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Telling Stories About Monsters Through Art

Megan L. Peterson

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TELLING STORIES ABOUT MONSTERS THROUGH ART

by

MEGAN L. PETERSON

Under the Direction of Dr. Kevin Hsieh

ABSTRACT

This study is about how the research of monsters and contemporary artists who create monster-related work can help create monsters from my own imagination using the process of synthesis. In it I discuss how the monsters I created in my artwork tell a story. I also talk about how this study can be used to relate art to other fields of study such as English and History, and the idea of Visual Culture.

INDEX WORDS: Monsters, Fantasy, Imagination, Storytelling, Synthesis, Composition

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MEGAN L. PETERSON

Committee Chair: Dr. Kevin Hsieh

Committee: Dr. Melody Milbrandt

Dr. Melanie Davenport

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family and
friends who have supported me, and my art, throughout the
years.

Acknowledgements

I would sincerely like to thank my thesis committee

members: Dr. Kevin Hsieh, Dr. Melody Milbrandt, and Dr.

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them for their assistance and feedback.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Description of the Study

In this study, I conducted a studio-based project. I produced a series of paintings using fictional monsters that I have created from my imagination and I have given a story to them, which is told visually through my compositions. I desired to use monsters because I was always fascinated with monster stories as a kid; I was always curious as to how the hero was going defeat the monster. Another reason I chose monsters is because of how popular they are in stories today (Booker, 2006). I reflected on my study in terms of processes, themes, and its importance to art education. I wanted to find out how monsters can be used in visual art to tell stories and how this can relate to art education. My research questions for this study are:

- How can I use research of monsters to inspire the creation of my own?
- How can I use the strategy of synthesizing different human and animal body parts to create imaginary monsters from my imagination?
- How can I visually tell a story through composition?

When I was creating my artwork I faced some challenges, such as, how to successfully give my monsters stories. To help with this, I decided to research monsters and their stories through

historical contexts because understanding the misunderstandings of the origins and historical development of different monsters would greatly assist me to conduct this study; it was through this research, that I understood how monsters came to be. From this research I implemented various sketches, lists, and notes from my sketchbook to help me in the development of my artistic process.

I used several research methods in my thesis such as researching monsters, artists, creating various sketches, and keeping data about my research in my sketchbook. First, I researched some fictional monsters within a historical framework. Second, I began my artistic process by looking at various contemporary artists that work with the theme of fictional monsters. Then I sketched out fictional creatures in my sketchbook from my imagination. Before I chose which monsters I wanted to portray in my paintings, I had to come up with ideas of how to portray them so that I could build up a composition for them that would tell a story. I wanted to base my stories around childhood themes and ideas because of the fascination I had with them while I was young, and because they are popular in children's stories today (Bettelheim, 1976). I created a list of words, such as swimming and playgrounds, which reminded me of childhood to help develop my ideas for my compositions that would tell stories. The list was added to and revised over time

to help me narrow down my ideas and focus on specific ones. From this list, I chose words to create compositions for my paintings; from these compositions, stories are told. I did several sketches of each composition/story and picked the one that would be the most successful in telling a story and which one would hold the viewer's interest while looking at my artwork; a "successful composition draws in the viewer and pulls their eye across the whole painting" (Boddy-Evans, 2011, p. 1).

Timeline and Outcomes

Throughout a six-month period I created seven paintings. I used some pieces that I created in the summer of 2010 as starting off point for this series of work. These two paintings are about monsters and imagination, but lacked interest and a clear message (see images below).

Figure 1. *Childhood Imagination #1*, acrylic on canvas, 16 x 24".

Figure 2. *Childhood Imagination #2*, acrylic on canvas, 18 x 24".

These paintings are about remembering what it is like to have a playful child-like imagination. I have worked with children, and am inspired by their imaginations. Warner (2009) states "in play, a child beams her projective imagination upon inert things and animates them with fantasy, infusing objects with meaning" (p. 7). Even if a child does not have toys to play with, they can make mental objects become real through their imagination (Warner, 2009). I wanted to portray a child pretending they were playing with monsters, but I feel these paintings were unsuccessful in communicating a message of reminiscing on a child-like imagination because there was no interaction between

the monsters and the child in the work. The child was detached from her imagination when she should be engulfed in it. This void of interaction made for a composition that lacked interest because, as mentioned before, they were just characters on a canvas; there was nothing there to make the eye move around the painting which made it difficult to hold the attention of the viewer.

Even though the paintings I created in the summer of 2010 were unsuccessful, they inspired me to work with the concept of monsters further, so I created seven new oil paintings on canvas for this study. Through this series of paintings, I used monsters I created from my imagination and give them stories, which are told through my paintings. These stories are based off things that remind me of childhood.

I used the month of August 2010 to begin research on monsters to better understand them, and I also researched how contemporary artists are using monsters in their work. This research helped me create my own monsters, which I will explain later in Chapter Two. I took the month of September 2010 and created several sketches of my monsters and worked on a list of words about childhood to help me come up with my stories. I used the months of October through December of 2010 to finalize my compositions and stories, and continued to work on my paintings. At the end of my Drawing and Painting Studio class, I reflected

on whether or not my paintings had the desired effect, and then spent the next couple of months, January and February 2011, making revisions to my work. My paintings were completed in March 2011.

I hoped that I could create a body of work that is cohesive and evokes interest in the viewer. My hope was that my paintings would successfully convey a story about fictional monsters through attention-grabbing compositions. I looked forward to further developing my painting skills through this process, as well discovering what I could create through using my imagination.

Develop a Plan for Reflection

Throughout this study, I ran into problems regarding how to create interesting compositions from my imagination, and how to successfully convey a story through my compositions. I have solved these problems by researching the historical development of monsters to help as a basis for creating my own monsters, and by researching other artists who are creating monster-related work from imagination to help with generating compositions from my imagination, which I will discuss further in Chapter Two. I have also solved these problems through experimentation of sketching in my sketchbook.

Chapter Two: Method of Study

Definition of Key Terms

   Composition.

"arrangements of elements in or the subject matter of a painting. A successful composition draws in the viewer and pull their eye across the whole painting." (Boddy-Evans, 2011, p. 1).

   Contrast.

For the purpose of this study, contrast is defined as arrangement of opposite elements, such as color (light versus dark).

   Fantasy.

"imaginary perceptions or reminiscences" (Brenner, 2003, p. 1).

   Imagination.

"the act of power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality" (Kay, 2010, p. 1).

   Monsters/Fictional Creatures.

An imaginary creature usually having various human or animal parts (Hunter, 2007).

   Shading.

For the purpose of this study, shading is defined as the variation between the differences of a color.

Sketch.

For the purpose of this study, sketch is defined as the preliminary drawings to my paintings.

Sketchbook.

For the purpose of this study, sketchbook is defined as the book that I am using to document my research, plan ideas, and create compositions for my paintings.

Story/Storytelling.

For the purpose of this study, storytelling is defined as visually telling a story through narration in a painting.

Synthesis.

For the purpose of this study, synthesis is defined as the use of juxtaposing human and animal parts together to create a monster.

Tone/Value.

For the purpose of this study, tone/value is defined as the degree of lightness and darkness in an area.

