

A black and white photograph of a large, ancient stone carving of a monstrous face. The face has multiple eyes, some of which are circular holes. The mouth is wide open, revealing a dark interior. The stone is weathered and textured. The background shows trees and foliage.

# The Monsters Of His Mind

Jerry Grasso

***In 1547***, Prince Vicino Orsini commissioned work to begin on a park filled with twenty-four natural bedrock-sculpted art pieces. Most of these are based on grotesque figures of mythological origin that were important during this time period. The park, currently considered by many to be the first theme park, was called Bosco Sacro. It is known today as “Monster Park”, located in Bomarzo, Italy. It eventually became dedicated to the loving memory of his wife, Giulia Farnese, who died in 1560 before the park was completed. The Prince commissioned Pirro Ligorio, well-known at the time for finishing St. Peter’s Basilica after Michelangelo died, to design these works. Sculptor Simone Moschino then created these, primarily as a sculpture garden which were popular during the day. My purpose here is to showcase the talent and dedication of these two artists in a moody glimpse back in history with a sense of mystery. The sequence of images presented here are my allegorical depiction of Prince Orsini’s plunge into madness, pursued by the monsters of his mind.

Legend has it that the heart-broken Prince had lost his sanity soon after his wife’s death, and changed the park’s creation to reflect his state of mind at the time. This may have been his way of conveying his sense of anguish, or the confusion and dizziness of his depressed experience.

As the visitor passes through the gate and wanders through the park, one will see over-sized mythological figures, moss-covered historic characters, monstrous animals and monuments.

A Sphinx, the classical riddler of ancient times; an Etruscan Bench with the inscription above it which reads, “You who have traveled the world wishing to see great, stupendous marvels — come here, where there are horrendous faces, elephants, lions, bears, orcs and dragons.”

Also found are bears holding the Roman rose and the Orsini coat of arms; Proteus, protector of the seas, rivers and other bodies of water, with weapons of the Orsini family; Hercules, who has barehanded slaughtered Cacus, a fire-breathing giant and the son of Vulcan; a sleeping nymph, a turtle with a winged woman on its back; a whale; a fountain called Pegasus, the winged horse.

Jupiter, the god of thunder, lightning, and storms, and also called the god of light and sky; Venus on a dragon pedestal; the Leaning/tilting House to showcase his sense of vertigo; Proserpina, wife of Pluto; Echidna, a half-woman, half-snake creature, the “mother of all monsters”.

The fortified elephant of Hannibal carrying the unconscious body of a Roman legionnaire; Neptune, the god of water and the sea; a dragon attacked by lions; a dolphin.

However, the most famous statue in the park is the mouth of Orcus “The Hell Mouth”, god of the underworld, with the words “Ogni Pensiero Vola” (Every Thought Flies) written above it; Cerberus, the three headed dog, guardian of hell; and finally the Temple Of Eternity memorial to Orsini’s wife, Giulia Farnese.

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Enjoy life!



The Sphinx, a lion with a woman's head and inscription "Whoever does not pass through this place absorbed and in silence, does not even appreciate the famous seven wonders of the world."



The Etruscan bench stands with scrolled ends and sits inside an arch with three Orsini roses on the vault. The inscription on the back, curved to follow the arch translates to say: "You who have traveled the world seeking marvels grand and stupendous, come here where there are terrible faces, elephants, lions, ogres, and dragons."



Pegasus is the symbol of the Farnese family, and this statue is oriented to look directly up the hill to the Villa Orsini providing a visual connection between the families.



*Monsters 4*

Standing bear, literally Orsini in Italian, which are symbols of the family name, holding a rose, which was also associated with the family.







The Whale/Orcus has an inscription obscured by moss that translates to "All Thoughts Fly".  
The giant jaws of the whale warn visitors away from the water.



The Leaning House is meant to confound the mind and alter our sense of perception.



*Monsters 9*

The Hippodromo and inscribed with Vicino 's the proud proclamation "Memphis and every other marvel too that the world has held in honor until now yield to the holy wood which is only like itself and nothing else."







The Goddess Demeter, who joined her husband Pluto in the underworld, summoning the darkness of Winter before reemerging in Spring, a time of regeneration, like the foliage filled vase on her head.



A two tailed mermaid.



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The Winged Fury has claws and a long scaly tail that twists up the wall like a serpent. She has a calm face that gazes straight forward and a now broken basket like crown. Her wing is webbed like that of a dragon.





The river god has a cornucopia filled with fruit and foliage lying by his side. It is possible that while representing a god of all waters, like Neptune, that this god also rules the underworld.



The funerary urns might suggest the spirits of the dead watching over the space.









