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Morphisms

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Art and Design

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts in Drawing

by

Samuel Crowe

May 2010

Anita DeAngelis, Chair

David Dixon

Ralph Slatton

Keywords: cat, animal, man, Photoshop, Painter, figurative, digital art, texture, layer,

zoomorphic, anthropomorphism, mythology

ABSTRACT

Morphisms

by

Samuel Crowe

I discuss my Master of Fine Arts exhibition, *Morphisms*, hosted by Slocomb Galleries on the campus of East Tennessee State University March 22 through March 26, 2010.

The exhibit includes works created during the artist's three year study at East Tennessee State University.

The exhibition consists of works that address the projection of human qualities on domesticated animals and the projection of animal qualities onto mythological deities. Discussion also includes the process involved in creating the artwork as well as artistic influences in technical concepts.

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I am forever indebted to my committee members, Anita DeAngelis, David Dixon, and Ralph Slatton. To Anita, I am grateful for her persistence, encouragement, and belief in my endeavour to become a better artist. Without her help and mentoring I would not have been able to reach the lofty goals I had set before me.

I always get excited when I get a chance to meet with David Dixon. He has an uncanny knack for showing me things in my art that I never knew existed. His encouragement and direction have lead me to trust my instincts and believe in what my imagination is telling me.

It is a sense of privilege I have when I sit down with Ralph Slatton and discuss my art and where it is going. It is through Ralph's instruction that I have learned the importance of mystery in my art as well as the importance and skill of mark making.

Randy Sanders is a huge influence in both my life and art. His view of the world and the people that live in it is something I will carry with me all of my life.

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The works and wisdom of Joseph Campbell have played a huge part in the concepts present in my artwork. It is to his memory and the Joseph Campbell Foundation that I owe a great deal of gratitude for keeping myth alive.

To my parents, Samuel Crowe and Patsy Crowe; their unwavering support, understanding, and love is paramount in all that I do.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My work is created with the idea that the viewer will first see the image at a distance. Upon closer inspection, the viewer will see that the figures and shapes seen from a distance are actually created by textures that relate to the narrative of the entire image. The majority of the textures being used are not random. They are, in fact, carefully researched and chosen to fit the concept of the entire image.

My conceptual ideas deal with the impression of human qualities and nature onto animals also known as anthropomorphism. Another conceptual idea is the impression of animal qualities and behavior onto deities. I chose the word *Morphisms* to describe my work as it deals with both anthropomorphism and zoomorphism.

I have been producing creative work for more than twenty-five years. During this span, I have worked with every media I could get my hands on. I have found that I am most comfortable with digital media and mixed media. I work primarily in these two mediums because they allow me more freedom for experimentation.

While working, I rarely keep a focused idea of what my finished work will be. I rely on instinct and previous experiences to guide me when working with the technical aspects such as anatomy or color theory. I listen to music with lyrics so that my conscious mind does not take over my subconscious mind. I have found that if I think too much about what I am doing and how the end result will be received, I end up struggling needlessly through the process of creating the image. This struggle is one of being “perfect”, pushing every pixel or carefully drawing every line so that it is exactly where it should be.

During my first few semesters as a graduate student I could not stop myself from working and creating new art. There were times when I would be working on five or more pieces at once.

After being in the game development industry where my creativity was limited by either style or hardware, I found that I had a pent-up amount of creativity to be released. One of my first courses as a graduate student was mixed media drawing. Through the assignments and experimentation in the application of various media, I discovered a new method of creating my artwork. This method involves staining the paper with coffee grounds to form abstract patterns. Once the paper is dry enough to work on, I would then begin the process of building layers of stain. I would repeat this process during all stages of the drawing until the image was finished.

As my experimentation continued with mixed media, I would often consider how I could replicate the same chaos and staining that is created by using coffee mixed with various other wet media with digital media. My concerns revolved around retaining the feeling of spontaneity and exploration through the chaos that is being created without the involvement of the artist's hand. By applying these techniques with digital media, I discovered that I could achieve the desired results that I was searching for and continue to explore and experiment.

My first few pieces of digital art were direct imitations of what I was doing with mixed media. I created brushes to mimic coffee stains as well as wet charcoal and watercolor. Digital brushes are much like traditional brushes but with the added benefit of containing multiple textures or brushes that act as one brush. If holding a traditional brush and looking directly at the bristles, one can see the end of these bristles and the basic shape they form. A digital brush can mimic this exactly or be changed in real time to any desired shape. In addition to the size or shape of the brush, I can also add textures that I created by hand or edited photographs that I took previously for additional texture and shapes.

Through further experimentation and study of my work processes, I realized I was trying to create imagery with texture and shape. I spent two years of my graduate studies exploring and testing various ideas on how I could create art that is a blending of traditional drawing skills and drawing with texture.

Having the ability to draw with a brush that contains a texture or in some cases multiple textures, allows me to create artwork that appears at first to be an ordinary drawing. Upon closer review, one can see that the image is actually made up of hundreds of textures that is not typical mark making.

