

Inked

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Senior Thesis

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My art has a wide variety of styles that have been influenced by multiple tattoo styles originating from around the world, these pieces can use numerous colors or use only lines and negative space to hold shape. My senior project combines the two to create a non-traditional self-portrait disguised as a torso-tattoo suit. The majority of my work is made with the printmaking processes linocut and screenprint, these prints typically feature aspects within nature; mostly animals or their skeletons, along with flowers. My work takes on a morbid expression, using the anatomy of all creatures to build an emotional response to the image. By using my anatomy and CMYK screen printing on vinyl, I was able to bring my passion project to life during my last semester in the print shop.

Strong female leads from mythology and other occult imagery are common features in my artwork, these pieces work together to create the theme of dark femininity. Often, women in history with masculine qualities were considered evil or taboo, most of these characteristics are associated with wealth, power, and sexual liberation. Since I had always considered myself a tom-boy growing up, I've formed a closer attachment to the non-traditional feminine ideology than the traditional feminine standard. Over the years, I've idolized many women who have unabashedly taken charge of themselves, their career, and their sexuality, hoping to follow in their footsteps to add to the ranks of empowered women in the world. Medusa and Lilith are the mythological poster women for this trend. It's theorized that Medusa may have been a goddess originally during the matriarchal rule of Greece, this changed when roles changed and the patriarchal society came forward. One of her most popular reiterations involved her being sexually assaulted by a male god. Because of

her power, many survivors use her symbol for support and protection, including getting it tattooed. Lilith was thought to be Adam's first wife; she fled from the Garden of Eden after refusing to submit to her husband. Though Eve is believed to come from Adam's rib, Lilith came from the same soil as Adam, therefore implying equality. Lilith is anticipated to have offspring, though not fathered by Adam, they are referred to as incubi/succubi. These demons come to a person in hopes of seducing them during their slumber, people born with deformities were believed to have been created by these demons.

Femininity has also been a harsh relationship for me, it's seen as repressive or as a liability in our patriarchal society, causing many little girls to feel like they have to reject feminine qualities to be viewed as equal. Historically, femininity is meant to subtly compliment their masculine counterparts, this can even leak into queer relationships, with couples often being asked "So who's the girl/man?" The world often splits womanhood into two sides, the Madonna versus the Whore (Vice vs Virtue). This can be seen over and over again in horror movies, embodied by the first kill and the final girl. The final girl symbolizes the good Christian purity standards imposed on women. They are written to be docile, well-behaved virgins that are designed to survive the film, while their sexually promiscuous partners get murdered. However, this lack of understanding shuts out much of the female experience. Dark femininity is more than just the raunchy or negative manifestations shown through media, it's a form of expression that includes the "mysteries of womanhood." One of the best representations in modern pop culture is Yennifer of Vengerberg, one of the most powerful sorcerers on the continent from the novel and television series *The Witcher*. From the beginning of her character arc, she is treated differently due to her unfortunate appearance and elven bloodline. After she makes a great sacrifice to become beautiful, Yennifer recognizes she will never be able to have children, a common conceptual punishment for

powerful women. Despite her attempts to reverse her fate, all magic proved useless to her curse. Yenn eventually becomes a maternal figure to a strong young woman named Cirilla.

The occult and other dark imagery are common themes to be replicated in different tattoo styles. Many artists will create flash images in their style of these themes to place at the front of their shop for pre-designed sales or to demonstrate what they can achieve in their parlor. Flash sheets are generally designed in a patchwork style, this is a personal preference of mine since it allows for a collage-composition of multiple different styles that change with the canvas/person's taste. My prints are heavily influenced by different tattoo styles, specifically neo-traditional, linework, and dot-work. Dot-work utilizes a technique called stippling (which was heavily influenced by the Pointillism movement popularised just before 1890). Most artists use black and grey for this traditional form. This style is visible in my project below on both pieces with the heart-shaped axe on the shoulder, as well as the heart-shaped spider web on the back left elbow. As you can see in the axe and medieval military flail, the more densely the dots are packed, the deeper the tonal range. In the small cat portrait on the back right arm, and the cherub and skull pairing on the front sternum, you see a different usage of this technique that leans towards the delicate formation. Historically, it has been used for religious and cultural tattoos in European and Asian countries, but the trend has seen a resurgence due to its smooth appearance and unique character. While this practice can be done using a tattoo machine, many artists use a hand-poking technique to have more precision with placement. Linework is very similar to dot-work, it can just be an outline, which is the base for a further developed tattoo, or it can be shaded by multiple smaller lines. This style is referenced with the knife on the forearm and in a few of the teeth in the circular form of the front print. The shading in the teeth of that selection flips between the dot-work and linework style changes, I feel like it's this quiet distinction that makes them more interesting. Neo-traditional tattoos stem from American traditionalism, which has one line

