hand, yet promises of misfortune on the other, is taken out of her element and instead put on a bed of ice, whose slow melting and effects on the artist’s body are experienced by the viewer in the virtual realm. This gesture, which comments on the concept of ideal beauty as a preservation of youth with which women have been tasked by society, equally can be understood as a metaphorical investigation into resistance – to the myth of the mermaid and by extension the myth of women, of beauty, and sexual attraction. Ultimately, the artist utilizes the mermaid on ice as an inquiry into her own capacity to resist the physical and emotional demands put on her by her chosen medium, performance art.

The “Mermaid’s Tale” confronts the audience with a paradoxical situation as the corporeality of live performance is substituted by an immersive technological environment. In doing so, the work prompts viewers to consider how we understand the changing dynamics between new technology and the human body, the relations between live performance and documentation, and ultimately the question of what constitutes a work of performance art in our current times.