CHAPTER 2

TECHNICAL ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

My style of drawing has developed by studying various artists of the past and present. When studying these artists, I spend time exploring their process and tools to better understand how they worked. Once I have done this initial exploration, I add what I have learned into my own skill-set. Artistic style changes and evolves over time with the artist, this evolution in style can come through experimentation in processes and gaining experience over time. (Speed 76)

During my time as a graduate student, I spent a great deal of time researching and experimenting with various styles of drawing. Among the many artists researched, three stand out as having the great influence over my style, Raphael Sanzio, John Singer Sargent, and Andrew Jones.

Raphael “Raphael Sanzio”, an Italian master painter and architect of the Florentine school during the High Renaissance, is a large influence on my life drawing studies—particularly his technique of shading and use of line weight. Raphael’s careful and masterful understanding of the human figure is evident in his drawings, especially in his images that show the human figure in motion.

Raphael’s experienced eye for light and how it moves across the figures is very evident in the *Study of Two Apostles for the Transfiguration*. The use of line weight and sensitive blending of the media that accentuates the landmarks of the faces and hands is done with a very confident hand. He has no need to draw each strand of hair; instead attention is placed on the shape or mass. Throughout the image, Raphael concentrates on shapes and light. *Study of Two Apostles for the Transfiguration* is typical of the master’s technique, Raphael would work from the middle tone outward, thus insuring proper tonal values and lighting that accurately reflect the subjects.

This drawing was never meant to be seen as a singular piece of art, instead the drawing was a “auxiliary cartoon;” created as a guide or template for the final painting. By studying and reproducing Raphael’s drawings I came to see the importance and beauty of a raw drawing.

For many years I had considered the drawing to be a separate part of the final artwork. It was through analyzing Raphael’s studies that I started including the initial drawing in my art so that the final image would be a mix of the initial drawing and broader strokes and colors created by a brush.

I find the illusion of detail in John Singer Sargent’s work amazing. His ability to paint what he sees without using tricks or effects is astounding. Sargent was trained as a classical artist and heavily influenced by the Impressionists. This combination of classical training and Impressionist thinking is what makes his art stand out from the other artists of his time period. Sargent’s theory of “painting with light” where objects are composed of shapes revealed by the light source has a profound impact on my own work. By understanding that the object I am making is created by the light sources that flow over the forms, I no longer fret over trying to create the exact details of the form.

“Instead of following the idea that “everything starts as a line” I chose to believe everything is composed of many masses that are revealed by light. The light acts as a liquid as it pours of the surface, hitting some areas while completely avoiding other areas.” (Wallace)

Embracing this theory, I have noticed that my renderings are no longer flat and they now have depth and a richness I could not achieve before. I find that combining Raphael’s technique of working from the middle value outward before I consider where the light flows on my subject has also helped to increase the realism of what I am rendering.

By combining the drawing techniques of Raphael and the theory of light as paint by

Sargent, I have been able to experiment and grow into my own style of creating art.

I am profoundly influenced by the art of Andrew Jones. Jones is primarily a digital artist who uses Corel Painter to create his artwork. His ability to create form and shape from abstract fields is something I admire greatly.

Jones can often be found creating his art live on a stage in front of hundreds of people with live music and a huge projection screen behind him showing his creation from start to finish. He uses the environment and his emotional perceptions of the crowd to create his art. He rarely has a preconceived idea as to what he is going to create before hand. He, instead, relies on instinct and environment in real time to create his artwork. He creates a huge field of abstract shapes and begins to look for familiar shapes that “speak” to him. Once he finds a shape that resembles something familiar, he then begins to work from that shape and build upon it until it is fully revealed.

Andrew Jones refers to himself as a “shape sifter,” sifting through shapes to pull out an image, much like a child looking at clouds and finding familiar shapes. When talking about his work and his process he says “...act from a place of intuition, impulse, allow the medium to speak for its self...” (Massive Black INC.)

By watching Jones work and listening to his comments, I was able gain the confidence and inspiration I needed to continue my research in my own work.

I chose Jones’ image *Tiffa Novoa* as a sample to show his use of layering with positive and negative space as well as the use of multiple textures and patterns.

The image depicts *Tiffa Novoa*, an influential fashion designer who died at the age of thirty-two. Jones depiction of Novoa shows her moving from a city in the distant background to a larger portrait in the foreground. The movement is represented in the shape of a large head dress Novoa was known for making. Her hands and arms are in motion, possibly depicting her intense work ethic. The perceived movement is happening from her head back, reminding the



Fig. 1. Tiffa Novoa, C. 2007, Digital, 24"x36"
Figure 1 courtesy of and © Andrew Jones

viewer of her influence and genius in the world of clothing design. In the seemingly random shapes that make up this swath of movement, we can see symbols of her life as well as her fashion. Upon closer inspection of the image, we can see all of the textures and shapes that make up the whole of the image, telling us a story about the person being portrayed.

Raphael, Sargent, and Jones are the three artists that have the strongest influence over my technical skills and artistic style as an artist. Through careful study and experimentation, I have been able to gain a greater deal of knowledge from these artists. The knowledge I have gained is now a part of my own style and process — as I grow as an artist, I will continue to learn from other artists, both past and present.

