

Featured Artist: Allison Akers

We are thrilled to share 3 art pieces along with their rationale by talented artist Allison Akers.

EMBODIED UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS

For my artwork, I wanted to focus on creatures that may not often be associated with utopia, but that I took to represent utopian and dystopian ideals both from the way I designed them and their representation in nature, literature, film.

“Sting”

Sting takes inspiration from the cover photo of the *DLR*. Jellyfish have always seemed otherworldly and beautiful to me, much like idea of utopia. However, many are also capable of



Sting, 2018, Ink, 4x4 in.

stinging and inflicting pain, making them dangerous and deadly creatures. A single person’s idea of utopia may be suppressive and harmful to other people, much like a jellyfish’s tentacles do not hurt itself but will paralyze and ensnare the prey it needs to survive. One jellyfish, the *Turritopsis dohrnii*, is even immortal, which I related to utopian and dystopian concepts that have persisted for thousands of years. I used black ink to capture the jellyfish’s slick appearance and to reflect the darker, less moral actions that are often associated with achieving a “utopia” on Earth.

"Siren"

The Modern Siren also takes similar inspiration to the jellyfish's themes. In Greek mythology, sirens were bird-women who enchanted sailors with their songs and drove ships into rocks, but over time sirens were conflated with mermaids into their modern incarnations. I like to think of utopias as modern sirens. Utopia is alluring, and many characters in literature and film want/try to achieve it, but often utopias are warped by human flaws into monstrous, corrupt dystopias. It is easy to stare at the siren's beautiful face, listen to her enchanting voice, but her more sinister features should not be ignored. Utopia also means "no place," which I also related to my siren, since it is a creature that does not



The Modern Siren, 2018, Ink, graphite, and marker, 9 in x 12 in.

exist. Since green is often associated with life and safety, my siren has a pale green tail and markings coupled with black to represent death and danger. She also strikes a dynamic, confident pose, smiling directly at the viewer in an inviting way.

“Artificial Beauty”

Unlike the other two pieces, *Artificial Beauty* embodies how mankind alters and mimics nature, shaping it to create utopia but often falling short of nature’s perfection. In class last semester, we examined nature-centric utopias such as *Of the Cannibals* by Michel de Montaigne and *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, which gave me the idea to submit this piece. The lack of color in the butterfly emphasizes the lifelessness of the butterfly, and the negative space in its wings, thorax, and abdomen allude to the idea of it being a hollow, manmade imitation of a real butterfly.



Artificial Beauty, 2017, Ink, 5 x 5 in.