Motherfuck

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MOTHERFUCK

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Painting, Hunter College The City University of New York

2018

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May 21, 2018
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I am interested in restoring a feminine archetype as cosmic creator. I like to identify God not as a vengeful father, but a nurturing mother. In my imagination, she is the ultimate busybody, spiraling through outer space multiplying herself into fantastic new forms. She is gentle and loving but as fierce as the hurricanes and volcanoes she created. Though we have rejected her for centuries, she sees the mess we have made, and has returned to help clean it up.

This maternal archetype is missing from our modern psyche. We elevate male virtues like strength and domination while feminine virtues like empathy and humility are considered weak. The denigration of this feminine aspect has caused world-wide violence, poverty and global warming.

Because of centuries of male domination, phallic structures are everywhere. Ultra-masculine systems like industrialism and modern capitalism exploded upon the earth as an attempt to try to control nature. Under these systems, women are dominated and treated as a kind of currency. Individual gain is valued over the collective.

Though phallocentrism reigns supreme in the man-made world, in the natural world, a feminine vessel is a more accurate description of our existence. We live within countless wombs that protect us. Our spheric planet cradles us by its atmosphere and magnetosphere. Back up even further to see the womb-like Oort Cloud encompass our solar system.

I want to investigate the opposite of phallic: yonic. If a phallic signifier points to action, explosion, and fortitude, a yonic signifier points to the subconscious, the sublime, and the cosmic void. A phallus points outward, a yonis inward. If the phallic is physical, the yonic is celestial. It is a portal into the dark unknown.

In my work, I want to dismantle phallic structures and show the rise of the feminine. I disassemble symbols from patriarchal systems to show the female aspect breaking through. I want to show us moving from the phallic age of industrialism into a new yonic age.
My paintings are small, no bigger than ten inches across, but pack a punch. Contorted houses offer vaginal openings, tongues curl out of dark corridors, and brick chimneys present a portal downward. Oil paint is slathered on with thick maneuvers, yet is controlled and detailed in its execution. Compositions are tight with objects bouncing off the edges as a way to create object to space tension. The small size of the work asks the viewer to move closer to create an intimate experience.

I channel these compositions intuitively. I allow a picture to form in my mind’s eye, then sketch or create clay figures to reference. I never want to assign a specific meaning to any of the forms I paint. The objects that bubble up in my mind are part of my subconscious and the collective unconscious as a whole. To try to define each symbol would do a disservice to the idea itself.
My past informs my work. The landscape I grew up in, the Midwestern prairie, had huge skies in every direction. The daytime colors of gold, cerulean, yellow and white, were opposed by the nighttime colors of emerald, indigo and black. Man-made objects like power lines, small clapboard houses, and steel structures peppered the horizon. The enormous starry skies offered me a glimpse into the vastness of the universe.

As an adolescent, I never connected with the Christian church in which I was raised. I didn’t like how the teachings were so dogmatic: “He” sat on a throne or the idea of a cloudy heaven. To me, the spiritual world felt like it transcended our physical world into something more sublime, something invisible. This metaphysical energy could be felt in every living thing.

In trying to reach this otherworldly realm, I became interested in supernatural subjects like the tarot. I liked to think that each card was trying to send a message from the other side. I wanted to leave some room for chance, unlike the dogma of the church. I read Starhawk’s *The Spiral Dance*, which held visionary ideas on mysticism and the Goddess archetype. In it she states,

> “We do not believe in the Goddess — we connect with her; through the moon, the stars, the ocean, the earth, through trees, animals, through other human beings, through ourselves. She is here. She is within us all.” ¹

The archetype of the goddess stuck with me. She tapped into the metaphysical to control the physical. She valued intuition over intellect. I noticed that throughout history the goddess archetype, or when embodied in human form called “female intuition,” was stifled. As messengers of the metaphysical, females were continually raped and pillaged in order to be silenced. Patriarchal societies erected themselves across the planet; their phallic structures reminding us who was in charge.

