

Research in Practice

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Curating fairy tales using visual illustrations derived from poetic language.

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In this essay I will be exploring narrative storytelling, passionate artists that create works surrounding fantasy and how experience can be the core motivation for the art that we create and how it influences the stories that are told. I love to create watercolor pieces surrounding nature, fairies and other mythical beings, sometimes touching on personal and surreal topics. Recently developing a passion for poetry, I will explore the relationship of poetry and storytelling and how it can co-exist and enrich a piece of art and vice versa.

Fae

Being welcomed to the enchanting world of fairies, we are enriched and taken into a variety of folk lore, fairy tales and the mischievous antics of these spiritual beings. "In French the word for fairies is *fee* or *féés*. This word means enchantment." (Clinton, pg.16) My keen interest in these small creatures is fueled by my love for fantasy and curiosity for the spiritual realm but what are fae-folk? "Small humanoid creatures who have thin, membranous wings and generally tend to stay away from humans." (Belmont, 2010) is the shortened, most common definition of a fairy (fae). The fae and fairies are subjective, with everyone having their own connotation and ideas of what a fairy is. People will often think of *Tinker Bell* (2008), a fictional character created by J.M Barrie and later adapted by Walt Disney, we think of a small and helpful being that resembles a girl with wings. As magical as the story of *Peter Pan* is, I am more enamoured by the telling's of fantasy in which folk tales see fairies as mythological gods.

“The word ‘Fairy’ is a generic term that refers to any of the supernatural creatures” (Clinton, pg.9) Exploring beyond the textbook definition of the fae we see changelings, leprechauns, pixies, banshees, brownies and boggarts in stories such as Grimms’ Fairy Tales that have been adapted by numerous illustrators as they strive to “enrich and embellish them.” (Gaiman, 2016, pg.18) Folk narratives consisting of fae have entertained adults and children alike for centuries and the inclusion of illustration with these narratives have developed them in a unique and entertaining aspect.

Fae folk have been reimagined in media in a plethora of ways, this makes sense as the fae have a variety of forms. The fae cannot be good nor bad, there are “solitary” fairies as well as “trooping” (Clinton, pg. 21) described as mythical, immortal creatures who do not suffer from death. The symbolic nature of the fae, how they are in tune with nature is something that I would love to focus on with my art going forward. Creating illustrations for folk tales and poetic verses I will explore how illustration enamours stories and demonstrates how magical the realm of fae fantasy is.



Fig 1: Harbour, J (1921) *My Favourite Book of Fairy Tales*

Jennie Harbour illustrated fairy tales beautifully in her engravings and watercolour pieces that were inspired by the Grimm's fairy tales. The mythical being in Fig.1 demonstrates a woman transcending into a large cat, the differences in light and darkness are explored amazingly in this piece. The details in shading with the dotted lines that demonstrate a range of static transforms the page into something magical. The image and text below the page in the story book inform each other and they co-exist remarkably, this is evident throughout Harbours

own fairy tale book titled, “My book of Favourite Fairy Tales” which contains strong narratives as well as illustrations that co-inside along the text. Harbour varied between two different art mediums throughout the book, featuring tiny illustrations, and often silhouetted characters highlighting aspects of text, we flip a page, and a beautiful painting enriches the stories being told.



Fig 2: Rackham, A (1909) *Undine Outside the Window*

Rackham's use of watercolours and ink in Fig.2 is astoundingly beautiful and enchanting. The contrast of colours that excel the character 'Undine' forward launching herself at the viewer and captivating the audience is something I would love to encompass myself. “His beautiful

feeling for landscape” (Hamilton, J pg.98) is evident in this piece alone, the composition of the character bouncing in front of a mountainous dream-like landscape is unforgettable. Fig2 is a fantastic portrayal of using illustration to form a narrative, as we question who the character in the piece is and why is she mischievously frolicking outside of the cottage window and does the smile on her face tell us that she is up to no good? This piece intrigues and spikes the curiosity of the viewer. Fig 2 was a response to a written letter between two gentlemen in 1931, “Friedrich de la Motte Fouque wrote to N. Carroll ‘*Undine, will thou for once leave off these childish pranks?*’” (Hamilton, J pg.99) Fig.2 demonstrates the need for illustration to encourage narratives as small as a single line in a written letter.

A key element to the fae is the stories spoken about them. Stories that spread wonder to children and adults. Fairy and folk tales alike were not originally created to amuse and entertain audiences, before being stylised and ridden of violence and topics of cruelty by editors. The serious artists

Sought to use fantasy as a means for criticising social conditions and expressing the need to develop alternative models to the established social orders.

(Zipes, 2002. pg.18-19)

Modern day fantasy and fairy tales have strayed from the representation of social conditions and towards conveying teachings and good morals, a good example of this would be the numerous adaptations of the Aesop’s fables. Instead of representing poor social conditions,

tales today have encouraged children to learn good morals which could lead to better social conditions in the future.

