MEDUSA

Gorgoneion

In ancient art, the most commonly depicted pictorial type of the myth of Perseus was not the hero himself, but a gorgoneion, the severed head of his nemesis, Gorgon Medusa.[211] "Gorgos" in Greek means "terrible," and the only thing Greeks knew for sure about "the terrible" was that it was invisible, and therefore unknowable. No one ever saw the Gorgon with their own eyes; nevertheless, the Greeks portrayed her – as an impossible combination of traits (**63**). The threatening grimaces make these faces even more repulsive. The dynamism of this monster is indicated by wings or running legs that grow from its head. An element that all the faces of Gorgons share is that artists represented them frontally, although the Greeks preferred to represent animals and human beings in profile. The frontal view of the Gorgon indicates that the monster tries to establish eye contact with the viewer. The oldest gorgoneia of this type appear on Corinthian painted vases from the 7th century BC, which spread this pictorial type throughout Greece.

63. Medusa, Athenian hydria (detail), 490 BC.

[211] Josef Floren, *Studien zur Typologie des Gorgoneions* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1977), cf. review: Isler, Hans Peter. Gnomon 53, no. 1 (1981): 89–91. Cf. also Ingrid Krauskopf, "Gorgo, Gorgones. Gorgones in Etruria," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, IV/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1988), 285–345; Orazio Paoletti, "Gorgones Romanae," in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, IV/1* (Zürich: Artemis, 1988), 345–362; Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Du masque au visage: Aspects de l'identité en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Flammarion, 2012).

The incomprehensible nature of Medusa, the most famous of the Gorgons, manifested itself also in the fact that she not only took life but also gave it. In Euripides' tragedy Ion, Medusa's blood, which has a double effect, plays a critical role. Creusa, Ion's mother, wore a golden bracelet in which she had two drops of Medusa's blood: one is a lethal poison, the other a reviving cure. The poison came from Medusa's snakes; the medicine was the blood that sprang from her veins. Creusa herself comments on the paradox of Medusa' existence when she emphasises that the drops must be kept separate, as good cannot mix with evil.[212] Medusa's exceptional position lies in the fact that in her case good and evil, or the beautiful and the ugly, form an inseparable unity.

Gorgoneion was not exclusively associated with Perseus and Athena. According to Homer, it was an attribute of Zeus.[213] He had it on the aegis, which made him invincible, and occasionally he lent it to the other gods. Mortals followed the example of the supreme Olympian god and protected themselves with depictions of Gorgon. We know from Homer that the most powerful King of Greece, the Mycenaean Agamemnon, had a representation of Gorgon as a protective symbol on his shield. In the middle of this shield there was a dark steel bulge, "and circled in the midst of all was the blank-eyed face of the Gorgon with her stare of horror, and Fear was inscribed upon it, and Terror."[214] Homer described not only what Agamemnon's gorgoneion looked like, but also how it worked. It was an abusive face, and her eyes were most terrible, its expected effect showing the attached personification of Fear and Terror. The fact that the heads of Gorgons had a circular shape from the beginning could be related to the fact that their original and primary place could be the centre of the circular shield.

The circular shield appeared in Greece in connection with a new technique of fighting that involved a phalanx of hoplites, who took their name from the shield they carried, called "hoplon" in Greek. Perfectly aligned rows collided, and the soldiers struck their opponents in the only gap in their bronze armour below the lower edge of the helmet and above the upper edge of the shield. The frightening face on the shield was meant to distract the enemy for at least a split second; in these cases, the glance of the gorgoneion on the opponent's shield was the last thing the soldier would ever see. We know shields with the gorgoneion not only from vase paintings;[215] a real specimen from the 7th century BC also exists.[216] This shield was made in Ionic Greece in the 7th century BC and was found in Carchemish, the famous ancient city on the border between today's Turkey and Syria. It was probably a part of the equipment of a Greek mercenary. In the middle of the wrought-bronze shield, we see the head of the Gorgon with snake hair, and around it there are concentric circles with running horses, gazelles and other animals.

At the same time, when the myth of Perseus arose in Greece, there appeared not only circular bronze shields, but also circular bronze mirrors whose smooth and

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[212] Euripides, *Ion*, 1017.

[213] Homer, *Iliad*, 5, 738–742. Cf. Pascalle Linant de Bellefonds and Évelyne Prioux, *Voir les mythes : Poésie hellénistique et arts figurés* (Paris: Picard, 2017), 64–65.

[214] Homer, *Iliad,* 11, 36–37, translated by Richmond Lattimore.

[215] Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia, 22679.

[216] London, The British Museum, 116253.

polished surface served as a reflective surface. Mycenaean Greeks already knew them in the 2nd millennium BC, and they reappeared around 700 BC. In Greek thinking, shields and mirrors formed a contrasting pair, while the mirrors were an exclusive attribute of women, their male counterpart being shields that could also be used as a mirror.[217] As we have seen above, even though the motif of a mirror image enriched the myth of Perseus in the 5th century BC, the authors of the Roman epoch were the first who wrote explicitly about the reflection of Medusa's face on the shield.[218] However, the Greek mirrors were demonstrably linked with the myth of Perseus already at the beginning of the 5th century BC. The reverse side of the bronze mirror could be decorated with engraving or embossing, and on the back of one specimen we find the head of the hideous Medusa with a beard and snakes instead of hair.[219] This of course may have only been for entertainment purposes. When a woman held the mirror up to her face, she turned into Medusa to those observing her, as they saw the back of the mirror with the image of Medusa in place of the woman's face.

The gorgoneia that were placed on Greek temples held a similar function as the Gorgon on Agamemnon's shield, i.e. to intimidate and protect (**2**). From the end of the 7th century BC on, we can find them on ceramic metopes in the frieze of a Doric temple, acroteria at the apex or corner of the pediment, or antefixes at the lower edge of the temple roof. [220] In ancient Rome, gorgoneia decorated public buildings for the same reason. In the ruins of the ancient city of Leptis Magna in Libya, we find them in the arcades lining the main square (**64**). Gorgoneia are also often found in funeral contexts, tombs and sarcophagi. In modern Europe, gorgoneia were often placed on keystones, and an ancient example of such protection is found on the Roman mausoleum of 40–20 BC, which is today on the outskirts of the French city of Saint-Remy-de-Provence (**65**). Gorgoneia were also used in private homes, where they can be found on Roman floor mosaics.

Gorgoneia also protected coins since the 6th century BC. Several Greek states used them as their emblem, appearing on roughly sixty different types of coins. Gorgoneia can also be found on jewellery, pendants, earrings, necklaces, or rings that people wore daily.[221] The head of Medusa in the middle of the zodiac protected the owner of this amulet all year round.[222] Several women portrayed on painted panels from the late second or early third century AD wore necklaces with Medusa medallions.[223] Gorgoneion was supposedly an apotropaion, an object which protects against evil forces. The Greek word "apotropaios," which means reversing, is derived from the verb "trepein" for pointing, turning, or changing. In literature

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[217] Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux and Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Dans l'oeil du miroir* (Paris: O. Jacob, 1997).
[218] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 785; Apollodorus, *Library*, 2, 4, 2; Lucian, *Dialogues in the Sea*, 14, 2.
[219] Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, 96.AC.109.
[220] Patricia Lulof, et al., eds., *Architectural Terracottas in Ancient Italy Images of Gods, Monsters and Heroes* (Oxford: Oxbow, 2010).
[221] E.g. London, The British Museum, 1917,0501.94.
[222] Roman gem, plasma, 2nd century AD. Paris, Cabinet des médailles (Erika Zwierlein–Diehl, *Antike Gemmen und Ihr Nachleben* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007, n. 682).
[223] Walker, Susan, and Morris Leonard Bierbrier. *Ancient Faces. Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*. London: British Museum Press, 1997, 172–173.

concerning magic, the term apotropaion indicates an object with the ability to actively protect. In theory, an apotropaion returned a curse to the sender or at least redirected it so as not to harm the person protected in this way. The front face of Gorgon was meant to provide the maximum effect by covering the largest area in front of a protected person or object so that it could deflect threats coming from any direction.[224]

64 (left). Heads of Medusa on spandrels of arcades on the main square in Leptis Magna in Libya, 210–216 AD.
65 (right). Medusa on arch of the Roman funeral monument.
Mausoleum Iulii, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, 40–20 BC.

Did all Greek depictions of gorgoneion have a magical function? Certainly not, as demonstrated by the Athenian cup from 530–520 BC that has eyes on its sides with gorgoneia in place of pupils.[225] The so-called eye-cups were produced in the second half of the 6th century BC, allegedly in order to protect the drinker, who could not see what was going on around him while drinking as his face was covered with the cup. In the case of the cup in Cambridge, this effect would be intensified by the gorgoneia in place of pupils. Six pairs of eyes, four of which belonged to the menacing Gorgon, would thus protect the man drinking from this cup. The problem of such an interpretation is that when the reveller emptied his cup, he discovered the dreadful gorgoneion at its bottom, just in front of his own eyes. The gorgoneion in the interior of the cup could not be an apotropaion, which means that the gorgoneia on the exterior of this cup were also not apotropaia exclusively. As Rainer Mack rightly stressed, "the gorgoneion is not at all the image of Medusa we have come to know: the transcendent sign of some monstrous and terrifying power. It is, to the contrary, a site where such a power was imagined in order to be denied … it is the other face of the hero, the face that looks out from the picture field, his prosopon. This is the gorgoneion itself, which Perseus holds up like a mirror that reflects back to us the image of 'Perseus,' the image of ourselves in the image of the hero." [226]

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[224] Albert M. Potts, *World's Eye* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), 26–37.
[225] Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, GR.39.1864.
[226] Rainer Mack, "Facing Down Medusa (An Aetiology of the Gaze),"*Art History* 25 (2002): 571–604, 571 and 598.

In Roman art, Gorgons were mostly beautiful girls, who nevertheless had snakes for hair and a round face represented frontally. On the Roman republican denarius of 47 BC, we see on one side the smiling Gorgon with carefully crafted hair, and on the reverse a winged woman with a palm tree branch.[227] This personification of victory leads a quadriga; beyond it, we can imagine a chariot with the victorious Roman general. The representations on both sides of the coin thus refer to triumph under the auspices of Gorgon. The famous Roman mosaic from Pompeii, which is today in the Archaeological Museum in Naples, portrays Alexander the Great as he fights in armour with the head of Gorgon on the middle of his breastplate. [228] The mosaic originated around the year 100 BC; it was probably a copy of the image of the famous Apelles, which depicted the Battle of Issus of 333 BC. Later rulers also wore armour with Gorgons, especially the Roman emperors of the Flavius dynasty. While emperors of the Julio-Claudian dynasty had Venus as their protector, the Flavians had Minerva, the Roman counterpart of Athena, which explains why we often find gorgoneia on their breastplates.[229] In 92 AD, Martial wrote in an epigram dedicated to Domitian's armour: "receive the terrible breastplate of the warlike Minerva, which even the anger of the snaky-locked Medusa dreads. When you do not wear it, Caesar, it may be called a breast-plate; when it sits on your sacred breast, it will be an aegis."[230] By taking on Minerva's armour, the emperor becomes Minerva, and is invincible thanks to her gorgoneion.

Archaeologists use the term gorgoneion for any representation of the face of Gorgon Medusa, but in ancient times this term was used only for her face on the shield or the aegis of Athena.[231] Homer already knew that the goddess had gone to battles with the aegis over her breast, which she had received from her father Zeus: "and thereon is set the head of the grim gigantic Gorgon, a thing of fear and horror, a portent of Zeus of the aegis."[232] However, the head that was placed on the aegis described by Homer was not Medusa, but another Gorgon, Zeus' nurse Aix.[233] The head of Gorgon on Athena's aegis was a protection of the highest quality.[234] Next to the oldest version, according to which she received it from Zeus, there is a 5th century BC version, according to which Perseus gave it to her. [235] In Euripides' tragedy Ion, however, there is an alternate version, according to which Gorgon looked like "a breastplate armed with serpent coils."[236] This Gorgon did not have a

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[227] David R. Sear, *The History and Coinage of the Roman Imperators, 49–27 BC* (London: SPINK, 1998), 20.
[228] Paolo Moreno, *Apelle: La Bataille d'Alexandre* (Milan: Skira, 2001).
[229] Statius, *Silvae*, 1, 1, 37–39. For Venus and the the Julio-Claudian dynasty cf. Bažant, *Statues of Venus,* 80-86.
[230] Martial, 7, 1.
[231] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 802–803, cf. Frontisi-Ducroux, *Du masque au visage*, 25–29.
[232] Homer, *Iliad*, 5, 741–742, translated by Richard Lattimore.
[233] Hyginus, *On Astronomy*, 2, 13.
[234] Kim J. Hartswick, "The Gorgoneion on the Aigis of Athena: Genesis, Suppression and Survival," *Revue Archéologique* 2 (1993): 288–290; Patricia A. Marx, "The Introduction of the Gorgoneion to the Shield and Aegis of Athena and the Question of Endoios," *Revue Archéologique 2* (1993): 227–268; Igor Baglioni, "La maschera di Medusa: Considerazioni sull'iconografia arcaica di Gorgo," in *Storia delle religioni e archeologia: Discipline a confronto*, ed. Igor Baglioni (Rome: Alpes Italia, 2010), 65–72.
[235] Pherecydes, fr. 11 Fowler.
[236] Euripides, *Ion*, 993, translated by Ronald Frederick Willetts.

head, and was more akin to a walking coat of armour – something like a tortoise, but with skin that Athena tore off to wear on her chest to protect herself. One of the first statues of Athena with the head of Gorgon on the aegis was found on the northern slope of the Acropolis; it was sculpted by the sculptor Endoios around 525 BC. On the vase painting of the same time, Athena has an archaic type of Gorgon with beard and boar teeth on the aegis thrown over her chest.[237] Snakes are both on the edge of the aegis and the head of the Gorgon.

66. Head of Gorgon on an aegis. Tazza Farnese, exterior, chalcedony gem, 2nd century BC.

Gorgon on the aegis adorns the outer side of the greatest Hellenistic cameo, the Farnese cup of Egyptian origin, which is twenty centimetres wide (**66**).[238] We find here a circular shield on which an aegis is stretched with snakes at its edges; at the centre, there is the head of a Gorgon. The Gorgon on the outer side comments on the carving on the inner side of the cameo, where we find an allegorical figural scene. In

[237] Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, F2159.

[238] Phyllis Pray Bober and Ruth Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture: A Handbook of Sources*, new, revised and updated edition (London-Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2011), 116, n. 68; Marina Belozerskaya, *Medusa's Gaze: The Extraordinary Journey of the Tazza Farnese* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

this scene, we also find an Egyptian sphinx and a seated man with a horn of abundance, which is evidently a personification of the Nile as a source of prosperity. From the context of the bowl's inner decoration, it is clear that this Gorgon was a protector of the affluence of Egypt. The prestige that the aegis with Medusa's head enjoyed in antiquity is evidenced by the Seleucid gift to the Athenians. Around 170 BC, Antiochus IV placed a gilded aegis with Medusa's head on the southern wall of the Acropolis in Athens above Dionysus Theatre. There is a high steep slope between the theatre and the wall, so the head must have been gigantic. Otherwise, it could not have been seen from below. The ruler of the mighty Seleucid Empire presented himself as a generous patron of ancient Athens, and therefore a supporter of culture in general, at a well-chosen place above the theatre. Gorgon's head on the aegis was the most famous and most effective magical object, and therefore it also appears on Greek coins.

