MONSTER MARKS

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ART MUSEUM OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MEMPHIS

MONSTER MARKS

SHERRY. C.M. LINDQUIST

Dorothy Kayser Hohenberg Chair of Excellence in Art History
University of Memphis, 2017-19

LENDERS:

Michael Allen, Art Museum of the University of Memphis, Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Roger Cleaves, Elizabeth Edwards, Le Marquee La Flora, Sherry C.M. Lindquist, Richard Lou, Greely Myatt, Rhodes College, James Patterson, Rushton Patterson Jr., Elliot and Kimberly Perry, Nancy White

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GUIDE DESIGN:

A.J. Pappas
Jason Miller
Samira Rhabe

REPRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHY:

Jason Miller

Art on cover by Myatt Greely Cat. 1.

There is something at work in my soul
which I do not understand.

Robert Walton in *Frankenstein*, by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition at the Art Museum of the University of Memphis (AMUM) takes its title from *Monster Marks*, by Memphis artist Greely Myatt (cat. 1), in which the word "monster" floats over the word "marks" spelled out in ABC blocks. "Monster" is made up of multiple versions of each letter in different sizes, shapes, colors, and materials. The "O" lights up and becomes the base of a giant wooden exclamation point; its neon glow creates atmospheric shadows behind the other letters and the shelf containing the blocks. The title, *Monster Marks*, is in dialog with *Making Marks*, an exhibition of Myatt's work held at the David Lusk Gallery, Memphis, August 29 - September 30, 2017. This show features a deceptively simple work consisting of only the word "marks" spelled out in wooden ABC blocks arranged in a row on a shelf, calling into question the ability of both words and material things to communicate. Implicit in the piece is a reminder of how easy it would be to make one word morph into another, simply by turning a block. On the other hand, the possibilities are limited by the random letters on the sides of the cubes. *Making Marks* also featured a two-story exclamation point extending above the roof of the gallery, which must—emphatically!—express something of import, but what? It is an arbitrary sign, both mute and rich with latent meanings. Myatt's soundings at the edges of what can be known and communicated operate in a way that overlaps with what monsters do in human cultures. We make monsters to stand for or substitute for things we can't quite categorize, which we find too elusive or disturbing to confront in a more direct way. Their ontological ambiguity gives the monsters we imagine a kind of life of their own.

Some of the works in *Monster Marks* are easy to recognize as monsters, such as a blue man-eating, bird-headed demon (cat. 4) or the familiar snake-headed Medusa originating in classical antiquity (cats. # 36 & 37). Most are not as clear-cut. It is fitting that the title of the exhibit features "monster" as an adjective, and not a noun, since the exhibit

does not mean to present a menagerie of monsters that can be named and put in alphabetical order. Rather, it is a meditation on the theme of the monstrous—and related themes of horror and the uncanny—in art from different times and places. The work in this exhibit is "marked" by the visual vocabulary of monstrosity in one way or another. These works do not look like one another. They are of diverse media, and they range from antiquity to contemporary art, from South America to Japan. Some things—maps, armor, political cartoons—bring up questions about the line between "Art" (with a capital "A") and visual culture. Such an eclectic selection demands an explanation.

Monster Marks is influenced by the work of artist Fred Wilson, who created an exhibit called *Mining the Museum* at the Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore in 1992. He rearranged diverse objects in a single museum collection to create startling and disturbing juxtapositions: an ornate silver service with slave manacles, a baby carriage with a Klan robe. He used the curator's tools of labels, lighting, and other didactic strategies to make clear that the traditional installations of objects in our museums are not neutral, self-evident retellings of history or the history of art. Such narratives privilege some and exclude others. Wilson's intervention continues to challenge curators to think creatively about the relationship of the collections in their care to broader issues of diversity and justice. Many museums have since invited artists to re-view their collections, and curators are increasingly addressing controversies, inviting community participation, and challenging viewers by combining objects and themes in unconventional ways.

One way to take a cue from *Mining the Museum* is to view

local collections through a thematic lens with the goal of teasing out new meanings from historical works while engaging contemporary concerns. The theme of monsters and the monstrous brings a new perspective to certain works of art in light of an expanded concept of monsters and the cultural work they do. In order to identify likely works of art for *Monster Marks* in Memphis collections, it was necessary to describe this expanded concept to interested curators, gallerists, collectors, and artists. This resulted in a series of productive discussions leading to a (very) succinct distillation of scholarly work on monster theory for the text panel that introduces the exhibit. This statement (on page 21) derives from scholarly work in the emerging field of Monster Studies (cf. Cohen 1996; Mittman 2012; Miéville 2012).

Our theories must deal with how humans "monsterize" others, that is, casting them as monstrous and/or subhuman. One way that *Monster Marks* addresses this is by considering the relationship between the themes of the exhibit and the objects from Africa that are on permanent display at the museum.The University of Memphis is home to an interdisciplinary Institute of Egyptian Art and Archaeology and a permanent gallery of impressive ancient Egyptian objects that are the subject of continuing study by faculty, students, and visiting scholars. A less regarded object in AMUM's collection is a movie poster from the 1950s horror movie, *Pharaoh's Curse* (cat. 16). The poster illustrates how art objects from one culture can be appropriated by other cultures in ways that exoticize and mischaracterize. The Hollywood treatment of a mummy coming to life embodies troubling and contradictory twentieth-century American attitudes toward the Middle East, perceived as a land of romance and treasure, but also of danger and mystifying cultural difference. *Pharaoh's Curse* conflates ancient Egypt with the majority Muslim Egypt contemporary with the movie; it does not at all attempt to contend with either culture on its own terms. As discussed

in the catalog entry below, this seems a deliberate misapprehension that served to rationalize the invasion of Egypt by American allies over the control of the lucrative Suez Canal, which figures prominently on the map that opens the movie.

A sixteenth-century map of Africa in the collection of Rhodes College highlights a similar disconnect between what Europeans looked to find in Africa, and the African cultures they encountered—cultures that produced objects such as are displayed in AMUM's permanent gallery dedicated to African art (cat. 17). This map by Abraham Ortelius claims to chart the way to the legendary kingdom of Prester John. Prester John was thought to be descended from the magi: a powerful Christian king commanding vast resources who would ally with European monarchs against Muslim rivals. Europeans imagined that Prester John ruled over the "monstrous peoples" described in ancient sources, such as dog-headed men, horned men, giants, and wildmen. These graphic works, placed near the entries to the permanent African galleries in the museum, illustrate ways in which Europeans exploited Africa and "monsterized" its peoples. They are meant to draw attention to the galleries and invite visitors in to experience genuine works of African art; they also ask visitors to make connections between such distorted representations of Africa and the horrific consequences of slavery and racism addressed in the contemporary works displayed in the main gallery.

Not only movie posters and maps, but also art and the history of art are implicated in making the other seem monstrous, as addressed by a gallery in *Monster Marks* dedicated to "Monsters in Art History." For instance, art historians sometimes unintentionally continue to employ

categories that carry forward the biases of the Europeans who founded art history as an academic discipline. Supernatural beings like angels and Greek gods may share characteristics with monsters—superhuman form, the ability to change form, the incorporation of wings or other animal parts—but they are rarely labeled monsters or understood as monstrous. In contrast, for example, art historians named the Mayan earth god a "cauac monster" (after a glyph on the Mayan calendar) (cat. 8). The cultural bias is clear when art history books teach that Mayans venerate "monsters" and Christians venerate "angels." The subsection in *Monster Marks,* "Supernatural Beings", considers the conceptual overlaps between gods and monsters by bringing together objects representing angels, demons, and gods from medieval Christian, ancient Greek, and Precolumbian cultures.

"Monsters and Rulers," a second subsection in "Monsters in Art History" addresses how cultures commonly employ the elements of monstrosity in works that make a ruler seem more fierce and powerful—even to close the distance between rulers and deities. For example, the textile worn by a Chimu king covered with representations of a powerful jaguar deity conveys his claim that he merges with this deity, and is deputized to wield its supernatural powers (cat. 10). A Japanese emperor commands Samurai soldiers whose armor incorporates references to fierce beasts and demons (cat. 13). Monsters are marshalled not only in the service of individual rulers but also ruling religious and political institutions. Otherworldly guardian lions in palaces and temples link imperial and religious powers in Ming China by evoking the majesty of Buddha and the bodhisattvas, both associated with lions in some contexts (cat. 14). A medieval Book of Hours illustrates the power of the priest in saving individual souls from the monsters of hell (cat. 15). Historically, monsters in art (mostly) function to enhance the power of the powerful, since it is the powerful who are in a position to afford

the luxury objects and trappings of rule on which monsters often appear.

But the potent imagery of the monstrous can escape such boundaries and be used to question those in power and even to threaten the status quo. This is demonstrated in a small subsection, "Satire & Social Criticism," that examines the use of monstrous imagery in early prints. Prints served as an especially effective vehicle for satirical monsters: they were less expensive than other art forms, and they could be distributed in great numbers that had a better chance of reaching a broad public. This section features prints by three masters of the genre—Francisco Goya, Honoré Daumier, and Thomas Nast—who used monstrous imagery to critique those in power, and whose works in some cases are even credited with effecting social changes (cat. #s 18, 19, and 20).

Contemporary artists, too, employ the language of monstrosity to create powerful images that call into question the current social order. As a way of honoring the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis, *Monster Marks* dedicates the largest gallery at AMUM to contemporary works that employ the visual vocabulary of the monstrous, horror, and the uncanny to address issues of race and racism. The striking sculptural work that shapes the space of the gallery, *The Old Landmark*, was made for this exhibit by Le Marquee La Flora, a recent graduate in art from the University of Memphis (cat. 31). It consists of a series of upside down nooses flecked with gold leaf and which sometimes incorporate gold-colored nails. These haunting objects, which seem to be moving

upward of their own volition, tap into the uncanny: described by Freud and others as the unease we feel when we suspect something that should be lifeless can come to life.

The title, *The Old Landmark*, makes us think about how we define "landmarks," in the midst of our national conversation about what demands or deserves commemoration. It is in dialogue with the opening of a memorial to lynching victims—The National Memorial for Peace and Justice, Montgomery, Alabama (April, 2018)—and the removal in Memphis of a public statue of Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general and the first leader of the Ku Klux Klan (December, 2017). A pastel by Larry Edwards, former chair of the Art Department at the University of Memphis, makes a related point by foregrounding a hulking monster in a rendering of the antebellum mansion of Longwood, a National Historic Landmark in Natchez, Mississippi, now a tourist destination that downplays the legacy of slavery on the site (cat. 27).

The *Old Landmark* grows out of an earlier work by La Flora that also makes use of inverted noose imagery. The thick ropes used for *Counting the Cost*, made in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, were dragged in the dirt and suspended in a gallery with a lower ceiling. "The nooses are dirty," La Flora reflects, and when viewers bump against them, or get their hair caught in them, "it's like they have a brush with death." In contrast, *The Old Landmark* is named after a Gospel song, and is constructed from what he called more "delicate" nooses, embellished with gold. The very act of looking up to see them changes the viewer's relationship to them, and the golden nails and connection to the lyrics of the Gospel song suggest a redemptive, Christological narrative. La Flora used lighting to project chilling shadows of nooses against the gallery wall featuring works by other artists represented in the show, whose works wrestle with issues of guilt and complicity. Thus, La Flora

calls attention to the way the exhibit brings together artists of diverse racial identities who explore difficult questions regarding race and racism from different perspectives.

