

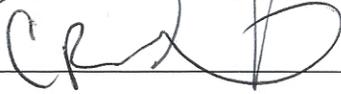
RED HAIRING: THE HISTORY AND MYTH OF RED HAIR

By

Erin Kentch

A Thesis  
Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty  
of  
Corcoran College of Art + Design  
in Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirements for the Degree  
of  
Master of Arts  
Exhibition Design

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“Red Hairing: The History and Myth of Red Hair”

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of Master of Arts at Corcoran College of Art and Design

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This is dedicated to my family for all their love and support, without whom I would not have made it this far.

And to all the redheads in world, your hair color makes you special, so embrace it!

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS/SYMBOLS

Met – The Metropolitan Museum of Art

WWII – World War II

## ABSTRACT

RED HAIRING: THE HISTORY AND MYTH OF RED HAIR

Corcoran College of Art + Design, 2013

Thesis Advisor: Adjunct Faculty, Veronica Jackson

Redheads make up one of the smallest demographics on the planet, yet exist in legends from almost every civilization throughout time. This exhibit explores the history of red hair and its role in the development of stereotyping by asking the audience whether it is by nature or nurture that redheads came upon their particular stereotype.



## TITLE RATIONAL

The exhibition is intended to draw attention to the larger issues of prejudice and labeling by focusing on one small community that has endured stereotyping for millennia. The title has to convey both the topic of red hair and the idea that the issues of stereotyping are much larger and more complex. For this purpose, I have titled the exhibition “Red Hairing: The History and Myth of Red Hair.”

Red herring is a literary term used to describe a detail that is intentionally misleading. Merriam-Webster defines it as “something that distracts attention from the real issue.” Given the definition, it is appropriate to use the term to highlight that labeling and prejudice are used by others to hide their own fear, insecurity, and ignorance.

## MISSION STATEMENT

The exhibition will seek to create an understanding of prejudice by taking a look at red hair and the worldwide fascination surrounding it. As a result, “Red Hairing: The History and Myth of Red Hair” will converse with visitors in a witty and frank manner about the unique role redheads have played throughout history.

Visitors will discover history through the lives of redheads and learn how different cultures have worshipped, persecuted, idealized, and overly sexualized redheads. By using red hair as a case study, the exhibition will subtly address the larger issues of discrimination, prejudice, racism, and sexism that permeate across the globe. Visitors will walk away from their journey having learned what it means to be “red” and hopefully engaged in a global discussion about the larger implications presented in the exhibition.

## TEACHING POINTS

- A. Visitors will learn why redheads have been targeted throughout history and how this paradigm has developed and shifted through time.  
Visitors will also learn about bullying and discrimination in a lighthearted manner as it specifically applies to high school students.
- B. Visitors will learn about the development of the red hair stereotype and how it turned into a myth, a lesson that can be applied to the development of all stereotypes.
- C. Because stereotyping of redheads is based in fiction, the exhibition will highlight perceptions of red hair across the globe and the truths behind the myths.
- D. Visitors will learn how the myth changed throughout history and how the theory of sympathetic magic was the driving force for using red hair to explain different people, cultures and medical maladies.
- E. Visitors will discover the cultural and geographical trends as they move through history. Redhead stereotypes moved and changed when disparate cultures met and exchanged values; over time, the stereotypes were passed and altered when cultures collided and interacted.

## TAKE-AWAYS

- A. Visitors will walk away knowing how a small community can forever be negatively affected by labeling.
  
- B. They will learn that the primary motivations for stereotyping are based in fear, not in fact.
  
- C. Visitors will apply the lessons they learn about red hair to identifying how other stereotypes are formed.
  
- D. Visitors will also gain a basis of knowledge that can be used to address prejudice in a larger context, and through this process, visitors will hopefully start to question human nature and why we manifest our fears into discrimination and prejudice.

## EXHIBITION AUDIENCE

### PRIMARY AUDIENCES:

- Redheads
- Adults ages 18 and up are the focus of the exhibition, most especially in cultures that have the largest exposure to red hair. Special programming will create a larger dialogue that addresses the world population.

### SECONDARY AUDIENCE:

- High school students ages 15 - 18 are in a critical point in their lives where issues of bullying and discrimination are an everyday occurrence. By giving this audience a topic and non-judgmental environment in which to learn about prejudice, the exhibition gives them the chance to reflect on their own questions and to open up a learning dialogue.

The exhibition is meant to be an engaging environment that attracts traditional and non-traditional museum audiences interested in learning about a unique niche in world history. Because of this distinct topic, the exhibition will attract visitors that already have a strong preference for history and culture exhibitions while being fresh enough to attract newer

and younger audiences that are more particular to contemporary exhibitions.

## EXHIBITION LOCATION

The intent of the exhibition is two-fold: to trace the history of the red hair myth as it relates to human consciousness, and to introduce red hair as a focal point for discussing issues of labeling and prejudice. Redheads exist primarily in the Western hemisphere, and for this reason I have chosen to address Western cultures and the redheads within.

Even though redheads exist primarily in western cultures it is a global trait, and it is important to create a global dialogue if any change to the stereotype is to be made. To that end, the exhibition will be at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Met) in New York City. New York City is an international hub for travel, arts, and culture, which makes it the perfect staging area for global community interaction.

The Met is one of the most well-known and well-attended museums in the world with attendance hitting 6.28 million visitors in the 2012 fiscal year.<sup>1</sup>

With its attendance, reputation, and location within the city, the Met is the

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<sup>1</sup> Metropolitan Museum of Art, Press Room. "Metropolitan Museum Announces 6.28 Million Attendance. July 16, 2012

perfect stage to discuss issues of prejudice. It is known for its extensive collection of art and artifacts from around the world, ranging from ancient cultures to modern works. The exhibition will utilize this global collection to create a framework for the story it will tell and allow visitors to extend their knowledge of the cultures discussed within.

