

## TRISKELE & THE MONSTER'S TOOLS

June 21, 2023 DRAFT

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## Triskele & The Monster's Tools (Final-ish Draft)

Maria Molteni

### ***Expired Contracts***

In 2020, amidst global anti-racist uprisings and dismantling of numerous monument statues, Boston's own Christopher Columbus, the "Italian Hero" who was never either, was beheaded. The operation left space to fill and a ripe opportunity for repair in Boston's, historically Italian-American, North End neighborhood.

While Columbus Day is controversially still celebrated as a national holiday, its origins are not taught in American history classes. When eleven Sicilian/ Italian-American men were unjustly mob-lynched following the murder of a New Orleans police chief in 1891, the holiday was created as a temporary band-aid. Following the massacre, outlets such as the New York Times celebrated the horrendous event for punishing those they called *monsters, pests, ruffians and murderers*- stigmas and slurs that many Italian-Americans were subject to in those times. With pressure from members of the Italian government upon American president Harrison to address the country's chronic bigotry, Columbus postured a message of global de-escalation.

However, Columbus Day and ideology grew to become a tool for assimilation and further oppression. At the moment of its inception, one could say that Italian-Americans, who had been treated as a lesser, non-white immigrant class, began a transition toward higher social status. Given the chance to opt in to the constructed protections of American whiteness, the monster's torch could be transferred onto other targeted groups of Others. Despite the irony that Columbus was a violent colonizer who'd never been Italian (his name was practically pulled from a hat of historic Italian figures that included Galileo), Italian-Americans were assigned a passable colonizing representative around which to establish cultural pride. The country of Italy was pleased with the responsiveness and gifted a Columbus statue to the US, a gesture likened to the arrival of the Statue of Liberty from France. Simultaneously many hopeful Italian-American grassroots efforts responded in their own ways. In some neighborhoods crowd-sourced statues were erected by small communities. Organizations like the Knights of Columbus stepped up to distribute mutual aid among immigrant families.

Today debates around Columbus are heated. And right-wing, Patriarchal, wealth-amassing operations of K of C counter the well-being of many who are vulnerable, including women and Queer people. There is certainly generational tension as descendants of Italian immigrants have gained agency and opportunities that our ancestors mostly did not have. The relative position of privilege that most Italian-Americans now operate from is plainly evident and the harm that CC's recognition imposes most harshly upon indigenous and non-white communities, blaring. For many descendants of American immigrants there is a complex conflict between the desire to honor those who endured hardships and chose protections for their children and a responsibility to recognize privileges, gained by false narratives, at the expense of others.

## ***A Double-Edged Visitor***

The same year Boston's CC statue was beheaded, I inherited a strange family heirloom- my Great Grandfather's Knights of Columbus sword. While it's more of a ceremonial tool than a weapon, it holds a violent energy by association. I've spent many moon cycles contemplating and clearing it. With my handmade Rosary hovering above, I've invited the Divine Mother, the Madonna, *Avem Maris*, to keep an eye on what feels like an energetic paradox. I have plans to replace the ornamental head of Columbus, capping the sword's handle with a rose. The sudden appearance of this heirloom, which is my only connection to my patrilineal Grand and Great-Grandfathers (both of whom died before I was born), brings to mind the Ace of Swords card of the Tarot. This card may represent an awakening, new idea, or fresh perspective- sometimes an epiphany delivered like a flash of lightning or a parting of clouds.

It so happens that my sword heirloom is not my first pointed omen of the sort. What could be framed as a prequel to the inherited sword narrative is a sea-floor \*synchronicity from 2017 that revealed a strange Italian *Fante di Spade/ Page of Swords* card during a swim in the Adriatic. The Page of Swords is another resonant Tarot card. It often depicts an androgynous young character holding their sword as if flower or stalk of fresh fennel, not yet sure how to harness its power. As a youthful, queer spirit myself, I accept my family's Ace of a sword with uneasy hesitation, but also brave hope that I may be able to reshape, reclaim or recondition it. It's my new-found Frankenstein to operate on and breathe life into.

\* Footnote: This event also greatly influenced my decision to create an elaborate Italian-style Scopa deck of cards based on terrestrial and celestial connections to cyclical Rosary prayer

## ***New Tools for New Awareness***

Sonya Renee Taylor shares many reflections on the new and sudden states of awareness that the Covid pandemic and Black Lives Matter actions have sparked in recent years. In a \*video address she posted to social media in 2022, she explains:

*So many of us have new awarenesses- about marginalization, harm, race, gender, class, age, etc- at the macro level and personal level... about our historical patterns, how trauma has impacted and shaped us, how things we didn't know we were carrying as we move through the world are shaping our lives....*

*But we have the same old tools... of violence, aggression, carcerality, isolation, punishment...*

Many are familiar with the famously poignant Audre Lorde statement and essay: "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House". Sonya Renee Taylor is certainly resurrecting this framework in her criticism of "the same old tools". As if carrying the torch for-

ward from Lorde's own house of wisdom, Taylor insists:

*We have been cosmically invited to build new tools for the future.*

I believe that artists are particularly equipped to build new tools as they call in new awarenesses. It's part of our calling.

