Divining The Divine: Pop Mythology And Its Worth

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DIVINING THE DIVINE: POP MYTHOLOGY AND ITS WORTH

by

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B.F.A. University of Central Florida, 2010

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

My thesis compares classic mythology of cultures like ancient Greece to the mythology that has risen from the popular culture of contemporary western civilizations like America. While there are some differences, the two use the same archetypes that humanity has used for generations. In my work I use sculpture and photography to show their similarities and differences in form and story.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Mythology is one of humanity's greatest tools. We have used it to teach our children how to behave through parables, and to warn ourselves how others may behave. We have used it to define our heroes. We even use it for entertainment. Many cultures throughout history have its own myths and legends, each reflecting the people that created them in its characters and stories. However, though each culture's mythology may differ, at the core of each are the same archetypes: "truth is one, sages speak of it by many names" (Campbell p.1).

Contemporary America also has its own mythology that follows these same archetypes; Characters and stories from comic books, video games and film go on epic journeys through the same stories that humanity has used for millennia. The main difference is that our mythology is not considered sacred, but is instead more connected to commercialism and popular culture. However, while we do not consider it truly mystical, it is still tremendously important. Furthermore, while there are attributes of our myths that some would say cheapens them, they are actually the reason why our pop mythology is so fascinating. These attributes prove the quality of our lore. In my art I explore the similarities and differences of both ancient myths and our own contemporary stories.
Since my childhood I have been enthralled by mythology. By the second grade I had memorized many stories from the ancient Greeks. Throughout grade school I studied these myths and the lessons they taught. I also became fascinated with movies like Star Wars and comic books. I used all of these as fuel for art. I sculpted and drew characters from all, developing skills while making toys for myself or creating dioramas for class projects. Later I learned these were skills that artists have developed to tell the myths of their times. "Ice age hunters undoubtedly had their myths, legends, and tales about the hunt, their heroes, villains, and lovers" (Brockway, p.30). A likely explanation of their cave paintings is that their "myths of the chase... and animals
were important to them” (Brockway, p.30).

High school exposed me to a world of fine art. I marveled at Michelangelo's statue of David and the Pieta, and I devoured the information in my humanities classes concerning the works of ancient peoples like the Celts, Inca, and Greeks. I did extensive outside research and presented it to the class; I listened to lessons about Stonehenge then proceeded to give a small lecture about how it was built and possible meanings it had. My interest in movies and games also increased. I asked the same questions of these contemporary works that I asked as I stared at any other great work. How is this made? Why does this look this way? How does this influence my work? This kind of questioning also aided me in science (primarily anatomy). I wanted to know how all living things worked, and studied the human form. I appreciated the detailed drawings of Leonardo, and the dynamic musculature in Batman comics. I saw people making sculpture models for movies that were not only amazing in appearance, but even mimicked the motion and behavior of life. In studying H.R. Giger's gallery work and film work I realized that it is all art, and is often made for the same reasons.

Once in college I continued to learn as many techniques as possible. While taking classes at the University of Central Florida I spotted some clay sculptures in a glass case in the hallway. I asked a professor about them, and he told me about animation maquettes. I immediately acquired an independent study to learn more about them for the following semester. They were so close to the pieces I had been making all of my life that I had to find out more. However, I still kept them separate from the other art I was making, seeing a connection between them but not fully realizing what it was.

I began my time in graduate school by making a myriad of projects in different styles and
media including graffiti paintings, abstract metal sculptures, computer generated movies, photographs, and clay sculptures. By the second year I knew that the clay sculpture works were the pieces that I cared for the most, and they were also the pieces that people loved during critiques. However, I struggled with a way to make them more acceptable to gallery venues. Some people saw them as interesting looking statues with no meaning beyond that, but they held an importance well beyond that for me. Finally, I realized that many of the influences I drew from were all incarnations of the mythology that fascinated me (like the labors of Heracles or Lugh, and even the adventures of game hero Cloud Strife). Not only does mythology tie my work together, but it is also a way to link all of humanity. Conjointly, while the myths of the world have many similarities, they also have differences that reflect the cultures they come from.
CHAPTER 3: CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

Tales of mighty heroes accomplishing great tasks while revealing themselves to be humanly fallible are common to many cultures, times, and places. "These hero myths vary enormously in detail, but the more closely one examines them the more one sees that structurally they are very similar. They have, that is to say, a universal pattern, even though they were developed by groups or individuals without any direct cultural contact with each other- by, for instance, tribes of Africans or North American Indians, or the Greeks, or the Incas of Peru" (Jung, p.110). Why would contemporary stories be any different? One may recall such stories of Heracles and jealous Hera, or, just as easily, remember a Star Trek rerun. No matter how they are presented, there are themes and characters that seem to be present in countless stories. There are apologues to teach the young, and heroes for them to admire. Embodiments of the many aspects of nature are still just as popular as they were a thousand years ago. You are equally likely to find the same lessons and adventures in books of mythology from every nation or a book bearing the Marvel comics label.
Ruler of Deities

One of the most easily recognized of the character archetypes is the head of the pantheon. These are supreme deities that reign over the rest and keep order. In Celtic mythology the name of this character is the Dagda, also called Eochaid Ollathair (father of all) and Ruad Ro-fhessa (lord of the perfect knowledge) (New Larousse, p.226). Like many of these fatherly rulers, Dagda is master of certain powerful aspects of nature; he possesses a magic harp that controls the seasons (Celtic Mythology, p.49). Given this powerful relation to agriculture, it is no wonder that Dagda is also known for his fertility. He has embarked on numerous exploits including having an affair with the married Boann. He even sleeps with Morrigan, the battle-goddess, in order to obtain a plan of engagement against his enemies. Known to have fathered at least six, he is even depicted as having his giant penis drag along the ground as he walked. Not only does this add to his fertile image, it also contributes to his more human side (it is difficult to feel reverence toward in image that unappealing). Dagda bears a homely countenance, sporting a round belly, rawhide sandals, and a short tunic that often does not fully conceal his backside. Despite his fatherly ways and human-like flaws, he is also the wielder of death and resurrection, carrying a club that can slay nine men with a single swing and restore life with the other end.

This archetype also exists in Native American lore. The Mayans have Itzamna, a creator deity. Residing in the sky, he is thought to be responsible for the birth of humanity. He is associated with wisdom, and is accredited with giving man writing, and also supported the development of medicine. Some accounts give Itzamna a tie to fertility as well; he is thought to have fathered thirteen children. In some tribes in the Americas the fatherly deity is not very developed. They are simply "remote originators who give the creation story its start, then often
disappear" (Bierhorst, p.14-15). However, there is often a second father. The Crow tribe refers to the creator as father or old man. It is actually Coyote, which gives this creator another link to the pantheon of Greece in light of Coyote's tendency to cause trouble (a trait shared by Zeus). However, the sky father that holds power later is a different being entirely (Bierhorst, p.154).

