TRANSCRIPT — Creatures of the WATER

Title + Intertitle: Creatures of the WATER  KRAKEN

NARRATOR:
Water is an unknown realm in human experience. We can’t breathe in water, it covers incredible distance and depth, and we encounter strange creatures that flourish where we falter.

On screen ID:
Clyde Roper
Smithsonian’s National Museum of Natural History
I think when the earliest sailors ventured into the open ocean – think about it – it must have been an absolutely terrifying experience. All of a sudden the world, as they knew it, was gone. There were these creatures that would occasionally be seen, and that was terrifying too because they were unknown creatures.

So a giant squid found floating at the surface of the sea could have been up to about 60 feet – 18 meters or so – in total length. The eye as big as a human head; and then all the arms and tentacles stretching out. This would be a creature, a beast, a monster that they had no, really no recognition of and no experience of. And were the basis, in Norway, at least and in the Northern countries, the basis of the story about the Kraken.

And if we had not taken our steps piecemeal into the deep sea, you can imagine we might have been like those early sailors that went out. We might have been terrified when we saw the first creatures from the depths.

Intertitle: Creatures of the WATER  MAMI WATA

NARRATOR:
In West Africa, many people appeal to a mermaidlike water spirit, Mami Wata, to ensure good fortune.

On screen ID:
Chapurukha Kusimba
The Field Museum, Chicago
Mami Wata has three major components. She's half human or half woman, and half fish. But this is not complete until she has the serpent wrapped around her. Because in many African societies the original water spirit was the serpent. Once the peoples of West Africa adopted the mermaid, the European mermaid, they still had to retain the snake as that symbol.

Everyone counts on Mami Wata to bring forth just the right amount of water during the annual floods. You just get enough floods to enable you to grow your rice. The association of Mami Wata and other water spirits with life and sustenance has taken very, very central stage among West Africans. They symbolize abundance, fertility, riches and sometimes greed.

Intertitle: Creatures of the WATER  Takeshi Yamada  CONEY ISLAND ARTIST

NARRATOR:
In the urban seaside of New York's Coney Island, Takeshi Yamada finds unique inspiration
On screen ID:
Takeshi Yamada
Coney Island Artist
I’m from Japan, and I lived by the ocean, so that’s why I was always fascinated by creating mythological creature of the sea. And that’s why I created more sea creatures gaffs than any other gaffs.

Gaff is carnival lingo – carny lingo. And it is about specimen and artifacts made by people for the purpose of fooling people’s eye.

Beauty is a really individual and narrow definition to move your soul, I think. Compared to that, monsters and marvels, I think, more fundamental. More something mysterious, wondrous, monstrous! Those sensations or the feeling to move people’s heart and soul is more primal.

This area is called Coney Island. And coney means “wild rabbit” in Dutch language. I thought if rabbit usually is living on the land, come to the beach, why not they could start swimming around like rabbit-and-mermaid hybrid? That’s how I originally came to this creation.

For me, art is not something artist has to create from nothing. I want to be part of the natural process. I want to be part of nature, to work together.