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Creating Gargoyles

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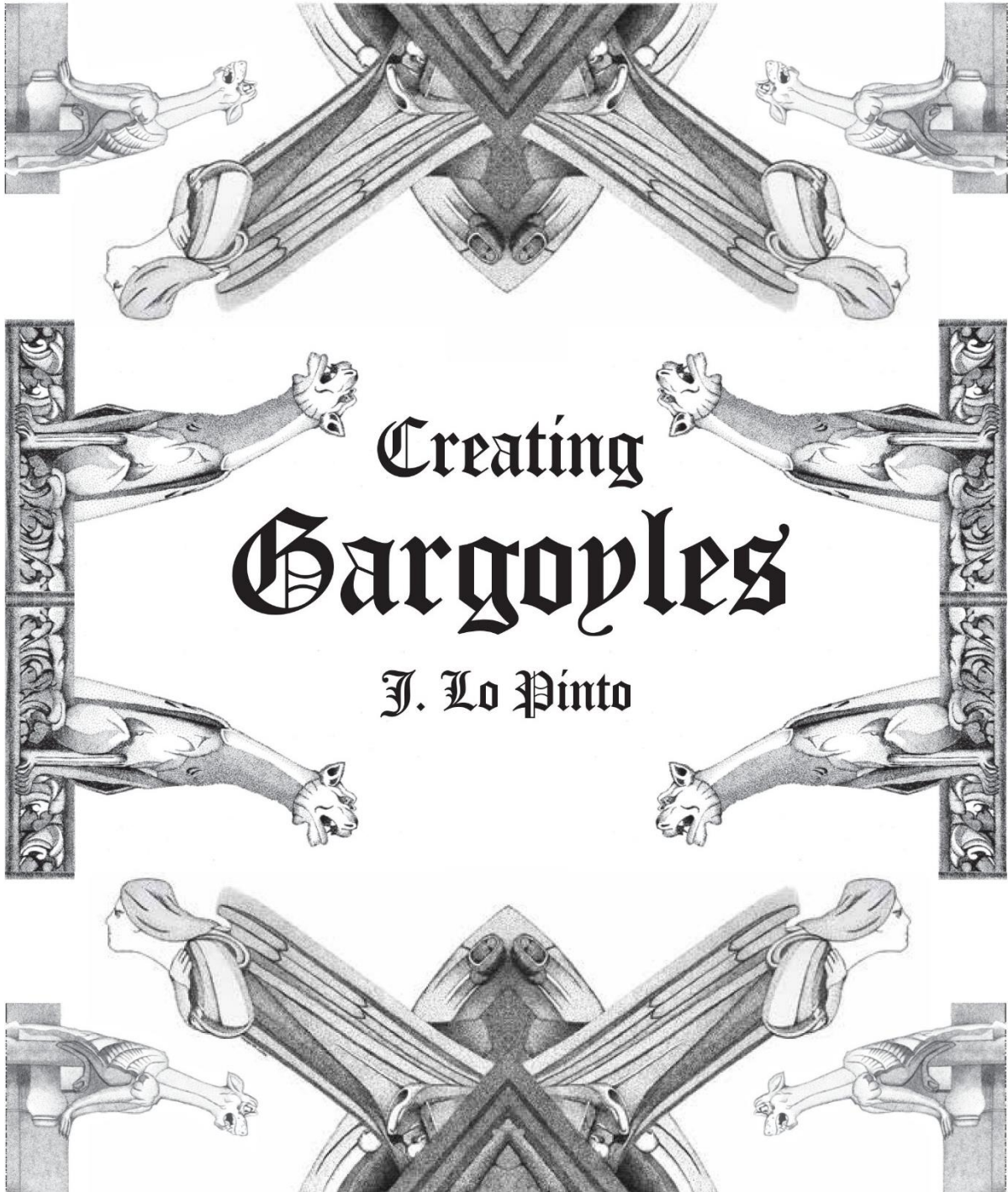
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Creating Gargoyles

