

CROSSING THRESHOLDS

*Stories and art from beyond the boundaries
of ordinary consciousness*

Contributing Artists

Aaron Baas
Dorit Brauer
Elizabeth Yoffe
Eva Marschan-Hayes
Irene Vincent
James Paddock
Linda O'Neill
Lulu
Mary Lou Springstead

Lorraine Tolmie

CROSSING THRESHOLDS

STORIES AND ART FROM BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES
OF ORDINARY CONSCIOUSNESS

Lorraine Tolmie



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It is the reader's responsibility to carefully consider and evaluate the information presented and to seek additional guidance as needed. The author cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on the information provided.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the participants whose enthusiasm for the project and willingness to share their artwork and stories made this project a joy.

This project would not have reached the finishing line without the loving support of my husband, Mark, whose calm presence and inner strength is an inspiration. Harris, my canine study-buddy, deserves a special mention for accompanying me to my desk every day and delivering gentle nudges to remind me of the importance of taking breaks.

Heartfelt gratitude is overdue to my family. My parents, Liz and Duncan, have always nurtured my interests and encouraged me to follow my own path. As the dedicated proofreading team for this book they carefully read each story, pointing out parts that might not be clear for a new reader as well as highlighting grammatical idiosyncrasies and errors. My brother, David, art director extraordinaire, transformed my original book cover design from dusty academic tome to contemporary eye candy.

I am grateful for the friends, teachers, and trainers who have shared their wisdom with me throughout the years. I also honour the souls of the wise and intrepid explorers who I have never met in person but who left a record of their knowledge for those that follow.

The research was completed as part of a Masters of Science in Consciousness, Spirituality and Transpersonal Psychology. I would like to thank the Alef Trust for creating a space to explore these topics and my research supervisor, Jessica Bockler, for her guidance and encouragement.

Finally, and with deep appreciation, I acknowledge the mysterious sources of otherworldly support who continue to guide me on my journey.

This book is dedicated to my ancestors, known and unknown.

I remember you.

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PREFACE

This e-book began as part of an MSc research project conducted in 2022. The stories in the following chapters have been woven together from interviews, survey responses, email discussions, and other details provided by the artists who generously shared their experiences.

Deciding how to structure the book has proved challenging. On the one hand, I felt a compulsion to outline all the exciting tendrils of theories that overlap and interact, and highlight possible links to my own research. On the other hand, my intention of creating this book was to place the focus on personal stories because the real magic tends to happen through connection and resonance rather than through analytical discussion. In the end, I have tried to strike a balance between these two aspects.

Introduction - In the introduction that follows, I share how my some of my own background and experiences led to my fascination with the links between creativity, states of consciousness, and nonordinary experiences. Different perspectives on these subjects are outlined and I introduce the concept of transliminality which was a significant influence on my research topic.

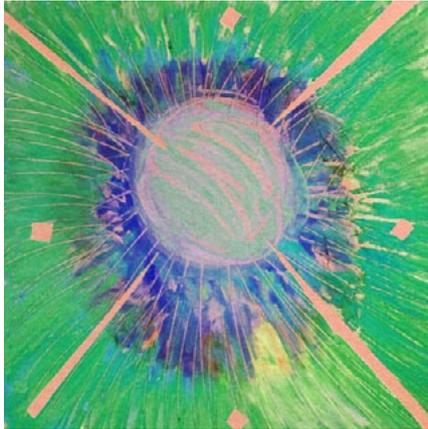
Section 1 - The first section contains nine stories and incredible artwork shared by the artists who were interviewed, along with weblinks and contact details. The interactive version of this pdf has links that will take you directly to the artists' websites and social media.

Section 2 - The second section describes the main findings of my research and discusses some of the theories that are important in relation to this topic. At the touch-points of these interrelated concepts I feel that something exciting is gestating. If you can fill in some of the gaps, or have an aha moment, please let me know.

After reading about the artists' experiences you might find that the theoretical ideas provide context that creates a new perspective. If you are interested in learning more about the research methodology, I would be happy to send further information or a copy of my dissertation.

If you have had similar experiences to those described in this book, I would be delighted to hear your stories. Please email me at lorrynetolmie@icloud.com.

