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Sister Sin and Spare Rib: Safety, Softness, and the Resilience of Womanhood

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Abstract

This body of work explores the strength of feminine joy, the power of softness, and the resilience of womanhood through large-scale oil paintings and acrylic prints. The central guiding questions for the work are: *How can I use paint and printing processes to emphasize the importance of feminine joy, the power of softness, and the inherent resilience of womanhood? Further, can these representations offer experiences of empowerment from collective patriarchal trauma*? By considering womanhood through a lens of agency, safety and joy, this project counters narratives that render women's experiences ornamental or subjugated. Instead, the artist offers an alternative: a vision of womanhood in which vulnerability serves as an act of reclamation, healing, and collective strength. Feminine power is extended through the inclusion of Great Danes in the artwork. No longer symbols of male ownership or domesticity, the dogs embody sacred protectors. They mirror the emotional states of the women they accompany while evoking mythic resonance, from the mother wolf of Roman lore to witches and their familiars. Rather than focusing solely on the historical oppression inflicted upon women, the work acknowledges its role in women's lives while highlighting a reciprocal force: joy as resistance. By celebrating women's relationships, via their friendships, self-love, or communal care, the paintings reclaim agency over the narrative of womanhood. Broaching such a subject is deeply personal to the artist yet universally relevant. Inspiration for the work stems from firsthand experiences while also drawing on a broader societal context in which women's voices are continually diminished. The artist asserts that in the joy and resilience shared between women, there exists a network of strength, from which all may draw and contribute to.

1. Introduction

For millennia, patriarchal systems have sought to control and define womanhood through oppression, violence, and rigid gender expectations. Art history has also contributed to a broader cultural endemic of objectification (Berger, 1972). This project is rooted in a deep resistance to such dismissal and dehumanization, both ongoing and in antiquity. The work exists outside of and in direct resistance to a world where women have been persecuted for their wisdom, healing practices, and their close relationships to one another. From witch hunts that targeted midwives, healers, and women's covens, to the modern-day commodification of female identity and political bids for control (such as the overturning of Roe v. Wade in 2022), the attempt to dominate women's bodies and suppress their bonds is disturbingly uniform and pervasive across history (Chollet, 2022). What once took the form of executions, in trial by fire, stone, or water, now exists in more palatable forms (Chollet, 2022). Women have been socialized not only to distrust one another but to discredit their own intuition.

This subjugation flattens the richness of female experience, turning women into symbols for the benefit of male-driven narratives. Patriarchy has attempted to turn women's power into tools of self-destruction by fragmenting and isolating them from themselves and each other. This project

honors an opposing framework: an intuitive network of tender strength between women. It challenges the culture of aesthetic and ideological norms defining art history's canon, while also reclaiming space for feminine tenderness and solidarity. This body of work contributes to a powerful female lineage of artists and writers, including Leonora Carrington, Remedios Varos, and Adrienne Rich (Moorhead, 2019; Rich, 1979). These women dared to center feminine interior lives and mysticism. Similarly, it considers sisters Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, who sought refuge and revolution within their sisterhood (Yale Review & Woolf, 2024; Berry, 2023). The work honors female impressionists left at the margins of art history, not because they lacked vision, but because they were born into a world that undervalued their voices. The artist strives to emulate the rebellious, yet tender vitality found in the contemporary work of female artists such as Amanda Ba, Colleen Barry, and The Guerrilla Girls.

Through color, form, and subject, the large-scale prints and paintings create visual sanctuaries for feminine connection and complexity. As a direct representation of tenderness between women, themes of intuition, embodiment, and resilience are carefully considered and offer a counter-narrative to the systems that pit women against one another. Drawing upon mythical symbolism of women and canine protectors, the Great Danes represent a conversation with the self, externalized as a mystic guardian. These pieces offer women a place to rest; to feel safe, protected, and comfortably vulnerable with one another. This series is a refusal to forget, a gesture of reclamation, and an invitation to honor and experience the strength of women in communion—past, present, and imagined. It colors a fully realized representation of women's embodied connections: their complex nuance, the painful power of love, the discomfort in vulnerability, and the imperfect feeling of tenderly protecting one another.

