

*Medusa with open forms*  
Mia Edwards



Sarah Crowner, *Medusa with open forms*, 2020. Acrylic on canvas, sewn, 70 x 60 in (177.8 x 152.4 cm)

*Medusa with open forms* was created by Sarah Crowner in 2020. She utilized acrylic paint and sewing to create this piece that is 70 x 60 inches. Crowner's use of geometric shapes and bright colors encourages viewers to spatially interact with the work and notice very discreet and meaningful details that show how she composed it.

*Medusa with open forms* is an attention-grabbing and appealing piece of work. Crowner uses vibrant shades of blue and red acrylic paint to render multiple curved shapes along the canvas that captivate viewers and lure them towards the piece. From a distance the overall painting appears to have a smooth, even texture. Different shades of blue can be seen throughout the piece, and when there is enough space between the viewer and the painting it appears that those shades are blended seamlessly into each other. The curved figures encompass the entirety of the canvas, and as in reference to the painting's name, the shapes in Crowner's piece resemble the serpents that make up Medusa's hair in the Greek tale. The vibrant and expansive nature of

these shapes encourages the viewer's eyes to travel along the entirety of the canvas and a desire to take it all in.

Upon giving a further inspection to Crowner's artwork and moving closer to the canvas, viewers can begin to understand her creative process. Sewing stitches can be seen along the outlines of the curved red shapes that are very subtle to those who aren't giving her work more than a glance. Viewers must be less than a foot away to notice her utilization of the back stitch that makes the surface of the canvas appear flat despite the reconstruction that was done to produce the piece. The brushstrokes she used are also brought to the attention of the viewer when looking closer, and one can see that the strokes aren't uniform or cohesive. The paintbrush strokes are all flowing in different directions with some shorter or longer than others. There are more abrupt changes in the shades of blue along different parts of the piece, rather than smooth blending from darker to lighter shades.

Sarah Crowner was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1975. She earned her BA from the University of California in 1996, and an MFA from Hunter College in 2002 (Guggenheim, n.d, Collection Online). She stayed in New York after earning her MFA, and that is where her work is primarily based today. Inspired by the integrative nature of the postmodernist movement, Crowner combines the aspects of abstract art with hands-on craft techniques including collage work. Postmodernism encouraged the acceptance of different approaches to artmaking. According to History.com (2017), philosophers during this time “proposed that structures within a culture were artificial and could be deconstructed in order to be analyzed.” This statement informs Crowner's compositional choices and her desire to have people interact with and around her work. She composed *Medusa with open forms* by cutting a canvas from different patterns, painting the pieces, and sewing them back together (Kaplan, 2020, p.1). She often made other

pieces with the desire to have her work included as backdrops or props for performances and plays. However, Crowner also created *Medusa with open forms* to be displayed in galleries and have a different type of interaction with human bodies.

*Medusa with open forms* attracts viewers with its vibrant primary colors and seemingly simply crafted shapes. However, Crowner is able to complicate the work she's created by encouraging the movement of viewers around her piece through the inclusion of smaller details. For example, Crowner's use of sewing places emphasis on what she describes as "a highly physical creation process". In an interview with Bartholomew, Crowner says, "one of the things I am interested in is how painting can engage the body." Crowner values the way her body moves when creating different pieces. Her tendency to compose work in a way that engages different muscles influences her utilization and placement of materials, and it brings viewers closer to the piece's surface. Crowner's inclusion of stitch work and sporadic brushstrokes forces viewers to come very close to the canvas, nearly touching it if they want to really examine it. This creates multiple layers of her art to experience in just one piece.

Crowner achieves her objectives in relation to the human body's existence around and within her piece. When I viewed this work, I initially chose to write about it because I thought it was beautiful and was intrigued by its vibrant colors. However, this piece has made me contemplate not only her composition process, but how I perceive perfection within artwork, and how one's body placement around the piece influences that. In society, people often respect pieces of art that are more cleanly structured and put together in a traditional way. Crowner's composition process rejects the traditional painting format, but the fact that people wouldn't know this unless they physically immersed themselves in this piece puts emphasis on how one's bodily placement can impact the effect a piece of art has on you. I think examining this in

Crowner's work showed me the value of artwork that isn't traditional or realistic. I was definitely able to appreciate the amount of work and creativity that goes into abstract art or postmodern art more because of my interaction with Crowner's *Medusa with open forms*.