Chaos

The Oxford definition of chaos is “complete disorder and confusion.” We see that chaos is often the defining point to our protagonists' journey in storytelling as they overcome an obstacle. Chaos, a strong element of drama, is important for the characters' development. “a long and grueling situation is enough to suggest that change is underway.” (Rabiger, M pg.38) The audience cheers for moments such as this as it ensues hope as we root for the character in the story, moments of chaos give the viewer a feeling of satisfaction as they witness a solution to the problem the protagonist faces. I will further explore how an illustrator denotes chaos and drama in illustration, as I see that chaos is one of the crucial parts of storytelling.

Abrupt lines, jagged strokes, harsh colours, and various illustrative techniques that denote the aspects of chaos. “Jagged angular shapes remind us of thorns, knives and teeth and create feelings of agitation” (Rydwezki, pg.8) are used to communicate powerful visual tension to the viewer that is quite often expressive. In contrast we see examples of shape language, circular objects give the audience feelings of serenity and calmness, this is seen in character design where round and plump characters often have cheerful, comedic personalities. “Circles and ovals are mostly used for friendly and outgoing faces.” (Naghdi,A 2021) whereas exaggerations in pointy, triangular shapes the characters are seen as evil and serious. A good

illustration expresses their ideas through exaggerated shapes and symbolisms, considering line, texture, composition, volume, proportion and solid depth.



Fig 3: Goya, F (1817-1819) *Old Women Looking in a Mirror*.

The work of Goya is something that springs to mind when the topic of chaos arises. “Expressing with paroxysmal intensity and bitterness.” (Chabrun, J, 1965 pg.226) Goya encapsulates the extremities of death and vanity in fig.3, we see two women pondering their existence in a mirror as a mythological being towers over them. The darkness in colour looms the page as the ladies' cheekbones highlights their approaching demise almost making them appear skeletal. Goya's use of shape in this regard is astounding as it narrates how much time

the women have left. In fig.3 the use of lighting also portrays a story as it composes the mythological figure's focus on the lady in the chair, highlighting them both perhaps to insinuate a closer approach to the afterlife.



Fig 4: Takahata, I (2013) *Princess Kaguya*

One of my favorite animated movies, *Princess Kaguya* was illustrated using ink and watercolor. Moments of chaos, danger and excitement enrich the story with jagged lines, contrasting colors and beautifully portrayed movement in flowing shapes. In fig.4 we see a painted landscape of a girl fleeing, we know she is in a rush which is represented by the painted brush strokes that sway in the opposite direction that she is traveling. A singular panel in this illustration denotes that she is running away from something that is causing her a lot of harm.

Experience

Sharing our experiences and telling stories is in human nature, it is how we connect with each other and how we experience the world is unique to us. Artists and poets alike often share their experience, though through totally different mediums they both strive toward the same objective, with any means necessary. "The poet or painter joins to the physical, to the human, and investigates soul." (Rosetti, W. 1890. Pg.4)

We compare a poet's allegories and metaphors to an artist's shapes and colour. Exploring how an artist shares these experiences and how text and imagery can co-exist and complement each other subtly to the audience is something I would like to explore further. How a pleasant experience like a painted sunset can inspire the audience to appreciate the scenery the artist depicts as well as what the painting says about the human who paints it and how we experience their work. It would be naïve to sit and think 'this artist just likes sunsets' when there are other key features to the composition. viewing the work of the artist and experiencing it is a precious thing. Looking closer and learning how to view the art as well as how the artist learned how to portray their experiences is a skill. I often think of myself as an artist that does not like to share my experiences through my art as I am scared that no one would understand it or view it properly, this mentality is not helpful for any illustrator, which is why I am hoping to forego this negative feedback loop in my third-year practice and further practicing visual communication in the process.

Art is a visual communication-not to be confused with a message making a statement in words, but an expression or experience that depends on use of the pictorial not verbal language.

(Rydwezki, 1967, pg.4)

looking at art that an artist has created from experience we often share the experience with them, thus evoking emotion.

