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A SPACE *for* DIALOGUE

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CHECKLIST

Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, Italian, 1609–1664
Circe Changing Ulysses' Men to Beasts, about 1650, etching
Purchased through a gift from Jane and W. David Dance, Class of 1940; PR.2004.5

Théodore Chassériau, French, 1819–1856
Apollo and Daphne (Apollon et Daphné), 1844, lithograph on wove paper
Gift of Dr. Franz H. Hirschland, Class of 1935P and 1939P; PR.949.24

Amy Cutler, American, born 1974
Millie, 2005, three-plate lithograph
Gift of Hugh J. Freund, Class of 1967; 2010.89.6

Pablo Picasso, Spanish, 1881–1973
Model and Surrealist Sculpture (Modèle et sculpture surréaliste), from *The Vollard Suite*, 1933
Etching on Montval laid paper
Gift of Ellen and Wallace K. Harrison, Class of 1950H, in honor of Nelson A. Rockefeller, Class of 1930; PR.965.23.45

Blind Minotaur Guided by a Young Girl through the Night (Minotaure aveugle guidé par une fillette dans la nuit), from *The Vollard Suite*, 1934
Etching and aquatint on Montval laid paper
Gift of Ellen and Wallace K. Harrison, Class of 1950H, in honor of Nelson A. Rockefeller, Class of 1930; PR.965.23.93

Dorothea Tanning, American, 1910–2012
Portfolio, 1993, lithograph, assemblage, fabric
Purchased through the Anonymous Fund #144; PR.2000.36

Lena Yarinkura, Australian (Kune/Remarrnga), born 1961
Yawkyawk, 2002, ochres and pandanus
Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.176

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Amy Cutler, *Millie*, 2005, three-plate lithograph. Gift of Hugh J. Freund, Class of 1967; 2010.89.6.

Agents of Change: Metamorphosis and the Feminine



Théodore Chassériau, *Apollo and Daphne (Apollon et Daphné)*, 1844, lithograph on wove paper. Gift of Dr. Franz H. Hirschland, Class of 1935P and 1939P; PR.949.24.

The seven works of art featured in this installation touch upon moments of feminine metamorphosis. In them, women are agents of change: they cause change and/or are changed themselves. Through these works, the unique relationship between the feminine and transformation becomes clear, and metamorphosis in turn becomes an act that can emancipate women from the confines of their traditional gender roles, to one degree or another. While these works of art all share the same essential subject matter, their artists depict different types of metamorphosis, grounded in different mythological or metaphorical contexts. These differences

reveal the potential for feminine metamorphosis to change not only women but also the world around them. The artists span time, space, and gender here—a deliberate decision that was intended to emphasize the changing depiction of women in art, especially when recast by women artists. There is, therefore, another layer of metamorphosis suggested in this exhibition: the changing role of women artists in the art world.

The two etchings by Pablo Picasso in this installation form part of the *Vollard Suite*, a series of one hundred etchings created between 1930 and 1937 for the French art dealer and publisher Ambroise Vollard. In *Blind Minotaur Guided by a Young Girl through the Night (Minotaure aveugle guidé par une fillette dans la nuit)* (1934), a young girl who personifies the innocent feminine assists a physically emasculated Minotaur. Uninjured,

the Minotaur represents a perfect hybrid, an ideal union of man and animal (Bolliger 1956, xii). However, when blinded, the Minotaur is reduced to a feeble, groping figure who must here rely upon a young girl for assistance. Picasso's use of aquatint, a technique of exposing a copper plate to acid through a layer of melted granulated resin, emphasizes the whiteness and purity of the girl, the dove she is carrying, and, by extension, the integrity of her mission to guide the minotaur. The vector of her gaze is directed toward the creature, but he cannot reciprocate with his head thrown back in anguish. The opposition between beast and man is transcended in this moment of pain and fear. The Minotaur's stretched neck extends the body in such a way that the mouth becomes an extension of the spinal column and extends his agony further still (Florman 2000, 148). The rippling musculature of the Minotaur stands in stark contrast to the rounded features of the young girl and suggests her physical inferiority despite the Minotaur's wounded state. This is not, then, an instance of actual feminine agency, as the young girl remains subordinate even to an injured if highly masculine product of metamorphosis.