CHAPTER 3

ANALYSIS OF WORK

My first couple of semesters as a graduate student were spent working mainly with mixed media on paper. During these early semesters, I would often work on multiple pieces at once; in some cases this was five drawings at one time. Due to my process, which involves the use of wet media, I would have to wait for the art to dry before I could continue working on it. While waiting for one piece to dry, I would start another and work as much possible before I had to wait for the paper to dry.

After two years of graduate school, I moved to digital media. This move evolved as I worked with traditional media and mixed media. I began to see more possibilities available to me by using digital media. The greatest possibility I saw in digital media was one of experimentation. I had fewer limitations and no waiting for media to dry while working with digital media. I felt that I had pushed my mixed media skills as far as I could at that time and I needed something new that I could experiment with and not have the down time that I was experiencing with mixed media.

The artwork I am discussing in this chapter is chosen from all the works I have completed during my three years as a graduate student. These selected works are also the images that appear in my thesis exhibition. The decision to pick these images is based on the shared theme of anthropomorphism and zoomorphism found in these works. These works also show my own progress and growth as an artist during my time as a graduate student

The main software package that I use to create my artwork is Adobe® Photoshop® software. I needed a software package that would allow me to experiment heavily with techniques and style. Photoshop was chosen as my main tool of creating digital artwork because it allows me to experiment with my own techniques and style in a fast and responsive manner.



Fig. 2. Rat, 2006, Mixed Media, 30"x20"
Permanent collection of the "Natural History Museum, Visitor Center, Gray Fossil Site"

Rat is one of the first mixed media drawings I completed during my first semester as a graduate student. This is a pivotal piece for me because it allowed me to be expressive and bold with my mark making. I was also experimenting with the idea of working from instinct, removing myself from styles and academic thought.

Before I started the drawing I asked myself, "What shapes and symbols interest me? How will these shapes or symbols be represented in space? Do these shapes and symbols have a consciousness of their own, are they self-aware? Will these shapes and symbols be created by me, or will they be manifested by their own desires and use me as their gateway into the visual realm?"

As I am asking myself these questions, I am building a visual library by sifting through magazines, the internet, and my own library of images. As I collect my visual library I start organizing the physical images into categories stored on a hard drive. I group them by simple categories: *Animal, Bones, Figures, Friends, Family, Body Parts*, etc. I continue to group images by what I find more interesting, placing the most interesting images before the less interesting

ones. This process allows me to see what influences me the most and question why these images influence me. Once I choose the images, I study and deconstruct them. In some cases, I will take an image, remove all of the background and foreground noise, place the image in a solid black environment and print it out for reference. I take these reference prints and use them as loose guide to help me create my art.

Rat was created using this method. I am naturally drawn to the organic shapes of bones and the various colors present in those bones. I knew that I wanted to do a drawing of a rat skull, but I did not want it to be a still life. I wanted the skull to have a sense of life and movement.

Through the various stages of development *Rat* began to take on a life of its own. I was no longer forcing my hand to draw shapes. Instead, the shapes where “appearing” to me on the paper. I simply followed the direction they where giving me. This resulted in structure beneath the skull that gives the impression of neck muscles, the shoulder, and a curved tail that passes into the background. My mark making became heavier and more varied as I continued to down this path.

I soon noticed a line of action present in the image, giving the impression that the animal was startled and looking off to viewer’s right. By following my intuition, and the shapes that appeared to me, I was able to bring this work to a conclusion.

When I stepped back and viewed the image, I was not at all happy with it. I was still thinking in academic terms. The structure of the skull was not anatomically correct. The heavy marks made the skull look flat and “cartoon” like. I was confused by the seemingly random marks that where scattered about the image—marks that did not appear to have any real reason for being there.

Months later, I realized how important these random marks were and what was really happening in the image. I had to take some time away from the image and reflect on a rat’s

characteristics. The first word that came to my mind was “scratching.” Those random marks were not random at all; they were tooth and claw scratches that the rat had made! The abstract, hazy background was not a flat plane of random shapes but the environment where this rat lived. Once I realized what I had done, or more specifically, what my subconscious had done, I was amazed. I had tapped into something new, something unexplored.



Fig. 3. The Dance 2007, Digital, 20"x30"

I often do artwork in small series of three or four pieces. These pieces share a common narrative that have a beginning, middle, and end. The story of *How Miniature Pinschers got their colors* was created after I finished all the art in the series. In most cases, I do not write stories that accompany my work, instead, choosing to let viewers create their own story.

In the short story, I create a myth that centers around dominance and loss of control. The short story also helps to establish the concept of zoomorphism, where human qualities and emotions are applied to the animals as they interact with their deity.

The dogs began their ritual of dance and worship that lasted for days. As they continued to dance and leap about they began to stir up the loose dirt. The more they danced the more dirt they stirred into the air. The Mother god looked down and began to chide the dogs for the large mess they were creating, as she did, a smaller defiant dog placed its paw on her foot as an act of

disagreement. The Mother god was furious over the single dog's action. She took all the dirt and dust the dogs had stirred into the air and blew it onto their white fur, forever making them the color of dirt and dust.