INTRODUCTION



The arts and creativity have been connected with non-ordinary states of consciousness for thousands of years. In ancient cultures, imagination and creativity were deeply intertwined with spirituality, and the creative process was seen as a sacred form of communication. Inspiration was often viewed as a message from a divine source.

In the contemporary West, the concept of creativity as a participatory process has been largely lost. Typically defined as an ability to produce novel ideas, the focus is often on productivity and commercial application. Creative commerce has the potential to improve our lives, and new ideas are essential when solving problems. Yet, an increasingly narrow focus risks losing sight of the full spectrum of self-expression and the expansive nature of creativity.

Certain aspects of my own creative practice relate to particular states of consciousness. In my early work as an artist and designer I often relied on an intuitive sense of aesthetics. The creative process felt like a process of tapping into embedded knowledge and accessing an unconscious library of technical skills. My imagination could be stimulated by input and incubation. At the same time, an unrelenting focus on the outcome created tension, and the logical and creative parts of my mind were not always in harmony.



After following an urge to join a community printmaking studio, I began experimenting with the process of etching and aquatint. This became a catalyst for my first experience of what I would later discover was termed a *flow state*. Even with a lack of technical knowledge and limited experience in these methods, my body seemed to know what to do. By surrendering to the creative flow of energy I lost my sense of self, and the process became effortless. When this happened, my creative output often seemed to go beyond my own abilities.



Later, my spontaneous drawing, painting, and sculpting opened another gateway to a source beyond my everyday awareness and perception. By relinquishing control of the outcome my ego and conscious mind surrendered, and my mind shifted into a state of receptivity. This created a sense of serenity. Unexpected forms, shapes and symbols appeared and the process felt like an expansive dialogue with something familiar but unidentifiable. The images that emerged often nudged at another way of knowing that simmered beneath the surface of my conscious awareness.

The imagery and symbolism contained in spontaneously-created art seemed to either catalyse or predict psychological shifts. Occasionally, the contents of a painting or drawing connected with a later event in waking reality, and I wondered if this indicated some kind of pre-cognition. Sometimes, a long-forgotten dream would surface in a doodle, or emerge while I absentmindedly played with a piece of clay, as if the memory had simply trickled through my hands. My understanding of the underlying meaning of a piece of art would often shift and evolve over many years. These creations felt like extensions of me, yet they also possessed an autonomy or sentience that was difficult to explain.



A few years ago I began training in family constellation and this process unexpectedly became intertwined with my creative practice. Anyone who has participated in a constellation map will be familiar with the inevitable synchronistic occurrences. Creating visual representations of my constellation experiences using paint and clay opened a channel for further strange events. My spontaneously created art sometimes contained details linking to information that transpired later, and connected to events in the external world. Constellation and art-making were characterised by the same sense of surrender to an intuitive creative flow and a connection with a mysterious source. A collection of little clay objects that I created based on dream symbols, transitioned naturally into representational spaces in the constellation maps. I subsequently wrote an article about my experiences for *The Knowing Field Journal*, a shift in sharing an aspect of my life and creative output that I had previously kept private - www.lorrainetolmie.com/articles/creativity-constellation-therapy

My experiences fostered a deep fascination with the links between creativity, non-ordinary states of consciousness and non-ordinary experiences, and ultimately led to a related topic which had a significant influence on my research - [transliminality](#). The concept of transminality (developed by the late psychologist Michael Thalbourne and discussed in more depth in Section 2) felt like a linchpin. Individuals who are highly transliminal are said to be more sensitive to material that is typically out of reach of the conscious mind. [Ernest Hartmann](#) developed a similar idea through his dream research, differentiating between those with ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ boundaries. Those with thick boundaries were less affected by internal or external influences, and those with thin boundaries tended to be sensitive and open. Hartmann and Thalbourne both conducted research that demonstrated links between these concepts and creativity.

On a personal level, the concepts of transliminality and boundaries helped me to make sense of my experiences, and provided me with a greater understanding of seemingly interconnected traits. A tendency to shift easily between states of consciousness, heightened perception, and sensitivity are advantageous in my artistic practice, yet they also have the potential to be problematic in everyday life. While I feel deeply attuned to my inner world, I am also very aware of subtleties in the external world and highly sensitive to sensory input.

