

TWO HEROINES OF ANTIQUITY: FROM BYZANTIUM TO POST-MODERNISM

Lilian Broca

My art belongs to the “critical postmodernist” assertion that all artistic perspectives are valid, but that greater understanding of society is possible by viewing them through the lens of individual artworks or narratives.¹

I create contemporary large scale glass mosaics in which I employ historical iconography and utilize an ancient medium; through them I am able to comment on contemporary societal issues.

Legends and mythological stories carry powerful and meaningful messages. With these two mosaic series and through their symbolism I express ideas about the role of women that also extend to more universal statements about the human condition.

Judith and Esther are biblical figures representing strong women who left their subservient position in a patriarchal society and who, through courage, wisdom and determination, succeed, despite all odds, to achieve leadership status in their respective communities. Although their stories are very similar, the two women are the exact opposite in temperament and in their approach to action. Esther uses her physical attributes, intelligence and the art of quiet diplomacy in her negotiations, whereas Judith, a warrior from the start, uses all the above plus adds her own secret agenda to destroy the enemy.... and without any physical help.

I consider The Byzantine style appropriate for the Queen Esther series because like Esther herself, it is a quieter style, with more formal poses, less action and although expressive, it is less emotive than other artistic movements. The unifying motif which holds the whole series consistent and connected, is the wrought iron lattice, a symbol for women's oppression in ancient societies.

The Judith mosaics require action poses to suit her hands-on personality, therefore the style I employ consists of more naturalistic spatial arrangements and visual appearance, compared to Esther's stylized forms and flat decorative backgrounds. I achieve fluidity of movement through dramatic poses, theatrical gestures and emotional expressions.

By placing the Judith compositions on white sketchbook pages with perforated tops, and with the transition from the black and white pencil sketch to monochromatic 2D and finally to full colour, I portray the gradual rejuvenation of an ancient story through its retelling. The sketchbook page itself becomes the unifying motif in the Judith series, the equivalent of the wrought iron lattice motif in the Esther series. The perforated page with

¹ Koscianski, L. “What is Critical Postmodern Art?” *Tamara, The Journal of Critical Postmodern Behavioral Science*. 2002

its black and white graphite drawing is a 21st century prop. The images of the heroine's plight and fighting spirit dressed in biblical clothing and placed in ancient surroundings provide a bridge across the centuries. As the black and white sketch unfolds onto the mosaic, slowly repairing, reviving and animating itself into full blown colour, the inherent symbolism becomes a continuous journey between antiquity and the present day.

Both mosaic series, Queen Esther and Judith, reveal a personal interpretation of two ancient stories which brings forth ideas about women's role in society, encouraging contemporary women to find inner strength and reminding them that we all possess the potential of the assertive Esther and the courage of the independent and daring Judith.

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Images:

1. **Queen Esther Seeking Permission to Speak** , 64" x 88", (162.5cm x 223.5cm), Smalti, Gems, Gold smalti, Millefiori, Vitreous Glass on Honeycomb Panel.



2. Judith Meeting Holofernes, 78" x 96", (198cm x 244cm) Byzantine Smalti, Millefiori, Gold Smalti on Honeycomb Panel.