The dogs began to whine and howl in horror as their once beautiful white coats were forever stained. The dogs asked, " Why have you cursed us with such dark colors? How will the humans love us if we are dark and dirty?"

The Mother god, feeling some pity for the dogs, said, " I will make you smaller than the other dogs in the world. You will be fast and agile so that you can go places the bigger dogs can not. The humans will have pity on you for your small size, and they will take you up in their arms as they would their own children.

As time passed, the dogs where indeed loved by their human owners. The dogs were fast and adept hunters when hunting for small prey. Due to the coloring of their fur, the dogs found they were able to easily hide in the environment when hunting, or in some cases, being hunted by larger prey. Because of their small size, the dogs where allowed to sit or sleep with their owners, especially during the wintery times of the year.

The Goddess, now alone, fell into a deep sleep while waiting for her dogs to return to her. She now lay in limbo with her one arm outstretched, a cold reminder to the dogs of her icy discipline should they ever disobey her or their owners.

When creating my artwork, I work from instinct and experience. I do not spend a great deal of time planning out compositions. I choose to let my instinct for what appears right, along with my experience as an artist make these decisions for me. It is not until after the work, or series of works, is finished that I see the design elements present in the image.

The female figure, as alpha dog or authority figure is represented by her bare foot pressed down on the paw of the dog in the foreground. In contrast, the other dog ignores this posturing

of the “leader” and puts its own paw down on her foot in an act of defiance. This dog is also reaching for the leader’s hand to form an invisible triangle that symbolizes the structure of the relationship the three have with one another. This triangle form is echoed by the woman’s arm as it bends behind her head, showing that she is at the top of the pyramidal hierarchy.

The overall composition is based around the position of the female figure. The visual flow of the image draws the viewer’s eye from the dogs in the foreground to the face of the central figure in the background. Many of my figures are represented as deities by the fact they have no navels. These figures are not conceived but created out of nothingness for worship by lower “beings.” The exclusion of the navel also adds to the mystery of who the being is. When my work is viewed as a whole body of work, common themes can be seen. One such theme is that of the deities being represented by human bodies with no navels.

The dog’s rib cages are exposed showing that they are mortal and made of flesh and bone; thus securing their position at the bottom of the hierarchy. The decision to show rib cages was based on preliminary sketches I had done of the dogs. I was looking for specific landmarks on the body to help define the shape, and I was drawn to how the rib cages could be seen when the dogs would bend and twist while they danced.



Fig. 4. The Dance2, 2007, Digital, 20"x30"

In *The Dance 2*, I chose to show the scene from the story where the dogs are dancing and stirring up the large dust clouds that angers the goddess.

I continued the idea of the triangle or pyramid with the dogs at the base. I chose to show the dogs dancing as they worship their deity. Again, we see a defiant dog who is focused on placing its paw down on the deity's foot. The other dogs are obedient servants displaying their fevered dance of worship.

I chose to do this piece more in the vein of my traditional artwork. Every work I create is an experiment; I rarely rely on "what works." Instead, I chose to give myself problems to be worked out through experimentation. In this case, I wanted to achieve the chaotic randomness that happens when working with coffee and water on paper. I was able to achieve some of the randomness, but I found that I had more control than I was used to. So I used that control to my

advantage. I draw the shadows and outlines of the female figure with a digital coffee stain brush. I took the same brush I had used for the staining and added a darker hue. Because the brush is set to work as a multiplier, meaning that it will multiply its hue with whatever color is under it. I achieved rich blacks without overpowering the blacks of the dogs.



Fig. 5. The Last Dance 2007, Digital, 20"x30"

As the story continues, the dogs are loved by humans for their keen hunting skills and camouflage, as well as their small “lap dogs” nature. Because their new-found love from humans, the dogs stop worshiping their goddess and worship their human owners. The Mother goddess falls into a deep sleep awaiting the day she will be awakened by the dancing and worshiping of her subjects.

The Last Dance is the conclusion to the story of *How the Miniature Pinscher Got Its Colors*. There is no longer a triangle being represented but I have retained the idea of a hierarchy. I have now placed the goddess at the bottom of the page with the dogs rising above her.

The dogs are shown with bones to represent their mortality. Now that they are no longer worshiping the goddess they have become even more mortal, thus more bone structure is seen.

This is one of the first pieces of art in which I experiment heavily with Photoshop. As I began to understand more about custom brushes in Photoshop, I soon realized the possibilities available to me.

I have found that I sometimes get lost in the details when I am trying to avoid them. I often have to force myself to stop what I am doing and look at the image as a whole. By looking at the image as a whole I am able to clearly see what areas need finesse and what areas do not.

During critiques I would often get a comment on how one area of my image could be an entire image on its own. This was due to me being zoomed into the picture and not working the image as a whole. Most of my images are in the range of 150-300dpi (dots per inch, or pixels per inch.) An image that is 20x30 250dpi will be a size of 5000x7500 pixels. This produces a very large image and can allow for an unwanted focus in a specific area. To avoid this problem I had to adopt a system of working where I would randomly flip the image horizontally or zoom out until the entire image is shown on screen and spend some time viewing the entire image as a whole.



