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# Imagining Envy, One of the Seven Deadly Sins

By SUSAN HODARA JULY 31, 2015

Bartholomew Bland, the deputy director of the Hudson River Museum, was enthralled by the challenge of curating a show about the sin of envy. “Envy is the subtlest and also the most corrosive of the sins,” he said. “It is often expressed under the cloak of something else. Envy is the hidden sin. In many ways, it’s the least visual.”

Nevertheless, the resulting exhibition, “Envy, One Sin, Seven Stories: Adrien Broom,” is highly visual, interweaving images of desire, vengeance and gore. The show fills three galleries with 58 large-scale digital color prints, three reproductions of stage sets used to shoot some of the photographs, and installations that depict characters and scenarios from classic fairy tales whose plots are driven by envy. All of the work was created for the exhibition by Ms. Broom, a multimedia artist based in Brooklyn, who described herself as a storyteller.

Approaching the show, museumgoers encounter two mannequins suspended by a web of black yarn high above the gallery. Each figure wears an ornate gown, one white, the other black. Titled “An Envious Dance,” the installation is Ms. Broom’s interpretation of one of the paradigms of envy, the no-longer-fairest-in-the-realm evil queen in “Snow White.”

Downstairs, the narrative continues, enacted in evocative photographs by

elaborately costumed models in spare, suggestive environments. There are images of the queen wearing the white gown ready to eat the bloody heart she believes was Snow White's, and another of her in the black gown reflected in her infamous mirror contemplating the poisoned apple.

Ms. Broom explained that the metamorphosis from white to black signals the queen's descent into envy. "Early in the story, she is starting to be taken over," she said. "Later, she is completely consumed. We designed the black dress so that the collar is creeping up over her."

"Envy, One Sin, Seven Stories" highlights the impact of the sin in six other fairy tales as well, including "Cinderella"; "Beauty and the Beast"; "The Singing Bone"; "Sprightly Water, Talking Bird, Singing Tree"; "The Black Bride and the White One"; and "The Goose Girl."

Ms. Broom based her creations on the original renditions of the tales (most from the writings of the Grimm brothers), which are far more sinister than Disney's counterparts. In an adjacent gallery, for instance, in an image titled "A Good Fit," one of Cinderella's stepsisters has squeezed the glass slipper onto her bloodied foot.

"In the Grimms' version, the sisters hack off their toes and heels so they can fit into the shoe," Ms. Broom said.

To produce most of the photographs on view, Ms. Broom devised a system she called "Storytelling in a Box." A construction crew and a prop designer helped her build a three-walled staging area in her studio to use as the backdrop for each shot.

"We build the set and photograph the scene," she said. "Then we tear it down and in the same space build the next set."

The sets in the exhibition are to-scale facsimiles. The dwarves' cottage from "Snow White" features, among many details, a thatched roof, axes, strands of garlic and the draped window where the queen tempted the princess with the poisoned apple. In the dark woods from "The Singing Bone," a boar's head is lit by a crescent

moon. In Cinderella's stepmother's well-appointed parlor, a delicate slipper rests on a footstool, a ribbon of red silk flowing from it like blood.

While Ms. Broom has previously employed professional models, for "Envy, One Sin, Seven Stories" she chose to work with family members and friends. Shrewd observers may recognize a few of the faces. On a wall of portraits of fairy tale archetypes, the king is embodied by a particularly regal-looking Mario Batali, the celebrity chef.

Generally, fairy tale archetypes of envy are women: stepmothers and stepsisters. But Ms. Broom was determined to include male envy, which she discovered in "The Singing Bone," the story of two brothers who set out to win the princess by killing a giant boar. Envy drives one brother to murder the other. In the gallery, in the photograph "The Price of Her Hand," he stands over his slain sibling clutching a blood-spattered birch branch.

Visitors interested in dipping further into sin have a unique opportunity this summer. "Envy, One Sin, Seven Stories" is part of "The Seven Deadly Sins," a series of exhibitions at seven museums, each addressing one of the sins. The museums are members of the Fairfield/Westchester Museum Alliance; "The Seven Deadly Sins" is the alliance's first collaborative programming endeavor.

As for envy, in all the fairy tales Ms. Broom chose to portray, it is instigated close to home. "It's personal," Mr. Bland said. "It's not a stranger in the woods who grabs you. It's a family member who turns on you."

Perhaps the scope of envy has broadened in contemporary culture, in which ostentatious consumption is rampant and flaunting success on social media is the norm. In the gallery, near a selection of photographs from "Snow White," a rosy glass-blown apple illuminated from below perches on a pedestal across from a mirror. Mr. Bland noted that visitors who stand beside the apple have a direct line of sight to their reflection.

"We want you to find yourself in the mirror," he said. "Are you envying someone?"

“Envy, One Sin, Seven Stories: Adrien Broom” runs through Sept. 27 at the Hudson River Museum, 511 Warburton Avenue, Yonkers. “Envy: The Stuff of Story,” an Arts in the Afternoon, Lifelong Learning for Adults program, will take place Aug. 12 at 1:30 p.m., followed by a gallery tour at 3 p.m. The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival will perform a 30-minute adaptation of “Cinderella” on Aug. 16 and 23 at 1 and 3 p.m. For more information: [hrm.org](http://hrm.org) or 914-963-4550.

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