



MARIANNE PON-LAYUS
FINAL GIRL

Final Girl

By Andrea Pelletier

Sitting alone in the back of a car, with bright red blood dripping down her face, she is the final girl, the last survivor, the fighter. She stands alone beside a burning building, grapples for a car in the darkness of the forest, and wields her flashlight down a dark hallway. She has survived a horrific attack, her clothes are shredded, and the perpetrator is close on her heels. But she is ready. Though her friends and family are dead and her body bloodied, she is ready to fight, to beat the odds; to survive. The final girl is both a victim and an anti-hero, a trope born from the horror film genre of the 1970s and 80s that depicts a woman as the sole survivor who ultimately mounts the last defence against an evil force. She is better known as Sidney Prescott (Neve Campbell) in *Scream*, Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis) in *Halloween* and Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in *Alien*. The final girl is the driving protagonist of the story, after suffering vicious and often sexually-driven attacks, she is the witness left behind to tell the tale.

In the exhibition *Final Girl*, artist Marianne Pon-Layus explores the final girl trope, its layers of meaning and feminist implications. Pon-Layus's *Final Girl* is a series of painted impressions of film stills, some real and others imagined. Each image depicts the world of these final girls; gritty, and dripping with blood. Pon-Layus's vision of these final girls is at once horrific and empowering, with many of the chosen stills focusing on moments of defiance and autonomy. "NOT ON DISPLAY" one canvas reads, "Can I get untied now?" on another. The chosen text excerpts reference the independence exerted by the final girls, a resilience in the face of horrific pain and suffering.

Carol J. Clover's 1992 book *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* discusses horror films through a psychoanalytic lens from a feminist perspective. Clover notes that within the slasher sub-genre, primarily produced in America, both male and female audience members are structurally forced to empathize and identify with the final girl. Clover goes on to discuss how it is through this character that weakness and victimization, which may be seen as disempowering, become pleasurable, and serve as reasoning for revenge. In order for this role to be fully realized, argues Clover, the final girl must be created in contrast of her community.

*The Final Girl is boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine – not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself.*¹

It is in this liminal space of masculine (read: strong) femininity that the final girl occupies, presenting the viewer a female character unlike others before it. Painted like the fevered memories they represent, the female figures in *Final Girl* explore this complicated feminism - occupying a space both as objects and subjects of their own story. In some scenes the final girls are exposed, their bodies battered, displayed not unlike a hanging animal carcass. In others they lie in wait, masters of their own destiny, ready to set their plan in motion and avenge their slain friends. It is in this tension between object and subject where Pon-Layus touches on the essential feminist struggle; how can we win a game when someone else has made the rules?

Pon-Layus's layered paintings leave reference to their cinematic origin; volume, fullscreen, pause and other video symbols distance the viewer from the gory scenes, and create a screen safe to view the violence through. Much like the films they reference, the paintings in *Final Girl* allow the audience to revel in their depravity whilst championing the humanity of their beloved heroine.

On raw, stretched paper, Pon-Layus presents a view of the final girl that displays moments of pain and cruelty. The paint drips from the skin-like canvases much like the blood falls from the victims mouths. Divorced from their origin story and interpreted by the hand of the artist, the film stills stand alone as moments of fear, loss and strength. Shining through the darkness, peering past the foliage, the final girls stand as the face of resistance.

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Andy Pelletier has a BFA in Photography from Ryerson University and an MA in Contemporary Art History from OCAD University. A retired wrestler from the League of Lady Wrestlers, Andy now sits as the Chair of the Dawson City Pride Committee, is Coordinator of Yukon Girls Rock Camp and hosts the weekly queer-issues radio show "Angry & Queer & in the North." In a continual search for new creative outlets that can be used to challenge the structures of oppression, Andy also dabbles in drag, stand-up comedy and plays bass in local punk band "Friendship Bracelet."

¹ Clover, Carol. *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992, p. 40.

MARIANNE PON-LAYUS | *FINAL GIRL*

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ARTIST STATEMENT

Final Girl depicts fantasies and still images from B-movies and horror films. Here, Marianne Pon-Layus shows these images for what they are: cruel, seminal, primitive and even liberating, portraying female protagonists acting ambiguously in equally ambiguous situations. These are anti-heroines that stand up to popular movie culture's stereotypes and mechanisms of seduction and sexualized socializing. If pornography as a genre is about sex, then horror is clearly about gender. In her recent works, Pon-Layus imagines a wide range of rich and dark ways of being, whether it be through symbolic metamorphosis, body-based transgression or pictorial experimentation.

BIOGRAPHY

Pon-Layus lives in Montreal, where she draws and paints.

She explores the influence of power relations and stereotypes on the construction of identity in her work.

In 2012, Pon-Layus received her Master's of Fine Art from the Université du Québec à Montréal's School of Visual Arts and Media, where she previously won the teacher fund scholarship. She has exhibited her work in Montreal's distinguished galleries including Art Mûr (2012), the B-312 Gallery (2013), the Outremont Art Gallery (2014) and New Eldorado (2015). In 2015 and 2016, she exhibited in Quebec, Sweden and Belgium as an artiste in residency.

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