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BABE CAVE: RECLAIMING FEMININITY THROUGH PAINTING

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## ABSTRACT

In many Western societies, our dominant belief systems are derived from Ancient Greek philosophy, which explains that humans are superior to nonhuman animals and nature because they possess *reason*, or the ability to think rationally. As technology has developed over time, these ideas have justified human mistreatment of nature as a means of growth and prosperity. One could argue that factory farming, clear-cutting growth forests, and unmanaged toxic landfills are modern-day manifestations of these exploitative ethics.

In this thesis, I evaluate how the work of Ana Mendieta, Kiki Smith, Jenny Saville, and other female artists over the last half-century challenges anthropocentrism and disrupts its perilous implications. By exploring the connections between women and landscape, women and animals, and women and abjection, I explain how my own work aligns with these artists to dismantle a constructed hierarchy of species. References to historical and cultural examples of human-nature relationships strengthen the associations that my work facilitates between women and the environment. I hope that this thesis encourages the reader to question our interactions with the planet and consider an alternative ecological perspective.

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## Prologue

As a freshman at Penn State University, I took the course “CED 400: Exploring Indigenous Ways of Knowing in the Great Lakes Region,” which studied the culture of the Ojibwe Native American tribe. The course culminated in a trip to the Ojibwe reservations in northern Minnesota, where we attended cultural ceremonies, learned from important community leaders, and stayed with a host family.

This experience introduced me to a worldview different from the one I had grown up learning in my own culture. Though I do not claim to comprehend the full extent of Ojibwe knowledge, I learned one of their core beliefs is the idea that “we are all related.” Birds in the sky, fish in the sea, and plants and animals on earth are all part of an intricate, delicate system of life. If you throw off balance in one area of this system, another area will also be affected.

Today, this idea may seem self-evident given what science tells us about climate change and human effects on the environment. However, for centuries, Judeo-Christian colonizers oppressed indigenous people on the basis that this idea was “pagan” and in conflict with their own belief that humans are superior to other life forms.

Recognizing this profound rift between belief systems has made a long-lasting impact on the way I view the world. I have realized that this thesis emerged out of a longing to explore the connection between humans, specifically women, and nature. My work puts forth broad questions about our relationship to the environment and recognizes my inspiration from Ojibwe ideology. I remain continuously grateful for the resilient and openhearted individuals I met in Minnesota, who generously shared their knowledge with us.

## Chapter 1: Women and Landscape

The site of a cave has long been a place of spiritual awe for humans. In my painting, *Babe Cave*, I implant female figures within this sacred space. They assume power from this setting associated with prehistoric human rituals and the origins of human art. Further, this work draws from the work of artists Ana Mendieta and Sara Lucas in their exploration of gender and nature. In this chapter, I explain how these historical and artistic references influenced me to reclaim subterranean spaces for female rituals and affirm their connection to nature as a source of strength.

### Cenotes, Caves, and the Chthonic: Ancient Interactions

Some of the earliest known expressions of human art and culture occurred within caves, such as the Lascaux Cave in France (17,000 BC). However, evidence indicates that men dominated cave painting rituals. Cave-paintings in France and Spain primarily feature pictures of animals, suggesting that these paintings were made during rituals to facilitate “hunting-magic.” By portraying “a symbolic slaughter, the hunters attempt to anticipate and ensure the death of the real animal.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the paintings served to ensure success and survival for the male hunters in the community.

In contrast to these male-dominated rituals of cave-painting, pre-Columbian Central American cultures often recognized a relationship between women and subterranean spaces. Specifically in Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula and Central America, skulls have been discovered

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<sup>1</sup> Jung, *Man and Symbols*, 235.

from human sacrifices to cenotes, or caverns filled with water named after the Maya word “Dznonot” or “well.” Spanish conquistadors documented Mayan sacrifice rituals to the rain god Chaac, where young people were lowered into the cenote to either bring back messages from the gods or drown. It was believed that the cenotes were windows into the underworld, and a crossroads between the living and dead. Unlike Christian ideas of hell as hot and fiery, the Mayans believed the “Xibalba” (underworld / place of fear) was a cold and dark place.<sup>2</sup>

The relationship between chthonic forces and women were prominently realized in the rituals at Delphi, where a young virgin oracle would provide prophecies to visitors. Ancient Greek philosopher Strabo (64 BC – 25 AD) stated that “the seat of the oracle is a cavern hollowed down in the depths... from which arises pneuma that inspires a divine state of possession.”<sup>3</sup> Underground fumes at Delphi allowed the oracle to connect with the gods and imbued her with divine power to foretell the futures of thousands of visitors from across the ancient world.