Perhaps the example of this archetype that is most developed and well-known to the western world is Zeus. An immensely powerful being, he is supremely wise and even has his will intertwined with fate itself. He has powers over nature, hurling lightning when angry. In his sexual appetite we can see his connection with fertility as well as his susceptibility to temptation. He married Metis (who was a goddess of wisdom), but devoured her along with the unborn child who could have threatened Zeus' rule. This had the affect of rendering Zeus all-knowing, as well. Next in his line of wives were Themis, Mnemosyne, Eurynome, and finally Hera (Leadbetter). There were also countless extramarital affairs including instances of shape changing in order to trick/force sex from someone. Many of Zeus' dalliances resulted in a plethora of offspring like the heroic Heracles (more commonly called Hercules) and Perseus. Part of a group of beings that dwell high atop Mount Olympus, Zeus and his fellow deities are in a category called sky gods. Zeus exemplifies this; "the Sanskrit root *dyaus* and the Latin root *dies* (the day)" evoke "the idea of the luminous sky" (New Larousse p. 98). Zeus is master of the sky and all its abilities: rain, wind, and his trademark bolts of lightning.

The concept of a group of divinities living in the sky is certainly not exclusive to Greece; many of the beings from the Aztec dwell in the sky (though there are exceptions like Dagda and his Tuatha De Danann and the rulers of the underworld like Hades who dwell under ground). Even in the pop mythology that is most present in contemporary America there exists a pantheon
in the sky; the Justice League is a group of super heroes dedicated to keeping order on earth that dwell in a station that orbits the planet, and are led by Superman.

In contemporary lore (in this case comics and film) one of the most successful characters of this type is Superman and his pulp Olympians in the DC comic universe. First appearing in 1938, this character is a combination of Zeus and Heracles. This relationship is fittingly expressed with a line from the movie Superman spoken by Superman's father before dying; "the son becomes the father, and the father the son" (*Superman*). In my piece entitled *Ultimate Hero* I built a character that shows traits of both Heracles and Superman, with references to them and the Celtic hero Finn MacCumhaill. Like Heracles, Superman earns his divinity through his actions, but he actually becomes the Zeus of his universe; this character has been around for so long that he seems invincible because story after story tells of his victories. His long list of wins against impossible odds coupled with his enduring popularity has made Superman the master of Olympus in both the comic universe and the commercial world that owns it; Superman has been featured in numerous films, television shows, and video games. His likeness and his symbol have been used to sell countless pieces of merchandise. Kal-El (Superman's Kryptonian name) also displays a close relationship with nature by gaining his immense power from the sun. Having ties to the sun (though not usually as strong a connection as the deities that embody or directly control the sun) is often a trait of the most powerful of deities; the creators of the five worlds of man in Aztec myth may be called suns. Kal-El also has the power of fire in his eyes and ice in his breath, displaying powers over natural elements not unlike the Dagda. Superman is wise and supremely powerful, but, like his ancient counterparts, still retains human weaknesses. Though, for the sake of our sensibilities concerning our children his weaknesses are more akin to Heracles.
than Zeus. This is not the only trait that Superman shares with Heracles (or with many other heroes of myth).

Heroes

Many great heroes in mythology are adopted in some manner. Heracles is raised by mortals, Perseus is adopted by a fisherman after his mother is dies, Finn MacCumhaill is left in the care of a warrior woman in the forest, and Superman is left in the care of the Kents. There are even heroes that are raised by wild animals; Romulus and Remus are raised by a wolf, and the more recent character Tarzan is raised by apes. I address this idea in the work titled *Nature As Mother*. In it there is a statue of an animal with a human infant with references to both Romulus and Tarzan around them. These heroes often share the burden of absent parents, but that is not all.

![Figure 2: Nature As Mother (Digital Print; 2010)](image)

No hero is very interesting without a thrilling story, and for a story to be thrilling the hero
must face dangers. Often the best dangers are the weaknesses present in the hero. Achilles may be killed by an injury to his heel, and Superman can be brought down by his vulnerability to kryptonite (radioactive pieces of his destroyed home world of Krypton). However, the weakness Superman shares with Heracles is more relatable to a normal human: susceptibility to supernatural powers attacking the mortal mind. Both heroes have been driven to madness and done terrible things. The villain Darkside brainwashes Superman in an episode of the cartoon series, forcing Superman to attack Earth (Legacy). This leads the hero to desperately try to make amends for the damage he has done. In a very similar story, Heracles is driven mad enough to have "killed his children and so was sent to perform labours...in penance" (Pinsent, p.94). The great boulder the hero is lifting in Ultimate Hero is a reference to one of the labors Heracles is charged with. The piece also shows such a close relation among this kind of hero that they are even depicted in the same poses in the paintings on the gallery walls.
The Trickster

Power to inspire others to madness and the will to do so may reside with another archetypal character: the trickster. The trickster can be devious, selfish, cruel, clever, and very strong, but is not always an evil character. In Native American mythology, he may be good and bad like Raven or Coyote. The Tsimshian tribe describes the trickster Raven as gluttonous and clever with his stories usually beginning with his becoming hungry (Bryant, p.28). However, he
also accomplishes much for mankind while indulging his appetite. In one tale a couple's son dies, and they one day find a boy in their house that looks like their lost child. It is actually Raven sent to comfort them, but when questioned he gives the rather surly response that Heaven was annoyed at their wailing, and that he was sent to quiet them. By being fed scabs by glutinous servants, Raven acquires the ability to feel hunger, and from then on is constantly hungry. His search for food eventually leads to him tricking the daughter of a sky chief into giving birth to him in her father's land so he can steal daylight and more easily search for food, bringing day to man in the process (Bryant, p.28-29).

Another story of Coyote is not so cheerful; in it a man goes hunting with Coyote who spots an eagle's nest on a cliff. Lowering the man down on a rope until he is on the nest, Coyote then drops the rope and tells the man that his wife will soon belong to Coyote. After befriending the eagles the man returns home to find Coyote mistreating his family, and Coyote is forced to eat two hot stones as punishment (Bryant, p.86-91). Such contrasting tales are a hallmark of the trickster; he will deceive people for his own gain, but is not always a negative character. Neither is he always positive. A trickster must make people unsure of the outcome of his stories, he must be able to trick.

