



# ***Reenchantment of the Self***



*Victoria Patrick Zolnoski*



Any awakening, transformation or simply different contemplation of my earthly and artistic purpose has been spurred by the following individuals who I thank whole heartedly. Peter Hocking, who saw and named me as a woman from the edge of the woods, your advice has resonated through every semester. I still hear you, thank you. Devora Neumark, whose artwork reveals her personal grief, showed the way beauty bridges pain and healing. I had to cross the bridge alone and in my own time and way. Shalom. Cynthia Ross, whose joy and playfulness fully embody the anthroposophical foundations of imagination, inspiration and intuition lightened my heart and introduced me to Hide Oshiro. Blessings. The most fervent thank you to Ruth Wallen for holding the ground under my feet while allowing my mind to travel the stars, earth and artist sister, you showed me the beauty and power of a positive union between art and science. Namaste. Mark O'Maley, instigator extraordinaire, thank you for adding motion and sound into my art life! Beverly Runyan, a woman who makes snow angels in lightning storms, thank you for being the best roommate ever! Diana Gonsalves, videographer, model, design master, I cannot thank you enough. Most of all my generous family, Paul and Elektra, thank you for your love, patience and trusting the process too.



*Autumn, 2012*

## Introduction

As I begin the portfolio process for the completion of the MFAIA at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont I am aware more of what I don't know, what has not been investigated than all of my exploration. The world has opened wide and my senses are awakened, renewed and hungry for more. Instead of a sense of un-accomplishment this sensation is an opening to different thinking. 'Think differently' has been my mantra throughout this transformational process. The word transformational is the key and becomes synonymous with educational.

As a professional educator I am already studious, committed to education and open minded in ways of learning, varieties of interpretation, and different means of growth. The 'Trust the Process' chant has been more shamanic than paper degree oriented; this was the reason for choosing Goddard in the first place. Nothing is as it seems at Goddard and yet it is exactly what you need and have asked for. Rightly so, this portfolio is not what I expected, but exactly what I learned. It is not a listing or regurgitating of past work, a lovely list with the logical check off points. No, it is another transformation, revealing future paths for growth. Instead of a grand dinner remembered it is a labor, perhaps of both types; one Herculean, the other, the feminine source of new life.

What I found first was my core philosopher, Owen Barfield, whose final sentence of *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* states the premise behind my work, "... **the other name for original participation, in all its long-hidden, in all its diluted forms, in science, in art and in religion, is, after all-paganism.**" (186) This statement supports my entire existence and lifelong belief system; I have consciously been a pagan since I was a teenager. Barfield's brilliance and eloquence resonates with my soul. Barfield became an anthroposophist after attending a lecture by Rudolf Steiner in 1924. In 1999 I completed the two year Foundation Studies, the anthroposophical prerequisite for becoming a Waldorf educator. Until Goddard I never realized how imbued anthroposophy is in my being and belief system. Anthroposophical thinking opens a person to the imagination, inspiration and intuition, great keys to life and art making.

My time at Goddard has led me back to Rudolf Steiner and Joseph Campbell, best known for his series with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*. The importance of Steiner has never felt stronger although his Christian language does not serve my beliefs or visions. I never seem to swallow anyone else's philosophical systems whole. In *The Power of Myth* video the profoundness of Campbell felt like a physical assault as I heard him say, "**Artists are mythmakers.**" This clip was played five times in succession for me to absorb the meaning, the suggestion of my own empowerment through my own art. Through separation of thought I have kept myself and my art separate, hiding both. This disconnection seems parallel to the



scientific revolution's separation and labeling, judgment by name and singular observation. Had I isolated myself by separation and inaction, suspended my own beliefs?

Through these two men Carl Gustav Jung emerged; I have never read much philosophy, but mythology has been meaningful since childhood and in some sense is partly responsible for my goddess worship. Women stand solidly behind my personal philosophy and art actions. Maria Gimbutas and Riane Eisler were reread and have secured the foundation again. Anne Baring, Jules Cashford and Barbara Tedlock were discovered, revealing deeper paths to wander, logically and organically expanding the patterns of my belief web. While reading spurs the mind, the proof is in artistic creation.

Other artists work makes me respond with art not words. The female artists around the Surrealists have intoxicated me with their strong personalities, powerful words and art so otherworldly it is soul wrenching. They led me to Mexico where I have discovered later artists, photographers of both genders, who through artful magic repopulate the earthly garden humanity was supposedly expelled from. They asked me to join them, to follow them there, for in my heart that is where I already stood, on the opposite side of the threshold. The work of Mexican photographers makes me artistically brave and proud of my medium, wanting to retain and further its mysterious qualities. Their photographs become the lightning strikes which re-fire my imagination to the point of childhood wonder and secret knowing.

Children are insightful and quite direct with their connections. The balance of a good life seems to be not losing the belief in the magic of the world. In your twenties the words of great thinkers have one meaning, in your fifties another, but the two weigh in together for an even more profound awareness. This has opened wide the probability that almost everything of importance I have read in the past should be read again. Also in this process I have newly discovered so much more I want to read, predominately on the subjects of mythology, phenomenology and earth art. Books lead to books and images to images. My time at Goddard has interwoven the philosophical world of words with the artistic one of images. This marriage of communication becomes an egalitarian hieros gamos. As a woman I embrace the image, the most ancient and original form of worship. To be egalitarian I must find away to accept man whose written history has denied my gender's worth or even existence. A new world can only be made with restored eyes and different thinking which is inclusive.

The most profound and inspirational experience of my MFAIA time was meeting Hide Oshiro at the opening of his dedication exhibition at Goddard College. Here is a man who embodied his work, living and creating as he thought. His personal symbolism enriches his compositions and ties them to the great cosmos, the source of life and origin of all mythology. All ages of human life were visible in his presence. Hide Oshiro in body and word appeared as the enchanted child, the middle aged mind of intellect, the later life inner knowing and



ultimately as the wise man. He took my breath away with internal recognition of life's truth. "You already know what you are supposed to do, you already know the truth." which I took as be true to yourself and get to work. His personal privacy and continuous creation of unrevealed art work supported my own deliberate rural seclusion. Perhaps I was not so far off my own path. Had I just blown out my own match? Hide Oshiro passed away shortly after I met him, but that one encounter was life changing.



At the end of the third semester and during the fourth, five people in my life passed away. If the words and artwork of one man touched me deeply in just one brief encounter then what did a lifetime with someone mean and translate into my art? This number of deaths is too difficult to absorb and decipher quickly. They are floating angels in the back of my mind who occasionally emerge from visible clouds and reappear in my own text and imagery. The death of Jean Day ended up changing the title of my practicum. The deaths of Hide Oshiro and my godparents spurred the creation of *Ash Angels*. I can only remain open to the language that crosses the threshold trying to give me new means of awareness, insight and interpretation.

My title comes from two texts, Morris Berman's *Reenchantment of the World* and Suzi Gablik's *Reenchantment of Art*. Both explain past human history and thinking, drawing points to places of change; they also write of possible hopeful futures if change is acted upon. The combination of their words made me realize none of this can happen unless each individual is re-enchanted. Like the Occupy Movement which I decided to do in my own backyard, enchantment has to begin in my own being. I believe in the beauty of the earth, the power of nature and in magic, but I was not enlivened. It is difficult to prove, but the beauty of the earth is healing. Time spent outdoors in nature, with other species regains our balance and reconnects us to the true human purpose, to be caretakers of the planet. I was not that out of step, but had become mute, thinking no one cared what I thought or how I felt. My disconnection was with other humans. David Abram's book *The Spell of the Sensuous* describes how I regularly live. I did not realize a life in nature was a form of investigation, an actual

philosophy, phenomenology. To be a meaningful artist I would have to be willing to reveal what I had protected and kept secret, my intimate connection to the Earth Mother.

Through the aid of human advisors, fellow classmates from all semesters and a great sense of community at Goddard I have temporarily hung up my turtle shell to join the dance of life. When privacy and distance is desired the shell can be my shaman drum.

## Personal Charge Poem, October 2011

A reoccurring dream of a great eye first thought of as a whale then revealed to be an elephant, although the universe told me they were interchangeable, one as representative of water, the other of earth, gave me my personal invocation poem.





**Table of Contents**

**Introduction**

**I. A Sense of Place**

**a. Phenomenology**

**b. Living with Cyclical Time**

**II. The Summer of Beautiful Women**

**a. Homage or Where do Images Come From?**

**III. The Web within the Ouroboros, A Mental Sampler**

**a. Trees**

**b. Revelations on Romanticism: A Big Step for Womankind**

**IV. Collaboration**

**a. Mark O'Maley, the Camera Betrays Who?**

**b. Maria Urrutia, the Gift**

**V. How the Song of Solomon Became the Golden Chamber**

**a. Journal Entries**

**b. Exhibition Imagery**

**VI. Self-Portraiture**

**VII. Feminine Footsteps with Totem**

**VIII. The Bowl or Natural Amphitheater**

**a. Ash Angels**

**b. The Descent of Inanna**

**IX. Ana and Anna**

**X. The Mirrored Path: On Being with the Camera and Oneself**

**XII. Double Vision**

**XIII. Conclusion**





## A Sense of Place

When I began the MFAIA portfolio I realized I needed a map, that all of my work was based on location. The outdoor landscape is the basis for photography, video, beginning performance and earth art. Even costume work is intended for a natural setting. The Hundred Acre Wood of Winnie the Pooh

was the first map I envisioned, clear in my mind after all these years. As children we were thrown outside for most of the day; sometimes sandwiches were left on the porch. You weren't expected back until dinner time and there was only a vague idea of where you were playing. Meredith Sabini, editor of *The Earth Has A Soul: C.G. Jung on Nature, Technology and Modern Life*, quotes the philosopher,

"But the fountainhead can only be discovered if the conscious mind will suffer itself to be lead back to the "children's land", there to receive guidance from the unconscious as before." (75) Current thoughts about my environment remain similar to the map in A.A. Milne's book. My landmarks are still where animals live and certain trees or rocks are prominent. Why hadn't I ever written about the importance of the land in my creative process?

Since I was very young I have always loved being outdoors. Being in and with nature is my chosen environment. Even though I live where there is snow sometimes six months of the year I still go outside as much as possible. For the breath of the earth, the wind, enlivens me and helps me to breathe deeply and freely. The fire of the sun warms me even when it is cold. The ground gives me a place to stand, to bury my dead both of form and thought. The soil cleanses and guides my emotions, not to mention providing food and flowers. The trees are my oldest green ancestors. The rocks interpret the stars for they are their fallen cousins. The stars show me time and are the diamond's of the universe, procurable by all. Through dream time the evening universe liberates and educates my mind, cleansing and realigning my spirit. Water in all forms keeps me and every creature alive. My thoughts are kinder outdoors, not about me, but about the beauty of the earth. What portion of my identity is based on where I was raised and currently live, on relationship to my environment?





I thought I could make a simple photographic yard map for navigation of my thesis. The result below, Sacred Circle Animals is far more complex in imagery and thought than I first realized, but this is my mind in pictures. The directions are true to our property. Animals, alive or deceased, are closely placed to where they reside. This is their home too even before it is mine. Sharing the earth with other creatures is perhaps the greatest joy in my life other than the companionship of my immediate family. Arthur Versluis in *Sacred Earth: the Spiritual Landscape of Native America* states my thoughts of the landscape simply and beautifully, "To be born of a particular landscape---to be a pilgrim within it---means that one travels through life as through the landscape. One's purpose on earth is not to own or control the natural world but to deepen one's character and to realize spiritual truth in one's own life." (103)



Sacred Circle Animals, 2012

My beginning definition of beauty comes from my childhood time outside. Nature is the ultimate source of beauty. Nature holds the all encompassing spark of life that unites every creature. We all share one home, the earth. We all breathe one air and drink one water. All hearts hold the fire of the birth of the universe. Beauty is the breath of connectedness. In my mind and heart, beauty and nature are synonymous. There is no need for me to deny I am a romantic; it is not a dirty, uneducated or naive word. In fact a new educated romanticism might be needed to save the earth, at least bring about awareness and action. We seem to be caught in a circle of conversation and panic about our shared home. Could the linear lives of modern society be derailed enough to reenter the inclusive circle of life? Could this step off the track change our vision, broaden our thoughts and provide for different actions and reactions? My own lack of liveliness of late has come from living in a too linear way. The minute I step off the fast track and walk into the woods I am transformed and begin to heal. The outer enters me, soothes, realigns and transforms me into the oneness of the world. I am equal to a blade of grass, a worm; I am a creature hand in hand with all other creatures. We are all powerful, vital, and unique in our own ways. All need to be honored.

For the last thirty years I have lived in Walden, part of Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, a coin termed by Governor George D. Aiken in 1949. In the online magazine, *Northland Journal* Aiken's widow explains, "The Northeast Kingdom was just one of his favorite places in the world...he always loved the people up there. He used to say that many of the people didn't have much of anything, or have big jobs, but they were always happy. They didn't complain as other people would complain in the same situation. They just made do with what they had. The people up there didn't put on "airs" and they always welcomed you." (vermonter.com) Tom Slayton, editor-emeritus of Vermont Life Magazine, reiterates the combination of material poverty and natural beauty, "The Northeast Kingdom is a really, really wonderful, distinctive place. At the same time it's a very poverty stricken place. Not everyone there is poor, I hasten to add, but it has the highest unemployment and the lowest wage average of any particular region in Vermont. And yet at the same time it has wonderful people, beautiful scenery, really great natural resources, (and in many ways it reminds me of the Vermont I grew up in)." (vpr.net) Despite the stark contrast between the lack of monetary wealth and the abundant riches of the landscape Patricia Schultz lists the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont in her book, *1,000 Places to See Before You Die*. Wikipedia supports this claim, "In 2006, the National Geographic Society named the Northeast Kingdom as the most desirable place to visit in the country and the ninth most desirable place to visit in the world." The location sounds like an UNESCO Heritage site for rural beauty and perhaps it should be. My art comes from this place as much as from myself. This land is my physical home and the home of my heart; my most recent memories come from this particular spot in the world. I am in love with the earth under my



feet and all I see, smell, feel and touch. My senses are heightened here. Northern Vermont provides a safe and exceptionally beautiful place to just be.

This environment is about the rugged landscape. Our granite hills are worn down, not as high as the mountains out west. The most striking components of northern Vermont are greenness, the forests and glacial remnants. One is struck first by the endless color of the landscape. The viridescence is so vast it is hard to imagine the water necessary to sustain such opulent growth. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford quote William Anderson from his book *The Rise of the Gothic*, "...the love we feel for nature is reflected back to us in measure of our appreciation and that the source of love is the same for as is the driving force of sap in leaves and branches". (412) Epic rolling fields and hillsides lead to deeper forests, following shades of greenness that leads us deeper into ourselves.

This dense landscape fits Joseph Campbell's second type of sacred space, forest or jungle so thick there is no horizon. The first sacred space belongs to the hunter gatherers who lived and believed in the vast plain and domed sky. This vision is clearly explained by Arthur Versluis in *Sacred Earth: The Spiritual Landscape of Native America*, "Above us is the circle, representing the completeness of our spiritual Origin, shown to us in the horizon's ring; where we stand is the human realm, marked by the directional cross, or by the figure of a man with his arms outstretched; and below us is the square or cube of the earth, or Primal Substance." (108-9) My version has a non-gendered person with arms outstretched or if feminine with arms curved slightly upwards in the epiphany gesture seen in ancient Goddess figurines. This stance receives, holds and gives wholeness. The land beneath my feet is round, a mirror of the above, speaking to my Wiccan training which espouses "so above, so below". Although, I do have a flower bed called the Square Garden after the alchemic tradition, "squaring the circle" which as a metaphor means to do the impossible. In Freemasonry it is the bringing of divinity to earth and for me it is the Mystic Rose, a symbol of the divine feminine associated with Venus, both the planet and the goddess. My father was a Freemason and after hearing the term when I made my own home the first flower bed was the Square Garden. It lies where Mars and Venus meet and has a fully open rose pattern created by the paths. At the center, flower beds in the shapes of a sun and moon slice hug each other, symbolic of the central stigmas and closest petals of a rose. To walk the paths and weed is a meditation relating to medieval mystic roses and to earlier labyrinths, becoming my own mini-pilgrimage to my most ancient feminine ancestor.

In northern Vermont the fields are large enough and mountains high enough to have the vast plain and domed sky scenario too. With this view the world in fact looks split in two, three if you consider what lies under your feet. The earth becomes the plane and place for survival and learning of life's lessons. The sky becomes the origin of all, the home

of deities and the language of the deities through weather and constellations. For some the ground beneath is the earth's navel, a storage place for the mysteries and a home land for the deceased. Having access to both types of sacred environments, the vast plain and domed sky and the horizon-less forest, makes my home extra special. In the winter the whiteness seems boundless and perpetual especially in contrast to the darkness of the short daylight hours. The great dome of the sky fills with stars and I quickly remember our most ancient ancestors when I glance upwards; they saw the very same sky. The cycle of the year keeps this ever changing and magical, yet comforting as the circle begins again. At the point you feel you cannot bear the season another one begins. This description and contemplation makes me wonder why I have never made circular art. Yet now I see I live in a circle, using my sacred space as the environment of creation. So the thought and process is circular, but currently not reflected in the physicality of my art.

My sacred circle is approximately half a mile wide. By car I regularly enter from the west and know I have crossed the line when I pass 1650 elevation. At this height there is a magical transition, recognized by most locals. From this point onwards rime ice can be held for a week. Cars often go off the road here. Dowzers and witches have told me about the ley line running behind my house. It is right out my back door and I am very aware of it. As crazy as it sounds my husband and I have both seen spirit forms traveling the ley line. Spirit matter doesn't remain here, but moves back and forth with the earth energy. A neighborhood dowser and witch called it a spirit highway. It runs parallel to the house and road and becomes the diameter of my sacred circle. Perhaps its existence is the reason I base my earthly participation here.

Ley lines and light are very closely related. Ley lines are cosmic forces originating outside of the Earth. They penetrate and leave the Earth vertically at nodes. The penetrating nodes are called power centers. When entering, ley lines continue to a point 265 feet below the surface of the Earth. At this point, it makes a 90 degree right-angle turn and travels in a perfectly straight line as seen from a "birds-eye view" and in an undulating motion as seen from the side, but always maintaining a depth of 265 feet, relative to the surface of the Earth. The average length of a ley line is twenty to thirty miles, although the length can vary from only a few feet to thousands of miles. The width of the line varies, but the average is 5-1/2 feet, the width of the Roman road. The horizontally traveling ley line exits the Earth by again turning 90 degrees and passing straight through the center of the Earth and coming out the other side. (geo.org)

The definitive marking for the western entrance is an old maple tree which leans like Daphne trying to escape Apollo. I call her the Queen tree; she is the cardinal point for the West. People walking the road often stop to admire her and I have been told by several

neighbors that the Queen tree is their favorite and marks a special location. The West represents air and beauty, I often think of the Pompeian wall painting, Flora when I look this way. In *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, Anne Baring and Jules Cashford describe the goddess who comes from this direction, "Aphrodite comes alive when the animal nature of humanity is experienced as divine." (351) The west and east are thick with both types of forest: maple-beech-birch and spruce-fir or boreal combinations. Although the west is the natural automotive entrance, the correct ceremonial entrance would be from the East.

The eastern point is where the sun rises over a hill and two roads converge towards our house, a human crossroads. This is the ancient direction of looking; from here the sun gives birth to each day. When I look east it is easy to envision any civilization's birth story, I try to honor as many as I know. The Milky Way spreads diagonally from north-west to south-east; when I first moved here I thought I had purchased a piece of the universe too. The night sky is so visible, so continuously vibrant. Stars can be picked like wild fruits. Venus and Mars flirt over the little one room school now occupied by my closest and dear neighbors. Best of all, if you fall asleep on the dining room couch the Big Dipper tosses stars into your dreams.

To the north and south there are open spaces. The North has a broad field my family calls the 'steppes' in honor of Mongolia. In the winter we call the space the 'tundra'. There is no direct cardinal point here, only the line where field meets forest. This gives the sense of a horizon which I associate with the Great Mother. The South has a high natural amphitheater and is the traveling area for most animals. This direction is dedicated to the Archangel Michael who I have prayed to for thirty years.

Of course all planetary and star activity is based on the time of year. The same is true about agriculture. Here begins the rhythm of rural life. The elements are so pervasive, so powerful at times you must



*Sacred Circle Trees and Death, 2012*



respect and be one with them. Nature is in control; the weather in Vermont is infamously changeable. I get bored and frustrated when it remains the same too long, even suspicious about a run of glorious days. This interaction with the atmosphere to the point one feels guilt, anger or utter joy harks to the primitive. I feel good when I am synchronized with my natural environment, no matter the season or time of day. We must act in unison for my health and perhaps the earth's health too.

Gardening is done in the old way. For over twenty years the biodynamic calendar has guided my planting, weeding and harvesting. My tools are a Korean plow, a British ladies spade and a good old New England dirt fork. Manually tending the land is pleasantly exhausting, the body works but the mind remains free. The surrounding natural beauty leads the imagination to realms of unconsciousness where the soul gets renewed. This is the time to contemplate my purpose on the planet and is the conscious time closest to dreaming. Other than teaching at college, nature's schedule overrides the one I have hanging on the refrigerator. The minute I walk out the door I am in the school of the earth where I am always the student.

Several years ago when an elderly cousin came to visit my garden she asked why it was so large. In an instant I realized the space tended was equal to the size of soul retrieval or maintenance I needed from the land. The land was healing me, reestablishing a true center not based on humans being the most important. For me to feel sane and most like myself I need to have my hands in the dirt roughly six to eight hours a day for three months of the year, more if possible. I was astounded; this does not include the time for walking, meandering, snow shoeing and the like, more gentle participation. Nor does it include the time spent making art. In Meredith Sabini's own words, "The purpose of doing these things, however, is not to repair Nature, but rather to let Nature affect us." (19)

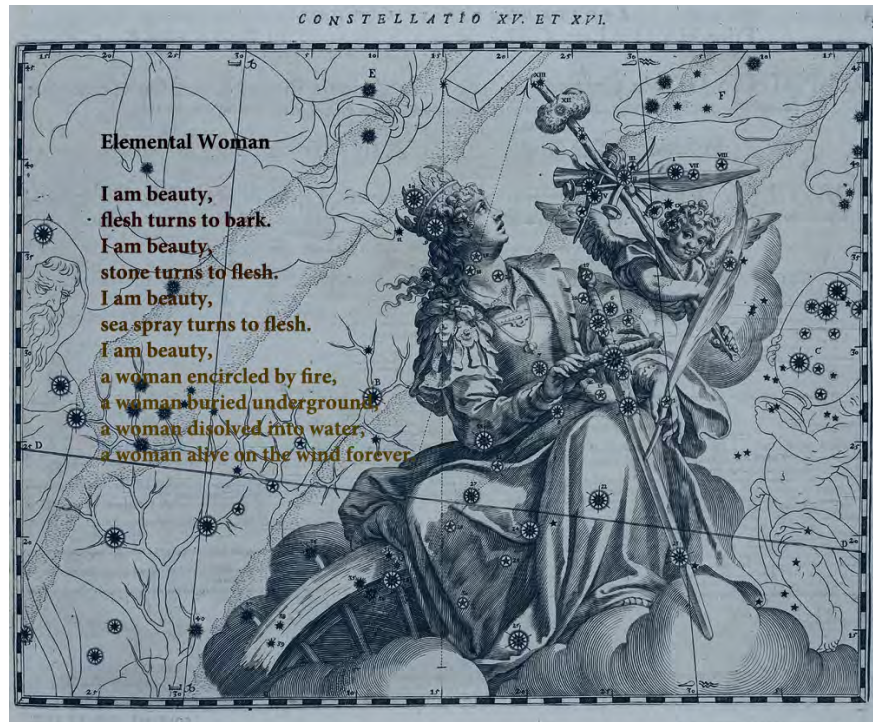
Every walk or car ride provides photographic possibilities whether immediate or as a future location. This interaction with the landscape yields my props and sets. I do not use purchased natural objects. To be honest most of my prized possessions are gifts from my husband. These cherished items, such as a bear skull, mark a specific day, time and season which my family remembers; time spent in and with the land. This synchronizing with the earth is the basis of magic for me. Earth worship and sacred participation can be retraced throughout history. It is humankind's beginning and my reason for my chosen environment and making art.

People often say their goal is to live in time, but are unwilling to redirect their lives in unison with nature. This has been one of the purposes of my life and therefore the subject of what I create, although it is perhaps not obvious. It is as if I am De-Cartesianing myself. "Without my piece of earth, my life's work would not have come into being," (5) Jung said

about his physical home and ancestral heritage. Sharing the same air Joseph Campbell explains, "The sanctification of the local landscape is a fundamental function of mythology." (The Power of Myth 91) The previous quotes unite in Jung's words, "...the collective unconsciousness is simply Nature-and since Nature contains everything it also contains the unknown."

(82) I keep the earthly mirror close to my face, but it is difficult merging modern linear life with the ancient circle.

During the time of matristic societies the earth and its inhabitants were interconnected. Life and death were overseen by a goddess who was the representative of the entire universe. Riane Eisler describes this union in *The Chalice and The Blade*, "Indeed, this theme of unity of all things in nature, as personified by the Goddess, seems to permeate Neolithic art. For here the supreme power governing the universe is a divine Mother who gives her people life, provides them with material and spiritual nurturance, and who even in death can be counted on to take her children back into her cosmic womb." (19) When warrior peoples over took these cultures the Goddess was replaced with a God who was removed from the cycle of life. In *Poetic Diction*, Owen Barfield describes the effect of man's "progress" through time, "And it is a tragedy of art in our time that most of those who-whether they desire it or not-are regarded as living representatives of the poetic, are under the spell of Kantian conception of knowledge, or, worse still, a popular conception of 'Science.'" (201) Barfield is writing of Descartes dismissal of sensory images as a source of knowledge. Added to this Cartesian 'fact' was the notion that animals only react mechanically to stimuli, having no true sensing ability. This belief dismisses the interconnectedness and the unity of all things on earth. Kant believed the mind structured reality which brought about a reformulation of viewing the world and its contents as objects. Kant's preeminence of objective thought transformed into the often judgmental and myopic view of the scientific revolution. This



thinking becomes the separation of man from all other beings, the world according to the human mind alone. Barfield is suggesting a step further back in time to the periods when humankind considered itself part of the whole, not superior and beyond earthly union. The danger becomes the creation of poetry and art which never delve deep enough beneath the surface to see existing paradise. Barfield hints at a blinded skyward glance for God, in sense a short-sided memory.

In describing the 'Gaia Consciousness', Baring and Cashford explain, "Underlying this phenomenon is the idea that only a personification of the Earth can restore a sacred identity to it, or rather, her, so that a new relationship might become possible between humans and the natural world we take for granted." (304) Rudolf Steiner suggests a means of repair in his *Lecture III, The Wisdom of Spirit*.

If we then endeavored to proceed through intuition, which sways the soul, we would not get very far; instead, we must proceed more from the other side, must try to develop imagination, to focus our attention on the imaginative world, in order not merely to wallow in emotions but to arrive at concrete images. If we do that, a sort of contact enters our life between intuition, which is not yet understood but rather felt, and imagination, which still floats in unreality and consists only of images. This contact finally enables us to ascend to the plane we can describe by saying that we have arrived among the beings who bring about spiritual events. Approaching these beings is what we call inspiration, and in a sense we have here the reverse of the processes confronting us in the outer corporeal world. (rsarchive.org)

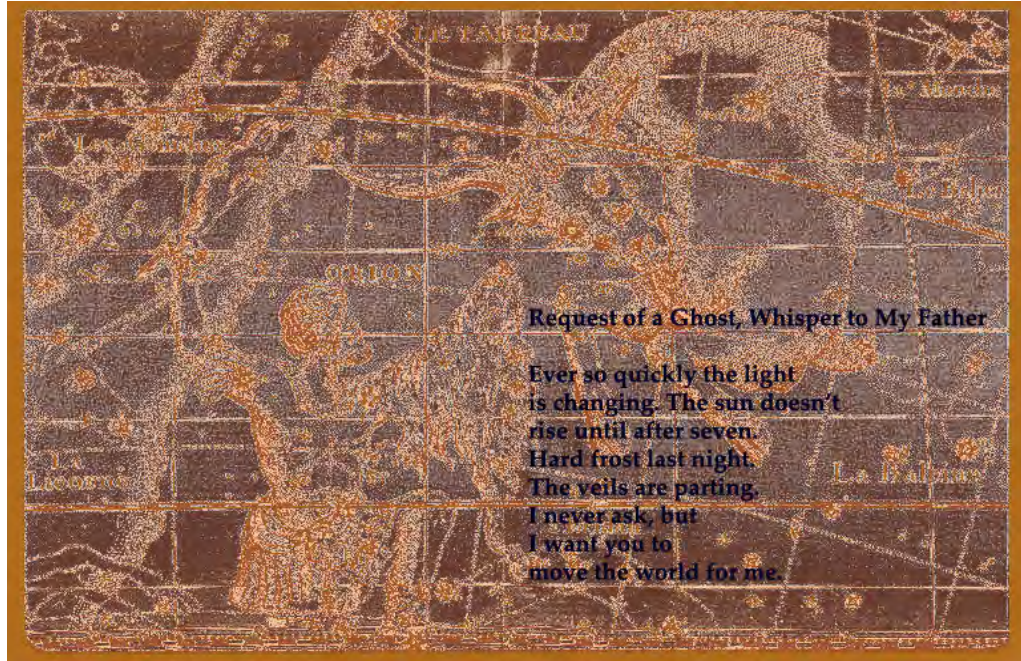
We cannot return to the past, but the logical hope is to move forward accepting and using the knowledge of all time, to not forget the original love for the earth. My choice of location opens the possibility to intimate interactions with Mother Nature and others, offering a chance for a song of praise to part from my lips.

My father was adopted so I only know fifty percent of my heritage. I have not participated in the Genome Project yet, but would like to. This is a future art project to create with my brother. Hopefully without being politically incorrect I use this unknown portion to explore my possible heritage. Perhaps it is best not knowing for I follow the song in my heart. This inner voice is of the primitive, still attached to humankind's umbilical cord. My heart is loyal to this connection and I feel as if I would die if the land did not sing to me.

What Jung and Campbell are trying to say is that the primitive voice still echoes through to our time. In Jung's words, "Nevertheless, the world of primitive feeling is not



entirely lost to us; it lives on in the unconscious." (93) he continues "On the contrary, every civilized human being, however high his conscious development, is still an archaic man at the deeper



levels of his psyche." (100). Daily, the act of waking reignites the original spark of life. How do I reaffirm and celebrate my connection to the planet? My childhood imagination easily recognized and associated with the archaic has never been outgrown or dismissed. As a white, middle class, American woman I still feel I can access the primitive; it comes from my deep affection for the earth and the realization that humans aren't superior. Our general lack of acknowledgment and consideration for animals, birds, reptile and the green world makes me embarrassed to be of my species. Could I use my art to correct this sensation?

The ancient method of celebrating the earth and life is through oral poetry and song. Two books have highlighted this means of communication for me. *Out of the Earth I Sing* edited by Richard Lewis was published in 1968 and includes songs from around the world. The chapters are divided into types of praise: morning, children, creatures, hunting, thunder, night and death. In the forward Lewis explains, "Part of their secret is that they have not broken their hold on the rhythms of the earth---they live alongside the ever-changing weather, they are sensitive to the ways of animals and creatures, they understand the solemnity of ritual---they are alive to the natural world in a way that we, over centuries have lost."

Willard R. Trask is the editor of *The Unwritten Song: Poetry of the Primitive and Traditional Peoples of the World*. Published in 1966, it is the first of two volumes. Trask was friends with Mircea Eliade who wrote *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. The table of contents is broken up into chapters for specific regions of the world. Again, the introduction is very informative. Trask explains that recitations were rare. Most often the poems are spontaneously sung. Rhythmic motion is added by dancing or at least clapping of hands and stamping of



feet. Drumming is the most common musical element. Collectively these activities create one homogeneous art form. Each person composes their own song; there is no restriction of gender or age. The publications by Lewis and Trask preserve vanishing beliefs and languages of indigenous cultures. The work highlighted spurs me to honor vocally and spontaneously the thoughts I keep in silence. Is this a footstep toward the past or a step which brings the past forward? If the archaic or primitive already exists within me, I am asking this part of myself to enter my daily life more boldly and predominantly. I would like my present self to embrace my most ancient form with deliberate recognition.

On the Gilbert Islands Sir Arthur Grimble found the songs were created in solitude and Knud Rasmussen discovered the Eskimos claimed they came out of sacred silence. Rasmussen passionately explains, "These works don't arrive like fragile orchids from the hot houses of professional poets; they have flowered like rough, weather beaten saxifrage which has taken root on rock. And they ought to matter to us. For do we not hear through them something that reminds us of the original features of our own old songs — the same teasing humour, the same quiet melancholia — and sometimes in glimpses, a simple but grandiose pathos which grips us by virtue of its immediacy." (qtd in Lowenstein 109) Versluis writes of the power and unity of silence in the chapter titled: *The Songs of Solitude and Silence*, "This Origin is at once the silence from which all things proceed and the solitary unmoving center of existence. To enter this solitude and this silence is to enter into perfection and plentitude at the very Axis of being; it is to enter the Absolute, into that which is inconceivable from a merely human perspective." (129) Respectful quietness provides for subtle hearing and sensing, allowing the larger voice of the world to speak for all. When the human voice breaks through with reverence it becomes the mirror voice of the world and often the voice for the unsung.

Robert Graves in *The White Goddess* describes the ultimate force behind poetry, "The reason why the hairs stand on end, the eyes water, the throat is constricted, the skin crawls and a shiver runs down the spine when one writes or reads a true poem is that a true poem is necessarily an invocation of the White Goddess, or Muse, or Mother of All Living, the ancient power of fright and lust—the female spider or the queen-bee whose embrace is death." (24) Graves boldly and dramatically connects oration to the ancient voice of the divine feminine. My preference is for a benevolent earth mother not the sexualized vision of some men, but the dance of life goes hand in hand with the one of death, thus making a circle.

As a woman the belief that the written word diminished, blamed and even removed women and all others from the world is extremely hard hitting. In Abram's succinct words, "And indeed, it is only when a culture shifts its participation to these printed letters that the stones fall silent. Only as our senses transfer their animating magic to written words do the trees become mute, the other animals dumb." (131) Oral poetry is magic, a remnant of the

old ways. Carol Merchant explains for most Europeans a belief in nature continued until the Renaissance "...the pervasive animism of nature created a relationship of immediacy with the human being. An I-thou relationship in which nature was considered to be a person-writ-large was sufficiently prevalent that the ancient tendency to treat it as another human still existed." (28) The I-thou language comes from Martin Buber's *Ich und Du* first translated into English, *I and Thou* in 1937. The I-thou creates a relationship without bounds with an equal, whereas, the it depersonalizes nature by making the subject an object, which can be attached to judgment and ownership. Oral traditions use the I-thou format to praise the earth and all of her inhabitants. The power of the sounds and the visualization that comes from the descriptions uses more senses than hearing and seeing, putting all forms of sensing before thinking. The great aura of praise and thankfulness can make an oral poem an invocation to a larger life force. The out loud acknowledgment of any others can become a proclamation of the unity of the world.

