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Kalon Kakon (Proposal)  
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Greek culture and myth is something that has worked its way into our society despite its ancient origins, holding influence in a variety of topics from the sportswear brand Nike, to the retailer Amazon, to the continued playing of the Olympic games. These myths have been told thousands of times through thousands of adaptations. What we don't tend to explore, however, is the way that misogynistic societal structures in Ancient Greece dictated the way women were written about and perceived in these myths. Through a 24 page visual essay, I will explore how misogyny colors the stories of 12 iconic women in Greek mythology and will recontextualize their narratives in a way that removes the lens of oppression and reinstates their autonomy and power.

As previously stated, there have been countless adaptations of Greek myths. Many of these adaptations choose either to tell the story in its original form, or modernize it in some way. Some of the most well-known examples of this are the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan, *Hercules* by Walt Disney Pictures, and *Clash of the Titans* by Warner Bros. Pictures, all of which are led by male heroes. The Percy Jackson series was actually what originally sparked my interest in Greek mythology as a child-- epic tales of heroism, romance, and tragedy all told with the addition of the magic and trickeries of the Gods to the present day. Within both the series and the classic Greek myths, everything is woven so complexly together, oftentimes with no black and white solutions and instead relying on a wide gray area of morals where no single party is entirely in the right or wrong. It requires you as a reader to think about the ethics of a situation or character from multiple points of view and be critical of how the stories are presented. This, along with the visual aesthetics of Greek culture accompanied by a tumultuous dramatic familial relationship amongst the Olympians, is what draws me so deeply into Greek mythology. As my interest deepened and I began to look into Greek myths on my own, however, I began to notice a pattern where the women in these stories rarely had the opportunity for acts of heroism like the male characters. In fact, they were often actively demeaned, punished, and exploited for the actions of men.

The groundwork for this was laid from the “birth” of Pandora, the very first human woman in Greek mythology. She is created by Zeus as a punishment for the Titan Prometheus and then given a jar of all the world’s evils, which she is told never to open. The result of this is her being burdened with evil for no reason, and then punished for both existing and for wanting to be rid of this burden after she eventually opens the jar. Furthermore, in her story, told in the *Theogony* by Hesiod in 700 BC, the purpose of her creation is described as “from her is the race of women and female kind: of her is the deadly race and tribe of women who live amongst mortal men to their great trouble, no helpmeets in hateful poverty, but only in wealth...[Zeus] made women to be an evil to mortal men, with a nature to do evil.” From the beginning, this establishes an association between women and the idea of “evil,” and thus dictates the way all women after Pandora were written about and interpreted. I seek to empower these women not by changing their stories, but by removing the patriarchal lens through which their stories were originally told, knowing that by doing so, I am challenging a long history of misogynistic bias in Greek mythology.

The tone of my visual essay is intended to be serious and defiant. An example of this through my own recontextualization using the previously explained myth of Pandora is depicting her angry and upset, opening her jar of evils on purpose as an act of revenge against the Gods for the burden that accompanies her mere existence, coupled with text on the opposite page that reads “I’ll show you how evil I can be.” For my visual language, I aim to merge the hallmark aesthetics of classic Renaissance-era paintings (exaggerated poses, chiaroscuro, areas of high saturation) with the aesthetics of Retrowave art (halo imagery, neon colors). This allows for a direct reference to the pre-existing visual language associated with depictions of Greek myth, while also engaging with the pre-existing visual language associated with my own work. Retrowave design is often used in horror movie posters or marketing, thus lending itself to dramatics and a confrontational tone, which are essential to the spreads in my visual essay. The addition of the Retrowave aesthetics also adds the association of “digital” to an aesthetic based

otherwise on classical oil painting, which intersects nicely with my own methods of digital painting as a medium, and functions to differentiate my work from being just an emulation of the Renaissance by modernizing the visual language. My hope is that the concept will be impactful for all of its viewers, while connecting specifically with lovers of Renaissance art and other women seeking representation of empowerment. Most importantly, I want the audience to understand that I am not rewriting the myths, but simply reframing them so that the way the thoughts and actions of the central characters are interpreted is through a more feminist eye.

