

public works

Jazmina Cininas, *Arline of Barrioux, Auvergne 1588* (2008). Collection RMIT University. Purchased through the RMIT Art Fund, 2013. On display in exhibition *My Monster: The Human-Animal Hybrid*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne City campus, until August 18.

Bronwyn Watson

In 1588, a Frenchwoman, Arline of Barrioux, was burned at the stake, accused of lycanthropy, or being a werewolf. The judge, Henri Bogue, was so certain of her guilt, and considered her story so truthful, that he wrote about it in 1602.

According to the judge, one evening in a village in the highlands of Auvergne a huntsman was attacked by a large wolf but managed to cut off one of its paws, which he put into his sack. On his way home, he passed a nobleman who persuaded him to share his booty.

The huntsman opened his sack but was horrified to find it wasn't a wolf's paw in there but a woman's hand, wearing a gold ring. The nobleman instantly recognised the hand and the ring as his wife's. He immediately tracked down his wife, who was in their kitchen nursing

her bleeding stump beneath her apron. That woman was Arline of Barrioux and she was subsequently handed over to the authorities and burned.

Arline of Barrioux is just one of many examples of female werewolves who have so fascinated Melbourne-based artist Jazmina Cininas that for more than 20 years she has depicted them in various historical and contemporary guises through her print series *The Girlie Werewolf Hall of Fame*.

For Cininas, the allure of female werewolves is based on folklore, medieval werewolf trials, psychiatric and medical literature, feminist writings, and pop culture such as television, films, and comics. Her extensive research has also led her to search out werewolf stories in France, which had numerous werewolf trials, Transylvania, Slovakia, Estonia and Lithuania.

Cininas's interpretation of Arline as a werewolf is on display at Melbourne's RMIT Gallery in an exhibition, *My Monster: The Human-Animal Hybrid*, which celebrates the 200th anniversary of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and examines the fantasy of animals and humans fused into one being.

The exhibition also features 24 other artists such as Patricia Piccinini, Sam Jinks, Peter Booth and international artists from countries including South Africa, Ukraine, and the US.

When I visit the RMIT Gallery, I'm shown *Arline of Barrioux, Auvergne, 1588* by *My Monster* curator Evelyn Tsitas and the gallery's collections co-ordinator Jon Buckingham.



Her sympathetic wound proved Arline's undoing

Materials: reduction linocut
Dimensions: 76 x 56cm

As we examine the print, it is evident it is packed with iconographic references.

The Auvergne crest floats in the top right-hand corner, a castle from the region features in the distance, and the various playing-card motifs on Arline's robe allude to the Auvergne deck, an early playing-card design. Arline is

holding mandrake, while hemlock and henbane are growing in the garden, all common plants used in werewolf transformation potions. The classic inquisitor's instruments of torture and execution also feature, alluding to further cruelties intended for Arline, and the girdle worn by the wolf references a common method of werewolf transformation in the 16th century.

For her prints, Cininas uses the painstaking technique of reduction linocut, where the plate is systematically cut away and destroyed with each layer of colour printed.

"It is not a process that is used very often because it is so fiddly and arduous," says Buckingham, "but it does allow her to get these wonderful textures coming out."

Buckingham says Cininas is an important artist because she explores feminist values and a female interpretation of old myths and legends.

"While werewolves and hybrids and monsters and the uncannies is a popular ongoing theme, particularly through surrealist and dada traditions, I would say that taking a feminist spin on it is quite unusual and different."

Tsitas says she chose *Arline of Barrioux, Auvergne, 1588* for the *My Monster* exhibition because the image is so powerful, and so intricate and dense.

"What appeals to me about her work is that she looks at female werewolves as women who stand out, or who are outsiders, or who rock the boat in any way, and then they are persecuted."

"She creates such a strong story about the werewolf and you can read so much into it."