The removal and diminishing of women from written history is perhaps one of the greatest influences upon my life. It is the reason I am a pagan. I cannot live with myself if I do not honor an all inclusive earth. Matriarchy did not dismiss men. Original marriage was the union of the priestess to the male principal, a ritualistic joining of the spiritual to the land. Some of the greatest myths speak of these intimate bonds throughout many cultures. In *Poetic Diction* Owen Barfield expands, "...the myths, which represent the earliest meanings, were not the arbitrary creations of 'poets', but the natural expression of man's being and consciousness at the time. These primary 'meanings' were given, as it were, by Nature, but the very condition of their being was that they could not at the same time be apprehended in full consciousness; they could not be known, but only experienced or lived." (96) This type of story has died or suffered greatly with the creation of religious texts which are predominately the myths of man alone. Again, this is a huge study in its own right and not the purpose of my thesis, although it influences my work.

Through the writings of Owen Barfield, Joseph Campbell, Carl Gustav Jung and David Abram I have been reawakened to my own beliefs and reminded of all of the senses needed for full participation. Beyond this I have re-found the writing of Rudolf Steiner, which seems appropriate as part of a circular return, the connection of the ouroboros. The rereading of books by Maria Gimbutas and Riane Eisler combine with the discovery of Barbara Tedlock to revitalize and strengthen my sacred practices of Goddess worship. The female artists who associated with the Surrealists have appeared with strong words about womanhood, nature and art, for they are artists in their own rights. Their voice and work echoes, grows and transforms through the likes of Anna Halprin, Ana Mendieta, and Ruth Wallen, women whose art has guided me through my process of transformation. Mexican artists of both genders

use their art to search for oneness, an inclusiveness of the original paradise on earth. Ritual is again more deliberate and prominent in my life. If I want to explain my sentiments towards the earth then I have to reveal my poetry. I have to break my own silence. I end this section with a poem which evokes my earthly home.





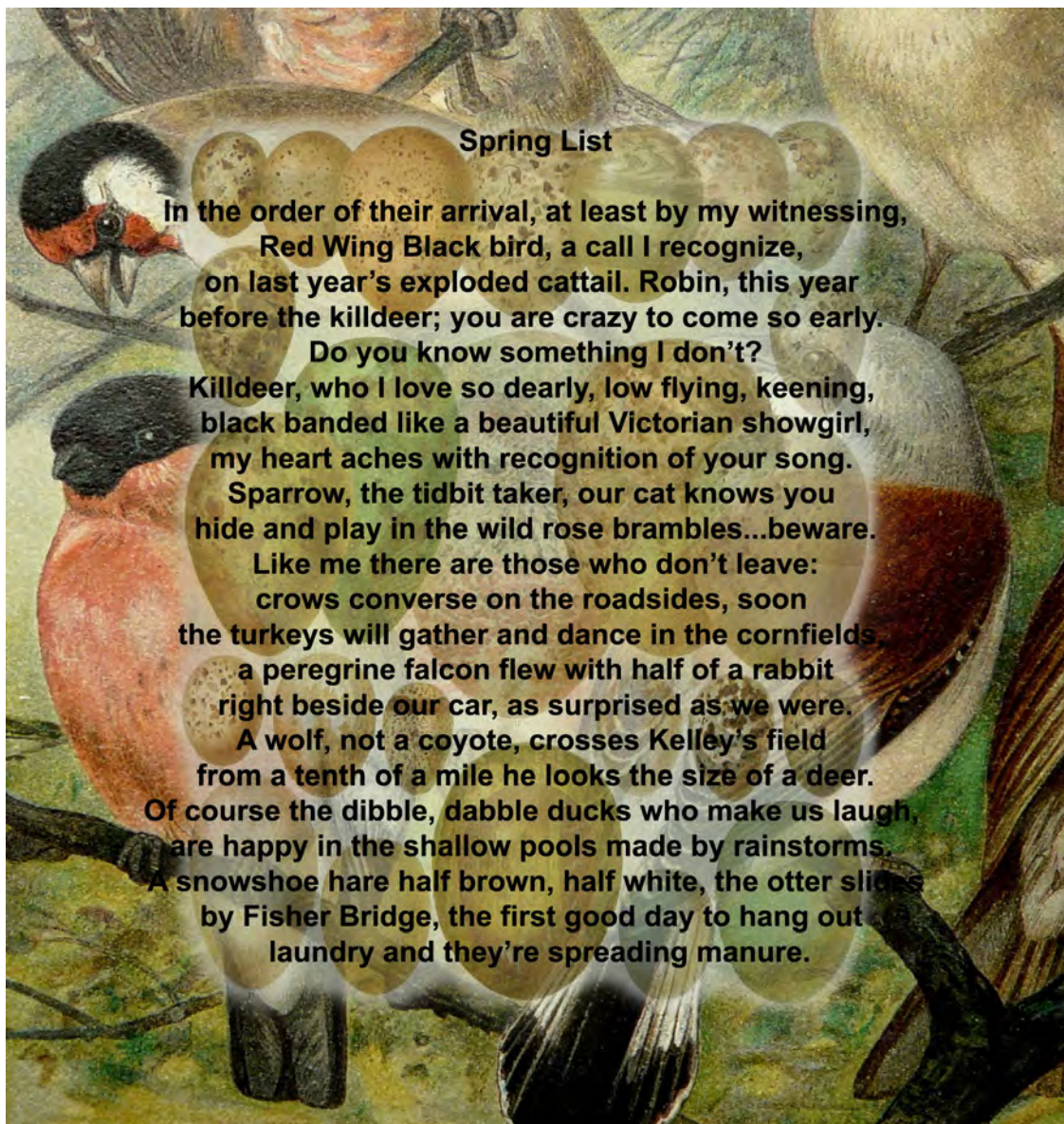
## Phenomenology

David Abram's *The Spell of the Sensuous* is rich with language that describes the beauty and sacredness of the land. I fell between its pages to a world I already knew very well. How I lived was actually a form of science, phenomenology. This I did not know. The idea of a collective landscape and participation with the earth, not the objective removal with almost omniscient viewing and judgment, enlivens all of the senses. This does not have to be a return to the past. It comes more as a reawakening to a more encompassing, inclusive future. The words of Jung in *The Earth Has A Soul* soundly clarifies, "Our evolutionary task is not to return to Nature regressively, but to retain the level of consciousness we have attained and then enrich it with experience of this primordial foundation upon which it rests." (195)

As David Abram explains, "The "real world" in which we find ourselves, then - the very world of our sciences strive to fathom - is not a sheer "object", not a fixed and finished "datum" from which all subjects and subjective qualities could be pared away, but is rather an intertwined matrix of sensations and perceptions, a collective field of experience lived through from many different angles" (39). The language of phenomenology such as Merleau-Ponty's "experiencing self" and "body subject" are rich with the living, feeling, and thinking language of Rudolf Steiner. Steiner attached his work to Christianity and a superior human mind. Who knows if Christianity was a safe, more accessible place for his beliefs? I have always felt Rudolf Steiner did not limit his meanings like the teachers I knew at the Green Mountain School. As a pagan I could read and comprehend his words with the deeper meaning I believe he intended. These large thoughts by great thinkers are meant to remain alive, not just become restrictive, repeated dogma. Steiner uses language similar to phenomenology, stressing particularly the senses being awakened, participation in the full world, and the importance of the imagination. In *How to Know Higher Worlds* Steiner writes,

Nevertheless, we must be clear about one thing. Those completely immersed in the superficial civilization of our day will find it particularly difficult to work their way to cognition of the higher worlds. To do so, they will have to work energetically upon themselves. In times when material conditions of life were still simple, spiritual progress was easier. What was revered and held sacred stood out more clearly from the rest of the world. In an age of criticism, on the other hand, ideals are degraded. Reverence, awe, adoration, and wonder are replaced by other feelings - they are pushed more and more into the background. As a result, everyday life offers very few opportunities for their development. Anyone seeking higher knowledge must create these feelings inwardly, instilling them in the soul. This cannot be done by studying. It can only be done by living. (19)

This quote is from a lecture given in 1904 and is astounding for its forward vision. Joining Steiner, John O'Donohue in *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* declares, "Ultimately, reverence is respect before mystery ... a sense of reverence includes the recognition that one is always in the presence of the sacred. To live with reverence is to live without judgment, prejudice, and the saturation of consumerism."(31) Almost one hundred years apart these men are saying essentially the same thing. We must try to live with grace and respect for all things on the earth and not be distracted by our materialism. Learning about phenomenology has re-energized my art life, actually changing and expanding methodology; I want to be a physical participant in my own work.



## Living with Cyclical Time

Every year I write a list of the order in which the birds return or my seeing of them. Like a bardic poem it is an honorary list, the naming as the breath of life, speaking those creatures into my existence. After birds I add animals, alive or dead as I see them. The dead I remove from the roadside most of the times. I feel guilty when I do not. Barry Lopez wrote *Apologia* in 1989 after moving dead animals off of the road on a trip from Oregon to Indiana. His text combined with Robin Eschner's woodcuts makes a beautiful if sad book. Removing dead animals from the road is a family tradition. To be honest when I see an animal hit on the roadside I imagine a human lying there and think how can people just drive by or not even stop, especially if you are the person who has done the killing. I admit my own guilt here, I am not blameless. Once when I was almost home a squirrel ran out in front of my car. I stopped in time and the squirrel couldn't decide which side of the road it wanted to be on. After the squirrel went to the right I started to drive. The creature changed its mind and ran under my wheels. I stopped the car and started sobbing. A squirrel came out from the grass on the right and dragged the dead squirrel off the road. It was claiming its dead. Then the squirrel climbed the tree next to my car and down the branch right over my windshield and began yelling at me. When I got out to apologize I saw several young squirrels in the grass. I had killed a mother moving her family. For the rest of the summer I left a cat food can full of corn or black sunflower seeds by the base of the tree. Wild animals shouldn't be fed sporadically, so I made a commitment to the squirrel family until winter when they dened up. This sense of family and commitment to my neighborhood of all beings permeates my life.

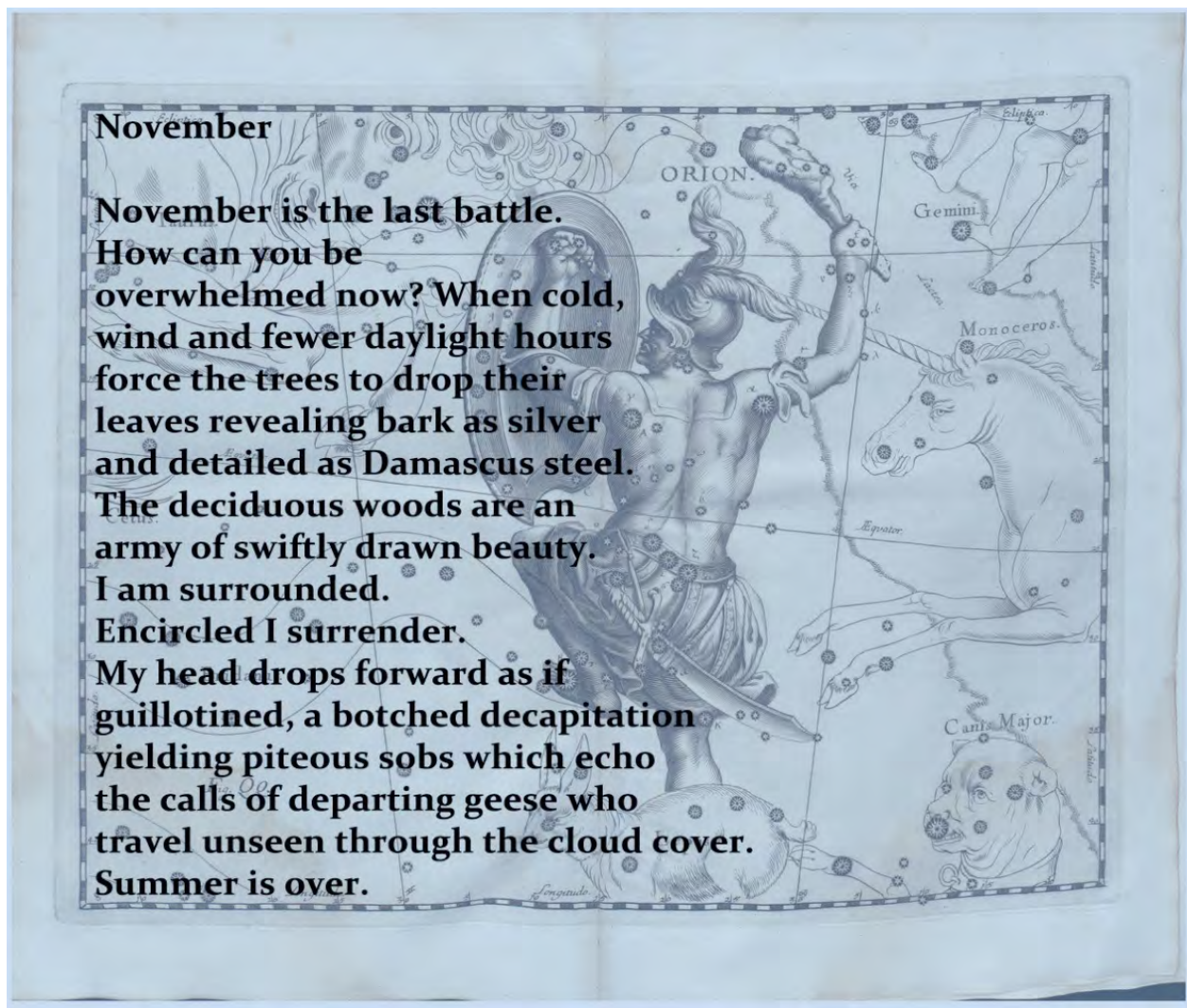
When the geese leave in the fall, so begins another poem or list, ending the cycle of spring and summer. Autumn becomes the descent, represented by the myth of Persephone. Solstice comes to relight the world and my family celebrates the twelve days of Christmas that end with Epiphany. Although we are not Christian the idea of the Magi is lovely; our approach is more a version of Twelfth Night when we honor the Holly King. This archetype is explained by Robert Graves in *The White Goddess* and similarly by Sir James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. These timely seasonal slayings are for the purpose of incarnation and renewal, symbolic of the seasons themselves as well as the overarching deity. This is the ancient pattern of descent and ascension continued by many belief systems to this day. Traditions tie us to mythology; time is living mythology.

My father taught me how to duck hunt when I was very young. By the age of eight I could shoot everyone's limit and my father would rest in the duck blind. If you killed it you cleaned it which is a good rule for honorable hunting. I would only shoot when they were far away in silhouette form. If they landed near the blind I could not take them. Seeing feathers



and beaks and hearing their garbled conversation made the ducks physically real; I could not pull the trigger. When the geese migrate I think of my father's ghost moving with them. I hold guilt for all of the ducks I killed and will never hunt or eat one again. I prefer to see them living.

When the geese leave they take the hope of summer. Those of us who remain are in for the long haul of winter. We are the guards left at Hadrian's Wall. My father always said the weather is what keeps the fakers out of Vermont. I wave goodbye to the geese and I feel like Dorothy Gale saying farewell to the Kingdom of Oz. Goodbye, goodbye.



My daughter was home schooled for the sixth and seventh grade in the Waldorf tradition. Rudolf Steiner assigned each grade a corresponding civilization. For the sixth grade it is ancient Rome. *Classical Living: Reconnecting with the Rituals of Ancient Rome* by Frances Bernstein brings the Roman calendar to life through daily ritual and the celebration of major

and minor festivals. This book was the foundation for our Roman year of homeschooling. Bernstein includes poetry, recipes, and suggestions for ways of participating. Adrian Anderson's *Living a Spiritual Year* describes the festivals celebrated at the Steiner school, explaining cosmic influences upon the earth and man. The book begins with an explanation of Rudolf Steiner's description of the living earth and living atmosphere. The concept of nature spirits are introduced then followed by an explanation of Christian festivals, seasonal festivals then most importantly the idea of new festivals to celebrate the earth. Anderson quotes Steiner, "We must develop the perception that, just as there is a soul in our bodies, so too in everything that occurs outside us --- the rising and setting of the stars, the bright sunlight, the twilight --- there dwells something spiritual. And just as we are inserted into the air through our lungs, so we are inserted into the spirituality of the cosmos through our souls." (53) The holidays are described by the season and are rich with the symbolism of archangels. In the afterword Anderson explains how to use Steiner's *Calendar of the Soul*. There is a verse for each week of the year beginning with Easter. A shift in the date of Easter can be modified in the reading by altering the number of days a verse is read. Anderson's comments on this book are glowing, "The *Soul Calendar* is one of Rudolf Steiner's greatest achievements, a manual for developing communion with divine beings that maintain the life on this planet ... Such experiences grant a wondrous, enchanted mood to the daily routine and result in not only an enhanced attunement to the spiritual world but also a pragmatic commitment to environmental questions, in the fullest sense" (334). Since my first contact with the Waldorf School I have read *The Calendar of the Soul* daily. So prompted by this living in time and honoring every day I have started my own *Calendar of the Soul*. Although I am finding it difficult to complete a full cycle with the deepest alignment and emotion; it will take me years.

Each verse should resound in the soul as it unites with the life of the year. A healthy feeling of "at one-ness" with the course of Nature, and from this a vigorous "finding of oneself" is here intended, in the belief that, for the soul, a feeling-unison with the world's course as unfolded in these verses is something for which the soul longs when it rightly understands itself.

— Rudolf Steiner

February 1-7

When still, I sense  
the sparks of light and  
dark imbuing the atmosphere  
with choice, without judgment.  
Feeling becomes clear.  
Thinking becomes clear.  
Willing becomes clear. I am  
open to the Will of the World  
and am active in choosing  
silence.

February 8-14

And in the dullness of the void,  
the density that can't expand  
to join the sky, is not the weight  
of the universe. It is the  
weight of mortal thoughts.  
I rise with the sun and want  
to feel the light, to be  
lightness itself.

February 15-21

I lift my heart to the sun  
knowing Michael's sword  
touched the star I call  
my own before the darkness  
set upon the world. As light  
returns my flame grows.  
My soul being the echo  
between both orbs, one  
silver and one gold.

February 22-28

Quietly the golden rays  
penetrate my life's blood  
opening pathways for  
divinity to thaw what winter  
suspended as unconscious.  
Ideas become deeds. The dream  
language of evening  
illuminates both night and day.

March 1-7

A change of month  
and the return of light  
is enough to sustain me,  
uplift the dead weight  
of winter, of inward  
turning. Descent is not  
a glance, but a direct  
gaze into the eternal fire.

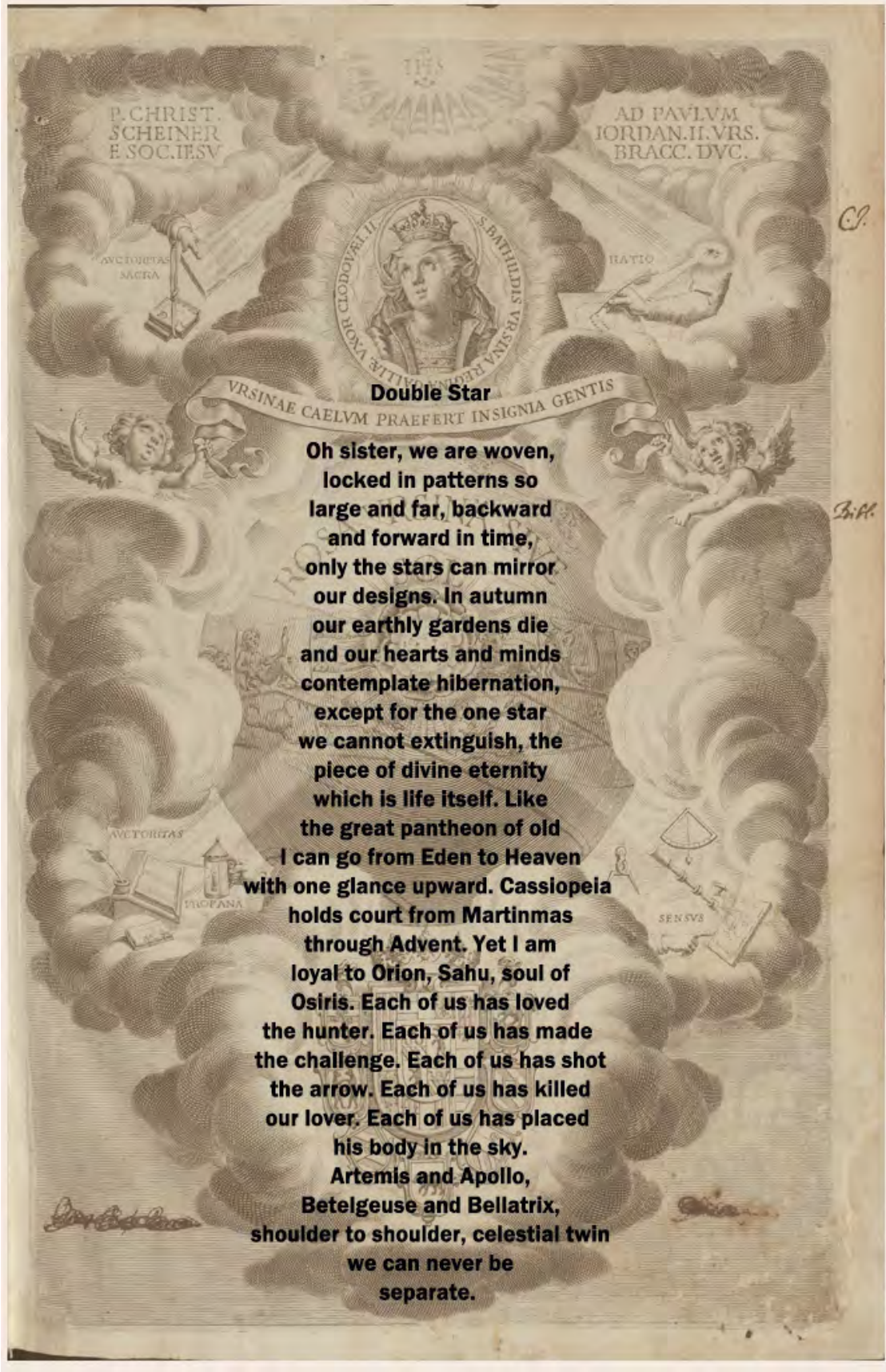
March 8-14

This morning there was  
a glimmer, a pulse of self.  
Though cold, the sun rises,  
frost glitters and melts, water  
and humans in many states,  
change, growth, and death,  
the conditions of life.  
A new day, all being, to be all.  
I need to live, to believe.

March 15-21

When the celestial feels  
closer than the earth bound  
and the sleeping body  
weighs as a fallen pillar,  
UNFOLD, for the human  
star knows no coldness  
or dullness when open  
to the inspiration of  
divine purpose.





**Double Star**

Oh sister, we are woven,  
locked in patterns so  
large and far, backward  
and forward in time,  
only the stars can mirror  
our designs. In autumn  
our earthly gardens die  
and our hearts and minds  
contemplate hibernation,  
except for the one star  
we cannot extinguish, the  
piece of divine eternity  
which is life itself. Like  
the great pantheon of old  
I can go from Eden to Heaven  
with one glance upward. Cassiopeia  
holds court from Martinmas  
through Advent. Yet I am  
loyal to Orion, Sahu, soul of  
Osiris. Each of us has loved  
the hunter. Each of us has made  
the challenge. Each of us has shot  
the arrow. Each of us has killed  
our lover. Each of us has placed  
his body in the sky.  
Artemis and Apollo,  
Betelgeuse and Bellatrix,  
shoulder to shoulder, celestial twin  
we can never be  
separate.

*The Veiled Pulse of Time* by William Bryant describes and reflects on biographical cycles and destiny. By using the seven year cycle, the thirty year or Chronos cycle and the twelve year or Jupiter cycle, Bryant provides possible ways of participating in and viewing the course of a life. On air and breathing Bryant writes, "Breathing is the archetype of all cycles. Respiration is a universal principle found in all life no matter what the complexity or line of evolution. Breathing enables the outside to meet the inside and vice versa, so every organism absorbs something from its environment and gives something in return. Not only do we inhale the life-sustaining air and exhale its residues, we also inhale nutritional matter and exhale energy; we inhale sensory information and exhale action; we inhale experience and exhale biography; we inhale at birth and exhale at death." (34) Without this simplest act it is difficult to live fully within our own bodies and interact with the world in a positive way. The rediscovery of this material verifies my commitment to Waldorf education and the study of anthroposophy. Beyond that I see the power in journal writing not only to acknowledge nature and daily beauty, but to see the larger patterns of my life. The act of breathing and the thought that it is a world sustaining, hints to its force behind our lives and actions.

The keys for my renewal appear to be a sense of place, a means of honoring through participation, and forms of documentation to learn from life's cycles. The authors in these sections are asking for full sensory perception, a whole being willing to cross the threshold from consciousness to the realm of unconscious, to leave linear life and enter the Great Round. Here the imagination reinvigorates intuition and the inspiration to find new ways of perceiving and therefore being. Humans can begin to reclaim a circular life, a life connected to nature and others. In the process of discovering the unity of the earth we might re-find ourselves. O'Donohue brings the power of imagination back to the self by stating, "This is one of the sacred duties of the imagination: honourably to imagine your self" (135). Rudolf Steiner states this thought quite simply, "Inner experience is the only key to the beauties of the outer world" (22). This reading helps make my beliefs a unified field. This is very important because I don't want to be removed or insensitive to the planet and other inhabitants. My art is not just a product post me; it must be the deepest reflection of my truest thoughts, hopes and desires.



## The Summer of Beautiful Women

From mid April to the end of October of 2010 I shot ninety-nine rolls of 120mm film of individual women in the local landscape. This body of work is meant as a celebration of the classic feminine form as seen through the eyes of a woman. The history of photography serves as a foundation and some images are homage to a specific image by a specific artist. The fact that I can currently use the words photographer and artist interchangeably shows the opening of the medium in my own lifetime. When I began this was not so. This natural response to draw from art history is explained by Elaine Scarry in *On Beauty and Being Just*, "But simultaneously what is beautiful prompts the mind to move chronologically back in search for precedents and parallels, to move forward into new acts of creation, to move conceptually over, to bring things into relation, and does all this with a kind of urgency as though one's life depended on it."(30) Indeed, my life on the whole depends on the quest for seizing beauty as well as the light. Although photography is my primary media the entirety of art history becomes one source for inspiration, a means of reclaiming the power of myth.

A lot has been written about the gaze of men on the feminine body with art being the vehicle of viewing. Men were my instructors in the darkroom, but women have held their own with photography since its inception. The reason I picked up a camera was the work of Julia Margaret Cameron. I have no feminist agenda behind this work, but prefer to act positively in the creation of beauty which exhibits two weakened or separated elements which I see as unified, women and the land. This statement perhaps seems contradictory. My desire is that the viewer opens their eyes, clears their mind, and re-imagines a world of connectedness; this wish is for any audience of my work. It is easy to assign beauty to youth, but these are not quick glances or judgments. I know and respect each woman before my lens. Each portrait is simultaneously singular and archetypal. In this way each photograph becomes a two-dimensional Venus or Idol, an image of the Goddess. These images exhibit reverence for the individual woman before me and her place in the larger cosmos of beings and ultimately my first mother, the land I stand upon, in fact, the land we all stand upon.

The garden across the road from our house serves as an outdoor studio especially during the warmer weather. Designed and planted in the American tradition of a proper British long garden, the main bed is approximately forty feet by one hundred feet. There is a central, four foot wide path and on either side a smaller serpentine path winds to create the image of a guitar which is also the shape of a sitting female figure. At different times it is either well tended or out of control with weeds and opulent growth. Both conditions are incredibly beautiful. I have noticed it is humans who are uptight about "weeds". Often they provide seeds for birds and a healthy interloper plant can be just as gorgeous as



any ornamental. This is the world where I bring my models. It is a place where my meager efforts merge with nature. Over time my human arrogance has been educated by plants, weather and the creatures of the garden. I now know that it is not my garden, but I am this particular garden's human. Gardening serves as my grounding and inspiration, the camera as a method of illumination. Similar to the water cycle I find the two activities provide a circular flow of creation.



The Garden of Eden was created by mankind; the real garden still exists and all of us walk upon it daily. Personally I don't believe in the 'Fall' or that woman was the creatrix of evil. Joseph Campbell explains that woman as sinner only appears in Christian mythology, "The idea in the biblical tradition of the Fall is that nature as we know it is corrupt, sex in itself is corrupt, and the female as the epitome of sex is a corrupter." He continues by explaining other possible, more ancient interpretations, "Woman brings life into the world. Eve is the mother of this temporal world... The serpent, who dies and is resurrected, shedding its skin and renewing its life, is the lord of the central tree, where time and eternity come together...."

The old mythology of the Goddess is right there.” (The Power of Myth 47) From a 1973 interview quoted from Whitney Chadwick’s *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Meret Oppenheim concurs with Campbell, “Woman is close to the earth. One could imagine that the first state was matriarchal...And the big old snake Nature in the Tree of Knowledge told Eve to give the apple to Adam (she eats it too!) The old snake Nature wanted him to take the way of intellectual development. Eve has been damned, the snake with her, by men.” (143) Some of these myths are still alive and continue to influence artists, who Campbell asserts are modern myth makers. (The god who does the banishing is only a visitor, but perhaps the word should be invader. The latter gives a very different energy.) Mircea Eliade in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* explains the shamanic purpose, “The most representative mystical experience of the archaic societies, that of shamanism, betrays the Nostalgia for Paradise, the desire to recover the state of freedom and beatitude before ‘the Fall!’” (134) So, existing indigenous beliefs and those of artists often meld in the desire for finding the self and possibly paradise on earth.

By growing a garden and using it as a location that honors women I am claiming the old ways, the belief in the Goddess. I never left the garden and I do not believe I, other creatures or the earth are soiled by any impurity. Through this silent, humble act of earth tending I am detaching myself from the patriarchal mind set and labeling. Gardening then is an act of passive protest, my private insurrection and at the same time a resurrection and affirmation of my beliefs. To stress the importance of the plants or natural objects and give them equal prominence with the model, most titles are botanical names.

“Women play a significant role in agriculture, the world over. About 70% of the agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, and 10% of those who process basic foodstuffs are women and they also undertake 60 to 90% of the rural marketing; thus making up more than two-third of the workforce in agricultural production.” (FAO, 1985) ([http://wikigender.org/index.php/Women\\_and\\_Agriculture](http://wikigender.org/index.php/Women_and_Agriculture))

With this project I am merging the beauties of my life, the land I love and tend and the women who occur just as naturally as the land. The women chosen for this particular series are of the classic age of beauty; they are in their twenties. As a college professor I actually know these women, others are my daughter’s friends grown up. Some might say I am giving in to the status quo, even copying the male gaze of old, but beauty is something that has to be embodied by the soul of each person. An incredible exterior does not guarantee a kind heart or brilliant mind. Each of these women is as beautiful inside as they are in their physical appearance. In each I have seen aspects of the Muse. Just because someone is physically

attractive does not guarantee my desire to photograph them. There has to be something of a soul resonance; our energies have to connect. This connection has to be reciprocal for any art creation to take place. Annie Leibovitz expresses this sentiment simply, "When I say I want to photograph someone, what it really means is that I'd like to know them."

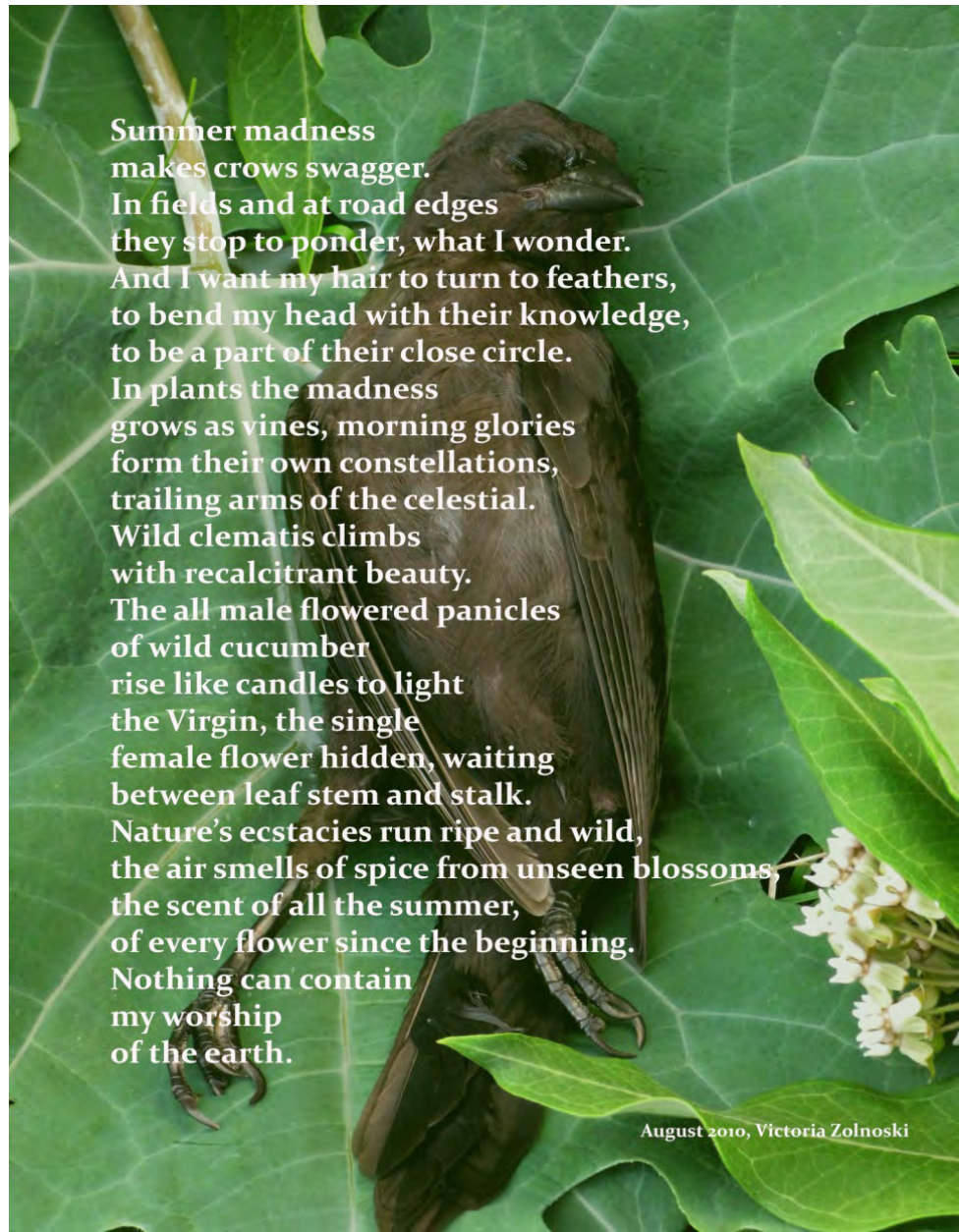
Portraiture involves mutual consent. Each image is meant to capture and reveal a specific individual and their archetype which for my artistic purposes is defined as the mythological self. The former is perhaps best seen during the actual shoot where personal dialogue, humor and sometimes nervousness blend into the one moment when model, landscape and photographer share a breath. The pre-shoot is the private time, the secret pleasure I keep for myself. I am selfish with my quest for beauty. It is an addiction and I am a beauty hoarder. The archetypes are embodied and grow and change with us. So photographs of a younger woman might portray a female warrior or Venus and an older woman might reveal the Great Mother or a wise woman. But it isn't necessarily that stereotypical. The model weighs in here too, blending with the soul response I carry in my heart of that person. Several of the younger women have already gardened for many years, choosing rural lives, off the grid, and deliberately creating small ecological footprints. In some ways they are wiser, less selfish and more pro-active than me. With the camera I am waiting for the conscious and unconscious to be visible simultaneously; this is the photograph created for more eyes than my own.