These associations between human ritual and subterranean spaces inspired my painting, *Babe Cave*. I am interested in the influence of gender in each of these examples, which I investigate through my own work. I look to artists such as Ana Mendieta, who expresses a female relationship to chthonic spaces. Reflecting on the reservation of caves for male-dominated cave painting rituals, I am inspired by Sara Lucas, who overthrows conventional practices and reclaims them for women.

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<sup>2</sup> Evans, Underworld.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, Ancient Greek Oracle.





**Figure 1: Lascaux Cave, 17,000 – 15,000 BCE. [www.sacred-sites.org](http://www.sacred-sites.org)**



**Figure 2: Mayan Cenote, Yucatan, Mexico. [www.thoughtco.com](http://www.thoughtco.com)**

### **Ana Mendieta, Sara Lucas**

Ana Mendieta was a Cuban-American artist who deeply explored the relationship between women and nature. While she is often recognized for her *Siluetas* series, where she

embedded her own figure into different landscapes around Iowa and Mexico, Mendieta's lesser known *Esculturas Rupestres (Rupestrian Sculptures)* are a powerful representation of women in nature. The artist created these works by "carving fertility figures into the caves and cliffs of her native land (Cuba). In one of these installations, *Mujeres de Piedra*, Mendieta carved ten sculptures of Taíno female dieties into the limestone caves at the Escaleras de Jaruco national park. Some of these included: "Albohoa (Goddess of Beauty), Atabey (Mother of the Waters), Bacayu (Light of Day), Guacar (First Menstruation), Guabancex (Wind Goddess), Guanaroca (First Woman), Itiba Cahubaba (Old Mother of the Blood), Iyare (Mother Goddess), and Maroya (Moon Goddess)."<sup>4</sup>

These works not only establish a primordial connection between women and earth, but also assert Mendieta's own presence and identity. By creating sculptures of women that emphasize their femininity and fertility, Mendieta celebrates the reproductive abilities of the female body. She refers to pre-Columbian practices of goddess worship and proclaims women as sacred. Furthermore, she subverts ancient male-centered rituals of cave-painting and allows female goddesses to fill this space.

*Mujeres de Piedra* is powerful in its relevance to both the ancient and the contemporary. It serves as a mystical and spiritual place, where the sculptures blend into the cave and seem that they belong there. A sense of human disruption in the environment is not evident, but rather, it appears as if the sculptures are a natural part of the landscape. This thus affirms that women are connected to earth as life-giving, resource-bearing entities. The viewer may be reminded that while goddess worship was practiced in the past, women remain venerable eternally.

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<sup>4</sup> Castillo, Ana Mendieta.

Though her work is not related to subterranean spaces, I am also inspired by Sara Lucas' work in its ability to dismantle established structures and return power to women. Specifically in her work *One Thousand Eggs: For Women*, which was a performance and installation staged in both Mexico City and New York, participants “painted” a gallery wall by throwing eggs at it in a collective action. Lucas intentionally uses this work to refer to an early Christian ritual of “egg tossing” around Easter time to celebrate the rebirth of spring. She rethinks this ritual, as well as current political debates over the female reproductive system, by putting women in control of the egg, a symbol of the female ovary. *One Thousand Eggs* enables women to perform liberating destruction of restrictions imposed on their own bodies.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 3: Sara Lucas. *One Thousand Eggs*. Performance with eggs and wall, September 13, 2018, The New Museum, New York, New York.**

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<sup>5</sup> One Thousand Eggs.



