Revisiting Marginalia: A Print Congregation of Plant and Place

Breslin Bell
bbell4@wellesley.edu

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Revisiting Marginalia
A Print Congregation of Plant and Place

Breslin Bell
Class of 2018, Art Studio & Art History

May 2018
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I. Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank the Wellesley College Art Department, from studio art to art history, for ensuring plentiful opportunities and valuable experiences in my four years at Wellesley. I am especially indebted to my thesis advisor Phyllis McGibbon for her limitless dedication and thoughtful guidance. She is a highly revered mentor of mine in study, work, and life and I am truly grateful to have been her student.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Meredith Fluke, Kemper Curator of Academic Exhibitions and Affairs at the Davis Museum at Wellesley College, for her interest and counseling in my thesis research work.

I would also like to thank Katherine Ruffin, Book Studies & Book Arts Program Director, for her unending support in the Book Arts Lab at Clapp Library. In addition, thank you to Ruth Rogers, Curator of Special Collections, for sharing her abundant knowledge and passion for artist books.

And Lastly, I thank my sister, my mother, my grandmother, and my great-grandmother for inspiring me to be a woman of independence and creativity.
II. Introduction

I make prints; maybe I’m a printmaker, maybe not. There are blocks, plates, stones, and stencils to plan, craft, and dwell on, until you roll on ink and press them into contact with paper again and again. Sometimes my goal is immaculate, repeatable precision for an edition — a group of identical prints, sometimes my goal is experimentation and variation — improvising through proofs of mono-prints. Both are meaningful. Printmaking is the thing that keeps me tethered and interested. This year, I’ve gravitated towards linocut printing, though there are other processes involved. I enjoy working reductively, toggling between carving and printing as I build color layers. By the end, the linoleum block is greatly reduced from its first stage and is stained with many layers of color. My prints, exemplified best by *pagan eden triptych* (Figure 1), have grown in scale from the typical printmaking formats and from my previous work in classes. This shift of scale has been a source of technical discovery.

Printmaking has a worldwide and century-spanning history; from the earliest forms of woodblock printing, to the introduction of metal movable-type and the printing press, to engraving, etching, lithography, and screen-print. Of particular interest to me is the Western codex pre- and post-Gutenberg woodcuts made for illustrations and marginalia, and text printed with metal movable-type. I have a passion for medieval cultures and am constantly drawing connections between medieval and contemporary print practices. In her article, *Printed Matter(s)*, artist Kathryn J. Reeves states: “This art form, as unnoticed in critical review as it is in the international post, is often perceived to be something more connected to the past than to the postmodern, conservative rather than disruptive.”¹. My work aims to embrace connections to the

¹ Kathryn J. Reeves, *Printed Matter(s)* 29.
past while breaking into the postmodern and disruptive with alternatives to, as she calls it, the ‘conservative’ — both technical- and content-based.

My thesis work is set in motion by a fundamental unease, a passion, an obsession, or some combination of the three. I like clusters, dualities, triptychs, and marginality. This body of work was set in motion by my personal paradox towards organized religion combined with my ongoing passion for Medieval art aesthetics, which is, after all, largely religious in nature. My thesis combines studio practices with art historic inclinations, exemplified by my extensive research at Special Collections of inspiring artists such as Elaine Galen, Alicia McKim, Ann Lovett, and Robin Price.

My uneases spring specifically from Catholicism, owing to the fact that I was raised in an Irish and Polish Catholic family. Though I would add that, this apprehension has become the initial anxiety that sparked the work rather than its singular interpretation. While it motivated the thesis research, there were times throughout the process when it mattered more and less. Looking back upon the work, I feel it is less essential for the viewer to know about these early motivations. Furthering this point, my thesis has taken on related yet fresh themes. My work aims to recontextualize religious imagery in subtle ways; my alternatives to the Church. The prints explore marginality; both physical marginalia added to the edges of the page and mental marginalia previously secondary or subservient. I’ve arrived at a body of work focusing on Garden of Eden imagery, or rather, my pagan garden’s imagery.

Roots are important to me. They seep into my prints. I am deeply connected to these roots — the roots that I have sculpted. My sense of place. During a Fall 2018 talk from visiting artist Lee Marchalonis ‘97, she said something about process that applies to how I’ve worked through
my thesis research: “find a seed or a kernel — some little things that nibble at you”\textsuperscript{2}. When something absorbs your mind you give space to it and let it breath, grow, and sort itself out. That’s my process. Those are my prints.