\* Link to SRT Video: <https://www.instagram.com/tv/CbtPjNpJUJp/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>  
(insert QR Code?)

### ***The Monster's Tools***

Meanwhile, disciples of Monster Theory, such as Turkish activist, designer and researcher Ece Canli, have proposed acts of resistance and resilience via "Monsterizing the Master's Tools". Monster Theory explores how the monsters that a culture invents or depicts in media, from advertising to literature and cinema, often reflect particular fears of difference that constitute an individual or dominant group as normal or protected. The marginalized may become monsterized by systematic holders of power who fabricate barbaric stigmas or characterizations based on gender, race, ability, faith, status, etc. However, some of these monsterized groups, many Queer communities in particular, have adopted, embraced and reclaimed Monster metaphors to express their own resonances with strangeness, pride and power.

While I've not found a definitive origin of the *Monster's Tools* concept, the phrase also appeared in a book called *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* by Elizabeth Young by 2008.

As a Queer (aka Queerd0) artist who has incorporated Monsters, particularly Sirens, Melusine, and other Sea Serpents into years of my work, I take particular interest in how queer community, and my fellow queer artist colleagues have embraced Monster identity and lore to express their own senses of pride, power, and alienation. When I consider the Monster and their tools, I recognize systems that pull together primal and futuristic desires. Just as a labyrinthine triple spiral moves clockwise and counterclockwise, we must look backwards and forwards as we reinvent tools for new awarenesses.

Footnote: Around 2020 I renamed all of my "Master" documents and lists with titles like *Mother CV* or *Mother List of Artist Statements*. I've also changed many to *Monster Budget*, *Monster Planner*, etc.

## ***Radical Lobotomy: Embodied Medusa Consciousness Occupies Heartless Colonizer Vacancy***

Medusa is a classic Monster figure who has come to represent punished, silenced, exploited and othered beings in many forms. For thousands of years her head has been depicted on coins, shields, in the center of ornate floor mosaics and more. Her gaze turns men to stone. Two drops of her blood may destroy and resurrect. While the \*gorgoneion can be a powerful \*apotropaic tool for protection, it has been used to reinforce the supremacy of “reason and intellect” by which colonial aggressors justify extraction, exploitation and violence toward those they have Othered. Medusa’s name means “Ruling One” or “Protector” but her objectification reflects a disembodied sense of power, wherein the head is separated from the heart or full person.

In many Medusa myths, which may also refer to the historic invasion by King Perseus upon Libyan Priestesses, the seductive mortal of the three gorgon sisters is slain in an act of unjust punishment. With Athena’s blessing and her reflective shield, Perseus is able to avert Medusa’s petrifying gaze. Eventually, her head is affixed to Athena’s Aegis, which she inherited from her father, Zeus. In his possession, the Aegis was used to defeat the Titans in the Great War with the Olympians. In Athena’s, it combines the tools of the Monster and Master. While it remains a complex mythological artifact, its hybrid nature can be seen through the lens of co-optation and exploitation of the imprisoned Monster by the Master. Though Athena is herself a triple goddess with roots stretching back Medusa as well as to her mother, the Sea Goddess Métis, her singular form as a wise, skilled warrior goddess has maintained rare privilege and influence via her mastery of tools for craft and war.

The decapitation of Boston’s Columbus statue may conjure other Ace of Swords interpretations, often connected to mental processing, ideas, will-power and communication. The entire stone figure was removed since the presence of its headless form only strengthens the message behind such an act of resistance to dominant Master paradigm influences. The blatant inverse presentation of the Master’s Tool with the mark of the Monster was too powerful a symbol to leave in public view and still, a petrified picture of trauma.

\*define gorgoneion

\*define apotropaic

## ***Gateway to Infinity***

One rich symbol with which Medusa’s head often appears is the Trinacria. The three spinning legs are even featured on the flags of Sicily and the Isle of Man. Like Hellenistic Triskeltes, it is often rendered as three bent knees in a pinwheel shape which, no matter how they’re spun, will never kneel. It has come to represent Sicily’s sense of independence and resistance when it was a colony of Greece and later during the Unification of Italy (aka Risorgimento).

The Triskelion, depicted as a triple spiral, is perhaps the oldest ancestor of these symbols, said to have Celtic origins dating back to the Neolithic/ Bronze Ages. Often carved into earth and stone, I perceive them as some of the oldest “horizontal monuments” (a framework I’ve used to describe many of my other works on the ground). Academics such as Miriam Robbins Dexter believe that the earlier Gorgoneion imagery also dates back to this era. The triple spiral symbolizes many ideas in different times and places; cyclical change, the third path, reincarnation, the triple goddess, eternal return, and transcendent three-fold relationships including: Life, Death, Rebirth/ Heaven, Earth, Underworld/ Masculine, Feminine, Expanded Gender/ Mind, Body, Spirit / Past, Present, Future and more.