Detail of Methods Used in the Study

The historical context & development of European monsters.

I began this series of work by researching monsters because I wanted to figure out why monsters exist; in what context they were created. I decided on five monsters from the European region because it has a rich history of fictional monsters (Booker, 2006). I selected to focus on five different monsters

from one geographical area because some monsters have different traits in different regions (Keyworth, 2006), this way I would only be focusing on one history per monster versus multiple histories from all over the world of the same monster. From my research, I produced a chart of traits and information about each monster I chose to help organize my research findings (see Table 1 on the next page).

Table 1. The development and types of monsters.

	Physical Attributes	Cultural Context	Theme	Origin	Other Names	Location	Personality	Other
Loch Ness Monster	Varies depending on the sighting; Large sea creature; Sometimes described as a big fish or dinosaur; Humps; Fins	Misunderstanding of mundane creatures or natural phenomena	Cryptozoology	First sighted by a Saint; sightings have been continuing ever since	Nessie or Ness	Lives in Loch Ness, a lake in northern Scotland	Vicious; Human killing	Evidence proving and disproving its existence; expeditions done in the 60s and 70s
Frankenstein's Monster	ORIGINAL: eight feet tall; yellowish skin and eyes; black hair MODERN: (comes from Boris Karloff's film portrayal) flat headed; electrodes in neck; green skin (green make up showed best on b&w film); scar on forehead	Created during the Industrial Revolution; Could be lesson about man playing with God; Don't mess with what you don't understand; Created in a time where scientists and business men were using nature in a destructive way; Natural consequences of love; Original sin	Environmental; Psychological: Science vs Nature; Original Sin	First appeared in Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*; later adapted into films, tv, etc.	NOVEL: The creature; The fiend; The daemon; The wretch; Frankenstein was his creator, not his name AFTER FILM: Frankenstein	Bavaria	Starts of as sensitive and emotional creature whose only aim is to love but through negative experiences with mankind becomes "evil"; mostly portrayed today as evil	Adapted in many films and other novels
Vampires	Human resemblance; Pale skin; Anyone who had a hideous appearance was believed to be a vampire; Healthy appearance; Cast no shadow or reflection	Misunderstanding of diseases; Rare diseases created fear since they weren't understood; People with rare diseases were falsely accused of being vampires; Fear of sin and its consequences	Epidemic; Death is related to each other (whoever save the corpse would die the same or related death); Misunderstanding of disease	Rose from the bodies of suicide victims, criminals, evil sorcerers, etc; Born of sin; Born from unnatural deaths or before baptism	Have different names in different cultures	Eastern European although found in almost every ancient culture; Major vampire scare in the 18th century	Can pass vampirism onto to innocent victims by biting their neck; first noticed when livestock was attacked; Obsessive-compulsive; Mean; Evil	Modern views of vampires are very different from folklore; Best way to kill is wooden stake through the heart (staking them to the earth), decapitation, or incarnation; Ward off with garlic, wild rose, hawthorn plant, or holy objects; To prevent bury upside down, sever tendons at knees, place poppy seeds at grave site to keep them up all night counting (obsessive-compulsive)
Werewolves	Man who changes into a wolf; large than a normal wolf	Possibly a food born illness; ergot poisoning causes hallucinations; Rabies; Hypertrichosis; Delusions; Mental Illness; Hatred of animal	Epidemic; Misunderstanding of diseases: Transfiguration; Metamorphosis: Magic; Misunderstanding of animals	By putting on a wolf skin belt; drink water out of a footprint of a wolf; cures removal of belt, kneel in one spot for 100 years, saluted with the sign of the cross, addressed by baptismal name 3x, 3 blows to the forehead with a knife, 3 drop of blood shed	Lycanthrope	All over but focusing on Europe; scare in the 16th century	More destructive than wolves; innocent god-fearing people; Craving the flesh of man; More powerful than a normal wolf	MODERN VIEWS: change at full moon; can be killed with a silver bullet; being bitten by one transforms you into one FOLKLORE: can be killed by destruction of the heart or brain; change because of curse, magic, or purposely
Goblins	Grotesquely disfigured elf-like phantom; Dwarf; Some man-like qualities; High pitched voice; Speak human language; Sometimes invisible to the human eye	Remnants of the earliest pagan faiths; deities shrunken to below life size because the power they held over their believers was weakened by newer and stronger faiths.	Opposite of humans; Religion	Considered to be the cousins of Gnomes; Harmless until the Puritans demonized them	Hobgoblin; Changeling	France and rapidly spread throughout Europe. hitched rides with Vikings	Steal women and children and hide them underground; replace human babies with goblin babies; plant nightmares in humans; Wiser than humans; Mimic human actions, twisting them and showing their worst traits	Smile curdles blood; Laugh spoils milk and makes fruit fall from trees; Love mushrooms; Wreak havoc on Halloween; Steal horses and ride them at night; Suffers from discrimination: Nomadic; Sometimes servant to bigger evil powers

Loch Ness monster.

One of the monsters I decided to research was the Loch Ness Monster because it is from my chosen region and it is widely famous; it is known all over the world (Loxton, 2004). The Loch Ness Monster is also known as Nessie, or Ness, and is believed to be located in lake Lock Ness in Northern Scotland ("The modern," 2004). The first recorded sighting of Nessie was by a Scottish saint 1,400 years ago ("The monster," 2004); it was described as a "50-foot-long creature with a slim neck"; it looked like a big fish ("Lady Loch," 2006, p. 18). Descriptions of the Loch Ness monster have varied over time; later Ness sightings reported the creature looking like an ancient dinosaur, plesiosaurs, or a fish called a sturgeon ("Deeper," 2004). People have described Nessie has having "one hump, many humps, feet, flippers, horn, no horns, and so on" ("Deeper," 2004, p. 105). Some believe that "it wouldn't be surprising if fossils themselves" inspired the tale of the Nessie ("Fossil," 2002, p. 97). People may have seen fossils of dinosaurs or other creatures and not understood what they were, creating Nessie stories. Others believe that maybe people saw an animal in the lake in which they did not know what it was, and the ledged grew from there, of people trying to understand their environment (Vitaliano, 2007).

Vampires.

Another monster I picked to research was a vampire because they are popular today and they have a strong history in Europe; there was a major vampire scare in Europe in the eighteenth century (Keyworth, 2006). Vampires are defined as:

> Spirits or demons that left their graves at night to seek and enslave their victims; it was thought that their victims themselves became vampires…they could be warded off with a variety of charms, amulets, and herbs and could finally be killed by driving a steak through its heart or by cremation ("Vampire," 2010, p. 1).

According to vampire folklore, they are believed to have a healthy appearance, filled with blood from their victims (humans and animals) and the blood sometimes flows from their nose or ears, make appearances at night; people who have sinned, were criminals, committed suicide, died an unnatural death before baptism, catching an unknown illness from someone in the family who had the same thing, etc. were commonly accused as returning as vampires (Keyworth, 2006). Vampires' appearances vary from region to region (Keyworth, 2006). There are a few explanations to describe how people could possess traits connected to those of vampires.