Oengus Mac Ind-Og is both the Celtic god of love and a trickster. Oengus is normally forthright, even killing because of a person's lie or betrayal. However, once he came of age Oengus was evicted from his home with the Tuatha. Oengus asks his father, the Dagda, if he could live in Brug Na Boinne (the area including the passage tomb of Newgrange) for a day and a night. The Dagda agreed, but since there was no singular form of that time span it turned out to mean day and night - eternity. Consequently, Oengus tricked a permanent home for himself from
his father. The trickster can be more sensible but selfish. It is a character capable of generosity and kindness or greed and malice.

The Greek messenger Hermes is no exception to this duality. When he is just one day old he steals cattle from Apollo, and covers his tracks so well that Apollo must hear the words of a witness to figure out what has happened. This is a testament to Hermes guile as Apollo is renowned for being far-seeing and intelligent. Even once confronted by Apollo and Zeus, Hermes tries to lie, and once caught he wins over Apollo so well with his words and the gift of the lyre that Apollo gives Hermes the gift of understanding bees' thoughts and entrust Hermes with the care of the cattle. Even Zeus "could not but laugh at the cunning of his new-born child" (New Larousse, p.124). Hermes also served a purpose as the messenger of the Greek gods, showing how he is not purely selfish. He even found a way to not simply give fire to man (as Prometheus did), but teach humans how to make it for themselves.

The trickster is also a very popular character in contemporary myth. With the mythology today’s popular western culture being separated from the sacred it is very easy for us to not trust a character because there is no reverence for it; its just a character. Also, ancient mythology like that of Greece has the advantage of being considered sacred. It was believed in, and then held in high esteem as an important part of history. Contemporary pop mythology can also gain esteem over time, but it must be captivating immediately or it is simply cast aside. It must be good enough to hold the interest of an audience based on the quality of the characters and story. A trickster can provide that interest. Lando Calrissian provides a character the viewer can hate but at the same time the audience will beg the screen for him to do the right thing in the end, and J.R.R. Tolkien's Gollum leaves the reader unsure what this pitiable, detestable wretch will
become by the end of the story. All the while these characters teach lessons of cunning and deceit. My work has a bit of this in it, as well. The scenes themselves are a trick, an illusion pulled over the eyes of the viewer in order to teach them how mythology over time and distance are related.

Sun and Light

Another widely used theme is the sun and its personifications. A large number of cultures recognize the power of the sun to fuel life and to destroy it. In fact, the sun often occupies a higher status than other spirits that may seem more powerful at a first glance. The Inca considered Inti the sun deity far more important than the creator Viracocha. Inti was so revered that in the city of Cuzco the sun temple called Coricancha a room walled in gold held an image of Inti as the sun made of gold (Mystic Places). Arranged facing the image were the mummified corpses of Incan emperors. Inti also has a very common trait among solar deities; he shares a close relationship (in this case a marriage) with the moon who is usually the opposite of whatever gender the sun happens to be. The sun spirit is usually associated with power and often positive attributes.

Apollo, the Greek god of light (who controlled the sun, but does not embody the sun), is an example of those attributes; he is a symbol of music, poetry, medicine, art, truth, and archery. Though given to temptations of love (much like his father Zeus), Apollo performed heroic feats like slaying the dragon Python in his childhood, and defending his mother Leto from a giant
(sent by Hera out of jealousy that Zeus had fathered children with Leto) alongside his twin sister Artemis (the moon). Like other solar divinities, he had the power to aid life with the sun or to destroy life with it. The first crops at Delphi were consecrated to Apollo (New Larousse, p.113), and he is accredited for killing rats that could have ruined the crops. Due to the sun's rays shooting down for benefit or extirpation, Apollo was seen as an archer and a healer (New Larousse, p.113-117).

The Celtic deity that parallels Apollo is the hero Lugh (often symbolized with solar imagery, and is described as a radiant person shining like the sun). Another talented character of light, Lugh is called by many names that boast of his skill with a spear, his heroic nature, and even his prowess at every skill a hero could want. Veritably, Lugh came to be in Tara (the court of Nuada, king of the Tuatha De Dannan until he relinquishes the throne to Dagda) because of his great skill. Upon trying to enter he is told that they will only accept him if he should prove that they need him. Lugh claims to be a master of poetry, craft, sorcery, music, swordsmanship, etc., but Nuada has all of these. However, Lugh suggests that he has no one who is a master of all at once, and he is admitted (Celtic Mythology, p.70-71). Lugh is also famous for defeating Balor (his maternal grandfather and one of the kings of a race of monsters called the Fomori), flinging "a magic stone that struck Balor's eye out through the back of his head" (Celtic Mythology, p 90).

Balor also is an example of a recurring character in mythology; he is a being that can cause devastation with just a glance, much like medusa. This character is portrayed in my work titled Ruinous Sight. There is a large figure with a mechanical eye and chords coming from his head. The eye is a reference to the eye of Balor and the countless robots of science fiction stories that shoot a death ray from their eyes. The chords refer to the snakes on the head of Medusa. In
the scene there are portraits of medusa, including a framed scene from the movie *Clash of The Titans*. There is also a picture of the Cyclops from Greek mythology (taken from the cover of a comic book adaptation of the story, showing the kinship between myth and comic). This is because the figure standing in the background is the contemporary version of these characters: the X-Man Cyclops. He focuses his destructive vision through a single lens over his eyes, making him a relative of both kinds of monsters.

Figure 4: *Ruinous Sight* (Digital Print; 2010)

Heroes of light are in no short supply in our mythology, either. Numerous super heroes gain bodily power from the sun, and many employ light in other ways. We have movies like
Blade were there hero uses his many skills to fight evil embodiments of the night while using sunlight as a weapon and even UV bombs. Similarly, in video games like Soul Reaver and The Legend of Zelda you must gain many skills until you can use the tremendous power of the sun. In my work Sun Shield I use the image of the sun along with visual references of ancient myths mixed with a symbol of a video game that uses light as a great power. Also, the shield itself tells of the duality of the sun itself; it protects, but is an instrument of war. The solar spirit is one of the most common because of the archetypal story that it demands follow with it: the battle of light and dark.