Hercules tears Cacus apart, an unfortunate adversary, by the legs while hanging upside down. Refers to the 10th of the 12 labors of penance required of Hercules to atone for the killing of his wife and children after being driven mad by the Goddess Hera.









The Mouth of Hell, Orcus is a Roman god of the underworld. The inscription above the entrance says, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."



The three headed dog, Cerberus, guardian of the gates of the Underworld.

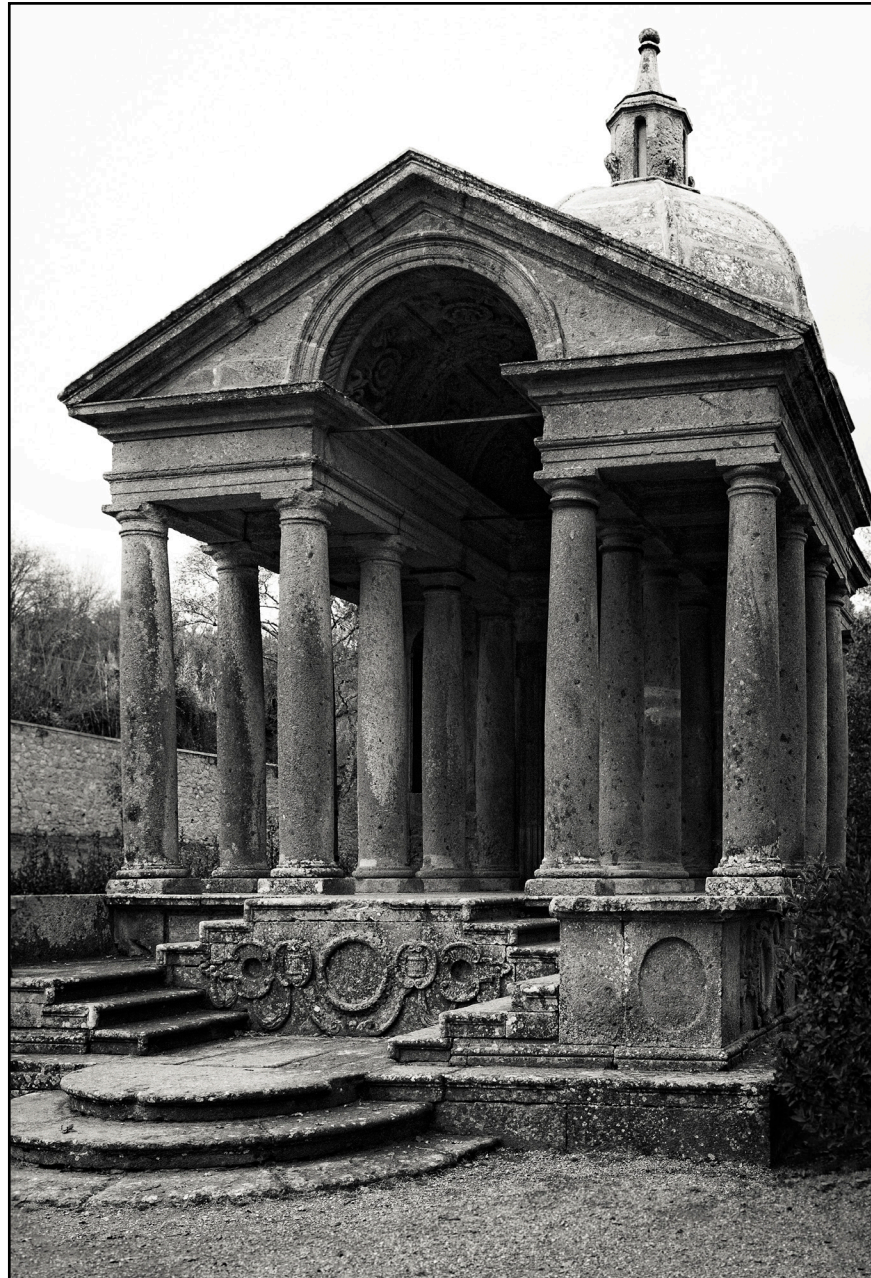


A Cerberus, a three headed guardian of the entrance to the underworld, preventing the dead from leaving.





The little temple, or Tempietto, was built in Vicino's wife Giulia Farnese's honor.



Proteus, Neptune's son, is the god of rivers and oceans. These waters are subject to constant and sometimes violent change, requiring mutability. On his head balances a striped globe with a castle on top, the crest of the branch of the family, Orsini da Castello.



No escape possible!



*Monsters 32*

# My Artistic Mission

## Child-like wonder and inquisitiveness

are qualities frequently put aside once we become adults. We tend to slowly become sterilized by our right-or-wrong kind of world which too often has too little time to explore the what-if's and the what-could-be's. I believe we all need to re-connect with these qualities to re-enrich our lives. A first glance at a photograph of an onion often reveals the fact that, indeed, it is an onion. But what also lies beneath its surface? We won't know until we peel back its layers.