One believed the origin of vampires comes from the misunderstanding of a disease called porphyria, Boffey (1985)

described in the New York times, "involves a malfunctioning in the body's manufacture of crucial chemicals, could have left victims grotesquely disfigured, turned them into creatures of the night and caused them to suck the blood of their brothers and sisters" (p. A.15). Boffey (1985) also believed that porphyrias could be spread genetically or by an infected person biting another, and in turn, spreading it to them (p. A.15). It is also believed that garlic "contains a chemical that exacerbates the symptoms of porphyrias" (Boffey, 1985, p. A.15). The misunderstanding of this rare disease could have started the myths about vampires; they are similar to the ideas of vampires appearing at night, biting and sucking blood of others, and their victims becoming vampires themselves.

Another one of the widely believed ideas, which comes from Barber (1990), is that the origin of vampires has come from the "misunderstood process of decomposition" (p. 76). One of the earliest recorded vampires in Europe was a man named Arnold Paole who died from falling off a wagon and came back to haunt the living (Barber, 1990). Townspeople dug up a corpse and:

> They found that he was quite complete and undecayed, and that fresh blood had flowed from his eyes, nose, mouth, and ears:…that the old nails on his hands and feet, along with the skin, had fallen off, and that news ones had grown; and since they saw that he was a true vampire, they drove a steak

through his heart, according to their custom, whereby he gave

an audible groan and bled copiously (Barber, 1990, p. 76).

The decomposition process can explain the things they witnessed.

"As a corpse decomposes it bloats (from the gases given off by

decomposition), while the pressure from bloating causes blood

from the lungs to emerge at the mouth" (Barber, 1990, p. 79).

The blood people saw coming from the corpse was real, just not

from its victims. In decomposition, it is also common for the

nails to fall off (Barber, 1990). The sound they heard can be

explained by "the compression of the chest cavity forces air

past the glottis, causing the sound similar in quality an origin

to the groan or cry of a living person" (Barber, 1990, p. 79).

Werewolves.

I chose to research werewolves because they too have a rich

history in Europe; there was a werewolf scare in the sixteenth

century (Blecourt, 2007). Werewolves are defined as "a man

temporarily or permanently transformed into a wolf"

("Lycanthropy," 2010, p. 1). They are described as being

"tailless or having truncated tails…smaller heads or appear

different in color" (Lawrence, 1996, p. 110). Werewolves were

sometimes described as "destructive, bloodthirsty, and cunning"

and people who were "antisocial or marginal, living apart from

others…conceived at the full moon, born feet first or with a

caul, had a hairy body, scabbed legs, or lupine features, or

whose eyebrows met in the middle" were accused or suspected of

being werewolves (Lawrence, 1996, p. 109). Misunderstandings of

diseases can be used to explain the origin of werewolves. One

example is ergot poisoning and rabies, which could explain the

irrational behavior of those suspected to be werewolves

(Lawrence, 1996). Other diseases are "hypertrichosis giving a

bestial appearance; malnutrition simulating an appetite for

flesh; various psychoses; ingestion of pharmacological

hallucinogens leading to delusions of lupine identity"

(Lawrence, 1996, p. 110).

   Goblins.

   Goblins also interest me because they are more spiritual than

human or animal and give more variety to my research. Goblins

are defined as a "small household spirit…performed household

tasks but also can make mischief, such as pulling the covers off

sleepers" ("Goblin," 2010, p. 1). They are described as beings

dwarf, sometimes invisible to the eye, having elf and human-like

features, and they wreak havoc upon the human world; thier

description varies from region to region (Carver, 2010) Goblins

are believed to have originated from "leftover people" or the:

   Remnants of the earliest pagan faiths…they are not dead gods

   but rather deities shrunken down to below life-size because

   the power they held over their believers has been weakened by

   the inroads of younger and stronger faiths, fractured by new

practices, and eroded away. Their lack of size is a

manifestation of their lack of influence (Grischy, 2010, p.

1).

They are often described as being the servants of greater evil

beings, the creators of nightmares, and as pranksters (Carver,

2010).

Frankenstein.

Finally, I decided to research the monster from the story

Frankenstein. I chose Frankenstein's monster because I wanted to

study a monster created for a story to see how it was similar or

how it varied from monster myths and folklore. Frankenstein's

monster fits into my focus of the European region since it takes

place in Bavaria, part of Europe (Shelly, 2003). The monster is

described as ugly and made up of other body parts that were

jointed together; the body parts came from dead bodies

(Bissonette, 2010). Frankenstein's monster was intended to be

beautiful and loving, but ended up being ugly and sought out

love from his creator; when his creator did not return his love,

he became evil and went rouge (Hammond, 2004). The novel was

written during the first industrial revolution and the idea for

the novel came from the fear of messing with nature, playing

god, and the power of technology (Hammond, 2004).

The creation of monsters.

Through my research, I learned that monsters are created from peoples' fears and misunderstandings of the world around them, such as: nature, diseases, death, etc. The images of monsters that people generated were created from things that are familiar to people, though the synthesis of human and animal parts.

Generated from fears and misunderstandings.

From my research of monsters, I learned that a lot of monster origins are very similar to one another. A lot of the monsters came to exist because of fear created from misunderstandings of nature (Vitaliano, 2007). For example, the Loch Ness Monster originated from the fear of misunderstanding fossils or seeing animals that had not been discovered yet ("Fossil," 2002).

Monsters were also created out of the fear and misunderstanding of diseases (Boffey, 1985). For example, vampires rose out of the fear and from the misunderstanding of disease and the decomposition process of the human corpse (Boffey, 1985).

As discovered from the research on Frankenstein, people also created monsters to represent things that they feared (Hammond, 2004). For example, Frankenstein was created by Shelly to represent her fear of technology during the Industrial Revolution.

Generated from synthesis.

I discovered through my research that these monsters were all constructed through synthesis; they are made up of human and animal parts fused together (Gilmore, 2003). For example, the Loch Ness monster has been described to look like various different animals, such as: a plesiosaurs, a sturgeon, etc.; people used animal parts that they knew to make sense of what they thought they were seeing (Loxton, 2004). Another example is Frankenstein, he was created out body parts from different people (Bissonette, 2010).

Monsters are not just created out of the synthesis of animal parts, they are also made from human parts, as seen by the Frankenstein example; this is mostly due to birth defects, disfigurements, diseases, etc. and peoples' fears and misunderstandings about them (Pullman, 2009). An example of this is the creation of werewolves, which could be explained by diseases that cause people to grow abnormal amounts of hair all over their bodies (Lawrence, 1996). Other examples are: abnormal growths, parts of the body that enlarged or shrunk, body parts in unusual areas (an extra arm), absence of a body part, displaced organs, premature aging, etc. (Pullman, 2009). The synthesizing of human and animal parts makes allows for monsters not to fit into any categorization in any systematic structure, they are different from the norm; this helps stem the fear

monsters personify (Cohen, 1996).

This process of synthesis is also metaphorical in nature (Pullamn, 2009). Not only are monsters given life from fear, misunderstandings, and fantasy, they also signify something other than themselves (Cohen, 1996). Monsters also embody a cultural moment; they inhabit the time and upheaval that it was created it (Cohen, 1996). For example, Frankenstein embodies the fear of the industrial revolution (Hammond, 2004).