Fig. 6. The lion is no more, 2008, Digital, 23"x31"

Not every image I create has a story behind it. In some cases, such as *The lion is no more* I wanted to experiment with the combined shapes of the human figure. The idea came to me after reviewing some of the works by Francis Bacon. I was looking at Bacon's *Self portrait* (1971) and his combination of facial structures that meshed into one another was fascinating to me. I wanted to take that idea and expand on it. Instead of a single face composed of like parts, I took three bodies and included them in the same space.

Much like the *Rat* image, I was working mostly through instinct. I had no intention of creating a religious narrative with this image, but my subconscious was in control once again.

There is a possibility that my subconsciousness picked up on the religious ideas and guided my hand. When I was working on this image, I was researching art history, and much of what I was researching dealt with religion.

Like the dogs in “*the dance*” series, I chose to show the figure as a mortal, with both, naval and symbolic rib cage. The deity in this image is seen as the lion’s skull. The lion skull represents Jesus, or God, while the three figures below it represent man and his worship.

The three figures could be seen as Jesus and the two thieves. The central figure carries the largest part of the symbolic cross or crucifix. The lion is seen as a symbol of nobility as well as a symbol for Jesus. The shape of the lion skull is that of a circle representing both Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. The skull is placed close to the center of the entire image. This placement symbolically pulls all aspects of life towards it.

The burden that Christ must have felt while on the cross had to be unbearable. To illustrate the idea of a heavy burden I added the majority of the visual weight to the bottom of the image. The negative space at the top helps to visualize this weight as well.



Fig. 7. *It's Time*, 2007, Digital, 30"x20"

It's Time is about “growing up” and being an adult. I was considering how humans interacted in social groups at the time I made this image. We are expected to act according to our outward appearance. As an older looking male, I am expected to act in accordance with the social norms for a mature adult man.

In *It's Time*, the robed man is holding a wrist watch above two cats playing with one another in an attempt to lure them into recognizing that it is time to stop acting like children and grow up. Anyone who owns a cat will recognize the folly of luring them into recognizing anything.

Unlike many of my other drawings, this image does not have the complex background environments that are usually seen. I chose a huge negative space so that the focus would be placed on the figures only, and that if the viewer's eye should roam through the image, it would eventually rest on the wrist watch that is highlighted by a single mysterious shaft of light.

I have included a hidden human face in the folds of the cloak towards the bottom level of the male figure. This helps solidify that the man in the cloak is a human and not a god. Other hidden features are the numbers 12, 4, 20 located on the inside of the hood the cloaked figure is wearing. These numbers, added together, represent my age at the time I created the image. I normally do not include numbers in my art, but I felt that some type of personal acknowledgement to my age should be included as a record of my maturity in years.



Fig. 8. It's Time, (detail)



Fig. 9. Self portrait, 2008, Digital, 22"x44"

Self portrait is one of the first life size digital images I created. It began as an assignment for a figure drawing class. At the time I created the image I was concerned with the technical aspects of mark making and creating a believable likeness of myself. I took the idea of the opposing heads from a previous image I had done in mixed media, "*Self Cat.*"



Fig. 10. Self cat, 2006, Mixed media, 30"x22"

I chose to use the cats as a reference to my personality. The top right cat represents my playful side, while the black claws represent my quick to anger mentality when pushed too far in play. The ghostly transparent cat located in the middle left area represents my inquisitive and curious side—always looking for information and new experiences but quick to forget those new-found experiences.

The top-most head is shown looking off into the distance, possibly thinking, possibly day dreaming, but confident and knowing. The bottom, upside down head represents the subconscious that I rely on to guide me through my art.

I created visual obstacles over my mouth. These obstacles represent my conscious efforts to keep my mouth closed as much as possible. I have found that when I do start talking I tend to talk more than social etiquette might warrant. In some cases, my subconscious speaks out saying direct hard truths that are politically incorrect.

Like many of my earlier works, this image was created with experimentation at its heart. I was still mastering my skills of how to use a new set of tools (Photoshop and the custom brushes).



Fig. 11. Self portrait (detail)

It was through creating this image that I first starting using custom brushes as a tool for form and structure. In previous works I had used the custom brushes as an auxiliary method of building up texture for the background.



Fig. 12. Daily Emotions, 2008-2009, Digital, 24"x32"

Like the *Self portrait* image, *Daily Emotions* was created as a requirement for a figure drawing class. At the time I created this image, I had been working with traditional media. I took this opportunity to return to digital media, taking what I had learned while working with traditional media.

Daily Emotions is a depiction of the range of emotions I go through while creating art. The two heads at the top represent doubt and depression. These heads share the same language, which is why I chose to show a connection between them at the mouth. Having doubt about my abilities leads to feelings of depression, and trying to resolve these issues is a hard task. This is why I chose to only show one ear between the two joined heads. Simply hearing that my doubts and depression will go away is not enough; it must be recognized and solved. This recognition is represented by the cat leaping from my hand.

