

# Creating *Invisible*

## The Concept

*Invisible* had its beginnings with a larger concept of fictional characters I have created who are protectors of the earth. Balena, a mermaid protectress, is part of my series, *Nature's Portraits*. This series is my way of expressing concerns about global warming, shrinking habitat, impending animal extinction, and pollution of air, water & land. Wanting to remain positive, I have created a fictional world of beauty and provocation which hopefully sparks a desire for positive change. *Invisible* is the first art quilt completed of 4 planned about and her world below the ocean.

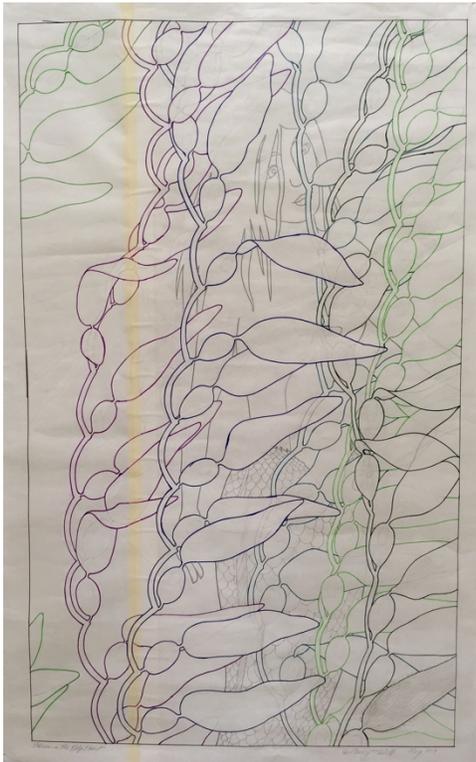
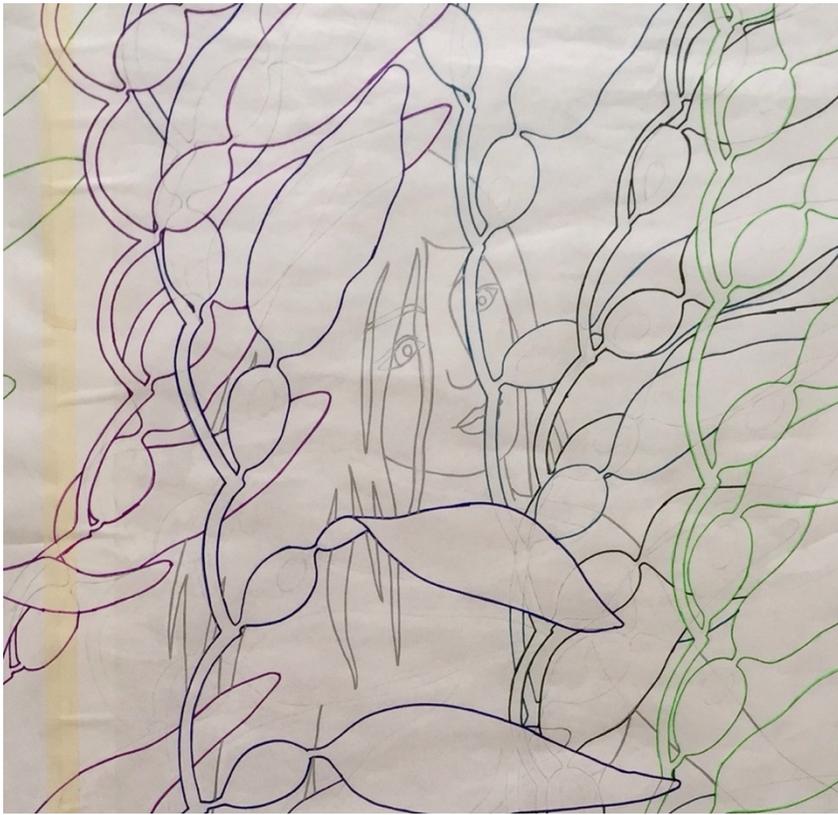


1<sup>st</sup> drawing, *Balena & The Blue Whale*



drawing for *Invisible*

My drawings are always how I begin. Wanting to show something about Balena's shy personality and age, I set her in a kelp forest. I drew her alone first and then drew the kelp leaves on top of her allowing her to peek through. I usually draw in pencil, which is how I began this time on a roll of drawing paper. Once I was happy with her I outlined all her lines with black marker. On top of her drawing I placed another sheet of drawing paper which had a 30" x 50" block outlined. I set her to the right of the quilt block and started to draw the kelp leaves. There are 66 kelp leaves which were confusing to keep track of, so I used several different markers to outline each stalk. Then I outlined Balena in grey in the areas where she peeked through the kelp. Thus giving me a cartoon to work from.