My final deliverable is a 24-page visual essay with a cover, comprised of 12 spreads each portraying a different Greek myth revolving around a woman. The 12 women I have chosen are: Pandora, Eurydice, Medusa, Clytemnestra, Callisto, Iris, Polyxena, Andromeda, Deianira, Eris, Hebe, and Minthe. Each spread will be sized at 11x17 inches consisting of two separate 8.5x11 inch illustrations. The right side of the spread will be a fully rendered illustration of the focal character(s), done digitally in Procreate. The left side of the spread will be a more expressive and atmospheric mixed media and collage-based piece to reflect the emotions present in the myth that accompanies them. While it will also be done digitally in Procreate, there is a heavier focus on texture and visible mark-making. Additionally, I will include a hand-lettered sentence or two mirroring the mindset of the paired figure to both guide the viewer into understanding who the figure is and in what way I've recontextualized her. This division lets the viewer not only experience the visual aspect of the reframing, but also offers the opportunity for them to get a direct glimpse into the head of the woman being illustrated, thus allowing them to place themselves in her shoes and empathize with her struggles. My method of presenting these is to have them bound together like a book with a relatively plain cover, being solid black with some faint brown textures and the title of my thesis, *Kalon Kakon* (meaning 'beautiful evil' in Greek), along my name on the front in gold, framed by simple gold laurel leaves.

I have many influences that I turn to for inspiration on my project, the most recent of which is the editorial photography series *The Olympus of the New Gods* by Ana Martínez and

Mario Ville. The collection showcases twenty figures iconic to Greek mythology, including the 12 Olympians, as black people, all wearing mixes of designer clothing and classic Greek staples like togas and elaborate headpieces. While not the exact concept I'm going for, it's useful for referencing how the artists blended together the ancient and the modern in a way that made the figures still recognizable. Artistically, I am influenced by the photographer A.J. Hamilton, who photographs portraits of women portrayed as deities in the style of Renaissance-era paintings, using muted, earth-toned colors and imagery like halos, wings, and clouds to show their divinity. The visual language and tenderness he captures in his work is exactly the tone that I hope to capture in my project, so I find myself returning to them as reference often. Stylistically, I am influenced by Felicia Alice Wahlström and Jodie Muir, both of whom do digital paintings inspired by classic oil paintings, using dramatic lighting, muted color palettes with pops of color, and religious imagery. I love the way that their work is so reminiscent of these classics and manages to replicate oil paintings through digital means, and I am influenced heavily by the way they place colors and render their figures.

In my own work, women, religious iconography, and neon colors are already hugely present elements. I love drawing women, especially in positions of power, because I yearn to provide empowerment and representation for my own identity, and I know that I can do so from a place of experience. I also frequently utilize large halos behind my figures's heads to add divinity and power to their characters, as well as to create a high contrast circular focal point that draws the viewer's focus immediately to the figure's face. Finally, I use highly saturated and neon colors in my work to create a level of intensity not present in our daily lives, which adds a surreality as it is still attributed to realistic figures or objects. I enact all of these attributes in my work in part, but I have rarely illustrated pieces in which all three come together. However, because they are so familiar to my process and content, combining these three ideas together is well within my wheelhouse. This project will serve to exercise my greatest strengths, as well as

allow me to grow in my capabilities as a narratively-focused illustrator, which I have begun developing the skills for over the last three years.

This project is something I have been considering and preparing for for a long time, and I think it's a project that's needed to be created for a long time, too. After countless instances of Greek women serving as little more than narrative devices for their male counterparts, it's time to give them their own spotlight devoid of misogyny. I am excited to be the voice reframing their stories and giving them back the power they have deserved for centuries.

## Bibliography

### Woman/Feminism in Greek Mythology

Meehan, Dessa. "Containing the Kalon Kakon: The Portrayal of Women in Ancient Greek Mythology." *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History* 7, no. 2, November, 2017.

Analyzes how the role of women in Ancient Greece affected the misogynistic way women are perceived and written about in Greek mythology. Meehan focuses on Pandora, Aphrodite, and Helen of Troy, and how villainy and seduction are ascribed to their characters, as well as the double standards for blaming women versus men when it comes to problematic actions.

Miller, Madeline. "Restoring Power to the Women of Ancient Myth." Literary Hub. LitHub, April 11, 2018. <https://lithub.com/restoring-power-to-the-women-of-ancient-myth/>.

Discusses how Circe was unrightfully demeaned in her encounter with Odysseus in *The Odyssey*, and how the author was compelled to dismiss rapes or punishments of women in subsequent readings of Greek myths because of the frequency of their occurrence. Also discusses feeling forced into silence regarding the matter because of the perceived notion of women in women's studies having an "agenda" rather than legitimate critique of the perception and treatment of women in literature and culture.