In the heart of Manhattan, the Met sits on the edge of Central Park and is located next to other popular destinations. It has two subway stations within a ten-minute walk and is along several bus routes.

The main obstacle to using the Met as the site is the fact that it is a huge museum. Wayfinding in this museum can be problematic if not addressed early and carefully. For this reason I have chosen Gallery 199, which is the closest gallery to the main entrance and easiest to navigate to. It only takes two turns to get to the gallery, so it will be easy to find. The gallery is adjacent to the Africa and Oceania galleries, the European Sculpture and Decorative Arts galleries, and the Greek and Roman Art galleries, which will queue visitors to the historical aspect of the exhibition. The gallery, like the rest of the museum, has very tall ceilings and large gallery spaces that allow for a variety of design opportunities.

## MISSION STATEMENT - THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART:

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded on April 13, 1870 "to be located in the City of New York, for the purpose of establishing and maintaining in said city a Museum and library of art, of encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts, and the application of arts to manufacture and practical life, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, of furnishing popular instruction."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Charter of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, State of New York, Laws of 1870, Chapter 197, passed April 13, 1870 and amended L.1898, ch. 34; L. 1908, ch. 219.

## EXHIBITION RESOURCES

Throughout history, red hair has been portrayed in many different ways, most of which are not very flattering. I want to use imagery and artifacts that illustrate this point and address the cultural prejudice throughout time, and I plan to do so using pieces from historical and contemporary material culture. Using red hair as a way of illustrating evil, mischief, and desire is not just a literary or artistic tool; it is also a form of prejudice. To fully round out the story I will also use artifacts to illustrate the truth about red hair and redheaded cultures. Collateral will include ancient artifacts, mummies, paintings, sculpture, original works of literature, video, and news clippings. These objects will exist in different forms such as multimedia, audio, and interactives.

## INTERACTIVES:

### “I LOVE LUCY: RELOADED”

#### Audience:

High school students, ages 15-18

Adults, ages 18+

#### Description:

I Love Lucy is one of the most iconic television shows in American history. Lucille Ball was not only influential in the way women were perceived in the entertainment business, but she also helped change the perception of the stereotypical redhead.

Unknown to most, I Love Lucy has an unaired episode. The original reel will be displayed in pedestal, set-up to look like it is being projected on an adjacent wall. The actual projection will be coming from a hidden projector in the ceiling. Visitors will get the opportunity to re-live a compilation of one of America's favorite TV shows. Displayed next to the original footage will be new content from contemporary western culture that can be directly linked to the work of Lucille Ball and I Love Lucy. At the same time they will be asked to consider the role Lucille Ball played in the overall perception of redheads, and whether that change in perception was for better or worse. Given the content, this artifact and video will be placed in

the “Pop Culture” section of the exhibition along with other contemporary stories that both audiences can relate to.

### “MYTH BECOMES REALITY”

Audience:

High school students, ages 15-18

Adults, ages 18+

Description:

“Myth Becomes Reality” is a full multi-media experience that will be its own room within the exhibition. The content included will be: images of headlines in the news and images of victims of discrimination against redheads, verbal representations of related news stories, interviews (talking heads) with victims of hate crimes and key players in the discussion such as the creators of South Park. Examples of represented stories are “Kick a Ginger Day” and the resulting hate crimes against grade school through high school students, the genocide of albinos in Africa, sperm banks rejection of donations from redheads, and other stories illustrating the results of this form of discrimination. All of these stories will be layered with sound bites and words that flash across the screen in direct juxtaposition with the stereotypes that bring about the discrimination. For example, the story of the Scottish judge handing down a harsher sentence

than the law allows to a red haired man, will be presented at the same time as the stereotype that red haired men are morally degenerative.

In this instance the environment will be oppressive to reflect the content. The ceiling will be lower than the surrounding exhibition, and the walls will be concrete to reflect the unforgiving content. The majority of the vertical surfaces will be tiled video screens that create one larger surface to run the video and images. The screens are meant to act as one with the potential to use the screens to separate content if needed.

The entire environment is meant to be dark and foreboding while also being completely overwhelming to the senses. The audience is not meant to feel comfortable in the space, which directly correlates to the fact that discrimination should not be comfortable for those who discriminate and is definitely not comfortable for those who are discriminated against.

Some may question the appropriateness of the content and the use of violent imagery in an exhibition that is meant for an audience as young as 15, but this form of submersion is great for illustrating the truth about discrimination and its real life consequences; especially as it relates to high school bullying.

## “HALL OF MIRRORS”

Audience:

All visitors

Description:

“Hall of Mirrors” engages audiences in two ways, it asks audiences to reconsider their self-identity, and ask if their personality would change in the event of their physical appearance changing. In this instance, the physical change would be their hair color. Audiences will also watch as others grapple with self-identity in an effort to question the notion of labeling.

The interactive uses two rooms. In room one, the audience looks at themselves in a mirror, where a digitally altered projection is displaying their image with red hair, instead of their original hair color. In room two, the audience can watch a projected recording of the audience in room one as they grapple with their image.

## “RED ON THE HEAD”

Audience:

High school students, ages 15-18

Adults, ages 18+

Description:

“Red on the Head” is an interactive that asks the audience to distinguish between famous figures that did and did not have red hair. Iconic figures like Rita Hayworth, Thor, Marilyn Monroe, and Malcolm X will be presented for consideration. Two questions will be asked: “Who is a natural redhead?” and “How does your perception of them change?”

Physical characteristics and identity are very closely linked. By asking the audience to reconsider their ideas about famous figures, the interactive will hopefully get them to start thinking about self-identity as it is linked to their own physical appearance. Do people consider themselves to be different once their physical appearance has changed? This concept can extend from hair color all the way to physical disfigurement and skin color change (Michael Jackson). Because the topic introduces ideas of self-identity, it is important for the interactive to be presented at the end of the exhibition. Visitors need to have a base of content and question building to give them enough context to start considering their own identity.

