

Be A Good Ancestor

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A Coloring Book

by Michela Martello

Published by Vilcek Foundation and Pen & Brush

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Michela Martello, an Italian-born illustrator-turned-artist who lives and works in Brooklyn recently published an uplifting, whimsical coloring book. The book speaks directly to some of her larger works; which are portrayed at the end of book in full color images. What people will love about Michela Martello's book *Be A Good Ancestor: The Michela Martello Coloring Book* is how the drawings provoke an inner conversation.

Coloring books have become a niche in the modern book market, providing relaxation for adults and children alike. Many of these images stretch one's perception; allowing one to see something familiar in a new way. In this book each image has the resonance of a fable or folk story, such as the one of Con Edison and the Tigers which is titled "Mandala" (2013). A fierce group of tigers congregate alongside a circular sign for an energy company. This theme of the environment is present in many of the images.

Be A Good Ancestor is about upholding truths passed down from one's ancestors, teachers, and human family. With every moment in time also arises the most universal questions. What makes us human? What makes us unique among all creatures?

Martello produces a series of visual connections to some familiar images of the divine across world religions. A sitting woman in meditative posture titled "Lovely Nerves" (2020) shows the enjoyment of contemplation. There are Christian elements such as pictured in "Transmigration" (2020). In 'Supreme Body' (2020) a pile of disembodied arms have landed at the feet of the female figure. The chaos in this scene is mediated by the elegance of the figure overlooking. Another illustration titled "22 tears" (2019) depicts the dejected horse and dog meeting sympathetically. One sees multiple eyes and tears in the space between, the suffering of the animal dimension. The illustration titled "Kelet" (2020) also possesses several arms.

Within the boundaries of the coloring-book genre, Martello explores images of the feminine across cultures in a whimsical and playful way. "Crazy Wisdom" (2017) portrays a larger than life female wisdom deity holding a bow and arrow while trampling a demon labelled ILLUSION. The whimsical

aspect comes into play with stylized crosses, flowers, and mountains shaped like breasts. The idealized feminine form is seen almost everywhere throughout the history of art. Think of early Greek sculpture or Hindu goddesses. In contrast the drawing “Life Life” (2019) has a Biblical theme while alluding to a Buddhist deity in form.

The illustrations are drawn from Martello’s other art work, comprising mixed media pieces on wood panels, burlap, and fabrics, seen in the final pages. One image in the coloring book portrays an urban/contemporary woman with a dotted line silhouette of arrows suggesting vintage paper dolls, with a bold block printed “shirt” on which the word DAKINI is printed, bordered by the block printed word DISOBEY. Here, the feminine principal of the Dakini in Tibetan Buddhism has been placed ironically on the t-shirt of a contemporary female. The self-portrait of the artist “Portrait of Michela Martello” (2020) includes miniature deer and arrows pointing upwards and towards the subject, possibly in a flow of self-knowledge.

These enjoyable images allow one to love the drawings even without knowing or attending to what the words mean. Drawing in between the lines can be a relaxing and meaningful experience or enjoyable activity. In these difficult times imagining a better world is certainly beneficial. Martello successfully creates a set of images which allow one to imagine the world of the feminine goddess without forgetting where we come from, and how we are really very much connected to the past. The work gives our human situation a hopeful and ironic spin.

It could be interesting for teenagers especially to explore themes of gender, cultural heritage, and spirituality, in this creative format. For those who are intimidated by the idea of mark making; coloring books also provide a framework in which one not fear making mistakes. Color inside or outside of the lines; you are free!

Please note; this book is currently available on the internet as a download.

References:

<http://yourworldreligions.blogspot.com/2009/10/images-of-divine-feminine-western.html>

<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=kelet>

A kelet is, according to the online Urban Dictionary, slang for a slug-like being who brings joy to others, while running with the “flames of death on its shoulders.”

Michela Martello was born in Italy, Grosseto, studied Illustration at IED, European Institute of Design, Milan, she was illustrator for children books for 10 years dividing her time between Milan and London and from 1993 focused her research entirely on painting. She lives and work in BK, NY.

In 2006 she was selected by the American Association of University of Women in the

“Emerging Women Artists Juried Exhibition” New York Design Center, in 2014 she was one of the winner for Understanding Media the Extension of human Being, Exhibit at B.O.S., BK, in 2019 she received a Special Merit Honor Prize, From Cultural Affairs Bureau, Tainan City Government, Taiwan, for her Installation Everything Has A Vortex .

Her work has being collected and commissioned by both public and private clients; such as Andrea Soros collection, MAAM museum permanent collection, Tainan Museum of Modern Art, In 2020 she is selected to be published in the New American Painting Magazine, issue n.146 . Michela collaborates with Pen&Brush (New York), an association which supports women’s work in literary and visual arts, founded in NYC 124 years ago.

Among most important exhibitions and public project she took part there are: Weight of Happiness (Tibet House Museum, NY, 2014). Transcending Tibet (Trace Fondation, NY, 2015). Domesticity Revisited (Pen&Brush, NY, 2015). Time Zone (MAAM, Museum Roma, 2015). Overlap-Life tapestries (A.I.R. gallery, Brooklyn, 2017). Public art projects : The Wave Walk (La Mer, 2017, NYC).

WoodenWallsProject Curated by Parlor gallery (Asbury park NJ 2016/17/18). Auspicious Field, Mural for The International Children Museum Of The Arts, Taiwan, 2018. Future is Goddess (solo, Pen&Brush, NY, 2017). SUPER- S.H.E. (Galleria Giovanni Bonelli, Milano Italy, 2018). Art Residency, (Taiwan, Soulangh Cultural Park, 2018/2019). Overlap; Life Tapestries, (PENN STATE, 2018). Michela Martello – Tricia Wright, (Pen&Brush NYC, 2019). Consequential Stranger, (solo, ArtSpace, Raleigh NC). Everything Has A Vortex, (Solo, Soulangh Cultural Park, Taiwan, 2019). Ingombri L’altro Altrove, (MACRO Museum, Rome, 2019). Art Point, (Tainan Museum of Modern Art, Tainan, Taiwan, 2020). Of The Earth-Sulla Terra (solo, Galleria Giovanni Bonelli Arte Contemporanea, Milano, September 2020).