The concept of neurodiversity is becoming increasingly accepted, but there are still bridges to cross. Ways of being that do not conform to cultural norms have a tendency to be pathologised or considered to be strange or unacceptable. In the contemporary Western world the concept of reality is still influenced by the paradigm of scientific materialism. Information that is acquired through the use of unsanctioned methods of perception is not considered to be veridical and is usually dismissed. Many other cultures do not make such a clear distinction, honouring the full spectrum of states of consciousness and information acquired through varying methods of perception. Although in my writing I differentiate between non-ordinary states of consciousness and non-ordinary experiences, they are in many ways inseparable.

This book was influenced by a desire to demonstrate that non-ordinary experiences, despite often being termed ‘anomalous’ and ‘unusual’, happen much more frequently than is generally believed. It seems likely that they are an indication of underused capacities of the human mind. Encouraging an open dialogue around these topics could help people to understand experiences that are often misunderstood, undervalued, or derided within the paradigm of materialist science.

The artists who participated in my research are courageous souls. I have been deeply moved by the stories, and inspired by the participants' openness and willingness to share meaningful, and often challenging, events in their lives. During the project there were many humbling moments that led me to reflect on my own underlying feelings of vulnerability, and resistance to disclose my own experiences in many situations. Many of the participants told me about a moment where they chose to reveal their authentic self and open up about their experiences, despite feelings of vulnerability. Their sense of purpose and commitment to a creative vision helped me to maintain my motivation to complete this project, and has fortified my own reserves of courage.

My hope that the stories will find resonance with you, the reader, is shared by the artists who participated.

Lorraine Tolmie
February 2023

www.lorrainetolmie.com/crossing-thresholds

SECTION 1



THE ANIMAL REALM, 24" x 18", ETCHING WITH AIRBRUSHED COLOUR

Aaron Bass is an arts educator and printmaker living in New Mexico. His atmospheric, animistic prints are created through an intuitive dialogue with a library of animal bones and collected curiosities. These objects act as a symbolic language, conveying a deeper underlying meaning.

AARON BASS

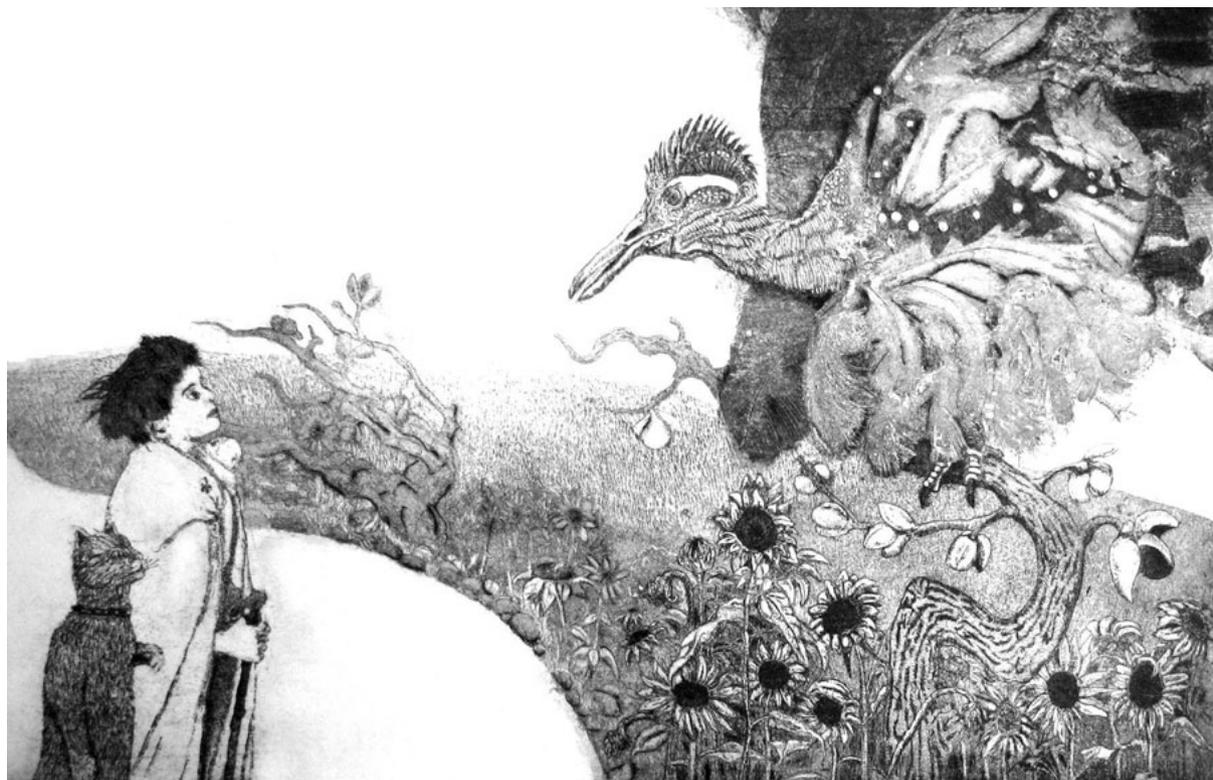
SOLITUDE AND THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