The Greek copper medallion of the Hellenistic epoch, which initially decorated a wagon designed for ceremonial processions, depicts Medusa's head in an unusual manner. It shows Athena with a spear in her right hand lifted high above her head; the goddess wears the head of Medusa on her own instead of a helmet.[239] However, this image type was not as unique as it might seem, as it was faithfully reproduced in a Venetian marble statuette from the first half of the 16th century.[240] The rare helmet likened Athena to Heracles, who killed the terrible lion of Nemea and afterwards used his head as a helmet. On this Hellenistic medallion, Medusa's eyes are closed, while the goddess had glass eyes which are wide open. On the head of the all-knowing and all-seeing Athena, the head of Medusa with closed eyes, which saw nothing, was not only a protective element but also emphasised Athena's divine intellect.

In the third quarter of the 5th century BC, Phidias created the most famous gorgoneion, which was in the middle of the golden shield of Athena's cult statue in the Parthenon at the Acropolis in Athens. According to ancient testimonies, Phidias' statue was twelve meters high and made of ivory and a ton of gold.[241] Pausanias, who saw it in the second century after Christ, gave a detailed description of the statue.[242] On the Roman copies of the shield, Medusa is frowning with a fixed glance and a round face, tongue stuck out, and two snakes wrapped around her head that are tied in knots both above and below it.[243] An ancient Roman relief from Apollo's Temple at the Palatine in Rome depicts Perseus, who puts the head of Medusa on the shield of Athena, who has the aegis on her chest (**67**). This Medusa has a thick round face with a rare smile, indicating how honoured she feels with her final placement. The representation was part of a series of terracotta slabs that originated in the time of Emperor Augustus, who programmatically proclaimed his cultural adherence to classical Greece.

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[239] Thessaloniki, The Archaeological Museum, 17540.
[240] Sotheby's, December 6th, 2011.
[241] Thucydides, 2, 13, 5; Pliny the Elder, *Natural history*, 36, 18.
[242] Pausanias 1, 24.
[243] London, The British Museum, GR 1864.2-20.18.

67. Perseus with the head of Medusa and Athena. Roman terracotta relief, 36–28 BC. From the temple of Apollo on the Palatine Hill in Rome.

The Christian Gorgoneion

In Byzantine empire, Medusa's head appears in the same function as in classical antiquity – as a guardian and triumphal emblem, which in the Christian context meant the salvation of the human soul and the victory of Jesus Christ over the devil. The 10th century Byzantine Medusa head demonstrates the survival of this pictorial type and its message.[244] The beautiful head with wings, snake hair and pained expression on its face decorated the lid of a luxurious inkwell, a gift to a prominent scribe whose name was Leon. Under the rim is written: "The holder of the ink is, for Leon, the means of all accomplishment." Below we find another inscription: "Leon, the delightful marvel of calligraphers."[245] Medusa was the guardian of the ink, which was vitally important for Leon. At the same time, every time he lifted the lid, he severed the head of Medusa. He was the second Perseus and the ink the blood of Medusa, the source of his art.[246] Medusa as a protector can be found in the Marian context on the Byzantine bronze amulet of 12th–13th century, with Madonna on the obverse side and the Gorgoneion on the reverse.[247]

Throughout the Middle Ages, people in Western Europe could see representations of ancient myths on ancient works incorporated into the Christian

[244] Padua, Diocesan museum.

[245] Paroma Chatterjee, "The Gifts of the Gorgon: A Close Look at a Byzantine Inkpot," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 65/66 (2014): 212–223.

[246] The miniature in the Paris Psalter also from the 10th depicts the death of Hezekiah (Bibliothèque national de France, Paris, Cod. Gr. 139, fol. 446v). The footstool beside his bed is also decorated with Medusa, "presumably used as an apotropaic device, cf. Anastasia Drandaki, et al., eds., *Heaven and Earth: Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections* (Athens: Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Culture and Sports, 2013), 170.

[247] Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Cf. Anna Gonosova and Christine Kondoleon, *Art of Late Rome and Byzantium* (Richmond: The Museum, 1994), 128–129.

context, even though these representations often openly denied it. These secondarily used ancient works are called spolia. The term is somewhat misleading because the Latin word "spolium" means booty or spoil, and the term thus implies the triumph of Christianity over paganism. In the Middle Ages, however, the term spolium was not used in this context.[248] Ancient spolia may be anything from architectural components to precious gems, and the motivation for their use varies from case to case. Spolia were used either because they were simply available or due to their precious material or high aesthetic qualities. Naturally, it cannot be assumed a priori that in the Middle Ages people realised that these reused objects were of pre-Christian origin and had a pagan significance. However, they may have been aware of the fact and thus the spolium may have been the bearer of a significant meaning – for example, it may have been used to neutralise the alleged pagan demonic forces or exert magical properties attributed to the depicted theme. It could have also justified contemporary political ambitions by visualising the ancient past in a present work of art.

The most common medieval intellectual manipulation of ancient spolia is called "interpretatio Christiana." In it, these recycled works are filled with new, Christian content that has nothing to do with the original.[249] This approach is based on the so-called disjunction principle. In the Middle Ages, we were told there was a separation of ancient form from ancient content.[250] As a result, the ancient spolia were "content-less," thus making it possible to fill them with entirely new content. In addition to supporters of "interpretatio Christiana," we also find researchers today who assume that medieval patrons and artists had a much more differentiated approach to ancient spolia. In any case, medieval works incorporating authentic ancient elements were a form of bricolage or "DIY," as we might say today, i.e. when something new is created using prefabricated parts intended for a different purpose. Today, we know that bricolage can be a creative principle in cultural history.

Among the spolia, ancient gems (above all cameos) enjoyed a privileged position. They appear in the most prestigious works of goldsmiths of the Middle Ages. Ancient gems were imitated competently in the Middle Ages and their ancient significance could be recognised, allowing us to assume their multi-layered interpretation.[251] Ancient gems with Medusa's head were commonly used on medieval Christian reliquaries, on which these gems were often found in important places or in pairs. It follows that they were undoubtedly considered something

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[248] Kinney, Dale. "The Paradigm of spolia," in *Mittelalterliche Mythenrezeption: Paradigmen und Paradigmenwechsel*, ed. Ulrich Rehm (Cologne: Böhlau, 2018), 175–192; Dale Kinney, "The Concept of Spolia," in *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*, ed. Conrad Rudolph (Hoboken: Willey Blackwell, 2019), 233–252.

[249] Dale Kinney, "Interpretatio Christiana," in: *Maxima debetut magistro reverentia. Essays on Rome and the Roman Tradition in Honor of Russel T. Scott*, ed. Paul B. Harvey and Conybeare Catherine (Como: New Press, 2009), 117–125.

[250] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960).

[251] Classen 1999; Dale Kinney, "Ancient Gems in the Middle Ages: Riches and Ready-mades," in *Reuse Value: Spolia and Appropriation in Art and Architecture from Constantine to Sherrie Levine,* ed. Richard Brilliant and Dale Kinney, 97–120. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011; Rehm 2014.

extraordinary and a protective power was likely to have been attributed to them.[252] This is all that can be said with certainty about the medieval interpretation of gems depicting Medusa, as we have no written evidence in this matter.

From the collection of Charles IV's ancient gems, only the ones incorporated into works of art that the Emperor initiated are preserved. Among them, we find four gems representing Medusa. This was one of the most common themes depicted on ancient gems, so their existence in the collection of the medieval monarch is not surprising. Nevertheless, the placement of these gems with Medusa in goldsmith works ordered by Charles IV indicates that their use was intentional. In 1368, Pope Urban V gave a splinter of Christ's crib to Emperor Charles IV, who put it in the golden reliquary, which was made in Prague at that time or soon afterwards. The reliquary is decorated with a row of twelve precious stones of different colours closed by a magnificent intaglio.[253] Thamyras, who worked for the court of Emperor Augustus, carved it in aquamarine around 10 BC. The head of Medusa is on the shield, which carries Nereid on a sea horse. However, during a recent restoration, it turned out that the reliquary does not contain the original intaglio but a glass cast of it made in the late 18th century. Someone stole the ancient gem and replaced it with a copy, which is indistinguishable at first glance from the original. In the reliquary, the Thamyras' gem probably represented Jesus Christ; the twelve precious stones without carvings stood for his disciples.

Three gems with Medusa decorate the crown with which Charles IV was crowned as King of the Romans in Aachen on 25th July 1349, symbolically at the grave of Charles the Great, his namesake and great predecessor. After the coronation, Charles IV donated the crown to the Aachen Cathedral Treasury, where it was to become a permanent reminder of his coronation. The crown was brought from Prague, where it was made for this occasion. The fact that the crown was custom-made for Charles IV proves its exceptionally large circumference of 67 cm, which corresponds to the dimensions of his preserved skull. The Aachen crown has four large lilies placed crosswise on the front and right axis. Between these large lilies with three leaves, there are four small lilies with only one leaf. On all lilies, there are ancient gems with different themes, and the regularity in the selection of themes and their distribution on the crown indicates a well-thought-out design.[254] What is most striking is the repetition of the Medusa heads and portrait busts, which could be interpreted as ideal portraits of sovereigns. We find these portrait heads on all the small lilies, forming a cross.

On the front of the Roman Crown, we find two impressive cameos with prominently unchristian scenes. White figures, two of which depict naked women on a black background, making them visible from afar. The nakedness and pagan scenes did not apparently offend anyone. On the contrary, this was the reason the front side was decorated with these precious gems. On the lower cameo, the audience assembled for Charles IV's coronation saw a scene with Amores triumphant over the

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[252] Wiegartz, Veronika, *Antike Bildwerke im Urteil mittelalterlichen Zeitgenossen* (Weimar: VDG, 2004), 226–228.

[253] Wien, Weltliche Schatzkammer, XIII 24.

[254] Jan Bažant, "Medusa, Ancient Gems, and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV," *Anodos. Studies of the Ancient World* 13 (2013, published 2019): 1–16.

naked Psyche. At the top, they saw a naked Bacchante playing the double flute. On both sides of the crown, we find on the large lilies gems with heads of Medusa, whose identity is clear from the wings over the forehead. In the Middle Ages, these Medusa heads could not have represented the Virgin Mary because they were under the gems with ostentatiously pagan themes. On the left side of the crown, there is only one Medusa (**1**); on the right side, we can find Medusa on a large lily and on a small lily in the front.

After his coronation, Charles IV had given the crown to the Aachen Chapter, which used it to link itself more closely with the Holy Roman Empire. The Chapter made a reliquary bust of Charles the Great and put the crown on his head. The reliquary bust was also connected with the crown of Charles IV through an antique gem that is placed on its chest. There is a frontal face on this gem, which has no snakes in the hair or wings over the forehead but resembles Medusa with wide open eyes. Ancient Roman emperors were often depicted on coins and sculptures with Medusa on their armour. This was the reason this gem was placed on the chest of Charles the Great, the restorer of the Roman Empire. Medusa protects the Aachen reliquary bust of Charles the Great with the crown of Charles IV so perfectly that it cannot be a coincidence. The heads with snake hair, wings, and eyes fixed on the sides of the crown guard the whole space around the reliquary bust. The face on the armour of Charles the Great additionally protects the space in front of the reliquary bust. The place that the head of Medusa occupies on the Aachen crown of Charles IV has no equal in medieval Europe. Even though we do not know exactly how Charles IV understood the ancient gems with the Medusa, their secondary use was undoubtedly related to the exceptional personality of this monarch and to the dominant position he held in Europe at the time.

At the beginning of 14th century, Medusa started to interest artists and writers in Italy. In Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco of 1321 we find a statue of Minerva holding the head of Gorgon in the fictive architectural decoration.[255] Around 1410 Taddeo di Bartolo painted Athena with a shield on which we see Gorgon.[256] Another example is found on the cover page of the poem written by Francesca Petrarca around the year 1460, where we see an ancient altar with a gorgoneion.[257] The models for these depictions were ancient works of art, among which a great cameo known as Tazza Farnese stands out (**66**). Lorenzo il Magnifico acquired it for his Florentine collection in 1471, which stressed a special relationship of the Medici with Medusa.[258] The artists knew ancient depictions of the Perseus myth not only from authentic monuments, but also from drawings made after them. Already before the middle of the 15th century, the drawings of Medusa by Ciriaco from Ancona circulated in the

[255] „Martyrdom of Franciscans" in San Francesco, Siena. Cf. Maureen Burke, S., "The 'Martyrdom of the Franciscans' by Ambrogio Lorenzetti," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 65 (2002): 484–485.
[256] Siena, Palazzo Pubblico, chapel vestibule.
[257] Sergio Marinelli and Paola Marini, eds., *Mantegna e le arti a Verona: 1450–1500* (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 458–459, n. 190.
[258] John Varriano, "Leonardo's Lost Medusa and other Medici Medusas from the Tazza Farnese to Caravaggio," *Gazette des beaux-arts* 130 (1997): 73–80.

workshops of Italian artists.[259] His drawings of reliefs with Medusa came from Hadrian's Temple in Cyzicus, the ruins of which Ciriaco visited in 1431 and 1444.[260]

Gorgoneion Revived and Redesigned

In 1495–1496, Pinturicchio painted Madonna for the Church of Santa Maria de Fossi in Perugia.[261] The Virgin Mary is sitting on the throne, the backrest of which is like an ancient Roman niche with a gorgoneion at the top of an arc. Medusa has wings on her head and two snakes with their heads raised threateningly. The snakes bring death, but the image of the snake can protect. The key to the interpretation of Medusa on Pinturicchio's Madonna is the pomegranate apple held by the Virgin Mary. The pomegranate, like the Medusa, has a dual meaning; it is a symbol of primaeval sin, but also a symbol of salvation. This is suggested by Jesus on his mother's lap, who holds the cross in one hand while putting his other on the pomegranate.

In his writings on architecture dating back to 1464, Filarete mentions Perseus with the head of Medusa among the appropriate motifs for façade decoration.[262] From the ancient reliefs in collections of classical antiquities in Rome, Renaissance artists knew that Medusa was placed on facades already in classical antiquity.[263] Lodovico Dolce wrote in his work on gems, which was a translation of Leonardi's work from 1502, that the stone-carved image of Perseus with the sword and the head of Medusa at the entrance to the house protects its inhabitants against lightning, storms and witches.[264] Medusa as the protector of the entrance appears in Hypnerotomachia of 1499, in which he describes the horrible head of Medusa at the foot of the pyramid, whose mouth was the only entrance into the interior of the building. The wide-open mouth indicated that Medusa was menacing not only thanks to her repulsive appearance but also her terrible screams. In the illustration of the first edition of this book, there is no Medusa on the pyramid.[265] We find it for the first time on the woodcut in the French edition of 1541, from which the illustrations were taken for all other editions (**170**). Although the text clearly states that the only entrance to the pyramid was Medusa's mouth, in the illustration the head of the Medusa is located above the entrance as a protective symbol.

