



To make a long story short

How one artist reimagines a storybook ending

Her life may be a fairy tale, but the Little Mermaid deserves a getaway just as much as anyone. With his 3-D-printed sculpture, Dutch artist Eric van Straaten envisions a vacation (the all-inclusive kind) for the beleaguered heroine. In Hans Christian Andersen's original story, she loses her tail, her voice, and ultimately her life, in the pursuit of an unattainable prince. This Little Mermaid though lies splayed out on a chaise longue, wearing sunglasses, with an empty bottle of booze and a pack of cigarettes at her side, suggesting that her modern vices afford her the escape that an archetypal royal could never achieve.

Like Andersen, Van Straaten reaches us via the medium of print. Since 2009, he has primarily sculpted with computer software, generating his works at Belgium's i.materialise prototyping lab. Although the figures resemble their hand-painted porcelain antecedents, they are manufactured from layers of powder mixed with a liquid binder made of glue and coloured ink. A self-confessed perfectionist, he prefers this method - his own means of escapism - over traditional sculpting and its inevitable accidents.

His statuettes, which typically stand 38 centimetres tall, feature young girls with a Lolita-esque

quality. They look hyperreal, yet retain an echo of their digital roots. "Folk tales, as well as religious images and those of pop culture, get all mixed in my head and come out in my fantasies," says van Straaten, who has recently shown work in Tokyo and Amsterdam. With 3-D printers now readily available, soon we may all be manufacturing our own storybook endings.

Emily Urquhart is a folklorist living in temperate Victoria, B.C. If she had her own 3-D printer, the busy mother - who has a memoir in the works - would like for it to make her dinner.