**Figure 4: Sara Lucas. *One Thousand Eggs*. Performance with eggs and wall, September 13, 2018, The New Museum, New York, New York.**



**Figure 5: Ana Mendieta. *Las Mujeres de Piedra*. 1981, Jaruco Park, Havana, Cuba.**



**Figure 6: Ana Mendieta. *Las Mujeres de Piedra*. 1981, Jaruco Park, Havana, Cuba.**





Figure 7. *Babe Cave*. 2018, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 80x60 inches.

## Babe Cave

*Babe Cave* is set in a deep subterranean enclosure that is exclusively female. The main figure squats down on her haunches, assuming an almost animal-like position of crouching on all fours. She stares confrontationally at the viewers as she urinates into the water. Behind her, the silhouettes of two other female figures dance wildly in projection against the wall of the cave.

Through their emboldened abjection and dancing, these women represent their comfort within the cavernous landscape. Though they draw strength from the original site of human art making, they create their own female ritual where they are free to brazenly abandon self-consciousness. The primordial connection between woman and nature becomes an archaic source of power that enables them to manipulate prehistoric rituals and create an alternative experience.

By depicting these female figures in acts of resilient rebellion, this work recalls the artistic influences of Ana Mendieta and Sara Lucas. Like Mendieta's *Esculturas Rupesterias*, the cave becomes a setting for celebration of women. Joined together through sensual dancing and reckless abjection, the figures draw attention to their bodies and alluring feminine power. Furthermore, they recall Sara Lucas' "One Thousand Eggs" performance by facilitating their own unique ritual. They take control of their own bodies, casting limitations aside and embracing their most carnal states of being.

More broadly, *Babe Cave* invalidates anthropocentrism as a dominant belief system in our culture. It returns us to our prehistoric roots, when humans hallowed nature rather than exploited it. Specifically, it fuses women with their landscape, exposing the depth of our connection to earth as natural beings ourselves. I hope that this painting may provoke greater consideration of our current disconnect from the environment, and that these women may guide us back to a deeper relationship with our world.

## Chapter 2: Women and Animals

While Chapter 1 explores the relationship between women and landscape as a source of female empowerment, Chapter 2 discusses the shared experiences of women and animals. I reference shamanism to provide a cultural influence for my painting *She's a Beast*, and drawings *Dragging My Feet* and *The Web Begins in Liquid Form*. Further, I strengthen the context of my own work by evaluating Louise Bourgeois' *Maman* sculptures and Jenny Saville's painting *Host*.

### Shamanism – Representing the Animal

In various shamanistic traditions, one who imitates the animal is capable of assuming its powers and psychologically appropriating its courage. Even in the prehistoric cave paintings at Lascaux, “there is a shaman depicted, lying in a trance, wearing a bird mask with the figure of a bird perched on a staff beside him.”<sup>6</sup> He presides above the other animals as a god or spiritual leader, and is thought to control the hunting expedition.

Shamanism continues to be practiced in places such as Siberia, where the word “shaman” is thought to have originated from. These individuals often play important roles as community healers and leaders. They perform ceremonies that evoke revered animals such as reindeer, whales, and bears.<sup>7</sup> Because one of the main responsibilities of a shaman is to transfer messages between this world and a spirit world, representing animals enables them leave their own body and transcend this reality. It imbues them with a unique method of communication and validates animals as an essential part of life.

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<sup>6</sup> Jung, 151.

<sup>7</sup> Walker, Shamanism Siberia.

In most Western cultures however, human capacity for rational thinking has long established our superiority over non-human animals. While ritualistic association with animals was once seen as a source of power, and still is in many indigenous cultures today, it may be acknowledged as “primitive” or “uncivilized” in a Western worldview. With the rise of feminist ecology, female artists such as Louise Bourgeois and Jenny Saville have reclaimed our connection to animals and appropriated their innate qualities to inform human narratives.<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 8: Shaman at Lascaux. [www.bradshawfoundation.com](http://www.bradshawfoundation.com)**

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<sup>8</sup> Heartney, Eco-Feminism.



Louise Bourgeois, Jenny Saville



Figure 9: Louise Bourgeois. *Maman*. 1999, steel and marble, Tate Modern, London.