2. The Women Art History Forgot // The Men Whose Bad Behavior it Overlooked

Throughout art history, women have long been posited as decorative objects rather than autonomous individuals. From Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) to Ingres' *A Sleeping Odalisque* (1810), women were arranged for aesthetic consumption. The use of the female nude to represent male desire persists through antiquity into the present day and has been identified as the male gaze. Laura Mulvey coined the term, describing how women are so often reduced to an image in "a world ordered by sexual imbalance…split between active/male and passive/female. The male gaze…projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (1975, p. 19). Women subject to this gaze are represented as bodies, wholly separated from their personhood. See *Venus of Urbino* gazing softly at the viewer; her most defining quality being her vaguely sensual passivity. A small dog sleeps at the foot of her bed, reinforcing themes of domesticity and ownership. Similarly, Odalisque splays seductively across the bed in her sleep, presenting her idealized nude form for viewing pleasure. She is unable to claim any agency over her bare flesh due to her unconsciousness. Here, we see the significance of the term nude; as Berger explains, "To be naked is to be oneself; to be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself"

(1972). These works represent the nude canon by excluding even the slightest vestige of the female experience. Margaret Atwood describes the internalized male gaze with her chilling observation: "You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur." (1993, p.392) Her words reflect the detrimental persistence of such gaze, spanning over hundreds of years and still felt today, so ingrained that it echoes in women's psyches and critically alters their self-perception.

Figure 1. Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1538, Oil on Canvas, 46.9 x 65.2 in.

Figure 2. Ingres, *A Sleeping Odalisque,* 1810, Oil on Canvas, 11.7 x 18.74 in.

Even in artistic movements challenging tradition, such as Surrealism, women's objectification continued under the guise of muse worship. Prominent surrealists Salvador Dali and Max Ernst were notoriously misogynistic, relying on young women to support their creative ingenuity while showing little regard for such individuals' well-being. Renowned "artistic genius" Dali was cruel towards women, allegedly sexually assaulting a model posing for his work and violently attacking a woman in public for complimenting his feet. Ernst, another revered surrealist, notoriously sought out mistresses decades his junior. When Ernst met 19-year-old Leonora Carrington, being well into his late 40s and married, they had a whirlwind affair until Ernst was imprisoned at the onset of the Second World War (see Figure 3, picturing Ernst and Carrington together). Carrington suffered a

serious nervous breakdown after their separation and was nearly institutionalized as a result. The young woman fled to Mexico City, where she found her own love for creating surrealist art, along with her close friends Remedios Varo and Kati Horna (Moorhead, 2019). Together, these women, dubbed the three witches of Mexico City, explored feminine mysticism and autonomy outside the male gaze in their artwork. Figure 4, *Tuesday*, demonstrates this, depicting a group of carefree women in an unearthly landscape filled with strange animal companions (Carrington, 1987). Their practices redefined the male-dominated Surrealism movement, creating a legacy that was "woman-centered and instinctive" (Moorhead, 2019, p. 209). These women did not wait to be seen; they reclaimed the narrative and redefined it on their own terms. When asked about Ernst's muses years later, Carrington quipped: "I didn't have time to be anyone's muse…I was too busy rebelling against my family and learning to be an artist" (Turner, 2025). Carrington and her peers' work speaks for itself, despite the male artists who attempted to designate women as muses, not makers.

Figure 3. Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst, 1937, photo by Lee Miller.

Figure 4. Carrington, *Tuesday*, 1987, Screenprint, 25.5 x 36 in.

In the same vein, the Guerrilla Girls, an anonymous all-female activist group, have repeatedly exposed the chronic erasure of female artists in the art world. The Guerrilla Girls met picketing at the Metropolitan Museum in 1984 and formed a sisterhood after their protests fell on deaf ears (Tate, 2016). The group gained notoriety from their 1989 billboard, asking "Do women have to be naked to get into the Met? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are" (see Figure 5). They've since recreated the billboard twice since '89, with updated statistics: the 2012 report found that, 23 years later, only "4% of artists in the Modern Art Sections are women" (Guerilla Girls). Their work continues to question and dismantle systemic misogyny, most recently highlighting the unchecked abusive behavior of famous male artists in their project *The Male Graze* (2021). Here, they redefine the male gaze as the male *graze*, a change reflecting artists' exploitative treatment of women. Reviewing Pablo Picasso's romantic history, they cite "of the women who had long term relationships with Picasso, two died by suicide, two had nervous breakdowns, and one escaped and wrote about it" (Guerilla Girls, 2021, 1:21). The Guerilla Girls' inflammatory campaigns represent a fierce dedication to standing up for themselves and other women, an ideal reflected in their pseudonym choices, honoring female artists of antiquity such as Alice Neel and Frida Kahlo. By fighting to undermine the art world's oppressive patriarchal structures, the Girls make space for women to freely create work about the authentic feminine experience.