III. Femininity — *Always Lilith Never Eve*

The earliest produced set of prints included in my final show are those titled *always Lilith never Eve* (Figure 2). These were produced by a single linoleum block. I used the Vandercook printing press in the Book Arts Lab at Wellesley College’s Clapp Library to execute the set. The Book Arts Lab, directed by Katherine Ruffin, is at once a museum and archive, as well as a workspace for those making handmade books — the Vandercook press could be thought of as a descendent of medieval manuscripts, calligraphy, and illumination. The Vandercook aids in registration during reductive printing — when a block is printed multiple times there needs to be a system to keep each layer of color aligned perfectly over the others. In some of my prints, the text is clear and crisp while in others, due to inversion of the block or paper, the text is hidden. The text itself becomes an image. In the print, “Always Lilith” is carved in an uncial-like typeface suggestive of well-known early Irish manuscripts (Figure 3). While Christian in content, these manuscripts were visual symbols of a Celtic culture that existed pre-Christianity in Ireland. Manuscripts such as this are abundant in lattices, knots, and rounded letter forms. “Never Eve” is carved in a more delicate, flourished, and complex type that contrasts the clear, strong, and full uncial.

\textsuperscript{2} Lee Marchalonis, *Visiting Artist Lecture in Print Studio* (2018).
always Lilith never Eve? Why this curt and concrete title? Who is Lilith? The story originates in the book of Genesis, the story of Adam and Eve. Lilith was Adam’s first wife. She rejected this role and turned towards the ways of Satan as she was cast out of Paradise. Soon after, God creates Eve of Adam’s rib, therefore, she is subservient and obedient. Adam and Eve existed together in Paradise until the fall of man when Eve is tempted by a serpent to take an apple from the tree of knowledge. The serpent is Lilith. This story is a powerful legend subtly referenced in art history (Figure 4). Elaine Galen’s artist book, Lilith: An Interpretation, expands and illuminates upon Lilith’s story in relation to the book of Genesis:

“Lilith of the Night
I am called
Twin sister of Adam
King of Eden
Beautiful am I and more wise than he
Yet, I was not chosen to rule
But to bear Adam’s children
submit to his desires
I would not be so
For this I was expelled from Paradise…
In the guise of a beguiling serpent
the apple was offered
The world was given knowledge
and conflict…”3

Here Lilith is a twin sister, prospective wife and mother, and later Sammael’s (Satan’s) lover. She is tenacious, vengeful, complicated, and wise. The book notes: “This is a third in a series devoted to women of antiquity and mythology following Deborah published in 1996 and Miriam in 2001”4. On the Special Collection’s website, the artist book is listed under “Semitic

Mythology”¹⁵. Lilith is acknowledged in Judaism much more so than in Catholicism. I think of her as an early feminist.

My introduction to Lilith was not at Mass, but rather, listening to musician Sarah McLachlan explain why she titled her all female traveling music festival “Lilith Fair”:

“I got the name from a girlfriend of mine talking to her about the concept of a women’s festival, and the first word out of her mouth was Lilith… she took off — said “Fine I don’t need this.” And, I loved the egalitarian element of that, I loved the reactionary element of it, I thought it was a bit cheeky; and I thought it was very perfect for Lilith and it’s quite curious because almost everybody I know didn’t know who Lilith was and she’s such a strong and wonderful feminist figure. Yet we’ve never been taught that so I feel really proud to put her back on her rightful goddess position.”⁶

McLachlan’s “Lilith Fair” was on tour from the summer of 1997 to 1999 and consisted of female solo artists and female-led bands, including but not limited to, Sheryl Crow, Indigo Girls, Meredith Brooks, Patty Griffin, Emmylou Harris, Jewel, Suzanne Vega, Missy Elliott, Cowboy Junkies, Liz Phar, Sinéad O’Conner, and Shawn Colvin. Sarah McLachlan and other female artists of the 1990s faced considerable opposition in the music business. “Lilith Fair” was a direct response to such opposition and Lilith was a fitting choice to serve as its icon (Figure 5).