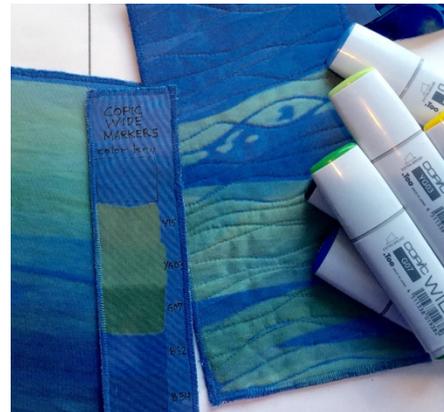


These are a detail and full shot of the complete drawing of *Invisible*.

With the drawing complete, I needed to start the quilt. I sandwiched a cotton backing, Fairfield's 60/40 cotton/poly blend batting, and a blue silk taffeta. Instead of basting them together, I use full sheets of Wonder-Under 805 fusible web. With fusible web between layers it keeps the top or bottom from slipping while stitching.

(sample of quilt sandwich)

Sample of quilt sandwich with fusible web between layers

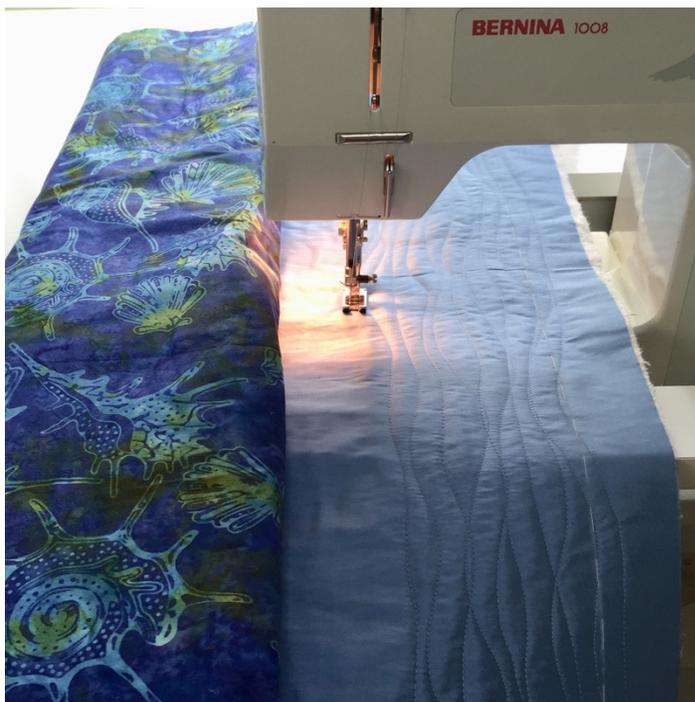


I wanted to create the feeling of water flowing and moving on the background. Knowing that the background would be chopped up between all the pieces of kelp and mermaid, I figured, as I often do, that I had to create this piece in steps. Step 1 would be to completely finish the background, with markers and stitching before moving to Step 2.

Not knowing exactly how to use markers or stitching on the background, I decided to do a few samples. On some samples I started by stitching first using the markers over the stitched fabric (first photo), on other samples I started with the markers first and stitched them after. I decided to use Copic brand markers with 1" wide tips. While not technically fabric markers, they work wonderfully well. After doing samples both ways with a few combinations of colors I decided I liked the use of markers over stitched fabric best.

## Step 1: The Background

Simple running lines from left to right in a wavy pattern that overlapped occasionally was meant to emulate the flow of water. I ran my stitch lines beyond the 30" x 50" margins in case take-up shortened my width or height.



Once the stitching was complete, the fun with markers began. I took a deep breath, knowing I did not have any silk left if I made a mistake, and drew the first wavy marker line from side to side.





Before I knew it I had the whole thing done. I used 7 colors of Copic markers from a deep ultramarine and dark green at the bottom to the paler green, yellows and pale, light blue at the top. The markers go on a bit darker to the eye and soften in color a bit lighter when they dry. I was now ready to begin the much more intense Step 2, Balena herself.

## Step 2: The Mermaid

The first thing I did was cut a piece of muslin big enough for the whole mermaid. I used my light box to completely draw the mermaid lines in lavender marker onto the muslin. Then I backed the muslin completely with paper-lined Wonder-Under fusible web, keeping the paper on the back for now.