Monsters are our children, created from our fears and misunderstandings; they show us how we perceive our world, how we misinterpret what we attempt to understand, and evaluate our cultural assumptions (Cohen, 1996). These fears and misunderstandings have given the monsters stories that have lasted hundreds of years, seeing as how monsters are still a common theme in stories today (Booker, 2006). What I have gathered and learned from researching monsters will help me greatly in coming up with my own monsters using synthesis. I looked at various animals in my environment and from my memory to synthesize together to create my creatures, which I will discuss more in Chapter Three.

Artist influences.

I also looked at several artists who create art from imagination and whose artwork consists of monsters and fictional creatures that they have generated themselves from their

imaginations and then incorporated into their artwork. This has helped me to see how other artists are using their imaginations to inspire them and their artwork and has also helped with my creation of my own monsters in my sketchbook. The artists I have looked at are: Michele Mikesell, Charles Burchfield, Scott Musgrove, Mark Ryden, and Tim Burton. I have noted some of their work and biographies or artists statements in my sketchbook for documentation and to look back at for further inspiration; below is an example of the documentation I did of one of the artists I studied in my sketchbook which includes notes about the artist and images of their work.
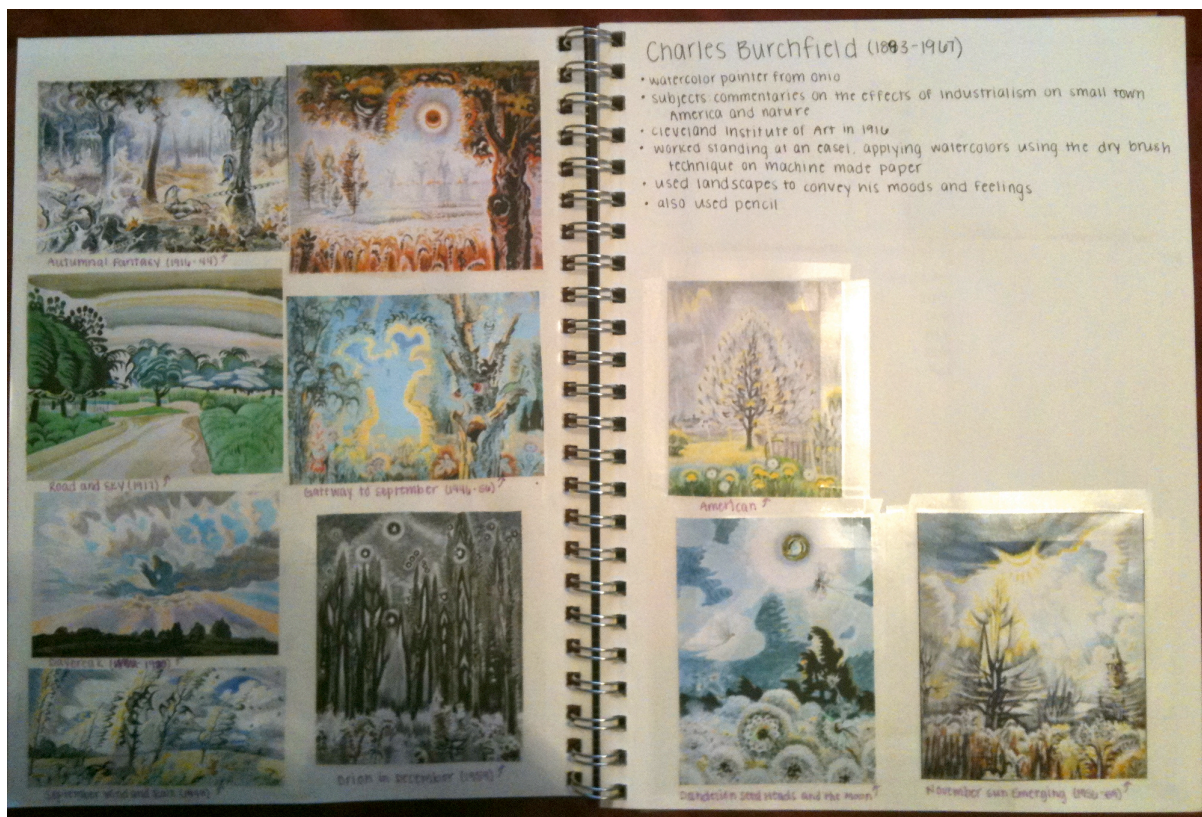

Figure 3. Artist Page in Sketchbook, Charles Burchfield, 4 x 6".

When looking at the work of Michele Mikesell, it was her characters that inspired me; she fuses human and animal figures together (Mikesell, 2010). For example, in her painting, *Chicken Dish*, she has a human figure wearing an animal costume.

Figure 4. Mikesell, M., *Chicken Dish*, oil on birch, 30 x 40" (2010).

The person is dressed like a chicken, but also has chicken-like features; the person has very short, wing-like arms and wobbly little legs, like a chicken. Her technique of human and animal synthesis inspired me because in my research on the history of monsters, I discovered that a lot of monsters have human and

animal parts because most of them originated from people misunderstanding disease and/or animals (Gilmore, 2003). By seeing how a contemporary artist, such as Mikesell, synthesized human and animal parts, it helped me to come up with ideas on how to create my monsters using different body parts of humans and animals and putting them together.

Another contemporary artist I explored was Charles Burchfield; he has created some landscape paintings, both from observation and imagination (Cotter, 2010). I was inspired by the way Burchfield could paint fantasy landscapes that are interesting and complicated. For example, the painting, *An April Mood*, is invented from fantasy, but it has excellent composition; the viewers' eye never stops moving around the canvas (Gober, 2010).

Figure 5. Burchfield, C. *An April Mood*, watercolor and charcoal on joined paper, 40 x 54" (1946).

I looked at the way he created his landscapes realistically but used lots of organic and abstract shapes as well to develop more interest. By looking at Burchfield's work, it helped me create interesting fantasy settings for my paintings by drawing from things I know, my imagination, and from observation (Cotter, 2010).

I also investigated the contemporary artist, Scott Musgrove (2011), who creates his own creatures from imagination and from his knowledge on the subject of biology. He invents new or extinct species that have never existed before and then paints them in environments that you would not expect to find these creatures in, for example, under a freeway (Lowpro, 2011). Musgrove has even had books of paintings published; these books are about the discovery and archeology of his imaginary creatures (Musgrove, 2011). He has created creatures and given them a story (Jager, 2005), like I am doing in my work. Musgrove's use of imagination and storytelling helped me not only draw my own monsters, but also assisted me in coming up with compositions that could tell their stories as well.

Another contemporary artist I researched was Mark Ryden, who uses his childhood and child-like imagination as inspiration for his work. Ryden believes in letting his imagination thrive in his art (Ryden, 2009) and he tries to capture the things that children see that adults do not (Ryden, 2001); this is a similar

concept to what I was working with in the summer of 2010. I looked at how Ryden's imaginary creatures interacted with people in his artwork because this is something that was lacking in my own artwork. In his painting, *The Long Yak*, the yak is giving a piggyback ride to a couple of children; they are interacting together in the composition.

