

Linda Vorderer

St. Germaine the Devout, 2006

Watercolor, text collage, heavy paper

12" x 9"

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Artist Statement

In this work, *St. Germaine the Devout*, I have used the artist book format to tell the story of Germaine of Pibrac, France. Relative to this exhibition, Germaine's story is a typical Cinderella tale with the difference that Germaine was a real person, a true victim of abuse, whose transformation can be physically seen as her incorruptible corpse lies in state in the church of Pibrac. She suffered deformity and illness in life, a fact that brought her cruel ridicule and ostracism in late 16th century village life. The villagers, her father, her stepmother, and her two stepsisters, cast her aside providing her meager food and shelter, and relegating her to menial tasks and depriving her of education. In this book, I hope to adequately illustrate her humble yet remarkable response to this abuse and injustice: prayer, patience, humility and charity.

I have aimed to give a sense of the parallel between the well-known Cinderella format and Germaine's story, by following the similarities these stories reveal. The cruel stepmother and stepsisters, the father who is ineffective and uncaring, the loving response toward those others who also suffer, and her humility and love even to those who torment her, all can be seen as elements strikingly similar to Cinderella of the 510 tale type. Her final transformation was not marriage to a prince, but rather in a spiritual sense, becomes a 'happily ever

after' exemplar. She is revealed after her death as an incorruptible, a corpse that does not decay, seen as a sign of sainthood by the Catholic Church, and a destination for pilgrims even today.

The issue of miracles is an important consideration for me. How does one recognize a miracle? Are they real? Who determines this? The Catholic Church moves enormously slow with care to details to validate reports of miracles in the process of canonization, the recognition of sainthood. This is important as this Church is a religious governing body that is constrained to be official in its regard to what is true versus what might be a hoax, or in some way exaggerated.

Yet, public miracles, such as those the Church has recognized in Germaine's biography, hold similarities to those private miracles that may go unnoticed, little occurrences that force us to take stock of our belief systems, force us to stop in our distracted and busy daily lives. This returns me to consider the role of perception and the ways that we may overlook, or let escape, the ways that phenomenon can break into our awareness and force us to consider our outlook, our directions, our beliefs. These moments are the flowers in our own aprons, out of season, out of place, food for our imaginations and validation of the existence of a Guiding Hand, a reassuring Presence.

If only we allow the inspiration to enter our perception. To me, that is the core of the issue of miracles. They exist, they are there if we notice or not. Only if we notice can they be labeled miracles, whether public or private. Only if we perceive them can the inspiration inherent in them serve to transform us.