The images are viewed in chronological order of participation with the environment. Sometimes glacial boulders are the important feature and at other times there might be a certain flower, either domestic or wild. Trees often take prominence in the photographs. Carolyn Merchant in *The Death of Nature* shows the earthly connection between women and the landscape by quoting Paracelus, "Woman is like the earth and all the elements and in this sense she may be considered a matrix; she is the tree which grows in the earth and the child is like the fruit born of the tree....Woman is the image of the tree. Just as the earth, its fruits, and the elements are created for the sake of the tree and in order to sustain it, so the members of woman, all her qualities, and her whole nature exist for the sake of her matrix..." (27) The places are always deliberately chosen and over time I have realized that even though they appear as the background, the land is in the forefront of my mind. The landscape holds the model and enchants the entire scene. The beauty of the location shifts our energies with a greater cleansing power. Always, I hear and feel it say, "This is what is important." If I do not enter my local landscape regularly, daily, I begin to feel ill, disconnected, and disheartened.

Once, someone asked me if I was bored with my drive to work. Since 1982 I have driven from Walden to Johnson, Vermont about three days of the week. I have seen trees



grow in diameter and moved dead animals off the road. I know where peregrine falcons sit for only two days when they migrate north and south. Pileated woodpeckers taunt me, but are too quick for my camera. Then there are the days when I see a tree for the first time, even though I have gone by it for a long time. First I apologize and then I announce its beauty. How could I have not noticed you? Forgive me, I have been blind. You are gorgeous, amazing, I honor



Summer madness  
makes crows swagger.  
In fields and at road edges  
they stop to ponder, what I wonder.  
And I want my hair to turn to feathers,  
to bend my head with their knowledge,  
to be a part of their close circle.  
In plants the madness  
grows as vines, morning glories  
form their own constellations,  
trailing arms of the celestial.  
Wild clematis climbs  
with recalcitrant beauty.  
The all male flowered panicles  
of wild cucumber  
rise like candles to light  
the Virgin, the single  
female flower hidden, waiting  
between leaf stem and stalk.  
Nature's ecstasies run ripe and wild,  
the air smells of spice from unseen blossoms,  
the scent of all the summer,  
of every flower since the beginning.  
Nothing can contain  
my worship  
of the earth.

August 2010, Victoria Zolnoski

you now. These are the places I ask the women I admire to pose. Sometimes they declare they already have a favorite tree or place. Occasionally it is even the one I am thinking would be perfect for them. It has happened more than once. There is a synchronicity to this union of woman and land, sometimes it is immediate and at other times it has taken years. No matter the time frame, it is always vital.

This sensation of vitality, a sense of undeniable life force, is the reason the camera goes to my eye. Quoting Scarry again, "How one walks through the world, the endless small adjustments of balance, is affected by the shifting weights of beautiful things." (15) She continues, "It is the very way the beautiful thing fills the mind and breaks all frames that gives

the “never before in the history of the world” feeling.”(23) The “never before in the history of the world” sensation is the addiction and yet I know deep in my heart it is the first voice of the world, the birth of life itself. Photography melds time. Often when the shutter is pushed it is such a specific moment and eternal at the same time. Powerful and meditative, this duality of immediacy and waiting means photographers have to be shamans, shape-shifters. This quality makes photography the perfect art form to stress humankind’s oneness with the world.

Sadly I must admit that my addiction to photographing women has partially been a search for my unloved self, which by no means detracts from any beauty before me. Perhaps every photograph is then a search for what is missing from my self-portrait. Joseph Campbell in *The Power of Myth* is clear and hopeful, “All these things are around you as presences, representing forces and powers and magical possibilities of life that aren’t yours and yet are all a part of life, and that opens it out to you. Then you find it echoing in yourself, because you are nature.” (92) When would I ever quit photographing women? Is there a definitive image that will make me stop, satiate and fulfill me? What is the power behind the words, “You are so beautiful.”? Imani Uzuri’s song, “Beautiful” ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXbyHvGsvx0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXbyHvGsvx0)) brings me to tears every time. Her words and voice combine in an invocation reminiscent of ancient Goddess worship. I was never told I was beautiful. In high school and when I first left home, I was clever, artistic, at best exotic or unusual, different. Surely I am silly or vain to worry over one word. In our hearts, very deep in our souls, we know the true meaning of this word. Beauty has a larger meaning. In this long quest of finding and defining beauty I have realized... Beauty is the breath of life itself, our original birth spark that echoes through eternity. Beauty is the connection between the known and unknown, the point when intuition, inspiration, imagination, and sensory perception unite for a split second. The word sense becomes very important here, because beauty meets and infuses the entire being to the point where we feel earth’s breath hold us. We are meant to use our entire being, every possible method of sensing, to feel alive. Beauty is our path back to nature and rethinking of ourselves. Beauty is the unspoken truth of human lives, we are meant to be caretakers of the earth. To tell someone they are beautiful is to reaffirm their life force, to give birth to them again. This is the power of naming.

In the not so far past this passion for nature, for original beauty, was labeled romanticism. The development of the scientific revolution equated romanticism with naiveté. We must remember that these are just labels and our thoughts do not have to accept them. Cartesian science seems to be the point of the most recent great disconnect although it goes back further to the destruction of Crete by warrior cultures. Personal sadness comes from the general societal disconnection with nature, also the dismissal and degradation of women. In

the most ancient cultures women and the land originally shared the power of birth; today we remain united by our patriarchal denial and subjugation. Current endangering environmental and social conditions are making it possible to revisit and change these judgments. The realization of one world connectedness is bringing humanity to a crossroads. In *Earth Art*, Amanda Boetzkes describes this mental adjustment, "To posit the earth itself as elemental, however is to make an assertion about how we conceive it, or more precisely, how it resists our concepts. It is to suggest that the earth is both all-encompassing (that it surrounds and interpenetrates our world) and at the same uncontainable, which is to say that it exists outside the human schema of production, consumption or meaning." (103) Although gentle, the images from *The Summer of Beautiful Women* are meant to be positive reminder breaths; we have not forgotten beauty. Beauty is not passé. Beauty is alive and I believe in it. I want to live in beauty and honor the earth every day. I believe in a new educated romanticism that works with science to help address threatened states of nature.

By combining philosophy, mythology, anthroposophy, and phenomenology, an interdisciplinary approach, my witnessing and participating metamorphoses into a better self. Best said by Owen Barfield in *Poetic Diction*, "This is why, in order to form a conception of the consciousness of primitive man, we have really-as I suggested-as it were, to 'unthink', not merely now half-instinctive logical processes, but even the seemingly fundamental distinction between self and world. And with this, the distinction between thinking and perceiving begins to vanish too....A kind of thinking which is at the same time perceiving-a picture thinking, a figurative, or imaginative consciousness, which we only grasp today by true analogy with the imagery of our poets, and to some extent, with our own dreams." (206-207) This potential quality of the human is suggested by the study of anthroposophy where Rudolf Steiner opens discovery to the use of intuition, inspiration and imagination. In the same source Barfield clarifies further, "It is simply that, at the time when the myths came into our being, our distinction between subjective and objective cannot have existed....We are confronting that inveterate habit of thought which makes it so extraordinarily hard for the Western mind to grasp the nature of inspiration." (204) In *Memories and Visions of Paradise: Exploring the Universal Myth of a Lost Golden Age* the author, Richard Heinberg, quotes Joseph Campbell, "We are kept out of the garden by our own fear and desire in relation to what we think to be the goods of our life." (200)

*The Summer of Beautiful Women* becomes the documentation of how I see the landscape and my preference for human placement as integrated with the earth. Women are a logical topic because I am one and younger women not only for their beauty at this point in time, but because time is always moving. These images hold impermanence lovingly for perhaps a little longer than the breath taken to create them. I see myself over and over again;



the beauty of other women becomes my eternal beauty. This makes me braver to face my own mirror, not in a vain way, but as a means of accepting impermanence. This leads to the act of just living a joyful life. Then there is the richness of shared creation. Making art helps me interact with other humans; it is safe place for expanding boundaries, testing the waters of others thoughts and emotions. The singular image could be a statue from an ancient matriarchal culture, the modern form of a two-dimensional idol. The addictive thrill I get from creating this work keeps me happily in the earthly garden. As Joseph Campbell says, "The difference between everyday living and living in those moments of ecstasy is the difference between being outside and inside the Garden." (The Power of Myth107)

"The path my feet took was lined with images, whole gardens of pictures. With exposures I picked bouquets, each more vivid than the previous...finally a gathering of gem-like flames in the low tide...I thought I had forgotten how to use my camera, so I counted each step of the process aloud...shutter speed, aperture, cock the shutter...Though I feared to lose the sense of beauty, no loss occurred; the sense of rapport was strong beyond belief."

- Minor White

**Summer Of Beautiful Women Color**



*Green Mansions*

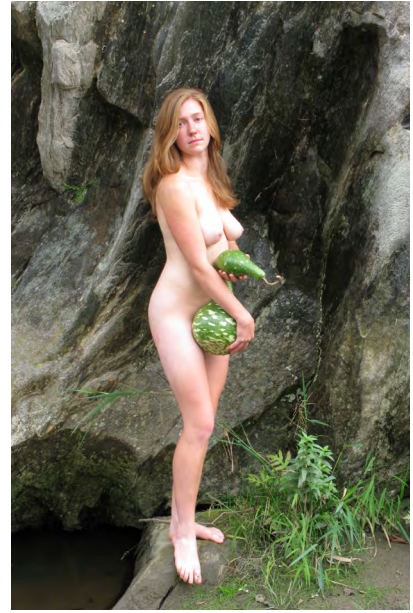




*The Necklace*



*Peacock Rock 2*



*Gourd Leda*



*Primitive Baker*

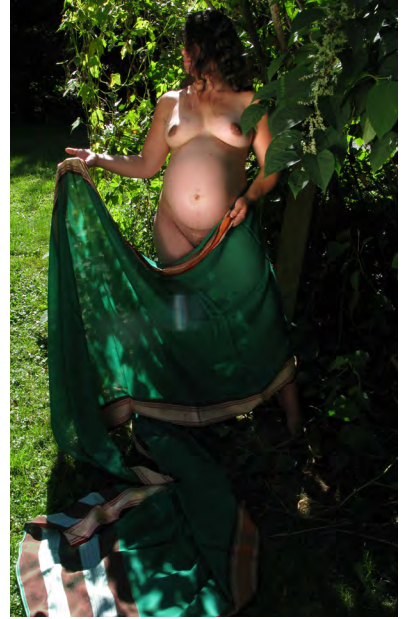




*Tahitian Beauty*



*The Neckalce 2*



*Tahitian Beauty 2*

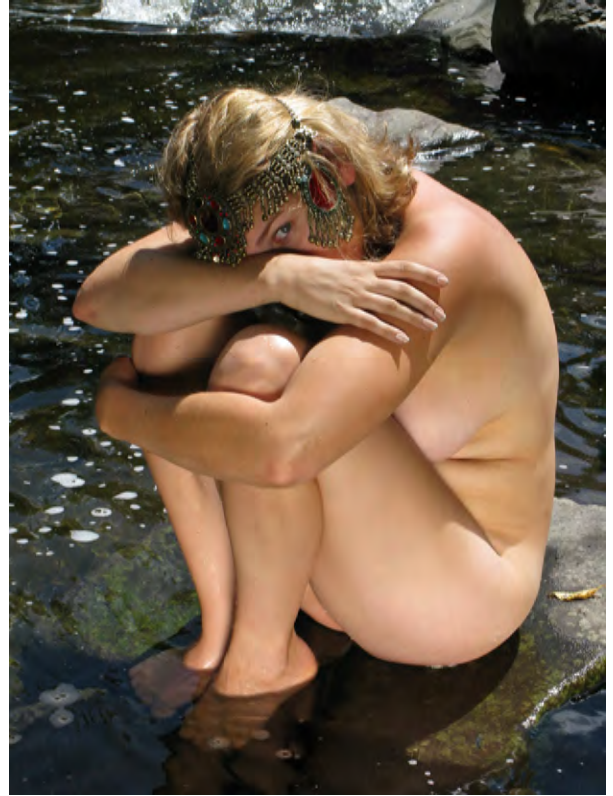


*Peacock 3*





*Flotsam*



*The Pool 1*



*Odalesque*



*Kitsune*



*The Pool 2*





*Japonaise*



*Four Quarters*



*Ophelia 1*



*The Directions*



## Summer Of Beautiful Women Black and White



*Peacock, 2010-11*



*Hawthorne Venus, 2010-11*



*Peonies, 2010-11*



*Dandelion, 2010-11*



*Tiger lily, 2010-11*



*Asparagus, 2010-11*



## Homage or Where Do Images Come From?

This is not a treatise on the deep, dark recesses of my mind, but will at least show the travel of my thoughts from inspiration to product. Art history becomes a method of time travel where I can extract images and concepts. This process serves many purposes. First I have a lineage or art heritage; all are meaningful and available provided I educate myself about them. Sometimes the inspiration is purely visual and immediate. At other times it is intellectual and often based on text, a quote from an artist, a monograph, or genre book. When the concept is rapidly formed it is a fast layered mélange of the two. Often taking months or even years to connect word and image, but once visualized quickly produced, as if my life depended on it. I would like to provide several examples:



**Francesca Woodman**, *Untitled*, New York, 1979-1980. Gelatin silver print, 4 x 9-1/2 inches.

This self-portrait by Francesca Woodman is in the last pages of Chris Townsend's book of the artist's name. For some reason when going through the book many times for many years I never saw this image. Then one day the book opened to Woodman with the foxgloves. This is a flower I regularly grow and I was astounded by its photogenic nature. I don't know what the photographer was suggesting by the medical tape for attaching the stems to her arms. We can make wild speculations about digitalis, a heart medicine, addiction, and Woodman's early death, but who knows; maybe that was the only tape available to the artist. One has a sense of Woodman working with immediacy; there is a great feeling of loyalty to inspiration in her work. She discards judgment about the set, props, model or even herself to get to the core sensation. This image prompted my photographic response. It is not a

copy; more like a chef sharing a secret ingredient, oh yes foxgloves. Foxgloves are biennials and have to be planted every year for continuous blooms. The first year is just leaf growth and sometimes a blossom. The second year is the main bloom and the plant expires in the fall. This particular spring the white foxgloves which I had started from seed the year before were amazing. I just needed to add a model. In reverence of the plant I preferred black rattail for tying; it seemed sexier and juxtaposed well with the white of the flower heads. I also had some in a drawer.

Keaven, a neighbor, friend and model, posed a la Woodman, and perhaps these aren't great because they are too close to the original. In the excitement of immediate reaction the idea had not become mine. We had fun and I learned a lot, the tying of flowers on women will be revisited. At this time I was not shooting video and now realize Keaven pulling the thin cord and the flowers swaying would be better, a nod to bringing Woodman back to life. I was instantly reminded of the line from Hans Christian Anderson's 1844 tale, *The Nightingale*, "Beautiful flowers, round which little bells were tied, stood in the corridors:"

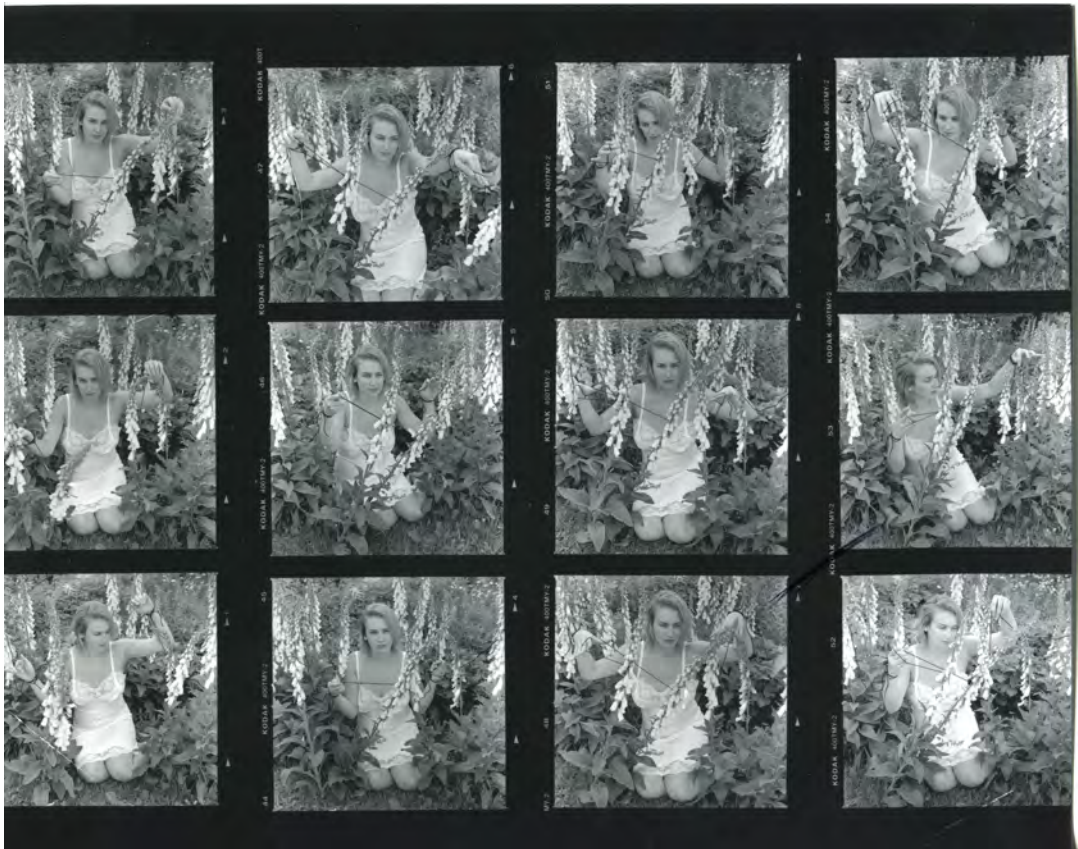


**Edward Steichen**, *Gloria Swanson, Veiled Face*, CA 1925

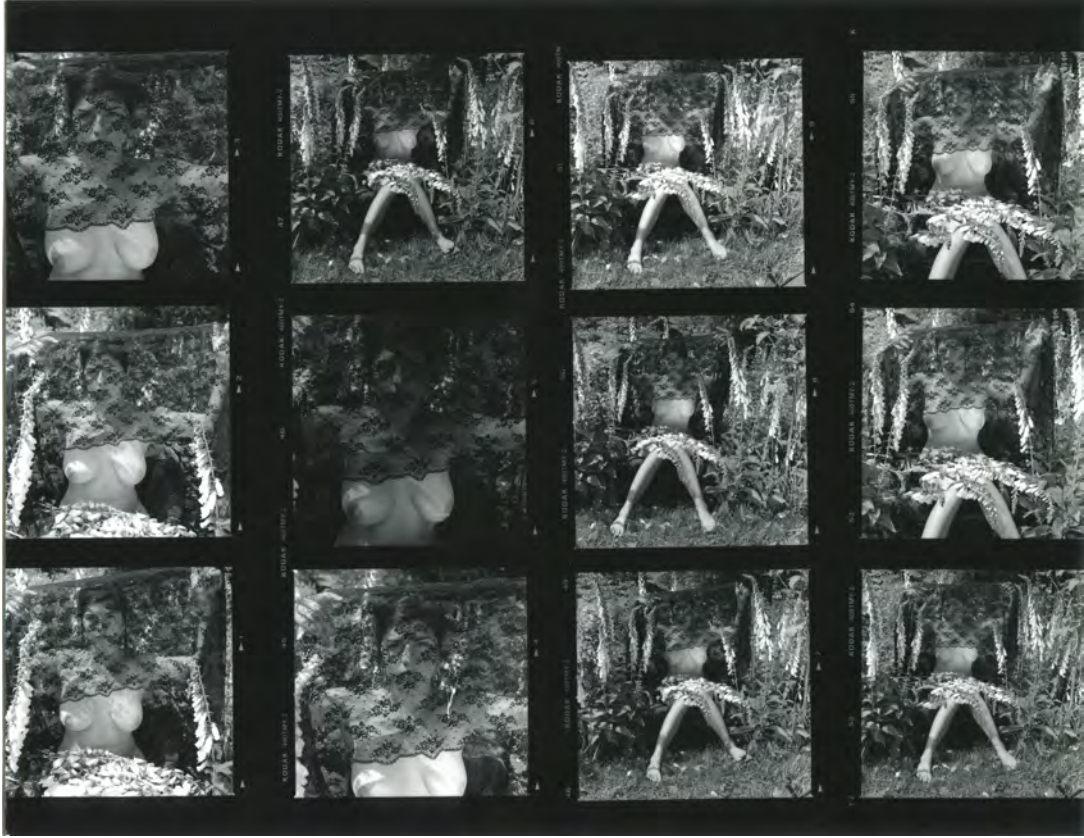
The thought connections are infinite. The white of the foxglove made me think of the beauty of its opposite, black. I had an old piece of lace I had wanted to use in homage to Edward Steichen's photograph of Gloria Swanson behind a veil. So the white flowers of Woodman became united with the black lace of Steichen in something more of my own. Another model, Sophia, was chosen because of her dark hair and eyes. Again, an imitation was not the chosen for the final print. I am only looking for one image from these shoots, just one defining moment, the breath we all agree upon.



**Flor Garduno, Carla, Mexico, 1998**











*Homage to Francesca Woodman, 2010-11*



*Black Lace and Foxgloves, Homage to Steichen and Woodman, 2010-11*

Gertrude Kasebier's 'The Bat', a gum print from 1902, is another favorite photographic image. Dark, mysterious and sensual, a veiled woman beside a boulder reveals her nude form. I have kept a top ten list for years; this image has always been on the list. Clarence John Laughlin also has a photograph with the title, 'The Bat', 1940. Laughlin is always on the top ten list but I am torn between several images. Having two works just less than forty years apart with the same title makes me wonder about the bat obsession. Again, black fabric is used to cover a female figure which this time is clothed. These two images travel from primal to gothic and remind me of Albert-Joseph Penot's Bat-Woman (1890), a painting of a very pale nude woman with wild eyes suspended in the sky by her own bat wings. Without my prompting my daughter volunteered to be photographed in our neighbor's field, the land of beautiful trees. She asked for a piece of black lace and posed a la bat without knowing of these images and my own bat obsession. During this period of study I realized the land needed to be depicted as well, as part of the portrait and the honoring. The triptych becomes a new format which I will continue to work in after graduation. The form fits the wonder sensed when immersed in the landscape and harks back to medieval thought and art. Below are the contact sheets and final product.



60  
The Bat, 1902. Gouache  
matte print. 8x8". Musée Rodin,  
Paris.

Gertrude Kasebier, *The Bat*, 1902



Clarence John Laughlin, *The Bat*, 1940



Albert-Joseph Penot's *Bat-Woman* (1890)



'The Bat' contact sheet



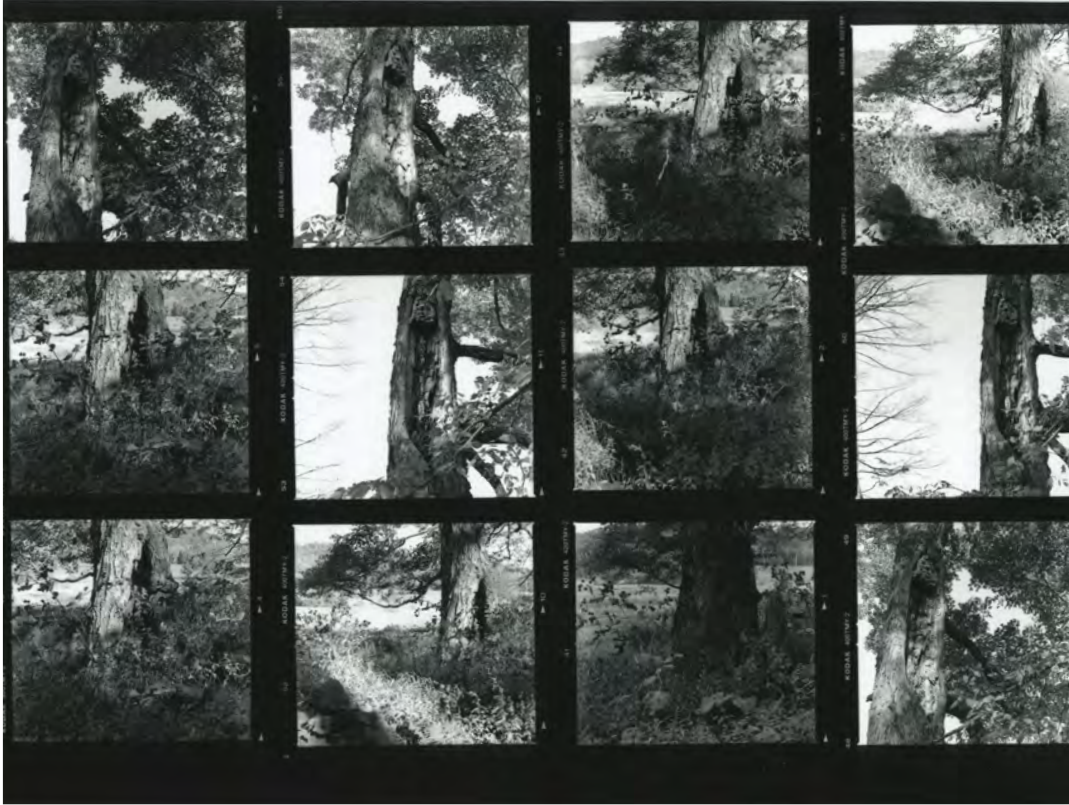


*Symbol trees*



*Viking Trees*





*Cut and Twin Trees*



*Mushroom Trees*





*Marsh Marigold Triptych, 2010-11*

Below is the final image, *Maid and Crone*, 2010-12. My daughter is on the left and my shadow is on the right. *The Viking Tree* from *The Land of Beautiful Trees* joins us with its branch arms. The triptych form is attractive because it speaks to Medieval and Renaissance religious art. It seemed logical to use this form as a method of unification of woman and land imagery. Photographs in this format become altars. Sepia is used to alter the image to an unknown time of creation. As the photographic grand-daughter of Julia Margaret Cameron I often use the tones of photographs from the Victorian Age.



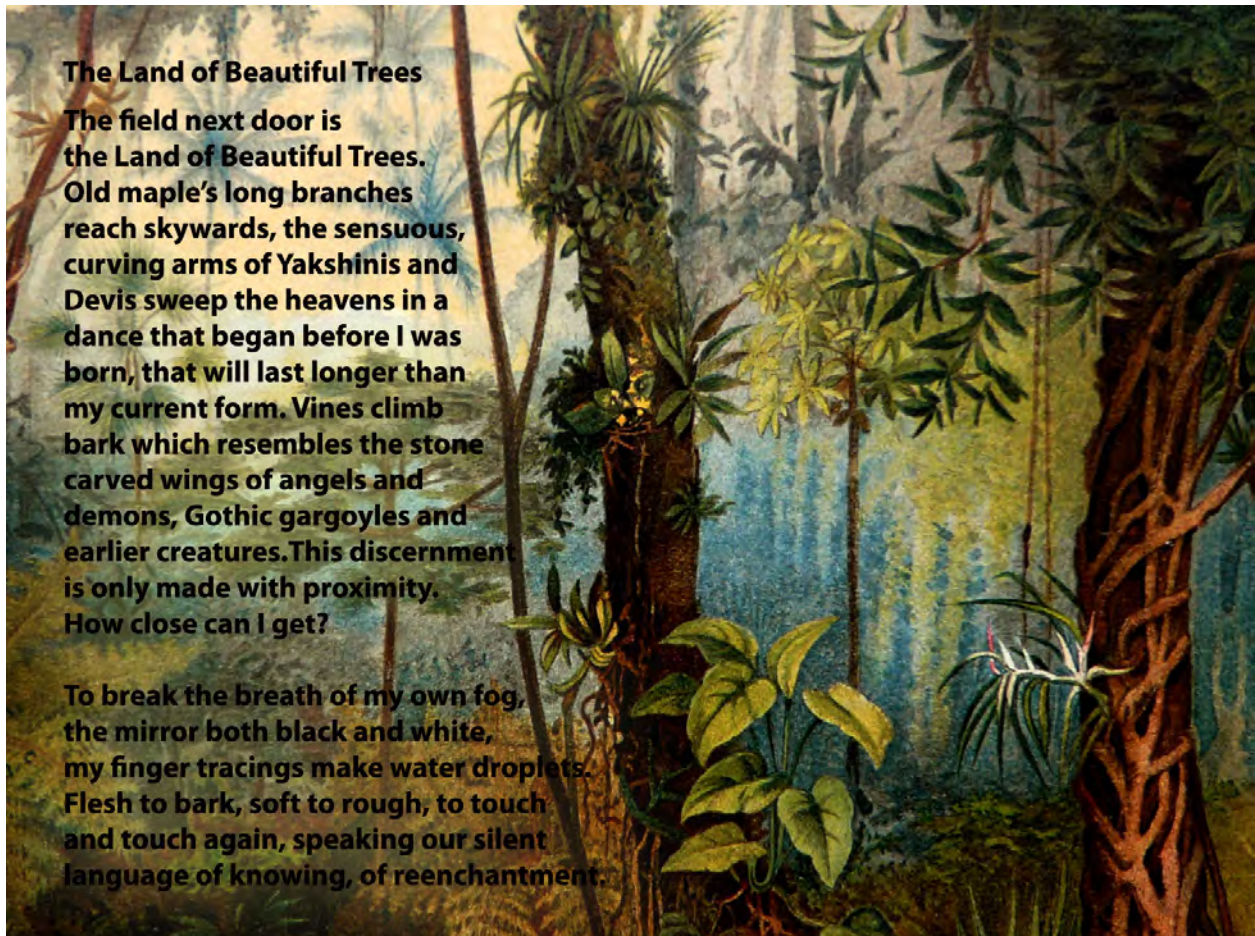


*Maid and Crone, 2010-12*

### **The Land of Beautiful Trees**

**The field next door is the Land of Beautiful Trees. Old maple's long branches reach skywards, the sensuous, curving arms of Yakshinis and Devis sweep the heavens in a dance that began before I was born, that will last longer than my current form. Vines climb bark which resembles the stone carved wings of angels and demons, Gothic gargoyles and earlier creatures. This discernment is only made with proximity. How close can I get?**

**To break the breath of my own fog, the mirror both black and white, my finger tracings make water droplets. Flesh to bark, soft to rough, to touch and touch again, speaking our silent language of knowing, of reenchantment.**





## The Web within the Ouroboros, a Mental Sampler

Almost every area of interest during my educational process at Goddard College could become a major study. Instead of perfecting one realm of knowledge I am immersed in a giant web which parallels scientific and mystical diagrams. This grazing or sampling method creates a different kind of completeness, one that submerges me into the world, providing me with the possibility of continuous learning. As a master of none I concentrate on being part of the whole; this makes me more like other species. I am not extracting a portion of myself for specialization; instead openness and consideration help me be a part of one world. In this section I will briefly enter and highlight realms of importance and explain how they connect intellectually and emotionally to my art. Prior to attending Goddard I thought of the Great Circle of Life as the ouroboros. Now inside the circle I have placed the web of life, the pattern of inseparable relationships. It becomes the tapestry in the frame.





## Trees

Take a moment to think of trees. Think of a single tree as if you were meeting another human. Now imagine you are listening to the over 4,700 year old Bristlecone Pine, Methuselah, growing in the Inyo National Forest's Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest atop the White Mountains. What has this tree seen? It is difficult to wrap my head around the wisdom of a tree, mind blowing in fact. I approach nature with the I-thou stance, others are met as equals and even closer as relations. Nature is part of my extended family. Crows are my brothers, flowers are my sisters and trees represent the grandmother, mother earth herself. A sample of this type of contemplation can be found at Chynne Morning Star's website. [http://www.chyennemorningstar.com/Grandmother\\_Tree\\_Just\\_for\\_an\\_Hour.html](http://www.chyennemorningstar.com/Grandmother_Tree_Just_for_an_Hour.html)

Called the Tree of Life, this central, unifying, singular tree can be found in the belief systems and art of many civilizations. Perhaps the most well known is Yggdrasil, the Norse cosmic pillar which connects the three realms of the world. This tree form is also seen in the pattern of the Kabbalah. The idea of the planet's central axis being symbolic of nature is only logical. Charles Darwin explained the imagery in Chapter IV of *The Origin of Species*, "The affinities of all the beings of the same class have sometimes been represented by a great tree....As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications." (104-5) James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* goes into great detail about tree worship. Easily we step backwards from Maypole to German fairy tale to Roman or Greek woodland temple dedicated to a specific god or goddess. None of this is far removed from us; one only has to use the imagination. Each tree on earth has the possibility of being a marker for the Axis Mundi, both the center of the earth and connector between earth and heaven. With this thought any walk where there are trees becomes place for communication between realms.

My favorite example of the tree of life is the headdress of the Siberian Ice Maiden. In 1993 Natalia Polosmak unearthed a kurgan in the Altai Mountains, the traditional home of the Pazyryk people, descendants of the Scythians. Inside the burial mound was a woman about twenty-five years old. The ice had preserved her body and garments. The following description by narrator, Stacey Keach and the archaeologist, Polosmak is taken from Nova by PBS, November 24, 1998.