The cat is a representation of my thoughts and tightly- held doubts. I simply have to open my hand to let doubts fall away.

The central face is the face of reason. It sits at the heart of my emotional and intellectual life and guides me to open my mind.

The lower face is one of frustration and anger. This face is upside down because it bears the weight of all the other emotions, especially those tied to doubt and depression.



Fig. 13. Daily Emotions (detail)



Fig. 14. Bast: Aspect of Fertility, 2009, Digital, 20"x30"

As I continued to research zoomorphism in art, I often found that many of the ancient religions used human figures with animal heads to represent their deities. I was inspired by the multitude of animal gods and goddess and decided to create my own representations of these deities.

Bast, Aspect of Fertility is a modern representation of an old Egyptian goddess. Bastet was the goddess of cats, the home, and pregnant women. She was also believed to be the personification of the soul of Isis. (Cass)

This image is the first in my deity series. As I researched the backgrounds and beliefs about these deities, I also began collecting reference material I would later use to create the



Fig. 15. Bast: Aspect of Fertility, (detail)

images.

At first look, the image appears to be a straight forward representation of the goddess. Upon closer inspection you can see that the image is actually made up of many of the textures and shapes found during the time she was worshiped.

I created a multitude of textured brushes with elements such as lotus flowers, papyrus reeds, Egyptian zodiacs, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and many other flora that existed during her time. Originally, I had drawn the head of the cat turned more toward the viewer, but I later chose to recreate it so that the head would be reminiscent of typical Egyptian wall drawings, or

broad aspect view. The textures on the body are placed to give reference to a calico cat, which is almost always female. (Werness 72) These textures are created from my older mixed media drawings, where I used coffee to stain the paper.

During my research for textures and ideas to create this image, I learned that Bastet was considered to be the goddess of wine and the protector of pregnant women. I chose to work within those two ideas and keep the image as feminine and docile as possible. It was a conscious decision to render the central figure more human than animal. I did not want the image to appear to be a rendering of a monster. I kept the animal properties of the figure central to the head and neck areas and relied on patterns and color for the rest of the figure.

My color choices for this image are based on the colors of a calico cat. The earthy hues also suggest an arid and dry environment common during the time she was worshipped. I chose to add the red hues toward the bottom of the image as a visual balance so the figure would not appear to be cut off at the hips. The red hues are also placed in the image as a foreshadowing of the next image that I was already planning out.



Fig. 16. Sekhmet, 2009, Digital, 20"x30"

I created *Sekhmet* with the intention of it being a complete opposite of Bast. Sekhmet is titled as “One before whom evil trembles.” She is a warrior goddess and a plague bringer and healer. She was synonymous with physicians because it was believed she could cure diseases. (Cass)

Much like the Bast image, I created the image with textures and shapes found during the time she was worshipped. Instead of using living flora I used dried and dead flora. In some cases, I had to draw the dead flowers first then create a working brush I could use later.

Many Egyptian deities have multiple aspects to their being. (Cass) I made a conscious decision to work within the opposite of what Bast was and concentrate on Sekhmet’s more haunting aspects.

The Egyptian mythology of Sekhmet depicts her as having the head of a lioness and the body of a human female. I chose the domesticated cat head because I wanted the idea of the goddess to be more contemporary and something to which an average viewer could relate.

I chose to create the female body as lethargic and wasted as possible while still retaining some form of believability that the body could function normally. I chose to show the chest area (where the heart lies) as an open, glowing area. This is a reference to her healing abilities as well as a nice method to balance the visual weight of the image since so much of the space is taken up by the figure.

Sekhmet has her mouth open as a reference to the belief that her breath created the deserts. (Cass) Her gaze is off to the viewer's left, not directly at the viewer. Her gaze is a reference to the protective nature of Sekhmet, telling us she is watching our back.



Fig. 17. Vision of the Elk God, 2009, Digital, 20"x30"

After spending some time researching the various gods and goddesses of Ancient Egypt, I began to look closer at the writings and theories of Joseph Campbell. When describing the use of imagery to represent various deities through time, Campbell said:

“...It’s as though the same play were taken from one place to another, and at each place the local players put on local costumes and enact the same old play... It is a mysterium, a mystery, tremendum et fascinans—tremendous, horrific, because it smashes all of your fixed notions of things, and at the same time utterly fascinating, because it’s of your own nature and being. When you start thinking about these things, about the inner mystery, inner life, the eternal life, there aren’t too many images for you to use. You begin, on your own, to have the images that are already present in some other system of thought.” (Flowers 38)

I realized that many of the myths about the gods and goddesses carried similarities throughout time. It was soon after realizing that many of these deities were essentially the same that I began creating my own gods and goddesses.

Vision of the Elk God is a representation of what a shaman would see in a vision while seeking the guidance of this god.

The Elk God is shown with four arms, three come up to form a cup that holds the seeds of many trees, while the fourth arm rests at his side. This is showing the shaman that he should tell his people to plant the seeds for their next crop in three days and on the fourth day, rest.

The head of the Elk God is turned so that his one eye is facing us directly to show that he is communicating with us, or in this case, the shaman having the vision.