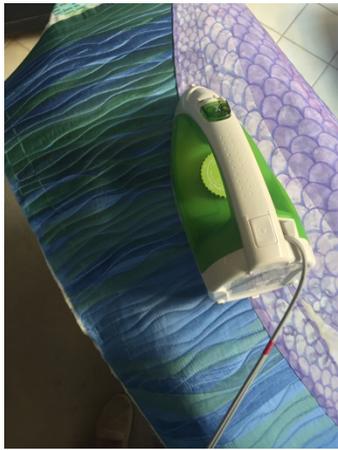
I began choosing my fabrics, first a light lavender, hand-dyed cotton as her skin. I applied fusible web to the back and cut the shape of her body by using a tissue paper pattern fusing it to the muslin in the right spot. I put my muslin with the fused body/face fabric (see above) onto the light box where I could see through the body color to the lavender marker lines below so I could place each tiny piece of her features exactly in the right spot. Because the paper remained on the back of the fused muslin I could use my iron to fuse as many pieces as I needed on top of her skin.



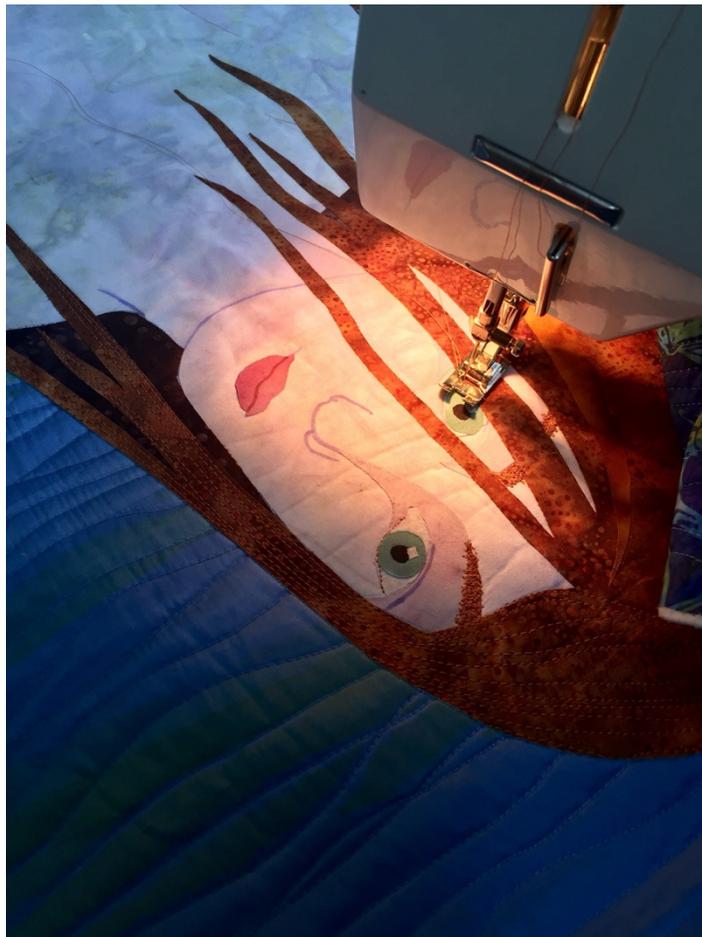
Once the features were completed, I moved on to the tail. I cut pieces for the tail the same way I had done for the body, ironing them to paper backed web. In the original drawing I had drawn the scales of her tail to show depth of field. By reducing the size of the scales as they moved back in space it gave her tail a more rounded appearance. Again I placed a drawing (bottom pg. 6) on top of my light box, placing my tail piece on top, and taped it into place with light masking tape. Then I drew directly onto the tail fabric with both Fabrico and Copic markers. The Fabrico markers were used to give me the line I needed and some darker shading. The Copic markers gave me a paler area of color and shade.



Once the tail was complete, I moved on to finishing Balena by adding her hair. Sometimes getting cuts with precision points requires the use of a sharp X-acto knife. When every piece was ironed onto the muslin, I cut the whole mermaid out like a big paper doll, peeled the paper off and positioned her onto the background.