NARRATOR: For her afterlife, this young woman was beautifully dressed. She wore a 3 foot headdress made of felt, which took up a third of her coffin, and a necklace of wooden camels. Other creatures adorn the headdress. Among them, this mystical griffin. All these carvings were originally coated in gold leaf.

POLOSMAK: It seems to me, the black headdress was a symbol of the tree of life. We have some indirect evidence for this from the pattern of 15 wooden birds which were sewn onto it. And we think the tree of life in mythology is supposed to bring universes together. The higher universe of the gods and the universe of humankind come together with this symbol.

This discovery prompted my first real self-portraits. The ancient Scythian civilization is a point in history I would like to claim, remember with the collective unconscious. As an artist I am tempted to recreate the Ice Maiden's headdress out of balsa wood which is easy to carve, although I have never whittled. I would make a felt base and currently have gold leaf waiting for a project. At the point of this young woman's death the tree, Methuselah would have been over two thousand years old. Today the tree of life is continued in the research of relations, the making of a 'family tree'. Perhaps my art family tree should have Methuselah as the center and the ice maiden as an ancient ancestor, a new project begins.

Peter Hocking, my first semester advisor, saw my secret self. He said, "Oh, you are the



*Land of the Amazons, 2011*

woman who lives at the edge of the woods." What does this mean? In the online magazine, *Mythic Passages: A Magazine of Imagination*, the Jungian analyst Marie-Louise von Franz is quoted, "In many fairy tales and poems the forest is the starting point for journeys and deeds of the hero. This represents emergence from a relatively unconscious situation into a far more conscious one." This language describes Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey* which is essentially the life transition



from infant to adult. Campbell explains, "This is a fundamental psychological transformation that everyone has to undergo." (The Power of Myth 124) The faster and more linear time goes these rites appear to be less magical. It is not that the rites have changed; it is the human way of thinking that has changed, forgotten or just become disinterested, lethargic or selfish. We need to bend time, to remake the circle.

This is one of the reasons I live at the edge of the woods. I am just out of civilization; people have to work to see me or be sincerely interested. In this liminality I am witness and participant with all beings around me. My location is the bridge between the realms of conscious and unconscious, a place where animals and spirits travel freely. At times I wonder if this point freezes me into stagnation or inaction like time spent in a fairy circle. People who enter the ring are often made invisible and lose time, often remaining a year until the exact day of entry. My choice of silence and my age perhaps encourage invisibility. Instead of feeling neglected, dismissed or unseen I should adapt my invisibility into a magical trait, which seems to be a skill of nature and documentary photographers. Or are the woods just the perfect place for me to be, that I need nothing more? Trees are reminders and keepers of enchantment. They keep me attached to the ground. Like old Methuselah I stand firmly and loyally in place, a witness to my environment.

## **Revelations on Romanticism: a Big Step for Womankind**

I have no quotes to prove my gut sensations, only the electric lightning bolts of cosmic recognition about modern attitudes towards romanticism, which I believe are currently open to change. Between dreaming and driving the car, two very lucid activities, a sense of truth swelled within my entire being that the belittling of romanticism was just self-embarrassment about our past great love for the earth, as if we had outgrown our childlike fondness for fairytales. The physical beauty of the planet was not what modern man wanted to remain tied to; he had to grow up and become a conqueror, not happy with the hero's journey and self-transformation. Man intended to become godlike on his own and transform the world, without gods and goddesses or others. A second thought followed so closely, like a double strike; perhaps some people deliberately wanted this passion to die, obsessed with mechanization and human superiority and a greed for natural resources to gain monetary wealth, all other types of wealth forgotten. Achieving money then becomes the new form of worship by modern man.

Leaving my blessed secure base of the Paleolithic time period where women and the land are one and worshiped, I make it safely to Sumer where Enheduanna supported the feminine principle with her literary skill and position as a priestess. Here in the archaic fashion,

oral language documents the means of belief as evident in her Inanna poems. Enheduanna could not stop time; the earth, animals and women were thrown under laws and wars created by men. From this point forward as a female artist I have no secure base to stand upon. A quick survey of art history shows the regular insertion of the landscape and woman as vital, stimulating imagery, with some art movements primarily focused on these two subjects. The silenced or hidden woman and the unacknowledged glory of earthly beauty rise in the souls of artists who recognize the missing wholeness of societal attitudes, actions and choices. Artists celebrate these missing ingredients, the disconnected links, knowing it is man who has separated himself by his choice to be blind, by his own renaming and labeling as a superior being. This is almost the removal of the sacred naming breath. Artists appear to still breathe the original air. In the DVD version of *The Power of Myth* Joseph Campbell says, "Artists are myth makers." This statement strikes me so hard I replay this section over several times in a row. Now I know why the past draws me and I sense an inkling of how to proceed with my art, I must tell the myths of my time or reintroduce, revive and reinterpret the old, so they are not lost.

As an undergraduate I found a place to stand in the nineteenth century. Why were the Pre-Raphaelites obsessed about medieval art and the imagery of blessed damsels and their opposites, the femme-fatale? It must go beyond painting techniques and a denial of Classicism. The painting and poetry of the Pre-Raphaelites and their champion, the critic John Ruskin, praised devotion to nature and the nature of womankind. Mimesis, the idea that beauty, truth and goodness are worthy attributes, has been chided as art progresses. Medieval Art was still connected to magic and the unknown world; we had not yet been fully separated from our environment. John O'Donohue in *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace* describes, "For the medieval mind beauty was a central presence at the heart of the real. Without beauty the search for truth, the desire for goodness and the love of order and unity would be sterile exploits." (45) Beauty and truth went hand in hand, in fact, the natural world gave birth to beauty. I realize now artists reinsert the most valuable missing elements of life. If women and the land were denied a voice, some artists would create to fill this void. In *The Rediscovery of Meaning* Owen Barfield explains, "Out of the whole development of the Romantic Movement in Europe at the turn of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth a conviction arose in these circles that man's creative imagination can be applied, not only in the creation and contemplation of works of art but also in the contemplation of nature herself. Through its exercise we begin once more to experience nature as image; and indeed an obscure recognition of images underlies that feeling for the beauty of nature which differentiates us so sharply from the eighteenth century." (20, 21) The desire to revere nature is an aching for the missing part of ourselves.



Symbolists too, brought recognition to woman and earth in a more dramatic way. Related to the Gothic component of Romanticism, Symbolist art uses the imagination and spirituality to show metaphor as an expression of the ideal, to have art express the truths that cannot be said with words alone. Their champion was Arthur Schopenhauer who believed art was a refuge from the will. The private, obscure and ambiguous nature of these painter's symbols extends to Surrealism. Sometimes the imagery of the latter appears darker, more psychologically imaginative and even tormented. Instead of being painted as weaker or strange beings the female surrealist took charge of their own images by becoming artists.

The women in Pre-Raphaelite paintings look lost in their own worlds or estranged, beautiful butterflies pinned to cotton wool or slightly deranged objects of desire. They are the possessions of men. The Pre-Raphaelite maiden is the ultimate forbidden fruit. My favorite Pre-Raphaelite painting is perhaps one of the most beautiful and disturbing, Sir John Everett Millais' *Ophelia*. This painting depicts the still singing Ophelia right before she drowns. The precise painting of the flowers *Ophelia* has picked and the natural ecosystem of the river merge woman and earth in a profound way. Upon seeing this work at the National Gallery I actually cried; the combination of exquisite painting and sadness of the story united to overwhelm me. My grief stems from the knowledge there will be no ascent; in Ophelia's case there is only descent. Even worse, it appears no one really cares; the value of her life is attached to a man who doesn't even know she exists. This mirage existence is seen in women today as they struggle for recognition. Psychologist Mary Pipher's 1994 book, *Reviving Ophelia*, compares adolescent girls to Shakespeare's Ophelia and suggests a holistic approach must be developed for their healthy growth and positive acknowledgment.



*Ophelia*, 2012





*John Everett Millais, Ophelia, 1852*

*Tom Hunter, The Way Home, 2000*





Tom Hunter's interpretation of Millais' *Ophelia*, entitled, *The Way Home*, changes the story by converting the dialogue from a Shakespearian tragedy to a societal alert. His pictorial narratives are re-enacted in our current time and deal with conditions of Hunter's home, Hackney in the East End of London. The East End of London was the location for the Jack the Ripper serial killings in 1888 and continues today as the home of working class, poor, most ethnically diverse and sometimes criminal citizens of Britain. *The Way Home* was created for the 1991-2001 series, *'Life and Death in Hackney'*. Even though Hunter admits this is an interpretation of a drunken evening of a friend; the photograph is so much more.

This woman could just as well been a rape or murder victim. Hunter's retaliation against sensationalizing newspapers is to turn daily headlines of grief, hardships and actual violence into modern versions of master works. These photographs are part homage and new language, one that reinserts the human story. They are the middle passage meant to make the viewer ask questions. How did this woman get there? Is she dead? Some might claim the beauty of the scene dissolves Hunter's intent, but what he really craves is dialogue beyond the headline. Instead of looking at the Millais and saying, "Poor Ophelia, she was crazy." I look at the Hunter and say, "Oh my god what happened to this woman?" and since it is a repeat image from my personal mythology I say, "Oh my god, it is happening again." meaning the disrespect and even violence toward women. Women are not synonymous with insanity and melodramatics, the Victorian view can be refashioned. While a single woman is immortalized in Millais' *Ophelia*, beauty connects Hunter's photograph to the immortality of the human condition, good or bad, the repetitive behaviors humans seem unable or unwilling to change. Hunter's image leaves me desirous of living beauty, not the fatal.

The Symbolists expressed their wants more openly, cleverly using the language of symbols to suggest thoughts and sensations; their work seems more complex, darker. Women for the Symbolists become powers to be reckoned with; they are enchantresses, witches, and vampires. Both the dark and light sides of the feminine trinity are revealed by their work. Man can be seduced, even fall victim and become fallen himself. Gustav Moreau's Salome is a far different creature than Millais' *Ophelia*; she demands a life instead of taking her own.





*Gustave Moreau, Salome Dancing before Herod, 1876 and Apparition, 1875*



In *Femme Fatale: Images of Evil and Fascinating Women* Patrick Bade quotes, French art critic, Joris- Karl Huysman's novel, *Against Nature* which describes femme-fatales in florid terms, "No longer was she merely the dancing girl who extorts a cry of lust and concupiscence from an old man by the lascivious contortions of her body; who breaks the will, masters the mind of a King by the spectacle of her quivering bosoms, heaving belly and tossing thighs; she was now revealed in a sense as the symbolic incarnation of world-old ice, the goddess of immortal Hysteria, the Curse of Beauty supreme above all other beauties by the cataleptic spasm that stirs the flesh and steels her muscles, ~a monstrous Beast of the Apocalypse, indifferent, irresponsible, insensible, poisoning, like Helen of Troy of the Classic fables, all who come near her, all who see her, all who touch her." (16) Moreau's own words perhaps best explain the real thoughts behind the Salome paintings, "The ancient mysteries and the modern mysteries, the first pertain to the great all-embracing phenomenon of nature, whereas ours belong to the private domain, the subsoil of feeling." Moreau was attempting to bring the mystery of the past alive in the present.

Although the Pre-Raphaelites and Symbolists painted at the same time period, Millais' image is a Victorian translation of the late 1500's, an adaption of Shakespeare's tragic fictional character. Moreau depicts an empowered woman of the past, at a time when women were being written out of history, 100 AD, the beginning of Christian dogma. In fact Salome's name is not used in the *New Testament*, but she was a real person, either the daughter of Herodias or the stepdaughter of Herod Antipas. Traveling in reverse time, these two images of women have gone from an indifferent pastoral death to deliberate temple reclamation. While both acts are voluntary, perhaps even full pendulum swings of stereotypical womankind, the latter is alive and not displaced. The immortality and beauty Huysman writes about is the strength of ancient non-patriarchal society.

Woman for the Symbolists became a life and death creatrix, more like Kali or the Fates; having the powers of life, death and regeneration. Even in the dark aspects projected by men I see the ability of ascent and no over shadowing male deity. The idea of frenzied ecstasy speaks to religion's altered states of consciousness and philosophy's standing 'out of oneself', both are a means of heightened awareness and possible personal growth. The within and without are also two points, not of the pendulum, but as different means of crossing the threshold. Huysman's "hysteria" and "curse" become the male thrown sticks and stones of his time period. Perhaps the diminishing portions of the power he gives Salome in describing Moreau's painting was more for the benefit of his male companions and his standing with them.

Surrealism melds the woman as muse elements of the Pre-Raphaelites with the deeper, often darker thoughts of Symbolism. Woman is worshiped again as an object to

be desired, but man re-assumes his superiority. While the Pre-Raphaelites perfected the maid, the Symbolists the dark mother, the Surrealists wanted both, the virgin-whore. Rene Magritte's photomontage, *Je ne vois pas la \_\_\_ cachee dans la foret*, depicts photographs of sixteen male Surrealists as a frame around the central painted image of a nude woman with her hand over her heart. The men have their eyes closed, but there is a sense they have seen and all want the same type of woman. The Surrealists' single fantasy, their object of desire, appears to be a disrobed den mother leading a strange pledge of allegiance. Robert Hughes' description of the Victoria and Albert Museum's 2007 Surrealist exhibition describes the 'l'amour fou inspired works': "...Surrealism invested a lot of energy in creating all sorts of sexual images, some of which - despite the huge expansion of pornography in modern life - have never been surpassed for conciseness and intensity." (guardian.co.uk) Ironically, perhaps the most sexually suggestive objects were made by a woman, Meret Oppenheim. So, while the Surrealism was a revolutionary movement the 'mad love' portion seems like juvenile fantasy.

Now enter the women I discovered in Whitney Chadwick's book, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*. This book is incredibly powerful and important because it goes beneath and beyond the 'larger than life' male personalities and egos which are synonymous with Surrealism. The women she writes about motivated the Surrealists and were often the inspiration for their art work. More importantly, these women were artists in their own right and claimed not to be Surrealists. Almost every woman in this circle reiterates this statement, suggesting the deafness of men who apparently considered their ideas and careers superior to the women they so fondly gazed upon.

These women claimed the right to their own bodies and minds, also a unity with the earth. Chadwick explains, "Women artists were quick to recognize and appropriate this identification between women's creative powers and those of nature. Having little need for a magical or symbolic Other, for a Melusine or Lilith, they identified their own psychic reality with the barren or fruitful earth. And they replaced Surrealism's concern with latent eroticism with an intuitive identification of the unconscious with a nature that is always implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, female." (142) Now, I had found a resting place for my entire being, female artists of my own century making art about themselves and the conditions of womankind.

In 1951 Alice Rahon addressed the idea of invisibility, "In the earliest times painting was magical. It was a key to the invisible. In those days the value of a work lay in its power of conjuration, a power that alone could not achieve, like the shaman, the sybil and the wizard, the painter had to make himself humble, so that he could share in the manifestation of spirits and forms." (187) There is comfort in her words and the possibility of reenchantment, a means of making visible the real emotions, desires and beliefs of womankind. Rahon's invisibility



is something closer to alchemy, not the denial of another's existence, the notion of women being perceived as an unseen "other" in patriarchal society. Art became the vehicle for the women around the Surrealists to reveal themselves in their own space and time. The negative connotation of invisibility is impossible for these women.

No artist's work better reveals internal darkness than the self-portraiture of Frida Kahlo. Her paintings are lifelong prayers for resurrection. Her figure and the natural world scream for united recognition. In her *'Self-Portrait from 1940'* she wears a crown of thorns as a necklace as if the one from Christ's head stretched and was given to her. A dead hummingbird hangs like an Art Nouveau pendant, a symbol of some fragile entrapment. The living black animals upon her shoulders, a monkey and a panther are cardinal points for the west and east directions, balancing the painting with darkness. Both creatures seem far away in their own thoughts and actions, remaining in their natural states, but tied to Kahlo. They become familiars. Kahlo's facial expression is despondent, almost trance-like. She is a drugged virgin made ready for primitive sacrifice. Insect flowers descend from each top corner, reminiscent of annunciation blossoms; they are both the angel and means of impregnation. Silver butterflies duplicate their forms and ornament a rope configuration on the top of her head. This is her shorn hair after the divorce from Diego Rivera re-braided and attached to her head. Tobacco type leaves fill the background and add a hint of ritual symbolism. The entire background could be ignited as an offering; she is the ultimate offering.



*Frida Kahlo, Self-Portrait, 1940*



*Frida Kahlo, Roots, 1943*

In painting after painting Kahlo and the environment are synonymous. Roots, hair, fingers and branches are all the same; animals and flowers are symbolic of the deep recesses of her heart and mind. The excavation and transformation necessary to heal her

soul is shamanism in its most primitive form. Kahlo can't reach deep enough inside herself or there is so much, too much to exorcise, so many paintings are necessary just for her to stay alive. Her canvases become altars, the place where she symbolically cleans her spiritual house. Her insides are heaved out onto the canvas, becoming beautiful others, each woe taking on an animal, insect, flower or other natural form. They become her primal healing family. Because of her popularity I have never given her adequate contemplation; I am the one who has lost out by my delay. Her ferocity and bravery are phenomenal.

Judith Golden also appeared for reconsideration; I had picked up her monograph on a free table years ago. My earlier response had dismissed her earlier painted photographs as sloppy, too casual and unimportant. Then I went to her website where I discovered her series entitled, *Twilight* described in her own words, "In this group of allegorical portraits, I asked each model to pick an animal, bird, or reptile that they could relate to. I painted the person to represent the chosen animal, then added more paint on the print surface to suggest dusk, the time of evening when spirits appear." There is palpable beauty and power as women merge with and out of natural elements. The colors are vital and enriching, the layering shamanic and primal. Who am I too judge anything, forgive me! I would be willing to pose for Golden although being in front of the lens is not my artistic or emotional preference. Judith Golden also created a tarot deck based on Jungian archetypes which she claims led to her individuation. Her opening page poem/statement, "I am an alchemist. With the magic of photography. I transform reality into the mystical realm of myth dreams and spirit." also describes how I feel about and use my chosen medium.



*Judith Golden, Loon Woman*  
1989-94 Photograph/Mixed Media 20" x 16"





Judith Golden, *Red Butterfly Woman*  
1989-94 Photograph/Mixed Media  
16" x 20" (<http://judithgolden.com/>)

Even in the process of this writing Golden's work grows on me. It is the total immersion of the individual woman into her own special environment that attracts me. Now I wonder, have I been looking at women with male eyes? Golden's *Loon Woman*, shares the strength of the shy but powerful bird not the exaggerated or imagined hysteria of Victorian women. *Red Butterfly Woman* belongs to the earth, not someone's private insect collection. They are kindred sisters to *Mitsue and Tsumugi* by Miwa Yanagi. The *My Grandmothers* series depicts two images I would claim as self-portraits. This is the largest compliment I can give an artist. Yanagi describes this series as, "...a project which visualizes the self-perceived notions of several young women when asked to imagine what type of woman they themselves might become fifty-years later. Borrowing from these model's ideas, these works are not only images of my own fictitious grandmothers, for they also stand as collaborative portraits of the ideal elderly woman. I bless all the grandmothers of the future." Here is a young female artist embracing womanhood, past and present and projecting it into the future. Miwa Yanagi's photographs make me content and perhaps even proud of my earned age. The two images

I relate to most show elderly women in nature. *Mitsue* is disturbing as an old woman has returned to the wilderness to die. Hauntingly I have always wanted to die in my own garden. A poem accompanies each image, helping the viewer more closely place the context to the artist's intent. The ultramarine blue ground cover provides a surreal quality suggesting magic and winter. Suspended in myth, the old witch could perhaps be the one who poisoned Snow White or a Snow White who has aged like Dorian Gray. The yellow rose which is very much alive suggests immortality. I see the crone as a wise woman returned to the earth. *Tsumugi* is very much alive, an aged prophetess playing a koto in the forest to welcome spring. Perhaps it is the same woman, come alive as the earth warms, making her a powerful witch indeed. Yanagi's photographs bring me up to date, a female artist living in the twenty-first century. Woman and the land remain united and now feel empowered to speak with the full voice of maid, mother and crone, cycles and web are one. The web must grow within the sacred circle renewing and affirming the connected life processes.



Listen to the breathing of the sleeping mountain  
witnessing these blooms of frost.  
While some await spring,  
others pass away in winter.

Miwa Yanagi's, *Mitsue*, 2009  
(<http://www.yanagimiwa.net/grandmothers/project/25.html>)



The sounds I play are not for human ears.  
In late winter the plucking of the koto welcomes the spring.  
With a tap it reverberates, shaking the earth;  
the mountains awaken.

*Miwa Yanagi, Tsumugi, 120 x 160cm, 2007*

Now I see rivers of art history twining with my current natural landscape, the real branches and brooks, footpaths I participate in daily. These rivers of thought merge and broaden with sensory awakening, not that I can rewrite history or go back in time, but that I exist in all time which today consists of linear and cyclical, not to mention metaphysical. So the weaving of my new art life is filling the ouroboros with living systems from the natural world and my own personal mythologies and beliefs, creating a cycle of renewal. In the process of cleansing my mind and heart I imagine and imitate the wisdom of trees who are deeply rooted in the earth, but keep their heads in the stars. Any unwanted or negative thoughts I desire to clarify and change transform by envisioning photosynthesis or the water cycle. By the time nourishment or moisture has reached the ends of my roots, I have found balance, making sure not to retain.



I end this section with a mental image of the Great Round and a video of Arnold Brown, an eighty-six year old former member of the Rosebud Reservation community, singing *Many and Great*. Peggy Sapphire brought me to meet Arnold, who rarely performs, but he treated me to this song and allowed me to video him. Arnold reminds me of Hide Oshiro in age, wisdom and truth.

**Follow this link to view the video of Arnold Brown Singing *Many and Great*.**  
***<http://vimeo.com/52955435>***

1.

Many and great, O God, are your works,  
maker of earth and sky.  
Your hands have set the heavens with stars;  
your fingers spread the mountains and plains.  
Lo, at your word the waters were formed;  
deep seas obey your voice.

2.

Grant unto us communion with you,  
O star-abiding One.  
Come unto us and dwell with us;  
with you are found the gifts of life.  
Bless us with life that has no end,  
eternal life with you.

#35 in Hymnal: A Worship Book

Words: Joseph R. Renville, Dakota Dowanpi Kin (Odowan Wowapi), 1846,  
paraphrased by Philip Frazier, 1929, alt.

Alteration © South Dakota Conference, United Church of Christ

Tune: Plains Indian melody, Dakota Odowan, 1879

## **Collaboration:**

The real transformation from my semesters at Goddard begin with Collaboration. I have been the classic solitary artist until my immersion into interdisciplinary practices. Collaboration appeared in the form of an individual, Mark O'Maley, who calmly lead, tricked me out of my comfort zone into expression that ended up being incredibly comfortable. Beyond a solitary art practice, I am a private person with a deliberately reduced public life. As a college professor since the eighties, I am comfortable in a classroom setting where I am in charge, set the rhythm and activities and leave when my job is complete. Other than that I am unseen by choice, preferring to be intimate with the landscape and the other species who live on the property. This has been my choice really since childhood, roughly between the ages of four and six. The land and her creatures have never lied to me or disappointed me or asked me to be more than I possibly could. Nature has known and accepted me from the start just as I am, as I have always been. Nature loves me unconditionally every moment of every day. I in return try to spend as much time as possible in her company.

Reversing my role and becoming a student after twenty-four wasn't difficult academically. I am the type of person who would go to school forever. If there was any nervousness it was over interacting with people, people I didn't know. It is easy to think residencies are short and one can rally for a brief period of time. Goddard College is not a place to hide in your room; residencies are immersion. As first semester entrants, G1's, Mark and I began an art process together that continues to this day. He has also introduced me to dance in general, but specifically others artists who have agreed upon collaboration.

### **Mark O'Maley, The Camera Betrays Who?**

At my first residency of the Masters of Fine Arts in Interdisciplinary Arts program on Goddard College's Plainfield, Vermont campus I met Mark O'Maley. Mark is a set and lighting designer who often works with dancers. His gifts have proven to be my missing elements, motion and sound. Our first project together was the photographic mapping of the tattoos on Mark's arm. Mark gets a tattoo whenever he travels to honor the new location and journey of his life. His body is a living testament to his earthly discoveries. "*Maybe These Maps & Legends*" was created for and shown at the *Art Crawl* of the 2010 fall residency. These immediate pieces are liberating because of the collaboration and the time frame. As quickly as this art piece was created, we realized we could trust each other to come through with our

promises. Both of us are endless overachievers, hard on ourselves and willing to give all for a better work of art. I have found a solid art companion to share and grow with as artists and friends. How could I have foreseen that the beginning, a map of an unknown man's tattoos, would be mirrored by my portfolio thesis being based on a map of my own back yard. (Little did I know my first and last art activities at Goddard would involve map making.)

<http://markomaley.com/home.html>

Map piece: "*Maybe These Maps & Legends*", collaborative installation by Mark O'Maley & Victoria Zolnoski, Goddard College, July 2010







*Mark contemplating out piece and Meara enjoying the work that evening.*

## **The Camera Betrays/ The City Belies You**

In the fall of 2011 Mark's friend and peer Liz Staruch received a grant and designed a dance work for the High Line of New York City. I was hired on Mark's recommendation to shoot the stills for this production. A student editor, Daniel Kontz, would translate this work into a video. The grant paid me enough money to purchase a digital camera capable of shooting quality video. We shot for fourteen hours in just one day. The end result is "*The Camera Betrays You*". This video won the 2011 ACDFA Region II Adjudicated Screen Dance Showcase for: Best Editing, Best Camera, Best Use of Location, and for Best Filmic Energy. I just purchased the camera and had barely used it, I had never shot for video, and I was unknowledgable of the location, performers and choreography until the day of shooting. There would be no retakes. It is remarkable and a pleasant surprise the film did so well. It shows the positive results of everyone being professional and dedicated.

<http://www.thehighline.org/blog/2011/02/07/video-th-camera-betrays-you>

The success of this work led to a country companion piece created when Mark moved to Wilmington, Vermont. "*The City Belies You*" was designed, performed, photographed and edited by the exact same artists. Mark, Liz and I met one extra time to re-shoot Liz's performance as she and I felt our responses were inadequate. The main production occurred at Harriman Reservoir on August 17<sup>th</sup>. On August 28<sup>th</sup> in between the original production and the re-shooting Hurricane Irene devastated the town of Wilmington. This is an understatement. The places we had eaten, the local diner called Dot's Restaurant and the snack shack, Wahoo's Eatery, no longer existed. The second take would have to be different. The disaster changed the atmosphere of the piece and when the production was shown at Liz's college, West Chester University of Pennsylvania, the money was donated to the town of Wilmington.

Mark got permission from the town for our second shooting; we did not want to appear insensitive to the needs of the community. Instead of filming at Harriman Reservoir which was closed, Mark found a rough stream bed heading south just outside of town. On the original shoot we had joked about the nude beach and floating excrement, but the second take was somber. This leads to the healing qualities of art, that art has the potential to shift the energy of pain.

## Journal Entry

**September 16-17, 2011.** At noon I drove to meet Mark and head down to Wilmington. My car has 247,000 miles and has just started leaking oil. It was nice to be passenger and see the landscape. Around Sharon and South Royalton the damage from Hurricane Irene was visible. Route 9 out of Brattleboro was open, but the devastation shocking. Mark had previously contacted the town offices in Wilmington to make sure our re-shoot wouldn't be offensive. We could not go back to Harriman Reservoir as it was closed. It is full of cars, oil, parts of houses, propane tanks and other debris. They are talking about draining even though it is 150 feet deep. Mark had come down around the 12th and found a new location. Along the brook on the way to Jacksonville banks had collapsed, the soil gone with the raging water, leaving boulders and collapsed trees. The long roots of standing trees decorated the bank like leather fringe. Devastation is oddly beautiful. We did a late afternoon site visit and plan. We would shoot first thing in the morning when the light would be perfect from the east.

I crossed the river discovering my knee high farm boots have leaks from age. The current was faster than first imagined, but the rocks weren't slippery. I walked to the farthest point while Liz stretched in dance sweats and then was standing in her red dress. I shot video for the next half hour to forty-five minutes. Liz and I were in sync. I don't know anything about dancing, but I have photographed people for so long I can interpret how they might move. She did incredible gestures that reminded me of Artemis in the archer pose and Greek relief patterns. Liz crawled on a huge gray boulder and reclined, sort of a modern Weston with driftwood shadows completing the look. I hope this is a success. I'll send her the files the same day as I send this. It felt good to correct and complete a project.



*The Archer*





Posters created by Mark with my photography.



**Email from Mark O'Maley, 3/12/11**

I'd love all my fellow G2s to take part!

I am working on a large scale performance installation that I am calling 'The LeWitt Project/ Requiem For Droz'; where I am just trying to create meaning for myself while trying to communicate with myself, and the world.

This is where YOU all come in. In addition to the Alteration instruction packets I am in the process of sending out to some of you, I need you all to take 3 photos of yourself and send them to me.(black & white is better, but I'll take whatever you send me.)

One: HAND OVER MOUTH, EYES CLOSED.

Two: HAND OVER EYES, MOUTH SLIGHTLY OPEN.

Three: HAND ON HEART, EYES CLOSED.

(This is not see no evil, speak no evil etc!)

There are two options now.

1. - take the Photos with your partner, wife, child, husband, best friend, etc etc. DON'T BE DOING THE SAME THING AT THE SAME TIME!~!

2. - take the photos solo thinking about the love of your life - whatever or whoever that is.

Email them to me at: mark.omaley@goddard.edu. NEED THEM NO LATER THEN 31 March 2011!!

Below is my photographic response which I did take as see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil even though we were instructed not to( the powerful suggestion of don't). The first image with the magpie became the poster. It was rather fun because the science department had just gotten rid of old taxidermy which I borrowed for this shoot. The birds were connected to their traits. The owl actually uses sound to tell the direction of its prey and technically should have been the hear no evil image. Eagles on the other hand can spot a rabbit from a mile away. Their vision is eight times sharper than our own. While I confuse these traits in my mind and the excitement of the prompts response to Mark's request, the real weight behind these photographs is my own image spontaneously and joyfully taken in nature.



## **Maria Urrutia, The Gift.**

Maria Urrutia, a dancer, was also in the MFAIA program of Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont, but a semester ahead of me. She knew Mark O'Maley from Philadelphia where they had previously worked together. At the 2011 Spring Residency Mark requested Maria Urrutia and Michael Bolger perform in a small room behind the sound and light technical area of the Haybarn Theater. They were given prompts and music. Roughly half a dozen to a dozen people at the most could squeeze into this space as the audience. I was asked to film the piece. There wasn't even enough room for a tripod, so I used someone's shoulder. The dancers wore white clothing and dark glasses. The lighting was predominately fuchsia and green, then red, white, and cyan. It was my first interaction filming dancers. The music was Patti Smith's interpretation of Nirvana's "*Smells Like Teen Spirit*" from her album, *Twelve* (2007), the sound of one of my favorite singers certainly aided in the seduction. The dance was odd and interpretive, but perfect with the lights, sounds, and dancers interactions. I wanted more. Annie Leibovitz in *Annie Leibovitz at Work* says, "All dancers are, by and large, a photographers dream. They communicate with their bodies and they are trained to be completely responsive to a collaborative situation." (87) My art musings were suddenly including dancers in motion.

**Follow this link to view the full video of Vimeo *alteration* # 1**

Maria was attractive as a possible muse, so I asked if she would work with me in the future. Since Maria performed publicly and knew how to move I thought she would be perfect for my first attempts at video. Also, I didn't know that many dark-haired women. Her fiery character displayed attributes for more visceral and challenging subject matter. Maria could easily embody the Goddess or nature spirits of many cultures. This was a vague idea until I received an unexpected gift in the mail.

## **The Gift**

It is interesting how life and art work ebb and flow. Things are created in their own time, guided by what needs to touch them. My dearest friend, Gretchen Renee, mailed me a soft envelope full of blue macaw feathers. She had rescued a bird and had been saving the feathers for a long time. The topside of the feathers were an incredible blue, brighter than ultramarine. The undersides were rich yellow. What was I to do with them? For years I



have made headdresses out of a wide variety of materials. Several books guided me to the possible use of the feathers. I would turn them into a feather crown. Using a nettle scarf brought to me as a gift from Nepal I hand stitched each feather. I considered the blue side to represent the transitional times of evening and morning twilight called the blue hour. The yellow side was the sun. The blue would all face one direction and the yellow the other, so the wearer could decide if it was an evening or day ritual. It was not to be worn casually for the sake of a photograph. A single macaw tail feather can cost up to sixty dollars. There were probably at least fifty feathers or more to sew. The Pueblo consider macaw feathers sacred and other Native American tribes use them as well. Since this project I have learned of several feather donation sites where owners of captive birds can share their feathers with indigenous peoples. The piece was amazing just because of the materials. I knew the headdress was not mine, but I would hold it until it could be used for an art piece then passed on. (provide donation information)

I brought the night and day headdress to the Goddard Fall 2011 residency where Maria Urrutia wore it for a dance in the red pines. We both sensed it was about the plight of peoples and the earth. There were two dances, one for each side to the headdress. We began with the blue or twilight side. Maria wore a long gold coat I had made from a Middle Eastern ratio pattern. Then the next day she wore the yellow side of the headdress and a scarf from India which was gold, green and black striped. The first dance had been incredibly intense, ending with both of us crying. We thought the second dance would be the lighter of the two; we were wrong. Maria made vomiting gestures, almost shamanic removal of dark interior objects. I thought of the French fairy tale, *Toads and Diamonds* by Charles Perrault. This seemed darker than any individual curse.

Maria's dance embodied the weight of the world. I could only think of the disappearing Amazon rainforest. Current satellite images show the destruction is happening twice as fast as previous estimates, perhaps up to six thousand square miles a year. We didn't know what would happen with this piece, both the headdress and the video, but felt the headdress needed to be gifted.

This is where the magic or synchronicity occurs, actually again. So far we had been intuitively working, letting the object and environment spur our actions. This discussion was happening as we passed a picnic table where Heather was sitting. Her last name is withheld to respect her privacy and own telling of her transformation. Heather spoke aloud that she was heading out west within a week to study with a wise man and could gift the headdress for us. It became part of Heather's costume, but that is her tale to tell. I will share the email she sent on October 28, 2011.

Hello Dear Victoria,

Please accept my apologies for not responding to your thoughtful note earlier. As I am sure you can imagine, life has been very full since last I saw you. It was such poignant timing to receive your email – my road trip out here to New Mexico was indeed one of winged and feathered beings. The journey which has continued since my arrival has continued to be guided by those beautiful riders of the air.

