Fragments of Perception: Lilian Broca and the Judith Mosaics:
A Heroine and Her Story Reunite

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The Apocryphal Judith is an archetypal figure. She has been rendered in art in numerous media, (painting, statuary, domestic crafts), since the story was first recorded, c. 163- 142 BCE. However, as far as we know, Judith's story has never been rendered in mosaic, nor has the cycle of her apocryphal story been depicted in its entirety, until the present day. This paper looks at the unique contribution of Lilian Broca's seven piece mosaic cycle of the Judith story. The use of mosaic as a medium, and its full presentation as a cycle, offers a unique perspective of Judith. Broca's work not only compliments previous depictions of Judith, but also expands upon the story's archetypal meaning.

The story of Judith in the *Apocrypha* tells of a young widow from the town of Bethulia. She is in a deep state of mourning for the loss of her husband. Her town is also in danger of being taken over by the Assyrian army led by General Holoferenes. This story focuses on this widow, and her plot to assassinate Holofernes, in order to save her people.

Although the story of Judith involves many aspects (her meeting with the Elders, her preparations for the assassination, her honors and dedication of the spoils), artists depicting the story have consistently rendered only one of two scenes, (a) the beheading of Holofernes, as represented by Judith holding Holofernes severed head and (b) the flight to Bethulia after Holoferenes' assassination. By focusing on these two scenes historically artists have demonstrated that the viewing audience, including the artists themselves, had become unfamiliar with the contents of the Judith story.

Instead Judith becomes associated with better known Biblical and mythological figures who committed the similar acts of murder and/or seduction. Through parallels made with David, Lucretia and even the sexualized Salome, it is clear that artists and their audiences were expressing moral judgments about Judith as a murderous woman.

This is an interesting development considering the Apocrypha clearly states that Judith was a devout woman who maintained her chastity and religious observances throughout the span of the story. By the 16th century CE, it is clear that the Judith figure had become almost entirely removed from the original Apocryphal story, this degree of decontextualization is best illustrated by the genre of Renaissance Italian maiolica pottery. On this ceramic form Judith's image is in constant flux. Some maiolica pieces depict her as an immoral murderer, in others, a heroine; she has even been associated with childbirth, even though the Apocrypha makes it clear that she was childless. All of these changes are based on the tastes of the buying audience, which drove the market.

Lilian Broca's work, however, as a cycle and as a monumental mosaic series, tells the Judith story in its entirety. She draws our attention to the textual origin of the story and brings clarity to this ambivalent and misunderstood figure. Broca's work challenges our

preconceived notions that traditionally female power is based entirely on sexuality, as she brings to light powerful stories of ancient women, who overcome obstacles through their intellect and ingenuity.

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Figures:

Deruta Maiolica Plate, c. 1500-1550
Judith in the guise of David.

Deruta Maiolica Plate, c. 1500-1550
Judith in the guise of Lucretia

Deruta Maiolica Plate, c. 1500-1550
Judith in the guise of Salome

Judith on a Tagliere, Part of a *descho da parto* (Childbirth plate), c. 1550-1600,
Ce 289, Koerner Gallery Ceramics Collection, Museum of Anthropology,
Vancouver, Photography Kiera Bailey