I had a multitude of problems when creating this image. The largest problem was working with a preconceived idea. I had the pose and posture of the central figure already planned out, creating a self imposed limitation. As I proceeded, I found myself wanting to make changes. I was having numerous problems with the fur and hair of the head. I had become too accustomed to working from instinct, putting down what came to mind. I considered starting over with a completely new idea, but I realized that what I was experiencing was more than technical and aesthetic problems. I was experiencing growing pains as an artist. I was working well outside my comfort zone and I had to push myself to finish this image if I wanted to gain the rewards it had to offer.

Once I had reached a place of satisfaction with the central figure I then began the process of creating textures and shapes that would make up the whole of the image. Having already dealt with the arduous task of creating the figure, I wanted to keep the textures and shapes simple and to the point. I chose to work with antlers and seeds, a combination of elements that complimented the idea of this god.



Fig. 18. Groomsch, 2009, Digital, 30"x20"

Staying with the idea of creating my own deities, I created Groomsch (pronounced groom-sh). Groomsch is the god of dust, dirt, and tick birds.

The head of Groomsch is that of a wart hog, an animal that is close to the ground and spends a great deal of time in the dirt. His skin is the color of dirt and tanned to protect him from the exposure of the sun. I chose to give Groomsch a staff as a symbol of wisdom and frailty. I want to convey that Groomsch is a benevolent deity that lives in harmony with his surroundings.

I gave Groomsch a halo of yellow feathers as a reference to the tick birds. Tick birds are typically seen on the backs of rhino's, living a symbiotic relationship with the rhino picking off ticks and giving sounds of warning if danger is approaches. If the bird becomes infested with mites or other parasites, it flies to the ground and bathes in dirt and dust to shake off the mites or parasites.

Groomsch is not a human deity. He is a deity of the animals that roam the forest. He is typically worshiped by birds and the rhino. His function is to make sure the ground is dry and covered with enough dust for the birds to bathe with.

The birds worship Groomsch by dancing in the dirt and throwing up large plumes of dust. Offerings of their beautiful feathers are often left behind as a sacrifice. The rhino pays homage to Groomsch by allowing the tick birds safely to stay on his back.

I created Groomsch with a multitude of textured brushes that contained the image of cracked mud and ice. Closer inspection of the central figure reveals tiny cracks and crevasses all over his body and face. The viewer will also find the hint of feathers throughout his body.

I chose to render the figure in a higher contrast with the hopes that it would give the feeling of a parched and cracked environment..



Fig. 19. Groomsch, (detail)



Fig. 21. Goddess of Messengers, 2009, Digital, 20"x30"

I was reading the series of books by George R.R. Martin, “The Song of Fire and Ice” and was fascinated that the characters in the books used ravens to send messages back and forth. (Martin) As I continued to read through the first three books of the series, the idea came to me of a goddess to watch over these ravens as they carried their messages.

The sole purpose of this deity is to keep messenger birds safe and make sure they find their destination. Like the deity Groomsch, this is not a deity worshiped by humans, it is a deity worshiped by messenger birds and birds that migrate.

Proper worshiping of this particular deity by birds involves the ritual of singing. The singing must be done early in the morning as the sun rises, as this is when the goddess is returning from her eternal errand of delivering messages to the other animal deities. If she hears a song that pleases her, she will bless the birds with good weather and an impeccable sense of

direction that will lead them to their destination. If she is not pleased with the songs, she does not give her blessing and the birds risk being lost or caught in bad weather. The birds that are lost are often seen perched on fences or gates waiting for a human to give them a message so they can hope to regain favor.

I chose a female form for this deity, as I wanted the shape to be bird-like and streamlined. The bulk and hard edged outline of the male form was not well suited to keeping with the idea of a birdlike form.

My choice of colors for this image was based on the hues of a raven's feathers. These hues range from vibrant blues to dark purples and in some cases hints of red highlights.

The environment is representative of a turbulent sky with storm clouds and faint streaks of lights illuminating the night clouds.

I chose not to show the lower half of the legs because I want the viewer to decide if the deity is standing or flying. The line of action created by the movement of the figure is echoed by the luminous feathers to the right; carrying the motion of the figure so the central figure does not appear to be statuesque.