The painted Medusa on the keystone can be found in the painting decoration of the hall in the palace d'Arca in Mantua from 1515–1520. The individual signs of the zodiac are placed in the architectural frames imitating the ancient arcades flanked by Corinthian pilasters connected by the entablature. The arcade with the Aries sign

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[259] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Codex Ashmolensis, MS. Lat. Misc. D. 85, 140v. Karl Lehmann and Phyllis Williams Lehmann, *Samothracian Reflections: Aspects of the Revival of the Antique* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 50–52.

[260] Bernard Ashmole, "Cyriac of Ancona and the Temple of Hadrian at Cyzicus," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 19 (1956): 37, 39.

[261] Perugia, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria.

[262] Cieri Via, *L'arte delle metamorphosi*, 32.

[263] Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, no. 11,56 a 90.

[264] Lodovico Dolce, *Libri tre ne i quali si tratta delle diverse sorti delle gemme* (Venice: s.n., 1565), 77v.

[265] Francesco Colonna, *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice: Aldo Manuzio, 1499), 5r.

has a bronze relief with Medusa in the axis; the monster has large wings on her head and two snakes tied under her neck. Aries is the first sign of the zodiac, and that is why it is associated with war and revolutionary changes. That was the reason that Medusa and the spandrel medallions with portraits of Caesar and Augustus, which evoke the beginning of the Roman Empire, were associated with this sign.

The head of the Medusa became an amulet and a trophy especially in connection with Athena. Gian Paolo Lomazzo wrote that the shield of Athena means protection, but when Medusa is in its middle, it is the emblem of wisdom and reason. He justified this by pointing out that, just like Medusa, who changed those who looked at her to stone, wisdom silences those who do not understand anything.[266] In Iconology, the first edition of which was published in 1593, Cesare Ripa explains the gorgoneion in a similar fashion. Iconology was an alphabetical catalogue of abstract concepts (concetti) to which the descriptions of the respective images were assigned. Ripa describes the Personification of Reason as a girl similar to Athena, who embraces the laurel tree "on which the shield with Medusa hangs, which marks the victory of reason over the enemies of virtue who become stupid, just like those who look at the head of the Medusa become stupid."[267] Medusa, which was the opposite of Athena, evoked the barbarity into which humanity would fall without God's help. In this context, Medusa's severed head has become a symbol of struggle with everything that threatens civilisation-pride, carnal desires, impiety, and other vices leading to chaos. Athena's armour emphasised the need to defend the order with all forces to ensure well-being and cultural prosperity.

In Pinturicchio's painting of 1495–1496 mentioned above, Medusa's forehead is furrowed in pain with her eyes turned up, mouth wide-open. Emotional facial expression and especially the wide-open mouth, a metaphor of violence and destruction, we find only rarely on ancient depictions of Gorgon.[268] Nevertheless, at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, Italian artists often expressed extreme emotions with the use of screaming faces.[269] They found the ideal theme in the gorgoneion, in which the wide-open mouth was justified by ancient myth. When an expressive gorgoneion was placed on Athena's shield, it was the opposite of the beautiful and peaceful face of the goddess.

On the tapestry designed by Botticelli and woven around 1500, we find the head of Medusa on Athena's shield; she has a wide-open mouth and angry expression on her face lined with writhing snakes.[270] In 1509–1511, Raphael painted the head of Medusa on the shield of Athena, whose statue decorates classical architecture framing the monumental wall painting of the Athens School in the Vatican. Raphael faithfully imitated the ancient motif of two attacking snakes on the

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[266] Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte della pittura, scoltura et architettura* (Milan: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1585), 470.

[267] Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia* (Rome: Gli heredi di Gio. Gigliotti, 1593), no. 321.3.

[268] Eugène Müntz, "Le type de Méduse dans l'art florentin du XVe siècle et le Scipion de la collection Rattier," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 17 (1897): 115–121.

[269] Jean-Jacques Courtin and Claudine Haroche, *Histoire du visage. Exprimer et taire ses émotions, XVI^e–début du XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1994).

[270] Private collection. Sebastiano Gentile, ed., *Sandro Botticelli. Pittore della Divina Commedia, catalogo della mostra, I–II* (Milan: Skira, 2000), vol. 1, n. 5, 18, p. 194–195.

head, ailerons, ruffled hair with snakes, and two snakes hanging under the neck, but he took Medusa's grimace to the extreme.

The redesigned gorgoneion was an immediate success, and we will meet this new pictorial type repeatedly in the next centuries. The early echo of Raphael's Medusa can be found in the engraving of Rosso Fiorentino dating back to 1526. It also shows the statue of Athena in the niche. In this case, Athena is naked because she embodies virtue, which hides nothing (**68**). The goddess is characterised by the helmet on her head, the spear, and the shield with the screaming Medusa's head, which in this case has no ailerons at the top. In monumental art, we find the pictorial type created by Raphael on Jacopo Sansovino's bronze statue from around 1549, which was placed in a very prestigious place in Loggetta at St Mark's Square in Venice.

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68. Rosso Fiorentino, Athena with the shield with the screaming Medusa (detail). Jacopo Caraglio, copper engraving, around 1526 .¨

From the preserved ancient monuments, it was known in Renaissance Italy that ancient armours and shields were decorated with gorgoneia.[271] In ancient literary works, one can read that, when placed in such a way, the gorgoneion protected and celebrated the person represented.[272] The first evidence of the renewal of this pictorial tradition is Donatello's equestrian statue of Gattamelata of 1453.[273] The sculptor significantly enlarged Medusa's wings. This innovation was immediately accepted,

[271] Bober and Rubinstein, *Renaissance Artists and Antique Sculpture*, 174A.
[272] Statius, *Silvae*, 1, 1, 37–39; Martialis, 7, 1. Cf. Pierio Valeriano, *Hieroglyphica sive De sacris Aegyptiorum aliarumque gentium literis commentarii* (Basel: Isingrin, 1556), 122r; Ripa, *Iconologia*, n. 321.3.
[273] Michael Greenhalgh, *Donatello and his Sources* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 139.

as evidenced by the Florentine relief bust of Scipio Africanus from around 1470.[274] The marble relief with the bust of Alexander the Great, which was created in the workshop of Andrea del Verrocchio between 1483–1485, also has Medusa on his armour with large wings but no snakes in her hair.[275] Unlike Donatello's Medusa, whose mouth is closed, those on Scipio and Alexander have opened mouths

The meaning of Medusa's screaming mouth is highlighted on the majolica plate with the Pitti family sign from around 1500.[276] The Medusa has blue and green snakes on her head that are fighting one another, and there are unambiguous war symbols around the plate – cannons from which balls have just been fired. When a tournament was held in Florence in 1475, the winner, Giuliano de'Medici, fought with a shield that bore the head of the Medusa.[277] His sculptural bust from the years 1475–1478, which was created in connection with these courtly festivities, demonstrates the restoration of the ancient type of three-dimensional sculptural bust with Medusa on the breastplate (**69**). This Medusa also has enormous wings and a roaring mouth, which liken her to the Christian devil.

69. Andrea del Verrocchio, Giuliano de' Medici, terracotta, c. 1475/1478.

In the 1540s, the oldest preserved steel breastplates, which were decorated with gorgoneia, were created for the wealthiest customers in Milan.[278] In Madrid's Royal Armoury, there is a full suit of armour with a breastplate with a gorgoneion,

[274] Paris, Louvre, RF 1347. Viatte, *Masques,* n. 59.
[275] Washington, National Gallery of Art 1956.2.1.
[276] London, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1204–1864.
[277] Adrian W. B. Randolph, *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-century Florence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 193, 322.
[278] S. W. Pyhrr, et al., *Heroic Armor of the Italian Renaissance: Filippo Negroli and his Contemporaries* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), nos. 33, 54, 55.

which was made in 1546 for Guidobaldo II delle Rovere, Duke of Urbino. In Florence's Bargello, there is a slightly older suit of armour with a gorgoneion, the patron of which remains unknown. Cosimo I de Medici was the first Renaissance ruler whose sculptural bust with a Medusa on the breastplate was made in marble. On the bust created by Baccio Bandinelli, there are even two gorgoneia.[279] On the bust of Benvenuto Cellini, the armour is dominated by the head of the Medusa, which completely overshadowed the prestigious Order of the Golden Fleece, which defined the Duke as the Emperor's ally.[280] The main feature of the Duke's face is the fixed gaze of his large eyes on both busts, which has been accentuated by deep drilling, indicating the irises of the eyes. As in the case of Medusa, the Duke's gaze alone was sufficient to sentence his opponent to death.

In Milan, a ceremonial shield with Medusa's head in the middle was made for Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.[281] Medallions with a double-headed eagle, Charles' emblem, Heracles' columns with the inscription PLUS ULTRA and imperial crowns above them personalize the shield. The nephew of Charles V, Archduke Ferdinand, also had a shield with Medusa in his collection.[282] On this shield from 1550–1555, we find scenes with the motif of decapitation: Judith and Holofernes, and David with the head of Goliath. Medallions with busts of Roman emperors and generals referred to the glory of war. There was also a Latin inscription (victory is a gift from the gods) and Greek (through victory and glory to the stars). The shield was probably commissioned by Francesco Ferdinando d'Avalos for Emperor Charles V. By creating these exceptional elements on the ceremonial equipment, Emperor Charles V was identified with Perseus. The heads of Medusa on the shields mentioned above are frowning and their mouths are only half-opened; we find a similar Medusa on a shield made in Milan in 1570–1580.[283] Medusa with a wide-open screaming mouth can be found on a slightly older shield in Florence.[284]

The Beautiful Medusa

The beautiful head of Medusa, which Canova's Perseus of 1797–1801 is lifting, is a variation on the ancient Roman relief known as Medusa Rondanini (**49**). The relief was evidently much discussed when Johann Wolfgang Goethe stayed in Rome in 1786–1788. In his diary entry of 25th December 1786, we find its first literary evaluation.[285] In the following year, Goethe's friend, Karl Philipp Moritz, quoted

[279] Firenze, Museo del Bargello, 7 Sculture. Detlef Heikamp, ed., *Baccio Bandinelli: Scultore e maestro* (Florence: Giunti, 2014), 304.
[280] San Francisco, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. De Young Museum, 75.2.16.
[281] Madrid, Real Armeria, D 64. Cf. Pyhrr, *Heroic Armor*, n. 32.
[282] Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, A 693a. Cf. Marco Bona Castellotti, *Caravaggio, la Medusa. Lo splendore degli scudi da parata del Cinquecento* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004), no. 7 p. 100–101
[283] Paris, Musée de l'Armée, I. 75. Cf. Viatte, *Masques,* no. 63.
[284] Florencie, Bargello, M956. Cf. Bona Castellotti, *Caravaggio, la Medusa,* no. 8 p. 102–103.
[285] He transformed his diaries into book form and published them only in 1816 and 1817. Cf. Johannes Rössler, "Im Blick der Medusa Rondanini: Aporien klassizistischer Theoriebildung in Zeichnungen von Johann Heinrich Meyer und Friedrich Bury," in *Heikle Balancen: Die Weimarer Klassik im Prozess der Moderne*, edited by Thorsten Valk (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2014), 179–198.

Homer's Gorgo in this connection.[286] In Homer, Medusa Gorgo is mentioned for the first time in world literature as a head that brings death. This interpretation illustrates the coloured drawing of Friedriech Bury, which he probably made in 1786–1788 and which Goethe had in his collection. On the drawing, we see the giant Medusa Rondanini in the underworld, in front of Persephone who is sending her to petrify Odysseus.[287]

Medusa Rondanini is undoubtedly the finest and most beautiful of the six specimens in which this image type has survived. The dating and original function of Medusa Rondanini are still the subjects of controversy, but Goethe did not spare his words of praise for this face, which expressed the state between death and life, pain and pleasure. The idea of a beautiful death is typically romantic. Goethe had a cast of Medusa Rondanini in his apartment in Rome. In 1808, King Ludwig of Bavaria bought the original for the Glyptothek in Munich, and six years later, the king granted Goethe's request and sent its plaster cast to Weimar. Goethe placed the cast in a prominent place in his house, which influenced the way he wrote about it in his book on his Italian journey. At the time the book was published, it was not only an essential ancient work but also a part of German cultural heritage. In Goethe's house, Medusa Rondanini was in charge of an important task: it introduced its master not only as a German writer but also as one of the Germans who had discovered the essence of ancient art. Goethe placed the cast in an honourable place among the windows in his Yellow Salon, which served as a reception salon and dining room. The yellow colour chosen by Goethe for this room was to create a pleasant, joyous atmosphere, which was emphasised even more by the transformation of Medusa Rondanini into an aesthetic object.

The prestige enjoyed by the Medusa Rondanini in the 19th century is demonstrated by the Wallraf Medusa. On the design of the unrealised wall paintings for the Wallraf-Richartz Museum staircase from 1856, the men to whom the city owed its cultural boom are grouped around the marble head of this Medusa.[288] At that time, the Wallraf Medusa was considered to be the most famous work of art in Cologne and a symbol of culture in general. Today, no one would say the Wallraf Medusa is a work of genius, and one would hardly seek eternal beauty in its unpleasant features. It comes from the Forum Romanum, where it decorated the frieze of the Venus and Roma temple, and therefore Medusa's proportions had to be grotesquely distorted to appear pleasant from below. Even before the monument reached Cologne, it was furnished with a plinth, which transformed it into a free-standing sculpture designed for close-up view. The glory that the Wallraf Medusa enjoyed in Cologne in the mid-19th century stemmed from the fact that it was from Rome and belonged to the same pictorial type as the famous Medusa Rondanini.

From the second quarter of the 19th century, the Medusa Rondanini enjoyed the status of an exceptional masterpiece.[289] As a result, it became an attribute of social success and wealth. At Westonbirt Castle in English Cotswolds, a copy of the

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[286] Karl Philipp Moritz, *Werke, 1–3* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel Verlag, 1993), vo. 2, 364.
[287] Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Graphische Sammlungen, GHz / Sch.I.259,0274.
[288] Eduard von Steinle, New Renaissance of Arts. Drawing, 1856. Köln, Stadtmuseum, HM 1954/131c.
[289] Konrad von Levezow, *Über die Entwicklung des Gorgonen-Ideals in der Poesie und bildenden Kunst der Alten* (Berlin: s.n., 1832).

Medusa Rondanini is placed on the frieze facade above each ionic pilaster. The castle was built in 1863–1870 by Robert Stayner Holford, an art collector and one of the wealthiest men in Great Britain and thus the world. His tremendous wealth was expressed in an endless series of the Medusa Rondanini, which proclaimed and protected the artistic treasures that had been gathered in this place. In this case, not only the model of Medusa but also the artistry of the copies was important. Their author was Alfred Stevens, who in his work attempted to break the boundaries between design and the fine arts. His Medusa in Westonbirt was not a serial architectural sculpture, but an original piece of art that could be exhibited in a gallery. In Westonbirt, Medusa Rondanini's features were highlighted so that her eyes and mouth attracted the attention of the viewer at first glance, even though it was seen from a great distance.