While still an adolescent, I became engrossed by Merlin Stone’s *When God was a Woman*. In the 1976 book Stone talks not only about thriving societies who worshiped the Goddess figure as divine creator, but places where the male served a supporting role. She writes:

“In parts of Libya, where the Goddess Neith was highly esteemed, accounts of Amazon women still lingered even in Roman times. Diodorus described a nation in Libya as follows: All authority was vested in the woman, who discharged every kind of public duty. The men looked after domestic affairs just as the women do among ourselves and did as they were told by their wives. They were not allowed to undertake war service or to exercise any functions of government, or to fill any public office, such as might have given them more spirit to set themselves up against the women. The children were handed over immediately after birth to the men, who reared them on milk and other foods suitable to their age.” 2

This world seemed so different than the social constructs around me. I began to learn about modern feminism. I became interested in philosopher Luce Irigaray’s idea that in our current society, women were a commodity for men to exchange. “The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women.” She explains, “Hence women’s role as fetish-objects, inasmuch as, in exchanges, they are the manifestation and the circulation of a power of the Phallus, establishing relationships of men with each other.” 3 Defining women as “natural,” Irigaray states that the male has a desire to appropriate nature and “make it reproduce.” In this scenario, men have the need to conquer nature and control it.

The fact that Irigaray was comparing women to nature, and that men wanted to control nature, spoke to me about why the Goddess archetype and thus women in general, were oppressed. The intuitive and empathetic ethos of the female challenged

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the patriarchal world of certitude, conviction, and domination. Thus, any kind of esoteric construct like the tarot, witchcraft, or Goddess-worshiping, threatened patriarchal society as a whole.

Around this time, I began to experiment with oil paint. I was attracted to the realist-style painting of the Renaissance and I learned classical techniques. I wanted to use this style of painting as a commentary on our modern world. I painted males posed in traditional female poses in the style of Rembrandt and Caravaggio. However, this work felt too didactic and controlled. I wanted to leave some room for chance.

I began to seek out female artists who touched on the intuitive world and was drawn to the work of Georgia O’Keefe, Agnes Martin, Louise Bourgeois and Ana Mendieta. Their work seemed to live in the world of pure emotion and not intellect. I liked how Martin’s paintings were so simple, but for her, represented an array of meanings. I loved her quote, “Art is the concrete representation of our most subtle feelings.”

When I became a mother, my work changed. I began to think more about the Goddess archetype I studied when I was younger and wanted to summon her. I still loved to paint with oils, but the work became more about communicating with the void, as if each painting contained a hidden message from the other side. I felt more perceptive and in touch with this archetype, and therefore I allowed myself to work intuitively, not trying to make sense of the images that were appearing in my mind. Scenes from motherhood were paired with the cosmic: breasts oozing moons and galaxies spewing out of a dark openings. Architecture from my past, like clapboard siding and red brick chimneys, writhed and twisted across the canvas. These scenes were usually painted on flat backgrounds as if they were happening on an astral plane. I let them be as strange or as funny as they wanted to be.

In my exhibition *Motherfuck*, I have chosen a small room off to the side of the gallery to create an intimate space to view the group of paintings. The room is not unlike a
womb as it cradles the audience from the rest of the world as they engage with the work.

In my painting *Moon Boob*, a breast oozes out a graphic shape which morphs into a moon, symbolizing breast milk. The breast is textural to evoke the surface of the moon. The graphic shape and the moon are painted smoothly with few visible brush strokes. The color palette is mostly dark to embody space or the unknown coupled with cool greenish tones to illustrate the moon. The moon appears for its feminine history in myth and connotations of menstruation.

In *Clap Trap 2*, a contorted clapboard structure appears to writhe from the upper right corner of the painting to the bottom. The phallic house-like structure shows us its underneath: a vaginal opening, or yonis, appearing to want to absorb the viewer. The paint is thick and seems to dance around the form making it feel menacingly alive.

*Catcall* reveals two blue walls with a tongue slithering out of their entryway. The long tongue makes its way around the corner wanting to lick whatever it may find. The lower part of the painting reveals an indigo starry sky. The painting speaks to repressed sexuality and rape culture.

I paint in order to deconstruct patriarchal systems and get closer to the sublime. I am most content when I am interpreting images from my subconscious into form. This act makes me feel closer to nature, the cosmos and the Mother/Goddess archetype.
Bibliography


List of works in the exhibition

Pressure Drop, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
6.25 x 7.25 in
Delivery, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
7.25 x 8.25 in
Hole Glory, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
10.25 x 6.25 in
Clap Trap 2, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
8.25 x 10.25 in
She Ready, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
8.25 x 7.25 in
Catcall, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
6.25 x 8.25 in
Level Up, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
8.25 x 5.25 in
Smart Hostess, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
8.25 x 7.25 in
Flesh Drain, 2018
Oil on board, wood frame
7.25 x 8.25 in
Moon Boob, 2017
Oil on board, wood frame
6.25 x 6.25 in
Installation Views