Figure 6. Ryden, M. *The Long Yak*, oil on canvas, 12 x 30" (2008).

His work helped me to come up with ideas of how to make my monsters and children interact in my artwork.

Finally, I looked at the artwork of Tim Burton; besides animation and film, Burton also creates illustrations and drawings (Gallo, 2009). Burton has created artwork from his imagination about his passion for misunderstood monsters (He, 2009). I looked at how he created his own monsters. Burton's use

of simple lines and child-like drawing style inspired me while creating my artwork in a more cartoon-like style.

Each one of these artists depicts monsters, creatures, or characters in fantasy settings that they have created. They have inspired me to invent more interesting settings for my paintings in comparison to the ones I created over the summer of 2010, as talked about in Chapter One. In the paintings I created over the summer, it was more like the child was observing monsters in her world, and now the child is playing with the creatures, like a child might do when they are playing pretend. Through the interaction between the child and the monsters in my compositions, I hope to tell a story. I want my paintings to tell a story because of the way that historical fictional monsters each have their own story (Booker, 2006). Researching these artists and how they use monsters, story, and imagination in their work has helped me to develop my own artwork.

Artwork production.

After researching artists, I began the artistic process in my study. Going off of the theme of childhood in the paintings I created in the summer of 2010, as mentioned in Chapter One, I made a list of words that reminded me of childhood. Below is an image of the list in my sketchbook.

Figure 7. List of Childhood Words, pen, 4 x 6".

This list of words was used to help me create compositions that tell stories for my monsters. I added to and narrowed down the list over time, and from here I picked seven key words to create compositions from my paintings. I wrote down notes about how I could convey a story based on these words through composition in my sketchbook.

Then I began thinking about the monsters I created from my imagination. I filled up many pages in my sketchbook of monster drawings; below is an image of these sketches.
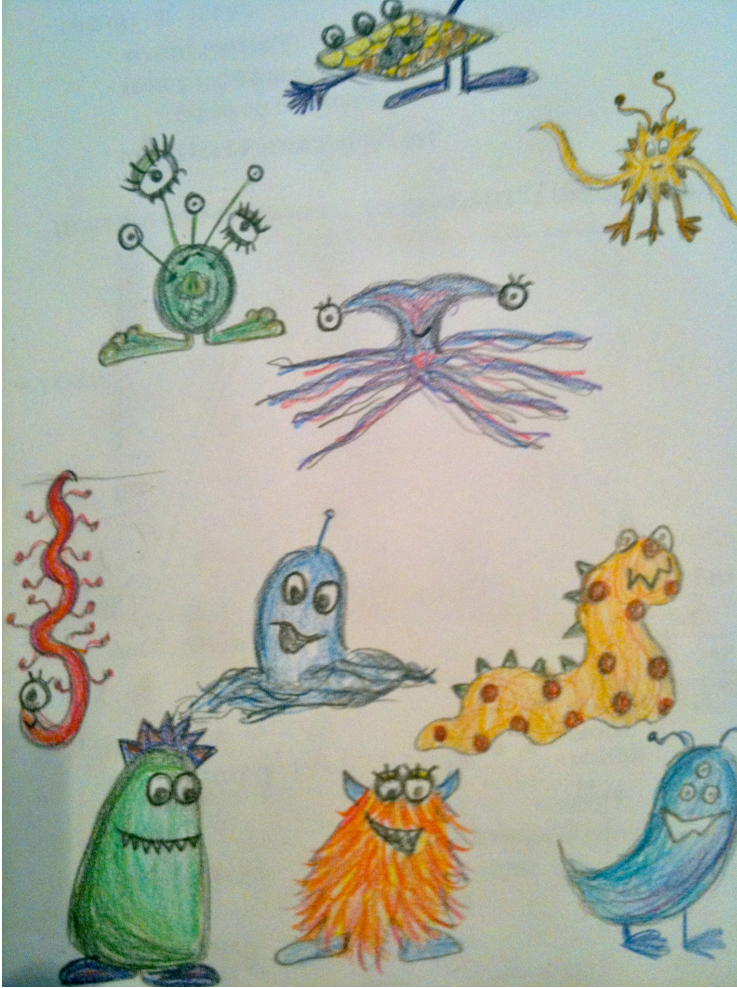
Figure 8. Monster Drawings, colored pencils, 4 x 6".

I drew from the inspiration from the artists and monsters I
researched, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, and I used
what I knew about synthesis and how monsters usually consist of
human and animal parts (Gilmore, 2003). I drew my monsters from
imagination, from observing people and animals in my
environment, and from my memory of what I have seen or know
about other animals. I then used the process of synthesis to
combine the human and animal parts together to invent monsters

from my imagination. I created the monsters to look cartoon-like

because I was inspired by the way a lot of the artists I

researched create monsters in the same style and because since I

wanted them to have a theme of childhood, I noticed that

monsters from children's movies, TV shows, and books are created

in a similar style. I chose the most successful monsters from

these drawings to depict in each painting.

    From here, I went back to the seven chosen words from my list

and looked at my notes about how I could use these words to tell

a story though my compositions. I sketched a few different ideas

per word in my sketchbook.
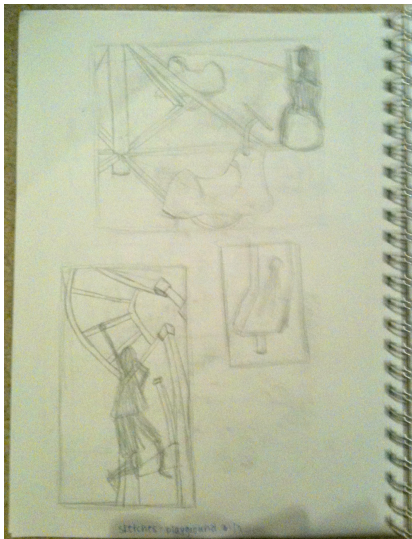
Figure 9. Composition Sketches for the Word "Playground,"

pencil, 4 x 6".

Once I picked a word, I sketched at least three different

compositions ideas of how to convey that word and story through my paintings. I drew the landscapes for my paintings from imagination and from things from my environment. I chose to sketch out multiple compositions so that I would have several different ways to tell a story, and from there I selected the sketch that I thought had the most interesting composition for each word and that most successfully told a story.

Then I began thinking about how to add contrast to my compositions. After selecting the composition I was going to use for each word/story, I then sketched at least three different ways, per word/story that I could add contrast to them by picking different imaginary light sources.
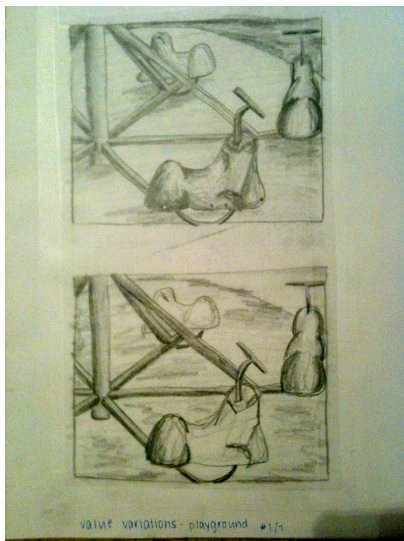
Figure 10. Adding Value/Contrast to Playground Sketch, pencil, 4 x 6".