In his late teens and early twenties, Aaron was living in a chaotic warehouse complex, a situation that was not ideal for his quiet, introverted nature. His neighbours were an eclectic collection of motorcycle clubs, bands renting space to practice, meth dealers, and a Hell's Angel that worked in illegal gun manufacturing. To escape the intensity of his living circumstances, Aaron began going to a deserted industrial beach to seek solitude. The opportunity to be completely alone in a quiet, open space allowed him to clear his mind and recover from the chaos. One day, while walking along this strip of beach, he sensed the presence of something that seemed to be calling to him. Following his intuitive sense of where this call was located, Aaron was led to a cat skull, a discovery that gave him an 'inexplicable sense of joy.'

During each subsequent visit to the beach, Aaron sensed a call that guided him towards a specific area where another bone was revealed. After gathering fragments of different creatures including seagulls, sea-lions, and barracudas, Aaron received guidance from a dream. He was instructed to rearrange the collection of bones to reveal the spirit that inhabited the area. Although Aaron felt guided to position each object, he knew that the creation of the drawing rested within his own abilities. Using handcrafted bone dip-pens, he created a nine foot ink drawing that depicted the animal bones and found-objects in their new, hybrid form. As with Aaron's explorations on the beach, this was a ritualistic process that opened a dialogue to a spirit realm. Completely absorbed in the task of portraying the spirit creature, the problems of everyday life seemed inconsequential. This meaningful connection provided Aaron with respite from his challenging living situation and was the starting point of a journey that influenced many aspects of his life, including the future direction of his arts practice.

BACKGROUND

As a very young child, Aaron lived in an industrial town near a beach. Although it was located on the opposite side of the country, this childhood beach echoed the atmosphere of where he would later find sanctuary. He recalls how he moved amongst the scavenging crows, horseshoe crabs, and littered animal bones, describing these explorations as nurturing. Aaron's deep connection with the spirit of the natural world is also evident in a story his parents shared with him about an event in his childhood. There were often hurricanes in the town where they lived. During a particularly bad storm, the ocean flooded into their home. Aaron, who was around five years old at the time, stood in the hallway communicating directly with the ocean and imploring the waves to go back. Aaron assumed that this animistic perspective was typical for all children until he had a child of his own. He was surprised to discover that his son considered his toys to be inanimate objects and made a very clear distinction between imaginative play and reality.



THING WITH FEATHERS

12" x 18" (Illustration for a children's book that Aaron is co-designing)

After his initial scavenging ventures on the beach in his late teens, Aaron began to seek out increasingly deserted areas. He would often scramble down cliffs to reach less accessible, forgotten beaches that offered complete seclusion. Like his earlier explorations, he would often feel drawn to a particular location. At times he found objects without direction or guidance but these did not have the 'same currency' as those that called to him directly. After a while, Aaron took a dog to accompany him on the beach trips. Imitating his human companion, the dog began to search out bones, which Aaron jokes were a little 'fresher' than he would usually collect.

