

THE PRINCE PROJECT

A large part of my working process is research. Making connections to the way in which Greek mythological characters or symbols repackage themselves in contemporary clothes has given me subject matter to mold in three dimensions. Researching these often intricate, web-like connections has become a reflexive by-product of my thought process.

My ideas for The Prince Project have been developing for several years. At first, scraps of paper containing notes or images were filed. Eventually, these files became dense. While examining the material; I began to visualize sculptures that could create a narrative for the collected images. When gathering my thoughts for this project, it was important that the project could be interpreted on two levels: as an internal, non-linear narrative as well as a less opaque narrative which could tap into universal emotions and concerns.

While collecting disparate bits of information, I initially concentrated on the prince figure in The Prince Project. Why did I want to make a prince? Would he be my prince charming, my “knight in shining armor”? Would he be a prince of darkness, or of light? Would my prince be a man, many men, or no man at all? Should my prince be a woman? Could my Prince be me?

As I was vacillating between all of the above possibilities, the answer eventually became obvious. He was none of the above, but all of them in their totality. Mary Shelly's 1818 novel, *Frankenstein* has been a long-term inspiration for me. The struggle between the characters and the story's multiple interpretations has left a lasting impression in my mind. Thoughts of this story would continually creep into my studio practice. On most occasions, I would think of this story as I was literally using my hands to manifest something in three dimensions. Not surprisingly, the most obvious way I started to relate this novel to my work was through my sculpting. My sculptures are made from carved and cast parts, which are adhered together or form fitted together to make a formal, conceptual, evolving whole. This process often reminded me of how the “Creation” in Frankenstein was sewn together from several disparate dead parts to make one monstrous body.

My studio practice is very hands on. Part of the time is spent on manual labor. Several techniques are used to get forms to fuse in this formal and conceptual cohesive whole. What conceptually guides this manual labor is often a dance between my head and my hands; time is spent grappling with various ideas and figuring how to best realize them. It is a dubious process I have come to love and protect, as my studio practice is the only place I can freely coalesce multiple points of reference into the rearrangement of thought with a new logic.

I began to notice how my studio practice had become a surrogate being. Being away from it for long amounts of time was like being away from a lover or a soul mate. I began to question the idea of a soul mate. The question of “what does one truly need to feel complete?” was the initial impetus for this project. A lover, a life's work, a spirituality; all can help one feel complete. As a young girl, I had an imaginary friend named Susan. I would speak to her privately whenever I chose to. She was a convenient companion that popped into my life with the flick of a thought. As magically as I would make her appear, I could

make her temporarily disappear. Her omnipresence gave me comfort, as I always knew I had a steadfast friend.

I decided it was time to confront how my studio practice was becoming an all encompassing imaginary friend. Similar to the making of Frankenstein's creation, an artist's studio practice can be at times magical, or conversely, it can feel monstrous. I felt it was time to speak through my sculptures with wonderment, excitement, elation, disappointment, disgust, and horror. All of these are emotions I have felt in my studio practice. I was determined to put all of these emotions into a three dimensional manifestation of a sculptural soul mate.

As I began plans for creating my surrogate being, thoughts and research of artificial intelligence surfaced. Previous (and ongoing) attempts to create artificial life are a controversial topic for many. It seems that efforts to create artificial life are simultaneously renounced, celebrated, termed as fact, and relegated as fiction. What seems to remain consistent is that these attempts continue. History has proven that humans have an intrinsic need to feel they understand their origin of life, as imbuing matter with human qualities is one way to make us feel in control of our collective destiny. This understanding of life can come in various forms: through an organized religion, a personal ethos, a scientific experiment, or games simulating human movement and thinking.

During the middle Ages, the alchemical myth of the Philosophers Stone turning lead into gold was an attempt to prove that all materials inherently have a religious savior inside them. If this transformation myth was proven, it would confirm that humans, as well as every material on the earth, had been created by a God. In the eighteenth century, automatons built initially as entertainment carnival attractions soon took a more sophisticated role than slight of hand trickery. In the name of science, mechanical reproductions we created to better understand human and animal biology. To some, this opened a wide door of discovery and experimentation. To others, it began to threaten the notion that only a supernatural force could create a movable being. In 1741, Vaucanson's artificial duck expelled fecal matter out of mechanical bowels. In 1890, Thomas Edison's much anticipated doll Eve is pulled from mass production, as consumers were reportedly disturbed by the howling voices pre recorded inside the doll's tin body (the Edison's Eve doll communicated emotions, cried, giggled and demanded food and diaper assistance through holes in her stomach to her buyer). The Sociable Machine Project at MIT tapped into simulating human psychology by creating the first expressive robot, named Kismet. Kismet has a "15 DoF face" that is motorized and jointed to express a varying degree of facial expressions (among a plethora of movements, Kismet can perk its ears in interested fashion and can furrow its brow in disappointment). Human simulation through technology is offered as yet another aperture to consider a "thinking" organism independent of a spiritual ethos. In 1997, Chessmaster 900 made national headlines when it defeated US chess champion Larry Christiansen, being the first desktop computer program to outsmart human intelligence. Today, cloning and stem cell research are making headlines as advanced scientific/ biological methods of simulating and creating a life source that is independent of the creation myth.