I see Lilith and femininity as a source of strength for myself and for my work. As exemplified by my mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, femininity is hardy and firm. My work is feminist. I am a feminist. I am choosing ‘femininity’ as my operating term for this thesis because I want to focus the broad feminist conversation on feminine strength — femininity is a collective group, a quality, a power, a knowledge free from biology and gender stereotypes.

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⁵ Wellesley College Library Web Catalog, Lilith: An Interpretation (2018).
My work alludes to feminine topics, such as the story of Lilith and Eve, to explore how the female experience, in all its manifestations, can be powerful. The text, chant, saying, prayer, or reminder of *always Lilith never Eve* encourages one to be independent, well-rooted, non-subservient, and assertive. I see Lilith as the weed in the conventional Garden of Eden. She is the first witch that dances with the devil. It’s important for my work to indicate a choice or an alternative even if the source is somewhat unclear to my viewers. In *The Storm of Creativity*, Kyna Leski notes that “language can carry more than what you intended.”

Here’s an example of the perplexities of language I thought about when making this set of prints: Why does the phrase ‘Adam and Eve’ sound so right while ‘Eve and Adam’ sounds so awkward? Words are laden with associations, connotations, histories, contexts, and references.

IV. A Shift in Path — Inward Looking

During my first semester of senior thesis research my focus gradually shifted towards nature imagery, the Garden of Eden, Catholic alternatives and away from more confrontational approaches towards the Church. Along the way, my prints and the topics they addressed became more focused and meaningful. Therefore, *always Lilith never Eve* was pivotal as I moved towards the plant based, *Pagan Eden Triptych*. This triptych reconsiders and revisits forms while breathing new life into them. With this shift, I also revisited the notion of marginalia, that which has previously lived on the margins — of texts, legends, histories, stories, books, and communities. ’Re-vision’, a term coined by Adrienne Rich, is used by Reeves to discuss the printmaking field of practice as Design: “The re-vision of the small print and printmaking is not

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a simple historiographic, revisionist exercise, but a process of re-looking, re-thinking, re-reading, and redefining both the historical and contemporary construction of the field.”\(^8\). I aim to re-vision printmaking and re-visit marginalia. Along the way, I learned that it is okay in the process of making to not know what you want until you see or make it. This shift was assisted by an exploration of artist books made by women, as well as, support from Meredith Fluke, Kemper Curator of Academic Exhibitions and Affairs, who helped me reconsider the relationship between plants and religion, specifically during the Medieval period as Fluke is a Medievalist, from herbals to dioscurides of many cultures (books describing herbs and plants and their culinary or medicinal properties) (Figure 6). *Pagan Eden Triptych* has become something of my personal herbal. Once this kind of inward looking began, the path of my thesis seemed almost obvious.

During this time I solidified my artist statement:

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set in motion
      an unease
      a passion
      an obsession
      a combination of the three
a conversation I want to dip into and immerse within
snatching up connections and carrying them with me through the process of making