“Red on the Head” will function as a computer interactive. The audience will be presented with a cast of “characters” to choose from. Each “character” or icon will be shown in black and white along-side biographical content that can be extended or kept short. At the bottom of the image there is a slide bar that allows the user to reveal the full color image of the characters original hair color. Audiences will get to see how famous people have answered the question of self-identity, and why. They will also learn why the physical characteristics of fictional characters were changed for a western audience.

#### “SEEING RED”

Audience:

High school students, ages 15-18

Description:

“Seeing Red” is a mobile app that connects to an open Instagram community board. The purpose of the app is to engage the audience in an active search for representations of redheads in art, media, and culture. Visitors will be made aware of the app on the exhibition’s website, and at the end of the exhibition. The platform, Instagram, is a program that most, if not all, young people are aware of and users of.

Exposing the audience in context with the exhibition and The Metropolitan Museum of Art will hopefully create a greater curiosity that prompts young visitors to continue to explore the MET's collections and to think about the exhibition's themes long after they leave the museum. By looking at other representations of redheads, and in greater quantity, visitors can start to draw conclusions about how redheads are viewed culturally, both nationally and internationally. "Seeing Red" essentially acts as a global scavenger hunt for not only the exhibition's audience, but the online audience that can not visit the museum. Users will be encouraged to photograph all forms of visual representation and art, from fine arts to media.

#### "RED HAIRING ONLINE"

Audience:

All audiences, both national and international

Description:

The intention of creating a completely separate online exhibition allows the conversation of red hair, and more specifically stereotyping, to become global. Stereotyping exists in all parts of globe, but to truly combat it and other forms of discrimination we, as a global community, must open up a conversation in an effort to create greater understanding.

## CHAPTER 1

It seems that everyone has an opinion of redheads, whether good or bad. What is it about redheads that so fascinate the world? Many have asked this question on behalf of other groups, and in the end, it simply comes down to prejudice and stereotyping. Red hair is just one chapter in the long history of discrimination that no matter how different each misrepresented group is, the answer to “why” is still the same. Throughout history, humans have used stereotyping as a mechanism for dealing with feelings of fear, awe, and that which we don’t understand. Naturally, minority groups are subject to prejudice more often than others because they represent the “other” or “outsider.” Given that redheads make up only 2 percent of the world population, it is no surprise that they have been worshipped, persecuted, idealized, and sexualized by different “in groups” in almost every period of history. I seek to understand where these ideas started, how they changed, and how they affect redheads of our time.

Prejudice is defined as “having to do with the inflexible and irrational

attitudes and opinions held by members of one group about another.”<sup>3</sup>

Prejudice against redheads has been occurring for millennia, starting as early as Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia and continuing through to today. As one of the oldest minorities on the planet, redheads have arguably survived the harshest judgment that humanity has dealt out. Yet this story remains one of the lesser known. Perceptions of redheads change depending on the culture and alter through time in accordance with globalization and developments in science and medicine. What we do know is that every culture across the globe has beliefs about the color red and is afflicted with the human condition of discrimination.

In the beginning, the red hair myth could be attributed to man’s need to explain the unknown. In a time without science, how do you explain severe illness, acts of nature, and strange maladies? Before the development of science and standard medicine, there were two common ways to explain the unexplainable: religion and pseudoscience. All early cultures had religion, whether they be polytheistic (the belief in many gods) or monotheistic (the belief in one god.) Gods were used to explain why people got sick, committed crime, or why Mother Nature suddenly became violent. In other cases, the gods themselves had red hair. Those gods with red hair

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<sup>3</sup> “Prejudice and Discrimination,” last modified November 30, 2012, [http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study\\_guide/topicArticleId-26957,articleId-26886.html](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/topicArticleId-26957,articleId-26886.html).

were often the unkind and vindictive gods, such as ancient Egypt's Seth, who was associated with storms, rage, and evil. This may, of course, have something to do with his treatment of his brother Osiris, whom he dismembered.

For those "gingers" that did not commit murder, dealing with the blame of the unexplainable was a daily occurrence. Sympathetic magic and physiognomy were two forms of pseudoscience prevalent before established medicine. Sympathetic magic is "based on the assumption that a person or thing can be supernaturally affected through its name or an object representing it."<sup>4</sup> For Early Christians, this meant that a person with red hair was or had been possessed by the Devil because the Devil himself was red and came from the "fires of hell." During Aristotle's time, up into the 17th century, physiognomics was one of the popular ruling theories. Physiognomics "is the study of the systematic correspondence of psychological characteristics to facial features or body structure" and "was regarded by those who cultivated it both as a mode of discriminating character by the outward appearance and as a method of divination from form and feature."<sup>5</sup> Aristotle wrote, "He whose hair is of reddish complexion, is for the most part, if not always, proud, deceitful, detracting,

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<sup>4</sup> *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*

<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "physiognomy," accessed November 30, 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/458823/physiognomy>.

venerous, and full of envy.”<sup>6</sup> By Aristotle’s logic red heads share the same hair color as the fox, which means they both share the same personality traits. At no point does Aristotle consider that there are many animals that have red hair, fur, or feathers, so when did he decide upon using the fox as the benchmark for a redhead’s personality?

At what point in history did humans decide that red was the color of evil? Perhaps it was the mere scarcity of the color that helped create its meaning, or perhaps it was the association of red and its biological effect on the body that was the foundation of its symbolism. Red “carried references to blood and fire, which in themselves can be, respectively, life-giving or shed in violence, warming, illuminating, or used to engulf a heretic.”<sup>7</sup> Biologically speaking, red “enhances the viewer’s metabolism and increases both heart rate and respiration,”<sup>8</sup> creating a very physical response. We see this everyday in the use of stop signs, coloring of fast food chains, and the popularity of red lipstick. For whatever reason, red has become synonymous with death, power, war, lust, and love; leaving viewers of the color in a more heightened state than before they gazed upon it.