In Mary Shelly's novel, the creation is begun as an experiment by Victor Frankenstein. Through electricity, the creation is "brought to life". The moment the creation has a visible pulse running through its mismatched parts is exhilarating to Victor Frankenstein. Finally! His postulations and theories had been proven as fact! Exhilaration soon turns into

exasperation, as the experiment quickly shows serious ramifications. Victor soon realizes that not only is he solely responsible for the well being of this breathing, moving, spewing form; he is confronted with being responsible for a new race of these monstrous bodies. The Creation's one request to his creator is for him to "build" him a mate. In return for this constructed partner, the Creation vowed to forever leave Victor in peace as in his pre-laboratory life. As the novel unwinds, Victor's conscious haunts and forbids him to fulfill his promise to the creature he has brought to life. Enraged, the Creation vows to destroy everything Victor has ever loved so he would feel loneliness and emptiness, a plight the Creation is certain is his doomed destiny. Both beings fall into a downward spiral of ruination. For the Creation, his physicality is what is at stake: his composite flesh. For Victor not only is his body in jeopardy, the lives of every person that he has loved are hunted and put into grave danger.

Similar to the Creation in Mary Shelly's novel, my Prince would also question his presence on the earth and yearn for a mate with which to experience true love. My prince figure would not be sculpted of disparate parts inspired by real men who have entered my life, but from men who had entered a non-linear narrative I had been working on (in text form and through my sculptures) for several years. My prince is a three-dimensional monstrous fusion comprised of twenty-one parts from four separate men: Jesus, St. Sebastian, Abraham Lincoln, and C3PO. Together, these characters' body parts converge to fit like armor on top of my body. In keeping with the spirit of my past and ongoing narrative, I will try to guide my decisions through the founding principle of this non-linear story, which is the character Snow White. I chose Snow White as the "founding father" of my narrative seven years ago for several reasons. One was that I felt she epitomized the kind of cross pollinating character I was drawn to. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* was the first feature length film released in the Disney Studios. Before that, they made seven minute short films, called Silly Symphonies. One of these Silly Symphonies was called *The Goddess of Spring*. It was the Disney Studio's version of the Greek myth of Pluto and Prosperina. This silly symphony was not commercially successful, was "canned" and put on the shelf. Unlike Prosperina, Snow White was to be the first realistically rendered woman of the Disney Studios. From the line drawing of Disney's Prosperina, Snow White was born. This birth fascinated me: a Greek myth high jumped a Germanic legend to create an American icon. To me, Snow White was the poster girl for cross pollinating symbols, legends, and different points in history. How exciting! How blade runner! How empowered and perfect! At this moment, Snow White became my Queen.

Unlike Walt Disney's repressed and puritanical packaging of this character, my version of Snow White represents a foundation of strength, a generator of multiple signifiers, and an ever-present reminder of change, as she was built within an ever evolving, morphing filmic process. She has always been a silent partner in the studio for me. As I am now the Creator of this three dimensional fusion, it seemed fitting my prince would long for my object of desire. In part of Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein*, the Creation is alone in a wooded area and spies upon a family. He watches all members of the family, and observes how deeply they care for one another. He looks as the wife and husband show passion to each other and he yearns to experience these feelings. My prince longs for these feelings of completeness as well. As the narrative of The Prince Project unfolds, it is clear the prince is only in a position to objectify these feelings, and not experience them directly. As such, he likens love with another

transient experience that he observes humans interacting with: spirituality. In this metaphor, he equates finding true love with spiritual aspiration. He perceives Snow White as the epitome of physical and spiritual experiences, and sees her as his key to an ultimate transient state. When he attains her love, he believes he will be forever happy. When he attains her love, he believes he will feel complete. Like the alchemical myth, he believes through her love, he will transform his monstrous physical existence: he will turn from lead (the sullied garment of the soul) into gold (perfection).

The prince figure is only one character in 'The Prince Project. There are four parts that define 'The Prince Project as a whole: *Dust, Seven, Wicked, and White Light*. In its totality, 'The Prince Project is a non-linear narrative based on the prince's thoughts, longings and desires for humanness and its associations with spirituality, love, loss, idealism, and realism. It shows a path from creating life for the protection of one's race (the legend of the Golem), creating life for one's ego (the novel of Frankenstein) to creating life for scientific advancement and human betterment (cloning and computer simulation), and ultimately, creating life for love (heightened experience). As is every aspect of my studio practice, the character's content in 'The Prince Project is initiated by a highly specified source. Often, but not always, this source is personal. It is my hope that 'The Prince Project will transcend my personal impetus and reflect external feelings felt on many levels by many people: feelings of our collective hope, our collective heartbreak, and our collective history.

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