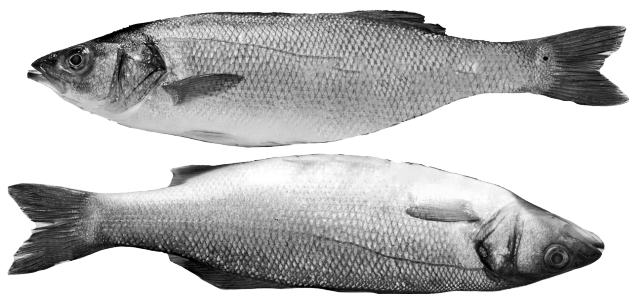


Reluctor et Emergo

1:40,5 Gallery
05/12/21 - 22/01/22

I was born on March 12, 1986, under the astrological sign of Pisces, a few weeks after the death of Joseph Beuys and a few weeks before the Chernobyl nuclear disaster.



According to the astrologers, being born a Pisces meant I was born to be an artist. In any case, this is what is written in the astral chart that my mother had made at my birth and of which I read and reread the thirty or so pages throughout my childhood and adolescence. To what extent this natal chart has influenced my career choices, I cannot say. Would I have taken this professional direction if my childhood had not been rocked by these beliefs? We will never know. But one thing is certain, seeing myself as a fish, I also learned to love water.

However, it was not a foregone conclusion! Because my early childhood was marked by an event that could have traumatized me for life: I almost drowned.

I was just under 2 and 1/2 years old that day. We were enjoying an afternoon at the park with my brothers and sister. That was the day we had the great idea of making fishing rods to play fisherman on the river crossing the park. All we had to do was find a stick that was about right, attach a branch of weeping willow to it and dip it in water. I was unable to make a very long rod, unlike my brothers, then 4 and a half years old, who were quite happy with their fishing rods leaning against the fence and the willow branch twirling in the current. «If the rod is too short, it means you are too far from the water». It's not a Chinese proverb (although! I wouldn't be that much surprised if it was), but that's basically what I told myself: I just had to get closer to the shore to enjoy the delectable joy of participating in my big brothers' games. I spotted a hole in the fence, crawled through it, grabbed my rod, and approached the edge. The rod was very, very short. Despite my brothers' warnings «stop!», «you're too little!», «you'll fall!», «mommy will scold you!», «we'll get scolded!», which I interpreted as «we don't want to play with you». I continued my evolution towards the shore. And there, at the very moment when I finally managed to soak my willow branch: PLOP.





Once my head was under water, I was immediately surprised by the ease with which I could breathe. The water was dark, opaque, in a shade of green tending to brown. I couldn't see anything for the first few seconds. Quickly my eyes got used to seeing underwater. And I discovered a lot of fish around me. They were really nice. Especially one of them, an orange fish, he could talk and invited me to follow him. We played swimming in the seaweed. I was really enjoying myself. I was a fish and I can guarantee you, it was a phenomenal experience. But it was short lived, because suddenly I was grabbed by the leg and pulled out of the water.

I know very well that the underwater experience I am relating here seems impossible. But that is how this memory was created in my childhood brain. It is certainly a mixture between the real memories and the dreams I had afterwards. And in spite of all the stories about this event that I heard afterwards from my mom and grandma, my memory is and will remain engraved like this. And so much the better! Because I have a great memory of it.

A few years later, I went to the elementary school of the Center of Souppes Sur Loing. A small town located in the south of the Paris region, along the Loing river. In the playground, there was a commemorative plaque indicating the level of the highest flood that the town had experienced in the last century. It was in 1910, and the water had reached about 1 meter high in my schoolyard. I used to fantasize a lot about that plaque. The kids back then were really lucky! I too would have loved to be able to go to school by boat. So I regularly wished, when the opportunity to formulate a wish presented itself, that such a big flood would happen in order to realize this dream. The only flood that I experienced at that time did not exceed 20 cm in height on a perimeter of a few tens of meters in a district far from my home and my school. I was very frustrated.

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In June 2016, my partner and I had decided to leave France to move to Sweden, his native country. We were a few weeks away from leaving. We had just closed the last exhibition that had taken place in the gallery we had founded in Montargis, a medium-sized town, also located along the Loing river, built on a network of small canals that earned it the reputation of the «Venice of the Gatinais.» The gallery was located about fifty meters from the commemorative plaque of the 1910 floods of this town. I sometimes thought of the one from my childhood. In this spring of 2016 we had suffered from a terrible season. It had rained for weeks. One afternoon while we were arranging the works in the gallery, which then served as a storage space, I stepped out onto the sidewalk to smoke a cigarette. Busy grumbling about the rain, I began to notice that the water was no longer flowing in a normal direction: instead of emptying into the sewer, the water was coming out, rising and slowly filling the street! A few minutes later I received a text message from a friend: the official announcement was going to be given, the flood alert had arrived, it was absolutely necessary to evacuate! The forecasts were serious, we had to wait for a flood of once in a hundred-year magnitude, of the kind the region had not known since 1910. Either excited or shocked, we decided not to evacuate and to concentrate our forces on the preservation of the artworks that had been entrusted to us. So we spent the remaining hours before the water rose, going back and forth between the gallery and our apartment on the second floor of the same building. When the water finally entered the gallery, it was empty and ready for the catastrophe.

It is obvious that from my point of view it was not a catastrophe at all. I had dreamed of this flood, wished for it so hard! Finally my wishes as a child had been heard! A bit at the last minute since I was about to leave the country, but I had my extraordinary flood. Of course, I soon realized that it wasn't as funny as I had imagined as a child.

I have a thousand anecdotes about this exceptional event. Among them I like to think about the fish that took up residence in the gallery. We saw him strawling-swimming in the corridor leading to the staircase. Its presence had really given us joy, especially during the two days of absolute solitude in which we were before our evacuation expedition. But I was also very sad to discover that he had not been able to find a way out when the waters had finally receded. We found him lifeless in the middle of the muddy gallery. We felt like losing a friend. For real.



Note that during our evacuation no boat came to pick us up: we had to swim in the dark waters. Then I still never realized my dream of boating in my street.

As we handed back the keys of the gallery to the owner of the building, we had this thought: we had opened the gallery with an exhibition entitled «Under Pressure, Beneath the Sea», a selection of works of mine devoted to the theme of water and the sea - I had presented my work «Knitting the Sea» for the first time at this occasion - and we were closing the gallery with an exceptional flood. What a coincidence! I was finally a little frustrated not to have been able to seize this opportunity, this sign of destiny in a way, to make a work of it. Fantasizing about an exhibition in the water.

I thought I had missed my one and only opportunity. It seemed impossible to foresee a flood sufficiently in advance to organize this, and I can't imagine any gallery owner willing to flood his space for an exhibition. So this project was still going to have to remain in the fantasy stage. Well, that was until I realized the power of models!

In the introduction to this text, I told you that I was born a few weeks after the death of Joseph Beuys and a few weeks before the Chernobyl disaster. You are right to think that this must certainly have a link with the rest of the text. But I won't tell you why. Not now anyway.



Ludivine Thomas-Andersson
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