

Archtypal Qualities,



THIS is a source photograph for the painting of Persephone's abduction by Hades. The messenger Hermes, as characterized by Evan, who is artist Anne Sherwood Pundyk's son, looks into the scene from behind the pitcher. "Abruptly, the peace is disrupted when Hades steals the beautiful Persephone away from Demeter," explained Pundyk. "Arranged with this dramatic moment in mind, the still life is partly in shadow, and taken from a sharp angle. Hermes, now awake, witnesses the scene." (courtesy of Anne Sherwood Pundyk)



Atypical Works



Myth Of Persephone Traced In Art By Anne Pundyk

by Claudia Schwab
Persephone.

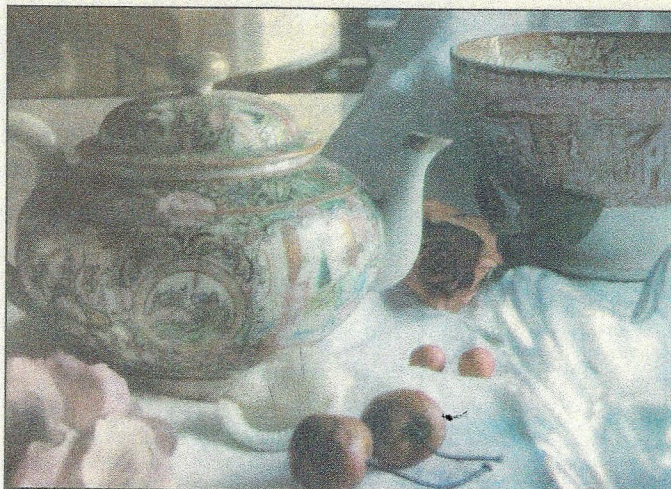
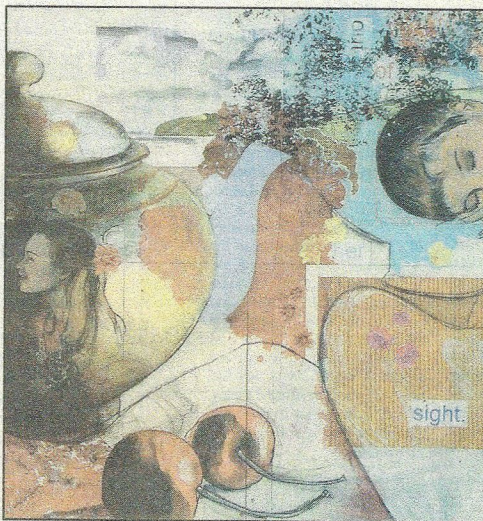
Not your ordinary name. For artist Anne Sherwood Pundyk, however, Persephone is a name she knows almost as well as her own. Persephone, who is the daughter of Demeter — the Greek goddess of the harvest is the key figure of a Greek myth bearing her name. "Persephone" is also the title and theme of Pundyk's art exhibit opening and talk this Friday at Washington and Lee University's Williams School of Commerce.

"The Greek myth of Persephone explains the origin of the four seasons, but to me it's more about the relationship between a daughter and a mother," said Pundyk. "This bond is tested and strengthened by separation, the threat of death and earthly destruction, loss of innocence and reunion."

"The vast American landscape from California to New York is the backdrop for the maternal drama unfolding for Demeter and Persephone with Hades, Lord of the Underworld; Zeus, King of the Gods; and Hermes, the messenger," explained Pundyk.

The show consists of about 35 to 40 pieces done in different media and sizes. There are five large acrylic paintings on paper, about eight small watercolors, 15 photos and six pencil drawings. The drawings are complete studies in

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ABOVE, Anne Sherwood Pundyk (right) talks with her mother Molly Brown (left) and her daughter Phoebe during a visit in Lexington at Thanksgiving. They are sitting in front of "Hermes' Dream," one of the large paintings that will be in Pundyk's show. ABOVE LEFT, in "Persephone 1," another large painting, Hermes is partially visible and Persephone's image decorates the side of the teapot as she smiles at her mother Demeter, who is just outside the painting, explained Pundyk. AT LEFT, this still-life photograph served as the basis for the drawings and paintings in the first section of the Persephone story.

Reception, Talk Friday At Williams School

An opening reception for the exhibit "Persephone" by artist Anne Sherwood Pundyk will take place this Friday, Jan. 14, from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Williams School Art Gallery at Washington and Lee University. The event will include a lecture by the artist at 5:30 in Room 221.

The show, which is dedicated to Pundyk's father, the late Dirck Brown, will run through the end of May. The reception and talk are open to the public.

The exhibit opening Friday will be followed only a month later by the exhibition of another of Pundyk's works in the annual invitational show "Twelve by Twelve" at the Nelson Fine Arts Gallery. The show's theme is "Roots and Shoots," celebrating the concept of gardening as nature and nurturing and also honoring Pundyk's father, cofounder of the Roots and Shoots intergenerational garden at Waddell Elementary School.

Pundyk plans to take "Persephone" to other university galleries.

Persephone

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themselves which incorporate pieces of the Persephone myth text.

"As you go from the pencil drawings to the larger acrylics, it becomes less literal," explained Pundyk. "It's somewhat like going from a book to a movie."

Pundyk's work seems to have an almost dreamlike effect even though there is a definite story line. Pundyk's style taps both the inner mind and outer realities. She likes to deal in multiple layers — words on top of paintings incorporating map contours, faces, objects and even overlaying seams of paper on top of paper giving the overall work a rich textural feeling. In addition, she uses the interaction of paint with paper as part of her art, keeping the shapes that occur from paint spills, for instance.

"It's a balancing act," she said. "You end up with an artwork that's intriguing. I like it to be beautiful and yet I want it to be entertaining."