Aaron's path in life often offered synchronistic opportunities. In his twenties, he worked as an estate liquidator in San Francisco, a job that unexpectedly became intertwined with his creative practice. In his new role as crew manager, Aaron organised the set up and dismantling of homes of people who had passed away so that the contents could be sold on behalf of their family. These houses were often located in the Sunset District. Typically owned by people of Irish descent who had immigrated in the late 1800's and early 1900's, they typically contained objects from previous centuries that had travelled with their owners. Items that were left at the end of the sale sometimes called to Aaron in the same way as the animal bones. These objects also began to feature in his compositions. Later, while studying at Temple University he was taken under the wing of John Dowell, a printmaking professor who also happened to have an interest in animistic practices.

Aaron's process of connecting with the animal bones evolved over time and shifted with his geographical location. When he moved to the East Coast to complete his undergraduate degree at Temple University, he discovered that the beaches were very regulated. Looking for alternative access to isolated areas without any human presence, Aaron began scavenging along railway tracks but this activity was unexpectedly halted by the police. Later, moving to New Mexico, the lack of animal life in the open desert made scavenging a much slower process.

As his collections of bones and objects grew, Aaron felt that they wanted to be interpreted. He became



**AARON'S FIRST
DRAWING**
INK ON PAPER



CAT SKULL DRAWING

driven by the process of translating the items into a composition. This process was rooted in an inner-knowing; the same feeling that he had experienced on the beach and while creating his first drawing. For Aaron, each bone or object seemed to have an inherent symbology that he analogously compares to different musical notes or letters in an alphabet. Through further exploration, he developed a more expansive framework. For Aaron, the animal bones ‘retain a residual trace of the being that it formerly was’ and had an innate drive to ‘reorganise and make itself into some other being... or spiritual creature.’

The process of finding the items, interpreting them, and including them in a composition alleviated Aaron’s enduring anxiety. Having experienced a persistent inner dialogue throughout his life, Aaron found that communicating with this mysterious source created a great sense of inner calm and comfort. Although his search for bones and objects became less compelling over time, Aaron would sometimes feel compelled to return to this activity when his anxiety level was very high, or there were circumstances beyond his control. In this case, the practice helped him to feel a much-needed sense of grounding.

Aaron’s animistic prints, and the symbology they contain, rarely relate directly to his personal circumstances. The Mechanical Realm (shown on the next page), is an exception and was created during a difficult time in Aaron’s life. In his late forties, when his teaching contact was not renewed due to complex internal politics, Aaron had to find alternative work. Although the job he secured was at a printmaking supplies company and seemed in alignment with his interests, it involved repetitive and gruelling tasks. Many of his co-workers dealt with the monotony through substance abuse. Aaron realised that he would have to find a way of supporting his creative spirit, as he had done in his twenties. He began to contemplate the existence of other realms inhabited by spiritual creatures and intended to create a series of nine etchings, each representing a different world. The Mechanical Realm was the first in this series and portrayed a creature tied to cycles and repetition.



THE MECHANICAL REALM
20" x 16", ETCHING WITH AIRBRUSHED COLOUR

To represent the need to seek a way out of a situation, Aaron selected a coyote skull that he had found in Death Valley. In this image, Aaron cast himself as the coyote, wearing a vest as he typically does in everyday life. The numerical patch on the vest also has significance and his first, smaller study titled *The Machinist* (right) contained the number thirteen, indicating bad luck.