    I like clusters
    I like dualities
    I like triptychs
still puncturing the busy conversation with breath and negative space
    empty bits
    blank regions
    marginality
```

\(^8\) Kathryn J. Reeves, *Printed Matter(s)* 30.
layers are good
layers of meaning
layers of process
layers of time

I make prints
maybe I’m a printmaker
maybe not

at times immaculate precision
at times experimentation and variation
more dualities

printmaking is the thing for me
the thing that keeps me tethered and interested

my roots are important to me
they seep into my prints
and I’m deeply connected to these roots
the roots that I have planted and tended and placed below me
the roots that I have sculpted
my sense of place

my prints are regularly plant based
    place based
    patina based

hallowing the natural world
drawn to things that are hardy and bulbous
things with spines and thorns
    the weeds
    the rural
    the rustic
    the ancient
    the pagan
and misapprehension of pagan
a wannabe medievalist but for now just an enthusiast

something absorbs your mind so you give space to it and let it breath and sort itself out
that’s my process
those are my prints
V. Plant Alternatives—*Pagan Eden Triptych*

During my thesis work, a central theme arose: the Garden of Eden. Much of my work is focused on this one aspect of Western religion and mythology. While this topic seemed unexpected at the time, it’s now obvious. Anchored by nature — in place of mythology, figuration, and iconography — *Pagan Eden Triptych* (Figure 7), is my version of the Garden of Eden, this time detached from the world’s major religions. Indicated by the word ‘pagan’ in the title, the three-part print is an alternative to established organized religions. Focusing on the Garden of Eden provides a way to narrow the scope of personal religious dualities; exploring alternatives such as, Lilith over Eve, plants over saints, marginal over central, pagan over Catholic, and nature over religion.

In early April of this year I attended Southern Graphics Council International (SGCI) in Las Vegas, Nevada, an annual gathering of artists who make prints. The 2018 Lifetime Award was presented to artist, printmaker, and activist Jaune Quick-To-See Smith who had a retrospective during the conference. Critic Gerrit Henry writes of Smith: “For all the primal nature of her origins, Smith adeptly takes on contemporary American society in her paintings, drawings and prints, looking at things Native and national through bifocals of the old and the new, the sacred and the profane, the divine and the witty.”

Though her work and mine are vastly different, I found similarities in her appreciation and hallowing of the natural world that stems from her nature-based and non-Western spirituality. During her keynote speech she spoke about her nature-based religion in America’s natural world noting that the plants on this continent

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are not recorded in the Bible\textsuperscript{10}. She elaborates: “…we are a part of everything that is beneath us, above us, all around us…”\textsuperscript{11}. These sentiments can be seen in her prints \textit{We are all Knots in the Great Net of Life} (Figure 8) and \textit{The American Landscape} (Figure 9). Her keynote resonated with me. Even though I had already produced \textit{Pagan Eden Triptych}, Jaune Quick-To-See’s words deepened my perception of my own work.

The triptych is filled with images of plants: fiddlehead, blueberry, raspberry, strawberry, thistle, dandelion, gorse, rhubarb, artichoke. All of these plants are of personal value to me. I’m drawn to plants that are hardy and bulbous (like artichoke) and plants with spines and thorns (like thistle). Fiddleheads, a wild fern plant, grow in the Northeastern United States where I was raised and are foraged for in the Spring. Fruit-bearing plants such as wild blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries adorn my triptych with rotund and robust forms. I associate these various types of plants with femininity. Rhubarb is stalky — a monstrous celery — with edible shoots and poisonous leaves. Dandelion and gorse are weeds infesting their countrysides. They grow in clusters and thickets, overpowering other plants. Their roots are strong. All of these plants call to mind words like weeded, rooted, rustic, and pagan.

The subjects of this triptych are foliage, herbage, and vegetation — subjects often kept to the margins. It is a congregation of plants thrown together in a fanciful, if somewhat irrational, composition. The plants are the focus. \textit{Pagan Eden Triptych} is a study of marginalia. For my prints, all my prints, what was marginal now is central. As observed by Reeves: “The margin,

\textsuperscript{10} Jaune Quick-To-See-Smith, \textit{Keynote Speech} (2018).

\textsuperscript{11} Jaune Quick-To-See-Smith, \textit{Keynote Speech} (2018).
and the identification with the marginal, is deeply imbedded within the printmaking psyche.”

I’ve chosen to hallow nature, to make it monumental. At its larger scale, *Pagan Eden Triptych* can be in conversation with painted triptychs and altarpieces that are often this size or larger. The plants too are many times life size and not to scale in relation to one another. Blueberries, gorse, and dandelion are carved in two sizes. There is a monstrous fiddlehead dropping down from the top of one of the panels with a bloated strawberry below. These relationships are whimsical, magical, even spiritual; monumental in its ability to push boundaries, sculpt meaning, and enhance perspective.