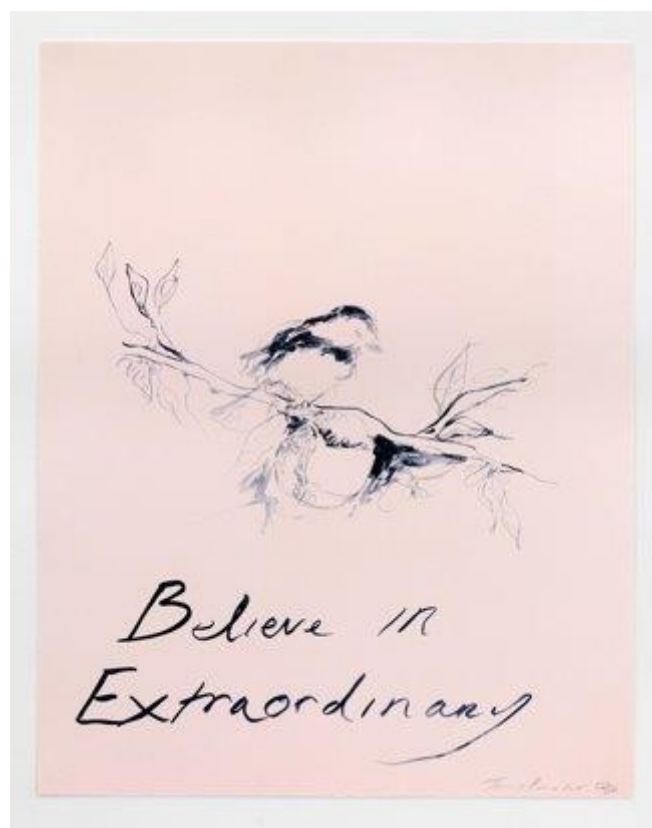


Fig 5: Emin, T (2015) *Believe in Extraordinary*

Tracey Emin's work is difficult to experience, when I first investigated her work, I felt an overwhelming number of negative feelings. I avoided Emin's art for the longest time, not because I think it's bad but because it reminds me of my own negative experiences. It is worth noting that everyone can experience art differently based on their own experiences. Emin's art is very personal, described poetic and confessional Emin touches on her history of sex,

abuse and love. In fig.5 we see a bird painted with watercolours on paper, the bird sits on a branch with the words 'Believe in Extraordinary' underneath. This piece is simple yet touching, her use of poetic language is exactly what I would like to strive toward with my work going forward as the communicative language compliments the visual language, by encouraging hope. It often begs the question as to why artists share their personal experiences at such a large scale. "I won't want to die being an artist that made really interesting work, I want to make a future" (Emin,T 2022.) We could debate that Emins work creates a voice for survivors who have struggled with similar situations, as well as starting a discussion.

'Since I left you, mine eye is in my mind' (113)

The bridge. The mountain. The lake. The ibex. The chocolate cake. *The Collected Poems of Robert Lowell*. The jar of cinnamon sticks. The slapping rain. The tiny dog. The paint chipped from the windowsill. The momentary concerned glance which passes like a shaft of light. The coffee cup. The flooded rails. The empty cracked shell of a snail. The grey fuzz of a scratch-card nail. The things we said inside the whale. Prostrate before the turning sail. The something and the something else. Betrayal of, betrayal from. Look over, through or set upon. The double dream, the double glaze, a less bad way out of the maze. Sometimes the action cannot match a long recalibrating daze. And sometimes, sometimes even when I'm the only one with you I want to text, 'Are you okay? Is this guy bothering you?'

Fig 6: Kennard, L (2021) *Notes on the Sonnets*

A poem I found in Kennards book of poetry, *Notes on the Sonnets*. I briefly mentioned how a painter paints a beautiful sunset and some would simply think that the artist liked the sunset. Comparing a painting of a sunset to a carefully narrated description of the little things we find beautiful in life that leaves a looming undertone of sadness is more evident descriptively as a whole than something that can be interpreted in various ways that carries clashing features. Communicating through text appears more straight forward than visual communication, and it could be something I could use in my practice to get over a fear of people misunderstanding my art

The relationship that words have with art gives the piece a whole new dimension and meaning. For example, Emin's work in Fig.5, the line of text offers the audience hope for the lonely blue bird. As well as the text beneath Harbours work in Fig.1, the line of text underneath the visual image demonstrates to the audience what is happening, and the image helps the viewer imagine it. Learning how to create a perfect balance between art and text is important as it helps the viewer to understand experiences, ideas, situations and narratives.



Booton, C (2023) *a Fairy Hides Under the Rhodotus Mushroom.*

For my final year practice, I will create a series of illustrations surrounding the fae, I want to create mythical characters who share my experiences in settings or make up stories based on them. I am inspired to take this into various directions, perhaps creating a visual story book with small portions of my own written poetry, illustrative pages that are enamoured by classical fantasy, floral designs and colours that seep and complement each tone and word as I explore and develop how a character's features and background composition can complement a single narration after admiring the work of great artists. Focusing primarily on watercolour and ink, I am excited to explore and improve my practice next year.

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Figures:

Harbour, J (1921) *My Favourite Book of Fairy Tales* [engraved]

Rackham, A (1909) *Undine Outside the Window* [pen, ink, and watercolour] Private Collection

Goya, F (1817-1819) *Old Women Looking in a Mirror*. [oil on canvas]

Takahata, I (2013) *Princess Kaguya* [watercolour and ink on paper]

Emin, T (2015) *Believe in Extraordinary* [watercolour on paper]

Kennard, L (2021) *Notes on the Sonnets*

Booton, C (2023) *a Fairy Hides Under the Rhodotus Mushroom*. [watercolour on paper]