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<sup>6</sup> “Of the Judgment of Physiognomy,” accessed November 30, 2012, <http://www.exclassics.com/arist/arist63.htm>

<sup>7</sup> Marion Roach, *The Roots of Desire: the Myth, Meaning, and Sexual Power of Red Hair*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005) 12.

<sup>8</sup> Roach, *The Roots of Desire*, 12.

The rarity of red hair has led to a search for its origins. Jonathan Rees, the scientist who discovered the gene, speculates that the “red-haired variants of the MC1R gene probably arose about 20-40,000 years ago.”<sup>9</sup> The widely held belief that the gene is native to the Celts is at this time unproven, but what is certain is that with “a few rare exceptions aside - all red heads are MC1R variants that derive from European populations; the prevalence of these alleles is highest in Celtic countries.”<sup>10</sup> Another interesting theory is the search for red hair origins among the Iranic regions. This is the region directly above and surrounding the Black Sea. This includes areas of the Middle East, Russia, Thrace, and the Ukraine. Thracians specifically were documented by the ancient Greeks as having an abundance of red hair within the population, and it is believed that it is interactions with the Thracians that brought red hair to the Celts.

The gene is MC1R. It is responsible for the color of a person’s hair, skin and eyes. One gene is responsible for determining if you are “in” or “out.” “Common variations in the MC1R gene are associated with normal differences in skin and hair color. Certain genetic variations are most common in people with red hair, fair skin, freckles, and an increased

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<sup>9</sup> Jonathan L. Rees, Wellcome Trust, *The Roots of Red Hair*, February 4, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Rees, *The Roots of Red Hair*.

sensitivity to sun exposure.”<sup>11</sup> In layman terms, red hair is caused by a mutation (super powers not included.)

What we can learn here, is red hair is a genetic trait, just like any other. It seems strange that discrimination starts with traits that we cannot choose. Skin color, facial structure, and sexual orientation are all well-known examples of discrimination. What they and red hair all have in common is the undeniable fact that we are born with these traits, and too a certain extent cannot change them. This all goes back to the idea of identifying the “other”. What seems to get lost is the idea that discrimination against redheads is less offensive than the same treatment toward skin color or sexual orientation. Maybe the fact that redheads are one of the rarest minorities on the planet is what makes them universally “other.”

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<sup>11</sup> “Genetics Home Reference, MC1R.” published November 26, 2012, <http://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/gene/MC1R>

## CHAPTER 2

The beginning of the red hair myth started in ancient times, and progressed through history and across the globe. The primary driving force was the creation of morality tales. These were used as a way of identifying evil as a part of anti-Semitic leanings. The blame placed on the Jewish community for Christ's death, and the acts of Judas Iscariot catapulted redhead stereotyping into modern times, and was perpetrated by Early Christianity. There are three main characters in history that stand at the center of modern perceptions of redheads.

The story of the redheaded male begins in ancient Egypt. His name was Seth, and he was the god of storms, warfare, and disorder. He "embodied the necessary and creative element of violence and disorder within the ordered world."<sup>12</sup> As previously stated, Seth had a bad reputation for causing trouble. However, it is his image that contributed the most to his reputation. He is a composite of multiple animals featuring pointed ears, long snout, and red eyes and hair. This is an image that has "contributed

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<sup>12</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, s. v. "Seth," accessed December 03, 2012, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/536211/Seth>.

to the model for Christianity's idea of the devil."<sup>13</sup>

Several pharaohs have associated themselves with Seth, but the most famous was Seti I. Like his father before him, Seti placed great importance on Seth's role in religious beliefs. He spent most of his early reign in conflict with many other cultures and was probably greatly served by claiming the god of violence as his namesake. It is not clear at what point Seth was given red hair, and most depictions of him have him wearing a headdress. What we can infer, however, is that by this time in history there is already a connection between the color red and violence, especially in context with males.

The traceable origins of the redheaded female stereotype begin in ancient Sumer, as a part of Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq). The first well-known redhead was a woman named Lilith. Depending on your religious beliefs, she was either a myth or the first woman created by God. She first appears in ancient Sumerian legend around 1800 BCE as a she-demon. According to Sumerian telling, Lilith was a winged demon who was famous for seducing unwilling men and for murdering children. This is not a very good start to redhead's relationship with man. Traditionally, households would bury clay bowls, depicting her, under their doorframes to prevent her

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<sup>13</sup> Marion Roach, *The Roots of Desire: the Myth, Meaning, and Sexual Power of Red Hair*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005) 51.

entrance into the home. She would later become immortalized in the epic *Gilgamesh and the Huluppu Tree*, a text that stood as a starting point for many stories that reside in the bible. Later, she appears in Jewish (Talmudic) text as the first wife of Adam, and also makes a brief appearance in the Christian Bible in the same role. In this version, Lilith was created equal to Adam and refused to lay beneath him because she was equal to him. According to the story, she then flies off to the Red Sea. At some point Lilith is removed from the Bible, but her visage continues throughout Christian imagery in many monumental works including the Sistine Chapel. Her story is long, and in most instances not very flattering to the red haired female. “No she-demon has ever achieved as fantastic a career as Lilith who started out from the lowliest of origins, was a failure as Adam’s intended wife, became the paramour of lascivious spirits, rose to be the bride of Samael the demon King, ruled as Queen of Zemargad and Sheba, and finally ended up as the consort of God himself.”<sup>14</sup>

The stories of Lilith and Set became the stepping-stones for the one story that truly catapulted the red haired myth into the human consciousness. It is well known that one cannot interact with a culture without forever changing it, and in turn being changed by it. This is especially true for Christianity, as exemplified by the symbol of the Christmas tree, which was

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<sup>14</sup> Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990) 207.

adopted from the Pagans. Through cultural diffusion Early Christians have pre-formed ideas of redheads, and as such, becomes an identifier for one of the most notorious figures in human history. Judas Iscariot is arguably one of the most well-known symbols for corruption that the world has ever seen. Every story needs a bad guy, and in the story of Christ, that man is Judas. It is a story as old as time; a corrupt man betrays his friend for money. In this instance, Judas betrayed Christ to his enemies for 30 pieces of silver, which brought about the death of Jesus Christ. Like most of history religions clashed, and for the story of Christ it was Christianity and Judaism that were disputing. What we are left with is the death of Christ at the hands of the Jewish, and the one man to blame is Judas. Forever more, Judas will reign as the universal symbol for evil and corruption. And his depiction as a redhead will make the color red forever synonymous with evil.