The plants move further away from the delicate flourishes in a petite Christian book of hours for personal prayer and devotion (Figure 10). Landscapes and greenery are rarely, if ever, the focus of a religious triptych or altarpiece; thinking of the resplendent Ghent Altarpiece in Belgium (Figure 11). Here, the vegetation is beautifully rendered though left to the margins, the background, or the periphery. It supports the sequence of figures. The same can be said of many Medieval Catholic manuscripts with marginal flourishes among small figural beasts and men. They accompany and enhance the text.

Employing the triptych form is a recontextualization of a primarily religious format. A triptych is a set of three and can be artistic, literary, or musical. For Catholicism, a triptych is a painting or carving on three panels, often hinged together in a horizontal format to function as an altarpiece. My large prints evoke religious altarpieces and tapestries, in both scale and palette. Somewhat accidentally, my palette became that of many Medieval works: rich religion-related colors like deep purple and colors evoking natural dyes like a muddied yellow ochre. Alicia

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12 Kathryn J. Reeves, *Printed Matter(s)* 30.
McKim’s *Blessed Mother not afraid of snakes* (Figure 12) is an artist book utilizing traditional religions iconography, particularly that of the Virgin Mary. Here, McKim also reaches for a warm mustard yellow for the cover, a blood red ribbon, and a muted purple for the inside. Her book is a series of unfolding panels seeping with duality and symmetry\(^\text{13}\).

Another artist book by Robin Price, *Altar Book for Górecki* (Figure 13), embodies “The symphony of sorrowful songs” by Henryk Górecki with a Lamentation of the Holy Cross Monastery in Poland, a prayer from a cell wall, and a Polish folk song accompanied by three copperplate engravings and a woodcut\(^\text{14}\). Price’s artist book is a triptych book with three panels of deep purple, gold, and black. Upon examination one finds soft flames in the background, illuminating rays of type, and phoenix-like birds rising towards the heavens. I have had the pleasure of connecting with artist Robin Price for an interview years ago. It was a pivotal experience as a first-year considering a studio art major, and one I am now able to reference here, coming full circle. When I asked Price, ‘Why did you decide on a triptych format for your artist book? What is the significance between the book and altarpieces and/or religion?’ she replied:

“It felt like a way to say a prayer to my mother, and somehow – I can’t explain why – as something like a prayer of gratitude to the composer. The other reference seems clear to me now, but I don’t recall how conscious it was at the time: triptychs were often used in Medieval paintings and altar pieces to depict the crucifixion, the archetypal Christian image of suffering and death.”\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Alicia McKim, *Blessed Mother Not Afraid of Snakes* (2002).


The triptych format and the muted yet rich color palette for *Pagan Eden Triptych* allow the print to reference the past as it elevates something present.

**VI. Place Alternatives—Communion**

In conversation with the highly symbolic and direct *always Lilith never Eve, Communion* (Figure 14) is a screen-print with a more transparent message than the plant based prints. The term ‘communion’ can take many forms. For Christianity, for Catholicism, it is a service at which consecrated bread (or wafer) and wine (or juice), the sacrament of the Eucharist, are shared with the congregation. This part of the service symbolizes The Last Supper, the body and blood of Christ, and the Word made flesh. One part of the print represents this Holy activity with a chalice for the wine and a wafer hovering above to be dipped and placed upon a congregate’s tongue. The chalice is based on memory, both from experiences at the altar during Mass and medieval examples seen in museums such as the silver chalice by Brother Bertinus at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figure 15). These silver, metal, and gold vessels are often stunning and the epitome of fine devotional craftsmanship. Frequently my respect and admiration for works such as these is coupled with my uneases about Catholicism; this being a personal discontent on specific issues of today, rather than, a wholistic problem with religion.

The other side of my print represents another interpretation of the term ‘communion’: an open birth control pack revealing the month’s supply of pills that is one of many birth control options and health decisions for women. The word communion conveys the sharing of intimate thoughts, feelings, experiences on a mental or spiritual level; a congregation of individuals who participate in a common activity. To me this pill pack is inviting and comforting, as the chalice
and wafer may be for others. It is how I have chosen to protect myself. This print communicates
the aesthetic similarities between the chalice and the pack. Both are containers, one of wine and