The story of Persephone

"I have divided the story of Persephone into six turning points and have associated a phrase for each of the sections," she explained. "In the beginning Demeter, Goddess of the Harvest, and her beautiful daughter Persephone are living blissfully together providing bountiful harvests for the earth."

One day, while Demeter isn't looking, Hades, God of the Dead, sees Persephone, falls in love with her and takes her back with him to the Underworld, said Pundyk. Persephone is miserable in the Underworld, where there were no flowers, trees or birds and the only plant is the pomegranate.

The fourth section, which along with the first section is most fully developed in Pundyk's ongoing project, is when Demeter becomes so distraught and angry about losing her daughter that she makes the earth cold and barren.

Finally, the mother learns where her daughter is and negotiates with Zeus, king of the gods, to have her returned. As part of the negotiation to reunite mother and daughter, Persephone has to return to the underworld for three months

each year, symbolic of the three pomegranate seeds she has eaten. Demeter, in turn, refuses to allow plants to grow during those three months of winter.

Personalizing the myth

Although it is a Greek myth, Pundyk has personalized the story. Most obvious is the fact that Pundyk uses her family and herself as inspiration for the characters in the myth. Persephone is Pundyk's 14-year-old daughter Phoebe, while Demeter is Pundyk's mother. Evan, her 10-year-old son is Hermes and her husband Jeff is both Zeus and Hades.

"When I read the story of Persephone, everything clicked," she said. "It fit so well for me. The story seemed like the right story for me to tell. It just seemed truer for me. I could see my family and me as part of the story."

But Pundyk likes this story because she is not only a mother but a daughter.

In Pundyk's mind, her mother, Molly Brown of Lexington, is one of the main reasons she was attracted to the myth of Persephone. Her mother and her now-deceased father, Dirck Brown, started the Roots and Shoots Garden, an intergenerational garden at Waddell Elementary School, shortly after moving to Lexington 10 years ago.

"The threads for me of both art and nature come from maternal sources," she said. "My grandmother was an artist and my mother, an educator and gardener. The idea of mother and another nature have been in the back of my mind for as long as I can remember."

"My relationship with my daughter is more in the foreground for me right now, but it's inspired by my mother whose picture isn't in the show," added Pundyk.

Molly Brown both inspired Pundyk with a love of nature and gave Pundyk many of the objects that appear in the paintings, she said.

"The still-life objects have a kind of magical association for me," she said. "Since we moved so much, we would always go back and visit my grandmother in Ohio in her 150-year-old house."

"Most of these objects came from my grandmother's house, but my mom gave them to me," she said. "They represent a

sense of security and peacefulness. They're kind of quirky, but they give me a feeling of comfort and of creativity."

Pundyk's works show the objects overlaid with the narrative of the story in the same way Greek vases have stories on them.

"Myths and fables have always appealed to me because they touch on universal or archetypal qualities," she said. "They may be old stories retold many times, but they are still relevant. Often they touch on deep feelings and mixed motives just below the surface."

Pundyk has been intrigued with Persephone in particular for the last year and a half. Creating art to the theme of Persephone has been a process of change and evolution and is a departure from what Pundyk has done in the past.

Challenges

"Prior to this, it was more single statements and my work was less narrative-based but I wanted to tackle something bigger," she said.

"Having challenged myself to take on a narrative for an entire group of paintings, I found I needed to develop a new painting vocabulary," she said. "As far as composition, I began to see the story needed to be told from each of the character's point of view."

"Related to this is the idea of translating a written story into a visual language," she added.

For the latter change, Pundyk said she found herself using tools she had acquired over the years but in new experimental ways. Although she has a background in photography, Pundyk said she learned to use imaging software, for example, and how to print large-scale images.

"It's a process of exploration. This experimentation is thrilling, yet difficult," she noted. "I have gone into my studio every day for the last year with a game plan of sorts, but frequently that would change as I began to work."

Local art enthusiasts may be familiar with some of Pundyk's earlier work if they saw her 2002 show at the Nelson Street Gallery. In this show, Pundyk incorporated teacups in poetic landscapes. Chairs as well as teacups have been some of the recurring themes in her art. In addition, she also likes using maps for their colors and shapes

but also because of what they signify.

"Maps are scientifically done and they're very precise, but they describe a vastness," she said. "It's a way of containing a larger amount of space within the artwork — something you can hold in your hand. It's a different kind of perspective, a different kind of landscape."

Maps have been an important factor in Pundyk's own life, too. The 48-year-old was born in Manhattan but spent much of her childhood moving between the East and West coasts as well as the Midwestern part of the United States.

Pundyk's educational background is just as varied. She studied at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1976 and received a bachelor of arts degree from Pomona College in California in 1978 and a master of fine arts degree from the Rhode Island School of design in Providence in 1982. Her work is currently represented in over 40 collections in the United States and Europe.

Interacting on art

The Lexington show and talk have inspired Pundyk to reflect on what she wants to say about her art.

"To me, it's an honor to have the show here, and the lecture is an exciting aspect for me," she said. "Again, it's a challenge. It's forcing me to think about my work in a different way in order to put to words the reasons behind what I do."

One thing Pundyk wants to emphasize during her talk, she said, is the process she goes through because she feels the process is as important as the end product.

Although the works featured are all finished pieces, the series itself is a work in progress. This show is only part of the entire project, which will most likely require another year to year and a half to complete, said Pundyk. She hopes to eventually publish a book of all the paintings.

"I invite the audience to get involved with the art and react to it," said Pundyk, who will have her e-mail address set up for the show and a place on her Web site to post comments from viewers. "My personal vision gives final shape to my artwork, but I rely on my audience's reactions to keep my field of view as wide as possible as I consider my next steps."