

Mary Reid Kelley Reimagines Mythology from a Woman's POV

BY ALLYSON REES

For her first museum show in LA, artist [Mary Reid Kelley](#) reimagines mythology from a woman's point of view.



Bull's eye! Artist Mary Reid Kelley's video trilogy, in which she collaborated with her husband, Patrick Kelley, has been a hit with viewers and critics alike. The third installment of her ancient-meets-modern-day take on the Greek myth of the Minotaur debuts at the [Hammer Museum](#) in May.

Upon first viewing Mary Reid Kelley's video, *The Thong of Dionysus*, it's hard to believe the artist was inspired by Picasso, but take a second look at the black and white sets, bug-eyed characters, and cartoonish elements, and you'll start to detect hints of the Spanish master's *Guernica*.

"Picasso said: 'Great artists don't borrow, they steal,'" jokes Reid Kelly, 35. *The Thong of Dionysus* is the final work in a trilogy that includes her *Priapus Agonistes* (2013) and *Swinburne's Pasiphae* (2014)—which, along with portraits of its recurring characters, will be on display at the [Hammer Museum](#) starting May 23.

Exploring the Greek myth of the Minotaur, Reid Kelley's *The Thong of Dionysus* depicts the monster as half-woman rather than man, and like Picasso, she uses the mythical creature to explore sadness, loneliness, and vulnerability. "There's not enough opportunities for women to be the monster in stories, so I wanted to adapt this Minotaur as a monstrous exaggeration of the self," she explains. "The pitiful, self-destructive self is eternal. You can see it in Greek drama, and you can see it today in social media."

A graduate of Yale University School of Art, Reid Kelley often portrays the women who history ignored. "You've got major female characters of myth and literature, but we know so little about what women's actual lives were like in the ancient world," she says. That gap allows Reid Kelley the freedom to invent and reinvent her characters. In the trilogy, the female Minotaur and supporting characters have a '90s beach flavor; Dionysus wears socks and sandals, a visor, and a status watch, and the Minotaur's mother is adapted into the classic femme fatale—think Pamela Anderson and Bo Derek—complete with braided wig.

According to Reid Kelley, the disparity between women's portrayal in media and art and their reality still exists today. "Even if an artist or writer could tell a perfect, true story about a woman, would that make the world a better place for women?" she wonders. "I doubt it, because true stories have been told and people still suffer. Any change that art is capable of is made on a very small scale, and I accept that."

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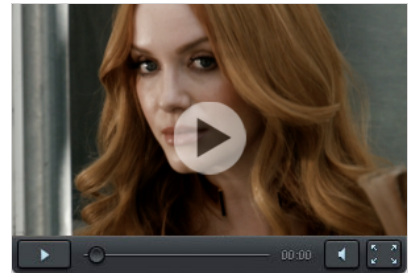


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One thing is for sure—*The Thong of Dionysus* will change the way viewers perceive the age-old myth of the Minotaur. "[It's] providing a familiar entry point for visitors, but leading them to question the stories that are handed down from generation to generation," says Hammer curator Emily Gonzalez-Jarrett. "There is something deeper going on that the viewer can deconstruct to reveal many layers of meaning." *"Hammer Projects: Mary Reid Kelley"* runs from May 23-September 27. 10899 Wilshire Blvd., LA, 310-443-7000

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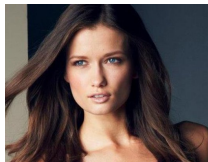
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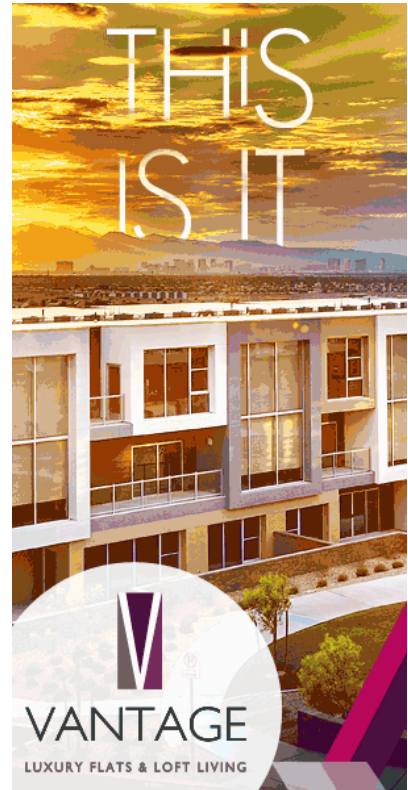


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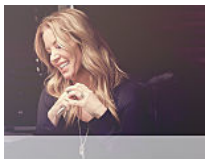
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