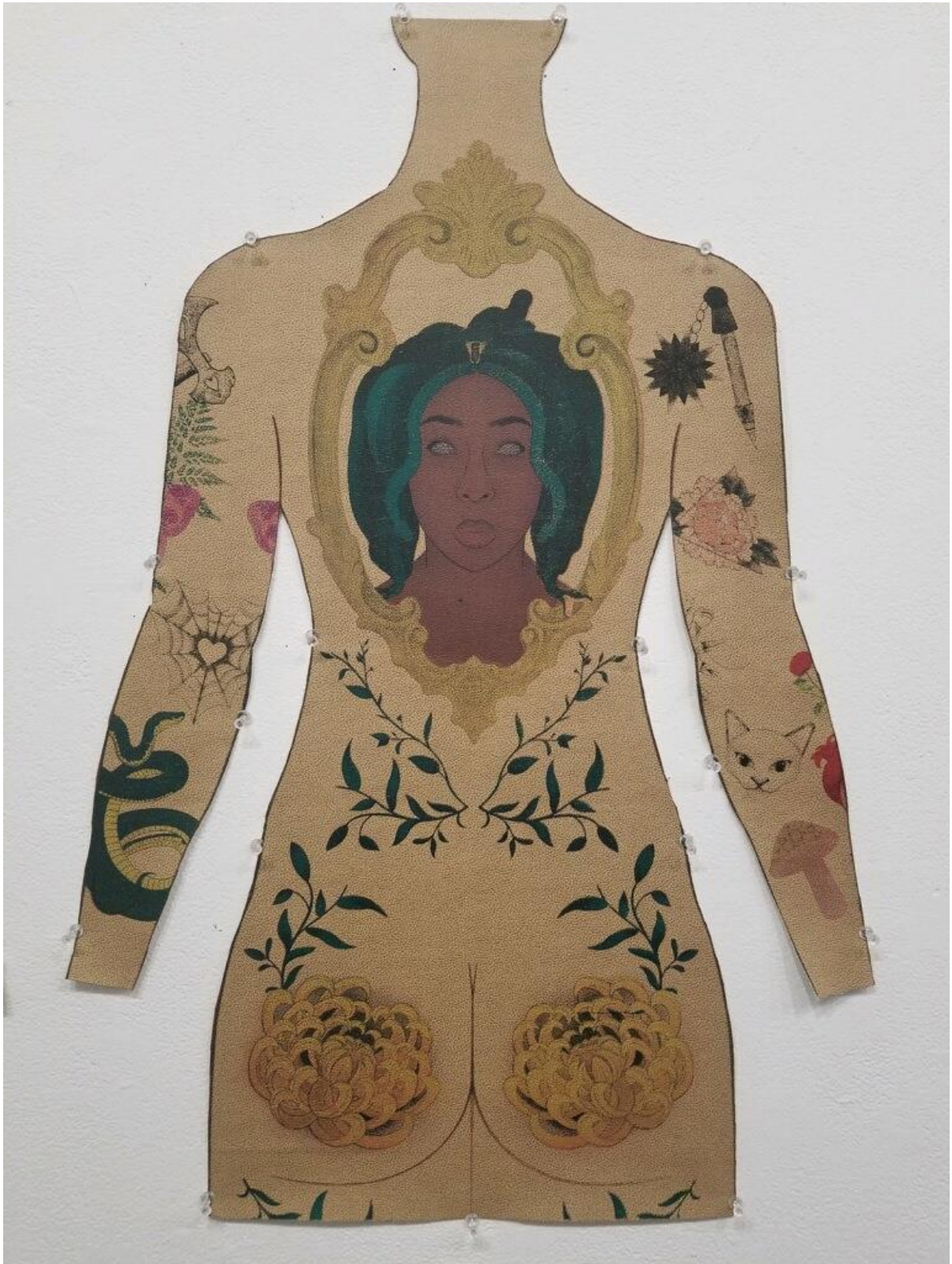
width, uses black for shading, and about one or two other colors. Neo-traditional branches off from this, taking on a more three-dimensional appearance, they continuously expand on the imagery used in traditional tattoos and use a wider variety of colors and line widths than the original standard. This is my favored style to push to replicate, it is primarily noticeable in the pomegranate tattoo on the figure's lower arm and the Medusa portrait on the back. I still include my printmaking influence when forming my designs, the chest piece design is based on the layers of a relief print. While developing that piece, I began with the lightest color and began working up the details in darker colors. This thought process was also present when building the monochromatic moth to the right of the crow.