Figure 5. Guerilla Girls, *Do Women Have To Be Naked to Get Into The Met Museum?,* 1989, various dimensions.

Moreover, the legacies of Impressionist painters like Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot are paramount when considering the representation of women's authentic bonds with one another. Cassatt's warm scenes center on moments from women's everyday lives, underscoring their importance. Her success in the art world as a woman working in the late 19th century is a feat in itself, as women were essentially excluded from artistic careers at the time. Cassatt was one of two female impressionists officially accepted into the movement (Camarga, 2025). Further, there is a resounding power in this achievement occurring through paintings that represent "the sacred intimacy of female friendships" (Camarga, 2025). She created work that "conceived of women as

complete within themselves", which was a radical act and a natural source of controversy. She recounted one male friend indignantly questioning her work, "…this is a woman apart from her relationships to man?" (Yeh, 1976, p. 359). It is true that male impressionists working alongside Cassatt also painted women, though these depictions fall flat in representing much more than their sexual appeal and proximity to men. Female subjects of such artists' work included prostitutes, can-can dancers, actresses, and, of course, a general abundance of anonymous nude women. Cassatt's paintings offered an honest window into womanhood in the late 1800s, reflecting her own experiences of heavy restriction to domestic spheres. One of her most powerful paintings, *Breakfast in Bed* (see Figure 6), depicts a fatigued mother, who appears bored and slightly annoyed, her arms wrapped around a perfectly content toddler (Cassatt, 1897). There's a warmth in such sincerity; Cassatt gave voice to the complex experience of motherhood outside society's expectations.

Figure 6. Cassatt, *Breakfast in Bed,* 1897, Oil on Canvas, 23 x 29 in.

Berthe Morisot undoubtedly paved the way for Cassatt's work, as a founding impressionist and the first woman to be accepted into the movement. She has been characterized as "a visual poet of womanhood" (Schjeldahl, 2018) her practice self-described as an all-consuming effort to capture the transience of passing moments (Gurney, 2020). Both Morisot and Cassatt's use of light, color, and brushwork to capture emotional truths inspires the artist's approach to intimate compositions of women's connections. Their influence is markedly seen in *The Napping House* (see Figure 7), depicting a woman sleeping in a pile of colorful quilts, intertwined with two Great Danes who rest protectively with her. The work emulates the loose brushstrokes of the impressionists, though the non-naturalistic color choices are reminiscent of the post-impressionist movement.

Figure 7. Settles, *The Napping House*, 2024, Oil on Canvas, 48 x 36 in.

Of the post-impressionist movement, this project was largely influenced by Vanessa Bell's life and work. Sister and close friend of renowned English novelist Virginia Woolf, Bell pushed the boundaries of the social order at the time and spoke openly about her feminist beliefs (Berry, 2023). Vanessa and Virginia's lives were inextricably intertwined, and they collaborated closely on their respective creative endeavors. Their relationship's mutual impact is undeniable; Woolf writes, "Words are an impure medium…Better far to have been born into the silent kingdom of paint", possibly reflecting fondly on her sister's career and life's work (1934). Bell's paintings are unique in their explorative use of color. Woolf wrote extensively on color, perhaps illustrating her intimate understanding of and love for Bell's work: "Color warmed, thrilled, chafed, burnt, soothed, fed, and finally exhausted me…the life of color is a glorious one" (1934). Her description reflects the whirling kaleidoscope of hues present in Vanessa's paintings, works that were emotionally charged, teeming with tension, movement, and excitement, no matter the subject matter. Bell's bold and expressive palette has directly influenced the paintings and prints in *Sister Sin and Spare Rib*. Color is employed not only as a compositional device but as an emotional language—layering unexpected hues to evoke feeling and narrative in a similar manner Bell employed in her paintings. This fearless application of color encourages a movement beyond realism, embracing the possibilities found in abstraction.