The Triskelion launches from and returns to itself. Represented as a Tarot card, it might be the Three of Pentacles (which relentlessly showed up in inspiration-seeking pulls for the Greenway project in its early stages). This trinity, from the suit of Earth, can symbolize collaboration, community, reciprocal learning. With an early introduction to the Catholic Holy Trinity as a model of the divine, the three-in-one mystery has guided my sense of queerness. A symbol that breaks and expands binarized or dualistic frameworks, it has represented multiplicity, simultaneity and infinite expressions of gender or dimension throughout my life. Today I refer to the Trinity as the *Gateway to Infinity*- the namesake of my painted artwork, which is my first Anti-monument.

### ***An Anti-monument***

Public monuments overwhelmingly memorialize violent events and figures whose ideologies are to be set “permanently” in stone. Similar to these devastating capsules of time and hegemony, Medusa’s form becomes petrified at its point of trauma through its many representations. The preservation of such oppressive structures prevents societal growth, reparation and healing. As our planet’s temperature and seas rise, literally, socially, and metaphorically, stones that are cast seek new targets while stones amassed change form. We’ve seen these monumental structures crack, sink and crumble by forces of nature as well as communal protest. But could frozen time and trauma be melted down to their basic elements by a cosmic fire?

On the 2023 Summer Solstice, as groundwork “Gateway to Infinity (An Anti-monument)” is unveiled. Located on Massachusetts and Pawtucket land, between so-called “Christopher Columbus Park” and “Faneuil Hall,” this artwork seeks to call upon the receptive properties of an Anti-monument, positioned to pull energy toward the earth for composting. The work invites audiences to reflect upon and contend with the sites’ violent legacies and the choices made to freeze and commemorate them via conventional stone monuments. This energetic installation aims to alchemize petrified trauma by centering moving, living bodies upon a communal platform, rather than atop towering pedestals.

Atop the piece, myself and collaborators- non-binary Italian American artists, Vin Caponigro, Ash Capachione, and Laura Campagna- host a public ritual to free the head of Medusa. Three Gorgons (Molteni, Caponigro, and Laura Ganci), united by a lunar Priestess (Campag-

na), journey to the center, an Anti-monument, to invoke the spirit of Medusa Consciousness and the emerging awareness that recent reflections on her myth have reawakened.

Via the beheading paradigm, we invite this ancient Ruler/ Protector to help restore connections of the mind and heart to land and sea. We call upon the Sun and the Ocean, as well as three conjunct planets the Moon, Mars and Venus, to aid in our alchemical process. We bring our own family patterns and privileges symbolized by our heirlooms and invite guests to bring theirs, distributing printed talismans and healing oils with prompts for participation. We invite the Solstice's fiery rays to melt down the tools of our ancestors so we may reshape them for future states of embodied, heart-centered memory and action.

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Vin's work about Medusa

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Rachel Rizzo's 3rd grade presentations on Columbus replacements

Verone Brite's Medusa meditations

Brennan's Monster Theory lecture

## **Medusa & the Radiance of the Night Sect**

by Laura Campagna

*CW: the myth of Medusa contains violence and sexual assault.*

### **Where We Are**

The Sun enters Cancer at 10:53AM ET on June 21, 2023, at the Summer Solstice in the Northern Hemisphere. The longest day and shortest night is a time of peak power, when the Sun ascends to its highest height as it enters into the Moon's cardinal water sign. There is a dynamic activation when solar fire meets lunar water that sparks an initiating force. The Moon is in Leo at the Cancer ingress chart, which sets the container for the season, and moving into a conjunction with the planets of the night sect—Venus and Mars. This sacred fire trinity of nocturnal consciousness in a solar sign imbues the Solstice with a creative radiance. We're encouraged to set intentions, engage in magic, and participate in rituals to manifest our hopes and dreams during the most fertile and abundant season.

### **Where We've Been**

The Sun and Moon are known as the Luminaries. They are lamps that light our way by day and night. For thousands of years, they were considered essential partners and great lovers enacting a dance between dark and light. The Sun and Moon share the sky, each getting an equal portion of the year, and so demonstrate the importance of party. Ancient humans venerated their interplay and closely observed its effects on earth, building rituals around the solar peaks and lunar cycles.

The Sun is an effulgent star who's light powers our solar system. The Moon is a satellite of Earth, an intermediary between Gaia beings and the cosmos, which reflects the light of the Sun to the people down below. The Moon cycles around the Earth every 28 days, at the same rhythm as the menstrual cycle, which is the basis for the monthly calendar. The Sun is all we see in the sky during the day, and its energies manifest in public and individual ways: spurring us to action, enlightening our intellects, inspiring bravery, and encouraging leadership. At night, we rest by the light of the Moon in our home with our family. Luna's energy is collective, connective, absorbent, intimate, private, personal, sensitive, and intuitive.

The Sun and Moon hold hands at the Equinoxes, days of perfect balance between dark and light, as they trade off between the solar (March 20-September 20) and lunar time of year. The Sun's cycle is honored at the Solstices when its at its strongest (June 21) and weakest (December 21). The initiating energy of the Sun has long been associated with the divine masculine and the elements of air and fire. The receptive lunar rays with the divine feminine and earth and water. All four elements are essential for growth, just as the lunar and solar are integral to human development and awakening. Together, they make up two halves of ourselves that we must learn to bring into balance to live in harmony with the Earth and all its creatures.