Picasso's *Model and Surrealist Sculpture (Modèle et sculpture surréaliste)* (1933) engages with a completely different type of metamorphosis. The "surrealist sculpture" in the work embodies the transformation of the art world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era marked by its abandonment of realism in favor of the abstract and surreal. The expression of the model/muse is deliberately ambivalent; her gaze is directed toward the "surrealist sculpture," but it is unclear whether she understands anything about what she is looking at. There is an almost comical element of meta-viewing going on here, as we the viewers look at an etching of a woman who is looking at a sculpture. Picasso appears to undermine the gravity of this particular metamorphosis—the art world is changing, but it may not be for the worse.

Amy Cutler's lithograph *Millie* (2005) depicts a woman (presumably Millie) in the midst of a metamorphosis. It is not clear whether the metamorphosis is complete, in fact, because Millie is so organically integrated into the vessel that is appearing here. The boat protrudes from her womb, while her arms have become oars. Cutler's choice of subject matter may allude to the reduction of women's bodies to their most basic function: as vessels for children. The vessel motif and the towel that hangs at the back of the boat combine to express Millie's domestic imperative to raise children and otherwise engage in household tasks.

An interest in the amorphous female body is also present in Théodore Chassériau's *Apollo and Daphne (Apollon et Daphné)* (1844). Here, Chassériau idealizes the female body in the process of metamorphosis. He represents Daphne as the archetypal voluptuous female nude, in keeping with the

Western tradition. Her nudity is in stark contrast to that of Apollo, whose robes reveal only his legs and arms.

Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione's etching *Circe Changing Ulysses' Men to Beasts* (about 1650) draws inspiration from a different classical Greek myth than Chassériau's work. Castiglione focuses on an episode from book 10 of Homer's *Odyssey*, in which Circe, a goddess of magic, turns Odysseus's crew into swine. Circe's wand creates a line of sight that alludes to the act of metamorphosis—the armor of Odysseus's men is all that remains of them. It is a particularly empathic rendering of Circe's act that both ennobles the men (they are not pigs, as in the Homeric version) and dignifies Circe as an agent of change.

Dorothea Tanning's *Portfolio* (1993) and Lena Yarinkura's *Yawkyawk* (2002) share profound symbolic value as interpretations of women's metamorphoses by women artists. *Portfolio* is a metamorphic self-portrait that transforms from an image of a young Tanning carrying her works of art into a surrealist exploration of her inner self. The tactile experience of opening the portfolio to reveal the girl's transformation mirrors for the viewer the metamorphosis the subject herself is undergoing. Yarinkura's use of earth pigments (ochres) to make woven sculptures is an idiosyncratic adaptation of customary basketmaking practices from Maningrida in Central Arnhem Land in northern Australia. According to Central Arnhem Land Indigenous spiritual beliefs, the yawkyawk represents a female water spirit, with long hair made of green algae and a fish tail, similar to the European idea of a mermaid. The physical articulation of a yawkyawk in sculpture is a relatively new phenomenon that builds upon more than a thousand years of Indigenous oral history and culture.

Feminine beings (women, girls, and female spirits) play an important role in either causing change or changing themselves. The works of these artists express moments of change in different ways and highlight a trajectory toward a metamorphosis of the art world and, we can hope, its understanding of the feminine.



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Lena Yarinkura, *Yawkyawk*, 2002, ochres and pandanus. Gift of Will Owen and Harvey Wagner; 2009.92.176. Copyright Lena Yarinkura, Maningrida Arts & Culture, Bawinaga Aboriginal Corporation.