Figure 10: Jenny Saville. *Host*. 2000, oil on canvas, 115 x 178.7 inches.

In the *Maman* sculptures by Louise Bourgeois, the artist uses a spider to symbolize her own mother. Their immense scale and pointed feet are juxtaposed by their precarious balance and delicate fragility. Though spiders are often associated with feelings of fear and disgust, these sculptures refer to the “deliberate, clever, patient, soothing, reasonable, dainty, and subtle”<sup>9</sup> qualities possessed by both a spider and a mother. Bourgeois takes a lowly creature capable of being squashed, and she transforms it into its opposite.

In this way, Bourgeois uses the symbol of an animal to complicate her own mother figure. By presenting us with a sculpture that is immense and terrifying, but also vulnerable to its own collapse, she asks the viewer to consider the intricate dynamics of maternal roles. She embraces the animal as a means of more deeply exploring the human, specifically, the mother figure. With her *Maman* sculptures, she circumvents social restrictions on human behavior and reverts to prehistoric rituals of embodying the animal.

In Jenny Saville’s paintings, she also conflates humans with non-human animals to more clearly portray human experiences. Particularly in her work *Host*, Saville represents an engorged, pregnant female body lined with the multiple teats of a pig-like mammal.<sup>10</sup> It takes a moment to fully register the work. We are not sure if the figure has pig legs or human legs. Does the figure have a hoof tucked into the body or a breast sagging across her chest? The horizontal positioning of the body further complicates the image, as it portrays a pig sprawled sideways or a reclining female nude. Her compositional focus on the swollen belly demonstrates the extent to which the female body undergoes transformation in this process. The title itself refers to the maternal responsibilities of nourishing and supporting another organism growing within the body, just as

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<sup>9</sup> Bourgeois *Maman*.

<sup>10</sup> Sylvester, *Jenny Saville Works*.

women have been historically responsible for the domestic tasks of nourishing family and hosting guests.

Saville therefore uses the animal, specifically the mammalian body, to emphasize the struggles and capabilities of the human bodies. She overrides ideas that humans are superior to animals and instead draws attention to our intense similarities. In *Host*, humans are not exalted to a lofty position of dominance, but instead, reverted to our most primitive animal functions. This intimate connection between human and non-human bodies reveals the carnal struggle of hosting a child within the female body, and the raw strength she must possess to endure.



Figure 11: *She's a Beast*. 2018, Oil on canvas, 67x51 inches.



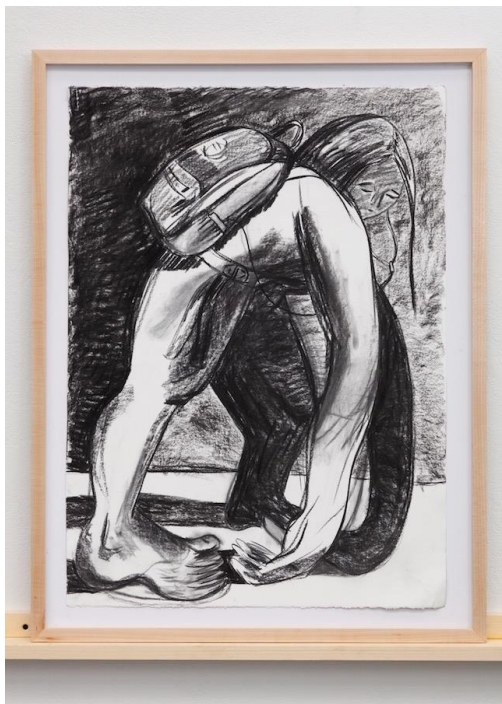


Figure 12: *Dragging My Feet*. 2018, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 inches