Pratt, Annis. "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers: Notes toward a Preliterary History of Women's Archetypes." *Feminist Studies* 4, no. 1 (1978): 163-71. Accessed September 13, 2020. doi:10.2307/3177634.

An analysis of the Medusa myth in relevance to archetypes found in ancient mythologies. It covers men's need to make the woman monstrous in appearance to discredit her and draw attention away from whatever horrible act was committed against her. Also touches on how weaving of the event (likely done by women) show Medusa as a beautiful woman.

Roberts, Ellie Mackin. *Heroines of Olympus: The Women of Greek Mythology*. London, England: Welbeck Publishing, 2020.

An examination of 50 different women in Greek mythology, spanning from mortals, to demigods, to Gods themselves. Each one has a brief rewrite done by Roberts of a section of the myth telling the story from the woman's point of view, accompanied by an illustration of the woman. This is followed by a description of the woman's life, lineage, and the context of her existence within mythology, resulting in four pages dedicated to each woman.

Shannon, Laura. "Medusa and Athena: Ancient Allies in Healing Women's Trauma." *Feminism and Religion*. Wordpress, June 24, 2017. <https://feminismandreligion.com/2017/06/24/medusa-and-athena-ancient-allies-in-healing-womens-trauma-by-laura-shannon/>.

A breakdown of the origins of Athena and Medusa, and why Ovid's telling of the Medusa myth is rooted in misogyny. Introduces the questioning of the monstrous feminine and why it's important to not take it at face value because the stories were told through a male gaze.

Vered Lev Kenaan. 2008. *Pandora's Senses: The Feminine Character of the Ancient Text*. Wisconsin Studies in Classics. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press.  
<http://search.ebscohost.com.libprox.pnca.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=307562&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

Discusses Pandora's role in Greek mythology and demands the need for an updated interpretation of her. Primarily focuses on the way misogyny colored the way Pandora was portrayed, and thus, the root of the portrayals of all Greek women in myth after that, since Pandora was the first human woman in the mythos.

### Patriarchy/Misogyny in Greek Mythology

Beard, Mary. *Women & Power: A Manifesto*. Liveright, 2017.

A compilation of two lectures given by Mary Beard detailing connections between modern misogyny and the misogynistic structures of Ancient Greece. Discusses the first instances in which it was considered acceptable for women to speak up and the relations those have with the way women in power are treated today. Also discusses the idea of power being mistakenly conflated with strength or wealth.

Hurwit, Jeffrey M. "Beautiful Evil: Pandora and the Athena Parthenos." *American Journal of Archaeology* 99, no. 2 (1995): 171-86. Accessed October 20, 2020. doi:10.2307/506338.

Relates the birth of Pandora shown at the bottom of the statue of the Athena of Parthenos to Athenian ideas of patriarchy. Explores the treatment of women in ancient Athens and the art in relevance to other myths depicted in the same structure.

Morales, Helen. *Antigone Rising: The Subversive Power of the Ancient Myths*. New York City, NY: Bold Type Books, 2020.

Connecting patriarchal issues in ancient myths to modern day politics. Covers the ideas of men's obsession with controlling women, sex strikes, dieting, dress codes, rape and sexual assault, female vigilantes, racism, and LGBTQ+ identities in relevance to both Greek myth and culture, and the present day.

### General Mythology

Bolen, Jean Shinoda. *Goddesses in Everywoman: Powerful Archetypes in Women's Lives*. New York City, NY: Harper, 2014.

Applies the archetypes of seven Greek goddesses (Artemis, Athena, Hestia, Hera, Demeter, Persephone, and Aphrodite) to modern female psychology. They are split into categories of the resourceful, the caretakers, and the creative.

Hesiod. "The Theogony." In *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914.



Poem by Hesiod written in 700 BC, covering the origins of the Greek gods. It begins with the four primordial beings and tracks the genealogies of the gods through to the creation of humankind.

Martínez, Ana, and Mario Ville. *The Olympus of the New Gods*. January 2020. Photograph. Neo2.

A collection of photographs showcasing twenty figures iconic to Greek mythology, including the twelve Olympians, as black people, wearing a mix of designer clothing and classic Greek togas and headpieces.

### Women in Greek Culture

Bergren, A. T. "Language and the Female in Early Greek Thought." *Arethusa* 16 (1983): 13-23.

Begins with the two modes of thought as told by the Muses, meaning that women are both prophets and teachers, ultimately commanding of the truth, and delves into how men try to re-appropriate that for their own gain. Uses weaving and marriage to explore this.