Christianity is the largest religion in the world. As such its influence reaches far and wide. Throughout the rest of Christianity, in text and art, red hair serves as an identifier for corruption, evil, and the devil. The original intent of red hair labeling was to make the “Jew” easily identifiable as corrupt to the world, but the unforeseen consequence were the large scale persecution of redheads across the globe.

## CHAPTER 3

Rome was arguably the greatest empire to inhabit the earth, just ask a Roman. Their influence was felt from Egypt and the Middle East, all the way to the north of England. Where ever the Romans went they brought with them their history, government, and religion; and in return they absorbed many beliefs from the cultures they conquered. At its height the Roman Empire occupied most of Western Europe, which might go a long way to explaining why notions of redheads have reached as far as they have.

Redheads had very specific roles in Ancient Rome and Greece. They were considered to be prized slaves (although slaves none the less), and were used as oracles in religious rites. Although redheads had a pre-existing place in these societies, the perception surrounding them evolved as the Romans invaded other territories. The Romans were famous for their continuous campaigns into foreign territories, and it is during these campaigns that they were introduced to two unyielding female redheads. Two of the most well known Roman invasions were the conquering of Egypt, and Celts. Rome had relations with Egypt prior to their finally overtaking

the empire, but it was the tragic romance between Cleopatra and Mark Antony that finally brought the Egyptian empire fully into Roman hands in 30 BCE. During her lifetime Cleopatra was well known throughout the world for the feud between her and her brother, and for her continued strategizing to obtain sole rule of Egypt. The world saw a shrewd and determined woman in Cleopatra, and a fierce personality that rivaled that of Roman rulers of the time. Her seduction and romance of both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony added to the allure of her story, and made her one of the most famous female rulers in the world. There is still debate over Cleopatra's origins. Many believe she was of Grecian descent, but others have postulated that she came from Africa. What we do know is Cleopatra is often described as a red head, having dyed her hair using henna. Even though she was not a born redhead, her personality trait was often attributed to her hair color and helped to shape the way Romans viewed redheads.

Roughly 700 years later while invading Britain, the Romans came up against a small, unassuming Celtic tribe called the Iceni. In an effort to spare his tribe from warfare, the king went to the Romans to negotiate becoming a territory of Rome. Upon the king's death, relations between the Iceni and the Romans went south. The king left his kingdom to his two daughters and the Roman Emperor Nero. According to Roman law, women

were not allowed to rule and the Emperor took the king's wealth and made an example of the royal family by flogging his queen, Boudicca, and publicly raping his two daughters. It is Queen Boudicca who is the hero of this story. In her outrage, she gathered the Celtic masses and led a revolt against the Romans, in what is described as a violent and barbaric campaign to regain freedom. She was written as one of the most heroic and tragic figures of the British fight against Roman invasion, refusing to give in to tyranny, and was described as "huge of frame, terrifying of aspect, and with a harsh voice"<sup>15</sup> and seen riding into battle with "a great mass of bright red hair."<sup>16</sup> The Celts ultimately lost the battle, but her image and legend remain as an example of the human spirit in the face of tyranny. Later, her image is used as the basis for the banshee, an Irish and Scottish folktale of a redheaded fairy woman screaming into the night, foretelling death to come. However, in Rome it was her visage that contributed to the image of defiance and cruelty, and perpetrated the myth of the red-haired female.

Rome took the stories of their redhead encounters, and like other societies, incorporated them into legends and fables. Red hair became the mark of slaves in Roman plays and were often seen as untrustworthy. Interestingly

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<sup>15</sup> Dudley, D. R. and G. Webster. *The Rebellion of Boudicca* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1962) 54.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

enough, among the Romans, redheaded slaves were considered prized possessions and sold for more money than other slaves, and even though they had a largely negative association, Emperor Nero was in fact a redhead. However, he was also the man who famously fed Christians to lions, which I'm sure did nothing to help redhead relations with either Romans or Christians. I think I can safely say this may be one of the reasons Christians became very opinionated against redheads.

For Christians, the use of red hair as a mark for evil and corruption continued after the time of Judas, and became even more prevalent at the height of the religion. Red hair was now a standard symbol, with many texts and art works commissioned by the Roman Catholic church continuing to use it. The second best example used in the Bible (the first being Judas) is the story of Cain and Abel. Cain being jealous and angry with his brother Abel, ends up murdering him. Cain, of course, had red hair. From here on out, red hair is known as either the "mark of Judas" or the "mark of Cain."

One of the most famous works commissioned by the Catholic Church is the Sistine Chapel. Painted by Michelangelo, it depicts the life of Christ and related stories from the Bible. "The Fall of Man" tells the story of Adam and Eve's fall from grace, and the moment they ate from the tree of

knowledge of good and evil. What most people do not notice is the transition of Eve from innocent to guilty. She starts her life on Earth as a brunette, but after her fall she becomes a redhead. Even today, the Roman Catholic Church remains one of the largest organizations to ever commission art. In all this time, what did redheaded Christians think of being depicted by their own church as corrupt or evil? The damage done to the redheaded population by the Catholic Church alone can never be measured. Because of the popularity of the churches art works, and the breadth of influence it had over the western world, it can arguably be seen as one of the largest contributors to the red hair myth.