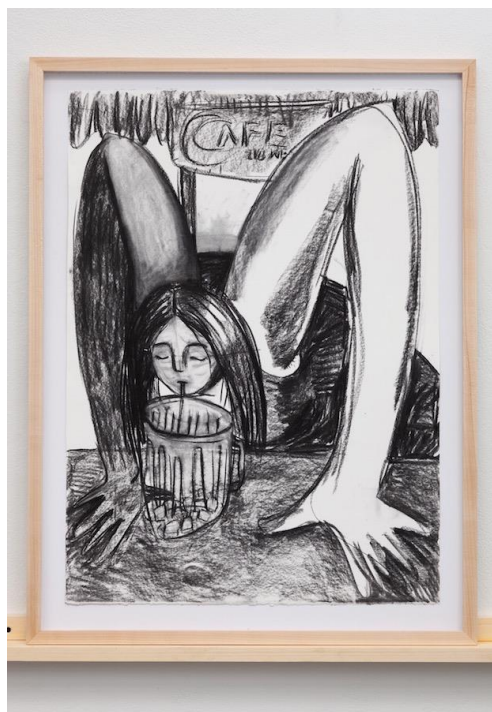


Figure 13: *The Web Begins in Liquid Form*. 2018, charcoal on paper, 30 x 22 inches.

### **She's A Beast And Drawings:**

In my painting, *She's a Beast*, the figure imitates a feline creature retreating to her den. She hovers in a recoiled position, ready to lunge forward at any moment. Her hand is lined in red, suggesting blood and sacrifice. The smoke rising in front of her and the dark night sky behind her further emotes the feeling of ritual.

Viewing this image, one may recall the furtive, secretive prowess of a lioness. The figure specifically imitates a feline creature to assume their stealthy and mysterious personalities. Even the title uses contemporary language to align her with a ferocious, unstoppable creature. She assumes the shamanistic role of a shape-shifter, blurring the distinctions between her own feminine allure and the calculated reserve of a powerful cat.

In my drawings, I also associate female figures with animals to further inform their human experiences. For example, in *The Web Begins in Liquid Form*, the figure's exaggerated arms mimic a spider or lotus, crouched in position and anticipating its next move. Like Louis Bourgeois' *Maman* sculptures, this work relates the human to the insect to amplify her persistence, precariousness, and nimbleness. In *Dragging My Feet*, the figure is almost ape-like, dragging her knuckles across the ground and hauling the weight of her enormous feet. By assuming the labored motion of a primate, she emphasizes her own stubborn resistance.

The work discussed in this chapter reveals the extent to which the female body and the animal are related. I reference shamanistic practices of revering animals, as well as the work of Bourgeois and Saville that exposes distinct human-animal connotations. These influences encourage me to refuse perpetuation of hierarchy between humans and animals, and more broadly, humans and nature. Merging the female with the animal reminds us of our similarities as living beings, and our shared belonging to the greater system of life.

### Chapter 3: The Female Body and Abjection

“Anthropologically, abjection has been seen to do with the ambiguity of borders, in particular, those of the body and its markers (hair of the head, nails, body fluids, human excreta, erotic sensuality) and those of transitional states (menstruation, childhood/adulthood, marriage, the cadaver).”<sup>11</sup> In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* by Julia Kristeva, she explains that we are repulsed by the abject because it is a form of disintegration that threatens the boundaries between self and the external.

Furthermore, Kristeva brings “attention to the role of the woman and the non-human animal as abject beings that play key roles in societal and cultural renewal.”<sup>12</sup> She explains that the mother and the female animal both signify the abject body because they possess the primitive functions of menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth. Their bodies experience malleability, formlessness, and impurity. They embody the ultimate abject being as they disturb their own boundaries and undermine their own form.

Therefore, female abjection blurs the distinctions between the ‘civilized and exceptional’ human and the inferior non-human animal. While this association has historically been used to diminish the female body, in the last half-century, artists have manipulated this relationship to demonstrate the maternal authority of women and her capability of giving birth to all life. They

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<sup>11</sup> Arya, and Crane, *Abject Visions*, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Arya, and Crane, 91.

encourage the viewer to question dominance *over* nature as a source of power and embrace instead connection *to* nature as a means of female empowerment.<sup>13</sup>

### Kiki Smith



Figure 14: Kiki Smith. *Deer Birth*. 2002, Bronze, 39 x 101 x 24 inches.

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<sup>13</sup> Warren, *Feminist Environmental Philosophy*.