In astrology, the Moon represents our physical body, survival based needs, and our attachment style. It's the place where we were raised, emotional bonds we formed with caregivers, and our experiences of nurturing, nourishment, acceptance, and belonging. The Moon is connected to the vulnerable places inside of us that long for embrace and comfort. Where and when we struggle to get our physical and emotional needs met. The Moon is our vehicle through life, but embodiment is not an easy process.

The Moon is closest to us and its ever shifting appearance is a reminder that the only constant is change. The visible lunar cycles serve as a guide for humans. Through dramatic periods of waxing and waning, the Moon teaches about the evolutionary process of becoming, maturing, and falling away that is the basis for all life on Earth. Each of the Moon's periods contain a unique power:

- The New Moon represents youth, emergence, newness, exploration, and beginnings.
- The Full Moon represents maturation, fertility, completion, and illumination.
- The Dark Moon represents wisdom, aging, distillation, release, and endings.

The lunar trinity is often referred to as Maiden, Mother, and Crone; and more expansively can be experienced as Youth (0-30), Mature (30-60), and Elder (60-90). These phases have been associated with many deities including the Greek triple goddesses: Artemis with the New Moon, Selene for the Full, and Hekate at the Dark Moon. The sacred trinity that the Moon embodies encourages us to observe and embrace the patterns of budding, blossoming, and withering in our own lives. For thousands of years, the Moon was venerated and rituals developed to attune with its rhythms.

The worship of the Moon and the divine feminine is as old as humanity itself. Luna was seen as a sustainer of life and its importance to early people is evident. The earliest found mathematical record is the Lebombo bone from the mountains above South Africa, dated over 40,000 years old. It is etched with 29 marks, the number of days between New Moons, and is attributed as a lunar calendar for tracking menstruation, making African women the first known mathematicians. The Venus of Willendorf is a fertility statue of a pregnant female Full Moon form dated between 25-35k years old found in Austria.

Both the solar and lunar are present in all people. They combine and reflect through an infinite prism that is not limited to socially constructed categories of gender or biology. Unfortunately, there came a point in human development when the primacy of the solar/active/masculine upended the balance between day and night. The mysteries and magic of the lunar/nocturnal/feminine became denigrated and oppressed. What followed has been thousands of years of dominance and subjugation for those associated with darkness, femininity, and the earth—especially women, witches, feminine, queer, and BIPOC folks. The violence of the Greco-Roman myths contain clues about the process of suppression of the divine feminine and subjugation of the Earth. The stories describe the very real wars waged against the Goddess by patriarchal forces, as well as the resistance of those who fought back, and the uneasy peace that never quite held.

The lunar triple goddess was often depicted with snakes in ancient art. Especially in the Dark Moon phase when we shed and release, as with the menstrual cycle. Snakes are creatures that naturally regenerate and so have been linked with immortality, regeneration, and the circle of resurrection. The Dark Moon is a time of endings, loss, grief, and resting in the emptiness of the void. The goddess of magic, Hekate, is a guardian at the crossroads and guide through liminal space. Her torches light the way for those undertaking a spiritual journey, when the spirit calls us to walk between the worlds. She is seen at cemeteries, and the keys at her waist unlock the gates to the Underworld. Dark moon goddess, Hekate, provided support for those making the final transition from life to death and was an essential part of maintaining the balance of natural law.

Follow the snake in myth, and you will find all the ways the patriarchy sought to subdue and destroy what it could not control because it feared the power of the dark. Lunar consciousness brings us into the truth of our bodies: our vulnerability, mortality, emotions, and physical needs. It is difficult to face death, but the Dark Moon goddesses showed us how. The solar forces sought to destroy a part of itself rather than face its own fears of change, impermanence, and transformation. In doing so, it cut us off from the sacredness of the mundane and the necessity of all stages of the cycle. The trinity of the Gorgon sisters, and the frozen face of Medusa locked in pain, is emblematic of the lasting legacy of this core trauma. We are activating Medusa consciousness at the Summer Solstice because it contains both the poison and antidote for the patriarchal pathology we have been living under for the past 3000 years. Many feminist historians have written about the importance of approaching the myths where we originally met them, and then reading backwards into the layers of history that came before, in order to give ourselves a full and more complete story for dreaming into the present a better future.

