

Kristin Anderson

The Annunciation (The Birds)

Set of eleven 8" x 10" Fuji Crystal Archive Prints in industrial sign frames

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Artists Statement

For years I have been drawn to, and perplexed by, the story of The Annunciation of Mary and the plethora of artwork depicting this theme. I decided to learn more. This installation is my reaction to my investigation.

Mary was 14 years old, engaged to a much older man who was out of town, minding her own business reading at home. She was surprised by, and impregnated by, otherworldly beings and light, and then left on her own to explain this to her family, friends and neighbors in a society where the punishment for a girl for being pregnant out of wedlock was death by being thrown down a well. Stoning would have been the expected result of making a claim that she was carrying the child of God. When I put myself in the shoes of Mary I have never felt the awe and wonder shown in the paintings, but, rather, fear and discomfort. I feel manipulated by the whirlwind chain of events and pressured by the angel and Holy Spirit. I imagine that in the moments following the angel's departure, the reality sunk in like it does after a car accident: What just happened? Was that real? What do I do now?

Therefore, I have illuminated the full story from Luke with production stills from Alfred Hitchcock's horror movie "The Birds." The birds represent the winged participants; the Angel Gabriel and the Holy Spirit. I have chosen the format of promotional movie slicks in sign frames to signify the parallels between the promotion of man-made stories in the Bible and man-made stories of popular culture, and how they intertwine and influence our society. The stills were selected for how the poses of the heroine relate to those that appear repeatedly throughout ages of artworks of The Annunciation,*and to put the psychological state of Mary (as I envision it, anyway) front and center.

I have realized that this story has been the basis for a lot of unfair societal expectations of women. The original Bible never said Mary was a virgin – this was added during the times when the church was trying to appeal to pagans, who worshiped virgins. However, the idea stuck, so, as a female, our primary role model from the scriptures gives us the unattainable ideal goal of being both a virgin and a mother, and tops it off with the glory and fulfillment of compromising oneself willfully for the wishes of the male authority.

I believe this is the basis of much confusion for boys too (the virgin/whore complex) which tends to make many early dating experiences and even marriages confusing. She may be chided for being frigid one day, and then, if she follows Mary's example by putting her trust in his motives and acquiescing to his wishes (i.e. being a "good girl"), she is ironically also being a "bad girl" and may likely get chided the next day for being a whore.

The story of the Annunciation as told in the Bible is significantly edited from its longer original books so that it will take up little space, take less attention away from the stories of Jesus, and focus on firmly planting women as second class citizens and willing vessels for the male use. In the story God didn't even bother to speak to Mary directly, as he does to chosen men in the Bible. In our society formed by Christian values, I hope this artwork encourages others to look for patterns in behavior in real life, movies, books, etc. that follow the abstract of the story of the Annunciation, and think about how unrealistic and oppressive they really are.