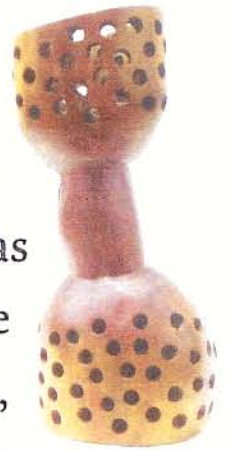


# WHEN MEDUSA MEETS PINOCCHIO

or Musing Around the Sculptures of Lim Soo Ngee

by Michael Lee Hong Hwee

**PINOCCHIO** could never be the obedient boy his daddy wishes him to be. He's always out on the lookout for new adventures, for new hangout buddies. But he'll always remember—as his daddy advises—to bring his personal penknife and pocket mirror with him wherever he goes, to preen himself whenever he gets abraded or messed up from his rough runabouts. This night, he is again out in the woods. As he grooms himself, shaving off excess fibre from his face and neck, he suddenly spots an attractive lady, a walking goddess, with hair so lustrous and long that gives Rapunzel a run for her money. He keeps his gadgets, tucks in his shirt, adjusts his collars and braces to meet a brand new friend. We witness from far **PINOCCHIO** and **MEDUSA** introducing themselves to each other, starting some small talk and we get our ears nearer to them to overhear them chatting....



**PINOCCHIO:** ... But I've already done my homework before coming out. (*Pinocchio's nose grows yet another inch.*)

**MEDUSA:** (*Controlling her laughter.*) You know, you really have to be careful with such things. Too bad—I can't help stop your nose from growing. The only way I could help is turn you into stone. But I can't; I only turn men into stones. You're still boy. And yet, (*Giggles.*) you're not even a boy, not a human boy anyway. Just a piece of wood! Dead log! (*Bursts into uncontrollable laughter as Pinocchio's nose continues to grow.*) I'm so... (*Still giggling.*)... sorry, but I really can't help it. What's wrong with your... (*Bursts out laughing again.*)... nose, if you don't mind me asking? (*Medusa's long, silky hair glitters against the moonlight.*)

**PINOCCHIO:** Ummm, think it's some kind of high metabolism thing. I eat a lot, and the food has to go somewhere—you know what I mean? At most I just cut it off. (*Ponders for a while.*) In fact, I'll do it now. (*Pinocchio fishes out his penknife, looks himself in his pocket mirror, and without hesitation, cuts off his by now 7-inch nose. Shocked by his move, Medusa shields herself from the unsightly scene; her head of long, silky hair now turns into a headful of snakes. Seemingly unaware of her reaction, Pinocchio places his cut nose onto a rock.*)

**MEDUSA:** (*Angrily.*) Hey, how insensitive can you get?! What do you think you are doing? Nobody cuts noses in front of a stranger. You don't think it's something so disgusting? (*She continues to cover her face from Pinocchio.*)

(*One of Medusa's snakes snares at Pinocchio; it's mouth wide open, ready to gobble him up.*)

**PINOCCHIO:** (*Avoids the deadly snare. Starts to panic.*) I'm sorry. Terribly sorry. But I just can't help it. (*Thinking hard to appease the angered Medusa.*) You know,

errr, well... you, you have such great locks there.

**MEDUSA:** (*Surprised. Stops shielding herself.*) What do you mean? (*Medusa's snakes stop snaring, and within seconds turn back to long, silky hair.*)

**PINOCCHIO:** I mean... They are so long, smooth, silky and glimmering with healthy shine. And so, by the way, what shampoo do you use? (*Pinocchio's nose continues to grow; he attempts to pluck it away, not using his knife though.*)

**MEDUSA:** You really think my hair looks great and lustrous, and that I am much more beautiful than that—bitch! —Athena?

