

Student Name: Thisari Punchiwedikkarage

Student Number – 2403969

Programme of study – Graphic Design

Module – ADDA4023/C

Task: Curate an Exhibition = 1503 words

For this assessment, I confirm that I have not used Generative AI to support me in structuring my submission, including creating a draft argument structure, identifying parts and headings. I confirm that I have not used Generative AI to create text for my submission. I confirm that I have not used Generative AI for creative materials, such as images

Enduring Echoes : The Continued Relevance of Greek Mythology in society through the ages

This exhibition was curated to showcase and explore the infamous myths and legends that the Greeks has created through our existence and why they're relevant to this day. Myths and Legends continue to have an impact and touch everyone's life in one way or the other. They shape our art, literature, and even modern storytelling. By stepping into this world of mystery and wonder, with each piece, viewers will not only explore legendary tales but also reflect on why such stories endured and will continue to endure in the human mind for generations.



Figure 1 – The Temple of Apollo, James Burt Milne, 1972)

I chose the Temple of Apollo in Athens, Greece, for the location of my exhibit because of its deep connections to the themes and stories that define the myths themselves. “A place with a rich intangible heritage, Delphi was the centre of the world (*omphalos*) in the eyes of the ancient Greeks” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2012). I believe putting the exhibition here would further push the viewers to immerse themselves further in the exhibit and reflect on the themes implied by the artworks I have chosen.



Figure 2 – (Caravaggio, dated as 1597, Medusa)



Figure 3 – (Luciano Garbati, 2008 Medusa with Perseus' head)

Caravaggio's *Medusa* (1597) presents the infamous gorgon in the throes of decapitation. During Caravaggio's time, women's voices were silenced and their autonomy denied. This is explained in his painting through Medusa's eyes, big and wide, with her mouth agape, and she screams a scream that the viewers do not hear. As Kalodimou and Kapalika (2023) argue, Medusa's transformation from mortal to monster by Athena is an act of victim blaming, punishing her for her violation committed against her. Caravaggio's *Medusa* embodies this cultural logic, where she is feared and not understood. The painting doesn't engage with her trauma; instead, it celebrates her defeat. This reflects what Lerner (1980) describes as "just world" beliefs, where suffering is rationalized by assuming victims must somehow deserve their fate. (Witte and Flechsenhar 2024) expand on this, observing how such narratives are possessed in modern Western societies, reinforcing social hierarchies and disempowering those who have already been harmed.

In stark contrast, figure 2, Luciano Garbati's 2008 sculpture *Medusa with the head of Perseus* reverses the myth's dynamic of power. The intention behind this artwork, "He says that he wanted to make up for Medusa's unjust characterization as the villain of the story. "What would it look like, her victory, not his?" (Daily, 2023). Here, Medusa stands tall and composed, holding the severed head of Perseus not as a violent aggressor, but as a figure of strength and resilience. This is further implied with the way Medusa's body is portrayed: "The body is lithe and toned, and both arms hang by her side" (Edling, 2024), implying a neutral state of the human body further shows her triumph. The sculpture is minimalist and unapologetically bold; Her gaze is level, her body is unshielded, yet unafraid. Where Caravaggio's emphasizes chaos and monstrosity, Garbati's offer is calm and controlled, turning Medusa from a passive victim into an empowered symbol. Through this postmodern reinterpretation, the artist challenges the traditional myth and reclaims Medusa's power.

Central to the artist's work is the theme of non-consent, a concept which is absent from the older depictions of the myth. By reimagining Medusa as the one who holds power, the artist brings attention to the historical injustices buried in myth and mirrored in society.

“In 2008, the sculpture was not intended as feminist symbol rape survival and female rage, but in 2018, when the #MeToo movement was at its height, that is what it ended up becoming.” (Edling, 2024)

The sculpture echoes contemporary movements against sexual violence, victim blaming, and the erasure of women's stories. As Edling notes in her thesis, Medusa has become a symbol of empowerment for survivors, especially through social media, where a Medusa tattoo now represents healing and resistance. This allows post-modernism's impulse to deconstruct dominant narratives and imply.

Together, both artworks illustrate how myths are not static, they evolve with the values of the society that reinterprets them. Where one reinforces patriarchal and hierarchical structures, the other dismantles them. By placing these voices in dialogue, we see not only how Medusa's image has shifted, but how myth continues to function as a cultural mirror, one that reflects both our dark histories and our potential for change.



Figure 4 – (Oedipus and the Sphinx, Gustave Moreau 1864)

Moreau's Oedipus and the Sphinx (1864) plunges the viewer into a charged, dreamlike encounter between man and myth. In this painting, Oedipus stands in confrontation with the sphinx, painted in an oddly intimate way. The artwork draws the viewer's eyes into the intense gaze between these two figures, neither is aggressive nor overtly violent, but profoundly symbolic. The way that the sphinx is presented is unnatural, almost predatory but still seductive.