Medusa is depicted differently in various myths as are her sisters, Stheno and Euryale. They were originally hideous winged creatures (*recognition of the Dark Moon association with "monstrous" preternatural beings and the more than human world*) but later Medusa is described as a beautiful maiden who is attacked by Poseidon in Pallas Athena's temple (*symbolizing the war against the goddess worshiping people through torture and rape of temple priestesses*). Athena was one of the only goddesses who retained status as wise and allowed to access the public male space of politics, but that was achieved at the expense of her sexuality and affinity for the divine feminine. Athena is outraged at this transgression against her sacred space, but does not punish the attacker (*The patriarchy is never held responsible for its misogyny by those in power.*) Athena vents her rage on Medusa by turning her hair to snakes (*patriarchal tactic of vilification and scapegoating of survivors of sexual assault*). Medusa retreats to a cave to live alone (*the suppression of goddess worship caused it to move underground*), but is not allowed to heal in private (*yet worshipers were still hunted and persecuted*). Athena sends Persus to kill Medusa, which he does by beheading (*cutting off our access to the snake wisdom and goddess traditions that were passed down for thousands of years*). Medusa is betrayed by Athena, a goddess who should be an ally, and murdered for being an outsider and a threat (*and in doing so further secures her place within the patriarchal elite*). Audre Lorde coined the term "horizontal hostility" whereby one member of a marginalized group oppresses the other in a way to exercise control and align with power

structures. Medusa is remembered as a monster and we are taught to fear her, rather than the men who abused her (*in blaming the victim, patriarchy shifts the focus away from its violence, and encourages the projection of very real fear of attack onto survivors*).

Medusa gave birth to Pegasus and Chrysaor as she died (*art and poetry are ways that goddess wisdom has been transmitted and survived*). Mere drops of her blood enabled the divine physician, Asclepius, to raise the dead (*goddess magic was incorporated into the patriarchal structure under new names*). Athena absorbed some of Medusa's symbols, including the snake for the gift of prophecy. In homage, Athena placed Medusa's face on her aegis (*perhaps her own act of subterfuge as a reminder that Athena too was once part of a lunar trinity and always would be*). Medusa's frozen visage was fearsome enough to stop attackers in their tracks. Granting those that continued after her the power of protection she lacked to defend her own life. Medusa's decapitated head was taken as a prize, but it serves more as a reminder of the rage of all people who have been violated and not avenged. Without justice there can never be peace.

The suppression of the Dark Moon goddess caused a severing in the heart. We have been living with it and suffering from this soul sickness for thousands of years. Humanity was forced to reject and abandon a part of ourselves and denigrate the truth that lies in the deepest place of us: that we are one with the divine, that we are all intimately connected, and that death is not an end to love or life. Although this truth was forcefully obscured, the lessons are still there in Medusa's story. The power of the Dark Goddess continues on, no matter how hard they try to stop it .

It would be easy to blame Athena, and, indeed, that is what we are set up to do, but upon deeper investigation of the clue she left us on her breastplate, over the heart, we find she is part of her own holy trinity that originally included Medusa. It is said that Athena sprung fully formed from Zeus' head, but that is the patriarchy's parthenogenetic disembodied version in which the male creates everything from its intellect. Of course Athena had a mother, the water goddess of wisdom, Metis, who hailed from Libya, in North Africa. She was associated with an ancient creation goddess, Neith, who's name means "I have come from myself." Neith arose from Lake Tritonis, land of the Triple Queens and home of the Amazon warriors, was eventually brought to Crete, and evolved into triple Moon manifestations as Athena, Metis, and Medusa. The popular legends of the ingestion of Metis, birth of Pallas Athena from Zeus, and murder of Medusa all speak to the suppression, adaptation, and eradication of feminine wisdom to the needs of the new patriarchal order.

### ***Where We're Going***

There was once a multitude of sacred forms that we all inhabited, but after the rise of patriarchy, the earth was objectified and exploited, women were only allowed to express as Maiden or Mother, queerness was outlawed, BIPOC people were systematically oppressed, and the sacred was divorced from the Earth and placed high in the sky. Instead of a trusted guide and teacher, the Dark Moon goddess became a monster that haunted our nightmares. But Medusa has been resurrected over the last several hundred years, and is speaking

again louder than ever. Medusa Medusa consciousness initiates us back into snake wisdom and the wholeness of our beings. It champions those who have been silenced and encourages an embrace of that which has been locked in pain for too long.

All three planets of the night–Moon, Venus, and Mars–are together in the sign of the Sun at the Summer Solstice. A shining reminder that what is hidden must ultimately be revealed in the quest for healing and wholeness. The triskelion and the radiance of the night sect is a portal to restore balance through rituals of magic designed to reunify that which was separated and stuck in isolation. Through embodying what has been occulted, we are empowered by the night to befriend, protect, defend, nurture, and nourish ourselves and the world in new ways. Medusa consciousness is both a return and a new beginning. The activation encourages us to live today as if we already inhabit a world where our bodies are safe to just be and we know ourselves to be free. The triskelion trinity ritual is a path of finding our way back to Medusa, ourselves, and the fierce power we were taught to fear, which is the gateway to the great awakening.