3. Contemporary Female Artists

Sister Sin and Spare Rib contributes to a lineage of female artists of antiquity, as well as those practicing in the contemporary sphere. Laura Krifka, a present-day oil painter, poses a feminine-oriented conversation about power, desire, identity, and motherhood in her exhibition *Carousel*. To

Krifka, "the feminine" offers great power and agency, yet also entails oppression and outside bids for control (AWT, 2024). Her work functions at the apex of such moments of tension, balancing on a precarious edge between desire and anxiety. This discomfort is intentional; Krifka hopes for the viewer to explore parts of themselves they don't usually engage with. She embraces the complexity of defining the feminine experience, explaining, "it is coveted, feared, revered, and disdained. Everyone relates to the feminine in a different way–claiming it, desiring it, rejecting it…it's a fluid concept–evolving and ever-changing" (AWT, 2024). In her painting *Hunger* (see Figure 8), a naked woman nurses her child, her back turned to the viewer, her vulnerability heightened by the intrusion (Krifka, 2024). The room hums with unsettling energy, its orange and red wallpaper too loud, until the eye is pulled to the open front door, where the warm interior dissolves into the cool, consuming dusk of a quiet neighborhood. The painting occupies a disquieting space within both tenderness and unease, between interior and exterior spaces. It embodies the "physicality of [motherhood]…new levels of love, dread, and obsession" (AWT, 2024)

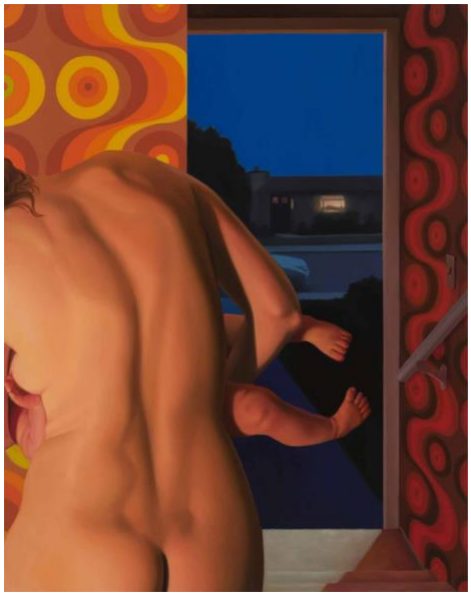

Figure 8. Krifka, *Hunger*, 2024, Oil on Panel, 30 x 24 in.

Sister Sin and Spare Rib considers motherhood through the painting *Mother Flame* (see Figure 9), in which the artist depicts her own mother shortly after giving birth to her younger sister. The four women make up two sets of sisters: Settles' mother and her mother's older sister, the artist as a toddler, and her newborn younger sister. The larger-than-life painting communicates the powerful bonds of sisterhood found across generations. The central figure, Deborah, holds her daughters softly but firmly. Her eyes meet the viewer directly and hold a steadiness that feels loving, instinctive, and fiercely protective, as if they contain a flame shielded by cupped hands. Her older sister stands behind her, cooing lovingly at the children and wrapping her left arm around the hospital bed. Deborah cradles the baby in her right arm, her hand moving into the forefront of the composition in the right-hand corner. The arrangement of figures is therefore held between the arms of the two sisters. Within their embrace, a new generation of sisterhood emerges.

Figure 9. Settles, *Mother Flame,* 2025, Oil on Canvas, 48 x 60 in.

As seen in *Mother Flame,* a crucial touchstone of this project was the close relationship between vulnerability and resilience. The artist looked to Augustina Wang, whose pastel dreamscapes blend divine femininity with mutually exclusive softness and strength. Further, her symbolic use of swans, such as in her work *Leda, Huntress* (see Figure 10) reflects the Great Danes as emblems of protection and inner wisdom (Wang, 2023). Augustina's work insists that softness and power are not opposites; instead, they coexist. The author's painting, *A Soft Inward Embrace* (see Figure 11), reflects a tender conversation with the self, in which gentleness offers the subject access to her own restorative power. The canine and the woman curl inwards toward one another, viewed from above in a landscape of their very own. The shape of their bodies is echoed by a cloudlike white duvet that rises and recedes around their weight, mirroring the softness of their embrace. The paintings' overhead perspective places the viewer as an outsider to the scene. The viewer is intimately close to the woman and her dog, yet they do not intrude upon the moment, which exists outside of anyone's gaze. The work is an invitation to witness this connection with the self, but does not offer total inclusion, as the conversation between the spiritual protector and woman is sacred.