After creating a few different ways to shade my compositions, I chose the most successful one to build on.

After choosing the composition with the best shading, I then picked monsters and added them to the sketch. I also shaded them to go along with the composition.
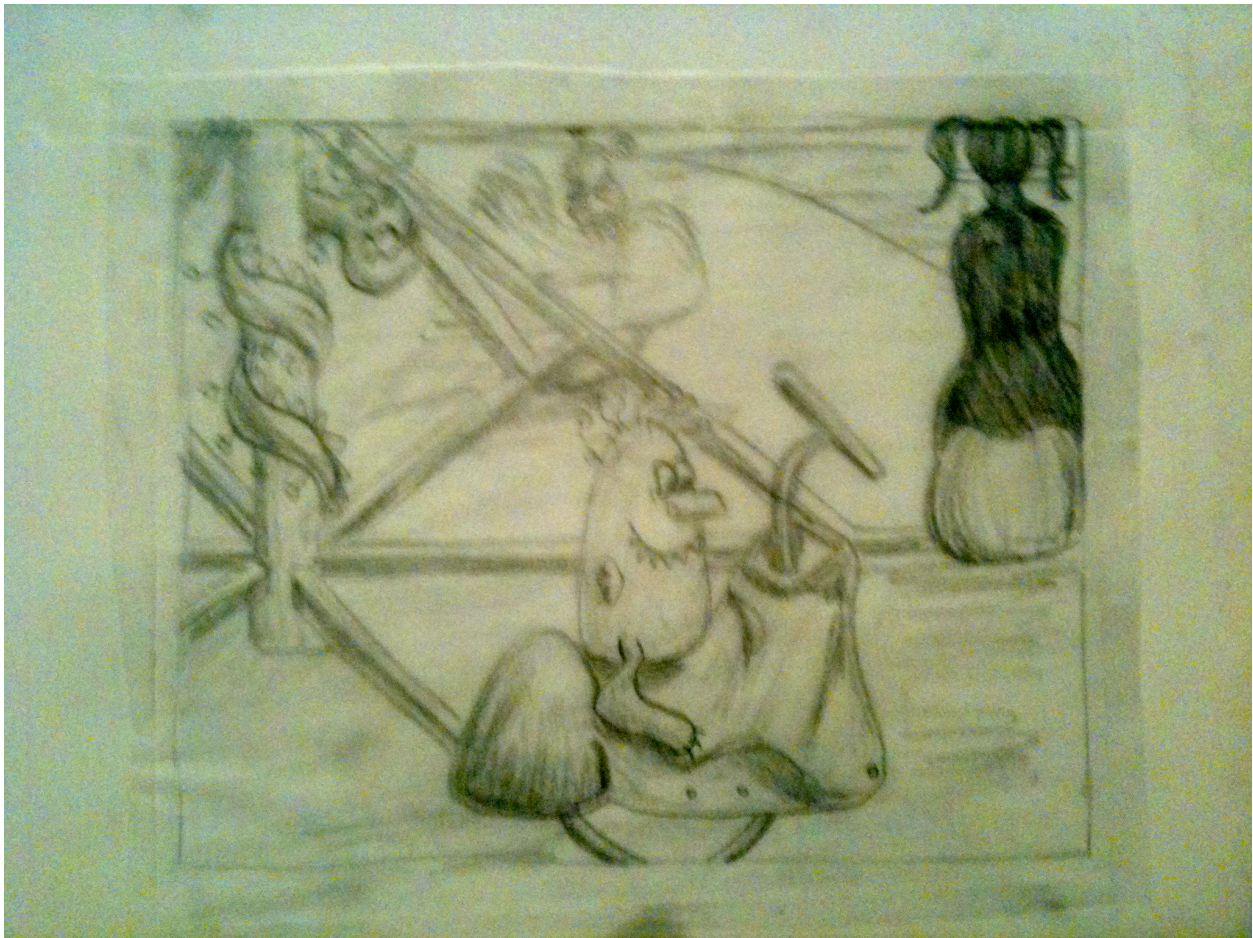
Figure 11. Adding Monsters to Playground Sketch, pencil, 4 x 6".

After creating sketches that showed how I would add contrast to my work and which monsters would work best in my composition, I went on to thinking about color. In my sketchbook, I took my

most successful composition and contrast sketch and added color
to them.

Figure 12. Adding Color to Playground Sketch, colored pencil, 4
x 6".

I chose bright colors because many children's items (toys,
clothes, etc.) are made with bright colors because children tend
to favor bright colors (Feeney & Moravcik, 1987); since my
stories are about childhood, bright colors seemed appropriate,
primarily colors like red and yellow which children respond to

with excitement and happiness (Feeney & Moravcik, 1987). I also chose to leave the children in the paintings as silhouettes, because I wanted anyone to be able to relate to the paintings, and place him or herself in the space where the child is.

From the finalized color sketches, I began painting. I have chosen to paint with oil paints on canvas. The canvas size and shape was determined by on how successful I thought my paintings would be on them. The canvas sizes will be small due to limitation of time allotted to work on this series and so that they can be easily transported to and from campus. It is my hope that this series of paintings will successfully convey a story about monsters and childhood.

Chapter Three: Development, Interpretation and Reflection of Works

Creation of Art Work

Using the work in Figures 1 and 2 as a jumping off point for this series of work, I began researching monsters and artists who work with this concept, as I explained in Chapter Two. Through my research, I learned how people create monsters from fear and misunderstandings about illness, death, and nature (Barber, 1990 & Vitaliano, 2007). I also learned how these monsters are usually a synthesis of things they are familiar with, such as human and animal parts (Gilmore, 2003). From these fears and misunderstandings, people have given monsters stories that have lasted hundreds of years (Booker, 2006). From my research and notes, I planed to create my body of work, a series of paintings that tell a story about monsters. These monsters are created from my imagination and are centered on the theme of childhood because of children's fascination with monsters (Bettelheim, 1976). I used the strategy of synthesis to create the monsters from my imagination by combining the parts of animals and people from my environment or from memory. The goal of these paintings is for them to tell a story visually through the imagery I have chosen to paint.

Figure 13. *Playground*, oil on canvas, 18 x 24".

For my first painting, I chose the word "playground" from my list (see Figure 13 above). I selected the word "playground" because I remember spending hours playing on the playground in my backyard and at my neighborhood park. I was fearless on the playground; I would jump from swings and climb on top of the monkey bars. One memory that sticks out the most is, playing a game where me and my friends could not touch the ground because the ground was lava and was filled with all kinds of scary creatures; we had to jump around from one part of the playground to another without touching the ground in fear the creatures would get us. I took this memory and began to wonder what it would be like to play with monsters at the park. To me, the

monsters in this painting symbolize the imaginary fear of
nonexistent monsters I had created playing on the playground as
a child. Through this painting, a story of a day spent at the
park with monsters is told.

Figure 14. *Swimming*, oil on canvas, 12 x 12".