My interest in body art developed when I was younger, I had many self-esteem issues and found myself gaining comfort in the piercings that I was allowed to get early on. Eventually, tattoos helped build my self-confidence. I often feature myself or aspects of my life in my work, an exercise of concentrating on the things I like about myself. My senior project is a self-portrait in the traditional aspect as well as an insight into my influences and inspirations. The print follows the outline of my body and is to scale my physical being, the works also include tattoos and piercings I already have. The watercolor lotus and triangle floral on the right arm, and the goat on the left are elements I replicated to include in my self-portrait. These pieces are unique to me, each having a special meaning or story. The triangle was my first tattoo, purchased for me as a birthday present from my mother. It's influenced by the patch used to identify homosexual people during the Holocaust and a popular floral geometric design. The second is my watercolor lotus, a memorial piece for my aunt whom I lost during my first semester of college when I was over four hours away from my entire family. I have often used tattoos to help me cope with unfortunate experiences that have come my way, this occurs again in my goat tattoo. This tattoo I got after losing two very close friends due to their choices, so this print is also a self-portrait in the emotional sense.

Much of the imagery seen in this diptych was influenced by previous works I had already created during my time at Purchase. Each section reminds me of a different class, person, or professor that I experienced during my studies in printmaking. When looking through old artworks to find inspiration for this final project, I noticed how drastic an evolution my work had gone through. Combining dark feminine imagery with numerous styles of tattooing strategies was a theme that maintained in my art through the years. I had been curating my prints to build a portfolio for an apprenticeship by replicating the essence of tattoo art through printing since the beginning of my education. By continuing on with the use of classic imagery and vibrant colors, I was able to fulfill my aspirations, proceeding with the construction of my alternative femininity.



“Inked (front)” CMYK screen print with corrective layers on leather textured vinyl. About 32 in height, 2024.



“Inked (Back)” CMYK screen print with corrective layers on leather textured vinyl. About 32 in height, 2024.

## Citations

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- There is even a thorough debate about women's place in modern pop culture, specifically in horror. Some watchers debate what made Laurie Strode the "final girl" in the Halloween franchise. The final girl is the stereotypical purity that women are expected to aim for, while the first victim is typically the "whore". There is no denying that Laurie is the picture-perfect pure American teen, but some debate that Laurie is only a final girl because she is constantly saved by a man. She eventually gains some amount of power from her PTSD while also being consumed by it.

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- Women were expected to be either pure or evil, no in between, this has been the way we were represented throughout history. There is a distinct difference in how the same stories are told when there is a male or female storyteller.

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- Kali, an Indian Goddess born from the frowning forehead of the Warrior Goddess, is seen as the reigning goddess of our times by Hindus. Kali is seen as a “resurgence for the deep feminine,” often seen holding a severed head and a sword, which represents the death of evil forces and freedom from bondage. She challenges the Western idea of good or evil, being neither one nor the other. Like many other dark feminine poster women, this figure helped the author balance motherhood and sexuality.

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- Throughout history women were seen as below men, when a woman displays characteristics that aren't “lady-like” she is often an outcast for the non-traditional characteristics she possesses. Powerful women are commonly painted in a dark light, made out to be the bad guys for doing things a man was always permitted. Women who are deemed “evil” often have some non-tangible control over the men who come in contact with them. In mythology, the prime example is Medusa. She had powers that outmatched the strength and wit of most men, while the goddesses with equal or lesser power to their male counterparts were almost princess-like. Now, her imagery is a symbol used to deter the darkness and protect the wearer, famously on armor or shields to protect those in battle.

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