Figure 10. Wang, *Leda, Huntress*, 2023, Oil and Iridescent Pigment on Canvas, 9 x 12 in.

Figure 11. Settles, *A Soft Inward Embrace,* 2025, Oil on Canvas, 48 x 60 in.

The artist asserts that femininity contains a carnal and primordial wisdom. Amanda Ba's dominating paintings of women and their canine counterparts emulate this point and further inform the work's inclusion of the Great Danes. Ba's captivating figures, rendered in vivid reds punctuated by contrarian greens (see Figure 12), represent a stoic strength (Ba, 2021). The dogs are a striking extension of the women Ba brings to life, existing outside of "the owner/owned hierarchy" (Hingley, 2022). Uncontained, they rest, run, watch, guard, and live in visceral moments of tension. Ba's rejection of domesticity and submission is mirrored in the painting, *Can You Feel Our Hunger?* (see Figure 13) capturing a raw moment of physical resonance shared between woman and Dane. A wild joy rises to the surface as they embrace their primal power and invite the viewer to do the same.

Figure 12. Ba, *Bitch and Bull*, 2021, Oil on Canvas, 39.4 x 39.4 in.

Figure 13. Settles, *Can You Feel Our Hunger?,* 2025, Oil on Canvas, 72 x 48 in.

4. Of Women and Witches

Visual culture, as discussed in Section 2, is just one avenue for patriarchal bids for control over women's lives, autonomy, and personhood. It reflects a pattern of oppression and dehumanization that began hundreds of years ago. When considering misogyny throughout antiquity, the violent admonishment of witches is one of the most striking examples of persecution towards women. Witch hunting began early in the 15th century and lasted until the late 18th century, persisting for nearly 400 years. During this period of feminine torment, up to 100,000 accused individuals were executed, with an estimated 85% of those deaths being women (Chollet, 2022; Aiello, 2021). This

period has been widely cited as being fueled by "societal misogyny…[which] played a role in almost all aspects of witch hunts, from conviction, to trial, to the archetype of people executed" (Aiello, 2021). The endemic witch-craze largely spread through a popular manifesto, *Malleus Maleficarum*, which outlined women's unique moral failings, such as their "inherent evil", and "primitive [nature]", claiming they were "closer to beasts than man" (Aiello, 2021). The authors outright called for a world without women, proclaiming "if the evil of women did not in fact exist—not to mention their acts of sorcery—the world would remain unburdened of countless dangers" (Chollet, 2022, p.14). These perceived female deficiencies made women highly likely to be seduced by the devil, who would then turn them into witches. By classifying woman as an entirely separate species from man, witch hunters were able to justify torture and execution. This justification was largely successful; as brutal and extremist a perspective as it may present, the rhetoric in *Malleus Maleficarum* was widely accepted at the time. The manifesto was the most popular book in Europe for 200 years, outsold only by the Bible (Chollet, 2022).

Women were at risk for being accused of witchcraft, Chollet outlines, for an inexhaustible list of offenses:

> Talking back to a neighbor, speaking loudly, having a strong character or showing a bit too much awareness of your own sexual appeal: being a nuisance of any kind would put you in danger… every behavior and its opposite could be used against you: it was suspicious to miss Sunday Mass too frequently, but it was also suspicious never to miss it; it was suspicious to gather regularly with friends, but also to have too solitary a lifestyle…The trial by ducking sums up these contradictions. The suspect was thrown into deep water: if she drowned, she was innocent; if she floated, she was a witch and must then be executed. (2022, p. 15)

Midwives and healers, in particular, became prime targets during the witch-craze. These women lived on the margins of patriarchal society, often unmarried, childless, and self-sufficient. They held knowledge that granted them power over life, death, and the body. Their ability to heal the sick, deliver children, and even prevent or end pregnancies placed them in direct opposition to institutions that sought to control reproduction and female autonomy. Unlike the male-dominated medical and religious authorities, midwives and herbalists cultivated networks of care rooted in experience, intuition, and mutual support. Their persecution thus stemmed not only from fear of their skills, but from fear of their solidarity. The community of women caring for women represented a model of strength and interdependence outside male governance; one that was both radical and dangerous in its implications. As Adrienne Rich observes, "connections between and among women are the most feared, the most problematic, and the potentially most transforming force on the planet" (Rich, 1979, p. 104). The eradication of these women, then, can be read as an attempt to sever women's transformative bonds and suppress the networks through which feminine power and knowledge were shared.

