

CLAUDIA FILOS: Good afternoon. This is Claudia Filos with the Center for Hellenic Studies. I'm here today, this afternoon, to have a video dialog with artist Glynnis Fawkes and two very wonderful members of Hour 25 and HeroesX community, Janet Ozsolak, and Sarah Scott. Thanks so much for being here, everybody.

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Thanks.

CLAUDIA FILOS: So, Glynnis, I'd love to just share some information about you and your work with our viewers. So, you're an artist and cartoonist, you're also an archaeological illustrator, and you teach a course on comics at the University of Vermont; you've drawn comics for Gregory Nagy's translations of the Homeric Hymns to Aphrodite, Demeter, and Dionysus, you have received a Fulbright Fellowship that has resulted in the publication of two books, one of paintings and the other of cartoons, both about archaeology. Your work can be found at glynnisfawkes.com.

So at the start I'd like to open up to Janet: I know Janet has some questions for you, Glynnis.

JANET OZSOLAK: Hi, Glynnis, thanks for visiting us again. My question is going to be about cartoons as a medium. How did you decide on cartoons?

GLYNNIS FAWKES: That's a very good question, thanks, Janet. Well, actually, I've always drawn cartoons, and I think that I've always been influenced by other cartoonists, especially cartoons from the New Yorker that I was reading as I grew up. I think the words and pictures together can create something that neither can on their own. And also I think I've always loved ancient art — I mean especially Egyptian art and Greek vase painting from when I was really young. And I think those, to me, are very similar to how comics work for us now. I mean especially the vase painting where the characters are named — they don't have word balloons like we're used to, but especially ancient viewers would know the story and they'd see how the characters are placed together to tell a story. To me that always seems so appealing. And so.. and so I have a ... my background is in painting and drawing but I somehow was never satisfied — well, yes I am! — but I always wanted, while I was doing paintings I was always drawing cartoons on the side to somehow add to the narrative, or — I don't know, maybe I just had funny ideas all the time and I had to write them down!

JANET OZSOLAK: Very nice! It's always — it's very intimate, your cartoons are very intimate, but very accessible — I really, really enjoyed reading them, and looking at them. Thank you.

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Oh — thank you.

JANET OZSOLAK: There is a question, from Jacqui, and she asks: How do you approach these texts? What inspires you? How to depict each character — do you take the description of personal features from the text, or do you do extra research?

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Oh, yes, OK, that's a whole pile of questions right there! I think that reading the Homeric Hymns when I drew them — first I drew Demeter, then I drew Aphrodite, and then I drew Dionysus — but I think that reading them always evokes a — it evokes a picture in my mind of what's happening. And I think that is the inspiration for what I — I just want to see the story on paper, I want to see it how I see it in my head, and so it's a way of engaging with the poems — if that's what they're called!

And let's see — what's the next part of that? — how to depict each character? I think that in the Demeter I thought of it as me! I mean, I had a little daughter at the time, and I think of Demeter and Persephone — Persephone's definitely a teenager, and my daughter was three or something, so it's somewhere between "How can I be in this story?" and make it sort of idealized. And the idealization also comes, to me, from Greek art — I mean the way characters in vase painting all really look the same. I mean, they have distinguishing attributes but they're almost interchangeable, a lot of them. So that doesn't necessarily make for dynamic characteristic in comics, so I — and I guess I can play with that with expressions, and composition, and things like that.

And for the character of Aphrodite, in the Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite, I wanted her to have — well, I took attributes from Cypriot archaic statues of Aphrodite, where they often have three or more necklaces

and they have big earrings and they're very dressed up. But I sort of made her a less formal version of that type of statue.

Let's see...

CLAUDIA FILOS: Glynnis, can I ask a follow-up question about that?

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Yeah!

CLAUDIA FILOS: So, I mean you're talking about the way that for you it was an opportunity to sort of enter the story yourself.

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Yes.

CLAUDIA FILOS: And at the same time you're drawing on all this knowledge of — all your archaeological knowledge, right? Because you are an archaeological illustrator — you were just talking about the way these statues really are. I'm wondering: does that make it harder — like the fact that you actually know what people wore, and really that deep knowledge in these comics: you're very careful about the way that you work, right — I mean does that make it harder or easier for you to enter the story?

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Let's see: harder or easier? Well, it's easy to ... I think ... it's very easy to just do everything straight out of your head, and I am often very guilty of that. But I really appreciate it in other people's work when they do research and draw costumes in the style of — so I feel like I would like to make sure that their clothes are right, and ... although I am not as perfectionist about it as I could be.

CLAUDIA FILOS: Well, you're not bound by it, right? You have other goals as well.

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Yeah, hopefully! Like I think of in the Eric Shanower series the 'Age of Bronze', he is very accurate about clothes. I mean, it's also a fantasy of the ancient world, so you can really do anything wild, but I want to be very unlike the movie 'Troy' where they were throwing all kinds of stuff together that didn't belong! So those are maybe the extremes.

JANET OZSOLAK: Sarah's question: Do you start at the beginning, or do you have a particular scene in mind to start with? I guess — in any of the comics?

