

## ARTIST PROJECT PROPOSAL

### Reclaiming Rapunzel



Facilitator: Barbara Bryn Klare

*Take, if you must, this little bag of dreams, Unloose the cord, and they will wrap you round.* –William Butler Yeats

#### Summary

Social practice art: *Reclaiming Rapunzel* is a temporary collaborative installation using reclaimed materials with a modern re-telling of the famous folk tale.

#### Background

In March of 2016, I conceived of and led a collaborative art project called the Rapunzel Art Project at the Open Studios at Marin Museum of Contemporary Art (MarinMOCA) in Novato, CA. It took place over two days and over 25 people participated, from ages three to 73. The result was a 15-foot+, five-strand “golden” braid hanging from the 2nd floor window to the ground of the MarinMOCA building.

Materials were purchased from Scrap, a non-profit creative reuse center/materials depot in San Francisco, CA.

More images, information and personal references from the event are also available.

#### Proposal

The proposal is to install the 15-foot golden braid and to invite participants to add their own individual strand to the braid, throughout the day. It would be installed along the length of the gallery floor, near an outside window, or through a window or door (if feasible). If installed outside or near an outside window, I will wrap yellow and red LED lighting around the braid, so that it can be seen after dark.

The setup is simple and inviting; basically, one or two long tables with the following:

- A collection of different lengths and widths of rope.
- A pile of different kinds of cloth in yellows, oranges, reds, and browns.
- Another pile with thread, floss, string, and yarn.

Participants are invited to create a “strand” of any length using the materials any way they wish.

The goals for the project are many, and, I believe, approachable. The artistic goal is to create a compelling piece of fiber street art from individual contributions, and to encourage free artistic expression with few limitations, and with no formal art skills required like drawing or painting. (I find that wrapping and lashing are the simplest, most accessible of the fiber art techniques. The youngest children were able to wrap, and needed minimal assistance with tying knots.)

Another goal is to foster community. There is something primordial and deep about coming together working with fiber for a common purpose; I think it brings us back to an ancient, shared memory of our ancestors sitting around legrolling fiber for nets or spinning yarn for clothing.

Historically, the goal is to create an understanding of the different ways which folk tales are told, remembered, and handed down. (And that often there was a female author in the mix who has been forgotten.)

I believe that art outside the classroom is very important—not to diminish the work that art teachers do—but I think it is good to reinforce the idea that art can be everywhere, on the street, outside your window, and not just in a school or gallery. Art outside our usual frame of reference helps to shift our thinking, artistically and otherwise.

### **Audience**

Community participation of all levels, abilities, and ages. No formal art skills needed.

### **Why Rapunzel?**

The tale of Rapunzel is one of the most mysterious and enduring of all fairy tales, with a tantalizing backstory. The basic storyline is of a young girl banished to a tower by a witch in exchange for a handful of bitter green herbs.

Before the Brothers Grimm, there was *Purcinette*, told in 1698 by Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de la Force, a strong-willed and fiercely independent woman who was banished to a convent after displeasing the Sun King, Louis XIV at Versailles. Locked away in a cloister, much like Rapunzel is in her tower, Charlotte-Rose was among the first writers to pen a collection of literary fairy tales and also one of the world's first historical novelists. Her stories were among the first literary fairy tales to be published, and many attribute her with beginning the historical fiction genre.

The story then was retold by the German author Friedrich Schulz in 1790. His version is almost identical to Mademoiselle de la Force's, except that he changed the girl's name to Rapunzel. It was then retold by the Grimm Brothers (1812), becoming less powerful, mysterious and sexually charged with each subsequent edition.

There is also a modern-day retelling of the Rapunzel tale, *Bitter Greens*, by Australian author Kate Forsyth, that weaves several of the tales together. I refer to that book, and/or read her special poem on Rapunzel.

### **Why Now?**

From the prevalence of dumb blond jokes to other public putdowns of women, there continues to be a need to offset negative female stereotypes. Several of the versions of Rapunzel depict her as a strong heroine who learns to command her fate, including the Disney movie, *Tangled*. Coming soon is *Tangled: Before Ever After* (starring the Rapunzel character from *Tangled*), a series that will premiere on Disney Channel in 2017.

### **Proposed Format**

1-day open workshop for the public (all ages).

**Informal Discussion (Or, Read to Me!)**

I create alongside the participants, and also take time to read the different versions of the story as everyone is working on their pieces, and it often sparks dialogue and engagement with the tale itself, maids in towers, hair ladders, and about fairy tales and their uses/misuses, the ethics of fairy tales, evil, and many other things. (I carefully and thoughtfully facilitate these discussions so that all opinions are heard and no one is left out or disregarded.)

I also discuss how I use rescued and reclaimed materials in my art, and the lifecycle of clothing and other textiles around the world.