Bathing Beauty

By

Alexandra Lazar

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Sponsor: Alison Miller

Second Reader: Stella Ebner

I was quiet and shy as a little girl and my parents never knew what to do with me when I became bored so they would set me up at the dining room table with crayons, colored pencils and paper. Completely losing track of time, I would color for hours until it was time to convert my makeshift art studio back into its primary use – a place for family dinner. I would never tire of creative activities like drawing, painting or building little houses for my dolls. When I got a little older and had outgrown the dining room, my parents converted the basement laundry room into a craft area. They bought me paints and a hot glue gun and I would stay down there all day and night, oblivious to the passage of time. The room was unheated, so in the winter I would shrug off the cold, wear my winter coat and get lost in creativity. It was becoming clear to me that not only had the creative process and expression of art become a true passion, but it also created a safe haven where being an introvert was an advantage rather than a curse.

As my taste and style matured and evolved, I developed an affinity for the bright colors, eccentric patterns and design features that seemed to be accentuated in bathrooms. This evolved into using these bathroom stylings to probe ideas of self-reflection, protection, solitude, relaxation, mortality and escapism. I explore bathrooms because it is a return to my safe haven – a safely enclosed, intimate environment where one can find peace and solitude, and seek contemplation. Within these safe spaces, I often find myself completely immersed in the present moment, staring down at my fleshy body and its awkward, organic shapes, until my body no longer feels like it belongs to me, resulting in somewhat voyeuristic perspectives. My body, just a soft, temporary fixture, juxtaposed against a hard, glossy, tiled interior. Toilets, mirrors, bathtubs, and sinks all allude to privacy, self-connection and relaxation. Using imagery, such as bathroom mirrors, toilets, and especially the

bathtub has been my way of expressing protection and self-reflection as a metaphor for my idealized vision of everyday life.

Another area that fed my innate need for escapism is a love of cartoons, fairies and books about mythology. Since I was young, I have made little constructs of houses, spaces and objects for small imaginary creatures. Using almost any material at hand, I would make tiny bedrooms that fit in the palm of my hand or leprechaun houses leaned up against trees. Making these objects has inspired me as an artist and I continue to think about these themes in my life and art. I recently began making sculptures about magic and small creatures. I fantasize that there are small troll-like creatures that follow me around and hide my things when I am not paying attention. I made a model of what my house would look like if the trolls had taken so many things that it lifted the house and made it topple over. This work was the progression of those small, earlier models. I cling to the fantasy that there is hidden magic in our everyday lives that subtly reveals itself through art. Children's cartoons, the illustrations in Roald Dahl books, and cartoon shows like Dexter's Laboratory and Rugrats have been a constant inspiration in my life.

A protective space for me is anywhere I can be alone with my thoughts. Without distractions, and free from the need to meet someone's expectation of who I am, I'm able to immerse myself in my own thoughts and fantasies. The bathroom is the perfect place – the most truly private space in a home. The smallness is a comfort, no one can intrude, and I'm able to free myself from real-world shackles.

In my work, the bathtub is depicted as an inner sanctum within the bathroom. The bathtub as a protective space is something I explore in my art. Its long, narrow shape encases the body, serving as a protective, elliptical bubble. The water in the tub presents a unique form of intimacy and protection, like a return to the womb. To broaden my fantasies, the tub is not always filled with water – it might be coffee, plant life or even clouds. As I sink deeper and deeper into these mediums, the line between reality and fantasy begins to blur and eventually disappears all together. In my work, bathtub iconography serves as a portal to transport the viewer into a transcendent state, a time and place where the world outside ceases to exist, a physical and emotional cleansing of the soul. One cannot spend their life in a bathtub, but they can always evoke the images and headspace that carries them away to that place. The bathtub is my chosen subject because it invokes feelings of physical and emotional cleansing. I find comfort in the knowledge that even if physical cleansing is not always practical, symbolic cleansing through imagery, imagination and art is always accessible.

My process often begins with inspiration from art works I come across in my everyday life while driving, hiking, watching TV and movies or through online platforms. I also reference my own sketchbook and digital drawings for inspiration in creating a new piece. Sometimes when starting a painting I have only a vague idea in my head and I allow the paint to tell me what to do. Other times when I am feeling blocked, I go online and look at artists on social media to draw inspiration. Being able to view and save so many images allows a clearer vision of what I may want to paint. When I am not thinking of painting per se, but just feeling generally creative, I'll pull out my sketchbook, markers and gel pens and start drawing things around me or things I have seen. Then when I am ready to paint, I can open my sketchbook and allow the scribbling to guide me. I love

digital drawings because it allows me to pull images from the internet as well as draw directly into an image without having to change media. My love for digital works definitely shines through in my paint handling and especially in the patterns I use.