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## TITLE TBD - SOMETHING ABOUT BEHEADING

Vin Caponigro

The Gorgons were three sisters, Stheno, Euryale, and Medusa, who lived on an island at the end of the world. Ancient Greek artists portrayed them as hideous winged creatures, often with bulging eyes, full beards, tusks, scales, tongues out. Believed to provide protection from enemies and ward off evil, Gorgons were painted onto pottery, carved into funerary monuments, and used on architecture and sculpture to scare off potential attackers, thieves, and evil spirits. Despite the fact that many ancient coins featured regional themes and personifications of geography, Gorgon images were a unifying feature, found on coins from across the ancient Greek world. The headwear worn in the ritual Triskele & The Monster's Tools references coins that were minted in Kamarina, Sicily c. 413 - 405 BCE, Lesbos c. 521 - 478 BCE, and Thracien Apollonia Pontica, present day Bulgarian Black Sea Coast, c. 480 - 450 BCE.

By the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, representations of Gorgons began shifting from the grotesque androgyny of early depictions to a more feminized and beautiful appearance. A similar shift occurred with other mythical beings, such as sphinxes, sirens, and the sea monster Scylla, transforming these symbols of death, believed to have protective powers, into more humanized versions of the former selves. The feminization of these monsters made it easier to demonize women in the patriarchal Greek society, where everything centered around the male citizen. Centuries later, the Christian Church would use similar tactics, associating women with demons who were able to change their shape and form in order to more easily brand and persecute independent women as witches.

In the *Metamorphoses*, originally published in 8 CE, Ovid retells and expands upon the story of Medusa, describing her as a once beautiful woman responsible for protecting Athena's temple. Desired by many, she refused all her suitors. Poseidon, in the shape of a horse assaults Medusa in Athena's temple, impregnating her. Athena, virgin goddess, is enraged at the desecration of her sacred temple, and turns Medusa and her sisters into monsters, their hair transformed into snakes. Whoever looks at their hideous faces is instantly turned to stone.

To the ancient Greeks, beauty was inherently connected to character. To be physically ugly was directly related to a moral deficit. The humanization and feminization of the Gorgons, along with the story of Medusa, remade her as an archetypal femme fatale, dangerous yet enchanting – symbolizing death, violence, and erotic desire.

After her murder, Perseus wields Medusa's severed head as a weapon, using it to turn his enemies into stone. After being anointed king, Perseus gives Athena Medusa's head, which she puts on her own breastplate or shield for its protective and defensive powers, intimidating and provoking fear in her enemies. Athena gives vials of Medusa's blood to Asclepius, god of healing. Blood from her right vein can heal the living and restore life to the dead, while blood from her left vein can instantly kill. In the desert, oases grow from drops of her blood that fall to the ground.

Medusa's physical form is altered without her consent by beings more powerful than herself. Even after her beheading, she retains her power but not her bodily autonomy. In a fit of anger, Athena changed Medusa into a monster. After her death, her head is used by her murderer to inflict further pain, and her blood is used to both heal and kill. She is hunted, first as a beautiful woman to be conquered, then as a weapon and trophy. In recent years, Medusa and her story have been reclaimed as feminist symbols, pushing against its victim-blaming narrative, rejecting male gaze and patriarchal demand that women must be docile and submissive and that to act otherwise makes them a monster that must be destroyed (1).

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The brutal history of the atrocities committed by Christopher Columbus was well documented in his own journals and by his contemporaries who witnessed his crimes against the Taíno peoples in Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic first hand. His governorship of Hispaniola was so inhumane he was sent back to Spain in chains, stripped of his titles, and imprisoned for weeks (2). Columbus was a man who stole from his own people. His voyage was funded by land and property seizures of Jewish and Muslim Spaniards. Columbus did not discover a place already inhabited by millions of people – he accidentally landed in the Bahamas. He was a man who cut off the ears, hands, and heads of people who did not find enough gold for him. A man who sold nine and ten year old girls as sex slaves. A man whose actions set the tone for the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Before Columbus the man was commemorated as a great explorer, the allegorical figure of Columbia was used to signify liberty and progress (2). An idealized feminine personification of the newly formed so-called United States, the name Columbia is derived from a latinized version of Christopher Columbus, meaning “Land of Columbus” (3). She is frequently depicted as a young white woman, reminiscent of Athena, wearing classically draped garments and holding a shield, staff, or flag.

In the early 1800s, the idea of Columbus evolved from a feminine allegorical deity to a lone explorer celebrating western expansion and personifying Manifest Destiny (2). In 1893, when the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival, it was met with mixed reactions. A champion for some, dissenters used the opportunity to confront Columbus's genocidal legacy. Ida B. Wells distributed 20,000 pamphlets discussing the idea of commemorative holidays and the exclusion of Black Americans from the expo. Simon Pokagon, a Potawatomi writer, said “On behalf of my people, the American Indians, I hereby declare to you, the pale-faced race that has usurped our lands and homes, that we have no spirit to celebrate with you the great Columbian Fair now being held in this Chicago city, the wonder of the world” (4).

The site of Gateway to Infinity (An Anti-monument) and its corresponding ritual Triskele & The Monster's Tools is situated between Christopher Columbus Park and Faneuil Hall, on the small peninsula that became the city of Boston, settled by English colonizers in 1630.

Boston was established on this site because of the harbor, which provided deep natural channels and islands for sheltered anchorages, fish were one of the few resources the colonists were able to trade and maritime commerce dominated life in the settlement (5).

