



Megan Greene

Rappaccini's Daughter



Los Norkuyles, colored pencil, gouache on black paper, 44 x 30 in, 2007

Their Gorgeousness Seemed Fierce, Passionate, and Even Unnatural

It is a hypnotic testament to the artist's hand and the viewer's eye that the drawings of Megan Greene appear to materialize from the darkness in which they reside. The things portrayed are not easily identified, but they exist within a convincing reality—perhaps better, a convincing unreality, manifestations of a waking dream, avatars of ambiguous meaning that we happen upon as we stumble forward through the shadows.

The black paper on which they are rendered offers a fuller blankness upon which (or within which) to draw and it's a savvy choice because, while these same drawings could exist on white, matte black creates a more emphatic sense that these object-creatures are physically occupying space. There is depth and dimension to their environment, without denoting whether the space is fantastical or real.

They are wildly unpredictable images and their uncertainty draws one closer and deepens their already substantial allure. They are overt, even unabashed, about their beauty but demure about what their splendor describes. It is unclear, before any given drawing, whether we are considering an object or entity; icon or organism; living creature or fossilized relic; tribal adornment or sophisticated jewelry; creature of sea or air; bird of paradise or bird of prey; rapturous fantasy or emblem of inchoate anxiety.

While commonalities of all these elements can be found throughout all the drawings, each one exists distinct from the next, parts of the same universe perhaps but not even remotely the same species. If they are a species, that is. As soon as we perceive an organic, biological detail within Greene's drawings, we are instantly distracted by the observation of non-organic elements. If we witness horns curling around and suggesting a living or once-lived thing, mechanical-seeming parts simultaneously reveal themselves and belie that expectation.

Greene's mingling of disparate elements imbue the works with a distinctive aura—despite the darkness, everything is on display, sometimes in a manner that verges on ostentatious. In a drawing like *Los Norkuyles*, the delineation of fabric forms stretching toward the top corners gives the impression that this entity is holding open its garment and brazenly flashing its flamboyant innards—*Red Skeleton*, by contrast, appears curled in repose. But it doesn't follow that everything is revealed, no matter how overtly splayed and displayed. The innards do not explain the thing either, but the precise arrangement of innards reveals another layer to Greene's work.

Los Norkuyles exemplifies one manner of formal composition used by Greene, a near-symmetry that, at quick glance, several of the drawings appear to contain. A repetition of forms, left and right, implies some sense of harmony defined by an unknown genome. But this breaks down upon closer inspection. This near-symmetry implies something measured, decorative, and tightly conceived but even within this there are hints of

wildness. Details are not actually symmetrical and even what appears balanced persistently includes some skew. Apparent symmetry, the suggestion of order, is as much of a ruse as everything else.

Even in her drawing method, Greene dismantles the viewer's expectations. Rendered with enormous dexterity—consider the impossibility of erasing these lines from black paper and you begin to appreciate the skill involved—they often read like the fanciful, unpublished imaginings of a deranged Victorian naturalist. Yet Greene often disrupts that naturalist's ease by inserting stark bright lines that purposely upset the softer, organic flow.

There are wide gradations to these marks and lines. Sometimes, these brighter marks intensify the sensation of depth. Sometimes they provide illumination on or within the things. Sometimes they are so intense, they register as white-hot. Sometimes they hint at motion. And then sometimes they appear entirely incompatible to the presumed reality of the thing. It's an interesting gesture because it is apparent that Greene's facility enables her to easily produce credible forms, yet she is not hesitant at times to distort that credibility with curious gestures. In *The Sorriest Sword*, the graceful swoop of a winged form is overlaid with bright lines that suggest skeletal/architectural markings, reiterating that what appears organic is perhaps manufactured.

In the Nathaniel Hawthorne story from which Greene borrows the title of the series, a 19th century scientist has concocted his own garden of eden verdant with exotic but often deadly plant life. It is intimated that he has employed the same machinations on his daughter, Beatrice, who is resplendent with her own beauty and her own potentially poisonous air. Throughout the tale, our hero Giovanni is flummoxed at trying to resolve his love for Beatrice with his fear of what toxins may actually comprise her being.

It is a complicated tale of resolving love and desire within undependable parameters. There is great dispute over the meaning of Hawthorne's tale. Much of the story involves itself with the instability of perception—Giovanni comes to doubt whether his perceptions are grounded more fully in fantasy or reality and Beatrice, the “unnatural” hybrid beauty, does not survive the tale. It's not clear why because she had the supposed antidote on the edge of her lips.

Hawthorne's suggestion may be that what appears unnatural and uncommon does not need correcting. An unexpected blend of elements may be a truer path toward satisfaction, made deeper because of its peculiarity. The intentionally ambiguous nature of Megan Greene's drawings is the tension that creates their singular beauty. If they defy easy categorization, it may be because they are not aspiring to evoke recognizable things in the world but to suggest a perpetual state of becoming.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator



The Sorriest Sword, colored pencil, gouache on black paper, 44 x 30 in, 2007



Red Skeleton, colored pencil, gouache on black paper, 30 x 22 in, 2007

Megan Greene
Rappaccini's Daughter
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Megan Greene lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. A native of Buffalo, Greene holds a BFA from the University of Notre Dame and a MFA from Rutgers University. Her drawings are exhibited at Kinz, Tillou+Feigen in NYC as well as at Katharine Mulherin in Toronto.

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front:
Untitled (after J.D.C.)
colored pencil, gouache on black paper
30 x 22 in, 2006
this page:
Untitled (With Pig Ear)
colored pencil, gouache on black paper
44 x 30 in, 2007



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