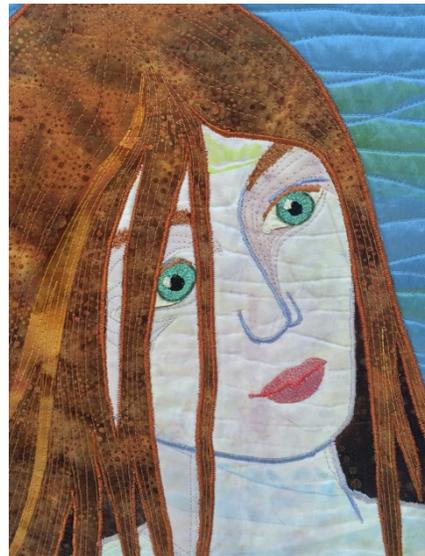
The mermaid was then ironed onto the background permanently.



And completely stitched



Some of the detail happening on the face both by machine and by hand.



Once all the stitching was done, I went over some of her body with the wide Copic markers to bring the feel of water flowing over and past her. At this point Step 2 is completed; ready for Step 3.

## Step 3: The Kelp

Knowing that kelp is a leaf that has texture, ridges running the length of the leaf, I wanted to give each leaf the best possible feel for reality that I could while still retaining my creative design. I decided to create the ridges with markers. However I had a bit of a problem because my fabrics were already darker than the lightest line I needed for the top of each ridge. Markers are, of course, a fixed darker ink.

In the past I had used a Jacquard product, *deColourant*, for taking color out of fabrics. It works like bleach but is controllable and has none of bleach's bad qualities, like being destructive of fiber. How it works is that you apply it (brush, tube or print) wet to a clean, dry fabric. Let it dry completely. Iron it until the desired whiteness is achieved and then wash it with soapy water to set it. The chemical process is toxic in it's gaseous form and therefore requires use of a full respirator. I iron all my discharged fabrics outside on my deck away from open windows and my kitties.

I knew this was the only way for me to get the light lines I needed while retaining the chosen green color in other parts of the leaf.



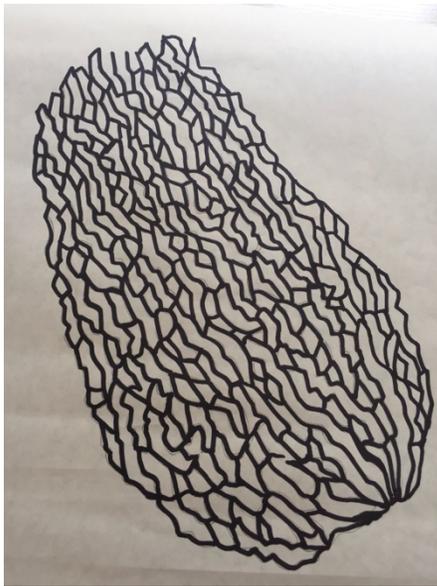
deColourant by Jacquard, respirator & iron

Before beginning I needed to chose three value shades of green fabric. I bought lots of options, having only a few good ones in my stash. These were my choices:

(Fabric samples are included here)

Having finally made a decision I needed to go about creating all 66 leaves (yes, I counted them) in a series of mini steps:

1. Trace each leaf, fully, (even overlapped leaves were complete) singly on tissue with a marker
2. Place the single leaf on the light box with a piece of fabric taped over it
3. Trace each leaf onto the fabric with a dark fabric marker drawn slightly outside the lines
4. The fabric was cut small to fit no more than 3 or 4 leaves at a time
5. The fabric was placed over a template of “ridges” and fluid was brushed onto the ridge lines
6. After they were painted, they were air dried and ironed outside to the desired whiteness
7. The fabric was washed, dried and ironed
8. Each leaf was drawn into with 2 or more marker colors to create depth
9. Fusible webbing was applied to the back and each leaf was cut to size



my template for ridges

This process took over three weeks of steady working. I went through 46 markers, having to special order more, twice. I used half a bottle of discharge and ended up running out of one of the chosen fabrics, ending up having to piece one of the leaves. The stem fabrics had to be other fabrics because I had so little left over. Poor planning. My lessons - Always add ½ yard more than you think you need and markers dry up fast when in constant use!



Tissue on the light box with single fronds just having been traced in marker onto the fabric.