Figure 5: Sun Shield (Digital Print; 2010)
CHAPTER 4: STORY ARCHETYPES

The Great War

Since the Fomorii are a race from below the sea in darkness, the battle between Lugh and Balor is a common theme, as well: the battle between dark and light, day and night, good and evil. Being gifted with a clever mind, Lugh even manages to become something of a trickster, sending what are known as the Celtic Argonauts on an arduous journey. The fact that these stories seem to match suggests that, passed down over generations and distance, they can be themes that speak to all of humanity. One of the most enduring is the great war between light and dark. Whether the goal is new enlightenment conquering old ignorance, light vanquishing dark or simply to restore a balance between the two, it is truly a universal tale. Many myths have a great war. In Greek mythology Zeus begins by waging war against his cannibalistic powerhouse-hungry father Chronus. Fearing that his children could overthrow him, Chronus devoured them. However, Zeus remained hidden until maturity and Chronus was tricked into eating a stone instead. Eventually, he was tricked into disgorging Zeus' siblings, and Zeus led a ten-year war against Chronus. Zeus prevailed, casting Chronus down into Tartarus (a pit of torment beneath the earth) with his titans while Zeus ruled on high Olympus (New Larousse p.91).

Like the Greeks, the Celtic pantheon had its own war to wage. Like the titans, the Fomorii where there first. They were brutal monsters from beneath the dark sea. They were half animal and represented the old primal ways that needed replacing. The Fir Bolg came first and...
overthrew the Fomorii, and then the Tuatha put down the Fir Bolg. Later, the Fomorii returned to wage war against the Tuatha. The long war ended when Lugh killed his grandfather Balor by putting his terrible deadly eye out with a sling, and the Fomorii returned to the depths of the ocean.

Among the Aztecs there was a conflict between Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl. Tezcatlipoca is associated with the night sky, jaguars, war, and strife. Meanwhile, Quetzalcoatl is associated with knowledge, the dawn, arts and wind. Each of them made suns (or worlds); Tezcatlipoca made the first sun, which was destroyed by Quetzalcoatl. Quetzalcoatl made the second and then the third, which was destroyed by Tezcatlipoca (Tezcatlipoca). However, both beings were needed for the creation of life, suggesting that it was a war that maintained balance between the two. These kinds of stories teach the lessons of good triumphing over evil, or the need to preserve the various balances that surround us.

This is the primary storyline for a great deal of pop mythology. When a person plays a video game they are usually the hero struggling to defeat the powerful evil force that has committed some awful crime. Sometimes the hero is fighting against the evil in himself as in Final Fantasy VII. At other times the good must try to simply contain the evil and keep the balance like Batman or Luke Skywalker, for to destroy the evil beings would mean crossing the line to becoming one. In the video game Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time the world exists in balance; evil is present, but it is kept in check. Once the villain gains too much power everything is twisted into a world of his creation. The hero Link must defeat the villain so that the world may return to its proper state. However, the villain is not destroyed, only put back in check. The idea of entire worlds being at stake in a never-ending struggle parallels the Aztec myth and many
others. Another very popular example of this idea of a great war is the X-Men franchise. One group of heroes battles another group like them in order to preserve the balance between themselves and the humans around them. You don't have to look hard to find this archetype throughout pop mythology.

The Hero's Journey

The hero's journey is also a common tale. It is often used to tell people traits that are valued in a person. The journey is always long and difficult, usually dangerous, and often made to correct an evil that has been done either by or to the hero. From this simple outline it can be surmised that many cultures would value determination, bravery, and a will to do good. Heroes are also in need of help quite often in these journeys, promoting friendship.

A classic journey of this kind is that of Odysseus. Odysseus made his long journey to get back home to his family. He had to display great endurance to last on a ten year voyage and cunning to think his way out of perilous situations such as escaping the Cyclops by blinding him and clutching to the bellies of his sheep so the monster would not feel them as the sheep's back passed under his hand. Odysseus also embodied strength and bravery; all qualities encouraged in mythology from all over the world. Jason and his Argonauts showed similar fortitude in their quest for the Golden Fleece. In my work Unlikely Hero the heroes depicted are all sent on such a journey. In their case it is by surprise; Frodo has the ring of power thrust upon him, Link is an outcast asked to save his world, and Perseus is tricked into hunting Medusa. After long journeys,
each of them returns successful. However, not all journeys have such a happy ending as these.

Figure 6: Unlikely Hero (Digital Print; 2010)

Cian, father of Lugh was traveling over a plain when he spotted the three sons of Tiurenn. The brothers had a private grudge against Cian, and, despite trying to disguise himself Cian was discovered. He warned the brothers that the blood-fine (payment to make amends for the taking of a life) would be crushing. They slew Cian, and, of course, Lugh deduced the truth. He made them promise to complete seemingly simple tasks that turned out to be near impossible. They succeeded, but returned with terrible wounds. One of the tasks was to retrieve a magical pigskin that could heal their wounds, but Lugh refused to let them use it. The Celtic Argonauts died from
their injuries after completing their journey. This tale warns more of the value of mercy than anything else, and proves that a sad ending (or at least one showcasing harsh justice) can be just as instructional as a happy one.

Often helping with these journeys is a teacher. An older, wiser character aids the hero while on his quest. Usually depicted as an old man with a white beard and a robe, the mentor is usually a part of every hero’s journey. The word mentor even comes from the person named Mentor from the Odyssey. He teaches Odysseus’ son while Odysseus Is away (though mentor may have gained his association with wisdom due to the fact that Athena took his shape more than once). This character is part of the Arthur legend, as well. Merlin is Arthur's teacher and adopted guardian (Fleming, p.110). In new mythology the character even looks the same quite often; Gandalf is the old wizard with a beard in a robe, and so is Obi Wan Kenobi. All three of these characters appear in my work titled Mentor. Obviously, the teacher’s primary role in classic mythology is to teach lessons that are important for the hero to finish his quest. Often, as the hero learns a lesson, so does the reader.
Contemporary myth has just as wide a view of lessons to be learned from the journey. In the movie *Hero*, the character Nameless changes his mind about killing an emperor after his journey and sacrifices himself for what he believes to be the greater good (*Hero*). Other times the point is a lesson in endurance and belief that with strength and courage good will emerge victorious. In *Ocarina of Time* the character of Link is forced to embark on a journey to save his world from an evil king. Skill, intelligence, and perseverance must be used in order to finish. This story also employs another much-used literary tool: the hero being taken away, sacrificing himself in a way until the world needs him or is ready for him (much like King Arthur). Link is locked away in another realm until he is ready to become the hero his world needs. You also see
this in the last episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*; after becoming something of a messianic character Captain Cisco must be taken away to an unknown existence in order to thwart evil and restore balance, destined to return some day (*What You Leave Behind*). A variation is used in the animated film *Akira* when Tetsuo (a teen gang member who has an evolutionary step triggered in his mind after an accident) loses control of his power and must be removed to another world because this world is not ready for him and his abilities (*Akira*).