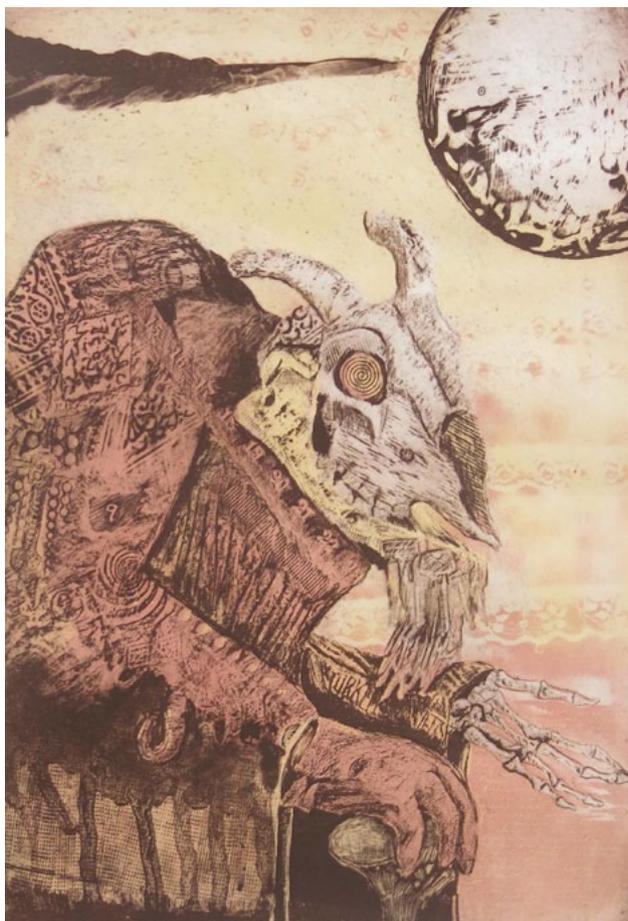
Creating *The Mechanical Realm* provided Aaron with a sense of serenity that helped him to get through this challenging period in his life. As his most popular piece of work to date, Aaron appreciates that this slight change in artistic direction was also a pivotal moment that opened his work to a wider audience.



THE MACHINIST
5" x 5", ETCHING

CREATIVE PROCESS

Aaron's creative process is very direct and his artwork often develops intuitively, in a non-linear way. At university and graduate school, the requirement to provide evidence of preliminary sketchbook work meant that he had to work backwards, producing these after the project was complete. In his current printmaking practice he does not create precursory sketches or spend time working out details in advance. Doing so can result in his drawings being 'watered down' and inauthentic. Instead, he prepares a copper plate for etching, or grained plastic for photopolymer-gravure, and then works directly onto the matrix. In some situations, he will create a study on a small plate in preparation for a larger piece of work.



THE STRANGER, 18" x 24"
POLYMER-GRAVURE

Instead of searching for objects outside, Aaron now tends to consult his existing bone library. Sometimes he will have a starting point in mind. At other times he will feel guided to select a particular object. Over time, Aaron has developed a symbolic code for the items in his library. The original cat skull is often a stand-in for himself, whereas dog skulls represent movement and investigation. Bird skulls tend to refer to themes such as transition, passing, and connection with spirit. A Victorian porcelain doll alludes to the emotion of love. Rather than having a specific aim for the final composition, Aaron works by seeking emotional resonance with what should be communicated. Often he will gravitate towards a particular object. If something additional is required that is not in his bone library, he usually has an intuitive sense of where it can be found.

By combining the different elements in a visual composition, a story with a deeper underlying meaning is created. Folklore has been a long-standing passion for Aaron, and the archetypal language contained within these types of stories also inspires his work. The Irish folktale, Balor, was used as the starting point for his etching, *The Animal Realm*.

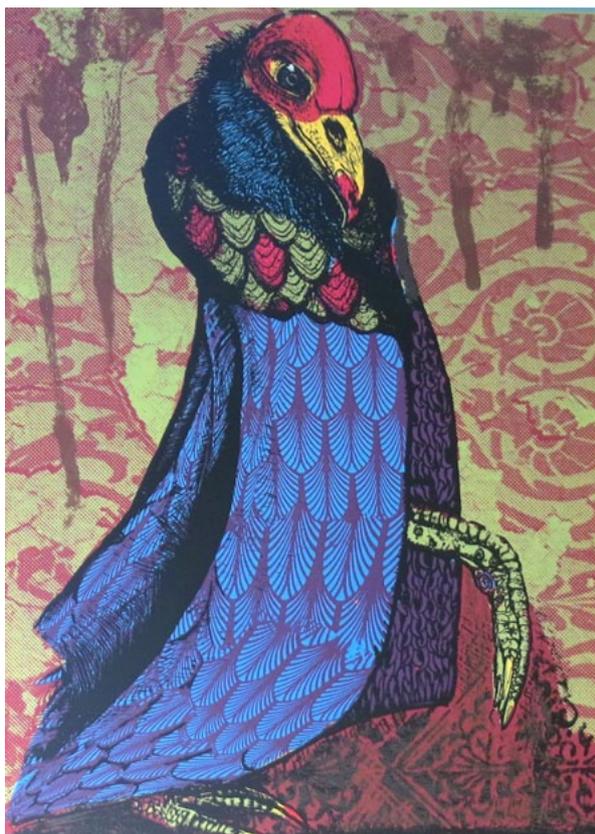
In order to immerse himself fully in drawing, Aaron listens to an informative or linear narrative such as a drama or documentary. In the past he would have listened to the radio, but he now uses podcasts or other streaming services. Music does not have the same effect because the sound needs to be enticing to his logical mind. Content with the task of gathering information, his critical mind quietens. An intriguing aspect of this technique is that the more absorbed Aaron is in the process of drawing, the better his recall of what he has been listening to. The absorbed state that Aaron enters is a calm space which he describes as ‘existing in two places, but only two places.’ With part of him engaged in creating the composition, and another part distracted by the audio, he is able to transcend the ongoing background noise of his inner thoughts. When Aaron has completed a piece of work, he finds it valuable to use his logical mind to reflect on the composition from a cognitive, critical perspective.