The Munich villa of then-famous German painter Franz von Stuck documents the tremendous prestige that the Medusa Rondanini continued to enjoy at the end of 19th century.[290] At the entrance, there was a bronze mailbox in the form of the archaic Greek head of Medusa, through the mouth of which all letters had to pass. In the vestibule just opposite the entrance, there was a plaster cast of the Medusa Rondanini; it was patinated to look like a bronze relief like the other casts of ancient sculptures assembled in this room. Franz von Stuck drew inspiration for his works from the still-popular ancient mythology, and therefore also returned to the myth of Perseus several times. In 1892, he painted a variation on the Medusa Rondanini which is now in a private collection. It differs from the original by having a calm face but wide-open eyes, giving it a hypnotic look. The white face of Medusa is surrounded by dark, mighty snakes to increase its effect.

In 1853, Karl Rosenkranz formulated the thesis of the unity of Medusa's life, death, beauty and ugliness in the Christian spirit. Medusa's severed head is, in his words, a prefiguration of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With this pictorial type, "Greeks were so fortunate as to build up the terrible into the noblest beauty … the gruesome has been attenuated to delight – Christian art went even further, for its whole worldview sees true life as mediated through right dying. The God-man, deceased but arisen again to eternal life, is its centre. The dead body of Christ must, despite all truth of death, allow the immortal spirit that dwelt in him and will dwell in him again to shimmer through it. These closed eyes will open again; these bleached, inert lips will tense again, these stiff hands will once again bless and break the bread of life."[291]

The painting by Arnold Böcklin is a variation on this painful Medusa.[292] Later, he elaborated his concept into a coloured relief on the shield, on which he collaborated with his pupil and son-in-law, Peter Bruckmann.[293] Later copies are now in the museums of Basel, Paris and Boston; the original version created in 1886 is in Zurich (**70**). Böcklin's Medusa on the Shield is ambiguous by being both a

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[290] Alexandra Karentzos, *Kunstgöttinen. Mythische Weiblichkeit zwischen Historismus une Secessionen* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2005), 105–108.

[291] Karl Rosenkranz, *Aesthetics of Ugliness: A Critical Edition*, ed. and translated by Andrei Pop and Mechtild Widrich (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 180.

[292] C. 1878, Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum , Gm2096.

[293] Heinrich Alfred Schmid, *Verzeichnis der Werke Arnold Böcklins* (Munich: s.n., 1903), no. 6.

representation and a reflection. This being has come from Hell. This is suggested by her dark red hair, but her eyes are not staring because of hatred and aggressiveness, but because of pain. She is the sufferer, which is made clear by the snakes on her head that are arranged to look like the thorny crown that fate has placed on her head for her to feel pain forever. It is a typical example of the modern representation of Perseus' myth. We see a monster from classical mythology and, simultaneously, the mirror image of a man of our time, our own face.

70. Arnold Böcklin, Shield with Medusa. Painted plaster, 1886.

Antoine Bourdelle repeatedly returned to Medusa and created perhaps the strangest depiction of her for the legendary Parisian International Exhibition of Decorative Arts in 1925, which gave the name to Art Deco. In the commercial section of the exhibition, a bronze knocker was exhibited with the head of Medusa, whose snake hair is held in Perseus' hand (**71**). The knocker depicts a beauty with closed eyes that is reminiscent of Bourdelle's Aphrodite, which he created around 1900 with similarly sharp features, an aquiline nose and closed eyes. This Medusa's head is beautiful, but one cannot imagine knocking with it. The visitor would have to hold the snakes hanging from Medusa's head, which make up the knocker's handle. Moreover, what if the tap awoke the monster and she opened her deadly eyes? On the other hand, however, there is an irresistible urge to become Perseus and repeatedly separate Medusa's head from her body. The knocker worked but was not

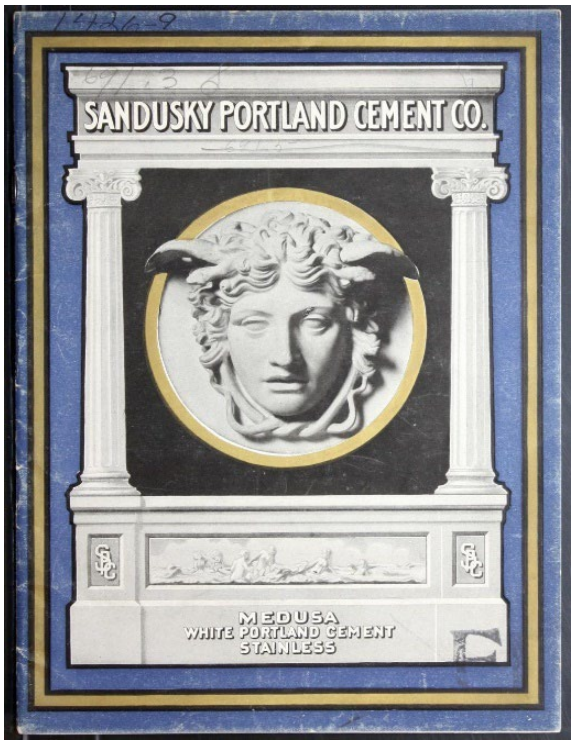
meant to be a functional object. According to period testimony, the only place where something of the sort could be imagined was at the entrance to hell.[294]

71. Antoine Bourdelle, Medusa. Door knocker, 1925 (bronze version: Rudier, 1930).

The 20th century can be characterised by infinite multiplication of all things including Medusa, and in this period the Medusa Rondanini enjoyed the most significant quantitative expansion. A hundred companies worldwide chose this beautiful dead face as their logo. The American cement company Sandusky Portland Cement registered the logo already in 1905 (**72**). It was a commercially successful move because in 1929 the firm was renamed the Medusa Portland Cement Company. We can find a visual commentary on its logo in the company's ads in the 1930s, which are dominated by portraits of the personification of the white Portland cement – a stylized naked man of classical proportions, the alter ego of Perseus, who has

[294] Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Les arts plastiques* (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1931), 374.

overcome the monster and appropriated its magical ability (**73**). The logo quoting Medusa Rondanini announced that it is a company with a tradition. It was founded in 1892, which is a respectable past in the American context. From 1924, the company specialized in white, waterproof and indestructible cement, and thus Medusa gained new meaning in its logo. Since the 19th century, white colour has been associated with classical antiquity, which was known mostly in the form of white marble sculptures that had lost their original polychromy.[295] White at the time was also very popular for plaster casts of classic sculptures. The high-quality cement from a company in Ohio was also linked not only to the white Medusa Rondanini and to the white race ruling the USA and the world, but also to the mythical monster that changed everything into eternal stone.



72 (left). Sandusky Portland Cement, catalogue, c. 1914.
73 (right). Advertising of the "Medusa Portland Cement Company," USA, 1932.

The Medusa Rondanini is known primarily as the world-famous logo created by fashion designer Gianni Versace in 1978 when he founded his company.[296] The Medusa Rondanini is such an influential work of art that we do not need to know the mythical story which it illustrates. This girl's face attracts us with its beauty, but we immediately feel anxious because of her snakes. The contradictory nature of the Rondanini Medusa, which scares and fascinates us at the same time, is also thanks to her half-opened mouth, the meaning of which we can only guess. Does this mouth suggest erotic arousal or a convulsion of death? Her huge eyes are calm as if they see

[295] Philippe Jockey, *Le mythe de la Grèce blanche: Histoire d'une rêve occidental* (Paris: Belin, 2013).
[296] Karelisa V. Hartigan, *Muse on Madison Avenue*: *Classical Mythology in Contemporary Advertising* (Franfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002), 130. https://gevrilgroup.com/versace/gianni-versace-medusa-logo/

something extra-terrestrial. Above all, there is her snaky hair, which is combined with ailerons on the sides of her head. The snakes evoke the earth and the underworld, while the wings evoke heaven and the divine sphere. The average modern man has only a superficial awareness of Medusa as a symbol of art and at the same time as something imminently dangerous; these two ingredients, however, have been enough to create one of the most successful commercial icons in the modern world.

In the second decade of the 21st century, controversial but notorious Damien Hirst has relentlessly exposed monumental representations of Medusa and attracted crowds of visitors. He conceives Medusa in a traditional manner, with a screaming face and writhing hair, but in different designs including crystal, gold, or malachite.[297] In a contemporary context, Medusa's commercial success and ubiquity in media has become more and more prominent. Whatever she is, nobody can deny that she is known to all. She is a top celebrity – scandalous, irresponsible, and unaccountable. Moreover, no one can overlook her erotic charm.

"Vagina Dentata"

At the turn of the 20th and 21st century, the psychoanalytical interpretation of Medusa was revived. This interpretation understood this myth as a product of the misogynist culture of the ancient Greeks. In Greek myths, the young heroes fought mostly with female monsters: Heracles with Hydra, Bellerophon with Chimaira, Oedipus with Sphinx, Theseus with the Amazons and Perseus with Medusa. These heroes were brought up in an exclusively male society, which, according to Sigmund Freud, expected superhuman performance from inexperienced youths who were unsure of themselves. In archaic Greek society, problems with male sexuality, we are told, led to the emergence of aggressive female demons. Freud had two typical Greek depictions of Medusa in his collection;[298] the founder of psychoanalysis claimed they demonstrated that ancient Greeks understood them as stylised female genitals, with the snakes standing for the hair surrounding the vagina.

According to Freud, the horror of Medusa is a specific male horror, but his oft-quoted text of 1922 contains only preparatory notes for a study that he never completed.[299] The text was published only posthumously, in 1940. According to Freud's notes, Medusa's head in the male imagination evokes both the female genitalia and the male penis. When a boy sees the crotch of a naked woman, which is missing a penis, he realises that castration is a real threat. The erection, an analogy of the petrification caused by Medusa's gaze, calms the little boy down as he realises that he still has his penis. In psychoanalytic literature, the head of Medusa is

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[297] Damien Hirst, ed. *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* (London: Other Criteria, 2017).

[298] Wien, Sigmund Freud Museum.

[299] Sigmund Freud, "Das Medusenhaupt," *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse und Imago* 25 (1940): 105–116; Thomas Albrecht, *The Medusa Effect: Representation and Epistemology in Victorian Aesthetics* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), 27–50.

associated with the fear of losing masculinity. It is a terrifying nightmare, a vagina dentata that amputates the man's penis during sexual intercourse.[300]

74. Igor Mitoraj, Ikaria. Bronze sculpture, 1996.

[300] Verrier Elwin, "The Vagina Dentata Legend," *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 19 (1943): 439–453.

Freud's interpretation of the myth of Medusa also inspired artists. The bronze female torso with wings by Igor Mitoraj called "Ikaria" pictures Medusa in the crotch (**74**). This female counterpart of the mythical Icarus has her wings outstretched, but she cannot take off, as a hand firmly holds her ankle, a motif known from the statuette by Rodin mentioned above (**58**). In 2009, Zaan Claasens created a bust of Medusa with penises instead of hair, which is also an illustration of Freud's theory.[301] As mentioned above, according to Freud, the little boy confronted for the first time with the sight of a vagina sees the pubic hair as small penises, which reinforces his fear of castration.

The Death of Medusa

The most famous Medusa was painted by the young Michelangelo da Caravaggio at the end of the 16th century.[302] At that time, he lived in Rome, in the house of his learned patron, Cardinal del Monte. According to Vasari, Leonardo da Vinci began his artistic career by painting Medusa on a wooden shield.[303] This may be an invented story, but it could have inspired Caravaggio. His painting is on a canvas-covered wooden shield with a realistic painting of Medusa's freshly severed and bleeding head with snakes for hair, which were faithful representations of the vipers common to Italy. The wooden shield on which Caravaggio painted his Medusa is convex and the painter, according to the inventory of 1605, had a curved mirror in his studio which he used to create this image.[304] However, it was not a mechanical copy of the mirror image. X-rays have proven that the painter was systematically searching for the appropriate proportions of Medusa's face. He first painted an only slightly distorted face with a wide-open mouth. In the second phase, he placed the eyes and nose considerably higher. The third phase was a compromise between the first and the second phases.

These changes can only be found in the first version of the image that was discovered in 1994 and is now in a private collection. Since 1598, a second version of the image is in Uffizi in Florence (**75**). The second version is larger than the first, but otherwise almost identical. On this version, x-rays did not show any changes and thus it was a replica made by Caravaggio. This version was commissioned as a gift to Grand Duke Ferdinand I de Medici by his long-time friend, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, who then served as the Duke's Roman ambassador. The Duke exhibited the gift with the Persian ceremonial armour he had received from Sheikh Abbas the Great.

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[301] https://www.zaan.co.za/sculpture-bronze/.

[302] Cf. Marco Bona Castellotti, *Caravaggio, la Medusa. Lo splendore degli scudi da parata del Cinquecento* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2004); Ermanno Zoffili, *The First Medusa/ La Prima Medusa* (Milan: 5 Continents, 2011); Elisa Ambrosio, "Le Bouclier avec une tête de Méduse du Caravage et son 'double:' réception d'une représentation paradoxale dans l'art italien de la première moitié du XVIIe siècle," *Iconographica. Journal of Medieval and Modern Iconography* 13 (2014): 143–159.

[303] Valentina Conticelli, ed., *Medusa: Il mito, l'antico ei i Medici* (Florence: Polistampa, 2008), 34–35.

[304] Maurizio Marini and Sandro Corradini, "'Inventarium Omnium et Singulorum Bonorum Mobilium' Di Michelangelo Da Caravaggio 'Pittore,'" *Artibus et Historiae* 14, no. 28 (1993): 162 („Item un specchio grande. Item un scudo a specchio").

In the poem written about this painting and published in 1620 by Giovanni Battista Marino, the Grand Duke is celebrated as the second Perseus; at the same time, the author emphasises that the Duke does not need to be protected by Medusa as he is already sufficiently protected by his virtue.[305] The horrified expression on Medusa's face on Caravaggio's shield may show that in the mirror image on Perseus' shield, she has for the first time fully realised what she is. In this way, Giuseppe Orologi comments on the demise of the monster and the function of the shield in a commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses, which were retold by Giovanni Andrea dell 'Anguillara. In this work, which was very popular in Caravaggio's era, it is written that "Perseus is severing Medusa's head with bristling snakes, as we are prudently eliminating the strength and power of the intrigues that our enemies plot against us. They then flee and see the abomination of their thoughts in the shield of our stability and virtue just as Medusa fled when she saw her naughty face."[306]

75. Caravaggio, Medusa. Oil canvas on wood, 1598.

[305] Giambattista Marino, *La galeria del cavalier Marino, I* (Venice: Dal Ciotti, 1620), 28.
[306] Giovanni Andrea dell'Anguillara and Gioseppe Horologi, *Le Metamorfosi di Ovidio ridotte in ottava rima* (Venice: De'Franceschi, 1563), 73.

