



## Y museum plays host to heroes and monsters

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"Trophy Topper," part of the "We Could Be Heroes," at the BYU Museum of Art, on display through April 6, 2013. Ph: BYU Museum of Art

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Don't look now -- OK, actually do look now, that's kind of the whole point -- but the Museum of Art at Brigham Young University has been taken over by mythical creatures and costumed superheroes. The museum launched a new exhibition earlier this month that looks at men in tights, women in capes and the kinds of fantastical creatures that you usually only see underneath beds, in dark closets, or on bad home movies taken with dataphones, camcorders or old Super 8 cameras.

The new exhibition "We Could Be Heroes: The Mythology of Monsters and Heroes in Contemporary Art" is not a traveling collection, or a set of works loaned by another institution. It's a BYU original, with pieces sent in from around the world. MOA curator Jeff Lambson said he's been pulling it together for nearly three years.

The idea for the show is something that's been on Lambson's mind for even longer than that. "I'm a bit of a fanboy," Lambson said. "Growing up I always liked superheroes and comic books and that kind of stuff."

He's not alone in those predilections and that, actually, was a big impetus for Lambson to get "We Could Be Heroes" off the ground. Superheroes and monsters have rarely if ever been more popular than they are right now, with movies like "Marvel's The Avengers" and last year's "Super 8" making money hand over fist, while books like Stephenie Meyer's "Twilight" and TV shows like AMC's "The Walking Dead" fill up every other corner of pop culture.

The excitement about superpowers and mystery creatures isn't strictly limited to entertainment. Just weeks before the MOA opened its exhibition -- which includes an impressive artist's rendition of Bigfoot -- the Daily Herald and other Utah news outlets reported about a video posted on YouTube that appears to show a bear-like human-shaped creature standing up from behind low-growing scrub near Squaw Peak.

"Isn't that great?" Lambson said, adding that Cameron Gainer, the artist whose life-size and very lifelike Bigfoot sculpture is a centerpiece attraction of "We Could Be Heroes," was thrilled about the video and its emergence so close to the show.

"Some people say, 'Why is that an artwork, that's just Bigfoot,'" Lambson said. For Gainer, Lambson said, the Bigfoot piece explores the overlap of myth and evidence (photographic and otherwise) that swirls around Sasquatch legends: "He's making something tangible that's drawn from all of this 'proof.'"

"We Could Be Heroes" is an international show, with pieces contributed from around the globe, including work from artists in Korea, Romania, Poland, Israel, Iran, Afghanistan, Mexico, Japan and the United Kingdom. There's everything from a large-scale sculpture of Captain America (done by an artist in England) to a life-size charcoal drawing of a great white shark (done by an artist in New York City).

MOA director Mark Magleby said in a news release announcing "We Could Be Heroes" that the new exhibition shows that people everywhere are still confronting centuries-old stories and legends. "This exhibition confirms the vitality of historical mythologies in 21st-century social negotiations," Magleby said. "It brings together an extraordinary spectrum of prescient artists who are caught in the act of conceptualizing both good and evil and the perils of choosing the wrong role model."

Lambson said that it made a lot of sense to feature monsters and heroes together: They may appear to be at opposite ends of a spectrum, but they have a lot of common ground. Stories as old as the saga of Beowulf and Grendel have blurred the lines between good and evil. "Many monsters have been misunderstood," Lambson said, while heroes are often not entirely pure. "We like to have a complicated hero."

"We like them to have flaws."

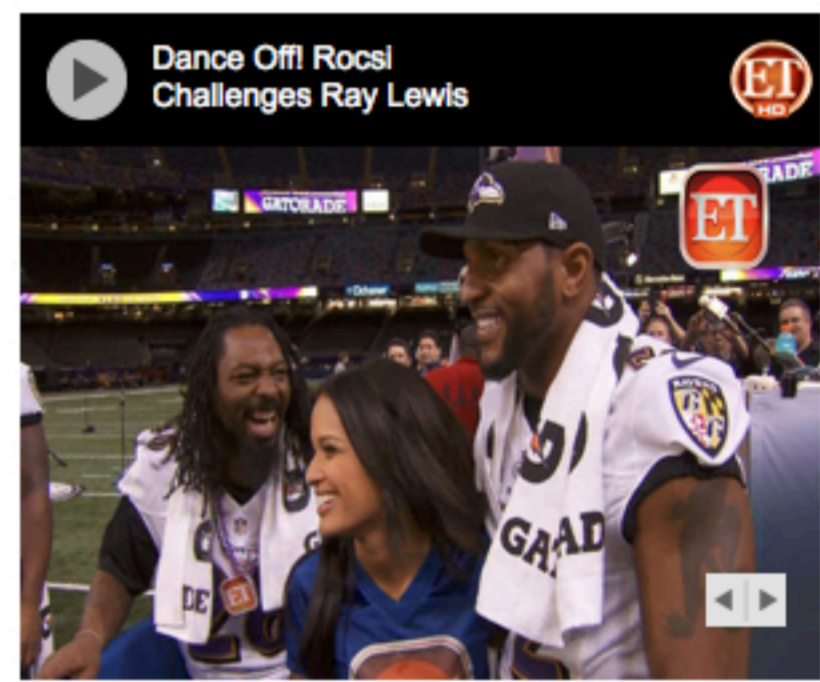
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