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ART OF MEDICINE

Radiate Youth?

Lio Barnhardt

Abstract

This diptych is a satirical advertisement for a fictional face cream, inspired by and based upon a radium health craze during the early 20th century.

Figure 1. *Radiation Rejuvenation*



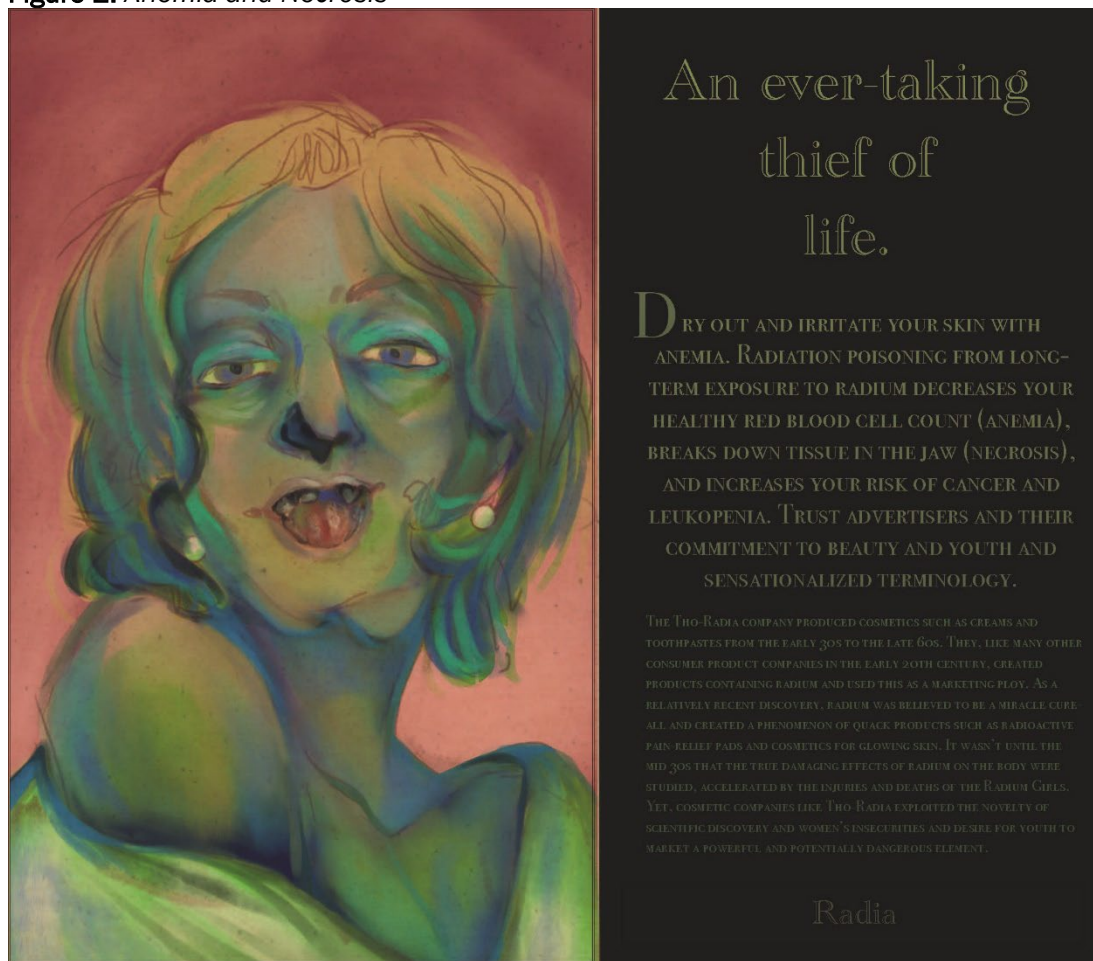
Media

Procreate digital illustration.

Caption

This diptych contrasts desired with more likely outcomes of an imaginary product, inspired by actual advertising of Tho-Radia,¹ a French cosmetics company that promoted the **beauty promise** of its thorium- and radium-based skin care products.² The company's visual promotions featured the face of a woman that was lit from below, glowing beautifully yet mysteriously. This work is a creative variation on that iconic portrayal of white young womanhood, still widely recognizable and used today to promote allegedly science-based products of many kinds.

Figure 2. *Anemia and Necrosis*



Media

Procreate digital illustration.

Caption

The second image, juxtaposed to the first, de-romanticizes the ideals represented in the first image. As an artist, I've always been fascinated by **pharmaceutical advertising**.

From vintage newspaper print media to today's digital mix of misinformation and influencers, products have always vied for our attention. The appeal of the kind of advertising I explore here persists, and its early 20th-century expressions are worth reflecting upon today, as beauty continues to be used by manufacturers to draw our attention and prompt our purchases. Manufacturers such as the Radium Appliance Company of Los Angeles also advertised a variety of household products. Radium spas, pain-relieving radium pads,^{3,4} and irradiated baths and drinking water⁵ were promoted until their dangers were exposed in the 1930s.⁶ My artistic interests focus on the uses of women's bodies—especially faces—to bear the health risks of **body images** that are unattainable, especially over time.

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Lio Barnhardt is an undergraduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in Illinois. They are also an interdisciplinary filmmaker, a writer, and a comic artist with an interest in personal psychology, history, and women's mental and physical health.

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

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