The symbolic language of witchcraft, seen in women's knowledge, intuition, and communion with the natural world, has been distorted over centuries into something to be feared or vilified. *Sister Sin and Spare Rib* reclaims that language. Within these paintings, gestures of care, protection, and vulnerability transform into acts of spiritual resistance. The Great Danes, reminiscent of familiars, become emblems of ancestral guardianship rather than subservience,

representing the enduring presence of women who once risked their lives to nurture, heal, and protect others. In *She Who Yearns to Bare Her Teeth* (see Figure 14), generational feminine rage finds form in the canine's open mouth, an emblem of both protection and defiance. The dog lies between the viewer and the woman, guarding her body as her hands rest upon him in trust. This intimacy evokes the embodied networks of care shared between women, as well as what might exist between a witch and her familiar. Through color and form, the work transforms the historical silencing of witches into a visual chorus of resilience and rebirth. Ultimately, *Sister Sin and Spare Rib* is not a memorial to persecution but a reclamation of power. Where the witch-craze sought to extinguish women's collective strength, this project reignites it, revealing that the same energy condemned as dangerous is, in truth, divine.

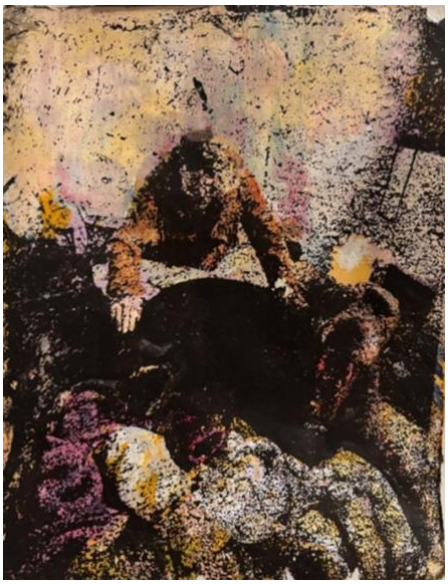

Figure 14. Settles, *She Who Yearns to Bare Her Teeth,* 2024, Acrylic Print on Paper, 10 x 8 in.

5. Feminine Power Through Symbolism and Legacy

As established, one of the most persistent visual elements in this body of work is the Great Danes. These animals are not represented as pets, but conceptually imagined as protectors, spiritual guardians, and extensions of the women they accompany. Imbued with a mysterious and resounding presence, they provide the viewer with an embodied metaphor for women's cultivation of inner safety and strength. They are especially present in scenes of rest, which is a choice that acknowledges stillness as a radical and vulnerable act. Their presence invokes safety and sanctity in these spaces; to rest without fear requires implicit trust and security. See Figure 15, *Good Dog, Enzo*, in which the figure sleeps sprawled around her protector. Her comfort is emphasized by the shedding of her bra, which lays disregarded on the coffee table in the foreground of the composition. Within these works, rest becomes more than a physical state; rather, it is a declaration of autonomy and emotional safety. To rest as a woman means prioritizing one's own needs above those of others—above work, children, partners, and the endless external

expectations of care. This act, though seemingly simple, is deeply subversive within a culture that socializes women into perpetual nurturance. This tension is reflected in Paris Paloma's (2023) song *Labour*, which critiques the uneven domestic burden placed on women, singing, "All day, every day, therapist, mother, maid, nymph then a virgin, nurse then a servant, just an appendage, live to attend him, so that he never lifts a finger." The artist emphasizes a right to rest, contradicting these expectations through tenderly depicted scenes of stillness. The Great Danes' presence reinforces this state of inner protection and sovereignty.

Figure 15. Settles, *Good Dog, Enzo*, 2024, Oil on Canvas, 30 x 48 in.