On the first version, the painter signed the painting with the same red paint which he used to paint the blood from Medusa's neck. The signature is located at the bottom edge of the shield, to the right of the blood splashing from Medusa's neck, as if the artist had dipped the brush in the still warm blood rising from the head that had just been separated from the body. By doing so, Caravaggio presented himself as an eyewitness. The painter added his original signature in red paint in a similar manner as on the painting of St John of 1608, where the signature is placed right next to a pool of blood flowing from the saint's throat. In the case of Medusa, the signatory may have been not only an eyewitness to but also the executor of Medusa's death sentence. The signature may also refer to the Archangel Michael, the painter's heavenly protector, with whom Perseus was identified, as we have highlighted above. In the abbreviation of the name, the letter A is highlighted (michelA). Everything depends on how we interpret the letter A and the abbreviation "f." that follows the name. We can read "f." as "fecit," a reference to the author of the painting (Michelangelo Caravaggio), or the executor represented on it (Archangel Michael). Nevertheless, we can read it also as "fra," a reference to Caravaggio's status as a Knight of Malta.[307]

Madrigal, published by the Genoese poet Gaspare Murtola in 1604, warns the viewer of looking at this painting.[308] The power to petrify that Murtola writes of does not refer to Medusa, but to the creator of the painting, Caravaggio, who is explicitly mentioned in the poem. Murtola was right – Caravaggio intended to stress that the painting has the same power as the monster painted on it. To draw attention to the painter's power to immobilise, Caravaggio painted the eyes of Medusa in such a way that she does not look at the viewer. Their eyes cannot meet because the monster looks down and to the left. Therefore, the viewer's immobility is exclusively the result of the painter's mastery. His brush can paralyse the viewer so that he resembles a statue. Caravaggio implicitly incorporated Perseus – which is to say himself – into his painting. The severed head illusively painted on the shield is not meant to be a permanent part of it. We may imagine that the painting represents the moment just after Medusa was beheaded. We can no longer see the hero's sword in the picture, but the head still has yet to fall to the ground. This is evidenced by the shadow that Medusa's head casts on the surface of the shield as it passes. When we look at this shadow more carefully, we realise the painter made the viewer think that the shield is not convex but concave. It is not only the reflected image seen by Medusa on its external surface but also the face of the monster seen by Perseus through his transparent shield.

The painter treated this traditional theme entirely as an essay on painting and life. The head of the Medusa has outspokenly male features, so it is possible that it is Michelangelo Caravaggio's self-portrait in the role of the Archangel Michael/Perseus. Caravaggio's painting can also represent the face of Perseus or the painter looking at himself. There is one more detail that should be noted – the snakes above Medusa's forehead create a formation very similar to the Isis knot that

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[307] Maurizio Seracini, "Investigations," in *The First Medusa/ La Prima Medusa*, ed. Ermanno Zoffili (Milan: 5 Continents Editions, 2011), 69.
[308] Gaspare Murtola, *Rime* (Venice: R. Meglietti, 1604), no. 478.

characterised Apollo, the patron of art, on ancient statues.[309] No matter how we understand the picture, there is no doubt that Caravaggio was also celebrating his artistic mastery.

The main character of the painting of Caravaggio is Perseus, whom he does not depict. Baldassare Franceschini later attempted to add him to this pictorial type. We see Perseus with a shield in his left hand, and in the right, he holds a sword and the head of Medusa, whose reflection we see on the shield.[310] Shortly prior to 1644, Bernardo Strozzi painted a portrait of the Venetian collector Giovan Donato Correggio as a Perseus with a shield and Medusa as an attribute. However, the gorgoneion is not a gorgoneion, but a realistically painted head of Medusa with male features looking downward. Its features are so distinctive that it could be a portrait, and the whole picture could be an insight into a situation in the life of the person portrayed, although no information about this exists. In the myth of Medusa's head, human and divine spheres intertwine; the polarity of the transient and the lasting is exemplified by the polarity of living and inanimate nature. In Ovid's Metamorphoses, the last-mentioned aspect is demonstrated by the story of corals; we'll come back to it later.

Caravaggio's painting influenced the head painted in 1617–1618 by Rubens, who may have seen Caravaggio's picture when he was visiting Florence in 1600 or sometime later; in any case, he decided to show a later sequence after Medusa's had fallen to the ground (**76**).[311] In 1629–1630, Constantin Huygens wrote about this work: "It represents the severed head of Medusa, encircled by the snakes that appear from her hair. In this painting he has composed the sight of a marvellously beautiful woman who is still attractive, but also causes horror because death has just arrived and evil snakes hanging around her temples, with such inexpressible deliberation that the viewer is suddenly caught by terror-since it is usually covered by a curtain – but that the viewer at the same time, and despite the horror of the representation, enjoys the painting, because it is lively and beautiful."[312] The end of the monster is the beginning of an even greater evil: Medusa's blood has created poisonous vipers, painted by Rubens's collaborator Frans Snyders. In addition to the viper, there are other poisonous animals in the picture – a salamander, spiders and a scorpion. Rubens' slain Medusa is the source of life of poisonous animals, which spread death all over the world. Rubens knew this ancient motif from Lucan or Apollonius.[313] He also adapted from classical antiquity the two-headed snake (amphisbaena) about which Pliny writes (foreground centre).[314]

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[309] Maurizio Marini, *Caravaggio "pictor praesentatissimus." L'iter artistico completo di uno dei massimi rivoluzionari dell'arte di tutti i tempi* (Rome: Newton Compton Editor, 2001), 417.
[310] Schleißheim, Staatsgalerie inv. 15531.
[311] Anne T. Woollett and Ariane van Suchtelen, *Rubens and Brueghel: A Working Friendship* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006.), 180–185.
[312] Caroline Alexandra Van Eck, "The Petrifying Gaze of Medusa: Ambivalence, Ekplexis, and the Sublime," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8 (2016): 1–2.
[313] Apollonius, *Argonautica*, 4, 1513–1517; Lucan, 9, 619–699.
[314] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 8, 35; 20, 82.

76. Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyders, Medusa. Oil painting, 1617–1618.

77. An unknown Flemish master, Medusa. Oil painting, the first half of 17th century.

The theme was popular in Flanders in the 17th century and Florence's Uffizi house a painting that inspired Percy Bysshe Shelley to write his famous romantic poem (77). [315] The glory of this painting began in the 1780s when it was declared to be the work of Leonardo da Vinci and was praised along with the Mona Lisa in the Louvre.[316] At the beginning of the 20th century, however, experts concluded that this was the work of an unknown Flemish painter from the first half of the 17th century.[317] Both Flemish paintings represent an alternative version of Perseus' myth

[315] Percy Byssche Shelley, *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (London: John and Henry L. Hunt, 1824). This text is a fragment published posthumously; therefore, its interpretation is complicated.
[316] Conticelli, *Medusa*, 66.
[317] Corrado Ricci, "Le Meduse degli Uffizi," *Vita d'arte* 1 (1908): 1–10.

because in the canonical version Perseus immediately took the head of the monster and ran away because the remaining Gorgons began to pursue him. On both paintings Medusa's head lies on the ground in an abandoned landscape; the place is similar, but the time is different. Rubens' picture shows the moment just after the head was separated from the body and fell to the ground. We see the next and final act in the picture in Florence. The severed head is left to its fate, and no one else is interested in it except the author of the painting. It is getting darker, and the last poisonous breath comes out of her mouth; the snake heads sink to the ground, and Medusa has begun to turn into a carcass. Vermin scurry towards their banquet and a bat flies in from the right. The approaching struggle for the carcass is a parody of the heroic struggle described in the myth.

The images also differ in terms of viewing angle; on the picture in Vienna, the viewer bent down and looked at Medusa's head from the side. On the painting in Uffizi, the painter suggests that the viewer will soon regret approaching the head even though he has snuck up on it from behind. Medusa's face is turned to the night sky, but her eyes seem to turn back to look at the viewer. Medusa thus kills even after her death. Lucanus knew this very well, but despite this fact (or perhaps because of it) he wished to see the monster dying: "Medusa's features must have worn a ghastly grimace in the moment of her decapitation – I have no doubt that the mouth belched poison and the eyes flashed instant death." [318] Rubens and the unknown Flemish painter answer Lucan's question, but each in his own way.

Realistic paintings of Medusa's severed head have a counterpart in stone sculpture. Andreas Schlüter carved it twice in 1696–1699 – we find these heads on the keystones of two entrances on the north side of the Berlin Armoury (**78**). Death is indicated by various anatomical details – the muscles in the faces are loose, the eyelids have spontaneously dropped down and covered the eyes, and the chin is lowered. The mouth is open, in which a limp tongue is visible. The frowning forehead testifies to the terrible struggle which Medusa ultimately lost. This sculptural work is obviously the result of a careful study of the changes in the human face that occur after death. These famous heads in Berlin spread a message that was intended not only for the local population but above all for the enemies of Prussia. The severed heads of Medusa are exposed at the Armoury as if they were war trophies, displaying the function of this building and celebrating the military strength of the Prussian state - its military power is so great that it can even expose the head of the greatest killer of all time, the legendary Medusa, amongst its various war trophies. We must not forget that in the 17th century the severed heads of the enemy were still publicly exposed. In order for the illusion of the real trophy to be perfect, Schlüter even displayed the method in which the head of Medusa was attached to the shield. It is hung on the curved upper end of the shield by the snakes that she has in place of hair. It is also attached to the shield with strips of cloth that run across her forehead and the stump of her neck.

[318] Lucan 9, 678–680, translated by Robert Graves.

78. Andreas Schlüter, Head of Medusa.
Stone relief on the northern façade of the former Berlin armoury, 1696–1699.

The courtyard of the Berlin Armoury displayed more severed heads, which realistically depicted warriors of different ages and nationalities in various stages of death. All these heads belonged to the enemies that the Prussian army overcame. Just like the Medusa on the northern front, these severed heads were not intended to arouse pity; they were meant to show the horrors of war but also celebrate the prowess of Prussian weaponry. They sought to warn the enemy that their soldiers might end up like those whose lifeless heads are displayed on the keystones. This is expressed explicitly in the inscription on the façade, which states that the Armoury was built and decorated to frighten the enemy. Although the Berlin Armoury was a functional building, it was entrusted with an important political message. This was a specific feature of Central European architecture. In this part of Europe, complicated political conditions often did not allow the builders to declare their political ambitions openly.

The builder of the Armoury, Elector Frederick III of Brandenburg, placed it in the centre of the city next to his town residence. Moreover, he built this utility building in the form of a city palace with rich sculptural decoration and a complex iconographic program. The problem of the emerging Prussian state was that its real power did not correspond to the established hierarchy of states in this part of

Europe. In 1701, Elector Frederick III was proclaimed King (as Frederick I), but his official title was "King in Prussia." He could not claim the title of the "King of Prussia" because the Brandenburg Elector was still formally a vassal of the Habsburg Emperor, and much of Prussia still belonged to the Kingdom of Poland. Political ambitions that could not be expressed directly were expressed through architecture and its sculptural decorations. This explains the exceptionally naturalistic depiction of the severed heads of Medusa at the Berlin Armoury. Schlüter's Medusa defined Frederick III as a second Perseus who was now performing his epochal deed. The head of Medusa was thus represented in such a way that it was indistinguishable from a real severed head.

79. Joachim von Sandrart, Medusa. Engraving, 1675.

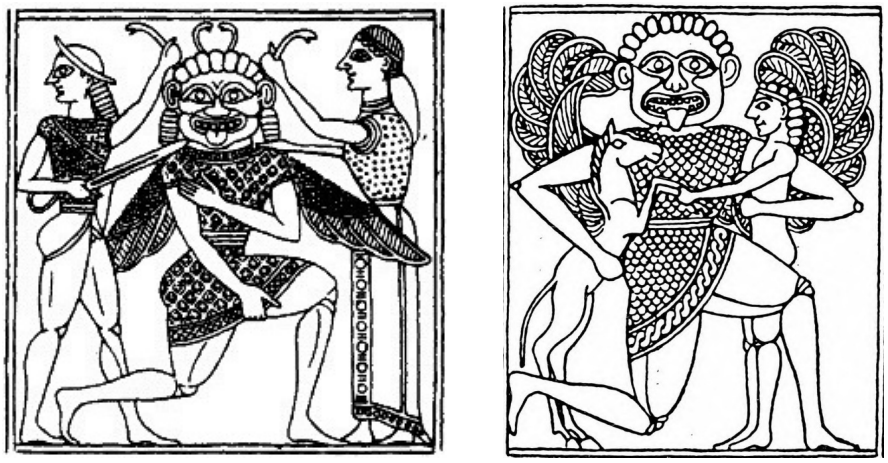
On the two heads of Medusa with which Andreas Schlüter decorated the Berlin armoury, as well as on those that Artus Quellinus I sculpted for the Amsterdam City Hall in 1650–1652, we find pairs of snakes that are similar but not the same. In Amsterdam, their heads are together as if they were kissing, in Berlin one bites off the other's head. In the 17th century, the ancient myth about vipers kissing and eating each other was linked to the myth of Medusa.[319] We find it, for example, also in the engraving published in 1675 in Sandrart's German Academy (**79**). The same motif can also be found in works of art that we have already dealt with, on the oil painting from 1617–1618 by Rubens and Snyders.

The Life of Medusa

Simultaneously, with the appearance of Medusa's beheading in the 6th century BC, images showing the monster with her children Pegasus and Chrysaor began to appear in Greece. These representations point to a completely different mythic tradition because Hesiod expressed himself quite clearly - Pegasus and Chrysaor saw

[319] Herodotus, 3, 109; Pliny the Elder, *Natural history*, 10, 169–170. Cf. Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae 12, 4, 10–11.

the light of the world only after their mother died.[320] The parallel existence of these two versions of the Medusa myth can be demonstrated on two bronze reliefs from Zeus' sanctuary in Olympia. On both of them, Medusa is displayed with a horrifying face turned towards the viewer; her wings and feet indicate running, a symbol of her speed and strength. On one relief, her murderers, Perseus and Athena, surround her (**80**). On the other, she is with her children, Pegasus and Chrysaor, whom she proudly embraces (**81**).

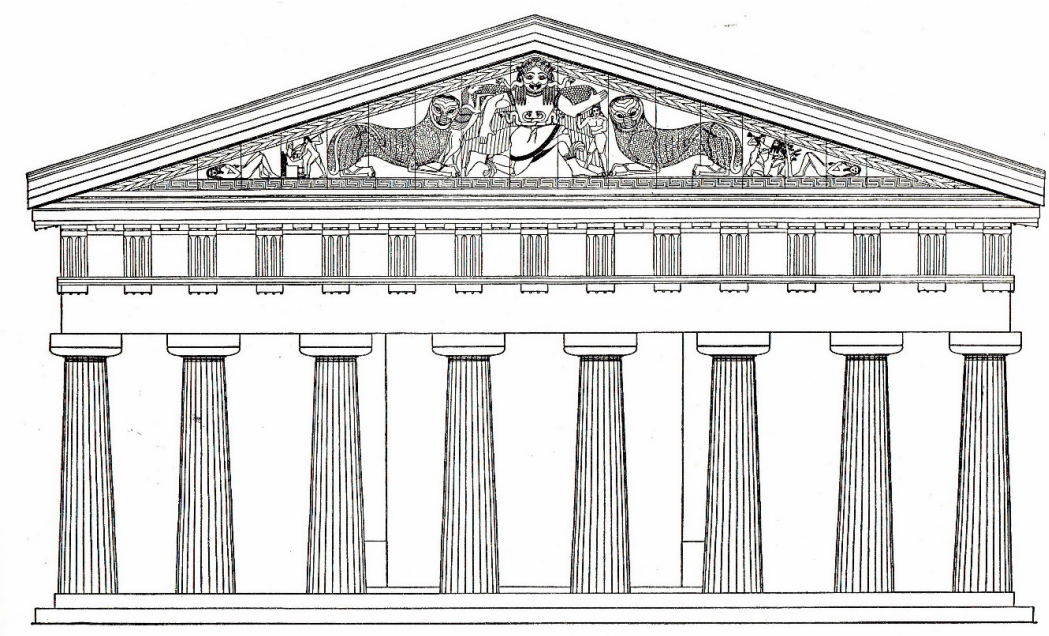


80 (left). Perseus and Athena kill Medusa. Greek bronze relief, around 550 BC.
81 (right). Medusa with Pegasus and Chrysaor. Greek bronze relief from Olympia, late 7th century BC.

