

Bone of My Bones, Flesh of My Flesh

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Wynnie Mynerva's paintings echo the compositions of Western Old Masters, reimagining themes of male violence, sexual abuse, the gender binary, and patriarchal control. Centuries of phallogocentric artwork perpetuate the dynamic of male as active, non-male as passive. Mynerva rejects this standard, informed by personal experiences of sexual trauma and, in a wider sense, by the art historical canon.

Bone of My Bones, Flesh of My Flesh focuses on the binary creation myths of Abrahamic religions. Lilith, a figure from Judaic biblical tradition and Mesopotamian folklore, is Adam's first wife. Created from the same clay as her male counterpart, she is considered a 'primordial she-demon', banished from Eden after refusing to accept subservience to Adam. Certain interpretations of Lilith claim she denied Adam's requests for her to lay physically under him during sex. Others describe her as consuming her own children in a constant cycle of creation and destruction, patron of still-births and infanticide. The only mention of Lilith within the Old Testament goes as follows:

'Her nobles shall be no more, nor shall kings be proclaimed there; all her princes are gone. Her castles shall be overgrown with thorns, her fortresses with thistles and briars. She shall become an abode for jackals and a haunt for ostriches. Wildcats shall meet with desert beasts, satyrs shall call to one another; There shall the Lilith repose and find for herself a place to rest. There the hoot owl shall nest and lay eggs, hatch them out and gather them in her shadow; There shall the kites assemble, none shall be missing its mate. [...] For the mouth of the LORD has ordered it, [...] It is He who casts the lot for them, and with His hands He marks off their shares of her; They shall possess her forever, and dwell there from generation to generation.' (Isiah 34:12-18)

She is defined by her spirituality, animism, lust for independence, sentenced to a life without men and left to mother and house the other 'ungodly' animals. After Lilith is sent from Eden, God replaces her with the antithetical feminine figure, Eve. Created from the rib of Adam and in debt to him for her very existence, prelapsarian Eve becomes a paradigm of subservience. It is this passage in Genesis from which the exhibition takes its name:

'And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, 'This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.' (Genesis 2:22-23)

Although set in opposition from one another, both Eve and Lilith are agents of chaos. Both share an inability as beings to comply with the gender roles prescribed to them, and neither can exist contentedly within the patriarchal paradise constructed by their 'creator'. The prevalence of these characters within art, condemned to continually serve to visually reestablish traditional conceptions of gender, offers space for reinterpretation.

The exhibition unfolds in three acts. On entering the gallery, two monumental paintings curve around the room, depicting the first act of Mynerva's epic story: *Violated Bliss (I, II)*. Inspired by Rodin's *Gates of Hell* and akin to the complex visual narratives created by Bosch or Michelangelo, the viewer crosses the threshold into a world of colourful, scriptural, sexual chaos. In passing through the gates the second act is revealed, *In First Naked Glory*. Now shunned from a patriarchal paradise, liquid bodies fly in chaos against one another: an exploration into flesh, gender, skin and bodily liberation.

An overgrown thicket of long, black hair hangs adjacent to these works. To inaugurate the exhibition this swathed Mynerva's static body, which was suspended for one evening as a sculptural addition to the exhibition. Their naked back was painted with the image of Adam's rib, and hair cascaded down marking centuries of passed time. Impaled in mid air, they became a symbol of the conquered and forgotten, another character left behind in institutional tradition.

Downstairs, the viewer steps into a womblike pit, dwarfed by vibrant, large-scale paintings facing each other in alliance. This presents the third and final act of Mynerva's dramatic voyage, *Two Bodies Touch on the Same Shore (I, II)*. Dimly lit and suspended, the canvases drape down to the red vinyl floor, completing an immersive installation of painting/sculpture. Lilith and Eve are situated on either canvas, stripped bare and ascending towards the ceiling. They physically oppose each other and yet, standing together as freed gatekeepers of a new world, bring focus to the parallels within their creation narratives. Lilith and Eve, now fleshy abstracted blends of sexual organs, become 'haunts' for lascivious angels, fairies and demons. Each pose as a transformed non-binary archetype, powerful symbols of insurgence.

In *Bone of my Bones, Flesh of my Flesh* Mynerva offers us the possibility of a new visual narrative, an epic that takes from the past yet insists on drawing us forward.