**PINOCCHIO:** Oh yes, you're more stunning than any woman in the world, ever. Who's Athena anyway? She's nothing next to you! You're the prettiest mythical monster—oh, I mean, ummm, you also have such monster-like, voluptuous figure to go with your gorgeous face of such peerless skin and Mona Lisa's ever half-smile. You're the epitome of female beauty and fertility, so perfect and unreachable a star you are, that Aphrodite and Cinderella are pale fruits from a roadside tree. Yah, definitely, you're queen of Caldecott, in the whole of Singapore, JB and some say Batam.

(*Medusa tries to hide her delight as she bounces her hair with her hands, and does a head spin or two, a la Vidal Sassoon models.*)

**MEDUSA:** You know, you young boys shouldn't use flattery so sparingly. It might get you into trouble. You know—whatever is happening to your nose that makes it grow and grow, (*She laughs again.*) perhaps you could put them to some good use.

**PINOCCHIO:** What do you mean?

**MEDUSA:** Like if you could turn these noses into functional objects...?

**PINOCCHIO:** (*Ponders for a while.*)

Like, oh yes, if I could gather enough nose, I could turn them into tools or containers? Well that's simple...

(*Pinocchio cups his hands in front of his face, so that his ever-growing nose gets piled up into a huge lump. He then plucks the lump off and mould it into boxes of different sizes.*)

**PINOCCHIO:** You think I'm doing fine?

**MEDUSA:** It's okay, just okay.

Actually something in-between—a nose and yet also a box—will be rather cute too. Something between and both—you know what I mean? I'm getting philosophical. Stop me!

(*Pinocchio immediately knows what she's referring to. He picks up the logs of wood, which used to be his nose, and starts to pock his nose into them. These logs now become both phallic and vulvic, at once the formidable insertor and with spaces for reception, containing goods.*)

**MEDUSA:** That's more like it.

Keep doing this. And if you ever grow up, or turn into a human, I hope I don't see you, or I can't help but turn you into stone sculptures the way I've transformed the Greek Gods and Roman Emperors. And you could be stuck at Middle Campus studios, posing for second-year painting majors semester after semester; rather than being able to churn out—as you've just done, so productively—woodworks so fine yet so functional. You could be like your daddy, a fine Carpenter, or even better, a fine Carpenter-Artist!

(*Penknife in his right hand, hidden behind his back, Pinocchio approaches Medusa, by now smiling to herself as she rests her eyes, so satisfied that she has taught another youngster a lesson or two about life. She is totally unaware of the approaching aggressor.*)

**PINOCCHIO:** Oh well, whatever...

(*Fishes out his penknife, getting ready to strike at Medusa's head.*)

**MEDUSA:** (*Eyes opens slowly.*) What the f\*\*... fish!?! (*Eyes now wide open. Eyes of all snakes on her head wide open.*) You liar! (*Medusa gasps in utter disbelief.*) Oh my god, you bloody Perseus! I should've known it was you!

**PINOCCHIO:** Liar is my middle name. Did I forget to tell you? Okay, my fault, a thousand apologies. And Perseus? Who's that? Anyways...

(*Pinocchio finishes her off with a single strike of his penknife. Puts the bloody head into a plastic bag. Blood from the severed head turns into baby snakes, almost overflowing from the bag. Pinocchio ties these snakes with dead knots to stop them from wiggling too much.*)

**PINOCCHIO:** (*Wide smiles.*)

Daddy could boil some snake soup tonight, and from tomorrow start making leather—snakeskin, for a start—furniture. And I could use a new soccer ball.

(*Pinocchio swings his bag full of Medusa's head and snakes as he sings to himself:*)

*Pinocchio's got new soccer ball  
It's not bought from the Super Mall  
Pinocchio's got new soccer ball  
Now is time to show dad and all...*

As we see Pinocchio hops home happily, we cannot help but question the moral lessons of the original Pinocchio, and start to wonder if coming out—to have fun—necessarily means getting hurt. Pinocchio's encounter with the formidable Medusa, from which he emerges unharmed, seems to suggest that, with wit and the relentless will to be true to himself, he could have his way; to be out and about, and still have his daddy totally proud of him. Or is this an exceptional case, a freak accident?