Boston was the epicenter for the domestic slave trade in New England colonies. Merchants participated in Triangular Trade, trafficking enslaved individuals from Africa to sell in the Caribbean in exchange for vast quantities of molasses, sugar, and rum – all produced by enslaved labor, which were sent to the colonies. The profits were then used to purchase more enslaved people. Unable to sell their lower grade fish in Europe, merchants in New England shipped the cheap, low quality fish – often referred to as refuse grade – to plantations to feed enslaved people (6). In the mid eighteenth century, Boston was the most populous city on the continent with the busiest port. Enslaved people made up roughly ten percent of the population (6).

The first documented reference to the sale of enslaved people in the Massachusetts Bay Colony was recorded in 1638. Though Boston did not have a centralized market, public auctions of enslaved people took place throughout the city and were frequently advertised in the newspapers. There are eleven sites where enslaved people were sold within a half mile radius of Gateway to Infinity (An Anti-monument) (7).

Some of the earliest auctions of enslaved individuals occurred at the site of Faneuil Hall. The original structure was destroyed in a fire in 1761 and rebuilt the following year by merchant Peter Faneuil as a gift to the city to function as a marketplace and location for public meetings. Like many merchants of the time, Faneuil built his financial empire through the purchase of enslaved people and the sale of goods produced by enslaved labor, benefiting greatly from the economy produced by the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. At the time of his death, he owned five enslaved people (6).

Despite its direct connection to slavery, Faneuil Hall is sometimes referred to as the “Cradle of Liberty,” a reference to the numerous gatherings in the years preceding the American Revolution that also took place there.

By the 1960s, Boston’s waterfront was “a dilapidated collection of tin-covered fish shacks, banana warehouses and rotting wharves” (8). In 1965, public hearings, led by the Boston Redevelopment Authority began, ultimately resulting in \$52 million in public money and more than \$60 million in private money being invested in hopes of revitalizing the area (8).

The waterfront was redeveloped and attempts were made to lure white middle and upper class young professionals into the area, driving up rents and pushing out families that had lived in the predominantly Italian North End for generations, where the majority of housing was still made of turn of the century tenements, about a third of which did not have kitchens or baths (8).

In 1975 Sasaki Associates, an architecture and design firm, began construction on Waterfront Park, conceived as an “urban, multicultural, children’s playground through an extensive, multi-year process of design, planning, and community consultation” (9). The park was planned to have open and unobstructed views of the water, an homage to Boston’s maritime history.

In the spring of 1979, Waterfront Park was officially changed to Christopher Columbus Park by an expedited 14 day proposal to City Council, circumventing public process, without community input, proper approval by Boston Parks and Recreation, or consultation with the Boston Arts Commission (9).

*“In a period of less than six months in 1979, a public park originally designed as a children’s playground and built with the intention of reducing social and economic inequalities... was co opted by the interests of a small committee of private interests whose corrupt efforts resulted in the deceitful renaming of the park and unsanctioned placement of a statue that, since then, has resulted in 40 years of racial divisions, historical deceptions, and socio-political confrontations.” Open Systems; Finding Aid & Document Archive – A Chronology of Events at Christopher Columbus Park 1959-2020 (10)*

Mayor Kevin White, who was seeking reelection in a contentious and close race, engaged in a quid pro quo – expediting the renaming of Waterfront Park without proper procedures in exchange for securing the Italian American vote. White defeated opponent Joe Timilty on November 6, 1979, a week after the park’s re-inauguration.

An appropriation of public space, designed and intended to be open to all, the park was weaponized and racialized at an especially volatile moment in Boston’s history – when white opposition to social equality and boycotts to federally mandated desegregation of the school system (10). (FOOTNOTE: For more on the history of racism and its legacy in Boston, see the Boston Globe’s seven part investigation; Boston. Racism. Image. Reality. <https://apps.bostonglobe.com/spotlight/boston-racism-image-reality/series/image>)

The Columbus statue, privately funded by nationalist Arthur Stivaletta – who was the single member of the Friends of Christopher Columbus Committee, the name of which is engraved at the statue’s granite base – was unlawfully placed on public land in 1979. Since then it has been maintained and repaired with public funds. The statue has been vandalized at least five times since 2004. In 2006, the statue was beheaded. In 2015 the statue was splattered with red paint and spray painted with “Black Lives Matter.” On June 9, 2020 the statue was beheaded again. The head was recovered by the police, and the statue was put into storage. In October 2020 the city announced it would be placed in a Knights of Columbus building in the North End (11). The granite pedestal still sits in the crossroads of the park, obstructing the view of the water. The park has retained its name and the pathway where Gateway to Infinity (An Anti-monument) is painted remains “Christopher Columbus Park Path.”



The world's first monument to Columbus, a 44 foot tall obelisk, was built in Baltimore in 1792. By 1892, 28 monuments had been erected. As of 2021, there were 149 public monuments dedicated to Columbus, though at least 36 have been removed in recent years.

