

## **Rán – Ditte Ejlerskov's Sublime Avatar**

With an arched body, a calm, almost generic gaze, and long strands of seaweed hair, the artist Ditte Ejlerskov (b. 1982) has created the sea goddess Rán at Fonderia Artistica Mariani in Pietrasanta. Through her sculpture of this almost forgotten figure from Norse mythology, ruling over the powers of the ocean depths, Ejlerskov explores the charged space of the storm, where fear and tranquility, destruction and transformation coexist – experiences that, in philosophy, are often associated with concept of the sublime.

### **Ditte Ejlerskov's Practice: Nature, Emotion and Female Primal Forces**

Ditte Ejlerskov graduated from the Funen Art Academy, The Cooper Union School of Art in New York, and Malmö Art Academy, and works at the intersection of the personal, the existential and the feminist.<sup>1</sup> Rán arose from Ejlerskov's own encounters with the sea and its dual nature – both life-giving and life-threatening – as well as her fascination with the ocean's washed-up remnants: shells, mermaid's purses, bladderwrack and jellyfish.

In Norse mythology, Rán, could stir up storms and waves and ensnare drowned sailors in her fishing net, drawing them into her underwater realm.<sup>2</sup> Rán thus embodies nature's dualities – life and death, creation and destruction, fear and calm.

Ejlerskov has shaped Rán in bronze as a naked female body forming an arch. Her almost generic, futuristic face gazes steadily into the surrounding space. She appears more as an archetype than a particular individual. Her hair, modelled on seaweed, cascades down to the ground. The sculpture's undulating movement and seaweed hair emphasize her power as a sea deity. Although she clearly embodies immense strength, her posture also evokes the yoga pose known as the bridge, signalling poise and self-control. Duality is present in the sculpture itself – in the very tension of the body. The movement can also be seen as a bridge between past and present conceptions of the female body and its inherent powers.

The pose has historically been associated with exorcism, witchcraft and female hysteria. The French-American artist Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010) explored precisely this posture in her sculpture *Arch of Hysteria* (1993)<sup>3</sup>, where bodily tension becomes a manifestation of psychological extremity. In Ejlerskov's interpretation, this historical charge is reactivated so that Rán appears as an archetypal female figure of power – both feared and alluring.

Yet Rán does not exist solely as a bronze sculpture. Ejlerskov has also brought the figure into the digital sphere through film, Non-Fungible Tokens (NFTs), drawing, painting, wool, 3D printing, sound and Augmented Reality (AR). In this way, Rán moves between the physical and the virtual, between myth and modern technology.

### **Forces of the Storm and the Feminine Sublime**

Storms, the power of the sea, and the encounter with nature's overwhelming forces evoke the classical philosophical notion of the sublime. For Edmund Burke (1729–1797) and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), the sublime was the experience of something vast and incomprehensible that exceeds human understanding,

provoking awe mingled with pleasure. The sublime was linked to encounters with nature's magnitude and violence – experiences in which the individual first feels threatened, then regains control through reason.<sup>4</sup>

The Rán sculpture is connected to meditative and digital works – including films, textiles and sound pieces – all designed to make the viewer experience both Rán's menacing forces and the calm that follows. At the same time, Ejlerskov's Rán departs from the classical concept of the sublime by rejecting ideas of dominance and control, instead emphasising openness, surrender and sensory awareness.

The French-Belgian philosopher Luce Irigaray (b. 1930) criticised traditional notions of the sublime for their masculine emphasis on mastery. Instead, she proposed the concept of the feminine sublime, also central to the feminist scholar Barbara Claire Freeman (b. 1948). The feminine sublime is not concerned with overcoming danger but with remaining open to what cannot be controlled – allowing oneself to be transformed rather than to dominate:

“The feminine sublime engages with forces that exceed the self, not by mastering them, but allowing oneself to be altered by them.”<sup>5</sup>

In Ejlerskov's interpretation, Rán is not a threat to be conquered but a force to collaborate with. She awakens a primal energy in the viewer – not to subdue it, but to let it unfold as part of life's natural rhythm. Rather than overcoming what is threatening, Ejlerskov leads us towards an ethics rooted in bodily experience, the rhythm of birth and nature's cyclical movements.

### **A Gesamtkunstwerk of Female Primal Power**

How does the feminine sublime manifest itself in Rán? Mainly through the ambiguous nature of the sculpture as both destructive and life-giving, a duality underscored by Rán's posture: balancing between motion and stillness, wave and pause.

Ejlerskov's Rán constitutes a Gesamtkunstwerk, encompassing meditative sound, textiles, paintings and sculpture, all uniting the viewer with female primal forces. The powers of the sea, the body and emotion are interwoven in a feminist, sensuous experience of sublimity. Here, the ideas of the classical sublime are transformed into a bodily and spiritual practice, where female experience becomes the bearer of a new form of aesthetic and existential understanding. Rán creates an echo within the viewer whose significance is summarized by Ejlerskov in this way:

“Her connection to the sea echoes the mystical feminist view that we are inherently linked to nature and life's cycles. As ruler of the ocean's depths, Rán symbolises facets of the feminine experience, particularly its spiritual and intuitive dimensions.”<sup>6</sup>

By guiding us into the depths of both sea and psyche, Rán invites us to confront the forces of the storm – not as a destructive power, but as the beginning of a renewed connection with the world, with nature and with ourselves.

<sup>1</sup> Overgaard, Majken (2023) “Preface” i *RANT*, 2. Ed., forlaget aftryk, s. 5-8

<sup>2</sup> Simek, Rudolf, (2007) Dictionary of Northern Mythology, oversat af Angela Hall (Cambridge, D.S. Brewer 2007), s. 260

<sup>3</sup> Cvetkovich, A. (2020). "Louise Bourgeois' Art of Hysteria" I *The Aesthetic Clinic*, kap. 1

<sup>4</sup> Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Edited with an introduction by Adam Phillips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Freeman, Barbara Claire (1995): *The Feminine Sublime Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* s. 6

<sup>6</sup> Ejlerskov, Ditte. RÁN, 2023, <https://ditteejlerskov.com/Ran.html>



Rán, 2024 Bronze, 60 x 148 x 98 cm

Rán, 2024. Skitser på papir