Another technique I favor is using collages as a reference point to start a painting, which eliminates the pressure of starting on a blank canvas. Collages allows me to create complex, dreamlike scenarios that I would not typically be able to tease out of other forms of visual media. The process of collaging is intuitive. I allow each image I lay down to dictate the next. I enjoy digging through old magazines, searching for the perfect form, texture, or color swatch that will allow me to best communicate my ideas. When I cannot find the ideal image, I can paint it either over the top of my collage or paint my own material to then incorporate into the collage. This allows me to create a mixed media piece that incorporates both found images and paint.

My collages are loose reference points from which I can create paintings. They inform both the concepts and formal elements within my paintings. I embrace the shifts that occur as the collage is translated into paint. Recently I have been using collage elements directly in my paintings. I have found a love for Japanese papers because they are transparent and can be laid into my work seamlessly.

I have recently begun transferring the bathtubs within my paintings into fantastical natural environments, such as forests, underwater and mountain tops. Using a bathtub as a way to transport myself to these places is a way to invoke the magic and sense of protection I feel. These are places where I can imagine the relaxation and sense of calm that I feel when in the privacy of my bathroom

I savor being alone with my thoughts and strive to create a similar experience for my viewers within my work.

When I take the bathtub outside of the bathroom, I am showing that the associated feelings can be transported along with it. When I encounter scary scenarios or places, I use the bathtub images to insulate me like a safe harbor. The bathtub also allows me to view my environment through rose-colored glasses. Everything is beautiful and calm in the bathtub because I am integrated with the elements around me.

Magical creatures such as fairies and trolls have been a part of my imagination since I was young. I have always believed that there are powers and forces beyond what we can see. When belongings go missing in my life, I imagine that there are trolls that follow me around and hide my stuff for fun. In Iceland there is a large population of people that also believe in mythical creatures such as fairies and trolls. They have creatures called “Huldufolk” which means hidden people ("Huldufólk"). The people of Iceland respect the Huldufolk and have even been known to prevent the building of roadways that would disturb their communities (Eveleth). There is a lot of myth and superstition around these mythological creatures. Kids are told to never throw rocks because they could hit Huldufolk, and there are many stories of people climbing on large rocks that are believed to be Huldufolk, later encountering misfortune as punishment for disturbing them. Stories like this inspire me further to create work about mysterious and magical creatures.

I love the idea of being in a place where magic feels possible. I directly relate natural beauty with magic in the world. I love to think about creatures like fairies, leprechauns and trolls and where

they might be hiding in our world. In my recent paintings and sculptures I have been showing how these magical creatures enter my world. They are around me all the time, moving my stuff and knocking things down. I am the connection between their world and my own and I incorporate color and pattern to flesh out how I imagine their world looks.

The portrayal of magic in folktales and princess stories is a way to escape reality. People want to believe in magic, and I love to paint in a way that makes magic seem possible. Places like foggy forests, meadows, waterfalls and mountain peaks are places where I feel magic is most possible. I am continuing to explore more "magical places" to find out where I can expand this element in my work. In the places I deem magical, there is a surpassing sense of calm and beauty, that leads one to believe that magical creatures dwell there.

When I paint these magic places and creatures, I become the conduit between worlds. To me, the magical world is bright and colorful. I typically do not show the magical creatures in my paintings because simply depicting their world is enough. I use the bathroom to create the tunnel of phantasy connecting my world and theirs.

Using bathroom imagery is my way of portraying protection, calm and magic in everyday life. Through my use of color, pattern, collage and sculpture I have opened my viewers to the window of my soul that leads to the safe place where I create my art.

My Work:

“Untitled”, 2019, acrylic and Japanese paper on wood

“Untitled”, 2019, acrylic on wood

“Untitled”, 2019, acrylic on wood

“Untitled”, 2019, acrylic on Masonite

“Untitled”, 2019, paper collage

“Untitled”, 2019, acrylic on wood

“Untitled”, 2019, acrylic on wood

“Untitled”, 2019, acrylic on wood

“Untitled”, 2019, paper collage

“Untitled”, 2019, paper collage

Works Cited

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