Pomeroy, Sarah B. *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*. New York City, NY: Schocken Books, 1975.

Examines the role of women in Ancient Greece and Rome, including the way women were portrayed in myth, both deities and human women alike, and the way culture informed these portrayals.

Rachel Bondesen

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### Creative Brief: Kalon Kakon

#### **Project Vision:**

I've been fascinated by Greek mythology since I was a child, both by the tumultuous familial relationships that make for inane amounts of drama and by the beautifully tender and intense works of art they inspired. Perhaps most entrancing is how the stories are woven so complexly together, oftentimes relying on a wide gray area of morals where no one is entirely right or wrong and requiring the reader to be critical of the ethics of a situation or character. The myths themselves have been adapted countless times and in countless different ways, but have historically focused on the idea of the "Greek male hero." In fact, the women in these myths were often actively demeaned, punished, and exploited for the actions of men. For my thesis, I wanted to bring attention to these women and examine the ways that our perception of them is influenced by the sexist ways they were written about. This incited the creation of "Kalon Kakon" (meaning "beautiful evil"): a 24 page visual essay which explores how misogyny colors the stories of 12 women in Greek mythology and recontextualizes their narratives in a way that removes the lens of oppression and reinstates their autonomy and power.

The 12 women I have chosen are: Pandora, Medusa, Iris, Andromeda, Clytemnestra, Callisto, Deianira, Macaria, Eris, Polyxena, Eurydice, and Hebe. This includes a mix of humans, monsters, and goddesses, as well as assorted motivations, examples being revenge, sacrifice, and general autonomy. Most importantly, I seek to empower these women not by changing their stories, but by removing the patriarchal lens through which their stories were originally told. Each spread contains a portrait of the woman opposite an atmospheric piece containing objects

related to her character and text reflecting her mindset, dedicating two full pages to each of them.

### **Audience**

My hope is that the concept will be impactful for all of its viewers, while connecting specifically with fellow lovers of Greek mythology and other women seeking representation of empowerment. I would especially love for it to make the viewer want to do their own research on Greek mythology and delve deeper into the stories of both the women I cover in my project and the other women in the myths who I didn't include.

### **Methods & Materials**

My project is done entirely digitally using Procreate for the iPad. The final deliverable was originally a 24-page visual essay with a cover, with each of the 12 spreads sized at 11x17 inches and consisting of two separate 8.5x11 inch illustrations. The right side of the spread is a fully rendered illustration of the focal woman, while the left side is a more expressive and atmospheric mixed media and collage-based piece to reflect the emotions present in the myth that accompanies them. In these atmospheric pieces, there is a heavier focus on texture and visible mark-making. I drew stylistic and compositional inspiration from Baroque paintings when drawing the portraits, since there are many that portrayed Greek myths with dramatic poses, lighting, and colors, so I sought to emulate the pre-existing visual language associated with Greek mythology. Ultimately, 7 of the 12 portraits were completed, with the remaining 5 sketched and color-blocked.

### **Comparative Media**

While not a visual art project, a work covering the same themes as my thesis is the book *Heroines of Olympus: The Women of Greek Mythology* by Ellie Mackin Roberts, which I actually

used in my research while developing my concept. She covers 50 different women in Greek mythology with brief accounts of their histories and followed by rarely-discussed details of the myths that round out the women's characters and provide more context for their lives. Where my project differs primarily is that it's nearly entirely visual, but it also is set apart by the rigidity of my assertions. Roberts mainly gives the reader details and allows them to come to their own conclusions, but my work has a lot of my own voice behind it and is very clear with my intentions.

While not specific examples, I feel that many explorations or adaptations of Greek mythology either change the content of the myths or modernize them in some way. My project is different because it only relies on the source material and doesn't try to change anything about the narratives-- only the way we look at them.

### **Marketplace Application**

Kalon Kakon is intended to be a strong body of work for my portfolio rather than a published work. In the event that this work is printed physically, I'm planning on including a table of contents alongside my essay with QR codes for each woman leading to my website, where the full-resolution spread will be available alongside a written account of her story and how I reframed it. This way, anybody looking at only the project without context is able to understand my intentions behind it without me needing to verbally explain it, while also giving them further access to my work via my website. Vice versa, it allows potential clients who are looking at my website without the context of who I am the same opportunity of fully experiencing my thesis without my presence required. I'd like to make prints available in the future, whether they be single prints of just the portraits, or printed copies of the full booklet.