For my next painting, I chose the word "swim" (see Figure 14
above). The word "swim" stuck out to me because of my many years
on swim team growing up; I practically spent all day, every day,
at the pool, whether it was for team practice, teaching swim
lessons or just playing with my friends. While teaching swim

lessons, I encountered a lot of people who were terrified of the water, and for someone who spent so much time in the pool, and is very comfortable in the water; I had a hard time understanding this fear. This observation of fear is what inspired my story of swimming. This painting tells a story of what it is like to be afraid of the water. The monsters in this painting are a symbol of the fear of water that is overcoming the child.

Figure 15. *Ice Cream*, oil on canvas, 10 x 10".

In another painting, I chose the word "ice cream" (see Figure 15 above). I chose this word because something I always looked forward to when I was younger was going to get a chocolate malt

from a local ice creamery with my grandparents. Another thing I remember is my friends and I always getting excited when the ice cream truck came through the neighborhood. Summers are filled with ice cream memories, so it did not seem right to not depict a story of ice cream when thinking about childhood. I thought about what it would be like to go to an ice cream shop with monsters friends. This painting tells the story of a child sharing ice cream, her favorite dessert, with her monster friends. The monsters in this painting represent the importance of friends in our lives and how as a child, the concept of true friendship was something I did not fully comprehend.

Figure 16. *School*, oil on canvas, 4 x 12".

For my next painting, I chose the word "school" from my list (see Figure 16 above), because school is a big part of growing up. While I was in grade school, I would spend the day doodling in my notebooks. I drew a lot of monster characters I made up from my imagination. I began thinking about these monster doodles and what it would be like to go to school with monsters. This inspired me to tell a story about monsters at school. In this story, the monster doodles have jumped off the page and come to live taking over the classroom causing all kinds of mischief, like drawing on the chalkboard and hanging from the ceiling. These monsters represent the rebellious side in all of us, the side that tempts us to misbehave, as well as my fear of getting in trouble as a child.

Figure 17. *Lemonade Stand*, oil on canvas, 8 x 8".

In another one of my paintings, I chose to represent the words "lemonade stand" from my list because last summer there was a group of kids in my neighborhood who had set up a lemonade stand on the main road everyday for weeks. They were very persistent and excited about what they were doing. One week they even set up their lemonade stand at the front entrance of the neighborhood in hopes that people would pull off the road and into the neighborhood just for a glass of lemonade. I admired their persistence and it inspired me to tell a story of what it would be like to have monsters helping you run a lemonade stand on a hot summer day. The monsters in this painting symbolize how it seems that children grow up faster these days, childhood seems shorter than it should be; the fear of growing up. They are bringing out the grown up side of children by helping them work instead of playing games outside like young children should do.

Figure 18. *Dinner Table*, oil on canvas, 11 x 14".

For another painting, I decided to choose the word "dinner" off my list of words (see Figure 18 above); it stuck out off the page because dinnertime was always a struggle for me. To this day, I am an incredibly picky eater; when I was little my parents would cook dinner and make me eat whatever was prepared. Being the picky eater that I am, I would protest and pout, I would sit at the table myself until I finished my dinner. These memories made me think about all kinds of different things that would have made dinner better as a kid, for example, sharing my dinner with monsters. In this painting, I tell a story of what it would be like to eat dinner with monsters; a dinner filled with all kinds of junk food, for example, cake, and how much fun a monster feast would be. These monsters represent the fear I had of trying new foods as a child.

Figure 19. *Story Time*, oil on canvas, 16 x 20".

For my last painting, I chose the word "story" from my list because growing up, being read a bedtime story was one of my favorite things. As mentioned earlier, I always had a fascination with monster stories. In this painting, I tell a story about a child curled up in bed sharing a bedtime story with monsters, the very creatures that make up many stories, both for children and adults. These monsters represent, not a fear or misunderstand, but the fantasy world we can become engulfed in through a book, which is something I enjoyed as a child, and still enjoy today.

Limitations

I have chosen to limit my monster research to only five monsters because of time allotted to work on my study while also taking classes. I also restricted my monster research to focus on monsters from one geographical area, this way I am focusing on one history of each monster versus multiple histories. Since monsters have different histories in different regions, this helped to keep from mixing up and confusing different ones (Keyworth, 2006).

My artistic process in terms of number and size of my paintings. I have selected to work with smaller canvas sizes because of time available to work on them and because of the nature of oil paint taking longer to dry. Also, because of painting about the concept of monsters, I have limited myself to

painting mostly from my imagination.

Reflection on My Process

When I began this study, I started with researching monsters and this was vitally important to my understanding of monster myths and legends and how these creatures and their histories came to be. This knowledge was significant in creating my body of work; from what I learned about monsters, I was able to create monsters and stories of my own based on how I learned about how monsters stories and myths were generated. I also learned how they were created out of fears, misunderstandings and a need for people to understand their environment (Vitaliano, 2007) and about how monsters are a major theme in stories (Booker, 2006). This research helped me take memories and observations and create stories from them for my paintings. From my research, I was able to create metaphors for my own monsters based on fears or misunderstandings from childhood memories. I took what I learned about how monsters are created from peoples' fears and misunderstandings and thought about fears and misunderstandings I had as a child, from these memories, my monsters were born. Through my compositions, these monsters were able to come to life.

From my monster research, I learned about how they are usually depicted as a synthesis of human and animal parts (Gilmore, 2003), and this became a strategy I used while

creating my own monsters from my imagination. I sketched out monsters in my sketchbook using the strategy of synthesis; I drew monsters based on human and animal parts from my environment, from what I know, and my imagination.

I also researched several contemporary artists who work with similar ideas to my own; such as monsters, childhood, and drawing from imagination. This research of contemporary artists was essential to the development of my body of work because by looking at other artists, I was able to see how other people are portraying similar ideas to mine. I was able to take what I learned about monsters, compare it to what I was seeing in the contemporary art world, and use this as inspiration to create my body of work. All of this research helped me work out my ideas for my own paintings in my sketchbook. The use of my sketchbook was also important because it helped me work out compositions ideas for each painting and served as a place for me to document my research to look back at for further inspiration.

Throughout this process, I have encountered many expected and unexpected challenges, for example, I knew that after choosing my topic, that coming up with visual stories for my paintings would be a challenge. I also understood that coming up with interesting compositions from my imagination would be difficult as well. The research that I did on both monsters and contemporary artists was vitally important to helping me through

these challenges. The research on monsters helped me better understand my topic; learning the origins of monsters helped me to brainstorm and come up with my own monsters. The research on contemporary artists helped me to see how other people are creating work about monsters and from their imagination; this helped me to create work from my imagination, which helped to improve my compositions. I took what I learned from my research and sketch from there. As mentioned earlier in this paper, throughout a series of sketches, I was able to come up with solutions to my problems.

However, one problem I was not expecting was determining sizes for the paintings. I had not thought about how the size and the shape of the canvas could alter my sketches for my paintings. I was able to solve this solution by taking my sketches with me when I went out canvas shopping. This was useful because I was able to pick a size and shape that fit my sketches the best. Maybe in the future, I would pick out canvas sizes and shapes I want to work with, and sketch with those in mind.

Overall, I feel my process has been successful in terms of creating paintings that tell a story through interesting compositions by helping me come up with contexts to create my monsters in and ways to integrate them into compositions. Through my research, I was able to create a series of sketches

that grew and helped me to create monster stories about

childhood.