La Flora's shadow nooses insert themselves into a sequence of large format polaroid prints by William Christenberry, an acclaimed photographer and former faculty member of the University of Memphis (cat. 29). In *Metamorphosis (4 works)* a homespun doll seems to be manipulated by an unseen and monstrous force that transforms it from emblem of innocence into a Klansman. Christenberry, known for his loving photographs of the South, also confronted the evils of racism in works created for his Klan Room, which included G.I. Joe dolls dressed as Klansmen arranged in disturbing tableaus. Some of the dolls in Christenberry's work were fabricated by long-time friend Rosa Eggleston, the wife of fellow photographer William Eggleston. A photograph of one of the G.I. Joes, included in *Monster Marks*, looks accusingly out of the picture, as if identifying the viewer a potential collaborator or victim (cat. 30).

A subtheme in works about race in *Monster Marks*—as observed by Leslie Luebbers, director of AMUM—is the way that racism despoils childhood. This is the subject of a ceramic tableau by Nancy White, *Shoot the Stars*, in which Klansmen morph into monsters as they approach a carnival booth staffed by a young boy (cat. 25). The resemblance to a Christian nativity scene cannot but comment on the hypocrisy of the KKK and their supporters who claim to be Christian—to espouse the Christian principle to love one's neighbor—while succumbing to hatred. White and Christenberry are white artists whose art considers how racist

ideologies poison the minds of white children. The consequences are all too evident in the heartbreaking works in the exhibit that address the torture and murder of children of color.

Till, a self-portrait by Demetrius Oliver, expresses in a visceral and personal way how the murder of Emmet Till continues to traumatize (cat. 28). By obliterating his features with chocolate frosting, the artist merges his identity with the murdered boy. His visual work echoes the influential essay by John Edgar Wideman, "The Killing of Black Boys" (1997), who reports that he, too, identified with Emmett Till—that he even believed the "monster" haunting his nightmares was the mutilated face of Till, whose open-coffin funeral shocked the nation. The *Invisible Man (after Ralph Ellison)*, by Tim Rollins & K.O.S. also commemorates the murder of children, including Christopher Hernandez, one of the "K.O.S kids"—an acronym that stands for Kids of Survival (cat. 21). The "I" and "M" in the collage are made up of pages from Ralph Ellison's famous novel about how we make specters of the "other." It is meant to evoke letters in the newspaper headline reporting the murder of Hernandez, and also the famous "I am a Man" placards used by sanitation workers striking in Memphis when Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. Thus, the work by Rollins & K.O.S. makes a poignant statement about loss, while calling for social justice. An iconic photograph of the sanitation workers' strike is featured alongside *Invisible Man (after Ralph Ellison)* to illustrate the connection; it was taken in 1968 by photojournalist Richard Copley, who was a student at the University of Memphis at the time (then Memphis State) (cat. 22).

This historic work of photojournalism also forges a thought-provoking link to the faux photojournalism included in the exhibit: *Los Anthropolocos*, created by Robert J. Sanchez & Richard Lou, (current chair of the Department of Art at the University of Memphis)

(cat. 26). Sanchez and Lou's social criticism is a parodic reversal: an alternate reality where Chicanos are the dominant culture. Chicano anthropologists investigate the remains of a civilization of "colorless people." They discover and capture living specimens, who are netted and displayed as trophies—a darkly sardonic commentary on the dehumanizing treatment by Europeans of natives in the "New World."

Other works in the show also create disturbing fantasies of racialized futures, participating in the global cultural aesthetic of Afrofuturism that aims to shift racial relationships in the present. Roger Cleaves, an alumnus of the University of Memphis art program, imagines a meeting between a nameless human interlocutor and members of a race of human-plant-animal hybrids who manage to survive, in spite of grievous treatment. The painting featured in this exhibit shows one of these "Forget Me Nots" under water and under siege, but who sends shoots up to the surface, and whose story is represented by an "Afroglyphic" at its feet (cat. 23).

The compromised bodies of Cleaves's Forget Me Nots are akin in some ways to the collages in works by Wengechi Mutu, assembled in part from images of black women cut from pornographic magazines (cat. 24). In Mutu's work, hybrid female bodies situated in stark, alien environments critique the harmful objectification of female African bodies. Even though the beings in her works incorporate and reflect the abuse and exploitation they have been subjected to, they nevertheless exude a dignity and charisma that projects their triumph over mistreatment.

These imagined, hybrid, future and/or alien beings bring up the question of what it means to be human—whether we can transcend (or should transgress) current notions of humanity. Such issues are the domain of Posthumanism, whose concerns can overlap with Afrofuturism. Notions of monstrosity are inevitably implicated in how we define human, subhuman, nonhuman, and posthuman. Saya Woolfolk's video Chima TEK: *Hybridization Machine* introduces a race of empaths with the ability to alter their bodies through a combination of technology and ancient artifacts (cat. 32). Woolfalk's imagined world is no utopia, however, as other works from in her series explore the conflicts and contradictions involved in customizing gender, race, and species.

The idea of trying on identities gendered both male and female—of defying categories via metamorphosis—is a staple of Cindy Sherman's work, represented here by her *Mrs. Santa Claus*, in which she uses makeup and prosthetics to transform herself in way that is at once worrisome and humorous (cat. 33). Sherman's influence is evident in other works featured in this gallery. Neil Winokur's *Cindy Sherman: Totem* calls attention to Sherman's metamorphoses by juxtaposing a frank portrait of the artist with a wig and frightening mask (cat. 34). Following in Cindy Sherman's footsteps, Yasumasa Morimura projects himself into iconic male and female roles in pop culture and art history. In *Criticism and the Lover A*, he creates a droll posthuman hybrid of human artist and art historical fruit (cat. 35).

Monstrosity can be gendered female in ways that imply that women are subhuman or monstrous. The monstrous feminine in art reinforces cultures of sexism and misogyny. Medusa is a quintessential icon of the monstrous feminine. She was turned into a snake-headed monster as punishment for transgressing sexual mores, and just a look from

this sexually dangerous feminine monster would kill. *Monster Marks* features two images of the Medusa—both by male artists—that seem to subvert this traditional meaning. Vic Muniz makes a copy of the most famous Medusa image by the Baroque master Caravaggio out of spaghetti noodles on a dinner plate (cat. 36). The comical high-carb apparition in a quotidian setting makes the threat of Medusa—so horrifyingly real in the Caravaggio—into a dinner-party witticism. Medusa appears again as gender-bending self-portraits by artist Larry Edwards, who pictures himself as multiple Gorgon heads rolling around on a dining table (cat. 37).

These dinner-party Medusas make us confront the persistence of the ancient ideas they refer to, and the continuing dialog between past and present, art history and contemporary art. The works in *Monster Marks* demonstrate how faculty, alumni, collectors, art institutions and organizations in Memphis engage though art with a powerful and conflicted legacy in which monstrosity surfaces in unexpected ways. Given AMUM's mission to support student research, we wished to enable students to participate in the exhibit's conceptual design. Graduate student Samira Rhabe played a crucial role in identifying and researching objects. Assistant Director of AMUM, Warren Perry, suggested that we offer students the opportunity to wrestle with the themes of the exhibit by building their own monster. Eight undergraduate students from the Department of Art and the Department of Mechanical Engineering worked together for more than a semester to create a work of art that embodies their idea of a monster. Faculty in engineering (Ali Fatemi, John Hochstein, Teong Tan) and art (Richard Lou, Matt Greely) made this possible by integrating this project with the curriculum in an exciting

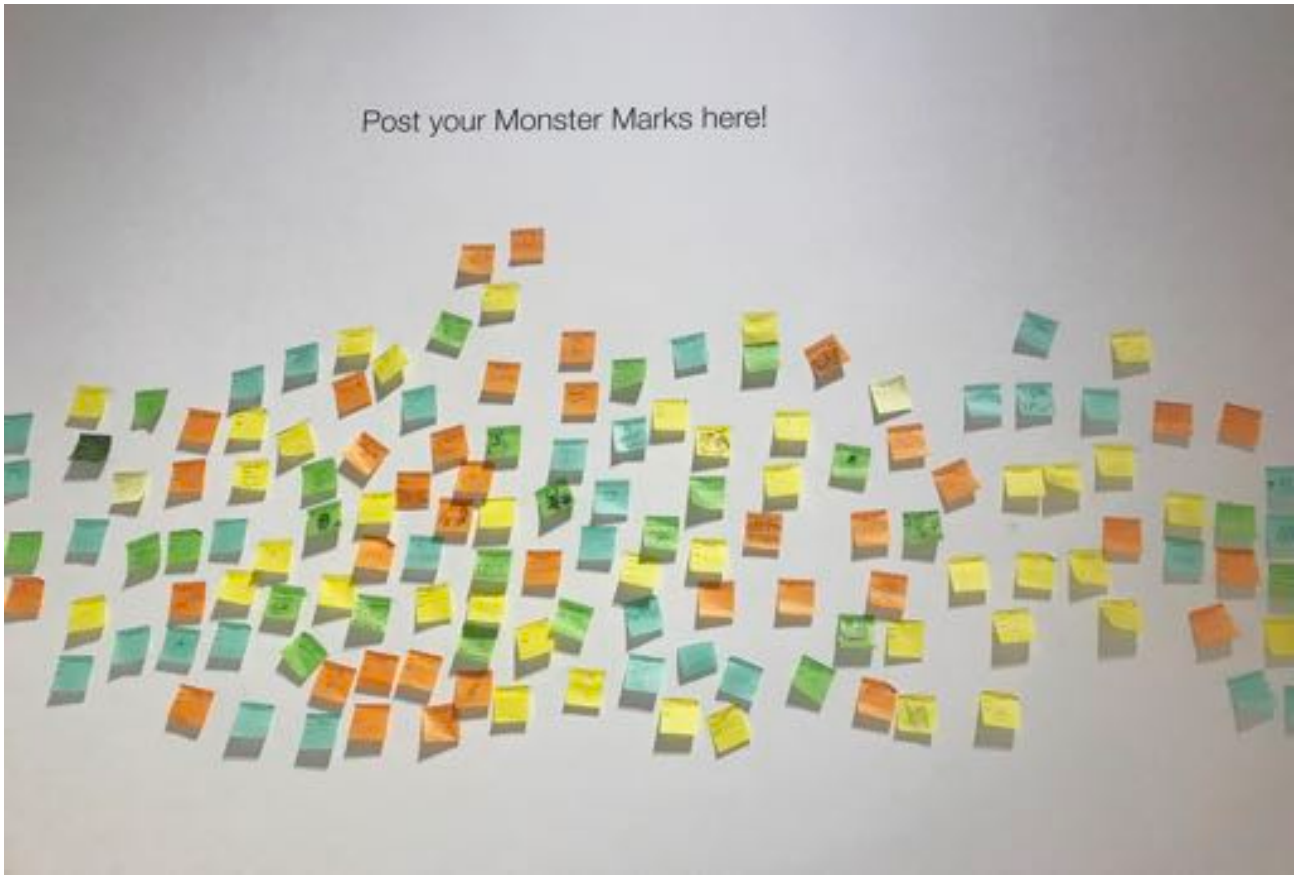
and unusual collaboration that demonstrates the interdisciplinary potential of the STEAM model (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math).

The monster the students created incorporates notions of monstrosity at the heart of the exhibit (cat. 2). Towering and ghostly, it is not identifiable as any recognizable thing. Motion sensitive, it startles, and makes noise, but does not speak. It is a cyborg with a black hole for a head, anthropomorphic in way that cannot be mistaken for human. Absurdly, it wears a bedraggled hoop skirt—though this still does not allow us to assign gender with any degree of certainty. The students say that the work is meant both to suggest and evade binaries such as male/female and industrial/natural.