“It is a woman who has the body of a lion and vast wings. Her nipples touch Oedipus, who has been left almost naked by the knot having been torn from his cloak, her leonine hindquarters curve voluptuously.” (Cooke, 2004)

Moreau uses surreal and symbolic elements, such as dogs, desolate backgrounds, and ornate, dreamlike details in the sphinx, as layers of mystery and tension. This painting is less concerned with realism and more with the atmosphere, invoking an otherworldly space where myth and meaning blur. From a modernist perspective, this painting celebrates the triumph of human reason over mystery. Oedipus, the hero, confronts the unknown and overcomes it through intellect.

However, a postmodern lens destabilizes them. Oedipus's role becomes more tragic than heroic when you consider the consequences of his “triumph”: his answer to the Riddle leads him down a path of unknowing self-destruction. Postmodernism invites us to question the binaries, the myth presence, reason versus mystery, hero versus monster, and fate versus free will. As Barthes (1957) argues that myths are not fixed truths, but narratives shaped by the ideologies of the moment. The painting then resists a singular meaning and instead becomes a space for reinterpretation.

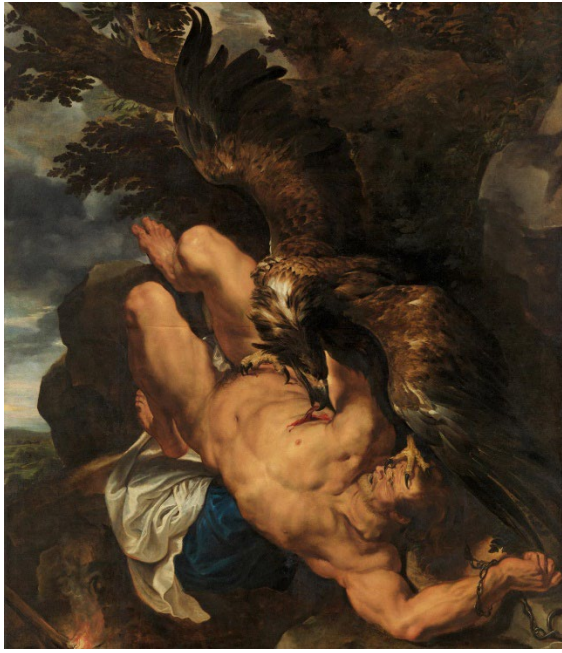


Figure 5 (Prometheus Bound, 1618, Peter Paul Rubens)

The myth of Prometheus tells us a story of a Titan who defied Zeus by giving fire, which symbolizes knowledge and progress to humanity. As punishment, Zeus chained him to a rock, where an eagle devoured his liver daily in a never-ending cycle of torment. This eternal punishment reflects the cost of rebellion against authority: “Prometheus is condemned to experience suffering as a man, with the same tenuous and hesitant belief in the order of the world” (Batson, 2009), a theme that resonates in both historical and modern contexts.

The eagle has its talons placed on Prometheus’ groin and his head, symbolising control and authority over his intelligence as well as his manhood (Reddington, 2022). In Rubens’ painting, the violence and agony of Prometheus are rendered in visceral detail. His muscular twisted body fills the canvas, writhing in pain. “This aspect of the punishment relates to the theme of freedom versus oppression because Zeus is using force through torture to hold Prometheus hostage.” (Reddington, 2022).

From a modernist perspective, Prometheus is a symbol of humanity's quest for knowledge, defying oppressive structure is for the sake of progress. The suffering is noble, a necessary sacrifice for enlightenment on evolution. Rubens’ anatomical position and emotional intensity

mirror this modernist celebration of human potential and struggle. However, through a postmodern lens, the image complicates this narrative. The sheer violence of the scene raises questions about whether this “progress” is worth the cost. The fire Prometheus gives could symbolize science, reason, or revolution, but it also unleashes pain, imbalance, and perhaps unintended consequences. Postmodernism asks us to interrogate grand narratives like progress and consider who benefits and who suffers. Prometheus's suffering and eternal punishment might not be seen as martyrdom, but as a critique of the blind pursuit of advancement.

I chose Rubens' work because it visually captures the dual nature of myth: it both inspires and warns. As Bathes (1984) argues, “myth has the task of giving a historical intention a natural justification.”. In this painting, suffering is naturalized as if rebellion must lead to destruction. Yet when viewed through a contemporary eye, it urges us to rethink these messages and recognize the constructed nature of power, punishment, and progress. The myth injures not only because of its story but because of how artists like Ruben make its meaning visceral, complex, and continually relevant.

Each of these pieces in my exhibition represents eternal stories that humanity has created; their messages stay with us for generations to come. They preserve culture and help us understand each other. Greek mythology has stayed relevant due to its exploration of the fundamental human experiences of love, tragedy, and power. These themes transcend time and culture. “a myth is a symbolic structure that expresses inner drives, fears and fantasies and endows human experience with order and meaning”. (Mazzarins, 1979)

