

“BREAKthru: Art Herstory and the Moth” – (working) Artist Statement

The idea for the moth series has evolved over many years. A long time ago, I decided that the moth was more interesting to me than the butterfly, and I found it wildly unfair that they were ALWAYS passed over for the latter. It bothered me. The butterfly gets all the attention, and every source from history to pop culture celebrates them over the moth nearly every time, despite the fact that Order Lepidoptera is comprised of 89 percent moth and only 11 percent butterfly. Moths possess a large spectrum of symbolism and inspiration for me.

I read an article a few years ago about the women pioneers in Abstract Expressionism. The article discussed the contributions these women made while their male counterparts got all the glory and went down in the history books as the stars of the movement. Like a bolt of lightning, I saw the parallel clearly in my mind. The moth is to the butterfly as the woman artist is to the male artist. I began to explore further movements of art and the women that played a major role, while nearly being forgotten by history. It's been happening since the beginning. I have read the opinions of scholars that say it's likely that the first cave paintings that we have in Lascaux were made by the hands of women. This series is the culmination of this relationship... women artists and the moth.

The name of the series, “BREAKthru: Art Herstory and the Moth” explains the relationship of the moth to the women in art within the subtitle. The main word “BREAKthru” has a couple layers. “BREAK” is in large letters to signify the intensity and necessity of the action. The complete word is a nod to the shattering of the glass ceiling and the barriers that women had to (and continue to) take down to be included in the art world of their day. It also describes the action of the moth emerging from the cocoon.

Each piece within the series includes the charcoal portrait of a woman. The model is often cloaked in a print, often including a portion of a painting or piece of art by a woman artist. Each piece in my series is a tribute to one woman artist and includes a visual component highlighting her work. Also included in the piece is a moth, either drawn, painted, or photo collaged into the work. The titles of the individual works are the Latin name of the moth species and the name of the artist being honored.

This series is a culmination of years of work and evolving ideas. It is now ready to come out of the sketchbooks and into the world. It is building on the most current direction of my work in charcoal and mixed media portraiture. It is ultimately a love letter to the women who paved the way for my generation of artists. It is a tribute to the power and connection of sisterhood and our shared experiences. To paraphrase an author I love, “I am her. She is us.”

--Traci Wright Martin