It is in this manner that *Sister Sin and Spare Rib* presents an alternative perspective to historical imagery of women with dogs, wherein canines were traditionally symbols of loyalty, status, and domesticity. The artist intentionally uses a domesticated animal to address the often chronic state of patriarchal oppression women experience. She acknowledges and subsequently subverts this narrative, creating a world for woman and canine outside of male conquest or dominance. The work discredits the notion of male ownership and creates relationships between women and her beast that is self-reflective and borne of a reclamation of agency. These Great Danes are not accessories but companions to the feminine figures, mirroring their emotional states, alert to the world, and acting as inner guardians. They evoke mythic resonance: the fierce yet nurturing she-wolf of Roman lore, or Artemis's loyal hunting hounds, drawing upon women's intrinsic primordial power (Chai, 2023). Ethno-clinical psychologist Clarissa Estés compares woman and wolf in her analysis of the Wild Woman archetype: "A healthy woman is much like a wolf: robust…strong life-force, life-giving, territorially aware, inventive, loyal, roving…With [the Wild Woman] as ally, as leader, model, teacher, we see…through the eyes of intuition" continuing, "The wild nature carries the bundles for healing; she carries everything a woman needs to be and know…to be alert, to draw on the innate feminine powers…to come into one's cycle" (1992, p. 110). Her work supports the artist's conceptual choices to include the Great Danes as extensions of women's uninhibited wild nature. Descendants of wolves just as women descend from the Wild Woman herself, the Danes

reflect the reality of a harmful patriarchal system as they reclaim their wild nature (Estes, 1992). By connecting with the Danes, the women are reconnecting with themselves and their inherent ancestral power.

In sum, the Great Danes in *Sister Sin and Spare Rib* function as more than visual motifs; they are active participants in a narrative of feminine agency, protection, and self-possession. By positing them alongside women at rest, the work reframes stillness as a defiant act of autonomy. The Danes' mythic and archetypal resonance reinforces the women's connection to ancestral power, intuition, and inner strength. Through this culturally informed interplay of softness and resilience, the series offers a visual archive of healing. Ultimately, these companions embody a form of protective intimacy that is both spiritual and tangible, asserting that rest, reflection, and conversation with the self are essential acts of resistance and empowerment.

6. Process

Sister Sin and Spare Rib consists of large-scale oil paintings and mid-sized acrylic prints. Painting as a medium allows for an embodied exploration of texture, color, and composition. When beginning a painting, the artist develops conceptual intentions for each piece before taking reference photos. Next, she creates thumbnail sketches of possible compositions from the photos. The final composition is chosen to support and communicate her conceptual intentions and research, extending the depiction of womanhood as one built upon a communal experience of femininity.

Before painting, the canvas must be primed by adding two to three layers of acrylic gesso and sanded smooth between each layer. Once this is complete, she works on her chosen composition, starting by applying a background color of thinned paint that will inform the painting's later color and mood. The artist then begins a "block-in," establishing the main darks and lights monochromatically to define the work's value structure. Figure 16 provides an example of the painting *Hungover Renaissance* in this early stage. From there, layers of oil paint are built up as color is both naturalistically and expressively integrated. The artist paints the background of the scene first, progressively working toward the foreground to create an illusion of depth for the viewer. The grand scale of the work intentionally envelops the viewer in each painting, furthering the impact and cultivating visual moments that are larger than life.

Figure 16. Settles, *Hungover Renaissance* as a work in progress, 2024, Oil on Canvas, 60 x 48 in.

The eleven oil paintings comprise half of the body of work, complemented by the inclusion of twelve acrylic prints. Acrylic "Gelli" prints allow for the merging of painting and printmaking techniques. These pieces began as a way for the artist to complete color studies before painting. However, they soon developed into standalone works contributing to the overall exhibition. To create a Gelli print, the artist uses a soft silicone "gel" plate. She completes a Xerox transfer of her chosen composition by covering the plate in black acrylic paint and applying pressure to the laser-printed image. The result is a ghostly echo of the printed photo. The artist then begins working in reverse, first applying the highlights and foreground details before moving gradually to the background. Reversing the painting process is necessary due to the transference of the print: whatever is painted first on the gel plate will be the last layer on the paper, and vice versa. Once the painting is finished, it must dry before a thick layer of acrylic paint is added. Paper is then quickly applied and weighted. The wet paint dries and adheres to the paper in a matter of hours. Once this is complete, the paper is carefully pulled off the plate, taking the layers of paint with it. Figures 17-19 depict, respectively, an unfinished work in progress on the back of the plate, drying on the paper pre-transfer, and the finished print.