The students' intense and thoughtful involvement brings them into the productive network of new meanings and connections generated by the show. *Monster Marks* contrasts with more traditional exhibits that aim to identify the best, the most important, the most representative works of an artist's career, or a revealing or defining art historical moment. Its broad, amorphous, overarching theme yields different kinds of insights. A different curator—even considering the same theme in the same city—would likely have selected different works, and interacted with different aspects of Memphis's rich artistic heritage and history. When Fred Wilson "mined" a regional museum in Maryland, he uncovered a wealth of meaning with a big impact on how we relate to the legacy of the things we preserve in such places. Like politics, maybe all art history, too, is local.

There is radical potential in mining our museums, collections, art organizations, and the talents of art professionals in our local communities to create new, prismatic configurations of familiar objects to speak to current concerns and controversies.

Monster Marks reflects efforts by faculty, staff, and students at the University of Memphis, as well as local artists, collectors, and other institutions in the city to identify and research thematically relevant works, and even to create them. Viewers also are invited to make comments and thumbnail sketches of monsters—their own "monster marks"—and to post them on the title wall in the exhibit. This catalog reproduces views of the galleries and the explanatory panels that introduce each section, as well as the individual objects and labels. Its goal is to extend and sustain the community created by the exhibit, and to encourage future collaborations.



“WHAT ARE MONSTERS?”

Monsters are difficult to define.
As the novelist China Miéville wrote in his “Theses on Monsters,” “Any bugbear that can be completely parsed was never a monster, but some rubber-mask-wearing Scooby-Doo villain.”

Monsters provoke emotional reactions.
We know something is a monster because it makes us feel fear, hatred, awe. When we perceive ourselves safe from their threat, we might also feel wonder, or even delight.

Monsters defy categories.
If we don’t have a word for it, a fearsome thing might be a monster. Monsters are often hybrid in nature. They can be disturbing combinations of human and animal, animal and god, human and god. Or all three.

Monsters are culturally specific.
Our monsters are not the same as your monsters or their monsters. Monsters are powerful cultural expressions that can be misused. Humans often use the vocabulary of the monstrous to stereotype and demonize enemies, foreigners, and disenfranchised populations.

Monsters can make us think.
We conjure them at the borders of the familiar. By contemplating these products of the human imagination, we can learn to face our fears, and find inspiration in what we don’t yet know.

“Monster Marks” from Visitors

1

Myatt Greely
Monster Marks, *2018*

Repurposed signage, neon, plastic, aluminum, building blocks, charred pine, poplar wood. Courtesy David Lusk Gallery

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Greely Myatt's work addresses fundamental issues of communication and miscommunication, of our knowledge of the world and its limits. He arranges ordinary objects like push mowers, bed frames, and gas cylinder caps to suggest they are imbued with significance, even if the viewer can't quite pin down their meanings. Physical and sometimes monumental constructions of abstract marks—letters, punctuation marks, thought and speech bubbles—playfully draw attention to the inadequacy of such arbitrary signs in expressing human experience. Monsters, too, exist at the edges of our understanding, which is why the visual vocabulary of the monstrous is impossible to categorize in any consistent way. Myatt's *Monster Marks*, with its competing, overlapping letters and exclamation mark, highlights the uncertainty and drama that inevitably accompany the monster. It is a fitting emblem for the elusive notions of monstrosity represented in this exhibit, which conjure up compelling but fragmentary insights about human connection and the abyss, of art and monsters. It is up to us to connect the dots.


MONSTER

2

Monster, *2018*

Artists: Tracy Treadwell, Mason Nolen, Ky Wagner, Julie Darling
Engineers: Kevin Ydrovo, Christian Clement, Austin Griffin, Hayley Wood
Steel, aluminum, stepper motors, an arduino microcontroller, one linear actuator, various electrical components, sheer voile fabric, 5.6m x 3.5m x 3.1m

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The towering humanoid cyborg begins to move when it is approached, though it cannot see. It is not black or white. It is both covered and exposed. The gauzy material that reads as clothing also makes up the undefined black hole substituting for a head—thus eliding notions of solid and void, real and ethereal, inside and outside. The tiered gown is gendered female, but the bare, flat chest seems male. It is hermaphroditic. Or transgendered. Or perhaps its gender is just a fantasy after all. It creaks and groans, but has no mouth. From the back, it is all girders and gears: the bride stripped bare. Art and engineering students from the University of Memphis worked together to conceive a form that suggests the idea of the monster in keeping with the themes of this exhibit. The hulking automaton in petticoats they created—incongruous, intimidating, inscrutable—defies categories and raises questions, as monsters do.

MONSTERS IN ART HISTORY

Monsters are a perennial and ubiquitous subject in world art. The systematic study of visual art, "Art History," developed as an academic discipline in nineteenth-century Europe in a period of far-reaching European imperialism and colonialism. Europeans expressed belief in the saints and angels represented in their art, while dismissing the supernatural beings represented in the art of other cultures they encountered as myths and monsters, testimony to "primitive" beliefs. This bias contributed to the "monsterization" of native peoples and rationalized their exploitation.

While the expansive understanding of the word "monster" in this exhibit is meant to encourage productive comparisons and the cross-fertilization of ideas, it is necessary to be mindful of the troubling ways the charged word "monster" has been misused in some of our own historical and cultural narratives.

MONSTERS IN ART HISTORY:

SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

There is a conceptual overlap between gods and monsters, and artists often use the vocabulary of the monstrous to convey notions of cosmic majesty and the unfathomability of the divine. This convergence means that it is disturbingly easy for one culture's gods to become another culture's monsters.

It is important to point out here, therefore, that it is not appropriate to describe most of the supernatural beings in this section in the noun form, "monsters." The adjective "monstrous," can be employed to describe some characteristics attributed to them that are associable with the category of "monster," such as hybrid bodies/natures, superhuman size and strength, and the ability to change from one thing into another.

3

Prayers to St. Michael and John the Baptist with Sibyls and Grotesques, *1515*

Leaf from a Book of Hours in Latin, Paris, printed by Philippe Pigouchet and Simon Vostre, on parchment with metalcuts, initials in tempera and liquid gold, 8.8 cm x 12.8 cm. Collection of Sherry C.M. Lindquist

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According to the Book of Revelation, St. Michael and his angels slew the dragon (i.e. Lucifer) in a "great battle in heaven." He is pictured in this prayer book dispatching a demon, accompanied by prayers enjoining him to protect the petitioner from the enemy. The evil to be overcome is further represented in the margins by additional fierce monsters and by naked children playing with their foolish toys, who symbolize vanity and folly.

Because of its tail, fur, claws, and the extra face masking its genitals, we are inclined to identify the demon beneath Michael's feet as a monster. But Michael also has non-human, "monstrous" qualities, such as mighty wings and self-generating light. St. John the Baptist, also pictured on this page, was (and is) believed to be able to exert his supernatural powers even after having been beheaded. In the corners, sibyls—ancient prophetesses—foresee the coming of Christ. Their presence is meant to remind readers that with the help of supernatural beings in heaven and on the pages of their personal prayer books, they can avoid being condemned to hell at the end of time.

tur fac vt anime donetur paradisi gloria. Amen. ℣. Tuã ipsius animam dolo:is gladius pertrãsibit. ℟. Vt reuelẽ tur ex multis cordibus cogitationes. Oremus

Ntercedat pro nobis quesumus domine ihesu christe nunc et in hora mortis apud tuã clementiã beata Virgo maria mater tua: cuius sactatissimam animam in hora tue passionis dolo:is gladius pertrãsiuit: vt te iesu christe saluato: mũdi. Qui cũ patre et spiritu sancto Viuis et regnas deus Per oĩa secula seculo:. Amen.

De sancto michaele. ãn.

Michael archangele paradisi preposite Veni in adiuto:iũ populo dei: et Velis nos defendere a potestate inimici et tecu: ducere in societatẽ domini. ℣. In ospectu angelo:. psallã tibi deus me⁹. ℟. Adora bo ad templum sanctũ tuũ et confitebo: nomini tuo Oremus.

Deus qui mito o:dine angelo:um ministeria hominũq: dispensas: concede propicius: vt quibus tibi ministrantibus in celo semper assistitur ab his in terra Vita nostra muniat. Per dominum nostrum ihesum christũ. ꝛc.

De sancto iohanne baptista. ã.

Inter natos mulierum non surrexit maio: iohãne baptista ℣. Fuit homo missus a deo ℟. Cui nomen erat iohẽs. o⁹.

Reста quesumus omnipotens de⁹ vt familia tua per viam salutis incedat: et beati iohannis precurso:is christi hortamenta sectando ad eum quẽ predixit secura perueniat: dñm nostrum ihesũ christum. ꝛc.

De sancto iohanne euangelista. ãn.

4

Follower of Hieronymus Bosch
Vision of Tondal, *early 16th c.*

Netherlandish, Oil on panel, 21.6 cm x 15.9 cm. Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Gift of Thomas Morgan Roberts in memory of his parents Emily Allen Roberts and James Thomas Roberts (2012.26.13)

In the lower left corner of this painting, we see a nervous-looking soul getting a guided tour of the worst possible tourist destination. The anonymous painter adapted a detail from the hell of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1503-1515) to illustrate the *Visions of Tondal*, a popular example of medieval visionary hell literature.

The angel points out the tortured sinners whose fates Tondal must learn to avoid: souls crushed by their love of lustful, secular music, who are sexually assaulted by tree monsters and bestial demons, or who suffer eternal diarrhea of gold coins to pay for their greed. An enthroned devil with a bird head—perhaps Satan himself—gulps down sinner after sinner, defecating them into a hole filled with excrement and vomit.

Such demonic monsters, designed to scare the faithful into being good, are frightening, but also ingenious and absurd. Antonio de Beatis, a secretary to the Cardinal of Aragon, saw Bosch's painting in 1517, and commented that it contained "things that are so delightful and fantastic that it is impossible to describe them" (Moxey, 122). De Beatis's remarks remind us of the contradictory and varied responses elicited by even the most terrifying monsters imaginable.