Bibliography

- Batson, A. (2009). *Batson 1 Running head: PROMETHEUS IN SUSPENSION Prometheus in Suspension: Suffering and the Tragic in Aeschylus's Prometheus Bound*. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1108&context=honors>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]
- Batular, F. (2019) *A Feminist Stylistics Analysis of "The Laugh of the Medusa by Hélène Cixous"*, *Folklor/edebiyat*, 25(97–1), pp. 177–189.
- CASTEL-BRANCO, N. (2021) *Material Piety: Science and Religious Culture in Seventeenth-Century Portugal*, *Renaissance quarterly*, 74(4), pp. 1162–1209. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2021.199>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]
- Cooke, P. (2004) 'Gustave Moreau's "œdipus and the Sphinx": Archaism, Temptation and the Nude at the Salon of 1864', *Burlington magazine*, 146(1218), pp. 609–615.
- Daily, R.R. (2023). *When Medusa Meets #MeToo*. Public Books. Available at: <https://www.publicbooks.org/when-medusa-meets-metoo/>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]
- Díez-Platas, F. (2023) 'Guardians of the Text: Griffins and Sphinxes in the Neapolitan Ovid (BNN ms. IV F 3)', *Arts (Basel)*, 12(3), pp. 96-. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12030096>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]
- Muraoka, A.H. (2024) 'From Leonardo to Caravaggio: Affective Darkness, the Franciscan Experience and Its Lombard Origins', *Arts (Basel)*, 13(2), pp. 68-. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts13020068>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]
- Webster, M. (1983) 'The Belief in a Just World: A Fundamental Delusion', *The American journal of sociology*. University of Chicago Press, pp. 1048–1050.
- D.J. Huppatz (2011) Roland Barthes, *Mythologies, Design and Culture*, 3:1, 85-100, DOI: 10.2752/175470810X12863771378833
- Drake, E.E. (2002). The Power of Story. *The Journal of Perinatal Education*, 11(2), pp.ix–xi. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1624/105812402X88650>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]
- Edling, E., 2024. Drop Dead Gorg (on) eous: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the Contemporary Medusa Tattoo.
- Henri Matisse. (2009). *Medusa, 1597 by Caravaggio*. [online] Available at: <https://www.caravaggio.org/medusa.jsp>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]
- Kalodimou, D. and Kapalika, M. (2023). Gender in Cultural History: Gender and Education. *Journal of Research Initiatives Journal of Research Initiatives Kalodimou, Dimitra and Kapalika*, 7(3), p.3. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.uncfsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1322&context=jri>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]
- Mazzarins, L. (1979) 'The Riddle of the Sphinx: Teaching Ancient Myths to Modern Students', *College literature*, 6(2), pp. 145–148.

Peterson, L. (2017). *The Science Behind The Art Of Storytelling*. [online] Harvard Business Publishing. Available at: <https://www.harvardbusiness.org/the-science-behind-the-art-of-storytelling/>. [Accessed - 6 April 2025]

Reddington, L.E., 2022. *Prometheus Bound by Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyders: Psychological and physical punishment*. [online] Available at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ugresearchaward_2023/5 [Accessed 13 April 2025].

Santa Clara University (2015). *The Just World Theory*. [online] @SantaClaraUniv. Available at: <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/ethics-resources/ethical-decision-making/the-just-world-theory/>.

UNESCO World Heritage Centre (2012). *Archaeological Site of Delphi*. [online] Unesco.org. Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/393/>.

Witte, L.P. and Flechsenhar, A. (2024) “‘It’s Your Own Fault’: Factors Influencing Victim Blaming”, *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 40(9–10), pp. 2356–2380. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241270030>.

List of Figures

Figure 1 – James Burt Milne, (1972) *The Temple of Apollo*. Available at: <https://collections.st-andrews.ac.uk/item/the-temple-of-apollo-delphi/633627> [Accessed: 5th April 2025]

Figure 2 – Caravaggio, dated as (1597), *Medusa*. Available at: https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FMedusa_%2528Caravaggio%2529&psig=AOvVaw2SK5ZF3EtOBlqR38HU_4o2&ust=1745952228054000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBQQjRxqFwoTCMiowoux-4wDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAJ [Accessed: 5th April 2025]

Figure 3 – Luciano Garbati, (2008) *Medusa with Perseus’ head*. Available at: https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theartnewspaper.com%2Fnews%2Fmetoo-medusa-sculpture-to-be-installed-across-from-new-york-courthouse-where-harvey-weinstein-stood-trial&psig=AOvVaw0fhvpWW_h3rSWdHHBOotYw&ust=1745952324450000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBQQjRxqFwoTCNimsrWx-4wDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE [Accessed: 5th April 2025]

Figure 4 –Gustave Moreau (1864) *Oedipus and the Sphinx*. Available at:

https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FOedipus_and_the_Sphinx&psig=AOvVaw1lqzfbGrYqmonl5WswdSh1&ust=1745952542209000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBQQjRxqFwoTCNCQoZqy-4wDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE

[Accessed 5th April 2025]

Figure 5 Peter Paul Rubens (1618) *Prometheus Bound*. Available at:

https://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fen.wikipedia.org%2Fwiki%2FPrometheus_Bound_%2528Rubens%2529&psig=AOvVaw0VVwHUCRgSb0Ou77uabKGz&ust=1745952734954000&source=images&cd=vfe&opi=89978449&ved=0CBQQjRxqFwoTCLDC7PWy-4wDFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE

[Accessed 5th April 2025]