**Vanquishing Monsters**

One of the most common tasks of the hero (often found in the hero's journey) is the slaying of a monster. Heracles must kill the Hydra in order to attain the Golden Fleece. Siegfried battles the dragon Fafnir, Gilgamesh kills Humbaba, and Beowulf fights Grendel. In the mythology of western pop culture there are also plenty of monsters to grapple with. Link must defeat a boss enemy at every level of each Zelda game, including dragons, phantoms, and many other monsters. Kaneda is forced to fight his friend who turns into monster in *Akira*, and the player faces monsters constantly in all final Fantasy games. The most popular version of the monster is a dragon, especially in America. There are even multiple films dedicated to nothing but the battle against these beasts (*Dragonslayer, Reign of Fire, Dragon Wars*). The statue in my piece of work called *Dragon Slayer* there is a hero fighting one of these creatures. Behind this figure are pictures of Siegfried killing a dragon and the battle against Smaug from *The Hobbit*. Seeing this hero is meant to make the viewer think they may be looking at any of these legendary
characters fighting a scaly monster. It is a story that is easy to understand how popular it is with humanity; many children spend their time fantasizing about defeating monsters, and many adults find themselves doing the same thing. These beasts can be representations of greed (western dragons often guard hordes of treasure they have no use for), supernatural forces set against them, or aspects of the natural world. The latter is often an attempt to explain how a natural phenomenon occurs. In this case it is the presence of a monster (like the Charybdis creating whirlpools with its gaping mouth). However, beasts are not always an evil.

Figure 8: Dragon Slayer (Digital Print; 2010)
Aspects of Nature

Animals representing different parts of nature are a common theme. They can also the symbol of a being or a harbinger. Some animals can even be all of these things. The owl is one such creature in mythology. It is the symbol of Athena, and is also considered an omen of importance in many parts of the world (Lewis). Even in video games they play an important role; in a Zelda game an owl is a reincarnated sage that guides the hero (The Legend of Zelda). In my piece Harbinger I sculpted an ancient looking statue of an owl being not unlike a totem. On the walls are Athena with her owl, and a Japanese ink drawing of one (Japan considers different owls as bringing different fortunes, good or bad). There are many kinds of animal legends, but it is surprising how often cultures come up with similar meanings to them. Owls can be wise bringers of dramatic change, ravens are often tricky, and other animals have other purposes. Humans even invent similar stories based on totally imaginary beings like the firebird. Cultures from around the world have stories about a powerful flaming bird, like the Simurgh of Persia or the Greek Phoenix (Wilkinson, p.171). In both cases, the creature is associated with long life and fire. Firebird (another work of mine) shows the similarity in the appearance of this creature throughout the world. This kind of interest in the power of nature leads to other another archetype: the creation of aspects of nature.
Figure 9: Harbinger (Digital Print; 2010)

Figure 10: Firebird (Digital Print; 2010)
Man has always come up with stories explaining how certain parts of nature were created or acquired. Natural landmarks become the inspiration for myths. The Giant's Causeway in Ireland inspired people to claim that the Irish hero Fionn MacCumhaill built the stone bridge so that he could battle the Scottish giant Benandonner. Upon seeing him, Fionn fled back to Ireland and disguised himself as a baby. When Benandonner saw Fionn he assumed that if the infant was that size that the father must be enormous, and ran back to Scotland demolishing the causeway as he fled. One way to explain aspects of nature is to make the aspect itself a mythical creature. Both the Greeks and the Native Americans call the north wind a living being. In the tale of the Argonauts Jason employs the help of two of his crew who are descended from the north wind (and can therefore fly) to defeat the dreaded harpies. Today's mythology includes these ideas. The reason unexplained lights appear changes from foxfire to UFO activity (just look at X-Files or watch a program about alien abductees). Characters in games summon elemental beings to aid them. One can even watch a contemporary embodiment of the north wind on screen in the form of the mutant called Storm.

Pop mythology even has its own Prometheus in the form of Anakin Skywalker. This Greek myth stole fire from the gods and gave it to man, and as punishment he was sentenced to have his liver pecked out by a giant black eagle every day for eternity. The Native American legend of Rainbow Crow is similar. When the world became too cold, the animals sent Rainbow Crow (the most beautifully colored bird with the most beautiful voice) up to the spirit-who-creates-by-thinking in order to ask him to make it warm again. It was a three-day journey up, but when he arrived the spirit said that the ice had a spirit, too. Since the cold must remain until spring, the spirit gave Rainbow Crow fire. On the long trip back the fire burned his feathers and
made them black, and the smoke choked his voice and made him hoarse. He was treated as a hero when he arrived, and was assured that, though he had paid a terrible price, he would be rewarded. Humans would not cage him because he could not sing, nor would they hunt him because he tasted of smoke. These myths explain the acquisition of an element, but they are more important for the fact that they both illustrate an important lesson; there are dire consequences to your actions.

The myth of Icarus flying to close to the sun relates to these, as well. A good companion for these myths is our own about Anakin Skywalker. He grasped at power, and when he reached too high he was burned, he was covered in black, and his voice was ruined. The difference is that he reached for the opposite reason of Rainbow Crow, so the only ones who revere him are the other fallen. *Flying Too High* is a piece that I made to show this myth. It portrays a combination of Icarus and Rainbow Crow on a stone tablet, and is made with techniques used to make films like Star Wars. I make these works to show the relationship between these stories, even though they are different in certain ways.
Figure 11: *Flying Too High* (Digital Print; 2010)
CHAPTER 5: POP MYTHOLOGY

Minor differences in the stories are not what really separate pop mythology from classic myth. These differences occur between each culture's myths. However, they are small, leaving the core of the story intact. The changing and passing of mythology is how people develop new stories, and also how we prove the timelessness of a truly worthy myth. If a legend speaks to us deeply enough then it will remain reasonably unchanged; the story of Gilgamesh has been passed down for around four thousand years. Though the cultures that write the myths have differences that are reflected in the stories, there are striking similarities. That is why we have archetypes that we can recognize: the trickster, the great war, the hero. The core of these characters has remained untouched from marble statue to film reel to computer chip. Even the differences that may seem larger don’t damage the lasting influence of these characters (in fact, some changes have been necessary to make our mythology more relevant to our time). Neither the separation of the sacred and the mythical, the change in the influence of nature, or the commercial aspect of our mythology really has that great of an effect on the quality of pop mythology in the long run. Nor does it lessen its importance to the present-day American.
Nature VS Nature