J. Lo Pinto

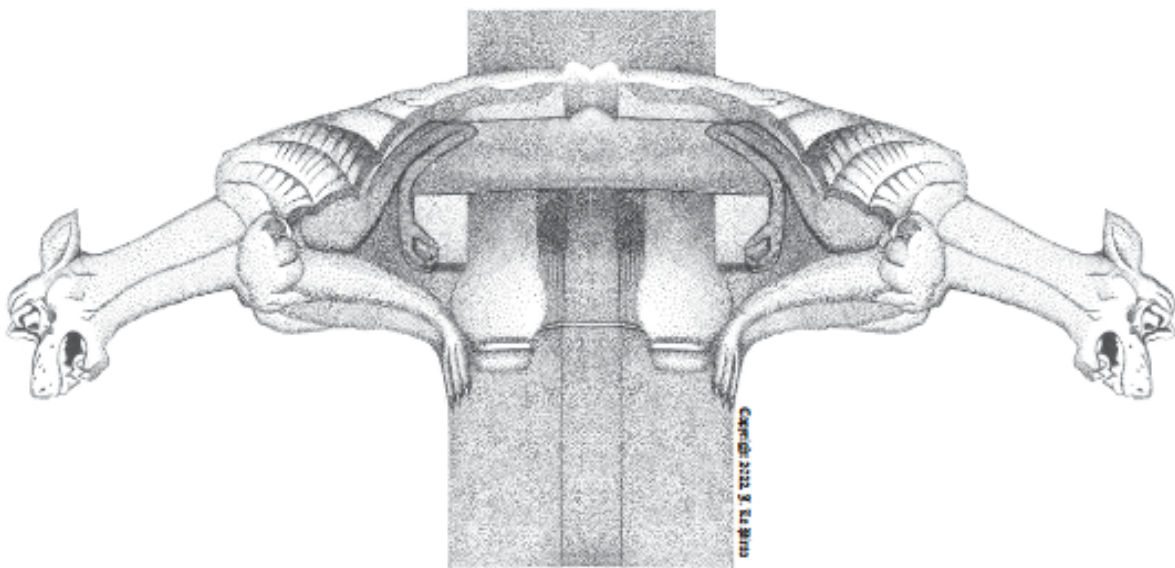


As an artist who works primarily in black and white, I have always been fascinated by images etched in stone. To me they are like black and white drawings in three dimensions.

I didn't know when I first became aware of gargoyles and grotesques. It was probably as a child, going to Catholic Mass on Sundays at some of the older churches in the Borough of Churches, Brooklyn, New York. Since New York City has more cathedrals and thus more Gargoyles than any city on earth, everyone was aware of these characters cut in stone, but I don't recall anyone ever speaking of them.



Some say they maintain a constant vigilance against evil entering God's Church. Others claim they are reminders that evil is ever present in the world especially when we do not abide by our faith. Yet, not all sculptures on churches depict evil looking creatures. Saints and scenes from the Holy Scriptures also live in the carved stone of Gothic structures.



But, gargoyles, in particular, also have a practical purpose. Gargoyles are carved or formed around spouts designed to allow water to flow from the church roof away from the side of the building, to prevent the rainwater from eroding the masonry. The term gargoyle comes from the French *gargouille*, which roughly translates to “throat” in English.

Yet, the name might be derived from the legend of the French St. Romanus and his encounter with a fire-breathing dragon named Gargouille in the year CE 600.

The story tells us of the monster that was terrorizing the area around the northern French city of Rouen. St. Romanus is said to have subdued the beast with just a crucifix. The dragon was then dragged to Rouen and burned. All that remained of it was its head and neck. Neither would catch fire due to being tempered by its own flaming breath. The head was then attached to the top of a newly constructed church as a reminder of Christianity’s triumph over evil.

For whatever reason they exist, gargoyles, grotesques, and other stone carving on our older religious structures add a sense of life, wonder, piousness and even amusement, to Gothic architecture.