Chapter Four: Implementation and Educational Practice

Impact on Teaching

This study could be easily adapted to use in a classroom by
allowing students to use my methods, such as research and
synthesis, to create their own monster artwork. Since I began my
study by researching monsters, I would begin by introducing the
students to the histories of a couple of monsters. I could
introduce the theme of monsters to the classroom through a
PowerPoint presentation; I would introduce them to the history
of monsters, how they came to be, what contexts they were
created in, and how people portray monsters, etc. We could then
have a class discussion about monsters and how they view them
today. I would then provide the students with a blank chart,
like the monster chart I created in Chapter Two, and have the
students research monsters of their choice and fill in the
chart.

From there, I could introduce the class to artists, who use
the theme of monsters in their work through another PowerPoint
presentation. I could introduce the students to the artists I
researched, such as Charles Burchfield, Mark Ryden, Michele
Mikesell, Scott Musgrove, Tim Burton, etc. We could also look at
monsters in pop culture, such as in movies, TV shows, or even
children's literature. We can discuss how monsters are created

from synthesis, and talk about these artists and how they use the process of synthesis to create their own monsters. I would explain to the students how these artists created my monsters from imagination, like I did, and through the method of synthesis, and how to approach doing it themselves.

After learning about monsters, artists who work with that theme, and the process of synthesis, the students could practice creating their own monsters using synthesis in their sketchbook. I could provide images of various animals, insects, dinosaurs, etc. to help inspire them. The students would practice imagining what a monster would like if they fused the animal body parts together, and then draw it in their sketchbooks.

From there, the students could create their own artwork about the monsters they have created in their sketchbook from synthesis and imagination. They could pick an environment for their monster, and practice drawing compositions from the imagination like I did before beginning their final piece.

Once the project is completed, we could talk about everyone's work and discuss the stories of their monsters, how they were created, and how they used their research to inspire their work. The project could even be taken further by having the students write a story about their monster to tell their monster's story in another way than through art, which is

something that I did not do, but could be something to consider for further research.

Contributions in the Field of Art Education

This study can contribute to the field of art education in multiple ways because it provides a way to make art interdisciplinary, which is something that many schools are implementing because it can "inform and enhance the study of other subjects" by connecting different curriculums (Ulbricht, 1998, p. 15). By having students create their own monsters, and create art about them, as a teacher, one could connect this project to various other subjects such as: English or Language Arts and History; and it could even connect to the idea of Visual Culture.

This study can be interdisciplinary in relating art to English or Language Art classes, especially through creative or narrative writing and reading. It is important to write about your art because "it is an extension of the art making process using words" and it is another "expression of you" (Bouk, 1999, p. 1). Writing about your work can help give others some "guidance and inspiration" about your art and help you develop another way of communicating your message (Bouk, 1999, p. 1). For the purpose of this study, students can create their own monsters in their artwork, and then write their own stories about their monsters; who they are, where they came from, how

the came to be, etc. There are also many stories written about monsters). The art teacher can talk about these stories, or read a short story or samples of a story to the students in class, which they could use as inspiration for creating their own monsters in their artwork. By having the students use a monster-related stories as inspiration for their artwork, and then have them write about their artwork "can facilitate the exploration of ideas" in different ways (Caldwell & Moore, 1991, p. 207). According to Siegenthaler and Vihos (1998), stories can be told in multiple ways, spoken, written, portrayed in works of art, etc. and this project would allow students to practice language skills by telling stories visually and written. This process of creating art and then writing its story allows student to see how using "different forms of expression could have a dramatic effect upon the way we process information" (Caldwell & Moore, 1991, p. 208) and it can contribute to language, concept formation, and other aspects of intellectual functioning (Thompson, 2005). It also allows for studies to practice their own ideas, letting them be creative and will also let them capture their own ideas, their understanding of others and the world around them, and their feelings and experiences in interesting and authentic ways (Thompson, 2005).

Another way of integrating other disciplines into art is through history in multiple ways; one way is by letting the

students, for the purpose of my study, select their own monster and research the history of it; the students could conduct research of a monster of their choice and take notes on it, and then they could use this research as inspiration to create art about monsters (Fontichiaro, 2010). This research of the history of monsters could help them to inspire the creation of their own monster artwork. It also connects to history through history paintings; for centuries people have been trying to capture historic events and tell their stories through art, for example, American genre paintings, such as *The County Election* by George Caleb Bingham in 1852 depicts a scene from everyday life in America during that time period (Holt, 1998). Studying history paintings allows students to gain a "global context, one which reflects the organizations and institutions of a culture as they respond to social, religious, and political forces" (Ortuno, 1994, p. 509). This cultural awareness is important because monsters are typically created from something happening in a culture and this kind of thinking can help them connect they ways in which monsters were created (Cohen, 1996). Also by looking at history paintings, students can try and guess the when, where, and why of the situation which can help them develop their own history painting of a monster (Ortuno, 1994).

This study also shows that it could be used to connect art to the idea of visual culture, a topic that is becoming popular

in art education (Duncum, 2001). This study can relate to visual culture because it can teach students how to view and interpret the monsters they see in pop culture, which is important because there is a usually a cultural metaphor or significance behind a monster (Cohen, 1996). Also, by studying visual culture, students can gain knowledge of the deeper meaning behind the images of monsters created in the media, especially since monsters usually signify something other than themselves: they often inhabit the gap between the time of the upheaval that created them (Cohen, 1996). Through this cultural understanding, students can use what they know about their culture and create monsters that could stem from them.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendation

The main strategies I used to create my monsters were: researching the history of monsters, researching artists who create monster-related work from their imaginations, and the use of synthesis to create my monsters. The research of monsters was important because by understanding the contexts in which monsters were created helped me to be able to create contexts in which to create my own monsters from; these ideas for my own contexts helped me with my development of my compositions. The research of artists showed me how others were creating monster-related art and this helped inspire me while I was sketching from my imagination; I was inspired by their style and layouts of their compositions. The process of synthesis was important because it helped me to construct monsters from my imagination by envisioning what it would look like if I combined different animals and then sketching them out in my sketchbook. All these strategies combined to help me create my artwork.

Through these strategies, I was able to answer the questions outlined in Chapter One. I used the research of monsters to inspire the creation of my own by using the process of synthesis I learned about which inspired me to create my own monsters; I created monsters by fusing together parts of animals and humans. I used this strategy to help come up with a basis for the

monsters; once I knew what kinds of animals I wanted to use, I would then use my memory of these animals to imagine what they would look like if they came together to create something else. Then from my imagination, I would create my own monsters. Then to tell a story with my paintings about the monsters, I carefully planned out compositions based on a word that I wanted the story to revolve around; through the composition and metaphorical meaning behind the monsters, the painting told a story.

I feel that this study opens up multiple doors for further research; such as some of the ways this study could be used to relate art to other fields of study (English and History, and the idea of Visual Culture), as I mentioned in Chapter Four. One could take those ideas, and implement them into their classroom and see what kind of effects it has. One could also try to relate this study to other subjects I did not mention, or come up with other ways to relate it to those I did mention.

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