

# DIAZ CONTEMPORARY

Dara Gellman

*pearlmaiden*

12 January to 11 February 2012

Opening Thursday 12 January from 6 to 8 pm

Artist Talk Saturday 28 January at 5 pm

In *pearlmaiden*, Dara Gellman draws on the pearl as an object, an image, and an idea. Throughout literary history, the pearl has served as metaphor for the feminine, for vision, for sensuality and for wisdom. Here, Gellman employs this precious and mysterious object as both subject and medium, mining the richness of the pearl's metaphorical significance and its mythic quality to put us as viewers in a fertile, ambiguous space where preconceived notions can be destabilized.

*pearlmaiden* is an experimental adaptation of an anonymous 14<sup>th</sup> century text entitled *Pearl*, a dream vision narrative in which the author is led by his search for a lost pearl into an alternate reality. Throughout the 1212 line text, the pearl has various meanings, morphing fluidly and even appearing as two things simultaneously. The pearl's transformation becomes its most substantial characteristic, and no physical manifestation is secure. The video component of *pearlmaiden* is based on this ambiguous dreamspace. Images of lush green foliage, layered water-landscapes, and luminous pixel terrains intertwine with images of a figure dressed in a pearl-encrusted gown. The pearl functions both as a quality and a subject of the imagery, and the various spaces and objects shown are blended and transmuted. The materiality of the artist's digital techniques is itself reflected and interchanged with the metaphor of pearl as pixel, as a component of vision, and as a luminous orb that projects as well as absorbs.

This relationship is ultimately manifested by the large scale video projection screen that supports and defines this represented world. Made of 500,000 tiny replica pearls and floating in space, the projection screen serves as a boundary but also as a link between the world of the video and the physical world, holding the viewer in a liminal space between reality and imagination. In a way, the pearl is positioned as a metaphor for the screen, and vice versa.

Accompanying the video is a soundscape composed by Andrew Zealley, also inspired by the text of *Pearl*. It is composed in 12 chapters, a number that figures prominently in the text, and in the key of C, known historically as the most "luminous".

*pearlmaiden* is also accompanied here by related print and video works that further take up the imagery and materiality of the pearl as a metaphor and component of vision, and extend its metamorphic potential by playing with scale and surface.

Dara Gellman is based in Toronto. Her video and installation works have been presented across Canada and internationally in over 80 exhibitions and screenings. Dara completed her Master of Visual Studies at the University of Toronto in 2008, and was recently a Banff New Media Institute Liminal Screen co-production resident. Her print work was featured in a limited edition print in the journal *Interfaces: Image, Text, Language* co-published by the Université Paris 7 and College of the Holy Cross.

*pearlmaiden* was funded by the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, and was produced in part during the 2010 Banff New Media Institute Liminal Screen Co-Production Residency.

Gellman will be giving a talk on Saturday 28 January that will explore some examples of pearl lore in history and literature.