Figure 15: *Pee Body*, Kiki Smith. 1992, Wax and glass beads, 28 x 28 x 28 inches, Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Boston.



Figure 16: Kiki Smith. *Tale*. 1992, wax sculpture, 160 x 23 x 23 inches.

Kiki Smith is an artist who intentionally fuses women and animals to explore their shared fertility, sensuality, and mortality. In her work *Born (Deer Birth)*, Smith sculpts a standing deer, with a woman seeming to emerge from behind her. The sculpture mimics an act of childbirth, with the grown woman acting as the fetus and the deer as the mother.<sup>14</sup> By joining their blood and flesh together in a single extended body, Smith reveals the strength of their connection to each other as reproductive beings.

Between 1992 and 1993, Smith created a series of sculptures that portrayed women performing exaggerated and explicit forms of abjection. “*Pee Body* (1992) depicts a nude female figure in wax, crouched on the floor relieving herself, urine trailing behind in the form of yellow beads. A gush of red beads streams from the vagina of the standing nude in *Train* (1993), while *Tail* (1992) presents a similar personage on all fours with a long trail of excrement extending from her anus.”<sup>15</sup>

Through these jarring and disturbing sculptures, Smith imposes a visceral reaction on her viewer. We are forced to confront the female body at its most vulnerable state when it is transforms into an unstable form. While they may not lead the viewer to reflect on the remarkable life-giving capacities of the female body, they force us to reckon with our own disgust and horror towards the abject. These works encourage us to acknowledge the abject as a powerfully disruptive force and a vital function of the human body.

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<sup>14</sup> Arya, Crane, 94.

<sup>15</sup> Kiki Smith – Collection.

**Jenny Saville**

**Figure 17: Jenny Saville. *Propped*. 1992, oil on canvas, 84 x 72 inches.**



**Figure 18: Jenny Saville. *The Mothers*. 2011, oil on canvas.**

In Jenny Saville's work, she challenges conventions of the sterilized and purified female nude. Through paintings of immensely fleshy and engorged women, Saville "transgresses the borders between human and animal to the point of metamorphosis."<sup>16</sup> Particularly in her early works *Propped* and *Branded*, she presents women with massive, disproportionate bodies, clutching fistfuls of their own skin. Words like "supportive," "petite," "decorative," and

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<sup>16</sup> Arya, Crane, 94.

“precious” are written over top of the women, contrasting with the bodies that they seem to describe.

In an interview with *The Independent* in 1994, Saville said she hoped these portraits would “encourage people to discuss and look at how women have been made by man.”<sup>17</sup> By presenting these bodies that spill out from their skeletal frames and threaten to overflow out of the painting itself, Saville creates a portrait of women in a malleable and transformative state. They refuse to be confined by limitations of a pure, thin, and sterile female body, which are often defining qualities of beauty in our society. Instead, they embrace Kristeva’s theories of the female body as abject, and challenge expectations of beauty that stem from a desire to retain form and avoid threats to stability of the body.

Her later work more deeply investigates the pregnant female body and her role as a mother. In her painting *Host*, discussed in Chapter 2, Saville equates her pregnant body to a pig’s body and portrays a splayed underbelly covered in teats. *The Mothers* references *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* by Leonardo da Vinci, as she uses gestural marks of charcoal to indicate the fluctuating nature of pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood. She explained that this interest in the maternal figure “came from actually growing a child inside my body.”<sup>18</sup> Though she does not explicitly portray menstruation or childbirth as material leaving the body, she references these innately abject experiences to render the female body ever changing. This work rejects the pure and idealized female body as dysfunctional and unrealistic, while embracing our evolutionary and animalistic origins.

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<sup>17</sup> Sylvester, Kane.

<sup>18</sup> Sylvester, Kane.

**Slamdunk, Tequila Sunrise**



**Figure 19:** *Slamdunk*. 2018, oil on canvas, 42 x 36 inches.





**Figure 20:** *Tequila Sunrise*. 2018, oil on canvas, 47 x 47 inches.

In my works *Slamdunk* and *Tequila Sunrise*, I align myself with these artists by exploring abjection as a means of transformative female empowerment. The first of these works was *Slamdunk*, which I made this summer at the Yale Norfolk School of Art, an intensive six-week

program where young artists from different universities come together to make work and participate in dialogue with faculty from the Yale School of Art.