Figure 17. Settles, *Find Us in the Moonlit Garden* as a work in progress: back of the Gelli Plate, 2025, Acrylic Print on Paper, 24 x 18 in.

Figure 18. Settles, *Find Us in the Moonlit Garden* as a work in progress: transfer from plate to paper, 2025, Acrylic Print on Paper, 24 x 18 in.

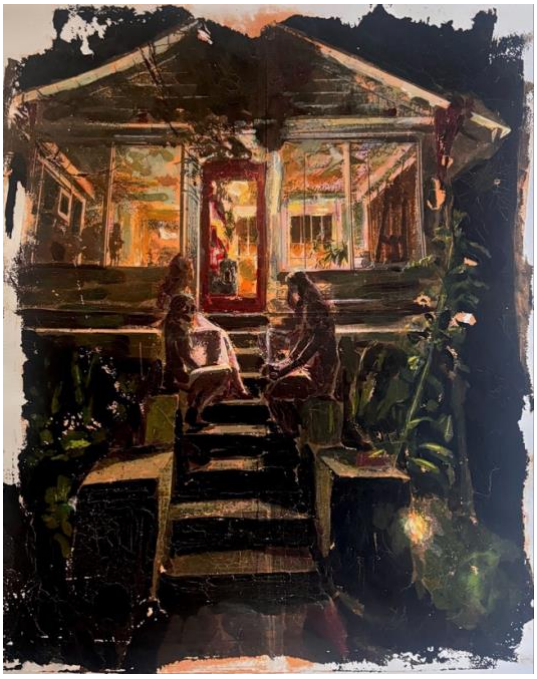

Figure 19. Settles, *Find Us in the Moonlit Garden* finished piece, 2025, Acrylic Print on Paper, 24 x 18 in.

To prepare for *Sister Sin and Spare Rib's* exhibition, each large painting was varnished to protect the surface and correct any sunken or dull colors. The edges of each canvas were painted to cover any imperfections, accentuating a chosen color from the composition. The gel prints were carefully framed to elevate the reception of these smaller works. These final attentions to detail reinforced the considerable time, intention, and tenderness imbued in each piece. The result was an impactful and cohesive solo exhibition.

7. Conclusion

Sister Sin and Spare Rib emerged from an intuitive need to create space for women's joy and offer a sanctuary that exists outside of systems of female persecution. The work was informed by a thorough understanding of how art history's canon has participated in women's objectification and dismissal. More importantly, the paintings honor a powerful female lineage of artists and writers who prioritized women's experiences, including the three witches of Mexico City, sisters Vanessa Bell and Virginia Woolf, and trailblazing female impressionists Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot. Their creative contributions represent the shared strength and tender power between women in both art and a broader context, considerations which are integral to this body of work.

Further, the artist's extensive research into the brutality of the witch-craze and its inherently misogynistic nature contextualizes the necessity of creating work that centers women's experiences. Witch hunting reflects stubborn patriarchal forces that still thrive; *Sister Sin and Spare Rib* rises to disbar these through its contribution to visual culture. The inclusion of the Danes honors accused witches' relationships with familiars, as well as referencing other powerful female

archetypes: the Roman mother-wolf, Artemis and her hounds, and the Wild Woman that exists within all feminine bodies. The feminine connections depicted throughout the series envelop the viewer in softness and strength through its intentionally large-scale oil paintings.

At the heart of *Sister Sin and Spare Rib* lies a simple yet radical inquiry: *How can painting and printmaking processes be used to emphasize the importance of feminine joy, the power of softness, and the inherent resilience of womanhood? Further, can these representations offer experiences of empowerment and healing in the face of patriarchal forces?* The artist found the answer through both creating the body of work and conducting research, but most profoundly in her experience with the exhibition itself. Generations of women, including family, friends, and mentors, assisted with the installation and deinstallation of the work. The reception became a thriving center of feminine joy, inspired by the work but ultimately created by the women who showed up to laugh, cry, love, and support one another. It ardently confirmed the artist's response to the above question: in the softness and resilience women create together, there exists a shared network of strength, one which all may contribute to and draw upon.

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