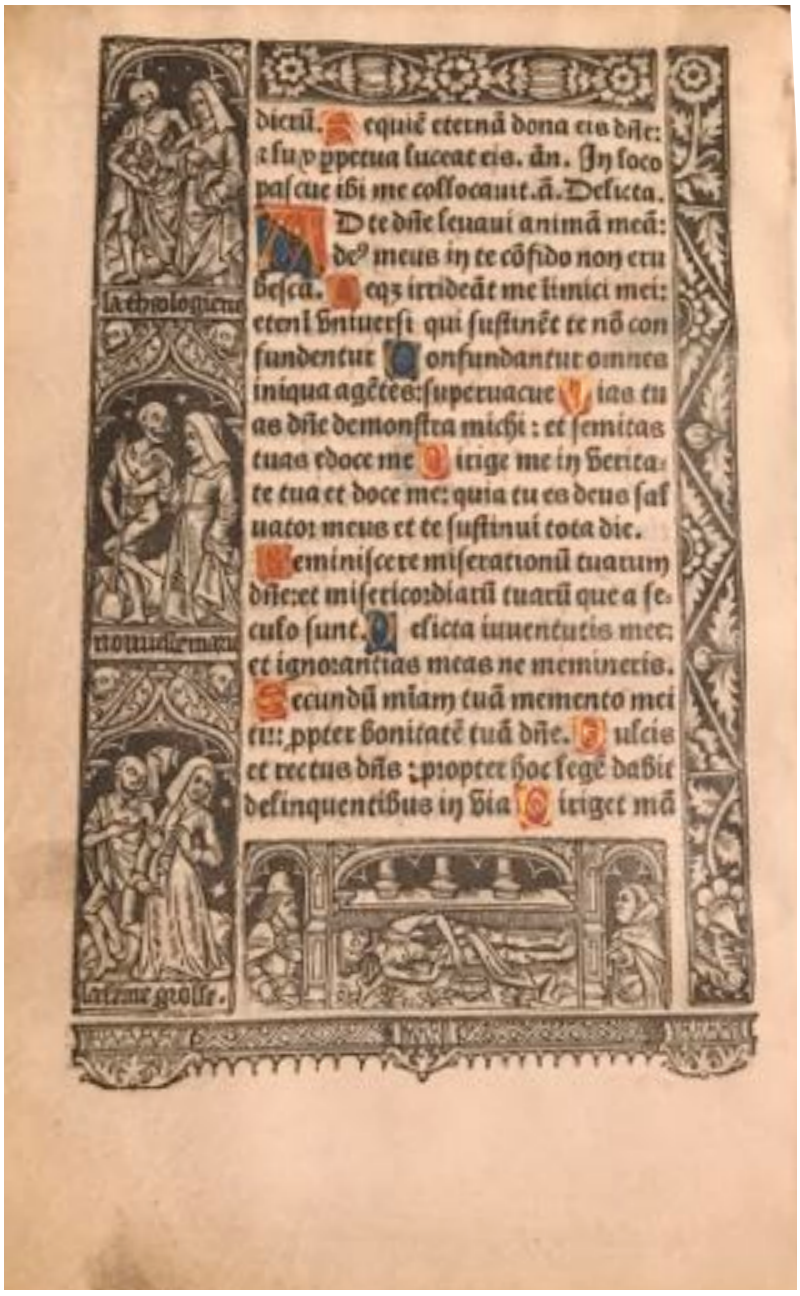
5

Scenes from the Danse Macabre: Female Theologian, Newly Married Woman, and Pregnant Woman, *1496*

Office of the Dead, Leaf from a Book of Hours in Latin, Printed by Philippe Pigouchet and Simon Vostre, metalcuts on parchment. Initials in tempera and liquid gold, 8.8 cm x 12.8 cm. Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Gift of the Carnegie Corporation (73.12.1)

The grinning, decomposing corpses on display here were first devised to illustrate the *Dance of Death*, a chilling medieval poem that reiterates the relentless inevitability of death for people of all stations. Here, death personified plays escort to a female theologian, a newlywed, and a pregnant woman. It says things like, "Dancing, I come to grab you. Today you will be put in the ground. Death never comes at your pleasure. Joy flees like fire on straw" (Harrison and Hindman, 80).

The dancing skeletons are repurposed here, on a page from a luxury prayer book, a Book of Hours printed on vellum with initials hand-colored in blue, red, and liquid gold. The text of the Office of the Dead offers a refuge from the mocking presences of monstrous death by furnishing the reader with excerpts from liturgical passages that petition a good and merciful God.



dicēū. Requiē eternā dona eis dñe: ⁊ lux ꝑpetua luceat eis. ān. In loco pascue ibi me collocauit.ā. Delicta.

Ad te dñe leuaui aīmā meā: deꝰ meus in te cōfido non erubesca. Neq; irrideāt me inimici mei: etenī vniuersi qui sustinēt te nō confundentur Confundantur omnes iniqua agētes: superuacue ias tu as dñe demonstra michi: et semitas tuas edoce me Dirige me in veritate tua et doce me: quia tu es deus saluator meus et te sustinui tota die.

Reminiscere miserationū tuarum dñe: et misericordiarū tuarū que a seculo sunt. Delicta iuuentutis mee: et ignorantias meas ne memineris. Secundū miam tuā memento mei tu: ꝓpter bonitatē tuā dñe. Dulcis et rectus dñs: propter hoc legē dabit delinquentibus in via Dirriget mā

6

Eros, *2nd-1st century BCE*

Hellenistic Greece, Red-figure olpe, terra cotta, 20.96 cm height. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson Jr.

Although we tend not to view the seemingly human-like gods of the ancient Greek pantheon as monstrous, they nevertheless possess certain monstrous qualities such as gargantuan size, wings, and the ability to transform themselves. And they were certainly dangerous to humans. The winged Eros embodied the idea of passion and sensual love, causing a loss of control that threatened self and society. Eros is closely connected to Dionysus, the god of wine, fertility, ritual ecstasy and madness.

The association between Eros and Dionysian abandon is evident from the vessel in this case, an olpe used to pour wine, which comes from southern Italy where the cult of Dionysus was quite popular. Eros is shown with an impressive pair of wings attached to a fleshy, almost hermaphroditic body, shown nude, except for some elegant beads and a Phrygian cap.

7

Eros, *c. 350 BCE*

Apulia, Terra cotta, 15.24 cm x 8.9 cm x 6.35 cm. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson

Unassuming terracotta statues of Eros made from molds, like the one shown here, are found across the Mediterranean region and testify to the god's broad appeal. This version of the winged god is not sensual in the same way as the more deluxe painted representation on the Olpe in the exhibition (cat. 6). Rather than a seductive reclining nude, we see a chubby child striding forward. Eros in either form represented a danger to humans, who were powerless against the arrows shot by the mischievous divinity that made them lose their ability to act rationally.

8

Chocolate Cylinder, *600-800 CE*

Maya culture, Mesoamerica, Ceramic, 15.23 cm x 9.4 cm. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson Jr.

Between the long-whiskered sea deity and skeletal death deity on this vase is a "cauac monster," so-called because of similarities to the cauac glyph on the Maya calendar. While this being does have monstrous qualities, including a fierce appearance and ability for metamorphosis, it is not conceptually different from other Maya deities not called "monsters."

The "cauac monster," likely a deity associated with earth, stone, and mountains, is shown animating altars or thrones in important events. Cocoa played an important role in such ceremonies, including funerary rites, and the vessels meant to hold it, like this one, are mostly found in graves. The "codex style" of this vase is associated with Maya books that were almost all burned by Spanish conquerors, who deemed them "superstition and lies of the devil" (Robicsek, xix). Their loss is one reason scholars must guess at the names and roles of beings in the Maya pantheon.

A recent proposal to change "cauac monster" to "witz (mountain) monster" isn't clarifying as to why this supernatural being is monstrous enough to be a monster rather than a deity. The case of the cauac/witz monster brings up questions about what it means to name something a monster, and what is implied when this involves another person or another culture.

9

Stirrup vessel, *500-800 CE*

Moche culture, Peru, Creamware pottery, 24.1 cm height. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson Jr.

This “supernatural” type of Moche vessel displays mutilated faces, skeletal beings, and disembodied feathery eyes. Its lumpy misshapenness suggest that it may belong to a category of potato-inspired vessels found in several ancient Peruvian cultures. The underground tuber, a food vital to Moche survival, was associated with the underworld, as were the skeletal beings and an owl deity whose presence may be signaled by the feathered eyes.

The two heads in front are shown with hair-lips, variously interpreted as congenital, deliberate scarification, or wounds inflicted as part of sacrificial ceremonies. Moche archaeological sites reveal that dozens of sacrificial victims were thus deformed or mutilated, and that part of the ritual of sacrifice involved exposing rotting bodies for weeks. One reason proposed for this practice was to permit maggots to incubate flies to transport the spirit away from the body. The rows of insects clinging to the heads on this vessel indicate that the spirits of the victims are in a transitional state between the worlds of the living and dead.

MONSTERS IN ART HISTORY:

MONSTERS AND RULERS

Historically, art has most often served the purposes of those with the resources to invest in it: powerful people, classes, and institutions. Rulers and other authorities harness the power of monsters through art that associates them with their frightening and awe-inspiring qualities. This section features works of art from world cultures that demonstrate various ways in which monsters and the monstrous in art operated to enhance the power of elite members of societies, as well as the systems of thought that sustained their supremacy.

10

Fragment of a Mantle or Tunic, *12th-15th c.*

Chimu culture, Peru, Dyed cotton, 58.42 cm x 68.6 cm. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson Jr.

Trophy heads hang from the three-fingered hands of the fierce supernatural beings repeated across this finely woven fringed garment. The “frontal personage,” a frequent motif in Chimu art, incorporates spots that are likely a reference to the jaguar, a majestic predator of great importance in ancient South American religions. The crescent-shaped feathered headdresses, oversized staffs, and attendant creatures also identify it as powerful deity. By wearing images of the god, the high-status person who wore this as mantle or tunic—possibly a Chimu king— merged his identity with the deity. In doing so, he projected authority accrued through his intimate association with a fearsome god that manifested the characteristics of the jaguar.

11

Stirrup Vessel, *500-800 CE*

Moche Culture, Peru, Ceramic. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson Jr.

Ritual combats ending in human sacrifice were a central element of Moche militaristic culture. The giant spiny centipedes that slither across this painted vessel are unusual in Moche pottery, though the subject of human sacrifice it portrays is not. Perhaps these supernatural versions of normally soil-bound creatures wriggling over and around the body of the victim serve as a horrifying reminder of his imminent burial.

The fallen warrior bends his knees in front of his confiscated weapons, arranged in a bundle as a trophy. That he is a person of high status is indicated by his armor, ear discs, trapezoidal back flap and crescent headgear. The owl deity of the underworld on the warrior's headband identifies him as a sacrificial victim. Another figure associated with Moche sacrifices appearing on this vessel is a deity named by archaeologists as "Wrinkle Face." Though his face is not very wrinkled here, he is still identifiable by his feline headdress, two-headed serpent belt, fangs, patterned tunic, and the presence of his frequent companions, a dog and an anthropomorphized iguana deity.

The bloody spectacles memorialized in images that incorporate fierce supernatural beings and monstrous creatures reinforced both the values and the power of the Moche warrior class.

12

Jaguar Vessel, *500-900 CE*

Maya culture, Guatemala, 7.5 cm height. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson Jr.

The most prominent motif on this Maya vessel is the spotted jaguar, the largest feline predator in Meso/South America, associated with numerous Maya deities. The red scarf or collar around the jaguar's neck is likely a reference to human sacrifice—an attribute of the Waterlily Jaguar, one of the enigmatic deities of the Maya Underworld. Tragically, the vast majority of Pre-Columbian sites have been looted rather than excavated, hindering the ability of scholars to understand the complex Maya pantheon.

Scholars propose numerous possible roles for this being: that it presided over decapitations, that it was invoked to activate spells against the king's enemies, that it served as a spirit companion for a ruler—even sharing his essence. Maya painted vessels like this one are typically found in the graves of high-status persons, and they were likely used in elite ritual feasts and exchanged as diplomatic gifts.

Images of jaguars are strongly connected to Maya kingship. Maya kings preferred jaguars as spirit companions and they alone could wear the jaguar pelt. This painted jaguar vessel was similarly a prestige object associated with rituals that aligned the ruler with the awesome power of jaguar deities both in life and after death.

13

Samurai Armor, *18th-19th c.*

Japan, AMUM (1983.1.1 V1)

Elements associated with wild animals, monsters, and supernatural beings incorporated into battle gear suggest that the wearer shares the strength and ferocity associated with them. Beasts and demons were common themes in Samurai armor—some more extravagant examples incorporate antlers, insect wings, and horns two or three times the height of the helmet. Such removable decorative elements were impractical in battle, but impressive statements about the status of the wearer in ceremonial contexts.

The more understated monstrous elements in this example are evident in the face mask (mempō) showing fierce, exaggerated features and a forbidding grimace. The swastikas incorporated into the helmet are ancient Buddhist signs connoting luck and protection. Such overt Buddhist symbolism may signal both the owner's religious sentiments and his commitment to be a protector of the faithful. The face mask may mimic the typical "mouth-open" expression of the stern and gigantic Buddhist temple guardians, which many Japanese armorers deliberately evoked in their work. The monstrous elements incorporated into Samurai armor were designed to be both warlike and aesthetically compelling—to intimidate on the battlefield and at court.