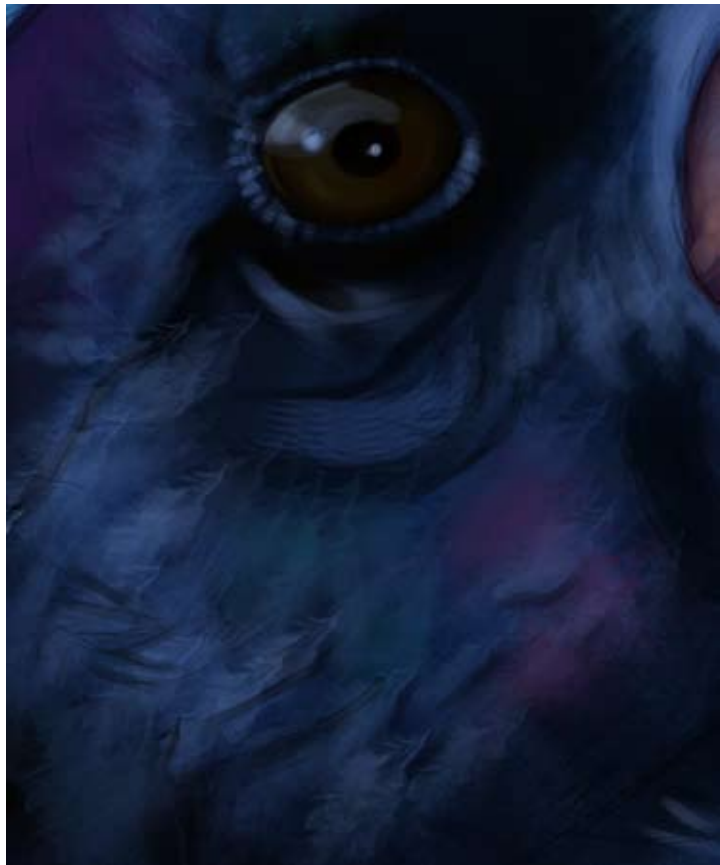


Fig. 22. Goddess of Messengers, (detail)



Fig. 22. Goddess of Messengers, (detail 2)

I gave the deity her own message to carry. On the scroll are the words, “Dark wings, Dark Tidings.” In the story I was reading, a character sees a messenger raven approaching her castle and remarks “Dark wings bringing dark tidings...” I felt that this comment was a fitting attribute to add to the image. I was careful not to make the words apparent. The words can only be read by close examination again, keeping with my idea that my work should be viewed at a distance as well as close up for the full appreciation of what the image has to offer.

After I finished the drawing of the figure and the raven’s head, I began using custom brushes to add in the color and tonal values. My brushes consisted of custom made brushes created from feathers, bird wings, and clouds. I also used some brushes of circular abstract shapes to further establish that this figure is a worshiped deity. The circle is seen in many cultures as a symbol of divinity and the placement of circular shapes in the body represent the concept that this central figure is a worshiped deity.

CHAPTER 4

CLOSING

Myth, anthropomorphism, and zoomorphism are the three main elements that appear in all the work I have created during my time as a graduate student. The decision to include these elements was not done on a conscious level, but one that has evolved and became more apparent through experimentation in my art and research.

The *Dance* images were initially created as a study and exploration of anthropomorphism. As I delved deeper into mythology, I began to see a common thread and story that tied the three images together. After I completed the mythos and written story about the goddess and the dogs, I began to see a whole new set of ideas and concepts that would further my work as a graduate student.

As I began researching the various deities of past and present cultures, it became evident that many of these deities shared the same mythos throughout time and across many religious beliefs. This was further confirmed by my research of Joseph Campbell, his teachings, and theory of mythology.

After I finished *Bast: Aspect of Fertility* and *Sekhmet*, I began creating my own deities and not holding myself to the confines of pre-existing deities. My decision to create my own mythology was based on the concept of how the viewer would view my artwork. I did not want the viewer to recognize the deity or mythology right away. Instead I want a situation where the viewer has to think for him/herself about the mythology. I also want the viewer to explore the image on a metaphysical level as well. I cannot do this by giving the viewer all the answers up front, such as incorporating the existing knowledge of past mythologies or religions.

In keeping with the idea of creating my own mythology, I chose to create mythologies around animals. I combined anthropomorphism and zoomorphism and created deities that are

worshiped by animals. The brief stories that accompany the artwork were created simultaneously with the art. As the final image took shape, so did the mythos that surrounded the art.

Looking at my artwork as a whole, I can see the journey that has taken place. I began working with traditional materials, letting go of the exactness of rendering that is common in an academic style. I concentrated more on experimentation and what my subconscious brought to the surface. While this was happening, I often considered the possibilities of recreating these same types of images with digital media. I believe that digital media is nothing more than another tool in my studio, much like a paintbrush or stick of charcoal. The brand names and quality of these tools has no meaning to me, as I am the one ultimately responsible for how these tools are used.

Without my previous experience of using traditional media I do not believe the work I have created with digital media would be as successful. By success, I am not referring to popularity or the amount of money that is placed on these images. I am referring to the ability as an artist to bring forth what I see in my imagination or through my subconscious and create it as a final product that can be seen by anyone.

The final artwork is printed through a process called Giclee printing. This process allows for highly detailed prints that will never fade or tarnish over time. (Johns) I chose to only print one proof print and one final print. The decision to only have one print instead of an edition is based more on finances than saleability.

Another aspect of working with digital media is that I can record the entire process of what I do. When I first started to experiment with digital media as a graduate student, I began recording the screen and capturing the entire process from start to finish. Initially this was done so that I could keep a record of what mistakes or discoveries I made. I later decided to use these videos as a form of explanation to show how the artwork is created. The process of creating my work is as important as the final image. This process can be seen partially by looking at

the final print. To more fully document my process, I have included a video as part of my thesis exhibition. The video was created to show the entire creation process from beginning to end of select artworks.

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