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Unknown
Mixed Media

I researched the different aspects of monsters such as environment, physical aspects and what exactly it is about them that makes us scared. After I researched I could then use my findings to create a monster of my own. I came to this conclusion for my final project when I visited the Skeleton Key Odditorium in Portland, Oregon where I found myself obsessing over an installation made by the artist M.R. Hopkins centered around a rather scary troll which was revealed in his artist statement to actually want to protect people from other monsters with bad intentions. This fueled my curiosity and caused me to wonder why it was scary in the first place. Before I started my project I knew that I wanted to use every media I possibly could in the week we were given to create a monster that would make me proud. I wanted this piece to cause me to be ambitious, experience new challenges and work with new material.

The Essence of a Monster

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OS50

I.   Introduction

What comes to mind when you think of a monster? Something lanky, hairy, or unpleasant? Perhaps full of eyes and claws that reach various inches of length? Or do you receive an image of the monsters you see in the movie *Monsters Inc.* They are funny, fluffy and harmless, only there to try and get a scare out of you? For my final project I want to make a creature of my own, meant to embrace what makes us truly scared and use it to my full advantage, but in order to truly understand how to create a monster and put it in the right environment first I must figure out what the components of a monster are that make it terrifying, and why that is. I will then move onto the environment and begin to explain the effect of the environment on the viewer and how it affects scenes with or without the monster involved for a complete explanation of its importance.

II.   History of the Word Monster

A great place to start when figuring out what a monster is includes going back into history. According to the University of Cambridge the word 'monster' may have originated from the Latin words *monstrare* meaning 'to demonstrate' and *monere* meaning 'to warn,' usually in an uncomforting way (University of Cambridge 2015). This makes sense because many old folklore and fairy tales were cautionary tales created for children to scare them into not doing or going somewhere they aren't supposed to. A famous example of this is the story of Hansel and Gretel which demonstrates a horrific ending (based on which version you're reading) where either the children end up getting eaten or the witch who owns the house does. This is all because the children get lost in the forest and accept a stranger's kindness a bit too easily.

III.   Studying Features

In order to create an acceptable monster I decided to list the aspects I commonly see amounting to a monster. When I picture a monster, I commonly see something tall, much taller than me. I see its arms much too long to be that of a human after all they seem to outstretch towards me showing off long red tinted claws dripping with an unnerving black substance. On the creature's arms is a thin, dirtied layer of skin fitted so tightly, I begin to wonder if the monster even has any meat or muscle on its bones other than that skin barrier waiting to give out. Eyes of all different colors litter some of the pores while others ooze with that familiar black substance from the nails. The back of the creature twists in all the wrong directions and its neck seems to crane out at an extremely abnormal angle. The unhinged jaw hangs low and the inside of the mouth is fitted with an uncountable number of long sharp teeth going down into the throat and a tongue resembling almost that of a long squid tentacle. The eyes on the face are bottomless pits and the nose is gone leaving two small holes to breathe from. The hair falls in front of its face but not enough to save anyone from those dark, dead eyes. Its hair is messy and unkempt. Dirt and blood still lingered there from what seemed to be its previous heists. Its hand holds a cracked watch, the time stopped at midnight with the word "END" painted over what was left of that glass in crimson. However, I don't think I would ever question what the substance really was. I'd like to believe it was simply just paint.

IV.   Monster Backgrounds

Still, I find myself wondering why these aspects scare us? After researching more about this question I've come to the realization that what scares us is not completely about what the monster looks like but also how dangerous it could be. Let's take the following sentences, "its