The largest portion of Columbus statues were created in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when his legacy was actively being retold as heroic discovery during a period when Italian Americans were grasping for equality among other white immigrants and fighting against discrimination. The veneration of Columbus and the building of statues in his honor came at a time when Italian Americans had a deep desire to prove to white America that they were "civilized" and "cultured" and could fold into the existing racial structures and power dynamics. It was a time when caricatures of Italian Americans and Italian immigrants were frequent in newspapers, erroneously citing that they were predisposed to violence, and when the memory of a mob killing 11 Italian Americans in New Orleans was still fresh.

The statue of Christopher Columbus in my hometown of Easton, Pennsylvania was erected in 1928 on land stolen from the Lenni Lenape. In the midst of the Great Depression, a group of mostly poor immigrants raised \$13,000, selling family jewelry and mortgaging their homes for the bronze statue.

Before 1900, there were fewer than 400 Italians living in Northampton County, PA. By 1930, the number had increased to 4,500, most settling in Easton. The immigrants were met with discrimination and distrust of their seemingly unusual beliefs, superstitions, and ways of life. There were cross burnings and racialized violence (12). Many Italian immigrants and Italian Americans were taught that embracing Columbus was a way to honor their ancestral heritage and their new country simultaneously, by creating a symbolic link to their native land and the one where they now lived. (FOOTNOTE: Columbus was Genoese, from northern Italy, and sailed under Spanish flags. He would have never claimed an Italian identity because Italy literally did not exist yet. The Risorgimento, or unification of the vastly disparate city states into a single Kingdom of Italy, didn't occur until 1861. Despite the fact that the vast majority of Italian Americans have ancestral roots in Southern Italy and Sicily, to this day, there are no statues of Columbus there.)

The Easton chapter of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan went on record as opposed to the construction of the statue, stating that they would "use any honorable method to prevent the placing of a monument or statue of any alien, especially one who never set foot on the soil of this country of ours, and never did anything for the benefit of the country or any public school." (12) Originally intended for a central location, after the KKK threatened violence it was placed in the corner of a park overlooking the river. The current mayor, an Italian American man I have known my entire life, has refused to even consider removing the statue and has said he will prosecute anyone who defaces it to the fullest extent of the law. Calls to remove the statue have gone unanswered, and it remains in the park overlooking the Delaware River.

Many of the statues of Columbus were built at a time when information about him wasn't readily accessible, and people in power were able to manipulate the truth to advance their own ideological needs. In the eighteenth century, the figure of Columbus was used to reassure white Americans that landing in a place gave you the right to take it, to kill or displace whoever was already living there so that you might settle it in god's name. Later, his image was used by Italian immigrants and Italian Americans in an attempt to link themselves with the history of European exploration at a time when they were desperately trying to convince a mostly white Protestant population that they were worthy of assimilation.

Like the numerous confederate monuments that were built during the Jim Crow era, the statues of Columbus are intentional. Mahtowin Munro, a leader of the United American Indians of New England, said in *Confronting Colonial Myths in Boston's Public Space*, "[The Columbus statue is] like a cat spraying to mark his territory. So you have these colonial settlers who are just marking their territory, and they're marking their territory as white space" (13).

While some Americans are able to look past the reality of Columbus's brutal and monstrous actions to venerate him as an admirable figure of Italian heritage or an icon of rugged individualism and exploration, for many Black and Indigenous Americans Columbus represents only oppression.

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Myths about Columbus and the founding of the so-called United States actively participate in the continued subjugation of Black and Indigenous people by erasing their histories, perpetuating the idea that European history – regardless of how dishonestly told – is more important than the history of others. These dangerous misrepresentations and blatant disregard of the truth uplift white supremacy

Similarly, the Gorgon's heads, once used for protection, were co-opted and altered in later years by Greek poets who transformed the story of Medusa into a cautionary tale of what happens when women exist outside of patriarchal ideals. Many of the powerful men in colonial New England, including Faneuil, amassed their wealth through active or passive participation in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade – a fact that often gets drowned out or outright ignored because of their actions in relation to the American Revolution. They are remembered as patriots, fighting against an unfair system. We are taught that Columbus discovered the "New World." In collective mythology, Medusa is dehumanized while men like Columbus, colonizers, and revolutionary figures are valorized and made into heroes despite the knowledge that they were actually benefactors or perpetrators of unimaginable violence against Black and Indigenous Peoples.

We can reject the persistence of these myths and instead acknowledge the truth. We can consider what stories deserve to be told. By removing these statues from the public realm and renaming the parks and walkways that uphold colonial myths and lies, we can embrace the original intention of Waterfront Park as a multicultural space that can be enjoyed by all and make room for other voices.

We can accept the ways in which our some of our ancestors were oppressed without glorifying the genocide and continued oppression of Black and Indigenous Peoples. We can recognize the harm many of us have caused to non-white Americans through the whitewashing and retelling of history. We can apologize and work toward righting the wrong. We can decapitate the statues and reclaim the narratives. We can reject the whitewashed version of history and acknowledge the truth and violence of settler colonialism. We can take our familial histories and heirlooms and traditions and alchemize them into something that does not blindly follow paths we know to be untrue, but instead transforms them into something powerful. Vi volgio bene.

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