One of the classic themes in mythology is man battling against the forces of nature. Some powers are so great (like rapids, whirlpools and earthquakes) that they require an even greater power to explain them. Consequently, overcoming these obstacles can prove one's extraordinary constitution (or at least one's link to the extraordinary in the form of help from a greater power). Jason proves he is worthy of a great task when he swims across a raging river carrying a disguised Hera on his back. Many of Heracles’ labors revolve around conquering some terrible animal like the Nemean Lion or the Cretan Bull. In Celtic myth Manawyddan, in order to restore his cursed companions, must deal with an enchanted plague of mice that steal his crops. In some tales an aspect of nature must be subdued in order to restore a balance. In a Cheyenne story Bow-In-Hand must defeat Winter-Man (who has brought a hard and early winter) and drive him away, leaving his children who bring milder winters. Our myths still deal with nature; superman may stop a lava flow with his breath, and Luke Skywalker must battle a monstrous snow beast called a wampa in order to save his own life and receive a sacred vision from his dead master (The Empire Strikes Back). However, a variation that has arisen is the replacement of nature.

Today much of the world understands more about nature and sees it as less of a threat and needing less explanation. Humanity's technology and separation from nature has become our biggest foe in industrialized nations. We are afraid of the unknown consequences of our technological violations upsetting the balance of nature. Where before was the threat of nature turning its fury on us in the form of avalanches and fire now resides the terror of our own machines turning against us. Even when our heroes are pitted against the forces of nature, it is often a natural force unleashed by the corrupting influence of man and his machines; the lava
Superman must stop frequently seems to be caused by a bomb or giant drill constructed by a 
villain. *The Lord of The Rings* uses Saruman and his armies as a representation of the horrors of 
mechanized warfare and the destruction of the natural world (Tolkein). The Terminator films are 
also a popular representation of this threat. In the movie humans go so far as to create an 
artificial intelligence that wishes to destroy us (*Terminator*). This intelligence creates a whole 
world of machines; it is a new world with its own artificial nature ready to punish humanity for 
meddling with technology just like myths about monster whirlpools warned us not to meddle 
with real nature. There are many stories of recent years that warn against letting our science 
consume us (*Tron, Dune, Godzilla*). There are even tales that encourage us to not only attain a 
balance with nature, but with this new techno-nature, as well.

Heroes must conquer the monsters created by an abuse of technology, restoring harmony 
between man and machine and punishing the offenders. In *Robocop* the protagonist wins by 
gaining control of his mechanical half, and stopping those who have caused technology to run 
amuck (a similar lesson of balance is taught in the Matrix trilogy). Perhaps the best example is 
Star Wars. The hero must use his balance with the universe around him to defeat an army 
(dehumanized by masks that are mechanical in appearance) whose symbol is a gear and are led 
by character consumed by his mechanical body that commands a false planet that can destroy 
worlds. In the end the hero prevails over the army, and restores a measure of humanity to the 
fallen cyborg while becoming part machine in the process. Just as the forces of nature are an 
obstacle in ancient mythology, so the forces of mechanization are in our contemporary 
mythology (becoming the lynch pin of the entire science fiction genre). That is why I made *Man 
Vs Natures*. I sculpted a beast representing the force of nature we must face fighting a robotic
figure representing humanity’s technology. These are both worlds we must deal with, but they also battle against each other. In the background are depictions of the fear people hold for both the natural and synthetic world; there is a picture of the wolf from the Little Red Riding Hood story, and a concept painting from the film Terminator. This shows how nature is an old fear, but the new world we have created is an equally threatening one.

Figure 12: Man Vs Natures (Digital Print; 2010)
Secular Myth

Probably the biggest difference between pop mythology and that of the Greeks, Celts, etc. is that western pop culture has separated religion and myths. The Greeks made statues of Zeus and Heracles, while we make life-sized resin statues of Spiderman and Darth Vader in boggling numbers. We don't light offerings to Batman, and we don't believe that William Shatner built a canon out of rocks and bamboo to shoot the alien lizard man. However, just because it is not a matter of belief, does not mean that our mythology is not sacred to us on some level.

Most people have some story that resonates with them all their life. Movies have inspired people to do great things, and comic books have made children grow up to be a hero in a uniform. The symbols generated by the greatest of these myths have taken on a higher (though not religious) meaning. I am a friend to a family in which the father was raised with Superman, as were the sons. When the father died my friends asked two things of me; they wanted me to paint a portrait of the father on his urn, and they wanted me to design a memorial tattoo for their father using the Superman symbol to go on the arm of the eldest son, Chris. I am equally honored to have done both because I know what that symbol means to them. Chris is the second one of the sons to have that symbol etched into his body. If you take a batarang or light saber and hold it in front of a group of a thousand people, almost all of them are going to recognize those symbols. Hold a wooden club and a golden apple in front of them and only a fraction will understand the references. Even the people that don't recognize the pop symbols must recognize the impact that they have had on the world around them. The fans of these pop myths are not part of a comic book religion, but their fanaticism can seem similar to the devotion of a cult member. Even the creators of these stories recognize the power of them; though not meant literally, Stan Lee (the
creator of many Marvel comics heroes like Spiderman, the Hulk, and the Fantastic Four) often greets comic book fans by calling them true believers.

**The Importance of Popular Myth**

Myths grow and change over distance and time, and this is the mythology for this time and western influenced popular culture. However, the characters and the tales are still the same at the heart. Whether it’s Dr. Who or Heracles doesn't matter. Many people see the mythology of ancient times and think of them as a way to teach lessons and timeless stories. The difference between that and our mythology is that ours did not go through a time of belief. Our mythological stories were made for entertainment right from the beginning, and they still inspire entire generations. Besides, the Greeks used their myths as entertainment in theatre.

The argument that we make toys based on our stories instead of monuments is asinine. Many cultures have made toys based on their heroes, and those that appreciate pop mythology do build monuments based on its legends. There is a bronze sculpture of a rider chasing a boar referencing the hunt of mystical boar into the underworld. This statue is small and has wheels mounted on it; that is a toy. Even the votive statue of Lugh's chariot pulling the sun is constructed in a similar manner. If only for an instant, that sculpture most likely used it or at least thought of it as a toy. Just pushing it across a few inches of a table and enjoying it is all it takes.