wafer, one of twenty eight pills. One transports the blood of the Lord and one manages the blood
of the human.

The print represents religious and reproductive freedoms and choices. For me, and for
Catholics in my family, it is one or the other — the body and the blood, or the pills. Most
versions of Catholicism have strong views against many reproductive rights for women. Ann
Lovett’s artist book, Glass House (Figure 16), addresses the complex and melancholy
relationship between religion and pregnancy out of wedlock, abortion, and miscarriage in
Ireland. Lovett summarizes her inspiration at the books commencement:

“Ann Lovett lived and died in Granard, County Longford, Ireland. She was 15, pregnant
and unmarried. On January 31, 1984, she was found with her stillborn son in the grotto
of the Virgin Mary behind the Catholic Church. She died two hours later from
hemorrhage and exposure. It is unclear whether family or community members knew of
her pregnancy or offered her any help. The family has never spoken publicly of her
death, or of her sister Patricia’s death three months later from an overdose of prescription
drugs. The father of Ann’s child has never come forward of been identified. Three
month’s before Ann’s death the people of Ireland voted to support a referendum
effectively making the existing ban on abortion part of the country’s constitution.”16

Lovett makes this artist book in memory of child and mother Ann Lovett who shares the same
name. The cover of the book is a deep eggplant fabric. The poem of the book is solemn and
sweet, backdroppped by water droplets veiling miniatures of the Virgin Mary. Virgin for Mary,
superior and uppercase; virgin no longer for Ann, unchaste and lowercase. Lovett scrutinizes
unhealthy and judgmental sexual attitudes by the Church that I also disagree with, as indicated

by my print, *Communion*. The poem addresses aspects of punishment, shame, and guilt put upon a young woman of Catholic faith. Two poignant excerpts of the poem read:

“I dream now ochre, 
cinder black 
and wear the ash 
a dirty smear to show my shame 
I press the grime in pores

erasing all 
that I once was

you would not know, Virgin  
soot embedded in my scalp  
carved deep in lines  
of soil”

“your face is hard, Virgin  
and you forgive me not

your opaque gaze  
in dampening light  
is vacant, bitter cold”\(^{17}\)

As the generations progress, the women in my family move further from the wafter and closer towards the pill. Even so, I can only speak for my immediate family and the women who raised me. Even though I feel I can only speak for myself, and perhaps my closest female family members, it is eyeopening to consider how widespread a sentiment it can be. For instance, Jaune Quick-To-See Smith is an artist and Native American woman who would have different reasons for her aversion to Catholicism, likely rooted in conversion and history. Her beautiful and heartening spirituality is considered pagan to strict Western religions: “In my work I use humor and satire to present narratives on ethical treatment of animals, humans and our planet. My work

\(^{17}\) Ann Lovett, *Glass House* (2009).
is philosophically centered by my strong traditional Salish beliefs.¹⁸ There is variation among those who live at the margins of the world’s leading ideologies. They are the breath between them.

VII. A Congregation of Snakes — *Serpent Triptych*

Snakes, serpents, beasts, ophidians: these are things nestled within my Garden of Eden. I’ve made a home for them, a place for them, among my nature-based work with *Serpent Triptych* (Figure 17). This print grouping is a congregation, a gathering, of snakes across three linocut blocks. Though this work focuses on reptile not plant, I see it as a microcosm to the larger *Pagan Eden Triptych*, the place where the snakes would reside. The three snakes, across the three blocks, are of three different types: milk snake, ribbon snake, and garter snake. All are native to my home state of New Hampshire. The three are non-venomous and rather small when encountered in real life, smaller than depicted in the prints.

The term ‘snake’ has numerous connotations and references. A snake is a long limbless and scaly reptile with a jaw of considerable extension and a sometimes venomous bite. A snake can also be a deceitful person, *a snake in the grass*. Or a snake can be a motion or extension in a twisting, dragging, pulling, jerking, or gliding fashion. Snakes are, more often than not, viewed negatively. This is exemplified by the many historical, cultural, and social cases where snake imagery is used to denote something evil, sinister, or deceitful.

Serpent imagery is often associated with women, witches, pagans, Celtic traditions and knots, heretics, druids, Lilith tempting Eve, Medusa with her hair of serpents, beasts knotted and...

biting themselves in marginalia, goddesses, sirens with scales, and a preferred legend of mine: the story of how St. Patrick, patron saint of Ireland, drove all the snakes from Ireland where today their are none. The legend goes that St. Patrick arrives in Ireland, bringing Christianity to the island — now a well-known population for Catholicism, and in tandem with his conversions he banishes the serpents forever. The story is a metaphor for St. Patrick and his followers converting, banishing, and murdering pagans on the island. Whether pagan, heretic, or witch, one would be tagged with a negative serpent-like character. Witches were topics of great interest yet great disgust during the Medieval and Renaissance eras as epitomized by famous woodcuts and engravings by artists such as Hans Baldung (Figure 18) and Albrecht Dürer (Figure 19).