I am not sure if we had the opportunity to talk about what my plans were for the semester - our meeting was so brief and at the very end of the residency. I would like to share with you some of the work that I am doing this semester – I am preparing a performance. I have been working on this performance for almost 2 years – actually the material, dreams, images, symbolism, etc. I have been gathering for what seems a lifetime. The performance is based on a series of dreams and a weaving of their tale. When you handed me the headdress, it too entered into the dream. The headdress has indeed made its way out here to New Mexico and it is still my intention to honor my word of bringing it to the Hopi. Before I make the journey to their land, I am writing to you to ask your permission to wear the headdress for the performance that I will be doing in January. It would seem that macaw feathers are part of my story and the story that I will be a vessel for. The feathers along with 2 other objects have repeatedly made their desire to be part of this telling known. If you are to grant me permission to use the headdress, it would be added to. I am currently working with a blacksmith in order to create copper feather and a copper snake which would be added to the headdress. There are so many stories in these sentences that I am sending to you – stories weaving upon stories – dreams upon dreams – and messages and communications. I hope that you can hear a faint whisper of their telling. Please know that I would not ask permission to use the headdress unless I believed it to truly be part of the story that needs to be told. Please let me know your thoughts about the use of the headdress.

I have attached some photos of my most recent painting for you to see. I hope you are well and the semester is being kind to you. With much appreciation and gratitude for our meeting and the headdress that you were part of bringing into existence.

Peace and Beauty,  
Heather



Of course, I gave my permission. I had never been the owner of the headdress, only the maker. Not even that really because the feathers were complete, beautiful, and powerful on their own. I was the transmission station, a living crossroads for a work of art, commentary on the earth and symbolic costuming for ceremonial work. The making of this headdress connected me back to the period in childhood when materials are used freely, matching the flow of ideas without judgment and true to purpose.



*Macaw Headdress, Night and Day sides*

The video of Maria Urrutia dancing in the pines at Goddard College is now entitled *Sacred Life*. Although not shot with music the soundtrack came instantly to mind while watching the raw footage. The song comes from my friend Margo Days album by the same title. Daniel Kontz who edited *The Camera Betrays You* assisted with this project. He and I have a string working relationship and currently have several projects in process. *Sacred Life* was shown on October 19th and 20th at the IV Sao Carlos Video Dance Festival in Sao Carlos, Brazil, and will be played every weekend during the month of November. No words can express the ultimate shape shifting and cleansing transformation this video has made in my personal and art life. I can now put all of the goddesses to life with the beautiful frequently undocumented art form of dance.

This early immersion with other artists has broadened my attitudes about my own art purpose and provided a means of accomplishing new ideas or ones that have remained dormant for a lack of means of expression. Collaboration has gifted me many things: a new digital camera capable of video, a different vision, but positive experience in shooting video, my first post production work in video which is collaborative, and beginning knowledge of working with dancers. This early experience transformed future semesters and my work ultimately from now on. While I have no intention of giving up black and white film camera work; there are new tricks in my bag that are perhaps more expressive of my intent. New methodologies lead to clarification and even richer, more imbued exploration. I am no longer satisfied with a two-dimensional art life.





Follow this link to view the full version of *Sacred Life*  
<http://vimeo.com/53340100>

## How the Song of Solomon Became the Golden Chamber

For my practicum I decided to photograph older women to illustrate text from *The Song of Solomon*. The concept for this project began when a friend and I were reading the Song of Solomon simultaneously, but without the knowledge of each other. Joan, who is sixty, explained that she read it nightly; it made her feel beautiful. She could recite major portions by heart. For me the text holds love for both genders through language that honors the land, in a way it has a pre-expulsion sensation. As a pagan and feminist I ultimately had to change the final exhibition title to the *Golden Chamber*, which refers to Aphrodite in ancient oral overture and temple worship. The text from *The Song of Solomon* is kept in some titles and physically included in several photographs. The power behind language and meaning became important as I tried to balance my beliefs with the women I photographed and the sacred text. It seemed false to title a collection of photographs from a patriarchal religious source. The real connection was women being compared to nature and extending the demographic of my imagery.

Initially one might think photographing older women is not much of a stretch, but negotiating with my peers was far more time consuming and less in my control than my standard method of working. Preconceived notions of image, fear or at least shyness of the camera, and time constraints rolled into an elaborate scheduling that required patience. The work was not difficult, but different. It was like working underwater or at an upper elevation where the air required another method of breathing. It was another realm, one I walked in, but had never photographed. Certainly I was of this age and must know this language, but I do not photograph myself. Although I did easily comprehend the bravery needed to face the lens even when held by friendly hands.

Photographing women who are peers and friends suggests the woman's world of Christine de Pisan's, *The Book of the City of Ladies* or even the turn of the century harem where wives spend their time together, in worlds of their own. Modern times suggest modern freedoms, but these can be surface level only. American women are held to working standards of lower pay and aging women are denied beauty by a society commercially obsessed with youth. This piece was not created with a political agenda, but, perhaps self worth must be discovered before activism can take place. My underlying discontent with women's unwritten, unacknowledged history is a fire under the surface, possibly making my work more political than I think. The politics of the feminine image especially in the United States is incredibly painful. I feel invisible since I've turned past the age of fifty. This series attempts to redress this condition in my immediate world with women from my community, women who are older, working, vital and beautiful. Ultimately, a semester later, it led me to

photograph myself in a way I truly feel represents my whole being. My own healing could not be forced and had to come in a form I could fully embody, physically, intellectually and spiritually. Would each woman I was about to photograph reveal her method of healing?

Photographing the women and assembling their portraits oddly reminded me of seeing Judy Chicago's "*The Dinner Party*" for the first time in 1980 at the Boston Center for the Arts in the Cyclorama Building. My memory was that it was in a basement of a church, the location unusual with a sense of the unwanted. I accidentally found the exhibition when walking to the post office; it had to be the first day, the opening. The next morning there was so much controversy in the newspapers. Now the work has a permanent home at the Brooklyn Museum and is a celebrated piece. The power behind "*The Dinner Party*" is that one woman's vision celebrates the entire history of womankind as well as many mediums; beyond this it becomes a physical document restoring the denied or unacknowledged history of women. In a way it becomes a 'First Supper', reinvigorating and correcting the time line of history. In fact each wing of Chicago's table is broken up into different time periods, the first is from Prehistory to the Roman Empire, the second is from Christianity to the Reformation, and the third is from the American Revolution to the Women's Movement. This same sense of affection, celebration and broad acceptance of all women was the core thought behind *The Song of Solomon Project*. My imagination wanted to honor and capture that of each individual's imagination, accepting and revealing how they viewed themselves. These were to be images that crossed the bridge of consciousness to the realm of unconscious hand in hand with another woman, hopefully connecting the threshold through the photographs.

Earlier work was based on my invitation verbally and the women in their twenties responded quickly, often just jumping into the car right then and there. I would find a location and discover the perfect hour for lighting then call and set up a date within a day or two. It was natural and spontaneous, an energy created by the idea and the beautiful light of the day. A gorgeous prop of a flower or vegetable would not hold its freshness very long. If a tree was in bloom or ferns were a certain height action had to happen at a specific time. The practicum changed the nature of my work so that it was guided by humans not nature. The fact that I changed the title suggests I could only intellectually and emotionally handle a certain amount of human control given over to others. Giving the shoot over to a model's choice was one thing, naming my title after a major patriarchal text was another. One difference is that younger models and I worked on public land, a place open to any individual. *The Song of Solomon Project* was a return invitation where I went to the model's home environment like an itinerant artist.

Even though an email or hand delivered letter initiated this process I feel every woman I photographed invited me on their own terms. My first approach was like a visiting



card left on an entry hall tray; there were unspoken rules of engagement. I had to wait for an invitation, a call back. I had to go to their house or land. This aspect of being invited created a very different energy, taking me out of my own terms, to an unknown location and into a partnership. These had the seriousness of formal bookings and the weight of soul contracts. The power of the camera could not steal, not that I had ever abused my subjects before. These shoots were more like an appointment with Queen Elizabeth II or the unveiling of a Black Madonna for some festival. Queens and muses are worshiped; their images are not stolen. The shoots were marked on the calendar like saints days.

The younger women in my life wanted to be included too and I did not deny their interest or ability to be part of *The Song of Solomon Project*. This would actually make the work a true representation of the ages of women. Several of them followed the protocol of setting up a date and inviting me into their vision. Some of the women agreed and wanted to be photographed nude as long as they remained unidentifiable. Their faces have been kept out of the portrait. I try to respect every model's wishes to the best of my ability. Every woman presented signed a model release. This document will only use first names.

The word harem means forbidden because of sacredness or importance. With this in mind the outdoors becomes my seraglio, a living Garden of Eden where women are safe, never banished. Women cannot be divorced from the earth. I believe Earth is the Garden and we never left; we only closed our eyes and minds to nature and our responsibility to take care of the planet. In *The Chalice and the Blade*, Riane Eisler explains, "The Garden is an allegorical description of the Neolithic, of when women and men first cultivated the soil, thus creating the first "garden." (63) My approach to this book from the *Old Testament* was to show each woman happily in her own 'Garden', not necessarily the one with vegetables and flowers, but at a place she felt safe, loved and considered sacred. Every woman I photographed wanted to be outdoors.

The importance of photographing women in the landscape seems so vital that I want it to never stop. I am not a finisher, not out of laziness or lack of vision, but more because of my image creation addiction. The interaction with the individual in front of my lens is private and a creation high. Editing and printing follow as the second phase or artistic high. Framing imagery, negotiating for exhibition space, and interacting with the public are paralyzing and until this point have been avoided as much as possible. The former is fine if one can write a big check. The second is a headache and often so restrictive the work gets diminished. Rarely does an unknown artist get the amount of space necessary to show enough work to create full understanding. My preference to the latter would be to send someone else to be me for the reception. Perhaps this sounds outrageous even terrible, but I am that private.

One aspect of the practicum was the sharing of this work. My reasons for not showing

are many. First, I am responsible for every "capture" although I have not stolen the image. Each woman is a private temple and I have been allowed to take a sacred photograph. This is a huge responsibility. The image is also an encapsulation of a divine moment, more than a memento or postcard. The standard method of presenting black and white photographs in classic metal frames is boring and has become so standard it renders all but superior images sterile. In general group showing diminishes most work unless deliberately curated and only of a few artists. With this I realize the real event is the shoot. Should the shoots be videoed or would that ruin or alter the exchange? Portrait photography is a spiritual potlatch, an archetypal revealing and a reciprocal distribution of respect and affection. The sacredness of the work and my reclusive nature suggests the problem of exhibiting has been in the presentation environment.

If my work was displayed more as an installation with control over all of the elements then perhaps I would be agreeable to exhibiting. This realization came about because of working with Mark O'Maley who creates environments for his lighting and performance pieces. Slowly as I watched him work I understood I had to do the same thing. If no good space was available then I would have to find or make one suitable to the specific body of work. This thought is incredibly liberating and shifts the whole dynamic of completing work. It also challenges other skill sets I may not have therefore connecting to collaboration. Mark in fact did the amber lighting for *The Golden Chamber*. Now I am asking for assistance in editing video work. This one realization is incredibly transformative and affects my future art life on many levels. I must see my work as a whole, find or create a space for it, ask for help in areas where I lack knowledge or skill and enter into a relationship with artists who assist me.

Another major transformation was the use of chromoskedastic chemistry for printing *The Song of Solomon Project*. The work of Edmund Teske inspired this approach. His solarizations with red toners provide a similar result. In this process two chemicals combine to make ammonia. The photographic paper can receive the chemistry in the light, counter to standard printing. Between the chemical laden air and having a print in the white light, chromoskedastic printing is exhilarating. The metallic tones and rust, yellow, and purple colors come from the light reacting to the chemicals. The term chromoskedastic actually means color scattering. The simplest definition comes from the Freestyle Photographic website, "A BW print is normally monochromatic because the silver particles that remain in the print absorb all color and reflect black. In chromoskedastic printing, the silver particles are carefully managed with different chemicals and/or exposure to light, to become different sizes. These different sized silver particles in turn scatter light in different ways to produce the different colors; this is known as the Mie effect." The effect is similar in appearance to a daguerreotype. A heavy pewter base swirls in and out between the strongest darks and

lights of the image. Portions can be painted with a stabilizer to diminish or slow the effect. I intend to use chromoskedasic chemistry regularly, especially to learn some control over the colors. Its overall effect is mysterious and otherworldly. During the creation process I felt like a Paleolithic artist decorating a prehistoric cave. Having just seen Werner Herzog's film, *The Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, the sensations of an underground sacred space are fresh in my mind. Using only torches to illuminate the rippling rock walls cave art was created from natural pigments such as bone and carbon black, red and yellow ochre and lime white. The bowels of a darkroom are a parallel primal space. Alternative methods are the wild part of a rather OCD medium and keep the alchemic magic of photography alive. In a chromoskedasic image the viewer has no secure knowledge of the age or means of creation of the print. This becomes destabilizing and exhilarating, hopefully giving over to greater sensing and different thinking about the work.

The group scroll ended up being a cyanotype window scarf with Lazertran images of almost every model. I had envisioned heavier linen curtains, but they never have been in stock at the nearby box stores. I refuse to waste gas looking for a ten dollar curtain. So, this sheer cotton window scarf appeared and though not quite my look it fits most of the women's style. In fact, the piece has grown on me quite a lot and is hanging in my bedroom. I connect the delayed appreciation to the different method of working and acceptance of a lack of control. Sometimes this disgruntled sense occurs when the art created doesn't match my advance mental image of the piece. The actual creation was more exciting and pleasing than the finished result.

Cyanotype does not work well in the winter. After submerging the curtain in chemistry I took it out into the light and placed skulls, bones, feathers and flowers all over the fabric. Even though I had cardboard on the ground the cold slowed the process. The low angle of the sun warped the skull images. Still it was magical and perhaps I should have videoed this process, but I did not feeling like invading the ritual aspect. No one was at the art building on campus on Friday, so I went berserk on the front lawn, displaying my skull collection, walking clockwise scattering feathers and flowers and cleaning up in reverse. This piece is visually very different for me.



*The Golden Chamber Curtain, 2011*



The Lazertran might be a little plastic, but I love copier imagery. I was quite surprised by the resolution from the plastic transfer sheets.

## Song of Solomon Curtain, 2011



The Lazertran scarf makes me think of Helen Chadwick's work; especially her piece entitled, "*Of Mutability*". Cyanotype nude images of her body float with animals and flowers on an elevated floor. Although it looks as if the large photographic images were varnished on to plywood, it is difficult to tell the exact method of application. Four golden orbs, like planets rest on top. The dreamlike appearance of floating animals, women and flowers, their possible mythological connections and a title suggesting transformation makes Chadwick's photographic sculptural collage attractive to my sensibilities. Prussian blue speaks to the original darkroom and has always attracted me in any medium.

For framing I removed a set of steplechase prints from their nineteenth century

frames; the glass was old and warped. The antique frames matched the daguerreotype appearance of the chromoskedasic printing method. Five images in this format were put on display; one was a duplicate to gift to Carolyn. Her shyness and sense of privacy seemed to fit chromoskedasic printing which melds the image with the chemistry. The presentation method for Susan's came to mind quickly, a thangka fabric base with a dry mounted and grommited chromoskedasic print. Years ago I had started a Tibetan sky coat and never finished it. Sky coats are the traditional garb of dancers representing dakini, the female embodiment of enlightened energy. The name dakini means "she who traverses the sky". The back panel of the coat could be sewn into one panel for Susan. To create a second for myself and showing I put together the two front sides. Altogether the panel combined red cotton with a woven tree pattern, antique black and gold striped silk, and emerald and gold material from the forties. Susan frequently wears red and black and bold tribal jewelry. The piece fit her personality perfectly. Her gifted piece hangs in her office at work. This piece would be the closest to another culture's belief and art vision. Some of the prints were created digitally, predominately that of the younger women.

When the time came to present at Goddard I knew I wanted to be in the Garden House even though it was unheated. There is only one small room with a large raised fireplace. The plaster walls are crumbling and Tudor style windows wrap around the corners on both sides of the hearth. Amber gels were placed inside upside down beaded shades which hung from the ceiling. The room turned a gorgeous color hinting at the Amber Room of the Hermitage. Golden is the adjective attached to Aphrodite to describe her epitome of beauty. I had dreamt the title at the end of the semester. *The Song of Solomon Project* was really *The Golden Chamber* encompassing my pagan beliefs and the idea of a deliberate environment. Unexpected February rains made the stone stairs a luge run, almost impossible to walk. Mark O'Maley helped with salt, sand and chipping of ice. Mother Nature's restriction of viewing my work was totally acceptable to me. As my father would have said only the brave or foolish would attempt it. On February 3, 2012 I filled the Garden House at Goddard College with the work from my practicum. Inside were the two thangka scrolls of Susan, two chromoskedasic photographs of Carolyn, a large digital scroll of Jamie as well as a chromoskedasic piece, chromoskedasic photographs of Joan and Sky, a digital triptych of Meara, a digital print of Katie and a double portrait of the Day girls, who are sisters. All of this was put under the title of *The Golden Chamber* in honor of Julifer Day and Morgana Rose Mellett's grandmother, Jean Raymond Day.

Jean passed away on December 4, 2011 and I had been with her for the last two days of her life. Her loyalty to beauty and the creation of her own artwork mirrored the transformative processes I have been experiencing. She and I often read Hesiod's *Theogony*

and the *Homeric Hymns* together. Before Jean lost consciousness she said, "Torry you know where I am. I am in a field of flowers and I'm dancing. It is so beautiful. Do not follow me here." Surely Jean was in the Elysian Fields. I needed to honor all of my muses, the memory of an incredible dancer and teacher, and perhaps for once my admittance that beauty has a real, vital purpose. It can heal. In a safe environment I am capable of sharing with humans and that others have pain which might respond to my efforts. On the fireplace I left a jar for responses. One said, "I can see the magic of your heart." Another, "...so much respect for the women you honor."

Because the cold was going to ruin my work the photographs only remained for one evening. Upon visiting the site viewers could leave a note for me in a response jar and then light a votive candle in a mason jar to leave around an evergreen circle formed outside around a frozen reflecting pool. A beautiful thought was to be given to someone else, another creature or the planet. The amber light from the windows reached out across the snow tempting viewers to climb the treacherous stairs; this too seems fitting of my personality and method of working. I don't want it to be easy, perhaps more correctly, I would like some reverence, not for my ego, but the quality of Beauty itself. It was not easy for me to expose myself, but this location, the Garden House, Goddard, and the audience felt safe. With this in mind, the idea of sacred space and the method and environment of viewing will more than likely be a part of my artistic purpose. At this point in time I cannot exhibit without considering the space. My work will become more of an installation, revealing the interdisciplinary aspects of myself.

After hearing Ruth Wallen talk about the grieving place in her exhibit *Cascading Memorials: Urbanization and Climate Change in San Diego County*, I am even more aware of the need for a means of communication for the viewers of art. Any art work that influences senses should provide a safe place for the discovery of emotion or thought and a means of placing or transforming it so they leave the exhibition securely. Some might argue this is not the responsibility of the artist, but I would like to make it one of mine.

### **The Golden Chamber Journal Entries September 10, 2011.**

My first invitation came from Carolyn who responded quickly and with great vision. She had wanted to be photographed last year during the height of summer by a brook in her backyard. It never happened. Carolyn has actually been very mindful about contacting me, calling weekly with her schedule until it worked for both of us. I photographed her September 10, 2011 at around 11:30-1:00, after I took care of my mother. I felt like a schoolgirl heading to



a play date; I wanted the chores finished so I could run off.

Carolyn lives in Waterville which is about thirty seven miles from me. The day was beautiful. Her property is about forty acres just off of a dirt road. I traveled in about a fourth of a mile and parked by log lengths that have been cut to build a garage. The cabin is further in and up on a little hill. The land borders a brook and has not been cut for a long time. Verdature is abundant, moss on logs and stone walls making everything emerald and indeed a place for faeries. Before I reached the house I was sensing Carolyn's magic. Is she a faery, witch, priestess... which one, or all? What and who will I find? There is the air of fairy tale and myth as I am entranced deeper into her realm. The place is so beautiful, so unique to her that I am in awe of her luck and joy and hold great reverence for what she has manifested. Then she is on her porch welcoming me. "I have made coffee and corn muffins, come in, I will show the cabin first then we can head to the woods."

Her small cabin is colorful and crowded with art everywhere: paintings large and small, most looking like self-portraits: women feeding horses apples, nuzzling, small fabric flags of goddesses, pick a culture, a century, a little altar with clay goddess whistles, all made by Carolyn. It feels safe and cozy. I meet the black cat and then we head out. For all of my shoot preparation I came here only with two cameras and two reflective disks. The thought of appropriate footwear never entered my mind. I squeeze my 9 1/2 feet into Carolyn's tiny sandals as we head through the mud to her sight. I am literally and figuratively walking in her shoes. We laugh.

The weekend before, for her own comfort and aesthetics, Carolyn did a practice run to really consider my request. She is so thoughtful, so prepared. We come to a little brook where she does ritual by an old tree. She has small bowls filled with soft gray watery clay and separate ones with flower petals. An old aluminum strainer holds a single fern almost as a pattern then more blossoms. It is high noon and sun is perfect filtering down through the dense evergreens and deciduous trees. She strips off her clothes and tells me she doesn't want her face concentrated on and that she is shy and probably won't pose very long. I stress that I am honored and will behave in accordance with her wishes.

Carolyn sits on some mossy boards that make a bridge across the brook and begins to paint herself with clay. I am witnessing a ritual in her personal sacred space. I am dumbfounded by the beauty of it all and her trust. I want to cry, I could cry, perhaps we both should cry, but we bask in the beauty and make art together. I realize this is a ritual from time in memoriam and other women might want to do this sacred gesture. It is therapy, healing, embodiment, and reverence, a cycle within a greater circle.

Carolyn and I are about the same age. She is all of her art work, a piece of living art, her own Goddess. I am witnessing all of her making in her own body. It is utterly one of the

most beautiful things I have seen. Her generosity makes me feel so gifted to know her, so hopeful to be human, so not alone. I feel fragile, but strong simultaneously. We are wrapping up. The sun is moving quickly now and Carolyn is getting cold, the energy shifting. I hand her a camisole to dry her brook washed skin. While she was posing Carolyn said she loved how the drying clay made her skin look like that of an eighty year old. This is honoring the wise woman, our elders. She repeats this thought many times. We both agree we would like to live to be eighty or ninety something, to be older wise women.

She asks how many people are going to be photographed. I honestly answer that only two other people are thinking about it and Carolyn says, "It isn't the number, it is the experience." I know at this moment I don't really need to photograph anyone else. This is a culminating experience, a good day to die. For all the years I have photographed women I have always wanted more, but not now. I feel fully resolved for this moment. So, the Song of Solomon is serving as a prompt for activity, but at this point I do not necessarily even see the text unless there are selected lines under images. Right now I have photographed one woman and had my family help me start to photograph myself. I am having epic experiential and reflective interactions with other humans and myself. I feel naïve, slow on the take, forever a child needing to learn. I feel open to discovery.

#### **Sept. 20, 2011.**

Sierra, a light worker and shaman, phoned to schedule her portrait for this Saturday at 1:00. She is one of the most beautiful women in town. I have always wanted to photograph her since I met her. I have always thought of her as the Selkie Woman. A long held fantasy image is of her wrapped in seal skins standing in front of Caspian Lake. No one is around, perhaps early morning, it is foggy and loons are swimming in and out of the frame. Of course I hear their call. The water looks silver as does her hair and the skins. Is this a fantasy or an ancient memory? I guess we'll see what happens. Sierra was my midwife. She and I once started an angelic, light worker, course together. I left after the most crucial activity and she completed the training. Sierra is one of the only people I allow to touch my body for healing.

#### **Sept. 21, 2011.**

Again, I am about to enter the home of someone I have scheduled to photograph. I go past the garage and the main door to a gorgeous clematis or virgin's bower that has not yet bloomed. The buds are full and ready to explode. I envision Peggy with her radiant silver hair, face encircled with little white stars like a Dante Gabriel Rossetti painting. She has prepared black bean soup and is making a salad. We hug and she keeps making individual salads. The cucumber smells like the ultimate cucumber, clean and crisp. Even the color has a scent. The soup is delicious and we talk about mothers. Peggy's sounds very similar to mine; there is anger and dissatisfaction with life choices. She has made baklava for the first time and it

falls apart, but tastes wonderful. It is actually better because it is not overly sweet and sticky. Peggy knows I love coffee, so she makes a large pot. Bob, her husband arrives and joins us. Peggy brings out a draft of a story she wrote many years ago. It is about children honoring the earth and is illustrated with her photographs. It should be published now. Now is the correct time for the book. Whether I take a photograph or not I am happy and the day could continue like this or end right now and I would be glad.

We set off to Arnold Brown's to take the pictures. Arnold is eighty-six and runs a blueberry business. There are two thousand bushes of several varieties. In his side yard there are apple trees, again, mixed types. One tree has small red black apples that are haunting. We check out all of the trees and settle on the first one that caught our eyes. I did not discuss or question Peggy's clothes. She is wearing a black top, black hoodie, and a soft gray skirt. Her ample hair is up in a bun with silver threads falling out. I love this kept, but wild woman look. I ask her to take off her glasses because they change with the sun. She is not perfectly comfortable, but is agreeable. I ask her to investigate the tree and she begins to relax while she touches the apples. We move over to a broken tree. I use the reflection disk to get a bit of golden light on her face. She plays with apples and rests her arm on a branch. Later I will ask to photograph her by the clematis and I will bring a sari to wrap around her, but today was perfect. I thank Peggy, we plan to talk Monday morning and I head home.

When I get to work Carolyn, who I photographed, is there. She says, "Would you like me to photograph you?" Then explains that she reasoned I might want to be part of the project but could have a difficult time creating my image, so she would like to help. Just her consideration makes me say yes. She has given me her all and I trust her. I would love to be reciprocal. This project is feeding itself. No one has ever asked to turn the camera on me.

### **Sept. 24, 2011.**

After visiting my mother I go to Sierra's house. I am early by an hour. I drive around. I am close enough to go home, but I don't want to. I stop and film two horses, but they aren't into being captured. I go back to her driveway half an hour early and plan to wait. Sierra pulls in right behind me and says she is ready to go. She invites me in to show me what she plans to wear. She will be nude under her leather shaman coat with furry collar and cuffs. She wants to carry her pipe bag. Sierra has a very specific place to go. We hop into her truck as the journey is on very rough backwoods roads. We head west out of Hardwick and take a left toward Buffalo Mountain. The road goes on and Sierra tells how some woman she did not know took her to the place. There was a community here years ago, but it got burnt down. Even earlier, there were Native Americans. The pipe ceremony is very special to Sierra. This will just be her with her pipe, but it is sacred. I wonder if I should photograph at all. On a huge glacial boulder Sierra spreads out the contents of her pipe bag. The bag is left hanging on a nearby tree. It



was a gift from one of her teachers. She made her own pipe which has the head of an eagle. All of Sierra's sacred implements are lying on a red wool cloth. She puts her pipe together and lights it. I sink to the ground, hopefully dissolving into the wilderness as Sierra honors the directions. When the tobacco is out she finishes the ceremony and puts everything away. It is another day to die for. Sierra's skin, clothes, even aura are golden, a rich brown from living outdoors. She is the color of tobacco. What an honor. We talk of being mothers on the drive home. Our daughters worked together for a gardener this summer and are only four years apart in age. Once this summer someone asked if Sky was my daughter and I answered yes.

**Sept. 28, 2011.**

After taking care of my mother; we are coming up with an assisted residence plan, I wait at home before going to photograph Gudrun. Gudrun is my neighbor, just two houses down. I take the car because Boots the cat wants to follow. Her home is an authentic log cabin. In the spring she invited me over for tea and I still remember the floral linens and antique tea cups. All sorts of sensuous fabrics and colors fill the place; there are beautiful items made by her hands. It is another stop still moment. When I enter she is at the kitchen sink. Dressed all in black, a scoop neck top and flowing skirt, Gudrun looks magnificent. She tells me she wants no jewelry or patterns. Gudrun doesn't need either. We walk down to the neighbor's field where large old maples stand at cardinal points. She admires this area of trees as well. A wild cucumber vine grasps the bark and she knows this is her location. I double check a favorite tree, one I call the Queen, and the light is not right. I go back to Gudrun and the shoot begins. We take some with and without glasses. The wind coming from the east picks up her hair and ripples the fabric. I can tell she wants this to be short. With digital it is like rapid gun fire. I am actually conscious enough not to shoot as quickly as I can. Rapid shooting can make some models more nervous. Even with all of the auto focus capabilities, I wear trifocals and like to take my time. With film I never felt like I was stealing. The rapidity of digital can bring this sense on, also the sense of senselessness. How many images do I really need? Surely one is good enough now? What am I looking for? Or is it the sheer addiction of seeing and capturing, a kind of vision hoarding? We wrap it up and walk back to her cabin. I will make her a disc of the images. I did take one roll of 120 black and white, but that takes a little more time.

**Oct. 9, 2011.**

At 9:30 in the morning I drive to Montpelier to photograph Susan, a college sculpture professor. She lives on Hubbard Street in a gray house with an ornate door from Prince Edward Island. Her home is beautiful. Oriental rugs layer the floor and the furniture is cushy and older. All of the walls are unique colors. The first sitting room is blue purple; the next is key lime pie. There are paintings and sculpture everywhere. I feel comfortable here. After

the tour of her home Susan and I take my car to Hubbard Park. Her dog Rosa passed away a month ago and Susan says she is grieving. We walk where Susan and Rosa used to go. I have never been here. Narrow paths wind up hill through maple groves. Bright moss tints the glacial boulders edging the incline. The sun is making a circle of light by an interesting log with a boulder ledge in back. Susan says anywhere in here would be good. This is the spot. She sits down and we talk. I shoot and listen, putting the camera down often to meet her eyes. Susan is a fascinating woman. We talk about our mothers and our children, also marital partners. In most of the shots she has her glasses on. We do a few with them off. We decide a lovely lunch is in order. Susan is someone you woo. We have an extravagant brunch and I pick up the tab. I can't really afford it, but she doesn't need to know that. Bagged lunches for the next two weeks! It was really lovely to be in her presence.

**Oct. 10, 2011.**

I left this morning at 6:30 to drive up to Bloomfield where Bethany lives. She is a digital and photography professor. We went to the same high school in Colebrook, NH. Bethany is thirty and the youngest woman I am photographing. She wants to be photographed with her goats. This week has been beautiful. The leaves which looked like they weren't going to amount to anything have kicked in with yellows and orange shades. The temperatures have been in the eighties without rain. The drive takes an hour and a half although the distance is sixty miles. Lots of back dirt roads are still washed out from Hurricane Irene. When I arrive Bethany is just finishing chores. The female goats and kids are let out. Bethany has put on a Moroccan caftan I brought. She is taking the text of the *Song of Solomon* seriously and wants to do the herd lines. We walk in her fields while the goats romp and graze. Bethany has the most gorgeous eyes, the kind that look like she's wearing eyeliner when she's not. She does have eyeliner on today. I vary far and close shots. Then she poses with goat horns that belong to my neighbor who runs a slaughter house. When she and the goats seem bored we quit. All of the goats go in except for one little girl. Bethany asks me to pick her up and pass her over the fence. Just as I'm about to hand her over the goat slams her head back smashing my face. I have to set her down. The pain is instant. I take off my glasses and realize they are broken. My face hurts. I wear trifocals. This is an unexpected expense for the sake of art. I thank her and drive home, getting back at about 11:30.

During this process with all of the women I have not choreographed the shoots. The models have been free to wander or choose where they sit, what they are doing and what they wear. I have just let go. It doesn't mean the images are any good, but I have enjoyed myself. I enjoy my regular way of working too. I realize the work with younger student models who are often paid are my imagination. This project has me meeting someone else's imagination. It is a passive collaboration. These are lady's agreements. There has been

something proper and lovely about the process, cordial phone calls and emails, selecting times of day, having to reschedule. I need time to see what is happening, what has happened. I have done so much shooting this period, but I need to breathe and digest not only the pictures, but the conversations before I start editing. The big subjects have been mothers, children, aging, and dying. I am feeling a connection to the feminine views of Mary Cassatt. First, I will make all of my recent models CD's of their portraits and then I will start to edit.

I am feeling like an itinerant primitive painter or early photographer. It is interesting how food often enters into the event. Only Bethany did not ask me in for a beverage or snack. In the evening as I finish typing my left eyebrow and cheek is swollen and painful. The young goat gave me a concussion. I wonder about Mary Ellen Mark's and Annie Leibovitz's working conditions.

### **November 22, 2011.**

On Saturday the twenty-second of November I met Jamie, the head garden girl, at the pull off before Wolcott. I love the look of this place. An unattractive large dirt pull-off leads to railroad tracks, then flowing cornfields where I often see turkeys and deer. There is an odd rise of land by the road where red pine is over planted in lines. I walked to the top of the hillock before she arrived and found a deer trail through the woods. There were lots of beech trees and mossy patches. I dreamt I was supposed to photograph the Stag Bride. Jamie was to be *The Stag Bride*. My neighbor had loaned me antlers which I planned to wrap with gold net. Gold net drives young women wild. They just wrap themselves up in it and perform. Jamie arrived and we walked to the place where she undressed. First I paid subtle homage to Andrew Wyeth. Jamie has the look of Helga. Originally I thought she would just hold the antlers. Instantly she saw they could be tied on head turban style and insisted it be done this way. She had to stand regally to keep the antlers attached. It was fitting to do this just off of a deer path. We shot digital, video and 120 film very quickly as it was deer season. Gunfire was heard in the distance. Was this shoot irresponsible or the echo of a ritual, an ancient memory resurfacing? There wasn't too much light, only a beautiful soft light with a little fog. Jamie has a Pre-Raphaelite look: the red hair, small form, baleful eyes and sensitive positioning of her hands. She tends to look tired or worn, but I rather like it. I think she's prone to worry; her large heart feels everyone's pain.

### **End of Journal Entries.**





*Peggy, 2011*



*Apples, 2011*





*Gudrun, 2011*



*After Helga, 2011*





*Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon, 2011*



*Thou hast doves' eyes, 2011*





*Pipe Ceremony, 2011*



*The Stag Bride, 2011*



*Shaman, 2011*





Carolyn, 2011





*Eve, 2011*



*Susan, 2011*





*Julifer, 2011*



*Hannah, 2011*



*Hog Ranch, 2011*





*The Shell, 2011*



Garlic Venus, 2011





*Behold Thou Art Fair, 2011*



*Selkie Woman, 2011*



*The Golden Days, 2011*





*White Peony, 2011*



*The Claw, 2011*





*The Stag Bride, 2011*

## Self-Portraiture

While some photographic artists such as Claude Cahun and Cindy Sherman make themselves the subject of their imagery, this has never been an interest for me. Other people and interaction were necessary for me to reveal myself. Others whose beauty I saw and held reverence for, made me dare to contemplate my own. This was a healing process, documenting beauty over and over again as if collecting solid proof it was something to be grasped by my own hands, forever preserving the ephemeral as if I might have wings.