In regard to monuments of pop culture, they aren't hard to discover. Metropolis, Illinois is an entire town that stands as a monument, carrying the theme throughout the city including a
massive statue of Superman. Yes, this is an attempt to lure tourists, but it means there are enough people passionate enough about this to make Metropolis worth building. Also, while the Parthenon was built with a belief in mind, it is ridiculous to think that it wasn't also built to impress and attract people to the city. We even have monuments to icons of pop mythology out of real life. In Bosnia there stands a life size Bruce Lee statue as a symbol of the fight against ethnic division between Muslims, Croats, and Serbs. A member of the Urban Movement Mostar said, "We will always be Muslims, Serbs, or Croats, but one thing we all have in common is Bruce Lee" (Bosnia). This is proof that Bruce Lee has become such an icon in popular culture that his appeal has become worldwide. To dismiss the cultural significance of these facts is nothing short of a blind refusal to see the art in the legends that are important to much of this world.

Some will claim that the level of passion that I describe is a rarity, that most people don't care that much about a single story. That is true to an extent; the fact that a pop myth is not called a belief system does mean that there is nothing to make people feel they have to adhere to that one group of stories. That is the reason that there are so many stories to choose from. Fans of games and comics will try out new adventures even if they come out as often as once a week. In fact, they often do come out once a week. With so many myths out there, people break into different factions. Their numbers may seem small because of how many people reside in this nation, or because there are so many groups, but they are all fiercely defensive of their mythologies (sometimes to the point of creating heated rivalries: Star Trek vs. Star Wars). Our ravenous appetite for tales has had an effect on another ingredient needed for all myths: the passage of time.
A reliable way to determine the greatness of any work of art has always been how it is viewed over time. A piece may be made for one culture at a certain time, rejected by a new cultural movement decades later, and after two hundred years be hailed as a masterpiece from then on. Mythology is also judged by time. However, being a story leaves mythology more subject to change and adaptation. A person may hear a story in one country and retell it in their own land, altering a few points to make it more relevant. Through the ages stories have become myth, and people have seen the same basic story arise in different cultures. The stories that last are the ones that are universally appealing. Often, a culture has discovered that a matching story exists in a place where they have never had contact. Every people seems to end up with a group of myths that are variations of the same stories, and they amass them is by whittling down the selection over time. Even events are turned to myth over the years. The Trojan war is a part of the *Iliad*, and many of our wars have a mythos about them (American revolution, WWII, Civil War). Many of our stories have become myth in the same way, gaining a following and esteem over time. However, because of the secular nature of our myths and the speed at which we digest them, it takes less time for fans of pop culture stories to find their mythology.

Information travels so freely now that tales can come, change, go, and be reborn in a matter of a few years. A good example is the recent movie of a classic character that has been around since Greece: the embodiment of rage and vengeance, a fury. The Incredible Hulk was turned into a movie in 2003, was absorbed by the fans and was found to not be the myth wanted, and was remade in 2008. Just five years and a story has been redone to make it the myth we want, just like the story of Heracles was redone to make it the myth wanted for an animated film in the 1990's. I do not insist that you view all of these changes as positive, I merely point out the
phenomenal speed (reflecting the speed that we employ for most aspects of our contemporary lives, especially the sharing and absorption of information) at which we can process and filter these tales until a myth remains. While this may make them seem worthless as we watch most new contenders crash and burn, it actually speeds up the process of divining the divine; worthy stories last while unworthy ones are forgotten.

Myth and Money

Finally, the commercial environment in which pop mythology is born is often not considered appropriate for the task. This seems an odd thing considering that so many of the ancient mythological subjects that have statues, murals and buildings dedicated to them. It is not reasonable to assume that all of these artists and craftsmen labored for no compensation for hundreds of years. The idea that art can also earn money is not a strange one. There are characters like the Toys R Us mascot Geoffry Giraffe that were made just for the purpose of advertising a product, and these are eliminated from consideration as myth; these are simple corporate symbols, having none of the story or depth of an archetypal character like Frodo or Luke Skywalker. Tales and characters created today that become myths only become that because they resonate with people, and the fact that money is involved has no more to do with it than any other art. The work made for the sole purpose of earning money that is put into the gallery is phased out just as the films made with just profit in mind are eventually dismissed. True, like any other art, the longer a series goes, the more likely money plays a progressively
larger role. Commercialism certainly has the potential to produce meaningless work, but one need only examine the characters and story (if there is one) for a short time to see the difference.

There has always been the potential for the misuse of mythology: the emperor Commodus dressing like Hercules in an attempt to gain favor, use of German and Norse mythological symbols by Hitler's SS, the Thunderbird used as the name of a low-end fortified wine, even Hercules being used to sell tires. However, this does not automatically mean that all mythology is nothing but a cheap grab at advancement. It is equally ludicrous to assume that all of contemporary mythology is made for the same reason. Commercialism has always had a place in mythology, and it does have its advantages. The marketability of mythology has greatly expanded the potential venues in which it can be shown.

It has jumped from pages to a movie screen where you can watch your chosen hero come to life. There are actually quite a few pictures about Hercules himself. We have been watching mythology on screen since Nosferatu was made on through the spaghetti westerns and Star Wars, and now the rash of comic book movies. True, some have been made that are not what many would consider worthy of being called mythology, but the ones that are worthy have hit such a chord that they have become a cultural phenomenon. They can do this because they are the new generation of stories that speak to a new generation of people. They are still the tales and lessons that have remained important to humanity, though they have changed just enough to be more relevant to this time. Mythology has grown along with us. Our mythology shares the same characters, stories, and lessons that ancient myths from all over the world have shared for millennia.

Joseph Campbell developed the theory of the monomyth, and many of our stories follow
that blueprint exactly; a hero leaves the common world to a place of adventure and magic, wins a victory and returns with the ability to bestow treasures on his contemporaries. *The Hobbit* fits this description, detailing the tale of how Bilbo leaves his comfortable life to embark on a dangerous journey to battle a dragon, returning with the monster’s horded riches. *Star Wars* fits this theory so well that Campbell himself commented on how amazed he was when he watched it with George Lucas, stating that Lucas truly understood mythology. While some may claim that Lucas was simply influenced by myths (pulling information from mythology rather than creating it), the reality is that all myths use these characters and stories. Otherwise, there would be no such thing as archetypes.

The Arthur legend has been passed around the British Isles, and has been changed and drawn from without one version being considered less than the others. Why should our mythology be considered less? The wisdom of Fintan or Gandalf is to be respected, the bravery of Odysseus or Frodo is to be admired, and the malevolence of Hades or Lex Luthor is to be guarded against. The fact that they now swallow us into a moving breathing world on a giant screen only makes the point clearer.