In the 7th to 6th centuries, these two traditions existed in parallel but not everywhere with the same intensity. The epicentre of the tradition in which Perseus kills Medusa is likely Athens, because the goddess Athena dominates in this version of the myth. The centre of the parallel tradition, in which Medusa is a powerful deity, was probably Corinth.[321] Pegasus was especially worshipped in Corinth, where the horse appeared on coins already in the middle of the 6th century BC when the coins began to be minted in Greece. The Medusa as a foremother can be found on a terracotta relief from the late 7th century BC that decorated Athena's temple in Syracuse, which was a Corinthian colony (**82**). At the turn of the 7th and 6th centuries BC, monumental architecture with sculptural decoration appeared in Greece. The oldest preserved stone relief, which decorated the pediment of the Greek temple, can be found in another Corinthian colony, Corfu (**83**). In the middle of the pediment, there is a running Medusa with snakes in her hair, snakes in place of a belt, and wings on her feet. Next to Medusa, we see fragments of Pegasus on the left and Chrysaor on the right. The huge lions, which are depicted at her sides, are subordinate to Medusa. She appears here as a ruler of animals similarly to Artemis, to whom the temple was dedicated.

[320] Hesiod, *Theogony,* 280–281.
[321] Cornélia Isler-Kerényi, "La madre di Pegaso," in *Corinto: Luoge da azione e luogo di racconto*, ed. P. A. Bernardini (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra editore, 2013), 257–270.

82. Medusa with Pegasus and Chrysaor. Greek terracotta relief from the temple of Athena at Sysacuse, late 7th century BC.



83. Western pediment of the temple of Artemis at Corfu, around 580 BC.

In Hellenistic Greece, another alternative version of Medusa appeared. It was undoubtedly the same monster we know from countless representations because she has snakes in her hair and wings over her forehead, but she is clearly in no danger and threatens no one. Greeks and Romans knew her as a bust of a beautiful and calm

girl who looked at the viewer curiously. It is a relatively rare pictorial type, but we find it in different art genres, on mosaics, small relief sculpture, and statuettes.[322] These portraits of Medusa were important for ancient Greeks and Romans; nevertheless, they have no counterpart in ancient literary tradition. We know from ancient literary works that Medusa was originally a mortal girl with beautiful hair that the goddess Athena turned into snakes. The beautiful girl became a hideous monster whom the hero Perseus beheaded. However, no ancient author has given us a literary portrait of the living Medusa.

In ancient Greece, no one wrote about how she dealt with her terrible transformation. Do the portraits of Medusa tell us that she accepted it stoically? Is she a monster who is unmoved by snakes, as some Roman authors suggest?[323] Is she an alternative Medusa who never met Perseus? In the ancient literary tradition, the story begins when Perseus cuts off Medusa's head and her life ends. This scene was very often depicted in ancient art. Even more often, the severed head of Medusa was depicted and is one of the most frequently depicted themes in the fine art of all periods. The bust of the living Medusa, however, does not belong to this series of scenes, as her head firmly rests on her neck. In these ancient depictions, Medusa is not only alive but also beautiful and does not look at all hostile. Sometimes, she looks searchingly at the spectator as if she wished to know what he or she thought about her.

What did ancient Greeks and Romans think about portraits of Medusa? There was no hierarchical relationship between the ancient pictorial and literary tradition, and both traditions could exist completely independent of one another. They were, however, firmly interconnected. Every ancient Greek or Roman who knew the myth of Medusa from literary tradition could identify the portrait of Medusa in the visual arts. Mythological narration differs from all other methods of communication in that it allows for the omission of lengthy exposition. The myth is, in short, a story that is widely known because it is considered essential to the whole of society. Thanks to this, we foresee the outcome of the story. Predictability, however, only facilitates the understanding of myths, the strength of which stems from their ability to capture a generally binding aspect of human experience. However, myth always exceeds or even contradicts this experience.

The myth of Medusa is one of the most potent stories because no one has ever seen a human being with snakes instead of hair. The myth contradicts human logic, and by doing so draws us into the story which it narrates. In the case of Medusa, this illogicality induces terror and disgust. With Medusa, the face, which is most vulnerable to human beings, has come into direct contact with snakes, something people are most afraid of. Close to Medusa's ears, eyes, nose and mouth is a cluster of hissing, slimy and putrid snakes whose teeth spit poison. Being Medusa is the most frightening nightmare we can imagine. How can she then be so calm in these ancient portraits? Why is this Medusa not scared to death? Her snakes frighten us, but the beauty of her face irresistibly attracts us. We sympathise with her because we know she was not born with snakes for hair. In classical antiquity, the portrait bust of

[322] On representations of Medusa in ancient art cf. Krauskopf, *Gorgo, Gorgones*.
[323] Lucan, 9, 632–634.

the living Medusa might have been a cautionary reminder that nothing is certain and everything depends on the will of the gods. Theoretically, the same thing could happen to anyone else.

84 (left). Medusa. Ceramic relief plaque with a polychromy, 225–200 BC. Made in Greek Sicily.
85 (right). Medusa. Greek bronze statuette, c. 150 BC.

The first portraits of Medusa were created in Hellenistic Greece. A ceramic relief plaque shows Medusa with wings on her head and a Celtic neck ring, which characterised her as an exotic foreigner (**84**). The plaque has an opening at the top, making it an oscillum. These objects were suspended as magic protective amulets. The wind rotated the oscillum on all sides, so when hanging on a fruit tree, for example, the amulet provided perfect protection over the entire orchard. In antiquity, the severed head of Medusa was usually used as a protective amulet. On this plaque, however, the head grows out of a body, which is covered with scales. Therefore, it is undoubtedly a living Medusa. In the Syracuse Museum, there is a bronze bust of Medusa with snakes in her hair and also snake scales on her body (**85**). However, they are not a part of her body, but an adroitly sewn tunic or armour. A similar coat of armour is worn by Medusa on a drawing of an ancient sculpture by Cyriacus of Ancona, which he made in 1444 when he visited Samothrace on his trips through the eastern Mediterranean.[324] The original of the drawing is not preserved, but we know of three Italian copies from the late 15th century. Two of these drawings have the Latin inscription "Medusa's Bronze Head from the New Gate on Samothrace." Busts of Medusa in this scaled armour can also be found on ancient gems. Most often, we find the severed head of Medusa on gems, but sometimes Medusa's neck is intact; in these cases, we must interpret the depiction as the bust of a living monster.

The Romans often used Medusa as a central motif for their floor mosaics.[325] On these mosaics, the severed head of Medusa might be theoretically depicted because

[324] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Codex Ashmolensis, MS. Lat. Misc. D. 85, 140v.
[325] Carolyn McKeon Hessenbruch, *Iconology of the Gorgon Medusa in Roman Mosaic* (Ann Arbor: University microfilms international, 1983).

we often do not see her neck; but her eyes are lively, and she watches the viewer closely (**86**). On one mosaic, Medusa's neck, including a part of the bust, is also shown (**87**). On another mosaic, we see a bust of Medusa, who is depicted in the same manner in which Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic rulers were usually represented. She is a majestic figure with her head turned upward, her eyes looking up to the heavens and a grim expression on her face.[326] Medusa's head is placed on Roman mosaics into an ornamental frame that induces a stroboscopic effect. The endless whirl increases her hair's frightening effect. In the middle, as in the eye of the typhoon, however, there is utter peace, and the timelessness embodies the immovable yet living Medusa, who gazes at us. We do not know whom these portraits are showing. We do not even know whether it is a living Medusa or her petrified bust.

86. Head of Medusa. Roman mosaic, 1st–2nd century AD.

87. Head of Medusa. Roman mosaic, 2nd century AD.

[326] Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Villa Collection, Malibu, California, 71.AH.110.

In post-ancient Europe, representations of ancient myths were not only renewed but also further developed or re-evaluated, and the portrait of Medusa became a means of the artist's self-reflection. This pictorial type corrects the widespread idea of a revival of ancient mythical images. We tend to connect this process exclusively with the Italian Renaissance, but sculptors and painters only began to represent the live Medusa and the transformation of her hair into snakes in Baroque and - above all - modern art. The portrait of Medusa demonstrates that the reception of the ancient mythical tradition in visual arts is a continuous process that is not over yet. It continues on in the 21st century, and will continue in centuries to come.

Since Medusa changed everything into stone with her gaze, it could have been fatal to her to look at her own mirror image for some reason. Therefore, we may speculate that the ancient portraits of Medusa represented the monster who looked at her image by mistake and was petrified before she could scare herself. In 1587, the blind poet and actor Luigi Groto wrote about this accident in his epigram called The Medusa Statue: "This is not a sculpture of she who turned one to stone, but Medusa herself. However, let you who approach keep low your gaze! If you want not through awe to be turned into her, resting her tired body against this wall she became part of it, as taking a mirror to admire her beauty, she herself was turned to stone." [327] This theme was later developed by Giambattista Marino, which testifies to how the image of Medusa turning herself into stone was attractive at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries.[328]

Renaissance Italy knew the sculptural bust of Medusa at least from copies of the drawings mentioned above by Cyriacus of Ancona. Already before 1474, the drawing of Andrea Mantegna was created, which may be his self-portrait in the form of Medusa.[329] Mantegna was one of the greatest experts in ancient art of his time, and he often incorporated self-portraits into his works. The drawing in Florence's Uffizi, which shows an angry screaming face from the front, could be his self-portrait. However, there are no wings or snakes on the drawing, so it may not be Medusa. Reports on ancient busts of Medusa in Roman collections date from the first half of the 16th century. [330] The first Renaissance versions are dated to the same period. On the bronze plaque in Berlin, we see a bust, not a severed head. It is undoubtedly Medusa, with wings on her head and snakes for hair, two of which are stuck under her neck.[331] Her eyes are opened; she has a painful expression on her face and parted lips.

Sometime after 1638, Gian Lorenzo Bernini created a monumental marble bust of Medusa, which depicts the monster with a mane of writhing snakes on her head

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[327] Luigi Groto, *Le rime* (Venezia: Zoppini fratelli, 1587), 138; Mina Gregori, "Caravaggio's First 'Medusa,'" in *The First Medusa/ La Prima Medusa*, ed. Ermanno Zoffili (Milan: 5 Continents 2011), 12.

[328] Giambattista Marino, *La Galeria del Cavalier Marino, II* (Napoli: Scipione Bonino, 1619), 3.

[329] Firenze, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, 1447. Cf. Marzia Faietti, "'Gorgóneion' mantovano, "*Artibus et historiae* 31 (2010): 27–42.

[330] Rodolfo Amedeo Lanciani, *Storia degli scavi di Roma e notizie intorno le collezioni romane di antichità, I* (Rome: E. Loescher, 1902), 216.

[331] Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, 7111.

and a painful grin on her face (**88**).[332] In its overall conception and details, Bernini's Medusa follows the ancient originals. The folds of the garment on her right shoulder indicate that she was dressed like the ancient Amazons, whose left breasts were left exposed. Bernini's Medusa was dressed like a man, and she has a face with male features. She is suffering; the model for the face of Medusa was the face of Laocoön from the famous group statue of Laocoön and his sons from the Vatican collections, a Roman copy after the Greek original from around 200 BC. Bernini appreciated it highly and, according to Laocoön's head, also created a marble bust, the prefiguration of his Medusa.[333] The gods sent snakes to torture and kill Laocoön and his sons because he opposed their will. Bernini's Medusa, however, is tortured by herself, the cause being either the snakes into which her beautiful hair has just changed or the fact that she is just changing into stone. In any case, Bernini's Medusa is portrayed as a withdrawn sufferer who turns away from the viewer. Her body is facing the viewer, but her head is turned away.

88. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Medusa. Marble bust, 1638–1648.

[332] Irving Lavin, "Bernini's Bust of Medusa: An Awful Pun," in *La Medusa di Gian Lorenzo Bernini: Studi e restauri,* ed. Elena Di Gioia (Roma: Campisano, 2007), 120–134; Costanzi Costanzi and Giovanni Carlo Federico Villa, eds., *Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Medusa tra luce ed emozione* (Crocetta del Montello: Antiga, 2013).

[333] Maria Grazia Bernardini and Maurizi Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Regista del Barocco* (Milan: Skira 1999), n. 31.

The suffering of Bernini's Medusa was an echo of the sculptor's anguish. In 1636–1638, when he was around forty, he lived a passionate romance with Costanza Bonarelli, the emancipated wife of a sculptor, who worked under Bernini's supervision in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. At that time, he carved a fascinating portrait of her for himself. [334] He caught his mistress in an intimate moment, with an open shirt revealing her breasts, watching her lover attentively. The affair ended when Gian Lorenzo Bernini learned that Costanza was also meeting with Luigi Bernini, who, under the guidance of his older brother, also worked in St. Peter's. The enraged Gian Lorenzo attacked his younger brother and injured him, sending a servant with a razor to the unfaithful mistress to disfigure her. Pope Urban VIII, Bernini's patron, punished the sculptor but soon granted him a pardon. Part of the deal with his powerful protector was that Bernini would marry the beautiful Caterina Terzio, with whom he lived happily ever after. He began a new chapter in his life by creating a bust of Medusa, a self-ironic counterpart to the Costanza bust. Thinking in contrasting pairs was typical for Bernini; his closest analogy to the pair of the active Costanza and the passive Medusa was a pair of busts dating back to 1620, The Blessed Soul and The Damned Soul, which is Bernini's self-portrait.[335]

The portrait of Costanza embodied immorality in this new context. [336] She treats Bernini as her equal; she is the representative of a new type of woman who appeared in the 17th century: self-confident, independent, and disregarding conventions. Her counterpart, Medusa, is the representation of punished licentiousness. She has sinned, and now she suffers for it. This is why she is ashamed and turns away from the viewer. Bernini shows us the transformation from beauty to monster. The snakes do not grow directly from Medusa's head; the locks of her hair are intact, but are transforming into snakes' bodies. These snakes have just been born, and therefore they are wildly writhing; they are just as surprised as Medusa.