14

Guardian Figure, *1368-1644 CE*

Ming China, Glazed ceramic, 51 cm x 41 cm x 15.23 cm. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson Jr.

This ceramic lion is shown mid-roar with bared fangs and glaring eyes—its vibrant, unnaturalistic colors contribute to an effect of otherworldliness. It is shown domesticated by a saddle, blanket, and harness adorned with bells. Such ceremonious trappings reflect its original location in a temple or the palace of a high-status individual. Rulers commonly adopt ferocious beasts as emblems, and lions take on added meaning in Buddhism, since the historical Buddha was of royal birth, and came to be known as the "lion of the Shakya Clan." A belled lion shows that its fierce nature is put into the service of Buddhist law.

Workshops that produced the kind of iridescent glaze (*liuli*) evident on this ceramic figure flourished with imperial support, and their wares defined the aesthetic of imperial palaces, temples, and other public buildings in the capital of the Ming Dynasty (Nanjing). Guardian figures like this one thus associated imperial and religious power. They exemplify attempts by rulers to harness the power of fierce, monstrous beings as a means of claiming the authority and the ability to protect their people and subdue their enemies.

15

Leaf from a Book of Hours
Service for the Dead, *ca. 1450*

French; Latin text, Ink, tempera, and gold leaf on parchment, 18.7 cm x 13 cm. Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Brooks Memorial Art Gallery Purchase (56.27)

The priest in this miniature embodies church authority, supervising the burial of a corpse in a sanctified burial ground. This is a required but not sufficient condition of salvation for the medieval Christian. An epic battle for the soul of the deceased plays out above the body: a demon snatches the foot of the dead person's soul, while an angel reassuringly fends it off with a lance-like cross. By locating part of the demon outside of the frame of the miniature, the illuminator suggests that such fiends not only inhabit the world of the painting, but that they also share the reader's space.

This miniature from a Book of Hours—a popular devotional book in the Middle Ages—illustrates the Office of the Dead, which urged readers to pray daily for the dead and to contemplate their own mortality. The silhouette of the demon was so unnerving—so monstrous—to one user of the book that he or she apparently attempted to smudge it out. This example, in which the ritual of the church seems to ensure the salvation of the individual, illustrates how ecclesiastical institutions employed the monster to reinforce their dominant role in medieval societies.

16

Pharaoh's Curse, *1957*

Color poster, 68.5 cm x 104.1 cm. AMUM (1989.3.50)

Scary fonts. A shadowy figure rising from a coffin. Screaming victims. A busty Cleopatra-like femme fatale. A grimacing monster head. A bare-breasted sphinx. This poster features the ingredients of the cheesy 1950's horror flick it advertises. Even when they do not appear in cinematic masterpieces, monsters in films from Disney to the perennially popular horror genre reflect and impact our cultural values.

Set in 1902 when the British Empire ruled Egypt, *Pharaoh's Curse* opens with a British flag flapping in front of a map of Egypt. An English commander reacts to troubling reports of unauthorized British archaeologists in the Valley of the Kings. He is worried the "mob out there" will riot if they get the idea "that we're tampering with their religious beliefs, their superstitions."

The film incomprehensibly presents 20th-century Egyptians—a majority Muslim population—as "superstitious," as followers of a cult involving a blood-thirsty mummy that "terrorizes the world." Such prejudicial characterizations of other peoples as threatening and "primitive" figure into justifications of conquest and colonialization. It does not seem coincidental that the map opening this film features the Suez Canal in large letters—evoking the crisis occurring in the year the film was made, when Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt in an attempt to control the Suez Canal.


Terrorizing the world...
A BLOOD-LUSTING MUMMY THAT KILLS FOR A CAT-GODDESS!
PHARAOH'S CURSE
MARK DANA
ZIVA SHAPIR
DIANE BREWSTER
RICHARD LANDAU
AUBREY SCHENCK
A BEL-AIR PRODUCTION

17

Abraham Ortelius, *1527-1598, 1549-ca.1620*
Engravings by Jan Wierix
The Empire of Prester John, *1598*

Hand painted copperplate map, from *The Perergon* (Antwerp: Plantin), 35 cm x 42 cm. Rhodes College, Warner Map Collection

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For centuries, the story circulated in Europe about a priest-king named Prester John who was descended from the Magi and who ruled over an exotic and incalculably wealthy kingdom. This early printed, hand-colored map locates this legendary Christian kingdom in Africa, which is labeled a "once Christian land." A famous "letter" from Prester John recorded the wonders of his realms: animals like elephants and griffins are listed alongside "monstrous" peoples, including "wild men, horned men, fauns, satyrs and women of the same kind, pygmies, dog-headed men, giants . . . and one-eyed men."

In fact, the explorers sent to Africa by Portuguese monarchs in the fifteenth century were explicitly charged to find the kingdom of Prester John. The elephants mentioned in the legend and pictured here are presented as imposing and wondrous as the sea monsters shown in Africa's coastal waters. Antique and medieval artistic and literary traditions featuring fierce, exotic fauna and "monstrous races" shaped European attitudes about the lands and the natives they encountered in their efforts at global exploration and conquest.


SEPTENTRIO
PERSIAE PARS
BARBARIA
NUBIA
ARABIA FELIX
OCCIDENS
ORIENS
MERIDIES
PRESBITERI
IOHANNIS, SI
VE, ABISSINO
RVM IMPERII
DESCRIPTIO

MONSTERS IN ART HISTORY:

SATIRE & SOCIAL CRITICISM

The nature of monsters—their ability to change from one thing and another, to be at once anthropomorphic and far from human—makes them good vehicles for satire and social criticism. Even so, two factors make it relatively rare for satirical monsters to appear on the kinds of objects that become part of the art historical canon. The first is that these are typically luxury objects made for powerful people and institutions invested in the status quo. The second is that—modern experiments with conceptual art notwithstanding—most art is made with an eye on posterity, while effective satire addresses the moment.

The advent of printing provided a new, cheaper, medium that trafficked in the ephemeral, and which created fertile spawning grounds for satirical monsters. In the European and American contexts of the prints displayed here, there remained a divide between what was considered "high art"—the painting and sculptures made for wealthy patrons—and "minor" or "low" art, which included the utilitarian and ephemeral.

The prints in this section feature satirical monsters that roamed the overlapping realms of high and low, popular and elite, timely and timeless.

18

Francisco de Goya *(1746-1828)*
Donde Va Mama (Where is Mama Going?)
Los Caprichos, *1799*

Etching, 34.3 cm x 25.5 cm. Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Bequest of Isaac L. Myers (60.97)

Francisco Goya was a rare court artist with an inclination to satire, and it got him in trouble. His dark series of 80 prints, called *Los Caprichos (The Caprices)*, was filled with satirical monsters, demons, and witches. It was a financial failure in part because its satire targeted just about anyone who could afford to purchase a set. Goya finally withdrew it from circulation because he was afraid it was drawing the attention of the Spanish Inquisition.

In *Where is Mama Going*? from *Los Caprichos*, a corpulent "witch" is being carried away by a trio of horrid demons. Everyone is nude, evoking accusations that witches consorted sexually with the devil. And yet the female figure has no visible demonic qualities, she does not seem to be participating consensually, and the print's title asks us to think of her as "mama."

This confusing and disturbing print may be a criticism of folk superstition about witchcraft, as well as of the failure of both the Church and the Enlightenment to end persucutions. Even if the butt of the satire is not the woman, but the society it critiques, repeated representations of old women and witches in Goya's work likely reinforced stereotypes that were (and are) harmful and even lethal for women.


65.
Donde vá mamà?

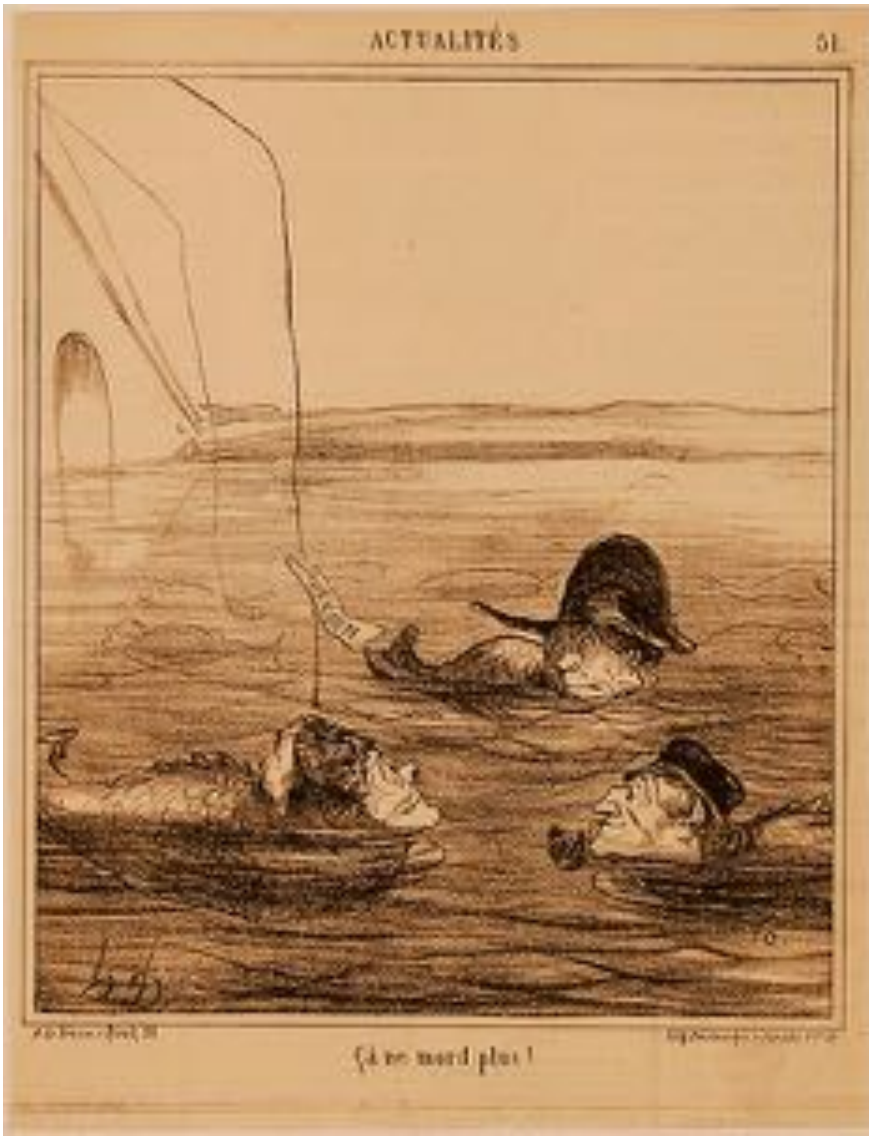
19

Honoré Daumier *(1808-1879)*
Çà ne mord plus! *1868*

Lithograph, "Actualités" series in *Le Charivari*, no. 51 cm x 4.3 cm x 20.6 cm. AMUM (1990.7.4)

Honoré Daumier, called the "Michelangelo of caricature," went to jail for six months for representing the king of France as Rabelais's disreputable giant Gargantua. Thousands of his lithographs appeared in the satirical French magazine, *Le Charivari*, weighing in on the most pressing and controversial issues of his day.

In this one, Daumier gave a Frenchman's idea of German faces and hats to fish representing southern German provinces considering unification with Prussia. The dangling hook reading "annexation" and the caption, "It does not bite anymore" imply that the southern German states would be gullible indeed to fall for Prussian promises like the northern states did. While Daumier's works had considerable influence on French politics, they had less impact on the Germans, who unified as the result of the Franco-Prussian War just two years later.