GLYNNIS FAWKES: I guess that's a good question, too. I definitely start at the beginning. But I read it many times before embarking, and then sometimes I have to read it again. And sometimes then, like in the Dionysus one, I worked with a different translation and then switched over to Greg's translation, and there was something very different: ... I thought the wine was inside the ship and Greg thought it was outside of the ship, so I had to change the scene, and redraw it, which was really great and it's the biggest treat to work with Greg, for his translation, for his interpretation. So I think, in certain scenes, definitely are more vivid than others, and that's one that is very vivid.

But I guess.. also in that question is kind of the over-arching look, what the look of the comic should be like, and it definitely comes from certain scenes, and I suppose in the Dionysus it's why I ... why I wanted to do it in blue and red: because of the image of the twining vine which would be red grapes and the wine-dark sea with the red, dark red, blue. So...

JANET OZSOLAK: ...Sorry....

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Go ahead!

JANET OZSOLAK: When you are reading the text, are you visualizing in comics, you know, in front of you, because when I read a book I visualize, you know, a character and real people. But when you are visualizing, do you see cartoons?

GLYNNIS FAWKES: What! Do you mean these aren't real that I'm drawing!?! I guess that I'm somewhere between that, because I guess that I ... know.... It would be like saying to a Greek vase painter "Are you drawing vase painting or are you drawing this real?" I guess I'm doing it as really as I can in my stylized kind of way. And.... I don't want it to look absolutely real. I want there to be some kind of remove from reality.

And so I think that maybe I visualize these things in scenes. And then, once it comes to putting it on paper it breaks down into more of a comics format. So I could also draw, you know, a single image on a

piece of paper, and another single image on another, instead of putting several images on the same page. It's just a matter of form.

CLAUDIA FILOS: You know, that's a really interesting question, because one of the things that we talked about in the HeroesX project is the way that verbal art within ancient Greek society — that kind of idea between artificial and real, you know, the artificial could be just as "real".

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Yes.

CLAUDIA FILOS: So in a sense that's something that's really important for us to think about — the differences and the similarities.

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Yes. And I've also played with making things very much more realistic when I'm doing paintings and especially from photographs, where they look photographic, the paintings I've done. They certainly really don't when you see them in real life or you look close up, they don't at all. But yeah, I like the idea of different levels of realism or naturalism, and the scale of real to comic. And there's one theory that Scott McCloud, who's famous for writing the book called 'Understanding Comics' — his theory is that the less realistic something is, and he reduces it down to a smiley face, the more that you can relate to the character. And I don't know if this is true, but for me — say like Charlie Brown is very relatable, and maybe Prince Valiant is not so much so. Because it's much more realistic. So — I don't know: just a theory.

CLAUDIA FILOS: That's so interesting!

JANET OZSOLAK: Another question is from Myrmidon, and he's asking: Would it be fair to say that your work refrains from showing the more disturbing side of these gods and their behaviors?

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Yes, I like this question, because I feel like I do leave out the most disturbing. And I just answered that, and I was thinking: who does highlight the disturbing aspects? And this isn't — and I gave him the example of Frank Miller's '300', but that doesn't have to do with the gods — I mean, it's just pure battle, pretty much. But I am quite interested in disturbing aspects of the gods' behavior and ... I hope it's OK for me to paraphrase the answer that I already wrote on the website.

Again I have to refer to the vase painting where I think of how stylized the figures are and I think of especially one vase where the Brygos painter I think of the sack of Troy where they're throwing the little baby Astyanax — if that's how you say it — over the walls of Troy, which is horrifying, but it's done in this beautifully drawn, nice little figures on a vase, where you wouldn't necessarily recognize the horrors that are going on or tell the difference between a party scene if you didn't know this mythology. And there's something about that, that I appreciate, that I maybe want to bring out the horrors by — through the humor, if that doesn't sound like a contradiction. And I think that I'd like to get closer to it, the more I work.

Right now I'm working on — I got into the medieval period somehow — I'm working on a Boccaccio story that is also set in the Mediterranean and it involves a lot of rape and murder, so it's quite awful. But it's somehow also joyously written. It's somehow hard to separate those. I think the violence and the joy of them are mixed up for me. And maybe I just am focused on the humor because that's where I see my way in.

JANET OZSOLAK: I just...

GLYNNIS FAWKES: If that makes any sense at all.

JANET OZSOLAK: It does... Greg's compensation: Professor Nagy talks about compensation in ritual, and these horrible things are happening, but in ritual they are compensated and they are beautiful, and that brings the joy, into pictures.

GLYNNIS FAWKES: I suppose that drawing is my way of doing that. I mean: just drawing. There's a small daily ritual that compensates for the horrors of the world.

CLAUDIA FILOS: Glynnis, that's so beautiful. You know, I can't thank you so much for coming to talk to us today, we're so excited to see your future work...

GLYNNIS FAWKES: Oh yeah, me too!

CLAUDIA FILOS: And one thing I would like to mention right now is that I know that you did some filming recently with Professor Nagy and with Professor Muellner really focused on your work on the Homeric Hymns and on Sappho, so I know that we're going to be able to share some more of that with our community in the coming months. So I hope you'll come back and talk to us then.

JANET OZSOLAK: Thank you!

CLAUDIA FILOS: And we hope to see you on Hour 25.

JANET OZSOLAK: Yes. Please come back! Bye.