Bernini kept to Ovid's version of the myth. Medusa was a girl famous for her beautiful hair, and her beauty attracted Poseidon, who raped her. This happened in the temple of the chaste Athena, who punished the girl on the spot.[337] The pair of Bernini's sculptural busts, Costanza and Medusa, represents the sinner before and after she was punished. Bernini is both Poseidon, raping Medusa, and the punishing Athena, as the sculptor changes a living girl into an inanimate work of art. [338] The Latin inscription on the base was made later, in 1731. It emphasizes that the work in the Capitoline Museums in Rome is to be judged primarily from the aesthetic point of view: "The head of the Medusa, which in the ancient times decorated the shields of the warriors to frighten the enemy, is now a pride of the famous sculptor and shines on the Capitol." Medusa is thus explicitly defined as the emblem of an artist.

Two Medusas with expressive faces can be found in Amsterdam City Hall, which is today the Royal Palace. In 1650–1652, Artus Quellinus I furnished a rich

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[334] Bernardini and Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, n. 19.

[335] Bernardini and Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, n. 32.

[336] Charles Avery, *Bernini: Genius of the Baroque* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), 91–92; Lavin, *Bernini's Bust of Medusa*.

[337] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 784–801.

[338] Patrick Haughey, "Bernini's 'Medusa' and the History of Art," *Thresholds* 28 (Concerto Barocco: essays in honor of Henry A. Millon), 2005: 83–84.

sculptural decoration for the courtroom where death sentences were pronounced. There is a marble bench for a jury with figural reliefs illustrating mercy, wisdom, and righteousness. The lintel of the bench carries four caryatids whose mournful gestures and expressions visualised the feelings of the men who were sitting under them. On the underside of the lintel, two reliefs represent Medusa. In her face, we see the expression of extreme horror, because she has just heard the sentence of death.[339] These depictions of Medusa were to celebrate the justice of the local administration, but above all to demonstrate the prosperity of the city and the mastery of Artus Quellinus.

The view of the world through the eyes of Medusa also attracted artists in the 18th century, as evidenced by the Florentine bust by Spinazzi, a professor of sculpture at the Florentine Academy.[340] Spinazzi's head of Medusa is bowed and her eyes are lowered, but not because she is afraid. She thinks and therefore does not want to be distracted by what is happening around her. Her soulful face is seemingly calm, but her raised eyebrows and her open mouth reveal the intensity of her thoughts. When looking at this bust, we immediately perceive two inconsistent traits. The perfectly groomed hair contrasts with the slovenly clothing. The massive knot is tied up in haste, in a typically masculine fashion. Spinazzi and his audience knew that Amazons and soldiers fastened their cloaks on their right shoulders so their right hands were free to fight. The beauty of this Medusa's face is somewhat rough, almost masculine, with bare cheekbones, a distinctive nose, and an energetic chin. Her figure is rather boyish, and she has broad shoulders and strikingly small breasts.

Spinazzi's Medusa ponders herself, her identity, her nature and the beautiful hair she has so carefully adjusted. The bust originated in the second half of the 18th century when the audience expected artists to stick to traditional image types, but fill them with radically new content. Spinazzi did not disappoint this expectation: his bust looks like a variation on Bernini's version of the myth, but when we inspect it carefully, we find that it shows something completely different. Spinazzi's marble bust has the inscription MEDUSA on its base. It is, however, not Medusa with snakes for hair, but a girl who has stitched two snakes into her hair. This was not an act of momentary caprice, but a careful work of hairdressing; the snakes are neatly crossed over her forehead, their bodies knotted into her hair, and the ends merging on both sides on her shoulders as if they were curls. The bust does not show a monster, but a beautiful girl fatally attracted by danger, inducing her to play with the snakes. She has only disguised herself as Medusa; her character drives her inevitably toward destruction, a fact which she does not yet realize.

The bust of Spinazzi is a patriarchal morality, and a hundred years later, several female sculptors responded to the social problem of their existence by creating a portrait of Medusa. Around the middle of the 19th century, the first wave of female emancipation begins, in which women started to attend art schools. The portraits of the ostracised Medusa can be the alter ego of the first women sculptors

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[339] Stijn Bussels, "Medusa's Terror in the Amsterdam Town Hall, or How to Look at Sculptures in the Dutch Golden Age," in *Idols and Museum Pieces: the Nature of Sculpture, its Historiography and Exhibition History 1640–1880*, ed. Caroline van Eck (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 85–102.

[340] Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi, 1914.11.

who have tried to enter into the purely male sphere. One of the first women to study anatomy was Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, the most famous 19th-century American sculptor. Her childhood was exceptional. Her father was a doctor, whose wife and three children died of tuberculosis. The widower intended to protect Harriet through physical exercise and keeping her outdoors, which he managed to accomplish, but he thus raised his daughter as a wild Amazon. In 1852, she moved to Rome, where she became the first member of the White Marmorean Flock, a sisterhood of American sculptresses. Hosmer's Medusa was sculpted two years after her arrival in Rome as a classicist counterpart to the Bernini version of this subject (**89)**.[341]

89. Harriet Goodhue Hosmer, Medusa. Marble bust, around 1854.

[341] William H. Gerdts, "The Medusa of Harriet Hosmer," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 56, no. 2 (1978): 97–108.

The difference is not only in the artistic style but also in Medusa's psychology. Both react to their transformation, but differently. While in Bernini's version she is panicked, Hosmer only indicated her emotional storm by tipping her head, raising her eyebrows and opening her mouth. The girl's transformation is irreversible, and the loss of humanity definitive, which is suggested by the snakes firmly positioned under her breasts. This Medusa, however, does not resign herself to her fate. She does not close herself, and on the contrary, she seems to reproach Athena, who has transformed her. From Bernini's Medusa, this version also differs in the wings that frame the girl's head, making it reminiscent of a halo. Hosmer has put a bit of personal experience into her Medusa; it belongs to a series of her works dedicated to women with a tragic fate - Daphne, Oenone, Beatrice Cenci and Zenobia. Not only Hosmer's artistic career was incompatible with the conventions of American Puritan society, so was her lesbian orientation, which she masked with life-long celibacy.[342]

Adèle d'Affry came from an entirely different background, which explains the different concept of her Medusa. She married Carlo Colonna, Duke of Castiglione. Her contemporaries knew her as Duchess Colonna, but she presented her sculptural works under the masculine name of Marcello.[343] The model for her Medusa of 1865, when she was 29 years old and lived in Paris, was a singer who captured the sculptor's attention during her performance of Lully's opera Perseus. In Adèle d'Affry's own words, she wanted the beauty of Medusa to be a mixture of "contempt, fury, and defiance." [344] There is indeed no sign of dismay in her Medusa (**90**). She is very masculine, with a lion's skin stretched over her head - an attribute of the mythical hero Hercules. She stares straight ahead, her lips firmly pursed; but, at the same time, she is not resigned to her femininity. Her hair is perfectly combed and the snakes are neatly woven into plaits. The snakeskin, which was a part of her transformation, takes the form of an elegantly cut waistcoat. The entangled snakes lining the lion's head are a parody, however, of the woman's headgear, which was an obligatory item of clothing worn by women of the time.

D'Affry's Medusa perhaps took inspiration from a bust with the same theme by the French sculptor Prospero d'Epinay, for which he created only a ceramic bozetto (**91**).[345] In this case, the psychological characteristics of the mythical being were borrowed from the person who was the sculptor's model. Her name was Assunta Della Ruella, and she was a convicted member of a highwayman's gang. The principal motive of the myth of Medusa was that a beautiful face may deceive. D'Epinay contributed to this theme by choosing at that time a famous criminal as the model of Medusa.

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[342] Alicia Faxon, "Images of Women in the Sculpture of Harriet Hosmer," *Woman's Art Journal* 2 (Spring-Summer, 1981): 25–29; Camille Coonrod, "Two Images of Medusa in the Sculpture of Harriet Hosmer," *Undergraduate Journal of Humanistic Studies* 1 (Spring 2015): 1–12.

[343] Aurélia Maillard Despont, et al., eds., *Adèle D'affry, duchesse Colonna, "Marcello" (1836–1879). Ses écrits, sa vie, son temps* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017).

[344] Comtesse D'Alcantara, *Marcello: Adèle d'Affry, Duchesse Castiglione Colonna, 1836–1879, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée et ses amis* (Geneva: Éditions générales, 1961), 88.

[345] Andreas Blühm, "'Une beauté sauvage:' Prosper d'Epinay's Head of Medusa," *Van Gogh Museum Journal* (1996): 133–144.

90 (left). Marcello (Adèle d'Affry), Medusa (La Gorgone). Bronze bust, h. 107 cm, around 1865.
91 (right). Prosper d'Epinay, Medusa. Ceramic bozzetto, c. 1866.

Artistic education became universally available to women in Western Europe in the 1870s, and at that time the English Pre-Raphaelite painter and sculptor Evelyn De Morgan was admitted to the Slade School of Art in London. She created a bust of Medusa in 1876 during her study residency in Rome at the age of 21. Five years later, the bust, which has since been lost, was exhibited at the London Grosvenor Gallery, one of the first public appearances by the female sculptor. There she demonstrated her artistic ambitions, which were then considered to be reserved for men only. Her Medusa is perhaps just about to transform into a monster; the snakes are just beginning to crawl about, but the girl does not seem to notice them (**92**).[346] She is neither surprised nor frightened, just lost entirely; she has no idea who she is, which is indicated by her face, which is neither female nor male. She is turning her head as if she wanted to leave the material world, which has lost all sense to her. She is completely absorbed in herself, but is not thinking of anything specific; she seems merely to be gazing into the void. The only idea in her head is that she wants to be somewhere else and be someone else, but she does not know where and who. This Medusa knows only one thing for sure - nothing of what she might want is feasible, and there is no sense in any action. All the characters the artist created have the same look, including the bust of Mater Dolorosa, which is also lost. This attitude towards life was the very opposite of De Morgan's stubbornness and explosive nature, which

[346] Walter Shaw Sparrow, "The Art of Mrs. William de Morgan," *The Studio* 19 (1900): 232; Elise Lawton Smith, *Evelyn Pickering De Morgan and the Allegorical Body* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002), 18, 66.

testifies to the frustration of the Pre-Raphaelite artists, and was multiplied by her being a woman and a sculptor.

92. Evelyn De Morgan, Medusa, bronze, 1876.

The ambiguity of female hair, which attracts and threatens, was typical of Pre-Raphaelite art.[347] In Frederick Sandys' drawing of 1875, Medusa has distinctive wings on her head, but the snakes are only indicated in the background.[348] The main motif of the drawing is formed by the rich curls of hair; the shiny metallic locks evoke snakes and arouse far more horror than the actual snakes themselves. The ancient Roman poet Lucan compared Medusa's snakes to curls that tower over the front of women's heads and loosely fall over their backs.[349] The hair of Sandys' Medusa frames a massive face with male features and an arrogant expression. The lips are pulled down, the brow is furrowed, and the gaze is avowedly aggressive. Sandys had a very unconventional attitude towards marriage. He was fatally attracted to strong, sensuous women, but his Medusa is typical of the Pre-Raphaelite artists who saw in her the attacker as well as the victim. At that time, women began to penetrate massively into the hitherto strictly patriarchal world, which artists

[347] Galia Ofek, *Representations of Hair in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2009).
[348] London, Victoria and Albert Museum, P.18-1909.
[349] Lucan, 9, 632–634.

expressed in their works by blurring the boundaries between masculine and feminine.

Simeon Solomon came from a prominent Jewish family, but he belonged to the same artistic circle as Sandys. His promising career ended in 1873 when he was first convicted for his homosexuality. In the 1880s, he repeatedly returned to the theme of the bust of Medusa, whom he always represented in the same way, with robust masculine features. On a woodcut from 1893, her masculine nature is highlighted by the inscription "corruptio optimi pessima" (the corruption of the best is the worst).[350] The Latin proverb is about men; if Solomon had wanted the proverb to apply to female beings, i.e. Medusa and her sisters, he would have had to write "optimae." In the European art of the last third of the 19th century, artists strove to abolish borders not only between women and men but also all between opposites - private and public, sleep and wakefulness, life and death, love and hatred, beauty and ugliness, past and present, image and reality. At that time, Medusa became the emblem of this universal unity of opposites. The recurring feature on Solomon's Medusas is that their eyes are neither closed nor open; their eyelids are shut, but their irises are visible. This ambiguity has far-reaching consequences in regard to Medusa; open eyes define her as an attacker because she kills with her sight. However, if her eyes are closed, she is the victim.

In German painting, Anselm Feuerbach, the son of a famous classical archaeologist, was most influenced by ancient art. In 1872, he draw Medusa in a circular frame that evokes a shield.[351] It is not a severed head, however, like the one painted on Caravaggio's shield, even though the neck and shoulders are only slightly indicated. The snakes on her head have open mouths, but they are not attacking anyone, and they do not look at Medusa or the viewer. Medusa looks directly in front of her, but her gaze is blurred as though she was thinking hard about something harrowing that she has experienced. This is shown in her wrinkled forehead and her mouth with its drawn corners and her lower lip in a slight smirk.

The painter was inspired by the famous ancient relief sculpture, Medusa Rondanini, but he assimilated it according to his living model. At the time, Feuerbach lived in Rome and used Lucia Brunacci as a model for all female figures, but her features were modified in this case to look masculine. Feuerbach's Medusa lowered her head, but it is not a sign of humility as she looks defiantly upward. Twenty years before, in 1852–1853, Feuerbach painted himself in the same way, as a demon.[352] Like Medusa, he is fully aware of his extraordinariness and physically suffers from the mediocrity of the environment he despises but in which he is forced to live.

On the 1889 watercolour by Carlos Schwabe, Medusa is a monster, as she was often presented in the late 19th century.[353] Medusa has serpentine hair and eyes; her fingers end in long sharp claws, and all of her snakes have wide open mouths. She is

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[350] London, The British Museum, 1896,1019.176.

[351] Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, VIII 1358. Cf. Karentzos, *Kunstgöttinen*, 113–114.

[352] Karlsruhe, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 92. Cf. Mira Hofmann, et alii, eds., *Anselm Feuerbach* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 118–119.

[353] Glencoe, collection of M. Hand and J. Nyeste. Cf. Jean-David Jumeau-Lafond, *Carlos Schwabe: symboliste et visionnaire* (Paris: ACR, 1994), 76.

screaming with horror and stretching out her hands - this she does in vain, however, for she will never escape herself. The circular shape of the watercolour indicates that Medusa is looking at her own face in the reflection of the shield; her deformed features refer to the famous image of Caravaggio.

In 1897, Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer painted a pastel called Medusa, or the Furious Wave.[354] The image is part of a series of similar works in which women blend in with the natural environment they personify. The hair of this Medusa, with its notable male features, is not made of snakes, but of green sea grass and red coral. Ovid in his Metamorphoses tells us that as soon as Perseus laid the severed head of Medusa onto living sea grass, it transformed into inanimate coral.[355] Lévy-Dhurmer's Medusa suffers from her destruction of living nature; her face with wrinkled forehead has a pained expression. The water turns red as she cuts into her chest with the nails of her left hand; her self–hate is so great that she tries to destroy herself. She is a dangerous monster, but she is also like a wave that sweeps away everything that is in its path, only to shatter finally upon the coast. The more furious she is, the faster her end.