Now there is even interactive mythology in the form of video games. You can be the hero (or even the villain) in your favorite myth. It is an incredible way to truly be a part of the story. The player can take time and explore the world, answering questions about the myth by seeing and experiencing. A book or a statue is a wonderful way to spark the imagination and let your mind draw the story out, but there is an excitement in the world responding in unexpected ways. You jump when surprised and your heart quickens the first time Link faces Ganon. This is mythology, and this is what my work explores
CHAPTER 6: MY WORK

It should be apparent that mythology means a lot to me, and that it is still very much alive in some very interesting forms. I explore these forms by creating works that combine and contrast the different mythologies using media from both classic and contemporary influences. At first glance my work appears to be photograph of an art gallery (often using a real art gallery as a reference). However, they are actually scenes created with processes developed for movies. By doing this, I can show the familiar side of mythology in the form of ancient statues in a gallery, but also display the influences of today's culture and the importance of contemporary processes.

Process

I begin with a design, pulling inspiration from classic and pop mythology. The work Ruinous Sight refers to the archetype of a being that can destroy with sight. The same design processes are used in the other pieces of the series. Hades is shown in a gallery in King of The Underworld with classic paintings of the character and a Ralph McQuarrie concept design of Darth Vader. Man Vs Natures depicts the two natures man fights in mythology: actual nature and our own nature (or the mechanical facsimile of nature we create). The walls bear paintings of the wolf with Red Riding Hood and concept work from Terminator. This alone shows the relationship between classic depictions of mythology seen in art galleries and the way our society
most often views myths today in the form of movies and comic books. However, to push the relationship further I have made the gallery statues, gallery, and even the paintings using processes used in movies and presented it on film. After all, film is a major gallery for pop mythology.

Figure 13: *King of The Underworld* (Digital Print; 2010)

After the design of the character is done I determine the skeletal structure that would support whatever character I have drawn. An armature is then made from 14-16 gauge steel wire or MIG welding wire. These armatures are then often attached to a wooden base. Then I sculpt the figure over the armature with clay (in this case Super Sculpey). Sculpey has the advantage of
not shrinking when baked so prebaking (the practice of hardening some pieces before adding them to the unbaked main work) is easily possible. Also, the clay hardens at such a low temperature that it is possible to use a heat gun to gradually harden specific areas of the sculpture. The statues are finished with acrylic paints and enamels to look like bronze and stone. This process is used to create prototypes for toys and character concepts for movies. Using the process and presenting it properly makes it possible to simulate classic techniques, mimicking a giant bronze sculpture in a photograph. The gallery itself is also a sculpted illusion.

Figure 14: Armature of Dragon Slayer
Modeled from galleries existing in real life, the scenes in my work are made from foam core, illustration board, and other assorted materials. The walls are cut and carefully handled (any small dents will appear massive in the photo) and arranged for each scene. I made the wooden floor by cutting slats of mahogany, cherry, and oak into miniature boards and laying them (creating a real, though tiny, hardwood floor). The concrete floor is made with foam core board and a paint that has a similar sheen to the paint used on a floor of that kind. The doors are made of real wood, and the windows made with plexiglass with painted frames cut from
illustration board. Objects like the light switch, benches, waste basket, power outlets, and
doorknobs were all painstakingly created using a combination of plastic model kits (a train set oil
tank building, a Ford Model T car kit, and a fueling station model). I cut and shaped the parts to
the desired forms, assembled them as needed and painted them to become miniscule copies of
details found in most museums. There is even a small brochure on a bench measuring only a few
millimeters across. I cut copper tubing and used Christmas lights to create the directional
lighting, and used floral lights and painted tubes for the track lighting. The florescent lights are
Christmas lights inserted into either end of a cut drinking straw and arranged over plastic panels
laid into the ceiling. The ceiling is made with illustration board attached to a rigid support
structure that I fashioned with around a hundred individual ceiling tiles cut from arches paper
and arranged carefully by hand.

The paintings on the wall are actually printed onto arches paper and hung miniature frames (most of which I made with pieces of wood). Even the figure of Cyclops was made to look like an average museum patron just for that scene. It is the small details that make a scene like this believable. This kind of construction is common in movies; many of the ships in the original Star Wars trilogy were made from assorted model kits and even safety razors. I made these objects clean and precise (as did the people who worked on these movies), otherwise the work would not stand up to being photographed and shown at such a large scale. I created a convincing art gallery using techniques that are usually used to make work often considered unfit to be in an art gallery: a contemporary showcase displaying what appears to be a classic showcase. This demonstrates the relation between the two worlds, and their equal importance to our culture.
Figure 16: *Lee gallery partially assembled*

**Purpose**

These pieces were made to display the close relationship between ancient mythology and the stories popular in many of today’s cultures. The differences between the two are differences that match the changes in the cultures that develop them. The boundaries people have put between
them in terms of their values are often undeserved; many of the people who have grown up with this new kind of mythology have gained more from it than from hearing ancient stories about Greek heroes. This is not because the tales are so different, but because the changes that have occurred have made the new versions more relevant. My work shows the similarities in the content, but it also uses some of the ideas behind pop mythology to make the artwork more relevant. I use visual illusions to put the content up on film. One of the lessons about contemporary America that its new myths have taught is that we respond to this kind of presentation.

I make these sculptures because I love the stories they come from. The Celtic and Greek myths from thousands of years ago are enjoyed with the movies and books that many children have been raised on in the past fifty years. I present them in these photographs so others will approach and think that they are viewing a picture of a large old sculpture in a gallery. Only after they think it is an impressive work do they find out that it is a small clay statue. Then they will be willing to lean in and really look at the actual sculpture. Then the viewer may think this kind of art means more than they may have thought, and so might the mythology in the stories of popular culture that permeate the world around them.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Whether it is from a gallery, a storybook or a movie, mythology is something humans see throughout our lives. It is important to our learning as a child, and useful to remind us who we are as adults. Mythology has been present throughout history, and the same characters have been used to teach the same lessons. Our time is no different; we can escape to a world of heroes doing great deeds by reading Beowulf or watching Return of the Jedi. Though we know that Lord of The Rings is only a series of novels and films, it still inspires us because it uses the archetypes that reach all people. I use my art to show how these myths are all related. I don't do this because our pop myths are obscure or unappreciated, but because so many of us do not know why we appreciate our lore. People don't know why these characters speak to us in such a profound way. I have simply pointed out that the stories that we have made part of our popular culture have always been a part of us. It is our mythology.
Figure 17: Stark Gallery (Digital Print; 2010)
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