ACTUALITÉS
51
Ça ne mord plus !

20

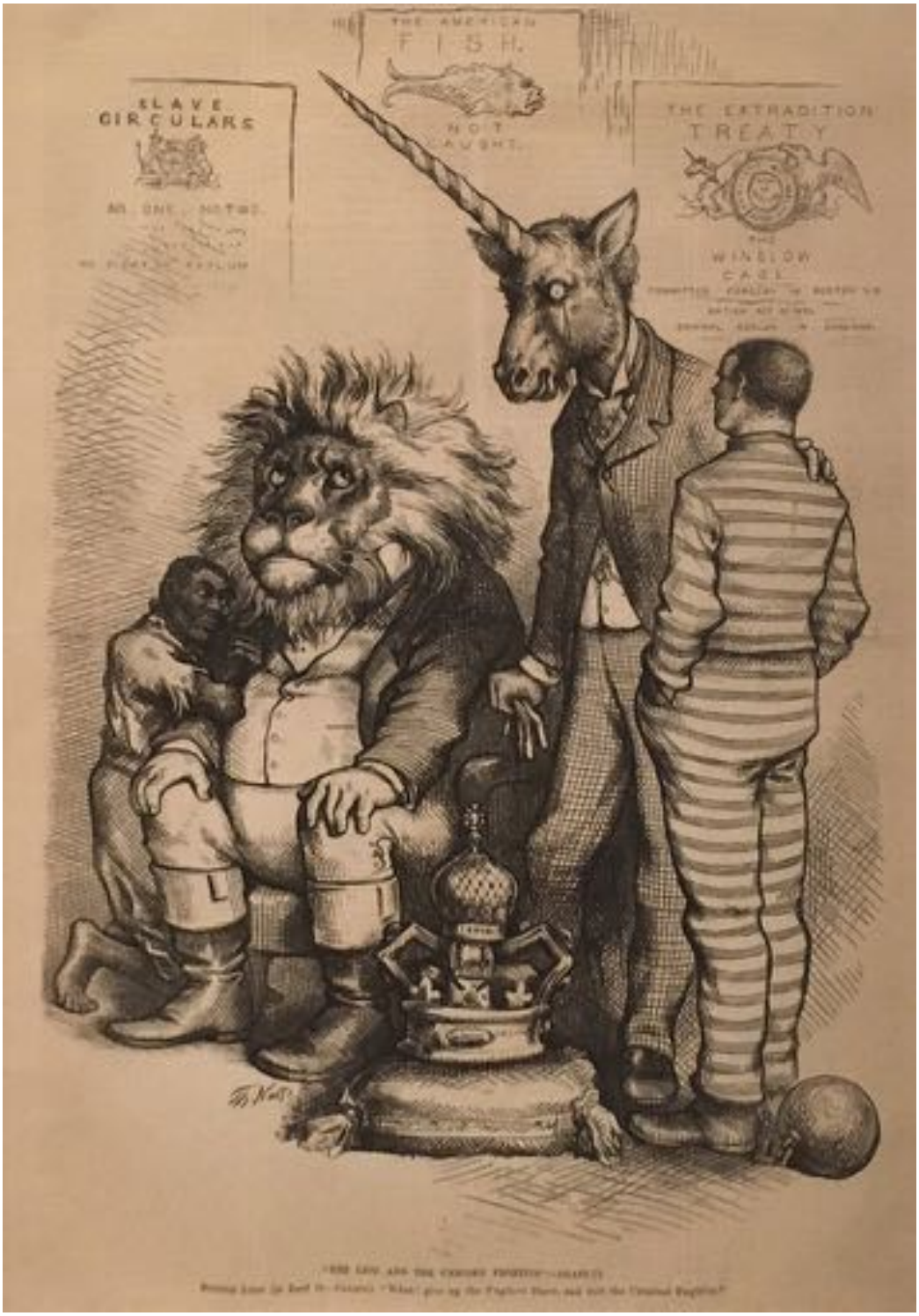
Thomas Nast *(1840-1902)*
The Lion and the Unicorn Fighting-Again, *June 17, 1876*

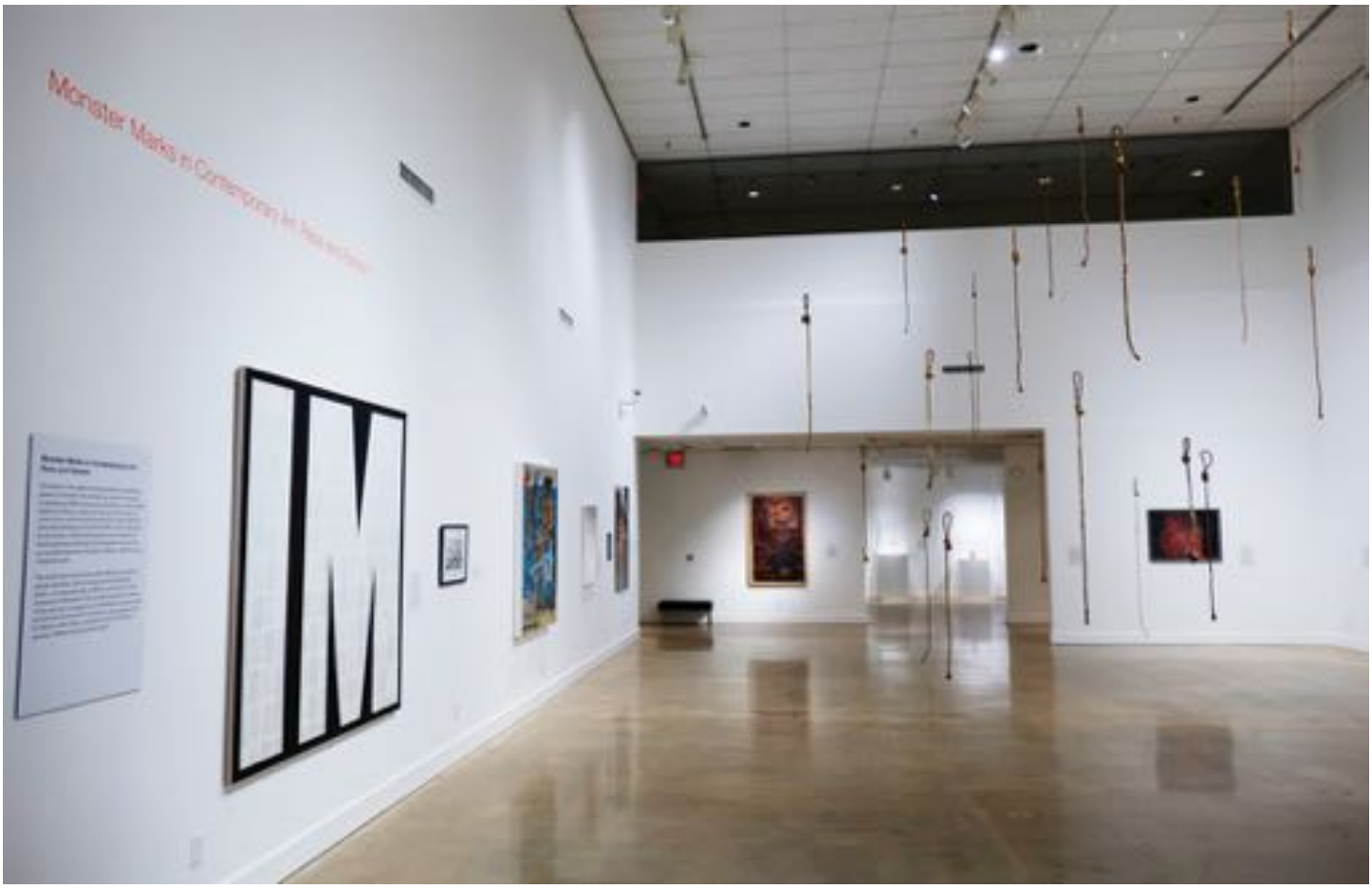
Woodblock engraving on newsprint, *Harper's Weekly,* Caption: "British Lion (to Lord D-Unicorn) 'What! Give up the Fugitive Slave, and NOT the Criminal Fugitive!'', 42 cm x 29.21 cm. AMUM, Gift of Burton Hunter (1982.1.206)

Monstrosity and monstrous beings were a staple in the work of Thomas Nast, the "father of the American cartoon," originator of the American version of Santa Claus and the GOP elephant. His illustrations in mainstream magazines are credited with bringing down the corrupt Tammany Hall administration in New York City and getting Abraham Lincoln elected.

Here, Nast distills the irony and hypocrisy embedded in abstract legal matters into a scene that is both affecting and absurd. A well-fed lion and a fashionably-attired unicorn holding a pair of gentleman's gloves stand for Great Britain (the royal heraldry come to life). The lion rolls its eyes and turns away from the barefoot fugitive slave clutching his arm.

The scene refers to the "Slave Circulars" that instructed British sea captains to return fugitive slaves to their "legal" masters. Even though the American Civil War was over when this cartoon was published, global slavery had not disappeared. Nast clearly shows Britain on the wrong side of the issue. By having the dead-eyed unicorn place a fraternal hand on a criminal's shoulder, he illustrates Britain's hypocrisy in granting conditional asylum to an American forger (the Winslow Case), while refusing it to those unjustly kept in bondage.


THE AMERICAN
F I S H.
NOT
CAUGHT.
SLAVE
CIRCULARS
THE EXTRADITION
TREATY
WINSLOW
CASE


Monster Marks in Contemporary Art

MONSTERS IN CONTEMPORARY ART

MONSTERS IN CONTEMPORARY ART:

RACE & RACISM

The works in this gallery demonstrate the compelling power of monsters, the monstrous, and the uncanny, in expressing difficult ideas and emotions. In the United States of America, notions of race are at the heart of some of our most wrenching divisions, most profound misunderstandings, and most horrific crimes. Haunted by monstrous crimes and injustices, this sampling of works represents attempts by Memphians to exorcise our racialized demons through creating, collecting, and interpreting art.

The works here are by artists with different racial and gender identities, both emerging and established artists—including faculty, students, and alumni of the University of Memphis. These works tap into the power of the monster to engage us in individual soul-searching and earnest conversations leading to the question that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. posed in one of his famous sermons: “Where do we go from here?”

21

Tim Rollins & K.O.S. workshop
Invisible Man (after Ralph Ellison), *1999*

Matte acrylic on book pages mounted on canvas, 152.4 cm x 152.4 cm. Collection of Dr. Rushton Patterson Jr.

"I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me." This famous first line of Ralph Ellison's award-winning novel from 1952, *Invisible Man*, eloquently reminds us that humans are guilty of making monsters of each other.

Artist and activist Tim Rollins incorporated Ellison's book into his Kids of Survival (K.O.S.) workshop, meant to empower students through reading and making art. This collaborative piece incorporates pages from Ellison's *Invisible Man*. The letters "I" and "M" come from the end of the headline "MURDER VICTIM," about the murder of one of the K.O.S. kids, Christopher Hernandez, and five others. As part of their struggle against the monsters of racism and violence, the artists also connect the "IM" to "I AM A MAN," written on the iconic placards worn by striking sanitation workers in Memphis after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.(see cat. #22).

22

Richard L. Copley *(1946-)*
I Am a Man, *March 28, 1968*

Photograph, 22.2 cm x 37.9 cm. Collection of Michael Allen

The visual connection is clear between Rollins's *Invisible Man (after Ralph Ellison)* and the protest signs of the Memphis sanitation workers in 1968. The prominent photojournalist Richard L. Copley took this historic photo when he was a student at Memphis State (now the University of Memphis).