A masculine view of Medusa is represented in a pastel from 1891 by Maximilian Pirner, a professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. He shows Medusa washing her snake hair with unconcealed pleasure.[356] Pirner emphasises her sex appeal by displaying her naked body; he has placed the bowl in such a way that one can see not only her generously curved breasts but also her narrow waist and wide hips. Her spiteful smile enhances the decadent confrontation of eroticism, the banality of the action shown and Medusa's appalling appearance. Pirner thus illustrates Lucan's verse that when Medusa was combing her hair, venom was shed from the snakes.[357] According to Lucan, Medusa was wicked and loved her snaky hair; she was hugely proud of it, as if it were a stunning hairstyle.

Clara Siewert drew her self-portrait as Medusa around 1890.[358] Her face is relaxed as if she were asleep; her eyes are closed, her mouth open, her eyebrows slightly upright and wrinkled. Even her snakes are asleep, hanging tightly across her face as if they had been randomly thrown there. Clara drew her self-portrait as a sleeping or dead Medusa at the beginning of her artistic career as if she were predicting her own fate. The identification with Medusa is not surprising; most of Siewert's self-portraits were Medusa-like. She usually looks straight into the eyes of the viewer with a slightly wrinkled eyebrow. She never smiles, as if she were fully aware of her tragic fate, which she cannot and will not change. Despite talent, thorough training, and a considerable amount of work, Siewert did not succeed in asserting herself, which was no doubt also partially her fault. In Königsberg, Prussia, where Clara grew up, women could not study at the painting academy; but, thanks to her art-loving mother, her daughter received private training, which she completed in Berlin. The beginnings of Siewert's artistic career were promising. Since 1900, she was a member of the Berlin Secession, and took part in its exhibitions with

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354 Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 35502.

355 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4, 741–752.

356 Prague, Národní galerie, O-5839.

357 Lucan, 9, 634–635.

358 Regensburg, Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, 9191. Cf. Roman Zieglgansberger, ed., *Clara Siewert: Zwischen Traum und Wirklichkeit* (Regensburg: Kunstforum, 2008), p. 74, and p. 165 n. 52.

paintings depicting mystical themes inspired by literary tradition. In 1912, however, for unknown reasons, she stepped out of the group, an act which had tragic consequences. She spent the rest of her life in a house she shared with her sisters, who were also artistically active. They lived in their own isolated world, surrounded by memories of their childhood in distant Prussia. Siewert died in misery and was completely forgotten after the end of the Second War, in which almost all her work was destroyed.

Siewert was obsessed with Medusa. She reproduced the above-mentioned drawing as a lithograph, which is now lost.[359] In the same year, when she created her self-portrait as Medusa, she drew a piece called Childhood, which she then also reproduced as a lithograph. The emblematic nature of the composition is evident from the fact that she placed this lithograph on the cover of the lost and perhaps unfinished portfolio with the title From Life and Dream.[360] Medusa, with large wings and hair, is placed behind a little girl with a wreath of flowers around her neck. The child does not know anything about the presence of Medusa; she has a thoughtful expression in her face, but she looks at the world without worries. The Medusa faces the viewer, whom she gloomily observes; her dark face and the darkness that surrounds her contrasts with the child's brightly lit face.

The child is already under the full power (or the protection) of Medusa, whose snakes are crossed under the child's bust. In her work, Siewert returned to the unity of life and death, birth and extinction. In her two roles, as protector and destroyer, Medusa expresses this unity. Siewert also expressed her intimate relationship with demonic powers in her Witch Cycle. It begins with the death sentence of a witch, her stoning by a merry crowd, lamentation over the dead witch and her apotheosis. The witch is naked in these scenes, and in her apotheosis, her head is ecstatically turned back, and she sits astride a winged black horse that drives her to the heavens.[361] This scene is a dark variation of Perseus arriving on Pegasus to save the naked Andromeda, to which we return later in this book.

In 1892, American painter, philanthropist and patron of art, Alice Pike Barney, painted her daughter Laura as Medusa (**93**). This stylization was not a momentary whim. At the time, Sarah Grand published the article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," in which she formulated the concept of a new woman - an educated and independent supporter of modern social trends.[362] The woman is presented here as a protector of spiritual values and the initiator of social and cultural development. The main promoters of the new women's concept were artists. The new ideal was fulfilled not only by the fact that they were engaged in a male profession but also by their cultural and educational activities. Their mission was also to represent a new woman. Laura shifted to the Bahá'í Faith around 1900 and

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[359] *Ausstellung Katalog. Clara Siewert. Zeichnungen und Aquarelle von 1890–1930. Galerie Gurlitt* (Berlin: Wolfgang Gurlitt, 1936), n. 162.

[360] Regensburg, Kunstforum Ostdeutsche Galerie, 9235. Cf. Zieglgansberger, *Clara Siewert*, p. 118, and p. 177, n. 146. Drawing: Zieglgansberger, *Clara Siewert*, p. 164, n. 51.

[361] Zieglgansberger, *Clara Siewert,* n. 32, 103.

[362] Sarah Grand, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," *The North American Review* 158, n. 448 (1894): 270–276.

played a considerable role in the worldwide development of this religious movement, which sought universal welfare. Alice Pike Barney's Medusa is neither an attacker nor a silent victim; she is a prisoner who refuses to give up in a desperate situation and is calling out for help. The boulders cover her so that only her head and hand can be seen; her supernatural character is only indicated by her clawed nails. Her snakes do not grow out from her head but attack her from the outside.

93. Alice Pike Barney, Medusa. Pastel on canvas, 1892.

In Art Nouveau, we witness the explosion in popularity of Medusa's portraits. As Warren stressed, "she was also interesting to the artists of this period for stylistic reasons. Her long snake hair had an immediate appeal to them because of their love of line and curvature. The female form itself already gave them ample opportunities to indulge this, but in Medusa's hair it could be extended further. This partly explain her endless repetition in both works of fine art, but also frequently in Art Nouveau architectural ornament and jewellery."[363] Around 1902, René Lalique designed an ivory and bronze paperweight with the bust of Medusa.[364] She and her snakes with open mouths eagerly look up to the owner of this luxurious object.

Claude Cahun's photo, a self-portrait stylized as Medusa, originated in 1914 when she was twenty years old.[365] Her step-sister, co-worker and life partner Marcel Moore photographed her. In the photo, Cahun's head is isolated from her body, but it is alive. The head is buried in a pillow, the folds of which evoke the intimacy of the bedroom. The neck is covered by the blanket, the straightness and flatness of which is quite unnatural and disturbing. It is arranged to look like the edge of a guillotine that has just separated the head from the body. Did Cahun intend to imply that she does not cling even to her body? Perhaps. In her self-portraits, she styled herself as a man, a woman, or as a sexless being, demonstrating that she in no way insists on her sexual identity. Although she was forgotten as an artist after her death in 1954, her work and attitudes were widely discussed at the end of the 20th century. It was only then that the above-mentioned self-portrait of Cahun was interpreted as a Medusa thanks to her fixed look and curly hair, which has been thrown about to evoke the writhing snakes. In Cahun's time, it was expected that a woman kept her eyes downcast and her hair carefully kempt. A telling example is the story of the French Impressionist painter Berthe Morisot, who convinced Éduard Manet, her famous colleague, to paint in the open air. Nevertheless, when she married Éduard's younger brother, Eugène in 1874, she stopped painting outside. As her letters show, the sight of her curls fluttering in the wind offended her husband.[366]

Jindřich Štyrský, one of the most significant painters of Czech surrealism, associated Medusa with the memory of his late sister, with whom he was in love. The beginning of the Štyrský book was to demonstrate how from 1925 to 1941 the memory of Medusa's image repeatedly intertwined with the memory of his sister. It was for him the emblem of a woman - a lover, a mother, and an artistic principle. As he wrote in the introduction to his book: "Head of Medusa. It kept recurring in my dreams. I tried to place this head on those closest to me at that time: my mother and sister. The head was a perfect fit on my sister. So I was madly in love with her. In the depths of my memories lies the memory of her death … She certainly knew the many ways of love. Thus I instinctively created my CHIMERA, my PHANTOM OBJECT, on which I am fixated and to which I dedicate this work."[367] Marie was Jindřich Štyrský's half-sister and she died of a heart defect when she was twenty-one years

[363] Richard Warren, *Art Nouveau and the Classical Tradition* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2018), 106.
[364] Lisbon, Calouste Gulbekian Museum.
[365] Juan Vincente Aliaga and François Leperlier. *Claude Cahun* (Paris: Hazan, 2011), 11.
[366] Denis Rouart, ed., *The Correspondence of Berte Morisot* (London: Camden, 1986), 102.
[367] Jindřich Štyrský, *Dreamverse,* translated by Jed Slast (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2018), 23.

old. At that time, he was only six, but in his surrealist writings and drawings, he declares that he had formed a powerful erotic bond with her.

Štyrský placed the drawing Portrait of My Sister Marie at the beginning of his book Dreams. Marie is a girl dressed in the fashion of the early 20th century with a gentle face and large, melancholy eyes, a distinctive bust and a slim waist that emphasises her femininity. In Medusa's portraits, the hair or the snakes into which they have changed always dominate. In the portrait of Štyrský's sister, the snakes are only indicated. She wears a large hat on her head with a veil; upon closer inspection, however, the viewer finds a tube with crossed stripes reminiscent of snakes. In the drawing, she does not have a mouth or a nose, only large eyes, which were the most important and vivid aspect of Medusa. In this drawing, the destructive power of Medusa seemed to be turned toward herself, as the surface of her body and veil is cracked as if it were the plaster on an old wall. We do not find these cracks in the background: he was not portraying a disintegrating image but his disintegrating sister.[368] Štyrský prepared the book for publication one year before his premature death in 1942, but it was published only thirty years later.

Artists began to return to the Medusa as if she was the carrier of some vital message in the troubled atmosphere of the Second World War. In the tragic period of the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia, Jaroslav Horejc created the head of Medusa.[369] The wooden original made by the grand master of Czech art deco from 1944 is now lost, but we know it from casts. Medusa is a beautiful girl with a soulful expression, whose tragic fate is indicated by the grim expression on her face. She has closed eyes and snakes in her hair, which at first glance we fail to notice. The attraction of this work lies in the fact that the girl seems as if she could open her eyes at any time and look at us. Horejc displayed Medusa's long neck with a part of her bust. The sculptor, however, stepped in before Perseus could act, leaving behind a brutal slash in the bust that cuts off almost the entire right breast of Medusa. The base, which consists of a lump of still unprocessed sculpting clay, also refers to the sculptor. This reference to the world before the arrival of Perseus completely cancels the illusion of Medusa's presence. Under the influence of the French sculptor August Rodin, modern sculptors understood sculpture primarily as a means to visualise the creative process. The bust is not the bearer of a specific message, but the sculptor's record of the never-ending search.

After the 1940s, the portrait of Medusa again disappeared from fine arts for several decades. It reappeared in the postmodern era, for which the return to traditional image types and ancient themes was typical. Audrey Flack, a New York artist, began to work with sculpture after a successful career as a photorealistic painter. In her sculptural work, she concentrated on mythical female characters. Her Colossal Head of Medusa from 1990 represents the pinnacle of her sculptural work.[370] Flack interpreted the story of Medusa's rape and subsequent transformation as a metaphor of the rape of our planet by modern civilisation. The brutality of the act is

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[368] Jan Bažant, "Surrealist's Dreams and Classical Tradition," *Ars* 48 (2015): 82–94.

[369] Olga Malá, ed., *Jaroslav Horejc (1886–1983). Mistr českého art deca* (Prague: Galerie Hlavního Města Prahy, 2016), 234.

[370] Susan Casteras, *Audrey Flack: a Pantheon of Female Deities* (New York: Louis K. Meisel Gallery, 1991).

represented by the rope, the ends of which hang from both sides of Medusa's head; this rope is the symbol of Medusa's violation. According to Audrey Flack, the attribute of violence that was carried out on Medusa is a counterpart to the snakes, which protect her against further violence. In her interpretation of the mythical story, Medusa knows she is dangerous to her surroundings, and therefore she hides underground to protect the planet earth. She is the embodiment of nature, which is suggested by the seashells in her hair and the antlers above her forehead. This Medusa is not a gruesome threatening monster; she is not an attacker, but a wise sphinx. Her face is a summary of the history of this mythical creature in art, and thus in it we recognise Rondanini and Cellini's Medusa. Above all, however, it is Audrey Flack's self-portrait. The context in which this work was created was the feminist movement at the end of the 20th century, in which Medusa played a central role.

Hélène Cixous called her feminist pamphlet of 1976 "Medusa's Smile." Her often quoted reinterpretation of the classical myth runs as follows: "You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. Moreover, she's not deadly. She's beautiful, and she's laughing."[371] Cixous criticised the traditional interpretation of Medusa, which was created by men for men. Cixous found an altogether different and "deeper significance" of this myth, which is the very opposite of its masculine reading. Medusa does not kill, and she is not ugly - Cixous' Medusa is beautiful and laughing. Hélène Cixous' laughing Medusa represents a total rejection of the male concept of the world without replacing it with anything else. According to her, female sexuality exists outside of the world's linguistic and communication systems, dominated by the phallus, which gives everything an exclusively male meaning.

The consequence of this asymmetry is that sexual activity causes a sense of guilt in women. They realise that their beauty immobilises men, who temporarily lose the ability to move and thus resemble motionless stone. Women, therefore, perceive themselves as monsters beheaded by the phallocentric Perseus to re-establish patriarchal order. Women must break down everything that men have built up; they have to start anew, writing about women and for women. They must not look at each other as men want them to look at each other. Once they get rid of the masculine vision of the world, women will start to see themselves as they are, and they will begin to realise their beauty. This is why Medusa laughs. The problem of this concept is that when Medusa becomes a harmless and laughing beauty, she ceases to exist. Cixous has killed Medusa by dissolving her in a crowd of innocent, beautiful and laughing women who have liberated themselves.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st century, Medusa sometimes takes life and sometimes gives it; she does, however, always attract irresistibly. The cover of GQ Magazine attests to this fact. Together with Esquire, the magazine (which is still named Gentlemen's Quarterly although it is a monthly magazine) co-dictates men's lifestyle. The cover of the 25th anniversary edition of GQ in 2013 was decorated with photographs of the successful pop singer Rihanna as Medusa, photographed by the above-mentioned Damien Hirst.[372]

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[371] Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen, "The Laugh of the Medusa," *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 885.

[372] Heaf, Jonathan. "GQ's 25th Anniversary Cover Star. Rihanna by Damien Hirst."*GQ* 12 (2013).

The portrait of Medusa appeared for the first time in late Hellenistic Greece, but it was only post-ancient Europe that fully exploited its potential. In these portraits of Medusa, her head was not separated from her body by a heroic act but by artistic convention. These Medusas do not exist as heads but as busts. While Perseus cut off the head that no one could look at, the sculptor or painter created a work of art that everyone wanted to see. Artists of course will never match the mythical hero, as they have killed no one. They have done nothing for humanity - they did not dispose of the monsters the world; they have only created their image. Nevertheless, artists can show us what Perseus has never seen. They can indicate to us what Medusa would have looked like if she had never met Perseus. They can show us what Medusa was before she became a monster, and how she responded to her fateful transformation. They can create the portrait of Medusa, which is the self-portrait of the artist and of his time.