I had been receiving critical feedback on the lack of emotiveness in the work I was making at the start of the program, which portrayed abstracted versions of modern-day group rituals. In response to these reactions, I felt compelled to create an explosive painting that accessed raw and powerful feeling. *Slamdunk* was the result, in which I stripped information down to one visceral experience.

Though I did not display my painting *Slamdunk* in my senior thesis show, it served as the catalyst for the work I made this year. I view the subject in this painting as similar to a Titan from Ancient Greek mythology – she is the cruder, more primitive precedent to the other female figures in my show. By expelling vomit from her body, she symbolizes a shedding process and gives birth to the next generation of women in my work.

In *Tequila Sunrise*, I was resolved to reverse the experience of vomiting. In reality, throwing up can feel pathetic and helpless. However, I wanted to portray this experience as a moment of strength wherein the body identifies a poison and ferociously rejects it. I also reference a childhood memory of feeling terrified and powerless when I crawled into the base of a tree and saw the green eyes of an animal glowing above me. In this painting, I reinvent this memory by confusing the viewer – is the figure expelling vomit or inhaling light?

I further imbue this figure with power through her violent motion, relationship to the landscape, and commanding cheetah print dress. She lunges forward as if she's been punched in the gut, referencing John the Evangelist in Giotto's *Lamentation of Christ*. Just as he throws his arms back in anguish and disbelief, this figure throws her arms back in a powerful expression of



shock. Her strong, thick legs solidify her flailing body; one can imagine them rooted into the ground like a tree.

Rather than accepting abjection as a weakness to distinguish women from the intact, solid male body, the figures in this work embrace abjection as a means of empowerment. Like the figure in *She's a Beast*, they act as shape shifters who transform their bodies from one form to another. Though they do not reference the specific female functions of menstruation and childbirth, the ferocious abjection from their own bodies alludes to their role as life-giving entities. They value their natural bodily functions as a means of purifying themselves, and in turn, implicate our connection to animals.

Like the work of Kiki Smith and Jenny Saville, I hope that these paintings undermine the sterile and idealized version of the female body, which is often perpetuated in the media of our consumer driven society. It is my intent that this work exposes the impossibility of this imagined body by revealing women in their most carnal and animalistic states. While the work presents an alternative version of the female experience, it also rejects the idea that humans are distinct from other animals. Similar to the work discussed so far in this thesis, these paintings remove women from a constructed realm of separateness and implant them in nature with a sense of belonging. Through their own shameless abjection, these women deconstruct a human-centered worldview and pioneer a world more inclusive and tolerant of all life.

#### **Chapter 4: Conclusion, Babe Cave – Senior Thesis Show**

My senior thesis show took place in the Art Alley HUB-Robeson Gallery between December 10 and January 20. I had applied for this space almost a year in advance for the coveted opportunity to show my work in a central location on campus where many visitors outside the art community would see it.

The installation process was a critical and exciting final step in preparing the show. Because each of my works feature a single female figure, I had the opportunity to create a dialogue between them and merge their worlds together when I installed the show. For example, “Babe Cave” was centered on the longest wall, and the figures in the paintings surrounding her were positioned to direct their gaze towards her. The installation of the show truly reinforced its name, “Babe Cave,” when the visitors entered the gallery and were immersed in an enclosure of powerful female protagonists.

Because the show was installed in a central area of campus, many people with different relationships to the university were able to see it. This was a new experience for me, as faculty and students from the School of Visual Arts are typically my main audience. Some interesting conversations occurred with visitors who were curious about my abstraction of the figure. I had one conversation with a woman who quite frankly told me she “didn’t get my work and didn’t like it!” However, once she talked to the Exhibition Coordinator Sara Kipp about my work, who suggested that I abstract the figure to indicate feeling vulnerable or awkward in a female body, she felt that she could relate to it. These kinds of interactions were valuable because they asked me to more deeply consider my stylistic decisions and how they implicate the viewer.

