Madonna Metamorphoses

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Madonna Metamorphoses

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of the Arts of Bard College

by
Isabella Slezk

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my gratitude to my friends and family for their continued support and encouragement. Special thanks to my sibling, for listening and supporting me wholeheartedly. My mom for her unbridled enthusiasm for my work. My dad for his artistic insight. My wonderful friends, who have cheered me along. I also wanted to thank my advisor, Adriane Colburne, her help has been invaluable and I’m so grateful for her. And a thank you to all the professors I had at Bard who fueled my passion for learning, you have helped enhance my skills and find creative inspiration for this project.

Thank you all!
Madonna Metamorphoses is a body of work illustrating the women martyred and monstrous. In fables, myths and folklore the woman is framed as a spinster, a seductress, a virgin, a victim. She is monstrous. She is contrary enough to upset the status quo, but weak enough to be defeated by it.

When women undergo monstrous transformations in these narratives there can be two reasons why. The transformation is either a curse placed upon her, one that must be broken for her to be whole again. The story of Swan Lake, for example. Or it is seen as a form of protection, usually from predatory men. Here, the tales of selkies and the swan maidens.

In these tales women commonly become ostracized, scapegoats. Think of Eve and the apple. Or the myth of Medusa. Throughout these stories, the condemnation and minimization of female characters is rampant. With Madonna Metamorphoses I aimed to challenge that.

I was influenced heavily by the writings of Angela Carter. She tackles the themes of transformation and fairytales in her own works. Her writing is incredibly evocative, as she writes these older narratives through a more contemporary lens. I wanted to pursue similar themes in my art, focusing on feminist narratives, LGBTQ issues, and social critiques.

The female body itself takes a center stage in this project. This is in part, because of my disability. I am incredibly aware of my own body. I am aware of the space I take up and, at times, afraid to take up too much. Both of these thoughts, I believe, come from my disability and my femininity. I gravitated towards digital illustrations because of these reasons. I wanted these illustrations to be larger than life. To emphasize the idea that women are allowed to take up space. However my disability posed an issue. I could not stand for long hours painting large canvases, I could work on a smaller scale, but having these images on a large scale was too important to me. I moved to digital illustration. There I combined this medium with elements of
my traditional practices. Stylistically, I was inspired by comic books, manga, and fairytale illustrations.

Female sexuality was another large facet of this project I began to explore more in depth. I wanted these women to own their nakedness, their sexuality. Yes, you are seeing them nude, but it is on their terms. It is not for the male gaze, it is for their own. Female identifying bodies should not inherently be seen as shameful or inappropriate. They should be respected, in every aspect of being.

Madonna Metamorphoses shows that this curse, moreso a metamorphosis, as a beautiful thing. Despite the visceral, sometimes violent, painful nature of it. Showing women relentlessly content, embracing their new cursed bodies, loving the choices that made them monstrous.
MADONNA METAMORPHOSES
A senior art exhibition on the women martyred and monstrous.
BY ISABELLA SLEZAK
December 10-15
Bard College
Fisher Studio Art Building
Opening Reception: Dec. 10 5-7pm