Catholicism, like the Romans, took over Western Europe and later most of Western cultures. Before the Church of England, Catholicism was the primary religion in England, and even though England eventually broke away and created their own church, their teachings are still largely based upon it. The tenets of Christianity are very similar throughout, so when the Western world went through times of conflict, the redhead was again brought forth as a scapegoat.

In England many of the population were red haired, as well as an astonishing number of the monarchy. The trait was seen on Henry VII, Queen Elizabeth I, and many more. It can be argued that the marriages of

British royals to foreign royalty are one of the main reasons that the trait traveled to other Western countries such as France. One would think that the prevalence of the trait within the royal line would ensure that redheads were treated better, but that was not the case. Red hair was still considered more a mark of Judaism, so when the Jews were expelled from the country it became an easy way to “spot” and to “depict” anyone who was Jewish.

An interesting by-line to this story is Shakespeare. Queen Elizabeth and Shakespeare lived during the same time, and at this point in history, Jews had been removed from England for over 250 years. Neither Queen Elizabeth nor Shakespeare had actually seen a Jew (to their knowledge), and yet red hair still remained a distinguishing trait. Shakespeare was also a very influential figure in England, and often used red wigs in his plays to depict Jews. His most famous portrayal is that of Shylock, the moneylender, in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock, being Jewish, is represented as a corrupt businessman, and demands a pound of flesh in return for an unpaid loan. One can begin to see a similarity between this depiction, and the stereotype that Jews are greedy. Because of his popularity, the masses were often exposed to negative depictions of both Jews and redheads, adding further belief in their corruption. Toward the end of Shakespeare’s life the focus was less on Jews as scapegoats, and

blame began to shift to another. In *Macbeth*, two major shifts happened. The role of the evildoer continues on as a redhead, but they changed to both a witch, and a woman. This is when the red headed woman starts to become less of a demon such as Lilith, and came into her own as a sexual lure and corrupter of man. Mary Magdalene was cast in the same light before Christ redeemed her. For women, this perpetration of is not new, but a resurgence of an old idea, and in the case of the Inquisition things do not turn out well for them.

The Inquisition was an institution established by the Roman Catholic papacy to combat heresy. The most famous of these was the Spanish Inquisition, enacted by the Catholic Church and the King and Queen of Spain. For the Spanish, the focus was on the Jewish and Muslim population, either converting or expelling those considered heretics. What made the Spanish Inquisition so infamous was the treatment given to those considered non-Christian. Torture was the preferred method of gaining confessions from the less desirable, and the most famous and ruthless inquisitor was Tomás de Torquemada, the first inquisitor general. During this time Spain was in a tailspin. No one could be trusted, prejudice ran free, and suspicion fell on everyone. For the most part the King and Queen did not believe in witchcraft, thinking it was a feminine hysterical reaction to myth, however Jews were still very much under attack. Given the very

predominant association with redheads to Judaism, this left redheads in a very precarious position and brought them first and foremost to the attention of the inquisitors.

Toward the end of the Inquisition a very similar hysteria started taking place in America. The Salem Witch Trials took place from 1692 to 1693. For a comparatively short incident it caused a lot of damage. Witchcraft was still a hot topic in Europe during the Inquisition, and the hysteria carried over onto American soil. The idea of sympathetic magic plays a big role during the trials. The incident started when the a Reverend's two daughters started having "fits" characterized by "scream(ing), threw things, uttered peculiar sounds and contorted themselves into strange positions, and a local doctor blamed the supernatural"<sup>17</sup> Today this could all be explained by a medical condition, but in the 1600's there were no answers to many common medical conditions. The girls, fearing what would happen to them, accused three women of witchcraft. At the time the fear was that witches could, and would, infect the innocent with evil. Fear and accusations ran rampant just like during the Inquisition, which culminated in roughly 200 people being accused of witchcraft.

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<sup>17</sup> Jess Blumberg, *A Brief History of the Salem Witch Trials*, Written October 24, 2007, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/brief-salem.html#ixzz2EOKhVXh3>

When Martha Corey, a well-respected member of the church was accused, the community began to fear that even the best of people could be harboring the devil, and no one would know. It was widely believed that you could not be touched by evil without having been forever marked by it. Town's people started looking for signs that a person was "infected". Strange birthmarks, bruises, and red hair all became identifiers for those who were witches. At the end of the trials 20 people had been executed, 19 were hanged, and 1 was crushed to death. The widely circulated hysteria, lack of medical advancement, and more importantly, ingrained stereotypes of "others" were the driving forces behind one of the darkest times in human history.

## CHAPTER 4

“With such a background in religion, myth, and legend, hair has inevitably become involved in a mass of folk superstitions. Perhaps because of the association of red hair with the devil, and with Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus, redheads have for centuries had the reputation of being deceitful and sometimes of being hot-tempered as well.”<sup>18</sup> This mindset however, does not extend to all corners of the earth. Around the world red hair has been imbedded in myth, with sometimes very different stereotypes. In Germanic legend red hair is personified in Thor, the god of thunder. In American pop culture Thor is depicted as a blonde, but in the region of his origins he will always be “red.” Thor is the god of thunder and uses his powers in acts of anger and punishment. Like most other gods, he is depicted with a long beard that is the source of his power. Today when it storms you can still here locals of Scandinavia exclaiming it as the work of “red-haired thunder.” While this seems to be similar to western perceptions of red-haired males, the story starts to differ in parts of the Far East and South America.

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<sup>18</sup> Wendy Cooper, *Hair: Sex Society Symbolism* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971) 206.

For Japan the story differs significantly. The legend of the Gaki was created to explain malnutrition and decomposition. When those with black hair become severely malnourished their hair starts to turn red. To explain this phenomenon they created the Gaki, a type of undead that was created when a person died (if having lived a dishonorable life.) They became the hungry dead, moving around feeding on the living. Their hunger drove them mad, making them fearsome, and without a soul. For many, this should sound familiar, for it is also the same tale as vampirism. In the legend, and more specifically in the Gaki Scrolls, the demons are depicted with malformed bodies and bright red hair. To stave off the hungry ghosts, the Japanese hold a festival to “feed” them in an effort to protect themselves. The festival still exists today. Fair warning, redheads who travel to Japan, be ready to receive strange looks.