I was happy to receive positive feedback from my peers and faculty in the School of Visual Arts. In particular, there was a great response to the charcoal drawings. It seemed that

limiting my materials to charcoal and paper enabled me to create highly expressive works, and visitors were able to deeply connect to them. Though the charcoal drawings were popular, people also responded positively to the saturated color that united my paintings in the show.

The reception was on January 17 from 4:00-6:00 PM. I was delighted to have so many family and friends in attendance. After almost four years in the School of Visual Arts, it felt like a major accomplishment to culminate my years of work and dedication to my practice into a solo show that I could share with so many people who are important to me. Of course, it was only fitting that I wore a cheetah print dress, with the thought that maybe I could cross between this reality and the alternate landscape of emboldened young women.



**Figure 21: “Babe Cave” Reception. January 17, 2019.**



**Figure 22: “Babe Cave” Installation.**



**Figure 23: “Babe Cave” Reception. January 17, 2019.**

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## ACADEMIC VITA

**Lindsey Marie Kircher**

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### EDUCATION

Schreyer Honors College, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA  
Graduation May 2019

Yale Norfolk Summer School of Art, May – June 2018

Studio Arts College International, Florence Italy, study abroad spring semester 2017

Major: Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art, Concentration in Drawing and Painting

Minors: Spanish, Arts Entrepreneurship

### SOLO AND TWO PERSON EXHIBITIONS

- *Babe Cave*, Senior Honors Thesis Show, HUB-Robeson Galleries, Dec 2018 - Jan 2019
- *I Am Woman*, Two-Person Show, Eisenhower Auditorium Penn State, September 2018
- *Paintings by Lindsey Kircher - Art on the Move*, Old Main Building Penn State University, May 2018 - September 2018
- *Gotta Get Out!*, Two Person Show with Catie Dillon, Patterson Gallery, January 2018

### GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- *Penn State Undergraduate Juried Show*, Zoller Gallery, February 2019
- *Penn State SOVA Scholarship Show*, Zoller Gallery, October 2018
- *Yale Norfolk Open Studios*, Norfolk, Connecticut, June 2018
- *Center for Arts and Crafts Faculty Show*, HUB-Robeson Gallery, March 2018
- *"Public Body, Private Life."* SACI, Florence, Italy, April 2017
- *"#psustudyabroad,"* Group Show, Zoller Gallery, October 2016

### AWARDS

- Creative Achievement Award, recognizing students who exemplify the objectives of the college with respect to enhancement of the arts, March 2018

- Kara D. Berggren Award, recognizing the most outstanding piece of artwork in the undergraduate juried student art exhibition, February 2019
- Exhibiting artist at Penn State College of Arts and Architecture Scholarship Donor Reception, November 2018
- Alfred/Christy/Davis/Fink Creative Innovation Award, October 2018
- Nominated and selected to attend Yale Norfolk School of Art, summer 2018

## **PUBLIC WORKS**

- Mural in Saxby's Coffee Shop, Penn State Business Building, 30'8'ft, August 2018

## **PRESS**

- January 2019, *Student displays art exhibit, 'Babe Cave' in the HUB-Robeson Center*, Madeline McCabe, The Daily Collegian
- September 2018, *From Sketch to Café: PSU Muralist Lindsey Kircher*, Greg Galiffa, Saxbys Stories

## **WORK EXPERIENCE**

- Gallery Interpretation and Public Programs Intern at the Palmer Museum of Art, Spring 2019
- Art Instructor at The Center for Arts and Crafts at Penn State, Spring 2018, Fall 2018. Oil Painting Instructor to Penn State undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty.
- Thesis Research Assistant, Nicaragua, Fall 2017. Worked with non-profit organization Potters for Peace, assisted with interviewing, translating, and transcribing interviews with indigenous artisans in Managua and Condega.

## **ACTIVITIES and LEADERSHIP**

- President of Penn State Painting Club, undergraduate organization for Drawing and Painting BFA students, 2018-19. Responsibilities include organizing visiting artist lectures and studio visits, planning field trips, curating group shows, and fundraising.