This idea of collecting beauty is best represented by Jayne Hinds Bidaut's *Tintypes*, a collection of academy style nudes and singular insect ferrotypes. The images were put into nineteenth century daguerreotype cases which add to their preciousness. The cover image combines the forms, a nude woman as the head, thorax and abdomen of a dark winged, elegant creature. The Victorian language of Emily Dickinson and modern author A.S. Byatt are easily heard when contemplating Bidaut's work. In the forward Eugenia Parry speaks to this and I concur, an older, slower, perhaps more magical time emerges through the reinterpretation of this darkroom technique. Bidaut is working with enchantment and the language of time; these images are more magical than precious. Their preciousness is converted by their female ownership. Throughout *Tintypes*, Bidaut's dialogue is about seeing, the imagination and the power to transform the past. Parry explains, "The result is a mirage of the Eternal Feminine." (19) Although not my favorite work the concept, methodology and presentation speak to my source of meaning and Victorian aesthetic sensibilities.



Jayne Hinds Bidaut,  
*Butterfly Lady/Brown Leaf  
Mantis*, 1994, 1998; from  
the series *Academy Figure*;  
tintype, each 5 x 7

Honestly, I have been happy for a very long time honoring other women, giving them a physical image in which they could not deny their own beauty. I have no images of myself from the glorious youthful twenties when insecurity and indomitable drive combine for a strong yet vulnerable look, the look fashion longs to preserve for eternal time. This remnant of the Roman ideal floats in the back of our minds although the form today is painfully slender. In my hands the camera did not turn around until *The Song of Solomon* or *Golden Chamber Project*. Before I could ask my friends and peers to pose I wanted to experience what I would be asking of my older models; women who did not regularly and deliberately pose for the camera.

The backyard became my studio for self-portraiture. I could run out the kitchen door and leave a tripod standing in a hedge row or flower bed. The first attempt was in the Square Garden as a middle-aged homage to Lucien Clergue. My daughter and I had been discussing the beauty of his early 1970's series of women shadowed by nature. These have a wilder and less pin-up feel than his water nudes which are still incredibly beautiful but have the weight of a man's stare. *Nu d'Agon* is reminiscent of Anne Brigham; the image of a woman emerging from a tree is solidly hers in the medium of photography. This is no Daphne escaping. The tree becomes a home or base mirroring the model's pose and strength; they are beauty and power doubled. More glamorous and suggestive are *Genese* and *Nu de la Foret*, perfect Venuses with branches or their shadows cast upon the headless forms. In the former the sensations of motion and suspended time are similar to Edmund Teske's double negative of his wife with Olive Hill, Hollywood. The bold branch shadows across the pale nude figure create a hypnotic effect in *Nu de la Foret* which is actually difficult to find and control as self-portraiture.

My attempt reveals a tissue wrinkled throat, pale nipples and aging stomach, a poor if not humorous try, not worthy of homage. The awkward composing as the continuous shooting mode snapped off ten frames was simultaneously ridiculous and brave, but as a methodology impossible. The only feature of mine I was attracted to was my hands; they are very large, strong and tanned, revealing the manual labor of gardening by hand. This will have to be retried in the future. I wanted vague success before I started photographing for *The Song of Solomon Project*.





*Lucien Clergue, Genese, 1973*



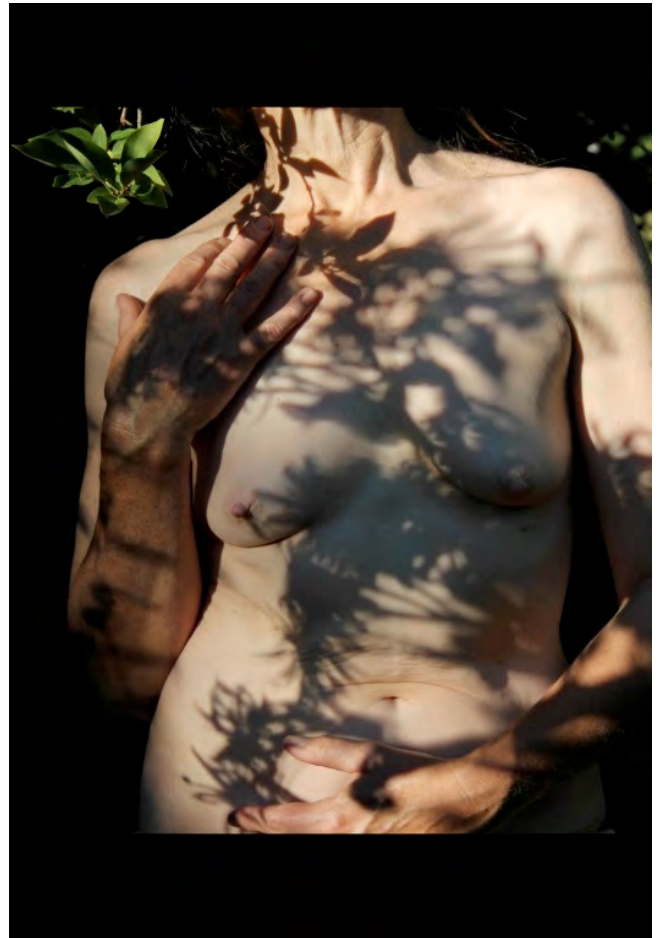
*Nu d'Agon, 1971*



*Nu de la Foret, 1971*



*Edmund Teske, Gertrude Teske, Composite with Olive Hill, Hollywood, 1932/1945*



*Failed Clergue Homage, 2011*

Assistance was necessary, so my husband was asked to come to my rescue. This new role became a serious project for him and his first part of the work was to create my prop. Knowing I used natural items he gathered red gold chicken mushrooms which he hand sewed onto a heavy golden cord with emerald green embroidery floss. This act of affection made the entire process worth every moment, acceptable image or not.

The shoot came with a mix of art and awkwardness, the politeness of love suspending exterior judgments and recommendations. He complained about my 'wild horse face' which I took to mean my personal version of the deer in the headlights gaze. "Too intense, too crazy," he would say. The most interesting pieces are two where I am gesturing with a cathedral bell vine as if in a trance or reverie. The idea of motion, active enchantment, shifts the meaning beyond a front and center still pose; the closed eyes provide a window into the unconscious. By no means is this imagery resolved, only a hint to a better method of creating self-portraiture. In fact I could be Julia Margaret Cameron experimenting in a Cindy Sherman fashion.

The idea of active magic is appealing; I instantly think of two Pre-Raphaelite paintings, *Magic Circle* by John William Waterhouse and *Morgan le Fay* by Frederick Sandys. Here enchantresses are ceremonially cooking things up; their physical beauty combines with magical skill and a private language rewrites history to accommodate their charms, the kind attached to magic not the compliments of men. These women have extricated themselves from the weaker, possibly crazy version of woman as seen in Millais' *Ophelia*, written about in this thesis under the section titled, *The Web within the Ouroboros*. Pre-Raphaelite paintings in general represent my own growth from young womanhood to adulthood, physically representing my own resuscitation from media and the male gaze. I could walk out of their frames and grow by my own choice to something of my own desire, perhaps even into a Remedios Varo painting in flesh. Recognition is the first footstep toward freedom. Ultimately I would like my self-portrait to be about empowerment as well as enchantment. This would not happen until the camera was switched from still image to video.



Remedios Varo, *Personaje*, 1958



Remedios Varo, *Pompiendo el Circulio Vicioso*, 1962





*Self-Portrait 1, 2011*



*Self-Portrait 2, 2011*



*John William Waterhouse, Magic Circle, 1886*



*Frederick Sandys, Morgan le Fay, 1864*



## Feminine Footsteps

While the words of male philosophers have helped me verbalize my stance on my relationship to the earth the art that inspires me is made by women. The ancient past becomes my first voice under the reinterpretation of Goddess worship during the Paleolithic time period by Marija Gimbutas, Riane Eisler and Barbara Tedlock. Through over thirty years of research as an archaeologist Gimbutas explains the religion of prehistory was a nourishing feminine tradition that did not dominate nature. Gender study and the reinterpretation of the archaeological, art history, and cultural time line arose through her work. By examining Neolithic artifacts Gimbutas concluded, "the primordial deity for our ancestors was female... a self-generating goddess." Considered the "Grandmother of the Goddess Movement" of the 1990's, Marija Gimbutas reinserted women and nature into the modern dialogue about our Indo-European past. Since the beginning of time women have been more than fetishes. We are life givers and I believe synonymous with the fecundity of the land.

Eisler's voice joins Gimbutas. In her book, *The Chalice and The Blade*, she explains, "This consciousness-later emphasized in Goddess figurines either surrounded by natural symbols such as animals, water, and trees or themselves partly animal --- evidently was central to our lost psychic heritage." (3) Modern research is supporting reinterpretation of ancient sites. In cave paintings spears are really plant matter. There is no definite answer to the gender of the artist, but in Sri Lanka "most researchers today agree that the artists most likely were the Wanniyala-Aetto women who spent long hours in these caves waiting for their men folk's return from the hunt." (wikipedia.org) Not that having cave paintings created by women makes our gender superior; I am just looking to be included as an equal in the first place. The books of Gimbutas and Eisler reinsert me into my own past, present and future as a person of value.

Barbara Tedlock, author of *The Woman in the Shaman's Body*, suggests the famous Venus figurines of this time might have belonged to female shamans as aids in midwifery. A portion of her deduction comes from the line and cross-hatch markings that resemble shamanic clothing. The main focus of Tedlock's work was to reinsert the female shaman as a correction to Mircea Eliade's book, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. Typical of the era, Eliade considered the women with shamans as wives and helpers only. Looking back to the work of Russian archaeologist Johann Gottlieb Georgi in the 1770's Barbara Tedlock found that male and female shamans wore feminine clothing with mirrors representing breasts not just for spirit protection, but to simulate the "integration of animal spirits with feminine regenerative energy in their own bodies and minds." (51) Tedlock explains that Buryat, Mongolian, and Mayan languages don't have gendered pronouns and that the male

archaeologists of the past gave the privilege to men as an assumed patriarchy. Eliade's classic text should not be read without Tedlock's as a companion.

"Among the Altayan nomads of Siberia, for example, women were the only shamans from the fourth through the sixth centuries C.E. Dressed in elaborate gowns, they represented the spirits of old women who guarded the Road to the Land of the Dead. These ancient crones were believed to be the ancestors of all shamans." (62)

*The Woman in the Shaman's Body* has reawakened a sense of primitive and childlike desire to have my art be created from as much sensory exploration as possible. This aligns my new interdisciplinary art practice with the participation suggested by phenomenology. My interest lies in discovering and expanding empathy as well as objective and subjective sensations of my own body. This union of participation to creation is explained by Tedlock, "During ecstatic mystical experiences the image-based right hemisphere of the brain comes to dominate the left hemisphere, where most language takes place. Mystical states, like dreams are fundamentally nonlinear, nonlinguistic, and distorted beyond recognition when put into words or conveyed to others." (82) Transformational experiences are often best expressed by an image which allows the detailed layering of senses to be revealed and contemplated, also recognized by others with similar experiences. With this belief in mind my earthly and artistic union becomes a transformation of spirit, body and art into shamanism.

Here is the 'artists are myth makers' stance described another way and by a woman. To say I am an artist and a myth maker could be a footstep towards shamanism. How are acts of artistic creation similar to shamanism? I suggest both are spiritual journeys inspired and empowered by imaginative flight. Add my belief system to a reverence and interaction with the earth and other creatures and a path becomes visible for a whole art made toward Owen Barfield's 'final participation'. This desire and choice for circular living propels all of me forward while reconnecting to the past. History remains alive and life sustaining, a vehicle and language to help the forgotten become remembered. My myths are born of the ancient ones, as far back as the caves of Chauvet or Lascaux. As a person living in the twenty-first century I would like to cross the bridge to the past and bring back through my art the visions and beliefs that guide me now, the ones that have guided me for forever. The most important of these is the value of the earth and all of her inhabitants.

## Totem

To show the worth of a single animal's life I created the video, *Totem*. The title comes from my reverence and personal connection to this great bird making a comeback in northern Vermont. Turkeys are heard in the spring when I am starting flower and vegetable seeds. Their tracks are large and obvious, tridents of direction, symbols of the great strength in their legs. I see turkeys often, alive and dead. The ease and frequency of seeing has brought them into my life as a pleasure and symbolic totem; they are one of my animal guides. In Jamie Sams' and David Carson's *Medicine Cards: The Discovery of Power Through the Ways of Animals*, turkey represents the give-away, realizing all life is sacred the person with this card is willing to give freely to others without any expectations or regrets and with an open, joyous heart. Arthur Versluis in *Sacred Earth: The Spiritual Landscape of Native America* explains the totem, "Tribal people are affiliated with a clan not because---as some commentators have suggested---they saw the creatures in that area and turned them into deities but because the particular animals in a given vicinity are manifestations of spiritual archetypes and are therefore revealers of both cosmological and metaphysical truth." (30) With the rise of their presence in my neighborhood I have taken notice of turkeys and could not deny their prominence in my life. Their health, strength and survival is directly tied to mine.

While driving to work in the late winter I found a dead frozen full turkey on the side of the road. The bird was huge and in perfect condition. The neck must have been snapped, but there was no visible physical damage. Conveniently I had a large empty grain sack in the back of the car; the turkey just barely fit. It was huge, perhaps the largest turkey I had ever seen. When I got home the bird was placed in the chest freezer as I did not know what to do with it yet, only that it had to be respectful.

Before any parts of the bird were to be used for costuming I wanted to honor this magnificent animal. I took it to one of my favorite landscapes along the Lamoille River in Johnson, Vermont. I had often seen turkey footprints here and thought it was an appropriate place for honoring. My Native American friend Diana was asked to do the filming as I processed with the bird. I enjoy lying down with a dead animal as a retrieving Earth Mother figure and have come to realize my archetypal self appears to be the crone who escorts creatures to the Land of the Dead. I am a professional bridge crosser.

Here silence and reverence loom large, an all encompassing egg or moon that paints the world white, a return to the birth mist. This was actually my first ritual performance piece and Diana's presence gave me comfort and support. One cannot help but feel verification when your art companion shares the name of the Virgin Huntress; we often laugh about this coincidence. Diana becomes the physical embodiment of Artemis for me and is currently the



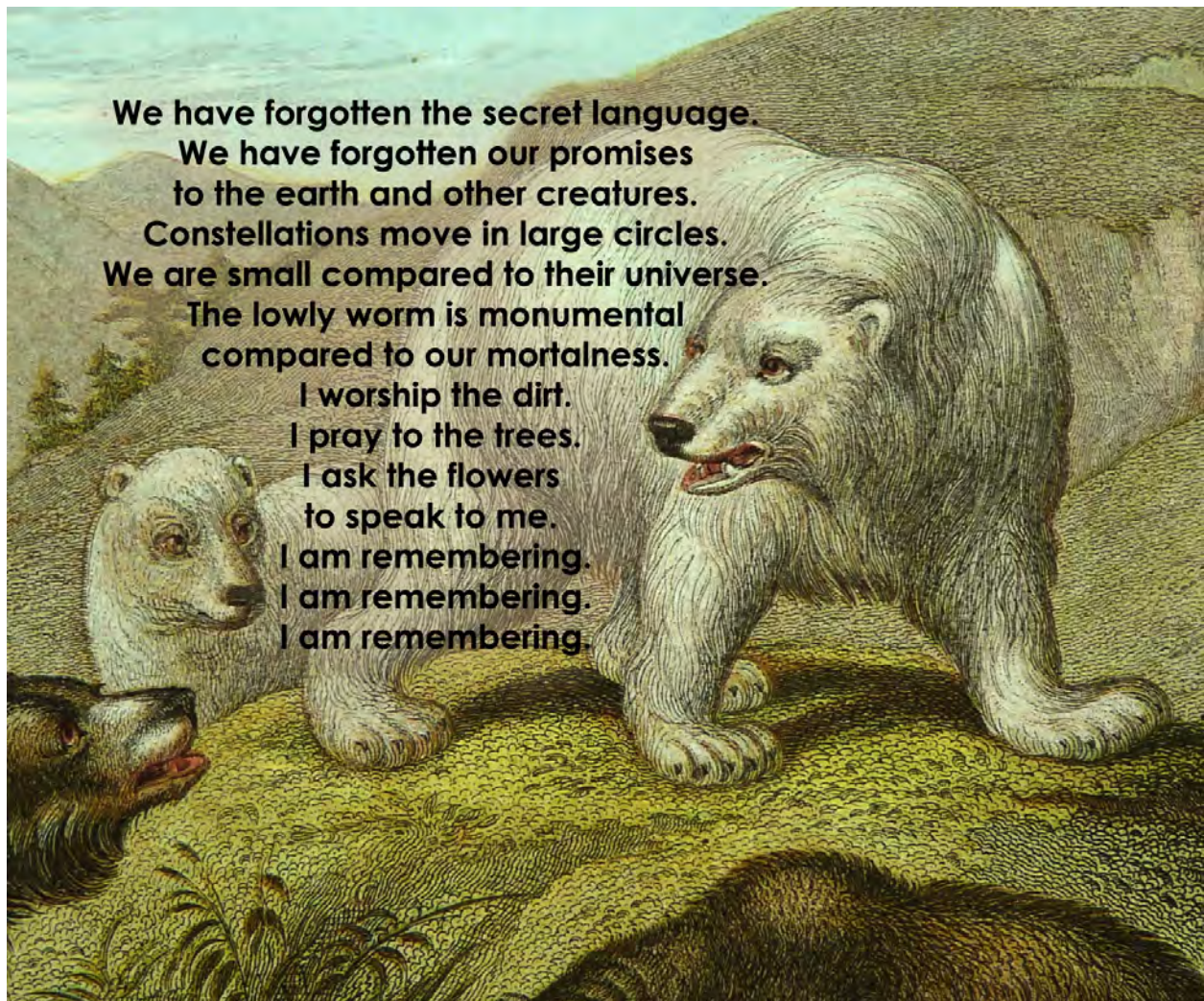
main focus of video work yet to be completed, but titled Northern Isis or maybe even Native American Isis.

On the first day of spring I cut off its wings and tail and plucked the beautiful breast feathers which blaze like polished metals, copper, bronze, brass and pewter. People often say how homely turkeys are, but I feel the reverse and I wonder how closely they have seen the bird. Correct cleaning of feathers for ceremonial use is a large task. There can be no meat left on the ends. I rinse the feathers first in clean water with a bit of dish liquid then rinse again. They are shaken full and dried on screens then steamed to kill any insects. Sometimes I put costume pieces I have made in borax or moth ball storage for just enough time to reaffirm insect death. Keeping these pieces is arduous work. My learning about feather care has come from indigenous people around the world. Once there is insect damage I throw any offending feathers out.

Some headpieces are re-feathered every several years. This is not just a physical replacement, but an actual renewal of the specific activity that the piece was created for, a commitment ceremony. During this time at Goddard I have realized I am a ceremonial costume maker. I do not have to be the performer. My gift is the garb which creates the activity, a gift that prompts another to find the magic within. This process cannot be forced or rushed; it must be natural and created in the ethereal realm of connected trance. These items almost make themselves by the sub-conscious overriding the conscious.

Once I had the feathers I left the turkey's body on the hillside for the coyotes, who came and sang that evening. Their rippling song is simultaneously sad and happy. Spring arrived and I felt the cycle was not complete. The turkey had been laid to rest, but not reborn. I sensed I had to be the turkey at the same place by the river. I called Diana and we met on a beautiful day, early spring when the sun is warm, but the air is still cool. Donning a Middle Eastern caftan, a simple black garment with gold piping, I moved like a turkey through the woods, a reverse retracing of the funeral steps to a fire circle made by someone before us. On the top of my head was a topknot made of stiff wing feathers, cedar branches and ilex berries. I carried the deceased bird's wings and tried to move with them like a turkey. It was over in a moment, but felt like a lifetime. The dance felt like the most natural activity in the world. I had never thought I would be my own subject even in a still pose, but to be performing was shocking and freeing at the same time. I also realize this is my second piece created with feathers and a means to honor birds.

Follow this link to view the video of *Totem*.  
<http://vimeo.com/53339456>



*Lyrics to Totem*

After Paleolithic female shamans, the world of womankind gets slowly muffled and close to silenced. The Vestales in Rome had some power and freedom, medieval women were left alone to tend everything while their men went to the Crusades, there is handwork and hard work, but I longed for a collection of female artists to speak to me. The photography of Julia Margaret Cameron had seduced me to put down a paintbrush and pick up the light capturing box; I honor her every day I take a photograph. I am from the Second Wave of Feminism and had already placed Judy Chicago at my table. Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* was purchased more because I had enjoyed her other texts, *Women Art and Society* (1992) and *Confessions of the Guerrilla Girls. How a Bunch of Masked Avengers Fight Sexism and Racism in the Art World with Facts, Humor and Fake Fur by Guerrilla Girls Whoever They Are* (1995). Inside I found what I had been hoping for, strong women who birthed intuitive and ancestral ideas through their art.

Just the word, Surrealism, suggests male egos, famous male artists known for their ideas and actions as much as their artwork. Salvador Dali had intrigued me in high school, but the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and the Symbolists were my chosen art movements for men obsessed with female muses. Where Andre Breton had linked his starry nights to Freud mine remain tied to Jung. Initially, I read Chadwick with trepidation. The irony of the Surrealist Movement is that the women who inspired the work never committed to belonging to the group. "I was never a Surrealist...I was with Max Ernst." declared Leonora Carrington. (56) An even stronger statement from Carrington, "I didn't have time to be anyone's muse...I was too busy rebelling against my family and learning to be an artist." (66) Frida Kahlo said, "Breton thought I was a Surrealist, but I wasn't. I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality." (66) These women were seeking their own voices, not following the eloquent words and ideas of someone else.

Leonor Fini had been in *Vogue* magazine a handful of times in the seventies. In person she depicted her paintings or was it vice versa? Fini wore feathers like she was a bird, a shaman in mid shape-shifting transformation. At the age of fifteen without knowing who she was her image was slid into my mirror frame as someone to emulate. She was self possessed, artistic and a master (mistress) of transformation. Little did I know thirty years later I would be making crowns of beech leaves and turkey feathers and boldly donning costumes of my own making; all as a means of speaking loudly without sound.

My favorite work in Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* is that of Remedios Varo whose mythic images of women in otherworldly yet natural environments speak of reenchantment. "Unlike the male Surrealist, who absorbed the image of woman into his own image through metaphor of the androgyne or couple, women artists have often chosen to emphasize the fundamental biological and spiritual forces that



distinguish woman's experience from that of man, and that place her in direct contact with the magic power's of nature." (182) explains Chadwick. Varo's painting, *Creation of the Birds* (1957-8), shows a feathered feminine figure painting birds that come to life and fly out an adjacent window; the one departing is red. An alchemical still converts the paint to a life making substance revealing the power of both the artist, a belief in the magic of life and their united abilities.

*Solar Music* (1955) presents a cloaked Demeter figure in a wood where a single beam of light descends to the forest floor. By waving a wand through the beam sounds emanate and a red bird, similar to Rossetti's in *Beata Beatrice*, waits for life not death. A woman alone in the wilderness creates the music of the spheres. Remedios Varo paints the women living at the edge of the village, the woman I claim to be. Her paintings become everywoman and me alone. Varo's work reveals the same sensations I hold in my heart, a loyalty to my gender and a belief the enchantment of the world is readily available through nature, that it is true feminine nature. The edge of the village is the bridge between so many worlds, conscious and unconscious, private and public, perhaps even male and female.



Remedios Varo, *Creation of the Birds*, 1957-8



Remedios Varo, *Solar Music*, 1955

Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* influenced Leonora Carrington and Leonor Fini. Both found the text adaptable to their personal visions of the Threefold Goddess which was seen in the beauty and intensity of their own person and the women enlivening their canvases. The symbol of the white horse is central to Carrington's 1936-38 *Self-Portrait*. An oversized nursery rocking horse somehow elevates and escapes out the window, transforming into a fleeing and free, one can only assume the gender, mare. The list of mythological white horses is so large, a vast and staggering mind map instantly occurs upon viewing Carrington's work. First I envision the Uffington White Horse, a Bronze Age chalk drawing three hundred and seventy-

four feet long in Oxfordshire, England. Remaining in Great Britain Lady Godiva comes to mind. Her steed is most frequently pictured as white. This 11th-century Anglo-Saxon noblewoman rode naked through the streets of Coventry to protest her husband's taxation of his tenants. Her act upon his dare is suggestive of the May Queen who was connected to tree worship by Sir James George Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. Layer upon layer of personal, cultural and historical symbolism shows Carrington's depth and reach. She excavates and exposes with equal fervor and in this way is an art sister to Frida Kahlo. Their paintings give birth to modern mythology as if their canvases were vivid and poignant scrying pools.



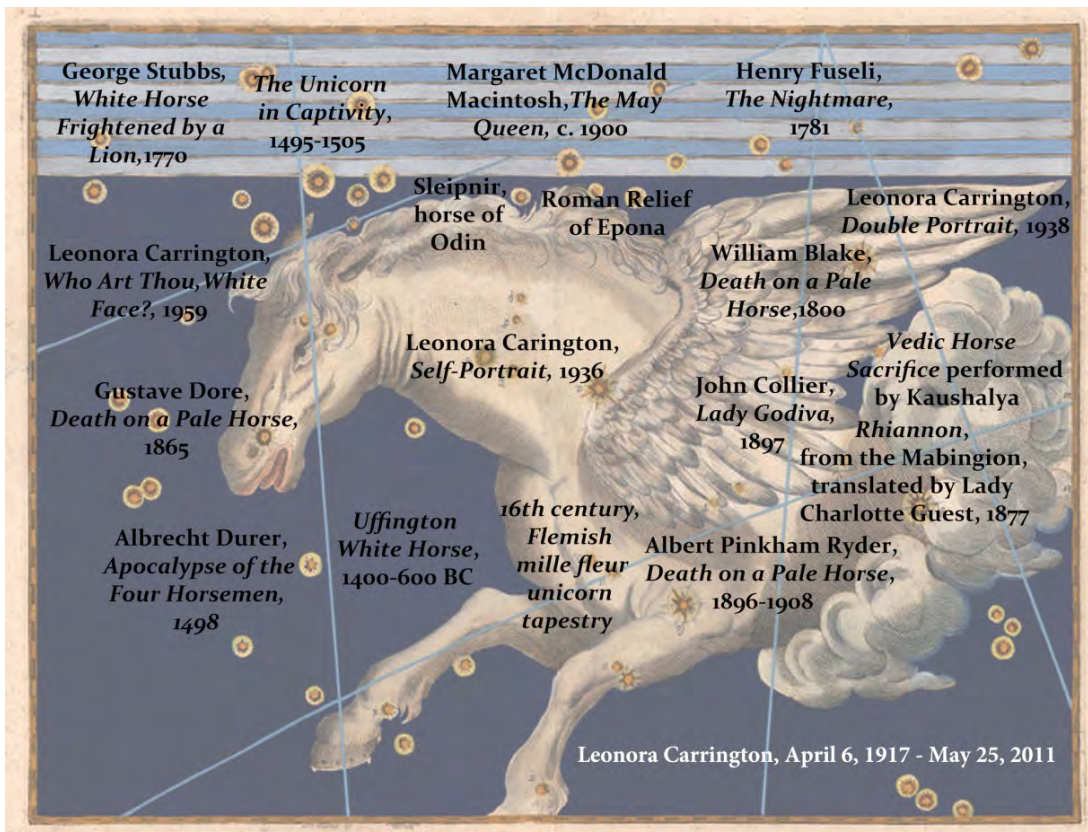
Leona Carrington, *Self-Portrait*, 1936 - 38





Leonora Carrington, April 6, 1917 - May 25, 2011

Carrington Mind Map, 2012



Leonora Carrington, April 6, 1917 - May 25, 2011

Carrington Mind Map Index, 2012



The Nazi occupation of Europe during WWII forced desperate life changes on the French Surrealists and their feminine muses. Remedios Varo moved to Mexico City in 1941 and several months later a desperate and broken Leonora Carrington arrived and lived just several blocks away. The Gestapo had arrested Max Ernst, a famous Surrealist painter and her partner. Carrington escaped to Spain, but had a breakdown at the British Embassy in Madrid. Her parents had her institutionalized, but after being released to the care of a nurse she fled to Mexico City with the help of a Mexican ambassador. Varo and Carrington became close friends and like the snakes of the caduceus grew together in an eloquent upward spiral of feminine energy and art.

As chthonic oracles, these two women would be perfect Pythia, uttering through painting their pre-Apollo voices, never caged by some Surrealist ideals. With the weight of war and powerful male Surrealist opinions behind them, the transatlantic crossing seems like a spiritual and cleansing shamanic flight. Their work exhibits a secret language as recognizable as any Venus figurine. In 1976 Leonora Carrington explained women's legendary powers for a retrospective exhibition at the Center for Inter-American Relations in New York:

The furies, who have a sanctuary buried many fathoms beneath education and brain washing, have told females that they will return, return from under the fear, shame and finally through the crack in the prison door, Fury. I do not know any religion that does not declare women to be feeble-minded, unclean, generally inferior creatures to males, although most Humans assume that we are the cream of the species. Women, alas, but thank God, Homo Sapiens.... Most of us, I hope, are now aware that a woman should not have to demand Rights. The Rights were there from the beginning; they must be Taken Back Again, including the mysteries which were ours and which were violated, stolen, or destroyed, leaving us with the thankless hope of pleasing a male animal, probably one of our own species. (218)

Carrington lost Ernst to Peggy Guggenheim who helped save his life. They would meet again in New York City, but there was so much pain and too extreme of a separation for a reunion. Life in Mexico and the companionship of Remedios Varo helped heal Carrington. Her art was a part of this process too. Why do some women have to extricate themselves from under patriarchal society so loudly, even in the silence of their art? I am one of them. Although I have not suffered such extreme circumstances I have always resented the fact that the history of women has been extracted and perverted through time. There is a sense of an original condition suffocated and denied, transformed by outright lying, the creation of false

myths. Somehow my life and art must address this sentiment. This is why I am attracted to Barfield's 'original participation' quote; it is a statement which verifies, unifies and animates my reclamation.

Mexico, a country rich with color and ancient culture, ultimately freed the visions of Carrington and Varo. This was the home of Frida Kahlo too. In a way she becomes the Triple Goddess of Mexico, her polio and physical pain from an accident, provided a life of continuous transformation revealed through her art. Kahlo shape shifts easily, but always remains aligned to the once broken spinal column and her home, the actual house she was born in as well as her country. Although not physically broken I hold the same sensations about my house and surrounding landscape. Her paintings are one of the greatest examples of creating beauty to heal pain. The canvases become another language, revealing what words seem impossible to express. A hurt so large no sound can emanate or encompass it, no words need to be formed from the mouth. The recognition of human anguish is so profound it uses silent though aching heart to heart dialogue. The layering of colors, Kahlo's direct gaze and frontal position in the self-portraits make viewing her paintings a religious experience.

Other Mexican artists appeared as recommendations by Ruth Wallen. Already familiar with Graciela Iturbide (b.1942) and Flor Garduno (b.1957) I did not know the work of most of the artists in *A Shadow Born of the Earth: New Photography in Mexico* by Elizabeth Ferrer. Here male artists enter the art world with pre-expulsion intuition, grace and power, speaking the same language of Carrington and Kahlo, the original human voice available to both genders.

Gerardo Suter's 1991 series *Codices* reinterprets and personalizes the scenes on pre-Columbian manuscripts, suggesting what is missing is the magic of the past. His *Tonalamatl* shows a nude man encircled by symbols reminiscent of the astrological wheel. Between his spread legs a snake ripples with smooth s-curves, a lightning strike phallus. This image represents the pantheon of Aztec deities not Leonardo da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*; there are earlier images holding a more ancient past and culture true to the land. The gorgeous, classically printed photographs by Suter are the perfect opening for the other world images of Jesus Sanchez Uribe and Pablo Ortiz Monasterio.



*Gerardo Suter, Tonalamatl, 1991*

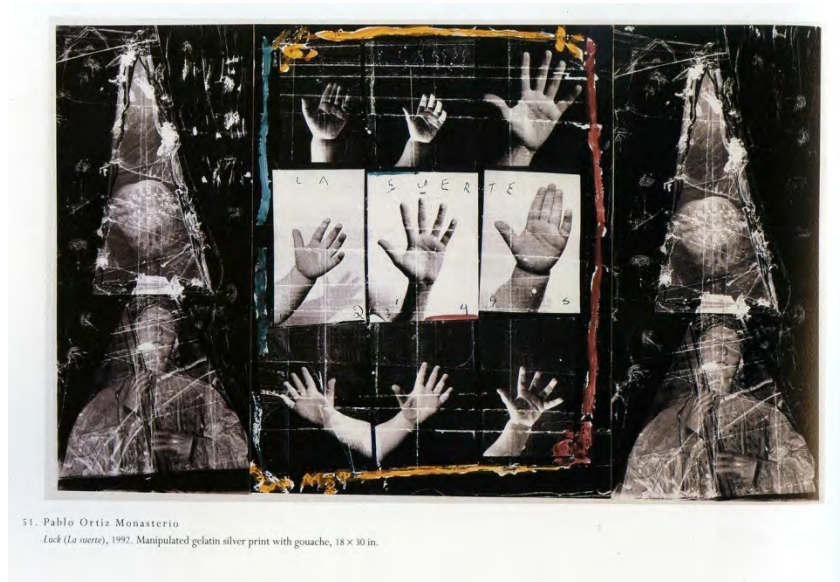
In the 1970's Uribe began constructing and photographing tableaux that represent more than what is before the eyes. His 1988 *That Things Do Not Appear as They Are* shows a little horse figure travelling to an Exacto pen rainbow through a celestial sea of sand and cotton balls. The viewer remains unsure of the items of creation, only that they have been transported to another world by someone else's imagination. These one of a kind images bridge the threshold between child's play and ceremonial sand painting; they are empowering images which produce purposeful magic.



*Jesus Sanchez Uribe,  
That Things Do Not Appear as They Are, 1998*



The world of symbolism looms large under the guidance of Pablo Ortiz Monasterio; his work is my favorite in Ferrer's book. In *La Suerte* (Luck) of 1992 a central triple panel of three hands is flanked by a Madonna on each side. Above the sacred feminine figure suspends an odd triangle containing a moving clock. This becomes an inverted pubic triangle maladjusted by time, not a dunce cap or if the latter perhaps representational of a society dumb for not preventing this alteration. The hands become our own and self empowering, a source of our own reclamation. All parts become milagros, religious folk charms for healing. Monasterio once said his work was 'a search for faith' (126). Viewing his photographic collages restores mine.



*Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, Luck, 1992*

I am left wondering why a woman from Vermont finds strength and parallel sentiments in imagery made in Mexico. The shared poverty of our chosen homes and the belief in human nature being tied to nature and the past are our common foundations. This suggests a future pilgrimage and reconnects the full landscape once joined by the Bering land bridge when 12,000 years ago our ancestors and animals, some now only of the imagination, birthed and united the Americas. My little corner of Vermont is somehow connected to the land Mexican artists embrace, making them sister landscapes. This makes me ponder the connection between physical location and personal identity. Or is it the realms of our imaginations that are united? Perhaps in my mind they have never been separate.

The art of these men has reintroduced their gender into my predominately woman centric view. I have accepted the philosophy of Steiner, Jung, Barfield and Campbell, which seems fitting to have men representing text. Perhaps these men actually un-write the words of men from earlier times that diminished women. The creation of words and images that are egalitarian and also includes others is vital for a new, ecology based world view. The imagery that influences me is either created by women or is of them. Ultimately, I want to be a humanist over a feminist. This will only happen as I heal myself, accept the help of other humans and be open to helping them.

Oddly enough, the nature worship characteristics I associate with my wildlife biologist father, the desire to be in nature, the sense of oneness with other species and the act of full sensing, are put into powerful action by traits from a depressive mother: silence, imitation and the art of sacred placement. The dark aspects of her nature have actually become the basis for my shamanic skill. Silence which I learned to remain unnoticed now gifts me with the skill for entering other worlds unseen or at least tolerated by the other. My perfect copying of folding towels now becomes my way of moving or making return calls to animals, a silence broken by a woman who has left so much unsaid by words. I understand this last statement means both my mother and me! Altars, which I prefer to be entirely out of natural objects and instantly returnable to the earth, are placed in perfection, a remnant of returning items to their exact place after dusting.

As a teenager the study of occult became my first means of naming and understanding my desire for earthly interactions. Because of my skin color I felt I could not learn American indigenous ways although that would have been my preference. Through my Scottish ancestry I embraced a theology which included polytheism, animism, and pantheism. Ultimately concentrating on Diana worship, later formally joining a coven and being released to be a solitary practitioner, I continue the safe practices post the witch hunts. Witchcraft verifies the dissolvable altar for 'Thou mayest not be a witch alone.' This phrase from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the witch hunting guide of the Inquisition, allowed for the deaths of an entire coven, a witch and all of her associates. Silence and a lack of physical proof was safety. How long have I held silence? Is it now safe for me to speak? This recognition especially helps to release the pain of childhood. Instead of a form of retaliatory protection my learned behaviors can become acts of power and healing, a means of restoring self-love and bravely entering the world or at least contemplating it from the edge of the woods. I realize nature has always been my source of comfort. Pain pushed me outdoors where I found my oneness with the earth. This recognition becomes the bridge back from pain to beauty, the choice of sacred silence over a silence born of fear.

# The Bowl or Natural Amphitheater

## Part I: Ash Angels

The land behind my house is a natural amphitheater. The hillside is concave, making a bowl. Its steepness makes it dangerous for haying, so the grasses grow tall. In the winter snow fills the dish, becoming quite deep. It is the last snow to melt in our vicinity. This is the place where deer cross down to the apple trees of the square garden and to the garden across the road, also to the fields to the east. Here is where the coyotes sing with their pups, songs to the stars, which I imagine as, "We are happy to be alive; we are one with the world." It is the place I chose for my descent, my sacrifice, my transformation, although my subconscious was more aware than my deliberate art mind. The groundwork was set by an unexpected art piece created two months earlier.

The fact that a natural stage was in my backyard never occurred to me. Instead I have traveled to the neighboring town of Glover to watch the Bread and Puppet Theater. Now I realize I can walk out the patio door and in a southerly direction for my own productions or invite others to use the space for their own creative work. This landscape calls for participation and collaboration, witnessing and performing. It serves as the crossroads of my sacred space.

After seeing Hide Oshiro's retrospective exhibit, "*Art and Breath*", at Goddard College's Pratt Library Art Gallery I dreamed the words 'ash angels' for several nights. From Jung's essay, *The Meaning of Psychology for Modern Man*, "Dreams are impartial, spontaneous products of the unconscious psyche, outside the control of the will. They are pure nature; they show us the unvarnished, natural truth, and are therefore fitted, as nothing else is, to give back to us an attitude that accords with our basic human nature when our consciousness has strayed too far from its foundations and run into an impasse." (188) Symbolism is prevalent in Oshiro's work. In particular, a mask shape which I interpreted as a representation of self was haunting. I did not know what 'ash angels' meant or what I was to do with the information. Jung explains the continuous growth and interpretation process of the symbol, "Mankind was freed from these early fears by a continual process of symbol-formation that leads to culture. Reversion to nature must therefore be followed by a synthetic reconstruction of the symbol." (202) The visualization of the Ash Angels became as empowered as Oshiro's mask. My unconscious was prompting my art making and not yet conscious steps to healing.

The idea of earth art intrigued and beguiled me, but I was having difficulty leaving my two-dimensional practice as a photographer. Documenting any earth art creation would be easy, but the creation process pushed mind sets and personal attributes into new realms. How could my belief system as an earth worshiper enliven my studio art practice? Acting upon this



dream information instinctually and with a child's imagination was freeing and immediate. Over thinking had to stop and reverent participation had to begin. Since my form would only be represented as a snow mold seeing myself was not a problem. I never thought about my envisioning as an angel. The method of creation brought joy without ego; I was not claiming to be a superior being, only an adult reclaiming childhood, my suspended self. This project was the fun embodiment of a dream.

Hide Oshiro's personal bravery, perseverance and beliefs became the over arching protective energy for this work. At the Goddard dedication Oshiro spoke of the wonders of the world, "The whole nature is breathing: the sun, the earth, the whole nature is breathing together ...When you realize this, you come to maturity." His language supported and expanded my artistic process, "It's not art, it's just an expression of yourself...The mind is fantastic; it doesn't want to be oppressed. Let it be free." Seeing and hearing Hide Oshiro in person along with directly viewing his art breathed life into me. I could hear him say, "Life is to be breathed by the breath of life." He insisted that we all knew what he was talking about.

The wood stove provided ashes, as it was February there were plenty. An angel could be created easily in the childlike manner of lying down in the snow and moving my arms and legs. I quickly envisioned a line of snow angels across the bowl, one angel for every day of the week. I began with Sunday and decided to make a blank angel for the rest of the week. Each was to be filled with ashes from the wood stove on the appropriate day. There was no set time of day for this activity; I only had to be true to the day, the medium and the form. *The Ash Angel Project* was documented by video and digital stills. Originally I was not going to remake any angels. The wind very quickly made me rethink this idea. Several times there was barely an original form to go upon. Only the Wednesday angel was not made on the correct day. A snow storm held this form off until the following morning.

My first visit to the Sunday angel on Monday morning provided a pleasant surprise, one I had not thought about. Coyotes had come to check out the form. Their tracks were evident in the snow. They actually examined the ash angel from all sides. I found this delightful and an audience more to my nature. This will be a beginning of future work under the title, *Art for Others (or Animals)*; nature will be my audience or will I be the audience of nature? The idea of the reciprocal and equal gaze with the earth has been an unspoken foundation of all my art making. Even in photography my model and environment are one; I join them as photographer. It as if we are all holding hands and breathing in unison. I foresee installing work that naturally degrades to rejoin the landscape being documented by game cameras as specific and unexpected species visit future sites. I also see myself entering these scenes somehow transformed or disguised as either a shaman or an animal or both. Without thinking about it I was already planning to create more earth active pieces. I was coming to

life. The perpetual witness is becoming a participant.

For several years I have shared property with a pair of skunks. The larger which I took to be male is called Bixby and his smaller partner, Flower. They moved into a series of woodchuck tunnels and can be seen late in the afternoon searching for compost, black sunflower seed and cat kibble. On the Friday of *the Ash Angel Project* when I left for work Flower's body was beside the neighbor's barn. She had been hit by a car, but sustained little physical damage. I moved her body over and would have to move her again to an appropriate location after work. Upon my return Flower looked like a sugar egg, fine crystalline snow had coated the dark fur. Her appearance was oddly beautiful, a morphing of matter, fur which resembled crystals which were really frozen water, the substance of all beings. My thoughts of 'ashes to ashes' turned to water to water. I thought of the *Ash Angels* just up the hill from her body. The beginning of this verse from the Anglican burial service is actually "earth to earth". Should Flower be placed inside one of the *Ash Angels*? I decided against it; the layers of death were getting too dense. I would place her by the hemlocks where Bixby would know she was close to home. Would this be offensive to a skunk? When the ground thawed she would be buried at the same location. Flower was photographed in situ on February 17, 2012. Valentine's Day flowers were placed around her body. She was buried two months later when an unexpected warm spell made it possible.



*The Death of Flower, 2012*



*Sunday Angel and the initial line of angels.*



*Tuesday Angel*

Hide Oshiro donated his life time collection of art work on February 8, 2012 and passed away just barely a month later on March 11, 2012. My godfather, Wing Woon passed away on January 24, 2012 and his wife, my godmother, a little over a month earlier on December 16, 2011. On December 4, 2011 a dear friend, Jean Day died at home. I had been with her for her passing, arriving several hours before she transitioned. Jean told me she was going to the Elysian Fields. Then close to home, the most recent death of Flower, she was a family member. Perhaps the Ash Angels were actual line of grief, a realigning of my soul to so much loss, an actual means of grieving and transitioning to life, a life without the physicality of these beings. Art in Memory becomes a potent idea, true to my heart; less selfish acts make me braver and more confident, more willing to be public with my art. If just meeting Hide Oshiro gave me a freedom to express a dream what do the people I have known and loved for a long time provide and how could it be revealed?

## **A Week of Angels, digital stills from the Ash Angels Project**



*Monday Angel*





*Wednesday and Thursday Angels, 2011*



*Friday Angels, 2011*



*Saturday Angel for Flower, 2011*

## Part II: The Descent of Inanna

The warm weather that made it possible to bury Flower the skunk spurred another unexpected art action. This one so powerful it overtook my body. Only active participation in a shamanic, ritual form would result in my personal transformation. For winter reading Cynthia Ross recommended Anne Baring and Jules Cashford's book: *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*. Although I have read a fair portion of goddess and mythological texts this book published in 1991 was unknown to me. The authors have gone back through time to resurrect the lost feminine principle and bring the subject matter up to date. My attraction to the Paleolithic and early Bronze Age stems from my belief of female union with the earth. Baring and Cashford explain, "For the Neolithic feeling, like the Paleolithic, was to experience both as unity through the image of the Great Mother as the totality of life-and-death." (57) Since childhood I have associated the land with the Great Mother. I was not taught this belief by human parents, but believe it has been a flourishing part of my collective unconscious from the early ages of 4-6. Jung proposed this concept in beautiful language, "If such a being existed, it would be exalted above all temporal change; the present would mean neither more or less to it than any year in the hundredth millennium before Christ; it would be a dreamer of age-old dreams and, owing to its limitless experience, an incomparable prognosticator. It would have lived countless times over again the life of the individual, the family, the tribe, and the nation and it would possess a living sense of the rhythm of growth, flowering and decay." The term I use for recollection is 'ancient memory'. I have sensed ancient history from a very young age and believe it can be remembered more as a collective conscious. For those who love the earth I believe there is an actual remembering of a different, earlier human behavior. To be one with and care for a piece of earth brings true happiness, calms the mind and balances the soul.

If I had a teacher in my childhood in this love and respect for nature it was my father. He was a wildlife biologist, an expert on white-tailed deer and a forester. When I was very young I thought he could breathe animals back to life. He often moved dead animals from the road, enough so I took it to be part of his job. Some animals were left for food for other creatures, others were buried. The presence of death prompted my silence; I never asked the reason for the difference. I could study the animal's form, their fur, face, and feet and even see the beauty in death. It made me incredibly sad, heart sick even. It began a mistrust of humans; they were often the source of the grief. I began collecting dead animals in the neighborhood and brought them to our porch. I told all of the other children who lived nearby to do the same thing. It didn't matter how flat or disfigured the animals were; my father could fix anything. He knew animal magic; it was even his job! One day he told me to stop bringing

dead animals home. He told me that he didn't need their bodies. My father never ruined his ability for me. In an instant I knew he was working with their spirits, that the body was just a shell.

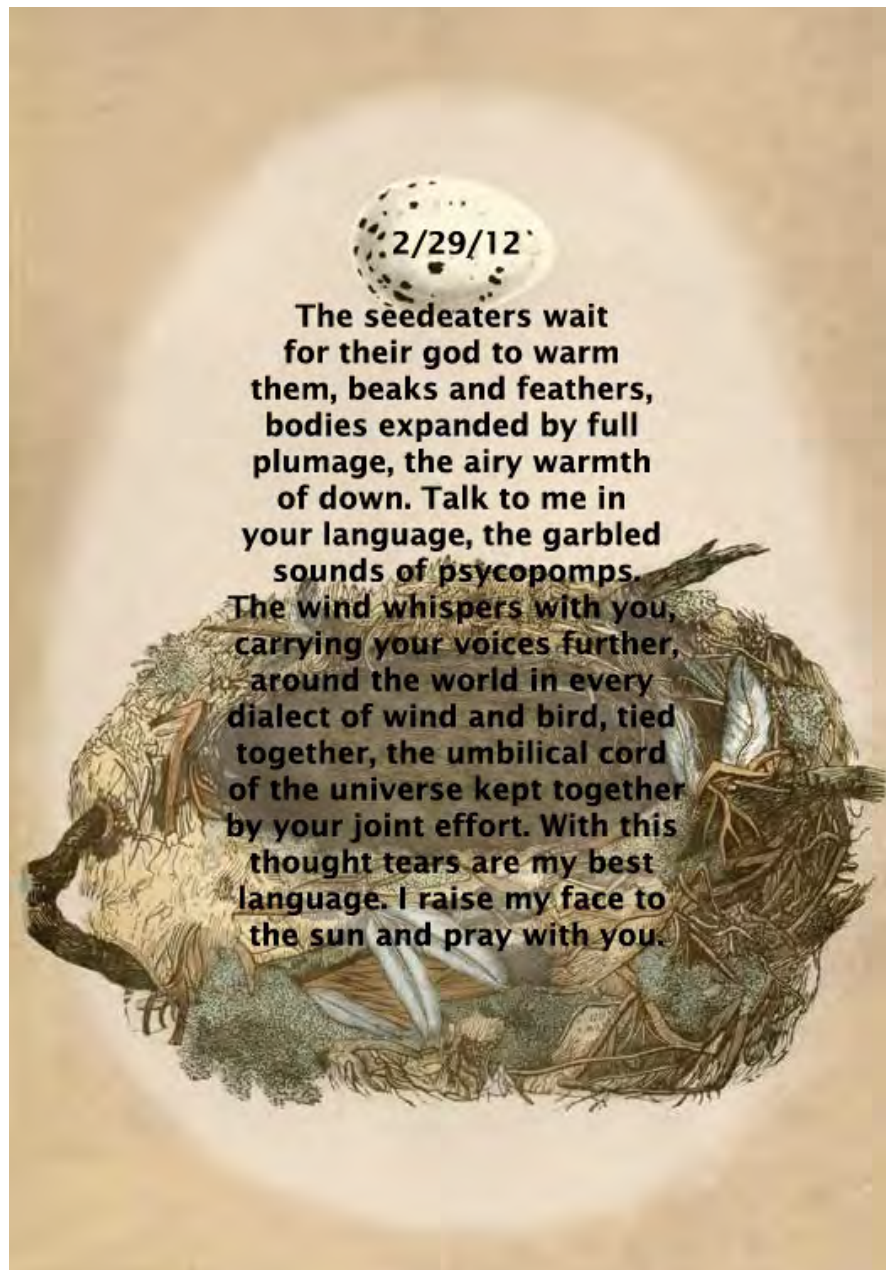
How does a young child immediately perceive the oneness of the world? Perhaps Baring and Cashford word the answer best, "This suggests that the sacred is not a stage in the history of consciousness but an element of the structure in the consciousness, belonging to all people at all times." (8) Why has it taken me so long to share my beliefs with others? Thoughts that stray from the norm or embrace other cultures often remain unspoken. At a certain age I was told to stop over sympathizing with the creatures of the earth, to toughen up. This demand by adults made me want little to do with humans. Would I lose compassion when I grew up? Time spent alone in the woods became my preference and the introduction to the languages of others. Why should I speak when nature has so much to say, so much more beautifully than I possibly could? Silence became a deliberate choice. Most humans did not want to hear my true sentiments, heart stirrings that put others before us. Trees and animals would listen to me endlessly without judgment. I could babble or the brook could or we could both be quiet. In nature, thinking and feeling happened without conditions or explanations. I could just be myself.

This naming air that had remained silent, wrote poetry, but never sang filled my heart and camera lens, but did not course back through my veins for renewal. Almost all of my photographic imagery since 1983 has been of women in the landscape. Shot with natural light outdoors, only a reflective disc when necessary and no tripod, my methodology keeps me free to move and reinterpret the given beauty of what is before me. The model and the environment are perfect. I am the inadequate element searching for the sacred breath. It can be an exhale or an inhale. I wait and stalk until the wind shifts, trees and model sigh, the brief moment comes and I hope to be in time, in synchronization with the greater picture. This has been my art shaman dance and I have never thought of it this way until now. This type of portraiture is a collaboration of all elements; we are equals. The model must be comfortable, trusting and free to reveal their soul, the landscape admired for its qualities like an individual and I must sense as much as possible so the shutter and breath are one. Self-portraiture and motion work have never been an interest, but now they appeared as missing elements, a means of connecting my past with my present, and a means of uniting me.

As if channeled or in a trance I kept rereading the Inanna portion of *The Myth of the Goddess*. In northern Vermont we live the seasons. The change to autumn is Persephone's descent or more appropriately Demeter's grief. When the maple trees drop their leaves and the geese head south we know winter is coming. We know we have to wait for six months for spring. The departure of Canadian geese makes me cry. They are the last to leave and



symbolize the loss of my father. The annual bird migration makes me vividly aware of my aloneness and impermanence. Their seasonal journey parallels Persephone's yearly reunion with Hades. Symbolically birds are often psychopomps, guides of the dead. Jung considered them mediators between the conscious and unconscious. Shamans and witches often serve the role of psychopomps; both are said to take magical flight. The bird form then becomes the bridge between the worlds. The psychopomp journey is not linear, but cyclical. They also assist souls in birth and transformation. It is the voice of the birds I prefer over mine. By listening I learn the true state of the earth and hope to gain some of their knowledge.



The classical abduction myth of Persephone is easy to envision, but I am not a goddess desired and stolen by a god. In fact I am no longer a maiden. I feel Persephone's loss of her mother and life above ground, but her story is not my own. While I hold Persephone as an emblem of season change she is not my goddess archetype. My relationship with my mother provides a different myth. As a representation of the moon Inanna is ageless. Her descent, the full lunar cycle, is of her own volition, a means of reclaiming her light. Sylvia Brinton Perera, a Jungian analyst, uses the myth of Inanna in her book, *Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women* as a basis for modern restoration of the Goddess. Perera claims Inanna's travel to the underworld to witness her sister Ereshkigal's husband's funeral is a tale of possible rebirth especially for women with no positive mother or female figure in their childhood. "She may be a woman who can find no relation to the Demeter-Kore myth because she cannot believe any mother would be there to mourn or to receive her again if she vanished into a crevasse."(11) The fact that my mother is a severe depressive, undiagnosed and un-treated, could be the basis for my attraction to Inanna. All of my growth has had to be independent of a mother. Perhaps my affection for the earth is a logical replacement, the original form of unconditional love physically present and excavated from ancient memory.

Similar to Joseph Campbell's four functions of myth Perera suggests four important values to the descent of Inanna. The story is seasonal and lived by us monthly. Mythologically it explains the rhythmic quality of nature. We participate in Inanna's story daily when we rise with sun and retire at night. Secondly the myth reveals the initiation process and is about active willingness in full sensory participation. As a third attribute, Inanna is a description of psychological health of the feminine and provides a model for a healthy soul. The descent is a means of reclaiming repressed emotions and thoughts which are transformed by being brought to the surface. Lastly the tale reintroduces the goddess to current society, helping us live in cyclical time. Although I owned this book I had only perused it years ago. Little did I know I was about to physically embody Perera's process with my own initiation.

Intuitively on Saturday I read and reread the tale. In the afternoon I made a crown of beech leaves. Baring and Cashford's description comes from Leonard Wooley's *Excavations at Ur*, "...exquisite head-dresses of priestesses or queens, some adorned with gold beech and willow leaves." (220) The branches were over two feet tall and full of the dried leaves which rattled with movement. Beech trees are often border trees representing the division between deciduous and boreal forests. I chose my branches from a strong cluster that is the actual western line of my sacred circle. Since I was young girl I have made crowns from organic matter. It is a natural activity when sitting in a field or gently passing through a wood. Only abundant crops are used, the scarce and minimal are left intact to ensure propagation. Wreath making is intuitive, one just needs to determine the size of the wearer's head then

begin wrapping and weaving. To secure the height of the beech branches I used artificial sinew and wrapped the entire frame of woodbine. The headdress was a custom fit and quite comfortable. The height gave it drama and the leaves sound. The latter made me want to move in the piece. Even the subtlest motion gave a prominent shake. Through the words of leaves and my own physical actions I was about to break my own silence.

The significance of Inanna is beautifully expressed by Andrea Deagon's description in *Inanna's Descent: An Archetype of Feminine Self-Discovery and Transformation*, "Inanna is a goddess, not a person, and her stories reflect metaphoric reality, not human values. Inanna's bride/widow status does not mean that she is immature, a femme fatale, or unable to maintain a serious relationship. What it means is that she is not a goddess of the central, stable nature of women's lives: marriage and motherhood, which would have taken up most of a typical Sumerian woman's adult life. Instead, Inanna is a goddess of the borderlines, the liminal times in everyone's life, the times when we leave behind the ordinary world, our ordinary habits, our ordinary perceptions. Not the goddess of day or night, but of dawn or twilight: the in-between times ruled by the morning and evening star." (people.uncw.edu) This liminal place and state of mind represent my home in Walden, Vermont and my inner being. The choice of Inanna as an archetype seems perfect to voice my unspoken self and enact a soul retrieval, encouraging me to embody my shamanic self.

On Sunday morning I awoke as Inanna, as if her spirit had entered me in the night. This is the closest sensation I have had to becoming a temple priestess. I stood naked in the bathroom and kohled my eyes. The headdress was next. I did not feel nude, only glorious and golden. I walked into the kitchen and asked my husband if he had any red clay. Riane Eisler, author of *The Chalice and The Blade*, explains the use of red ocher in Paleolithic rites, "But at the same time, death-or, more specifically resurrection-also appears to have been a central religious theme...the practice of coating these shells and/ or the dead with red ocher pigment (symbolizing the vitalizing power of blood) appear to have been part of funerary rites intended to bring the deceased back through rebirth." (2) As a former potter he said red clay was available and he would mix it for me. As the partner of an artist he did not respond to my unusual appearance. He brought me a gorgeous platter of freshly made clay. I said thank you and left for the hillside behind the house.

The *Ash Angels* were melting quickly with the unexpected high temperatures of March and April. Only the three central angels were totally visible. They would represent the three nights Inanna hangs dead on a hook, put there by her sister who represents Inanna's darker self. The moon cycle's parallel to the myth is explained in *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image*, "Ereshkigal is the dark moon, who 'kills' her younger sister, disrobing her as she descends into the underworld through the seven stages or days of the waning moon,



impaling her on a nail or stake during the three days of darkness when the moon is gone.” (218) Without prompting my neighbor, who is a professional butcher, had brought me his collection of animal skulls in the fall. The Highland cattle skull would represent the ancient form of the goddess when I reached the underworld and be brought back to the surface as a symbol of my re-empowerment. In describing prehistoric symbolism Eisler explains, “Images traditionally associated with the Goddess, such as the bull and the bucranium, or horns of the bull, as symbols of the power of nature, also survived well into classical, and later Christian times.... Images of bull horns have been excavated in both houses and shrines at Catal Huyuk, where horns of consecration sometimes form rows or altars under representations of the Goddess.” (22) The Descent of Inanna would be an open demonstration of my affection and dedication of my being for my beliefs.

My camera was on a tripod pointing towards the bowl in the hillside. The air was warm, in the eighties, so unnatural for the time of year, but perfect for being sky clad. Starhawk states in *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Great Goddess*, “The naked body represents truth, the truth that goes deeper than social custom” and “is a sign that a Witch's loyalty is to the truth before any ideology or any comforting illusions.” (109) On the western side of the line of angels I disrobed and knelt to paint myself with red clay. As I crawled across the *Ash Angel* forms the charcoal embedded in my flesh and the snow chilled my skin. For a woman used to gardening in all weather conditions it was especially difficult on my knees. Amanda Boetkzes in *The Ethics of Earth Art* writes, “Through the interplay between the immersion of the body in the depths of elemental substance and the friction of encountering that substance as surface, artists pose the question of how nature is sensed via the withdrawal from perceptual expectations and representation.” (148) I have never been fearful of Earth's face; I have never considered dirt dirty. How close do I have to go to her to hear her secret whispers, the ones our raised bodies do not hear because we never kneel to worship what we stand on?

I never thought I would ever perform naked in front of any camera or document a private ritual. Now I was left with what to do with the video. *The Descent of Inanna* is interwoven with footage from the *Ash Angels* for both were created in the bowl during the same year. The grief of loss pushed my actions into life. The Inanna piece is an attempt at being proactive about growth. Hide Oshiro said, “Liberty means you are supposed to grow and the pursuit of happiness is growth every day.” So my art making is my mythic journey to finding home which in my case is living in my own body, self-love and beauty thought discarded, un-nurtured, under nourished, diminished, to be re-found. I am learning to live in and love my own skin and what lies underneath while honoring the land I stand upon, and those I have loved and lost. There is the quiet honoring too for beautiful beech leaves, the hillside amphitheater, the man who loaned the antlers and especially the man who mixed the clay.



*Bull-Headed Inanna and Ritual Pose, 2012*

Follow this link to view the full version of *Decent Of Inanna*  
[vimeo.com](https://vimeo.com)

The Descent of Inanna

Oak and beech speak to me  
rattling leaves in the spring,  
holding winter's knowledge,  
parched, but poignant sistrums,  
the music of my descent.  
We are all but ash and water  
when we return to our mother.

Dark self, bulging behemoth,  
slabs of thighs and buttocks,  
bog and desert Venus, Awaken.  
Dark deer sip from hidden  
brooks; they are un-yarded.  
Ice floes submerge or lift  
with the shape of the river.  
A processing caravan of turkeys  
stops for a performance, at the  
center a full-fanned tom rotates  
while hens orbit. The disinterested  
young and old are meteors  
and comets. Worlds within worlds,  
we all share one universe.  
Fresh or frozen I stop to gather  
the roadside dead; they are  
parts of me, symbols  
of my impermanence.





## Ana and Anna

Even though an artist might have made work years ago, even centuries ago, for the viewer the initial seeing becomes the birth of the art work. This belief keeps art alive for all time, empowered as long as eyes, hearts and minds discover the pieces at a time appropriate for the viewer's stage in life. As long as the work clings to some portion of the memory it is possible to be reexamined or contemplated. Viewing art is one of the great joys of life. It is a sacred time for the self, a time to have the imagination stirred by another's. Ruth Wallen recommended Ana Mendieta's *Silueta Series* to connect me to Earth Art and continue exploration in the feminine form. It is said that the *Silueta Series* was about Mendieta's exile from Cuba at the age of twelve. Between 1960 and 1962 the CIA's Operation Peter Pan moved 14,000 Cuban children to the United States. First taken to Miami the children were sent to family, friends and foster homes. Ana Mendieta ended up in Iowa. The age of puberty can be traumatic enough without being separated from your parents and your place of birth. The *Silueta Series* was created from 1973-1980, beginning when Ana Mendieta was twenty-five. Mendieta wrote of other art forms, "I realized that my paintings were not real enough for what I wanted the image to convey—and by real I mean I wanted my images to have power, to be magic. I decided that for the images to have magic qualities I had to work directly with nature. I had to go to the source of life, to mother earth." (clamormagazine.org) This reminds me of the power behind Varo's, Carrington's and Kahlo's paintings, so an artist must find the medium that most expresses their magic, the methods which best tie the personal to the universal.

Ana Mendieta used natural elements to create positive or negative forms of her own figure as part of the landscape. Mendieta's work is so powerful and haunting; it lingers in my mind, leaving me speechless, but full of physical remembrance. Her work affects my body and my senses to a point of distraction and upheaval. Even in the photographs that document and preserve her work I feel the sand or mud, travel the sunken or raised portions of her impression. I want to fill her space as a human and a woman. I want to make the same impression, both as a connection to the physical earth and in my artistic dialogue. Without text or words my soul recognizes the language of Ana Mendieta. Her work reflects the power of sacred silence. With *Ash Angels* and *Inanna* behind me, both can be seen as trials by water in a frozen state with the element of carbon, I have a deeper understanding of Mendieta's *Silueta Series*. My knees have been bruised by icy ground and charcoal chunks, my body cold, but determined for a vital connection to the Earth Mother as if saving my soul. Over and over again Mendieta's form replaces what was taken from her. She is constantly creating her own birth right. She asks me to leave the two-dimensional world of the photograph and physically become my own image.

Since we are spatial beings seeing the empty space created by Mendieta's form makes it easy for the viewer to take her place, to sympathize and empathize. I almost relate more to the *Siluetas* than I do most humans. The goddess shapes mirror what is in my heart, a longing for a home and a love for the earth, my own self-love found through nature's many forms. Her work proclaims emotions and conditions freely and accepts the same in return. I can feel without explanation or justification. This is the same sensation from childhood when alone in nature. No questions are asked of me, yet I am given so much personal information by these embodiments. The *Siluetas* become monuments to the Great Goddess. She has transformed her mortal form into something divine. Again and again, like a temple priestess, Mendieta enacts a sacred ritual. The *Siluetas* are remnants of mystic states. The presence or absence of her form makes the work span thresholds, the full cycle of birth to death, the bridge between the conscious and unconscious realms. Mendieta is a shamanic shape-shifter. Her work triggers ancient memories. The sharp edge of her exile meets Mendieta's embodiments suggesting these are 'Borderland' pieces. Gloria Anzaldua uses this term powerfully, "Living in a state of psychic unrest, in a Borderland, is what makes poets write and artists create." As a New Englander this term is not used as it is in the border states of the American south and west. The *Siluetas* are emotional and other world bridges, personal declarations of self-proclaimed existence, power and belief that span all time.

Climate is frequently what connects us to space more directly. Like a primal Aphrodite Mendieta's form emerges out of sea foam. She is also seen descending like Persephone, leaving crimson flowers echoing her form. This ability to be born of and reenter the physical earth is magical, even godlike, yet ultimately human. We all share birth and death, all of us will join the earth one day. Mendieta dies regularly, almost plantlike she transforms with the seasons, with the type of land or country. Her home becomes her body, wherever it exists. Her pieces ask; where is your home? Do you embody yourself fully? How do you feel about the earth? As she questions her existence the viewer in turn questions their own. Although Mendieta's work speaks of personal exile from Cuba it expands to reveal humanity's mental exile from the physicality of the earth. To overcome her sense of personal loss of a homeland she embraces the ground under her feet as the home shared by all of humankind. While deeply personal the *Siluetas* reveals the condition of modern life, how easy it is to be transient and unconnected to our earthly home. This heightened awareness of presence and absence speaks to the need for earthly participation and its ability to repair the human heart. While honoring the earth Mendieta honors the Earth Mother Goddess and in the process becomes one herself.

Below is a small collection of the *Siluetas* images, most are labeled '*Untitled*'. In the first Ana Mendieta is physically visible. I enjoy this image because I see her flesh and know

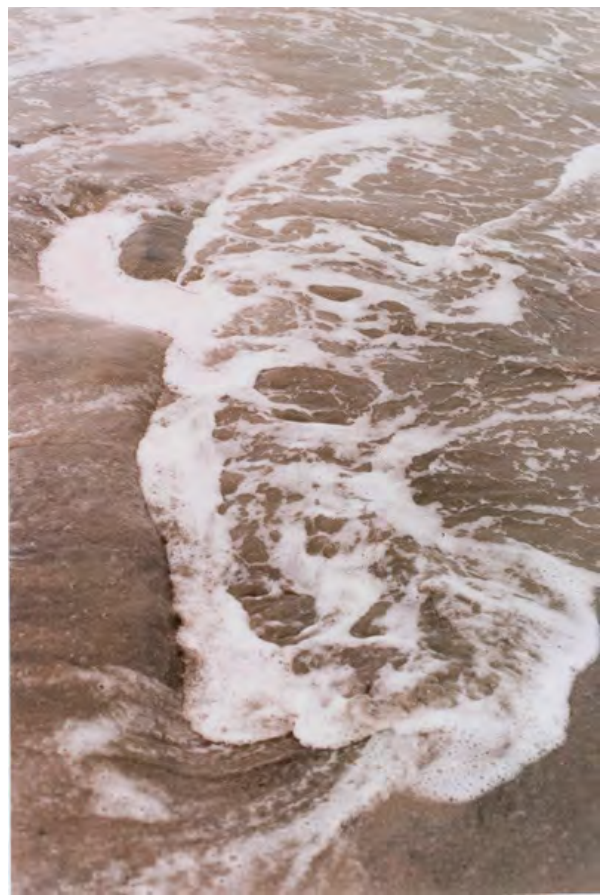
she is a real woman. The negative space in the second image is as if the flower festooned Mendieta dissolved into the ground. The flowers become the garland frame for her form. I do not even ask where the stone wall went; it disappeared with the mortal woman. The second representation is armless like the *Venus de Milo*, so begins the suggestion of the Goddess. The third photograph is famous and regularly reproduced. The goddess form has gone further back in time with arms raised in the epiphany gesture. The bird headed goddess from Egypt could be its prototype. Mendieta's impression is more deeply sunk into the sand and red pigment washes around like a gauze sari. The red shade can also be seen in the head region. For a location and time period I am torn between the volcanic annihilation of Pompeii or a Prehistoric ritual by the river near the Chavet Cave. The final image shows Mendieta's impression being washed away by water, the foam filling and eliminating her form. Mendieta's union with nature becomes a form of omnipresence. As an undergraduate I remember hearing about Carl Andre's partner falling or being pushed out a window to their death. I never knew it was Ana Mendieta. I am grateful to know about her now and wish I had seen exhibitions of her work during her lifetime.