In other cultures redheads are revered as godly. For the Indian, reverence of red hair is buried in the Hindu worship of the sun god. His name is Surya, and he represents (among many things) soul, courage and kingship. “Ancient hymns of the Hindu sacred book, the *Rig-Veda*, described the solar god as ‘the brilliant sun with the flaming hair.’”<sup>19</sup> The sun god is still worshipped in contemporary Hinduism, which should make it no surprise that redheads are seen as godly. To honor their gods, the local population

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 185.

will dye their hair red in the same way Cleopatra did. When traveling today, redheads can expect to get a warm welcome in Hindu based cultures, but expect to have your hair touched a lot.

Across the world in South America, the Inca had a legendary god called Kon-Tiki Viracochas. Viracochas was the god of creation, and brought about the earth and man. His image is often associated with the redheaded Nazca mummies, and written as white with a long beard. “The red haired peoples appear to be a group of peoples often given preferential burial spots with many grave goods and sacred wrappings.”<sup>20</sup> If the Incas venerated the red haired mummies, then it would go a long way to explaining why they were, at first, so open with the Spanish when they came to conquer the new world. In this case, the reaction to “other” was that of awe. In the end, it did not serve the Incas well to be so open with the Spanish given the way it ended up. But even today, redheads are treated with awe in South America, particularly in areas of Peru where the Inca existed.

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<sup>20</sup> Alternative Archeology, *Viracochas of the Inca*, accessed December 7, 2012, <http://alternativearchaeology.jigsy.com/viracochas-of-the-inca>.

## CHAPTER 5

The transformation of red hair from the time of the Inquisition to now has been both drastic, and disturbingly similar. World history will continue to have its ups and downs, but with discoveries in science and medicine, most of the world has managed to move on from overzealous persecution of what is considered “other.” There are still major stereotypes that exist today. When moving into the mid 1900’s we start to see a shift in reaction to red hair. The stereotypes about redheads remain unfortunately the same, but the way in which people react becomes more “tolerant.” Ideas have already been formed and embedded in the human experience, but what is considered an acceptable response has changed. This makes the reaction change from stoning and expulsion, into one of “well, what did you expect.” In fact, “what did you expect” becomes a standard response for most stereotypes. In many cases, it can be argued that “groups” of people are forced to behave certain ways because society gives them no other choice. It is the same principle discussed in the book *Utopia*. If you give someone no resources or education you are setting them up to rely upon thieving to gain resources, with no opportunity to become employed because you gave them no skills. Are we as a society, setting certain groups up to fail simply

because we pigeon-hole them into one stereotype and function in society?

When looking at redheads in the modern world there is a trend that starts to surface, in which there is a definite distinction between redheaded males and females. The women in this tale continue in the time-honored tradition of Lilith. Being cast as the sex symbol and corruptor of man. In all forms of art (be it fine art, film, or print) the redhead only expands upon the stereotype of her foremothers. One of the most popular females in the mid 1900's was Rita Hayworth. She was cast as the quintessential sex symbol in films between the 1930's and 1940's. Her most famous role was playing the title character in "Gilda" as the iconic femme fatale. Her long red hair, curvaceous figure, and wardrobe made her one of the most popular actresses among men. *Life* magazine writer Winthrop Sargeant dubbed her "The Great American Love Goddess" for both her roles in film, and because of her role as the unofficial pin-up girl for American troops serving in WWII. Indeed she personified redheads not just in her actions, but in her words in the movie *Gilda*, she stated the ground rules for being a redhead: "If I'd been a ranch", she said "they would have named me Bar Nothing."

Ten years later, one woman started to change the role redheads played in pop culture. Lucille Ball is arguably one of the most widely recognized

redheads. Her show *I Love Lucy* created a new way of viewing redheads. She did not play to the typical stereotype, but instead charted a new course for redheads as the comic relief. Lucy is typified as the quirky, uncoordinated, troublesome, but still lovable housewife. It is hard to say whether what she did for redheads was good or bad. She broke the mold in defining how the public could see a redhead, but in doing so; cast them into yet another stereotype that they would have to fight against.

Whether you believe Lucille Ball was a force for good or bad in this tale, you can not deny that she paved the way for the future of women in film. Because of her, many women (not just redheads) could pursue a wider range of roles in the comedic genre. Among the comedy greats that followed her were Carol Burnett (another very famous redhead) and Gilda Radner (sadly, not a redhead). Although redheads had a slight reprieve from over-sexualization, it did not last long, and the pendulum swung back toward the side of sex. In fine art works by Edvard Munch and Lichtenstein, we can still see the depiction of red haired sexuality, and we even see it start to become immortalized in cartoon characters such as Jessica Rabbit and The Little Mermaid.

The redheaded men of the world have not fared as well as the women. Given that Judas is largely credited with the hair color, one can understand

why it is that men draw the short straw in the stereotype department. Men for the most part are considered corrupt and mischievous. It is fair to say that things have gotten easier for men since the Inquisition days, but just like with women, the men still have prejudice to overcome every day. Today, some of the more popular redheads are Conan O'Brien, who provides the comic relief, Carrot Top, who provides the creep factor, and Prince Harry, who gives us the sex appeal. The majority of redheaded males do not fall into the sex appeal category, and are often seen as the least attractive among men. Most fall into the Conan and Carrot Top categories. The *South Park* episode, *Ginger Kids*, did nothing to help this prejudice. In fact, it is often said to have made it worse. Soon after the episode came out, an Internet group (not connected to the creators of *South Park*) established *Kick A Ginger Day*. This resulted in the assaults and bullying of many redheaded children, mostly within a school environment. Many blamed *South Park* creators for what happened, but at what point do we look to parents to teach their children that any form of prejudice is wrong?

