

## The Measure of She (and other aesthetics)

A feature film by Karen Dee Carpenter  
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Sirena, 30, is beautiful, intelligent and newly wed to Thomas, 38, a competent but uninspired academic in the field of Social Science. Thomas has been hired at a top research university in a new city and the couple has just moved into a spacious apartment that suits Sirena's idea of how they should live, but is beyond their financial means. She has married Thomas largely because of his family money and his promises to support her. Unfortunately, he overestimated his family's financial backing and finds that he is in over his head. A full professorship with a research stipend at his new university has been alluded to, but not guaranteed, so he now finds himself struggling to pay rent on an under-furnished, luxury apartment.

Jules, 45, is a successful French painter that lives and works in their building. He is intrigued by Sirena and befriends the couple. He asks Sirena to pose for him and she agrees. During these painting sessions they become confidantes.

By chance Sirena meets Thea, a former classmate from art school, who is scheduled to present her first one-person show. Thea's ostensible success spurns Sirena to reinvest herself in her own art making and she insists on renting a studio, which Thomas opposes on financial grounds. Sirena ignores his objections and creates an ideal space in which to work. Driven by ego rather than expression, she is stymied by what to create. Her frustration at her inadequacy begins an escalating series of petty crimes and acts of self-harm.

At a university function, Sirena meets Thomas' colleague Owen, 32, and is intrigued with his intelligence, wit and lack of control. He's a brilliant, young researcher who has written several well-regarded studies on the creative impulse. Since this early success he has yet to publish again and his drinking is slowly destroying what remains of his career. But his charming personality ensures that he's well liked at the university with at least one female graduate assistant harboring a crush on him.

Thomas and Sirena have a house-warming party. Here Sirena introduces Owen to Thea. Several weeks later at Thea's gallery opening it's revealed that they've become a couple. With Thea's care, Owen has given up drinking and re-devoted himself to his work. He has begun a new study, inspired by Thea, which Thomas insists is groundbreaking. Owen's improvement means that he is in direct competition with Thomas for the tenured position at the university.

Sirena spends long periods of time in her new studio but seems to fail at every effort. After Thea's show we see her replicate an image from Thea's work. She catches herself in the imitation and then destroys the painting, viciously. Sirena is intensely jealous of Thea not only for the attention that she is receiving for her art but also from Owen.

Through careful manipulation, Sirena hastens the end of Owen's sobriety, to Thea's horror. Sirena then orchestrates an affair with him, which, with the help of drugs and alcohol, begins a downward spiral of their mental and physical wellbeing.

Sirena continues to pose for Jules. She enjoys having him under her control and encourages Jules' affections for her just enough to have him lose his model/girlfriend and his art dealer, which seems like it might signal the slow crumbling of his successful career. He's become set on an affair with Sirena, but she is able to skillfully rebuff him.

The results of Owen's experiments aren't showing the desired outcome. When he briefly mentions Thea in a casual conversation Sirena's jealousy prompts her to suggest that Owen could falsify some of the results, fully aware that this could destroy his career. Owen laughs off her suggestion but through careful manipulation Sirena is able to convince him to adjust the data in order to create an "elegant" result that will attract sponsors and publishers.

His spurned graduate assistant discovers Owen's fraud and reports him to the Dean. He's placed on suspension pending an investigation and he falls into a state of depression and becomes suicidal with shame. Sirena provides false comfort to him. When he talks to her of killing himself, Sirena, seemingly on the edge of madness herself, encourages him. He leaves her studio with that objective.

Sirena later finds out from Jules that Owen has instead made his way to a bar where he has instigated a rowdy party, rather than pursue the poetic suicide that Sirena has tried to orchestrate. Jules realizes during this conversation that Sirena is Owen's lover and is furious that she disregarded him and his interest in her. He threatens to expose her affair to Thomas unless she sleeps with him. Sirena, furious that he would try to control her through blackmail, leaves.

Sirena returns to her studio finally inspired. Here she commits the poetic end that Owen was unable to accomplish, which she documents on video, finally completing what she feels is a work of art.