**MILDLY SCARRING**

*“The doors to the world of the wild self are few but precious. If you have a deep scar, that is a door, if you have an old, old story, that is a door. If you love the sky and the water so much you almost cannot bear it, that is a door. If you yearn for a deeper life, a full life, a sane life, that is a door.” -Clarissa Pinkola Estes*

The idea for my diploma project found its conception within a chapter of Clarissa Pinkola Estes’ book, “Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype”. This has been my reference book for almost 10 years now, as it deals with issues that are heavily present in my work. In this book, Clarissa Pinkola Estes bravely digs through the ruins of the female unconscious, by employing myths, fairy tales, folk tales, and stories that exist in many different cultures. Estes herself is a wonderful storyteller, who successfully breaks down the attributes of the ‘Wild Woman’ archetype. When first researching my project, I mostly explored the recurring theme of “The Dark Men or The Predator”. It was in this context that I subsequently revisited a chapter – ‘Stalking the Intruder: The Beginning’ – from Estes’ book. Here, she introduces a story commonly known as ‘Bluebeard’. Bluebeard is a story which reflects some of the strongest human anxieties; those associated with gender, violence and mortality. I was already quite familiar with this story, as the tale had left its traces in many forms of media, as well as in some aspects of my personal life. I always thought it was a wonderful tale of learning, about the destructive part of the female psyche. I should also note that Bluebeard is present in the work of another favourite author of mine, Angela Carter, in her book “The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories”. In this work, Carter retells traditional stories whilst tailoring them to her own work, in terms of the politics of gender and ways of seeing/being seen. This led me to the possibility of employing some of Bluebeard’s themes within my own work.

My installation thusly draws its symbolism from Bluebeard. However, it is important to note that my work does not merely illustrate the tale. For me, Bluebeard is a psychological thriller that urges women to take control of their lives, to defeat their own “Bluebeards” by empowering themselves with curiosity and knowledge. Their terror may be social oppression, an unhappy marriage, or lack of a productive life. On facing situations similar to those described in Bluebeard, a woman may start asking, “What stands behind this door that should not be opened? What is not as it appears? What am I overlooking? What part of me is asleep and needs to be re-awakened?” All these questions were in fact embodied in the moment when, upon stepping into the “forbidden” chamber, Bluebeard’s young wife is stained with her own blood. Without asking such questions, the women will remain forever a slave to the predator. What Bluebeard’s wife sees when she opens the door to the forbidden room is in fact her own reflection of death and murder, i.e., her own slaughtered psyche. The answers to such questions are very likely to arrive themselves stained with blood. This is a metaphor for the killing aspect of the psyche. Asking the questions is a very dark task. Stepping into her forbidden room, the woman will be confronted with decay, cold bones, dying girls, stink, or even murderous husbands. Once she opens the door into the psyche that shows how dead and how slaughtered she is, she sees how various parts of her feminine nature, and her instinctive psyche, have died a lowly death behind a facade of wealth. When she sees this, she registers how captured she is and how much psychic life is at stake.

My favourite version of this tale is the one where the young wife steps inside and sees skeletons and bones, rather than decapitated heads. Archetypally, bones represent what can never be destroyed, and thus usually about something in the psyche that is difficult to destroy. Here, I believe they represent the soul, implying that it has suffered something undeniably dark. There are remains, however, that might be hollow, as all remains go but they have not been destroyed. These remains may be reawakened, as soon as the patterns of ignorance are broken, and as long as the woman stepping into her terror room doesn’t choose to look away. This is the **mildly scarring** nature of the woman’s painful experience which I attempt to depict in my installation. There are symbolic places explicitly described in a very visual way in the tale, like the dungeon, cellar, and the cave, or the forbidden room, which all represent many layers of the human psyche. I was especially fascinated by the forbidden room. I spent a lot of time thinking what it would be like for me to experience such a place. This room would be my room of terrors. So naturally, I dealt with issues that are present in my own life and work. I became the narrator who is using her own background and perception. Because of the tale’s flexible structure, this kind of narration is possible. While exploring the tale from my point of view, I was able to explore the tale in relation to my past and present conditions. In my version, it becomes highly autobiographical. The mysteries in Bluebeard are presented in a visible form and the story unravels in a physical domain. Doors that should not be opened reveal secrets. The scene of action is a domestic area, and it is obvious that the home – bluebeard’s castle – is a prison, where the helpless young wife is at the mercy of ominous patriarchal authorities. This domestic area also becomes the backdrop, as problematic issues arise when the young wife leaves her childhood naivety behind, and starts asking questions she’s not supposed to.

I relate to this deeply, as curiosity is what led me to fine arts at the first place. Trying to make sense of things happening around me, while fighting the destructive urges held within. Eventually, I developed a curiosity of the materials, textures and processes which shape and form things. That is why I used raw materials as much as I could. Shaping them directly with my hands, all the processes that connects my mind and body were necessary for the intimacy of this work. All the while, I was imagining a room that beckons the viewer to enter, explore, and begin to understand that it contains war – but also wonder.

Merve Akyel, Vienna 2016

Bluebeard

*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bluebeard*

*“Bluebeard is a wealthy and powerful, yet frighteningly ugly, aristocrat who has been married several times to beautiful women who have all mysteriously vanished. When Bluebeard visits his neighbour, a noblewoman, and asks to marry one of her daughters, the girls are terrified. After hosting a wonderful banquet, he chooses the youngest daughter to be his wife - against her will - and she goes to live with him in his rich and luxurious palace in the countryside, away from her family.*

*Bluebeard announces that he must leave for the country and gives the keys of the château to his wife. She is able to open any door in the house with them, which each contain his riches, except for an underground chamber that he strictly forbids her to enter lest she suffer his wrath. He then goes away and leaves the house and the keys in her hands. She invites her sister, Anne, and her friends and cousins over for a party. However, she is eventually overcome with the desire to see what the forbidden room holds; and she sneaks away from the party and ventures into the room.*

*She immediately discovers the room is filled with blood and the murdered corpses of Bluebeard's former wives hang on hooks from the walls. Horrified, she drops the key in the blood and flees the room. She tries to wash the blood from the key, but the key is magical and the blood cannot be removed. Fearing for her life, she reveals her husband's secret to her visiting sister, and they plan to both flee the next morning, but Bluebeard unexpectedly comes back and finds the bloody key. In a blind rage, he threatens to kill her on the spot, but she asks for one last prayer with her sister Anne. At the last moment, as Bluebeard is about to deliver the fatal blow, the brothers of the wife and her sister Anne arrive and kill Bluebeard. The wife inherits his fortune and castle, and has the dead wives buried. She uses the fortune to have her other siblings married, and eventually remarries herself, to a man she loves, and moves on from her horrible experience with Bluebeard.”*