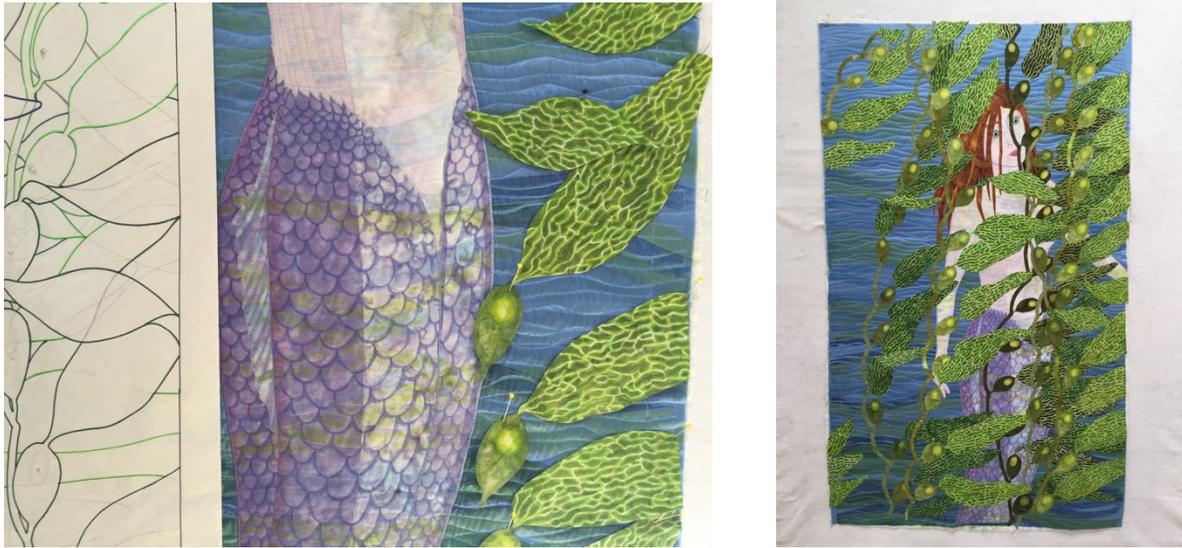


Ironing with a press cloth which helps slow the process just enough to make it manageable. It's so much fun to see the discharge leave white patterns.

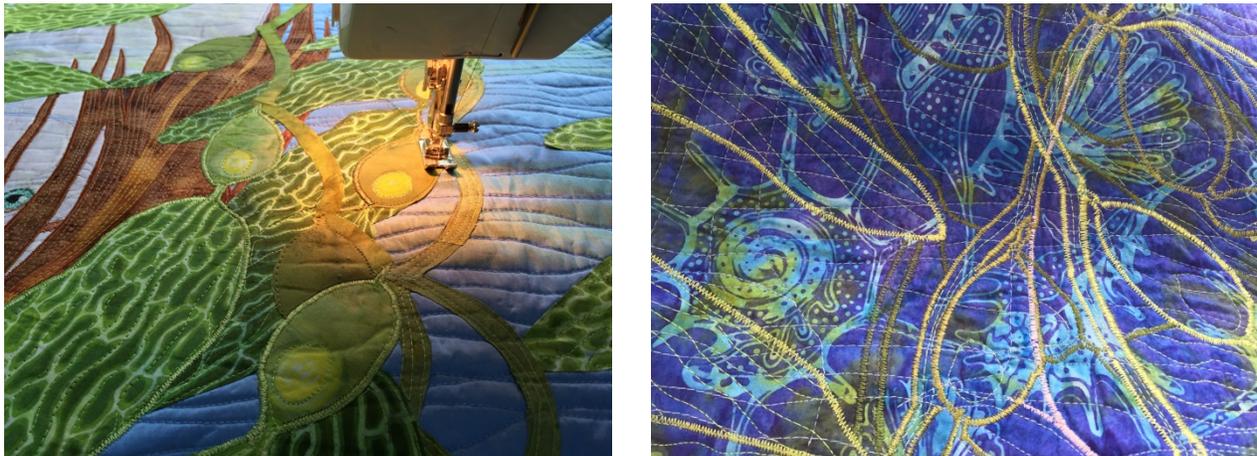


Photos of the discharge and marker process for the help

At this point the end was in sight and all I had to do was get each leaf placed in the right spot on the quilt, iron them down and stitch them all.



Pinning the leaves went slow at first, as I was using the cartoon to measure out where to pin the leaves. It took about 4 hours to pin all the leaves in place. Then I stepped back to get a good look at the flow of it. I slightly moved one of the stems, having to adjust the leaves accordingly and I took out a couple of leaves that were mostly behind others. When happy with the placement, I took a hot iron directly to the wall fusing section by section as I removed the pins.



Stitching was done with straight, free-motion stitching with Aurifil threads, and satin stitching on the edges with Sulky rayon thread. I completed the piece by using a facing instead of my usual binding edge. The quilt was signed, sleeves were attached and labels made. My last surprise was a small school of tiny fish swimming past Balena's tail. FINISHED!



***Invisible***  
**30" x 50"**  
**2018**