Ana Mendieta, *Siluetas Series*, 1973-1980



"I have thrown myself into the very elements that produced me." Ana Mendieta

Another artist unknown to me was Anna Halprin. Cynthia Ross, my fourth semester advisor, emailed me images of Anna Halprin's *Returning Home* at the same time I was sending her my clay covered *The Descent of Inanna*. Cynthia's intuition and the serendipity of the crossed exchange brought to light many connections and the power of transcendental exchange. Intuitively Inanna came to me and without judgment or over thinking I lived the part. I am not a dancer or public performer, but *The Descent of Inanna* was a ritual, an invocation that could not be denied. Anna Halprin's *Returning Home: Anna Halprin Dances in Nature* is both a private and public ceremony honoring the human body and our earthly home, our two homes really. Anna Halprin is a pioneer of postmodern dance, concentrating her abilities on the healing power of dance, the beauty of aging and the human connection to the earth. Halprin is still dancing at the age of 92.



In *Returning Home* Anna Halprin engages with all of the elements, water, earth, fire and air. As waves wash upon the beach Halprin rolls in with the rippling sea foam in a tan stocking bag resembling an amniotic sac. This appearance suggests her birth, far more primal than that of a goddess, at least one of Greek or Roman origin. The incoming tide laps her body as a mammal would lick a newborn. As a priestess of the primordial soup her performance is entirely intuitive. Halprin remains safe in her fabric casing and caresses the



sand as if grateful to be born. Birth by the sea is raw, not the windblown, tidy affair seen in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. This makes me realize that my two-dimensional photographs are born of the wind and performance art gives birth by any element(s) chosen by the artist. The wind retains its power as the source of an idea, but the actions of Mendieta and Halprin leave the frame and enter the world





A, late-16th century, vision of a Pictish warrior (clearly based on Herodian's description of the "barbarians" of Caledonia) by John White.

inhabited by the viewer. Until *The Descent of Inanna* and the knowledge of these two artists I was content to remain inside the borders of my images.

In the next earthly interaction Anna Halprin appears nude, but painted a pale blue. Initially the blue skin made me think of the Picts described by Julius Caesar in *The Gallic Wars*, "All the Britons dye themselves with woad, which produces a blue colour, and makes their appearance in battle more terrible." (classics.mit.edu) Halprin does not look terrible, instead her blueness is magical. My own Scottish heritage drew me to this thought then I realized the Indian Lords Vishnu, Krishna, Shiva and Ram are blue and so are the major Indian Avatars. Halprin describes the color as one that reflects the sky and indeed the deities of India are painted the same shade to suggest their immeasurable power and connection to infinity. Is this Halprin's reason, to suggest the great continuum of life? Then my mind travels to

the more earthly Tuareg, a nomadic, pastoral Berber people of the Saharan interior. In Arabic, the word Tuareg means abandoned by god. Tuaregs call themselves Imohag which translates to free men. The first suggests a lack of blessing while their own term reveals independence and free will. The men wear veils to keep away evil and as a rite of manhood. The indigo dyed scarves called an alasho often stain their skin, so they are known as the 'blue men of the Sahara'. It is important for me to explain how my mind travels before I settle upon a thought.

Mentally I return to Scotland and settle on the Cailleach, sometimes called the Blue Hag. She is the Gaelic Crone who creates and protects the land. The types and reasons for blueness fade as Halprin paints her body with mud. As she sits on collapsed roots in a sink hole in the woods Halprin slowly covers almost all of the pigment. Upon her head is a skull cap wig of twigs and small roots giving her the appearance of a tree come to life, but for me

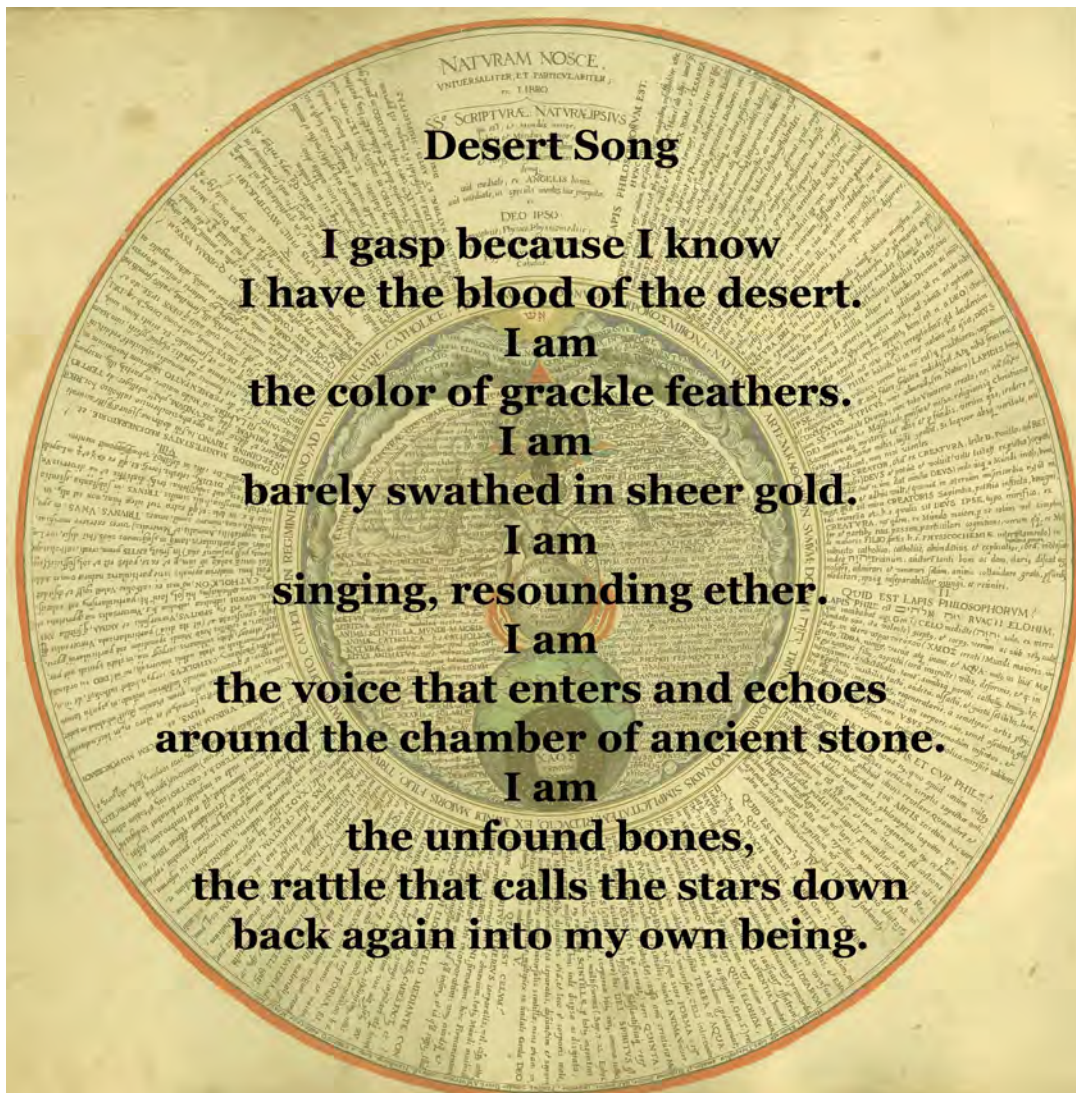


Photograph by Aman Iman



she is a Wise Woman. I am enchanted. This is a woman I know from personal memory.

Through more natural encounters Halprin continues her journey home. Moss covered she submerges under the woodland litter, moving slowly like a camouflaged insect. She is barely visible. This is the opposite of the invisibility womankind has known. In a white wimple and long veil Halprin becomes a Medieval Crone, perhaps Morgan le Fay, in a fiery wood. Her visible flesh is painted white and broad black lines encircle her eyes and mark her lips. Totally covered in white gauze and with gestures reminiscent of Mary Wigman she moves as if airborne with the gulls. Then Halprin ends humorously, after rolling and crawling elegantly in the tall golden grass Halprin becomes a grass garmented person. Fleeing questions and the camera the artist runs off like some anthropological escapee. This makes her journey seem continuous, unstoppable, and eternal. I hope to touch the earth and others with my art as powerfully and joyously as Anna Halprin has touched me.



## Desert Song

**I gasp because I know  
I have the blood of the desert.**

**I am  
the color of grackle feathers.**

**I am  
barely swathed in sheer gold.**

**I am  
singing, resounding ether.**

**I am  
the voice that enters and echoes  
around the chamber of ancient stone.**

**I am  
the unfound bones,  
the rattle that calls the stars down  
back again into my own being.**

## The Mirrored Path: On Being With the Camera and Oneself

If we are what we eat then perhaps we are what we see. Yet wisdom tells us blinders do not hide the actions of the world. Yet as an artist if I surround myself with powerful, inspiring work, (say Flor Garduno or Francesca Woodman, I am not ready to be Sebastiao Salgado) those qualities get transmitted into my psyche and out through my art. Their influence pervades, almost as if it had entered my bloodstream. I do not have to copy them, but the recognition of shared sensibilities requires a reaction. Immediately I recognize what these artists have found or are searching for because I am on the same quest. Elaine Scarry claims, "Beauty prompts a copy of itself." (?) Seeing beauty brings such joy that one cannot help but want to share the experience. Also the special nature of beauty makes it like a gift. Receiving prompts giving. The camera not only captures, but gives images. Current society claims the conquest: shoot, capture, expose, but not the return. It has made photography a linear system which in actuality it is cyclical. Images don't just remain in the light tight box. To be acknowledged they must see the light of day, therefore connecting artist to subject/object and audience. This I realize is a reason for showing my work. If it remains hidden in boxes, never seeing the light of day, no reflection can occur. My work and I will be absorbed into the darkness. I must face the image I have created seeing not only my original subject, but myself in it. Minor White stated, "...all photographs are self-portraits." If this statement is believed then the photographer resides in a connected world. Through the camera, both outer and inner worlds can be revealed. So begins the mirrored path.

Searching for beauty is my addiction with a camera. It has always been the purpose of my life. The shape and smell of ferns comes to mind immediately from childhood. All aspects of autumn, more than the color of the leaves, the sight and sounds of them dropping and whirling, blowing, rustling, crunching, the rich nutty smell of the earth, the more vigorous wind, pink cheeks and wild hair, horses charging around a field, chubby, blushing wild apples and the departing geese, are lived through all of the senses. Beauty does not restrict or limit the senses to just one. Beauty is inclusive and as if born on the wind, by the power of air becomes a vital life force. In *Uncontrollable Beauty*, Bill Beckley writes, "Beauty is generosity and reveals itself freely for it must be seen in order to exist." The air we breathe is imbued with magic, the sensation of beauty being one of them. Often it is reduced to a sighting, not a full sensing. We have made the senses a single option and not argued for the full set. The reduction of beauty to visual objectification comes from this narrow sighted vision, the constricted optics of the scientific revolution. We do not have to sense in a removed or limited way. Why is beauty challenged at every turn, even by fellow artists?

I must suggest that we have lost the powers of belief and imagination, perhaps belief

in our imaginations. One only has to close their eyes to have heightened hearing and sense of smell, to feel a little off balance and want to touch. Perhaps we should close our minds and discover what under active or totally inactive parts of our being are enlivened. One only has to read Rudolf Steiner's description of what happens during sleep to understand how humans limit their day time perception. A part of me from my childhood has never died, been bought or sold, or corrupted and that is my imagination. Even though his wording sounds sexist, perhaps Ralph Waldo Emerson says it best,

To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. His intercourse with heaven and earth, becomes part of his daily food.

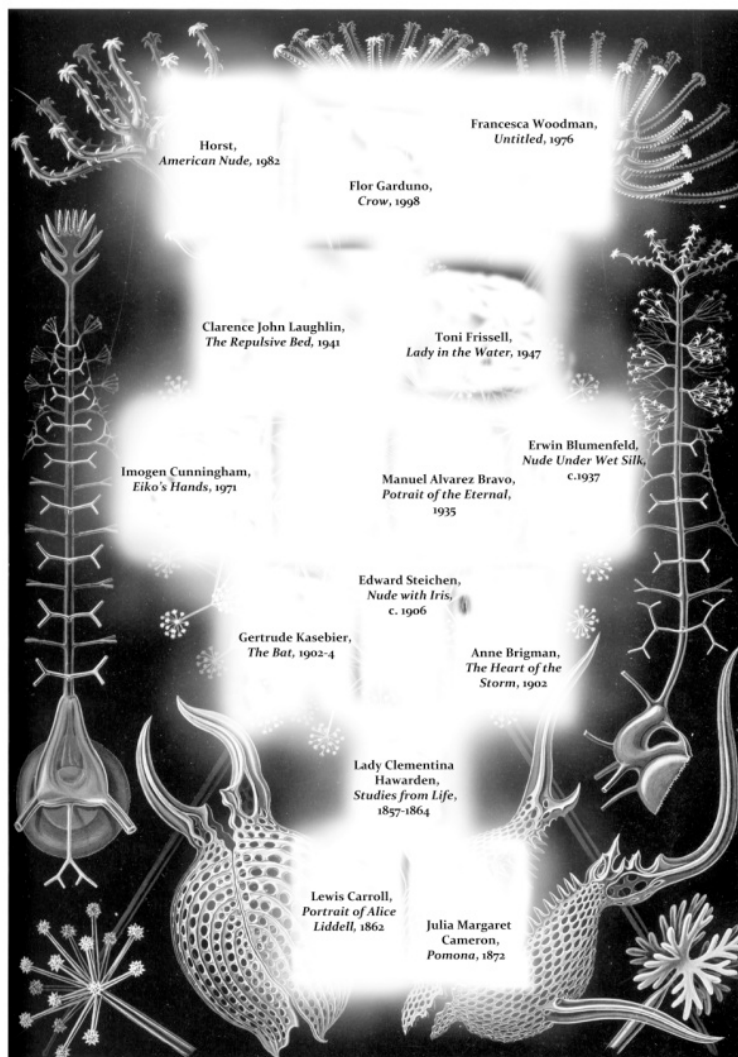
My imagination yearns to honor beauty of which nature is the greatest source. I actually believe I can learn from seeing. Therefore art history is of great importance to me. Similar work, whether by subject matter, appearance or methodology places me in a school; one I call the School of Beauty. Artists I admire become part of my art family tree. Imogen Cunningham and Edward Weston are my current photographic parents. The wild cousins, Anne Brigman and Edmund Teske, influence through their determined individuality. Now I have my newly discovered cousin from Mexico, Gerard Suter, Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, Kathy Vargas, and Luis Palma. Of course no writing on my work would be possible without mentioning Julia Margaret Cameron. The title of this writing seems a direct extension of her ten year diary, *Annals of My Glass House*.

Cameron has her detractors, people who don't understand the vision that seeks beauty. Deborah Solomon's scathing article, "*Sorority Sisters*", in the New York Times Magazine, November 1998, accuses Cameron of photographing her help and producing fluff. I would think modeling would be much more fun than dusting. Solomon, being blinded by the current age, misses several points. Firstly, Cameron never needed to pick up a camera; she could have remained a wife and just run the household. To start using a camera at the age of forty-eight is amazing, even more so in Victorian times. Even more complimentary to Cameron is the fact she did her own darkroom work at a time when it was very messy. I find it ironic that Julia Margaret Cameron was getting dirtier making her art while her maids posed in silks. Solomon just sounds disgruntled. Cameron acted upon a gift from her daughter and son-in-law, so the actual use of the camera returned her affection to the persons who gave



the present. I imagine the artist saying to heck with the dishes, let's capture beauty instead. This sense of play, hope, and spontaneity was hopefully infectious and a joy, not a burden at all. Again, we have the gift that gives a gift, the reflection that mirrors again and again.

The ability to learn from seeing is not just limited to my direct medium, photography, but occurs with the viewing of any art. One of my undergraduate professors claimed every student of art works their way through art history, extracting the information they need before they become an artist in their own right. Art history allows me to time travel for inspiration, new ideas and methodologies that further clarify my vision. By creating an art history family tree, art can be both school and home for those wishing to look for themselves through the eyes of others who create art. My personal silence is supported by another language, that of images. The artists I admire and emulate speak to me through form, the qualities of light and medium, and subject matter. A return image is my preferred response even if the artist has long since passed away; their idea is still alive and what spurs me to creation.



Photographic Family Tree 1 Index, 2012



*Photographic Family Tree 1, 2012*

Art becomes a shared language that organically grows over time. In *Image, Language, and Belief in Synthesis*, George Legrady explains, "Moreover, competence in reading visual imagery is an acquired skill similar to the process of learning language, a social activity defined by the norms of a particular culture. Norman Bryson maintains that the reality experienced by human beings is always historically produced." The current state of art and society can use art history as a tool for, to use the words of Berman and then Gablik, Reenchantment. James Thompson stresses this point in *Performance Effects*, "Beauty is not irrelevant to a troubled social context but can be part of its critique...Beauty is not, therefore, 'merely another nice thing' (qtd. in Armstrong 137) but in certain contexts can be experienced as a source of inspiration." (151) Without realizing it I have announced beauty as my source of enchantment. Nature and beauty are also conjoined, so by spending more time in nature and making art in, with and about nature I am re-enchanting myself perhaps in ways that have occurred before in history. How far can I travel back and at what point in time do I find parallel thoughts and actions?

Rudolf Steiner writes in detail about the relationship between imagination, inspiration and intuition. From his *Philosophy of Freedom*,

The individual human being is not truly separate from the world. He is part of the world, and there is a connection with the cosmos as a whole that is a reality and is broken only in our eyes, the way we perceive it. We see this part initially as something existing by itself because we do not see the 'ropes and belts' used by the basic forces of the cosmos to move the wheel of our life." . . . In his human nature, he is linked to the cosmos through 'ropes and belts', that is, through spiritual entities. Yet man is only able to perceive this connection if he now goes through the intermediate stages between object-based perception and Intuition, stages that are not required for ordinary reflections. He needs to ascend from object-based perception through Imagination and Inspiration to reach cosmic Intuition. (44)

The work of other artists from all time periods and cultures touch my imagination which then becomes inspired. The Lascaux Caves are as important to my work as Gustav Klimt's paintings. My interest is in the artist's imaginations, the source of their inspirations and how their art mirrors the world, our shared mythologies.

If seeing beauty makes me create art then the mirror is not just a looking glass but a reflector of light. Meaning it will either be turned inward or absorbed (revealing myself) or turned outward and bounced off of things (creating art in response), the latter possibly



infinitem. Someone seeing my work might be inspired to create their own artistic vision. So in the still pool or someone's eyes we see not only our own reflection, but the clouds too and a search ensues. If the water ripples or the person cries we know other things are happening and all of our senses become engaged. We react. When I first envisioned the mirrored path in my mind it was like a honeycomb, a fly's compound eye or the top of a steel drum, many parts to the whole. This image of the multifaceted whole is suggested by Owen Barfield in his essay, *Form and Art in Society*, "A work of art, then, is characterized, not by the absence of distinct parts but, on the contrary, the greatest possible distinctness and self-sufficiency of its parts--- provided only that we do not think of them a mutually impenetrable." (254) Here we have the microcosm and macrocosm of the world visible simultaneously or at least in close repetition.

While I am attracted to non-documentary photographs one could argue that all photographs document something. I understand how people trust this form more, but it is their own nature they doubt, their own fears dismissing work that embraces symbolism and mystery. Barfield puts it simply, "We doubt pretty well everything, because we doubt ourselves."(176) I know there are documentary artists that use tripods, lights and assistants. Yet the viewer believes these works are natural, unaltered. There is something to be said for the artists who tackle the ephemeral. Why can't we embrace the combination of material and immaterial? Only science has separated the two. Human hearts long to keep both alive together. We have lost our bravery in the quest of the soul. No matter how painfully beautiful Salgado's images are they prove something. People are abused, mistreated, not given fair wages or any income at all. They endure hardships and pains with a weight beyond the almighty dollar. Yet the images of Flor Garduno show me another world, the positive side of beauty. Have we grown content with only one way of seeing, with beauty as only a commodity? If we do not see ourselves in the rest of the world, if we do not want to re-find the lost paths in the wood then we have bent our heads to close to the microscope, (never stopping to look out of the window where early in the morning the sun catches the dew on some cobwebs.) Perhaps this sounds painfully romantic, but just the fact we have turned romanticism into tragedy shows the repression of our senses. I am not referring to the romantic tragedy of literature or the enneagram in any form. What I suggest is the mirror on the threshold that can turn both ways, showing the conscious a path to the unconscious where we can find ourselves whole, in fact from Owen Barfield's 'original participation' to 'final participation'.

## Double Vision

The camera while freezing a specific moment does not suppress or stifle it, but liberates the image to travel in time and space. The who, what, why and where questions vitalize the viewer. Curiosity becomes a means of reentering the world, creating a possible desire for participation. Is it the single image separated out as something special or is the mind liberated by what the image triggers internally? Or do the two have to work in unison? Obviously certain images are of events. One only has to think of the Farm Security Administration images of the American Dust Bowl, the brave photographers who documented the Vietnam War, or even a single image such as the assassination of President Kennedy or the Moon walk to be brought to a place and moment in time.

Duplicating in a modern fashion the pre-text period of history when Goddess worship was based on the visual arts, photography gives images power again. At the conclusion of *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*, Dr. Leonard Shlain suggests the development of photography re-empowers the image perhaps making the possibility of a more egalitarian society, a time when word and image are equal. Shlain states in the Epilogue, "I am convinced we are entering a new Golden Age---one in which the right-hemispheric values of tolerance, caring, and respect for nature will begin to ameliorate the conditions that have prevailed for the too-long period during which left hemispheric values were dominant. Images, of any kind, are the balm bringing about this worldwide healing. It will take more time for change to permeate and alter world cultures but there can be no doubt that the wondrous permutations of photography and electromagnetism are transforming the world both physically and psychically." (432) In *The Power of Myth* Moyers and Campbell share an exchange about this condition, "The person who has the experience has to project it in the best way he can with images. It seems to me that we have lost the art in our society of thinking in images." comments Moyers. Campbell responds, "...Our thinking is largely discursive, verbal, linear. There is more reality in an image than in a word." (61) Artists such as Jo Spence, Carrie Mae Weems, Lorna Simpson and Lalla Essaydi interweave words and pictures to make powerful statements about the gender and racial politics of society. My use of this combination is passive, but I have learned my images must be shown with my own words. I prefer to speak for myself. This is a huge statement considering my propensity for silence.

Photography seduced me, luring me with its opposites of light and dark, spontaneity and patience, allowing me to be an angel and a vampire simultaneously, a living Inanna or Kali...a primal creatrix. This art form embraces my entire being, emotional, spiritual and intellectual. My private or public natures can be revealed as well as either or both my feminine and masculine qualities. I can be made whole or dissected depending on my intent. In fact the

camera has been a great clarifier of purpose, not just for art, but for life. The camera does not go to the eye unless what is before the lens is meaningful. The inspirations can be humorous, ironic, romantic, profound or tragic; any sensation is possible just by being one with the shutter. There is also an area of accidental awareness, learning and growth. Sometimes it is as if the unconscious self is pressing the shutter with a synchronization that overrides human consciousness. This hints of the eye and hand coordination of the magician which travels even farther back to the ancient in the form of the shaman.

This sensation is addictive, especially when trying to match intent with content. Owen Barfield in *The Rediscovery of Meaning* writes, "Imagination, in fact, presupposes "double" vision and not simply the substitution of one kind of single vision for another. It requires the sober ability to have the thing both ways at once. May it not be that, if we have reached a stage at which both sides of the threshold are now found "within" us, instead of one side being within and the other without---if what was once inspiration is now imagination---nevertheless we must not lose sight of the fact that there is still that threshold between them?" (140) The photographer and the camera become the chicken and the egg conundrum. Is the camera leading me or am I safe behind it, boldly having it follow my will? Here is the essence of a world divided only into black and white. True to life, the gorgeousness of most photographs comes with the slight differences in shades of gray. For this reason I am still loyal to film, photographic paper and printing in a standard black and white darkroom.

When I make a test strip of a print and it is gray I don't instantly think to correct it with filters. My first recognition is of the actual day of the shoot. Oh, it was a gray day; I didn't meter incorrectly and then in my mind I relive what I can remember. It was cold, the wind was brisk. It was a brilliant sun; a hard frost had happened. The camera helps me to live in time up to a portion of a second, to intimately synchronize with the sun and any passing elements of nature.

If I put the camera down I continue to enter nature at first with the eyes of a photographer. I exhaust myself with mental photographs and surrender to the smells and touches of branches, the sound of falling leaves or the rustle of a chipmunk. Other sensing beyond seeing begins to happen. Nature lightens my mind and can even make me laugh, something I don't do easily. Chunks of my mental and emotional weight fall off, somehow transforming into rocks and logs that belong there without burden. I wander further and feel lighter, more like my childhood memory of playing outdoors, the immersion of my imagination and the great outdoors making everything united. I never doubted this oneness when I was young. If I still believe why am I silent, insecure? Why do adults have to prove everything? Who am I trying to convince and of what?

Immersion in nature alters time, sometimes dissolving it into one mythic time that is



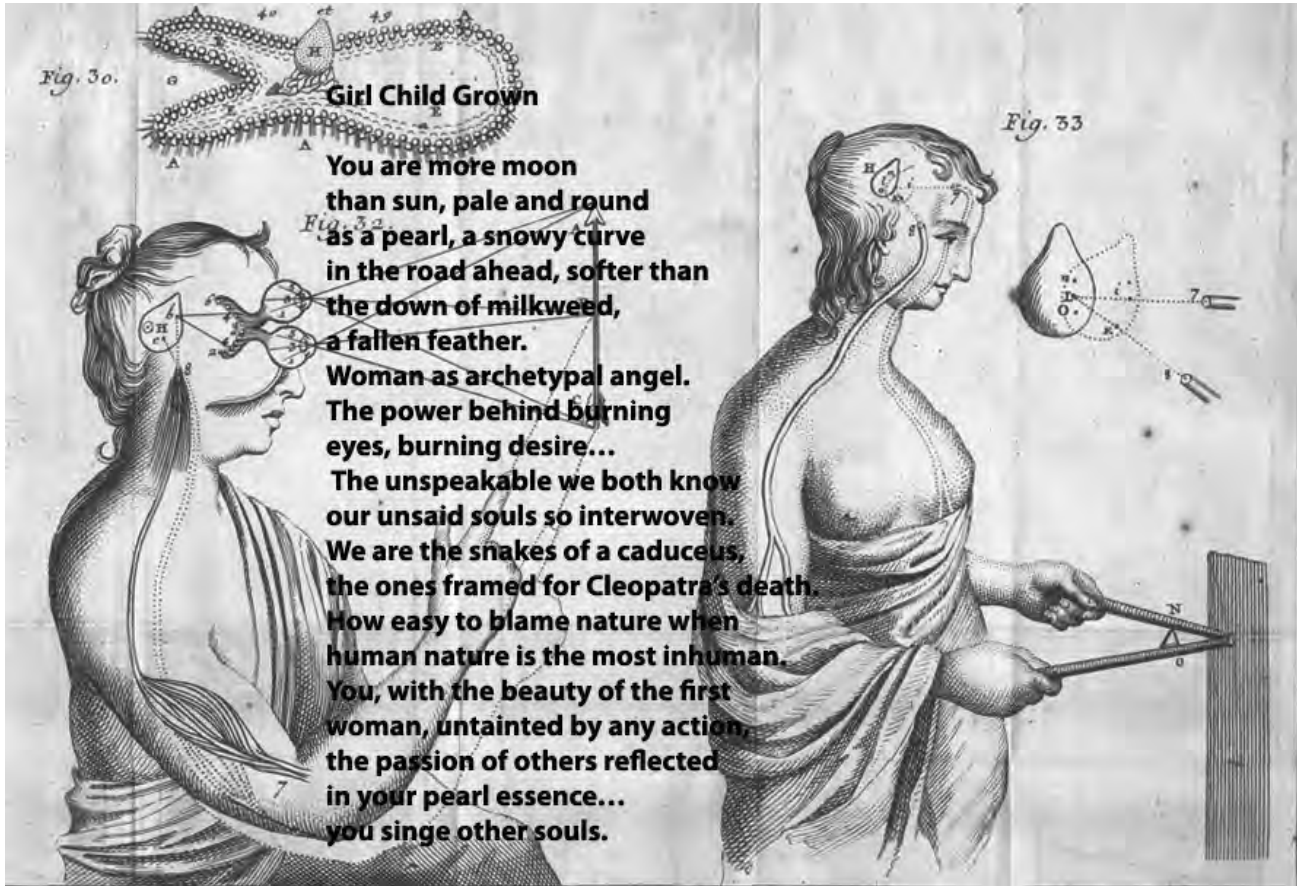
kept alive by art. Without the aid of my second set of eyes, the camera, with no objects at all, the outdoors brings me to earliest human history. In *The Chalice and the Blade*, Riane Eisler describes the main purpose of Neolithic art, "the primary purpose of art, and of life, was not to conquer, pillage, and loot but to cultivate the earth and provide the material and spiritual wherewithal for a satisfying life...the primary function of the mysterious powers governing the universe is not to exact obedience, punish, and destroy but rather to give." (20) True giving is not specific to a certain creature or gender, but for the consideration of all. Gimbutas in *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* brings double vision to the genders, "the world of myth was not polarized into female and male as it was among the Indo-Europeans and many other nomadic and pastoral peoples of the steppes. Both principles were manifest side by side. The male divinity in the shape of a young man or male animal appears to affirm and strengthen the forces of the creative and active female. Neither is subordinate to the other: by complementing one another, their power is doubled." (237) At this point in time the land, its inhabitants, and the magic suspended in the air was unified. When I leave the woods with my imagination intact how can I bring this image of oneness with me?

No photograph is necessary to inform me I live in a beautiful place, that I need to spend more time in nature, and that the women I know of all ages are gorgeous, generous and kind. While pointing outwards the camera reveals what is inward, taking both views simultaneously. Even when a negative fails perhaps the inward development is worthy of keeping, contemplating and even displaying. Perhaps this is the "double" vision spoken of by Owen Barfield, a single image made by a united conscious and unconscious whether there is a camera or not.

Victoria Patrick Zolnoski, 2012.

**Follow this link to view the full version of *I Am My Own Grandmother*  
<http://vimeo.com/23972424>**

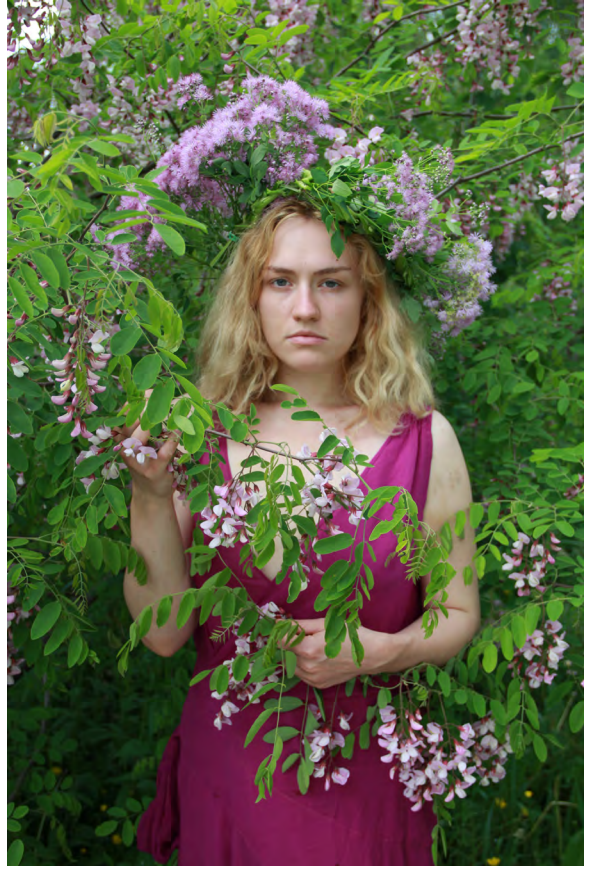
# Conclusion

















# Artist Statement

My chosen environment, a deliberate rural lifestyle and the natural beauty of northern Vermont, is the foundation, almost a co-creator of my artwork. By combining art history as homage with universal and personal mythology my intention is to punctuate, re-enliven and reconnect the human time line to the sacred circle, our shared origin, to a time when earth and all inhabitants were thought of as magical, interconnected and equal. (The only thing that has changed is human thinking.) Through the mediums of classic darkroom photography, digital imagery, video, and performance art, I echo the Paleolithic voice of the divine feminine's unity with the earth. Poetry becomes my means of breaking and sharing sacred silence. Through the union of words and images I ask the viewer to travel with me across the bridge of consciousness to the unconscious world where we can remember the secret language, the inner voice which proclaims nature is the ultimate source of beauty and a means of healing humanity.



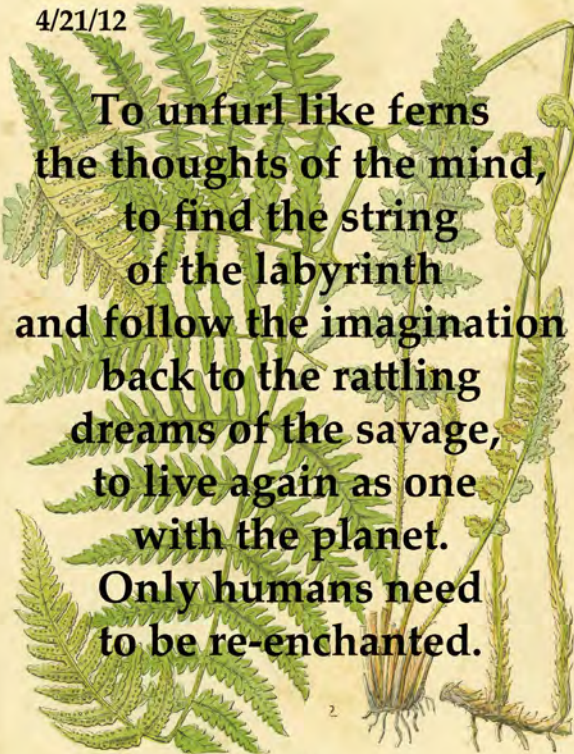




4/21/12

Breaking down,  
I am autumn in April.  
I cannot rise from  
the ground, I am rooted  
by my descent.  
The dark and light  
of my soul embrace and melt  
until I am unrecognizable.  
I cannot rise without  
transformation.

4/21/12



To unfurl like ferns  
the thoughts of the mind,  
to find the string  
of the labyrinth  
and follow the imagination  
back to the rattling  
dreams of the savage,  
to live again as one  
with the planet.  
Only humans need  
to be re-enchanted.

Plate III.