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Megan Greene: Rappaccini's Daughter

Megan Greene's bestiary is a chaotic symphony of forms tightly woven together in a decorative fantasy. She has generated her own invented iconography of grotesque and macabre forms that are handsomely embellished with baroque details.

In his treatise *American Technical Sublime*, historian David E. Nye states that the beauty perceived in nature and technology will differ: "One person's sublime may be another's abomination." An individual may find grace in nature, in the curve of a leaf; another may find elegance in technology, in the arch of a bridge.

Greene finds the sublime simultaneously in contrasts of nature and technology, primitive and futuristic, feminine and masculine, plant and animal, ritualistic totems and machinery, carnal and ghostly, tribal and rococo. These eclectic elements inspire the genesis of Greene's metamorphic species.

The title of her exhibit is taken from a Nathaniel Hawthorne story. *Rappaccini's Daughter* is the tale of a young man who spies an angelic woman kept in a scientist's garden surrounded by poisonous plants. The protagonist yearns for this woman, an exquisite but deadly Venus flytrap temptress who has absorbed the garden's poisons and has herself become toxic.

The narrative is an allegory of lust, temptation, damnation and redemption, the struggle between flesh and spirit. The garden is a metaphor for Eden's paradise, the woman the forbidden fruit.

Patterns of plant life such as roses and vines appeal to Greene. Of particular fascination to her are fragments of the animal kingdom: fur, feathers, leather, claws, horns, shells, teeth. Braids of hair are intermingled with scales, flowers, drapes, mushrooms, military medals, ruffles, tiaras, a pig's ear.

Greene is fond of the dichotomy inherent in Victorian embellishment and proper etiquette, between the era's lovely, pretentious artifices and the unsavory underbelly of those pretensions.

Greene's intricate works are drawn on black paper with colored pencils and gouache. The choice to use black paper was motivated by the emptiness of white paper. For Greene, white represents a challenging blankness, a void to fill, whereas black is a space already filled with potential.

The effect of these curiosities, scaled to human proportions and presented upon a black background, is that of staged set pieces or elaborate adornments set against the velvet of a jeweler's box.

They resemble *teratomas*, a type of monstrous ovarian cyst which grows from a mass of cells into an often benign tumor. These bizarre products of asexual reproduction are *dermoids*, which come complete with a clump of flesh with hair, teeth, nails, occasionally even higher organs such as eyes and extremities.

Greene's *bioluminescent*, ectoplasmic phantasms are floating apparitions encapsulated in an undefined space and time. It is uncertain if they are sea creatures swimming through the abyss of a distant past or if they are evolving, *Gigeresque*, alien space chimeras.

These creatures are full of ambiguities, whether they are alive or dead, displayed like a taxidermist's specimen. They are in a perpetual state of transformation, their *hermaphroditic* features enshrouded in mystery.