## CHAPTER 6

We as a species cannot escape prejudice. It is ingrained in the way we tell stories and identify the unidentifiable. In a way, stereotyping gives us comfort and allows us to fill in the gaps of our own ignorance. This however, does not mean that stereotyping is right. What we have done is given ourselves an excuse not to learn more about the world and other cultures, and not given “others” the chance to express who they really are. The worst part of our stereotyping is its transformation into discrimination. Today every culture discriminates. Through bullying, crime, and ostracizing we see the effect stereotypes have on the “other.” For redheads we see the effect on children who get bullied over their hair color, and Africans who are singled out for genocide because of their genetic traits that make them pale and red haired. Most surprising, is hearing about prejudice within the country that accounts for the most redheads world wide, when a Scottish judge gave a man a harsher sentence because of his red hair.

## CHAPTER 7

What we learn is that discrimination is everywhere. While the story of redheads is longer, and has a global story, it is no less the same story as any other form of prejudice. As we grow up we play with self-identify as we play with identifying others. Do redheads see themselves the same way non-reds see them? I would argue toward the negative, that redheads see themselves as unique as any other person sees themselves, and not defined by preset qualities. However, there is something to be said when we discuss self-identity, about the role hair color can play. There are those who chose to dye their hair red in an effort to feel freer. The question is do you see yourself differently if you have different features, or do you remain the same person you always were?

## CHAPTER 8

With there historically being a small number of redheads (which is even smaller now), and having a less than flattering perception globally, the question remains, how have redheads survived all this time? “Perhaps the most flattering way of explaining the survival of the gene is ‘sexual selection theory’. This states that certain traits with no obvious advantage survive simply because they’re considered attractive, and that their owners are more likely to reproduce...In other words, gingers have survived because everyone wants to shag them.”<sup>21</sup> This, in and of itself, is not the most flattering assessment of the situation. But perhaps it goes a long way of explaining not only the nature of their survival, but also the nature of prejudice. We either fear that which is rare, or seek to possess it. In the case of redheads both are true, but it seems so ingrained in the human condition, that we have yet to determine whether or not it ranks as wrong as other forms of stereotyping and prejudice. But hopefully, we can continue to grow and find a way forward that does not include prejudice.

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<sup>21</sup> Tim Collins, *The Ginger Survival Guide* (London: Michael O’Mara Books Limited, 2006), 16-17.

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

### LOOK AND FEEL

The story of red hair is full of adventure, strife, humor, and perseverance. The design will reflect these points in the story by visually flowing, creating moments of light and dark to visually cue the audience to points of merriment and gravity. Hair by its very nature is a textural experience. To reflect this the exhibition will use texture and layering as a design element. To give the collateral the punch it needs, I will use ivory colors, natural materials, and copper as a contrast. I will use layers of horizontal wood and clay, and curved walls to create movement that alludes to hair textures. To accentuate the curve, the exhibition will use straight, vertical lines as a counter point and also give the visitors eyes a place to rest.

### ENTRANCE

I want the entrance to envelope the visitors and create a feeling of transition and discovery. This will be achieved by using curving wood and copper walls in the entrance, creating movement into the exhibition. I think it will also be effective to make it feel like a journey, using twists and turns before visitors get into the official introduction. The walls will filter

visitors through a smaller space that opens up into a larger new experience. This creates a sense of discovery and that moment of wonder, much like entering a cavern.

New York City has both local and international museum audiences. To keep up with the variety of visitors, exhibitions must be unique and fresh. The content of this exhibition presents an untold story in history that still remains very relevant. Visitors approaching the Metropolitan Museum of Art expect to see art and artifacts from around the globe and throughout history. Putting this exhibition in the MET sets the audience up for history, antiquity, and discovery. By giving history to art, I am allowing visitors to take a journey that gives them a unique perspective on already familiar points in history. They will come to the gallery space having already walked through the grandeur of the Great Hall, and the Greek and Roman rooms. The moment of transition into the gallery must come early to make visitors aware they are entering an equally grand but vastly different space.

#### WALK THROUGH

Most of the world has some history with or legends about red hair. The exhibition needs to start with the understanding that most of its visitors will walk into it with well-established preconceptions about redheads. What this does, is allows the exhibition to create a great amount of surprise in

the form of revealing unexpected information.

Walking into the exhibition, visitors will be immersed in a lower ceilinged space. The lights will be lowered to create a feeling of mystique and almost forbidden entry. It is in this space that I will give the audience an introduction to red hair and the context of its early beginnings. I will use the quote “Sin is a Redhead” as an irony to what visitors will learn throughout the exhibition.

For visitors to understand how red hair prejudice started, they must first understand sympathetic magic. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, sympathetic magic is “magic based on the assumption that a person or thing can be supernaturally affected through its name or an object representing it.” This piece of information is intrinsic to making the visitor understand how the red hair stereotype began and continued to persist into this century. Therefore this information as well as, understanding of the MC1R gene, and the color red will be presented in the introduction to the exhibition.

There are several main characters that set the stage for red hair. Those people are Lilith, Seth, and Judas Iscariot. A description of each will begin the exhibition giving visitors context to start from. As the exhibition walks

them through history the visitors will be given subsets of the story relating to geography, history, and myth. How the stereotype formed and altered across the globe will be explored through maps. Within this context, people will learn how cultures interpreted and represented redheads, and what the realistic consequences were. In today's context, the majority of stereotyping redheads is manifested in jokes and pop-culture. By using jokes or ironies in each section to lighten the mood, I can create poignant moments when the visitors learn the outcomes of what labeling people can do to a population.

Moments of triumph or humor will be designated with a raising of the light-level and lightening of the color. When visitors walk through the darker moments of history, the colors will become darker, lowering the lights, and using darker materials will illicit feelings of foreboding, fear, war, tragedy, and in some instances, sex. This technique is also used in movies to let visitors know that something monumental is about to change the story (300).

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