I AM
A MAN

23

Roger Cleaves *(1980-)*
You Can't Drown a Shark, *2017*

Oil on Canvas, 122 cm x 152 cm. Collection of the artist

You Can't Drown a Shark is part of a series of paintings visualizing the expansive worlds created by Roger Cleaves. The "Forget Me Not" shown here is one of a species of human-plant-animal hybrids surviving in a disheveled garden, who relay to an unnamed human visitor their race's history of oppression by an enigmatic enemy. They communicate via a mysterious interpreter in a pictorial language called "afroglyphics," carved in stone in the lower left corner of the painting.

Each of the hybrid bodies of the Forget Me Nots responds and adapts differently to harsh treatment. This one is attacked underwater by swords and weighed down by balls and chains. It looks in different directions with multiple eyes, and is stabilized by a shark propping up its legs. The Forget Me Not raises an arm in a defiant gesture and sprouts some prickly blossoms above the surface of the water. Its one fruit uncannily resembles a hanged man.

Although it is possible to see these strange creatures as having been made into "monsters" by horrific treatment, Cleaves notes that "what may be a monster to you may not be a monster to me." He represents an encounter in which a human listener imagines the Forget Me Nots' stories with sympathy, who confronts his conflicted relationship to his own ancestry through this encounter with monstrous difference. The Forget Me Nots, of course, do not see themselves as monsters; they are survivors whose bodies incorporate a shark if necessary, in order not to drown.

24

Wangechi Mutu *(1972-)*
Untitled, *2004*

Collage, 93.345 cm x 66.04 cm x 5.08 cm. Collection of Dr. James Patterson

From its perch on some kind of exotic mushroom, a creature—part animal, part woman, part machine—stares out at us with one human eye. Its limbs with hands-as-feet are cut out from pornographic magazines. The collages of Kenyan-born artist Wangechi Mutu express her sense of alienation from the ways the black body is objectified, sexualized, and commodified, from "what is perceived to be me—the African woman, the African female body." Here, she reconfigures black porn, which she describes as "graphic beyond porn of any other ethnicity or race," into a monster that is at once unsettling, appealing, and accusing (Hernandez, 427-28).

The amorphous spotted mushroom taking up half of the image further conveys Mutu's fascination with the blurring of categories. In a classificatory kingdom separate from plants and animals, mushrooms are "in-between." A colony of mushrooms is, Mutu contends, "like a migrant culture that exists in the most decrepit parts of the city, and what emerges are these fascinating people and interactions" (Enright). Mutu's work reflects disgust at a culture that abjectifies certain bodies, recognizes and mourns the harm done, and offers monsters as means of protest and resistance.

25

Nancy White *(1947-)*
Shoot the Stars, *1995*

Ceramic, collage, marbles, 50.8 cm x 47 cm. 61 cm high. Collection of the artist

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In this ceramic tableau, four Klansmen appear unambiguously as monsters, having sprouted tails and dinosaur heads. They are coming to play the game, "shoot the stars," at a carnival booth managed by a young boy and his dog. The boy's face is painted with stars, and the implication is that he might be the target.

There is an unmistakable resemblance between this scene and traditional representations of the magi bringing gifts to the Christ Child in a manger—especially evoked here by the faithful animal and stars hanging over the booth. Instead of revering the child, the Klansmen endanger him; instead of bringing gifts to celebrate Christ's triumph over death, they bring death with them, in the form of skeletons and decaying animals.

Through this work, artist Nancy White expresses the shock she felt when she moved to the south and came into casual contact with people associated with the Klan, and her worry about the potential influence of the harmful ideology on her children. White's multilayered symbolic imagery interrogates the way racist ideas are inflicted on vulnerable children and it visualizes disgust at a legacy of bigotry and hatred.

26

Robert J. Sanchez *(1952-)* **& Richard A. Lou** *(1959-)*
Captives of Fate, Los Anthropolocos, *1992-2005*

Photography, 121.92 cm x 182.88 cm. Collection of Richard A. Lou

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Captives of Fate is part of a series of staged photographs and accompanying texts: *Los Anthropolocos*, which chronicles the activities of fictitious anthropologists who operate in the imagined future Chicano nation of Atzlan. In this parodic narrative, the scientists excavate sites associated with the "Colorless Empire," or Caucasians, believed to be extinct. The unearthing of "colorless" mummies, and exotic artifacts such as recordings of country music and Thomas Kinkade paintings, capture the imagination of the Atzlan public. The celebrity of the anthropologists, who are given the name "anthropolocos" (crazy anthropologists), rises to new heights when they discover "colorless" people still survive in the wild, whom they capture, study, and exhibit.

This photograph mimics the trophy photographs of big game hunters, who typically exert their dominance by posing with their weapons next to their prey. The satirical reversals in this fictional history call attention to painful truths about actual encounters between Europeans and natives of other continents. Spurious scientific and theological ideologies cast fellow humans as bestial and monstrous, which led to the slaughter, enslavement, and exploitation of native peoples. Dark and absurd, *Captives of Fate* attempts to jolt us into grappling with the consequences of these injustices.

Captives of Fate

After capturing and tranquilizing these two magnificent specimen Los Anthropolocos were overcome by a combination of euphoria and grief. They understood the importance of being privileged, figuratively, to travel back to some unspeakable primordial place. To see and touch one's past is frightening. Los Anthropologocs walked the Mounts of the West, just north of Whittier, grieving, tormented and forlorn. Had they reached the end of their life work, searching for and analyzing the Colorless? And what will become of these godless brutes? Will they be capable of learning a language beyond their customary grunts, squeals and belches? These questions caromed off the left banks of their collective minds. As with lightning and thunder there was a great burst of energy and light, then silence. The Captives of Fate World Tour was born.

Los Anthropolocos would begin their travel with the two specimens, to all major cities in United Aztlan and the world recreating a live dramatic reinterpretation of the capture of the Colorless. A handsome publication (with 150 frame-able color plates) would coincide with the interpretive re-enactment tour on the talk show circuit: Late Night with Ted Briseno, Chatting with Charro, It's the Olmos Morning Show, Ondas con Handro, Good Morning Aztlan and the Coco Fusco Hour.

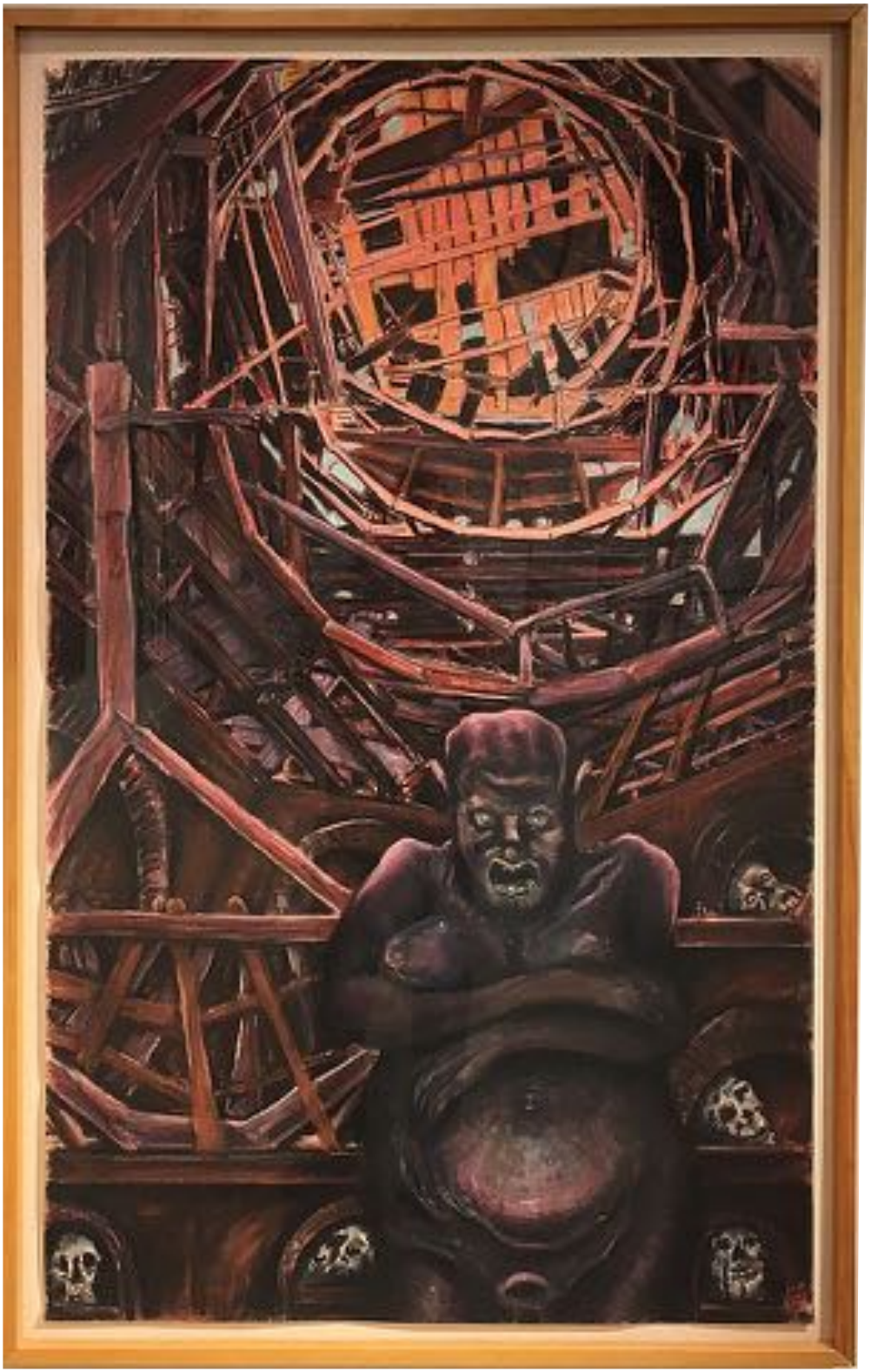
27

Larry Edwards *(1931-2013)*
Unfinished Tomb, *1988*

Pastel, gouache on paper, 152 cm x 91 cm. Collection of Beth Edwards

Larry Edwards's work is full of monsters, of violence, of disturbing things. "What I observe," said Edwards, "is uncomfortable. There are uncomfortable things in life in spite of what we try to cover up" (Christensen). Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that his *Unfinished Tomb* is not recognizable as Longwood, an antebellum manor and National Historic Landmark in Natchez, Mississippi, described on its website as "the unfinished dream home of Haller Nut" ("Longwood").

Edwards's view of the building does not linger on its whimsical onion dome and decorative white balustrades. Rather than a romanticized dream of plantation life, we confront a nightmare: a dark, glaring, open-mouthed demon surrounded by skulls and surmounted by a vertigo-inducing view of rickety rafters spiraling upwards to a makeshift roof. This brooding monster makes us to think about the uncomfortable aspects of this mansion, such as the brutal civil war that interrupted its construction, the thirty-two enslaved persons housed nearby in much less luxurious quarters, and the fate of the people whose bodies are buried there.



28

Demetrius Oliver *(1975-)*
Till, *2004*

Chromogenic print, 68.6 cm x 91.4 cm. Collection of Elliot and Kimberly Perry

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In "The Killing of Black Boys," (1997), award-winning author, John Edgar Wideman, writes of a recurring nightmare in which he is chased by a monster. What he is afraid of, he has come to believe, is the mutilated face of Emmett Till.

Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old Chicago kid visiting Mississippi in 1955, was tortured and murdered by J.W. Milam and Roy Bryant after Bryant's wife Carolyn reported being insulted by Till. Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley, insisted on an open-casket funeral, so that the world could see what was done to her son. After Milam and Bryant were acquitted by an all-white jury, they publicly bragged about committing the crime; years later, Carolyn Bryant confessed to lying about the incident.

Till's martyrdom galvanized the Civil Rights Movement, but there is no compensating for his loss. Born in the same year as Till, Wideman identifies with the murdered boy, painfully realizing that the killers of black boys often do so out of a belief that black people are less than human.

Demetrius Oliver was born more than thirty years later, but his unnerving self-portrait testifies to the lasting impact of the monstrous attack on Till, which is also an attack on black identity and personhood. Till's murder remains an open wound because the senseless killing of black men is tragically recurring, captured in horrific images that permeate the public sphere, like the pictures published of Emmett Till in an open coffin.

By covering his face with chocolate frosting, Oliver temporarily makes his own face featureless; he loses himself to identify with Till, whose face was so battered and bloated that he could not be identified except by his ring. It is not Emmett Till, of course, who is the monster chasing Wideman, and Oliver, and all of us, but the legacy of slavery and Jim Crow, which produced not only Till's murderers, but also the killers of black boys in our own century.

29

William Christenberry *(1936-2016)*
Metamorphosis (4 Works), *1984*

Large-format Polaroid prints, 86.36 cm x 109.22 cm. Collection of Dr. James Patterson

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"A doll can get under people's skin" (Olson, 290). This statement by artist William Christenberry acknowledges the unsettling effects of his *Metamorphosis* series, in which a homey-looking rag doll converts into a Klansman. This horrifying transformation is an instance of "the uncanny," explained by psychologists and neuroscientists as the troubling feeling that arises when one suspects something that appears to be knowable and familiar is instead strange and threatening. With its calico gown, bunched apron, and floppy kerchief, Christenberry's doll is the picture of homespun innocence.

But then we see a menacing shape behind her, and then the doll is turned upside down by some unseen force. A Klan robe with slitted eyes is being pulled down the doll's body, its rope cord sticking out like the tail of a demon. Finally, the once-appealing doll is made completely unrecognizable by its new, hateful garment. The use of Polaroid snapshots makes the nightmarish work more immediate, just as a shaky handheld camera puts the viewer of a horror movie in the scene. Christenberry implicates viewers by placing the doll front and center, close to our space—implying, perhaps, that we, too, might conceal hateful impulses beneath innocent-seeming exteriors.

30

William Christenberry *(1936-2016)*
Klan Room, *1984*

Polaroid print, 73.66 cm x 57.15 cm. Collection of Dr. James Patterson

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Alabama artist William Christenberry, known for his affectionate portraits of the south, has said that he is in love with where he is from. But he considers it his responsibility as an artist to "deal with evil"— "to reveal what we might call a strange and secret brutality, the Ku Klux Klan" (Ferris, 188).

As part of his struggle to contend with the racist crimes of white southerners, he created a "Klan room," which he worked on over decades. Among the objects in the room are G.I. Joe dolls uncannily transformed into white supremacists whose identities are masked by their ghoulish KKK robes. Some are bound, stuck with pins, and dripped with wax—seemingly attempts to exorcise the racism they represent.

In this photograph, we peep through the door to see one of these figures with its cape resembling a noose. The image is disturbing. We see the evil, and it looks back at us. The work forces each viewer to contend with the strong emotions—fear, guilt, horror, hatred, sadness, anger—triggered by a confrontation with the vile and disastrous legacy of slavery and racism that it represents.

31

Le Marquee La Flora *(1993-)*
The Old Landmark, *2018*

Rope, gold leaf, nails. Collection of the artist

These nooses, suspended ominously in the viewers' space, seem to have a life of their own. Of varying shapes and sizes, they hover at different heights: some with tails curling up, others with tails dragging on the ground. La Flora presents the upside-down noose in an attempt to take away its lethal power, "Turned wrong side up, you can't die from it." And yet, as he acknowledges, these nooses still have power, in their inescapable reference to lynchings of black people in our history, and in the latent violence of their ghostly forms.

This work, however, has a second, more uplifting meaning signaled by upward movement and touches of gold leaf. It shares a title with a famous a gospel song, and like this song, it calls for unity and faith in the future. The nooses are uncanny as theorized by psychology and neuroscience: although we know they should be ordinary, non-threatening inanimate objects, we cannot avoid a sense of dread that they might somehow come to life and do us harm. By entitling his work, *The Old Landmark*, La Flora comments on the national debate about the status of confederate monuments. His work reminds us of the horrifying consequences of the white supremacist ideologies that characterized the confederacy, which have left their dreadful marks on our land.

MONSTERS IN CONTEMPORARY ART:

THE MONSTROUS FEMININE & POST-HUMANISM

Notions of female monstrosity and feminine monsters are common in art and literature. Traditionally, they have served to rationalize and enforce culturally specific gender norms, as well as the subjugation of women in male-dominated cultures.

With wit and humor, the contemporary works in this gallery employ the visual language of monstrosity—especially of hybridity and metamorphosis—to question the parameters of gender categories and roles. Some go further to experiment with ideas of "posthumanism," which ask us to reexamine the nature of humanity in relationship to machines, artificial intelligence, plants, animals, and the environment.

32

Saya Woolfalk *(1979-)*
Chima TEK: Hybridization Machine, *2013*

Single-channel video loop with sound by DJ Spooky. Collection of Dr. James Patterson

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Chima TEK: Hybridization Machine is part of a richly imagined future world called No Place. There, female Empathics form a company, Chima TEK, to help clients customize their gender, race, ethnicity, and species. This video of Empathics at work avoids the high-tech, sci-fi props we associate with futuristic worldbuilding. Instead, Woolfalk creates a brightly colored, do-it-yourself aesthetic of tinfoil, felt, and face paint, influenced by multi-ethnic folkloric festivals in Brazil.

Woolfalk's utopia has a dark side, despite its groovy colors. The crazy-quilted skulls in the video belong to ancient plant-humans whose posthumous spores give the Empathics their powers. Also necessary to Chima Tek's identity-changing services are finite materials mined with destructive techniques. Woolfalk envisions a future promising escape from restrictive categories, but which also carries the danger of fetishizing and commodifying designer selves to the detriment of the common good.

33

Cindy Sherman *(1954-)*
Mrs. Santa Claus, *1990*

Chromogenic print (c-print), 35.56 cm x 27.94 cm. Collection of Dr. James Patterson

Cindy Sherman creates anti- self-portraits in which she is disguised and disfigured with monstrous prosthetics and masks. She also loses her self by role-playing culturally constructed gender roles, as portrayed in film and art history.

In *Mrs. Santa Claus*, the artist shines a bright light on the scene, exposing its artifice: the unnatural puffed cheeks, the painted-on lips, the contours drawn with makeup to make her young face match the age suggested by her silvery wig. We can see by the bemused expression in her eyes how much she (or anybody?) would feel trapped in the role of the domestic helper invented for Old Saint Nick—a wife who doesn't need a first name.

At once hilarious and disturbing, Sherman's experiments with masks and monstrosity question socially constructed gender roles, and the ways they are promulgated in popular culture and fine art.

34

Neil Winokur *(1945-)*
Cindy Sherman: Totem, *1985*

5-dye destruction prints. 50.8 cm x 40.6 cm. Collection of Dr. James Patterson

In calling his likenesses of people "totems" and not "portraits," Neil Winokur evokes sacred objects that communicate the spirit of ancestors or supernatural beings—beings that are not monsters, but which share some conceptual qualities with them (see pp. 29-44).

Unlike photographs by Cindy Sherman featuring herself, Winokur's *Cindy Sherman: Totem* offers us a frank photo of the artist, without disguises, masks, makeup, or costumes. And yet the totem makes clear that the photo is not enough to convey the complexity of the photographer's subject. It gestures to what is missing and unrepresentable through objects associated with Sherman: a wig, two enigmatic snapshots, a grinning skeletal mask.

In common with Sherman's own work, Winokur's totem of Cindy Sherman makes us question the notion of identity, the differences between person and persona, and to what extent we are defined by gender and other socially constructed expectations.

35

Yasumasa Morimura *(1951-)*
Criticism and the Lover A, *1990*

Chromogenic print, 179.07 cm x 224.155 cm. Collection of Dr. James Patterson

Influenced by Cindy Sherman (cat. 34), Japanese artist Yasumasa Morimura inserts himself into iconic images from art history and elsewhere. Like Sherman, he creates gender-bending photos, merging himself with the likes of Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, Frida Kahlo, the Mona Lisa and others. As a Japanese artist confronting Western art history, he brings additional questions to the images he appropriates. For example, what does a Cézanne painting mean to a Japanese photographer a century after it was made?

Not content merely to look, Morimura reproduces Paul Cézanne's *Apples and Oranges* in a photo about the same size as the original (housed in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris). He goes so far as to illustrate his relationship to the painting by projecting his own face onto the apples and oranges. The resulting fruit-human hybrids all have their eyes closed. The message seems to be that even if Morimura could literally enter into one of these canonical masterpieces of Western art history, he still wouldn't be able to see it as an insider. His intervention results in a monstrous object, one that makes us see how strange and alienating the culturally-specific aspects of art can be.

36

Vik Muniz *(1961-)*
Medusa Marinara, *1998*

Photographic transfer-printed porcelain, 1.25 cm dia: 34.29 cm. Collection of Dr. James Patterson

Somehow, Vik Muniz succeeds in making spaghetti noodles and marinara sauce resemble Caravaggio's terrifyingly lifelike rendering of Medusa, the decapitated snake-haired gorgon who literally petrifies with her gaze. According to the artist, "Illusions as bad as mine make people aware of the fallacies of visual information and the pleasure to be derived from such fallacies. These illusions are made to reveal the architecture of our concept of truth" (Kinley, 58). *Medusa Marinara* is true, in a limited way, to Caravaggio's painting. Other "truths" embedded in this work are implicated by Caravaggio's subject matter.

Medusa's horrifying countenance was a divine punishment for her supposed illicit sexuality (in some versions of the myth, she is a rape victim). She is an icon of the "monstrous feminine"—analyzed by both Freud and feminist theorists in varying ways that spotlight her disruptive power. Here, the uncanny emergence of Medusa's face in the realm of the domestic seems to conjure up the most uncomfortable of dinner parties. It thus wittily evokes the way women, in our stories and our histories, are "monsterized" when restrictive and contradictory social norms are transgressed.

37

Larry Edwards
Medusa with Drunkards, *1931-2013*

Mixed media on paper 109.2 cm x 144.8 cm. AMUM (2016.8.1)

A deathly snake-haired Medusa has manifested on a vacant dining table in a cavernous Gothic space lit by an ornate chandelier. Two smaller disembodied Medusa heads with agonized expressions on their faces roll around on the tabletop. The hissing serpents striking out at the viewer collapse the worlds inside and outside of the painting. At least one, and probably both of the male faces are self-portraits. Thus, the painting suggests that the artist, Larry Edwards, was dragged into the frightening realm of his own imagination, and we, standing where he was standing, are threatened too.

The appearance of Medusa in any context raises questions about the monstrous feminine. Like Vic Muniz's Medusa (cat. 36) Edwards's Medusas are conjured in a domestic context (albeit an eerie one): there is a beer bottle on the table and rather ordinary fiddleback chairs in the foreground. Edwards has projected himself onto a monstrous form traditionally gendered female. The horrified self-portraits seem to interrogate—not without a dash of self-deprecating humor—the dominant culture's revulsion when cultural norms separating human and animal, male and female, are transgressed.

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