Looking back to Alicia McKim’s artist book Blessed Mother not afraid of snakes, on the connection between Lilith and serpents, McKim’s work references Eve’s serpent. The book focuses on the Virgin Mary, celebrating and idolizing her every attribute. Still, the legend of Lilith makes its way into the poem that starts: “They say you crushed Eve’s serpent lover in the garden, we say you are fearless…”

Additionally, when the book is completely closed, every protruding panel folded up tight, the text reads “Blessed Snakes” with the “Mother not afraid of” tucked away (Figure 20). Perhaps not purposeful, though, seemingly subliminal.

During my thesis research and production I’ve been thinking about how serpents fit into the conversations about femininity and feminism, marginality, paganism, religion, and nature. I’ve been on the lookout for snake references in an effort to culminate the before-mentioned list of reptile relations. The connections can come out of nowhere; during a visiting artist lecture by Wellesley alum Alia Ali she describes her travels in Mexico and her work that came out of that

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19 Alicia McKim, Blessed Mother Not Afraid of Snakes (2002).
journey. She adds in an anecdote she learned about how Catholics came to South America and cut down all the trees with snakes in them — another metaphor for stomping out paganism. I want my three snakes to be positive rather than negative. In a way, I aim to reclaim the imagery of the serpent as something still strong, yet not evil.

VIII. Conclusion — Outward Looking

Initially, my thesis work was set in motion by a personal unease, my relationship to Catholicism as it pertains to my family’s traditions and expectations: it was propelled forward by a series of intuitive connections made that ultimately focused my study. I drew closer to formal aspects, such as triptychs and marginality, unpacking both their physical and mental layers. The physical layers of printmaking and the mental layers of clustering connections. As I researched and created, I branched out and beyond my original unease and trusted a process of reconsideration, recontextualization, and revisitation. I focused more on alternatives rather than refusals. Diving back into my given roots, I found plant and place. My work hallows the natural world and pagan nature. As the last lines in The Storm of Creativity Leski writes:

“…students often ask, “How do you know? How do you know what to do, where to go, when it’s right?”… The permission to enter the “unknown, unremembered gate” comes from realizing that you don’t know. Wanting to know something that you do not know is the creative process.”

The process of willingly entering the unknown and accepting uncertainty as you work through a tension, a question, or a set of possibilities was the core of my thesis research. I aimed to

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21 Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience (2014).

embrace the creative process of not knowing and wanting to know. This thesis body of work has initiated reflection about the past, present, and future. There is a sense of revisiting in the work — by revisiting tradition, religion, history, the medieval, and early printmaking. The work has also enabled me the ability to look back to earlier work to find plentiful threads between these works and the prints that came before. This year has allowed me to see my own style, technique, and tendencies as an artist. Now, I am eager for the opportunity to share my work and my process with others. Printmaking has a very specific culture based in multiplication, distribution, visibility, and communication. As Jaune Quick-To-See Smith reminds us “…we want our messages to wallpaper the world… multiply our art like dandelions in the wind… share our work with the whole world and with each other…”23. Looking ahead, I aspire to wallpaper, multiply, and share my work — always Lilith never Eve, Pagan Eden Triptych, Communion and the like — for viewers to make their own cluster of connections as they revisit what may have been previously marginal.

23 Jaune Quick-To-See-Smith, Keynote Speech (2018).
IX. Bibliography


Reeves, Kathryn J., Printed Matter(s).


X. Images

Figure 1: detail, *Pagan Eden Triptych*, linocut and collage, 38 x 73 in., 2018

Figure 2: *alway Lilith never Eve*, linocut, 2017

Figure 3: detail, *The Book of Dimma*, second half of 8th c., TCD MS 59, f. 3, Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin
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Figure 5: Album Cover: “Lilith Fair: A Celebration of Women in Music - Best of Lilith Fair 1997 to 1999”

Figure 6: f.26.v (and detail), 3rd quarter 9th century-1st half 17th century, composite manuscript digitized, British Library
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Figure 20: cover (closed), Alicia McKim; [poem by] Susan Edwards; [box by] David Ashley, *Blessed Mother not afraid of snakes*, Rattlesnake Press, c2002, folded in box 28 x 28 cm
XI. Figure Credits (In order of appearance)

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