hair is messy and unkempt. Dirt and blood still lingered from what seemed to be its previous heists." This makes our brains immediately make the connection between blood and the creature's previous actions. We aren't necessarily only scared of the monster itself, we are also scared of what it could do to us. Sharp teeth and claws are quite scary but if you think about why they are it's not because of what they are, but instead because it's seen as quite abnormal to be that of a human, and can easily hurt us if used in that way. Monsters in many stories such as the story of the Wendigo (a creature who looks similar to a big deer that roams in the forest and eats unsuspecting victims, or stalks and possesses humans turning them cannibalistic) and even Werewolves aren't entirely scary just because of their looks. It's also because of not knowing what they are capable of. Many monsters are similar to animals to which you can't necessarily communicate with so it's impossible to know what they are thinking or what they could do to you. While on this topic I also wondered if knowing the background of the monster could change opinions on the monster. A couple weeks ago I went with my mom to a museum called The Skeleton Key Odditorium in Portland, Oregon where I got to see this incredible installation piece created by the artist M.R. Hopkins. The installation centers on a very large troll squeezing through the door of what looks to be a children's bedroom, seeing as it has a very small bed with a pretty childish design and fun colors. The physical aspects that I noticed first on the monster that gave me an immediate feeling of panic was the size of the creature, the elongated arms, the large slim fingers fitted with claws, the morphed/dirtied face, and the hairiness of the creature as a whole. All of these were aspects of a monster that I had thought of prior, but what struck me with the most surprise was when I read the small artist statement on the metal plaque stating that the monster actually meant no harm and just wanted to make sure the child was safe from any dangers or other monsters that actually meant harm. I noticed that immediately after knowing

this new information I immediately felt a sense of ease towards this creature and even found myself wanting one of my own! This led me to the further realization that how harmful the creature is plays a huge part in how it is perceived.

V.   Aspects of Setting

In every movie and book there is still one important topic that I haven't talked about yet, which is the setting. So what exactly is a setting? A setting is simply where a story takes place and the aspects of said place. Setting goes much deeper than that, as it is able to set the mood for the whole scene and steer you into the direction of where a story is going. Which one is scarier: an abandoned house or a family home that a small happy family has lived in for years? Without the setting, any viewer would be incredibly confused. I decided I needed to dig deeper into this topic because in order to create the perfect monster, the environment around the monster should complement it. One of the main, highly effective, and important aspects of a creepy scene is how we use the lighting. It's already been proven that many people already feel an increase in unease when the lights turn out, but why exactly is that? According to COLBOR (a lighting brand) when a scene is darker it induces a sense of unease from the unknown. When you can't see what's around you then you can't exactly tell if you are in danger or what might be lurking in the darkness. An example of this could be the installation I saw at the museum. M.R. Hopkins had placed a lamp next to the child's bed that had a very subtle yellow hue only illuminating the giant monster a little bit. I think this worked really well for the installation because without the lamp on it would not give the same effects. The lamp being on told me that it was nighttime and this creature was sneaking into the room and I assume since it was

nighttime the victim wouldn't be expecting it. The low lighting in many films is also used to make the viewers feel specific emotions such as grief and melancholy.

VI.   Where Does my Installation Come in?

Why are things like the environment and aspects of a monster important for the making of my installation piece? One of the reasons it's good to look at the setup and setting of a piece is because when you are looking at it in person, it's one thing to see a monster that intrigues and brings out your fear but it's another thing to fully immerse the viewer. When you bring setting into the equation it gives the viewer a place to imagine themselves in and brings out the unease of the monster because now that they imagine themselves there they also feel that they are with the monster as well. Standing face to face with a monster is different than viewing it in a show or movie because you get to see how big it truly is compared to you. People feel a separation from the monster watching it on the television rather than seeing it in person giving them a sense of ease, after all, you're not in the movie so you're not the target but when you see an installation in person you are basically part of the installation; You are the main character.

VII.   Conclusion

You might still ask why exactly I needed to go further into other topics like background, setting and what makes a monster instead of just researching the looks of a monster? This is because I believe that what makes a monster is heavily influenced by those other topics. Although physical appearance is important to a monster, I knew that it still goes beyond that. The setting is so important for actually immersing the viewer and heavily changing our perception of monsters by

forcing us to focus on the features that truly terrify us. Even just knowing the background behind

the word monster

and knowing what they were originally used for helps so much with enabling me to make my

own and give meaning to it. With all the information I've gathered from my research I'm

confident I will be able to make a monster that's scary to the best of my abilities. I've dug into

the importance of how I can manipulate lighting and setting in my installation to make my

environment match the mood of my piece as well as how to use aspects of the monster such as

physical features or a background story to my advantage in the creation of my own creature. I

was even able to let my imagination run wild which doubles as brainstorming for how I could

make my monster look and give me ideas for how I can make it as well.

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Footnotes

Check out M.R. Hopkins at https://www.nightmerriment.com/shop.