Animation innovator, Walt Disney, recognized this and tried to bring back the power and importance of imagination. Inspired by his spirit, my mission therefore is to encourage the use of viewer imagination. My work attempts to explore and suggest what often lies hidden within the personalities and mysteries present in the world that was, and the world that is around us.

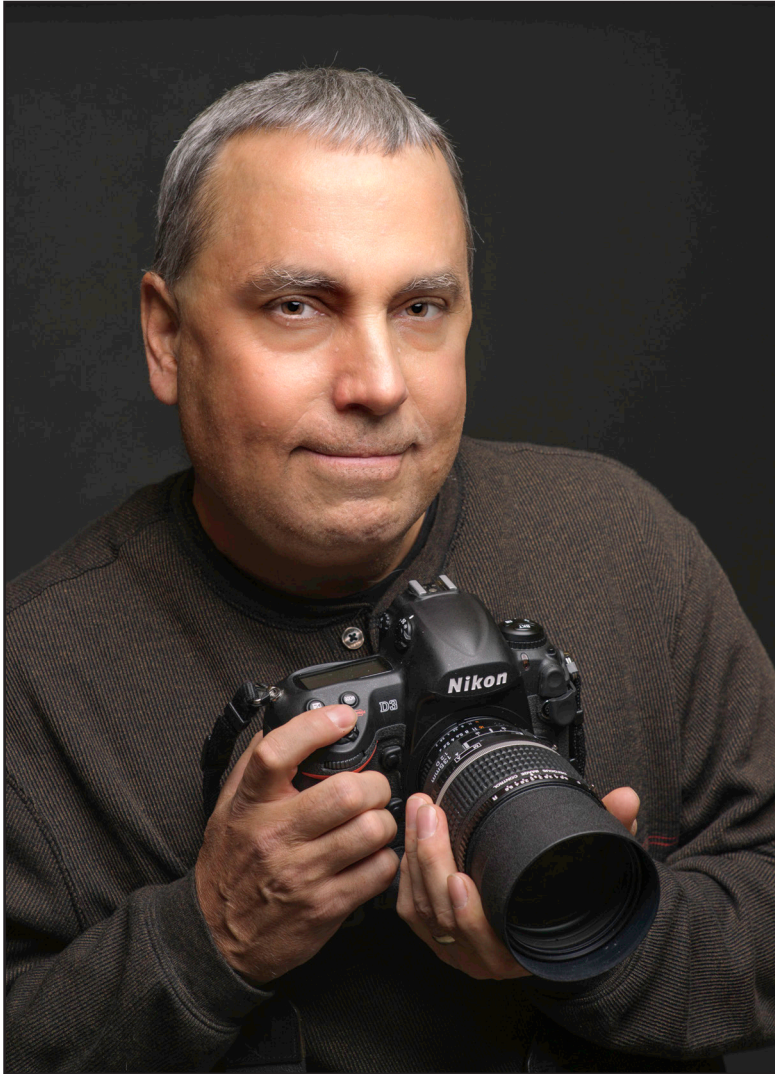
For me, my photography often is not so much about the decisive moment. Rather, it is about creating an awareness of place and a sense of history, with an aura of mystery. It is the starting point for my artistic journey, not the destination. I try to use what I produce

as personal metaphors for my reactions to what I saw and felt. My favorite motivational quote is that "Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone." My works attempt to reflect this as I probe the emotional, mind's eye after-image that was captured by both the eye and the heart, and which often defies logical explanation by the mind.

My goal is that my projects will serve as a springboard into inventiveness and exploration with the hopes of awakening my viewer's inner child. I try hard to show the connections and implications of things that others may not readily see. My hope is that my work may also help viewers discover the beginnings of their attempt to understand and perhaps even learn to tolerate and sympathize with the human condition and the world in which we live. I will try to do whatever I can to make viewers linger longer in front of my works so as to ignite their imaginative response through discovery and inquisitiveness.

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**JERRY GRASSO** has been an award-winning, international fine art photographer and visual artist since 2002. He has mentored locally with photographer, [Mallorie Ostrowitz](#), and then with internationally-renowned visual artist, [John Paul Caponigro](#). Photography is only the starting point for many of his projects. His favorite motivational quote is that “Life begins at the edge of your comfort zone.”

In addition to his travel photography, Jerry specializes in the intimately abstracted architectural photography, the photo essay, and the photo composite series.

Jerry’s mission is to awaken his viewer’s inquisitive inner child by creating an awareness of place and a sense of history, with an aura of mystery.



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