A core aspect of Aaron’s creative practice is receptivity and following his intuitive guidance wherever it leads. Focusing on a concrete end goal is counterproductive to his creativity and prevents him from tapping into inner guidance. By keeping this in mind, Aaron has avoided a creative block for over a decade, but there was a point in the past when he felt like he was forcing the imagery. This resulted in an internal struggle that he found difficult to overcome. An emphasis on the commercial aspect of art can also be detrimental. Concerns about what is likely to sell, rather than flowing with what wants to be created, can derail him. Letting go of practical concerns and relinquishing any investment in the outcome allows the work to expand into what it wants to be. When creating illustrations for children’s books or short stories, Aaron tends to work with people who know him well and who give him space and freedom to create in his own way.

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

Aaron describes the boundaries between his inner world and the external world as a ‘thin veil.’ In his twenties, this veil was particularly permeable, and he experienced an unusual side effect of connecting with the bones and objects. After an intense period of working with them he would have vivid, prophetic dreams where he would be shown an exact scene from a future event. The meaning of the dreams never became clear until they occurred in material reality, but they were always a bad omen. Although Aaron often knew when the predicted event

would occur, he had no way to prevent it and became increasingly uneasy.



EITHER THIS WALLPAPER GOES OR I DO
12" x 9", *SERIGRAPH*

life were significant. Aaron views this outcome as a trade-off that enables him to function in society. Having retained the ability to communicate with his collection of bones and objects, he continues to experience a great sense of comfort from this dialogic practice.

In his thirties, Aaron was advised by a neurologist that he was not getting enough REM sleep. Many years earlier, his school counsellor had misdiagnosed Aaron with dyslexia on the basis that he had difficulty with math, could not tell his right from his left, and had a poor sense of direction. The neurologist's explanation was that Aaron was lapsing into dissociative, dream-like states as a result of sleep deprivation. The sleep medication that Aaron was prescribed eliminated the foreboding aspects of his dream life, reduced his anxiety, and made it possible for him to focus more on the material world. In many ways, his diminished connection with the non-physical world felt like a loss, but the accompanying effects on his day to day

Living in the warehouse complexes in his youth made Aaron realise that he can become ‘a ball of neuroses’ if he is around too many other people, or exposed to excessive sensory stimulation. He has never reacted well to bright lights. In his home environment he prefers soft, ambient lighting and feels fortunate that his spouse is similarly inclined. He can also have a startle reaction to loud noises, and tends to seek out environments that are quiet and calm. He attributes his acute awareness of the feelings and intentions of other people to the vigilance that he developed when he was living in unstable environments. Albuquerque, where he now lives, is a quiet city with a lower population density than other urban places he has lived. During the lockdown restrictions, Aaron appreciated the increased tranquility and slower pace of life. His current living and working situations suit him well. When Aaron can devote an entire day to focusing solely on his creative practice, he considers this to be perfect.



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STORM TEMPLE, OIL ON CANVAS, 122CM x 91.5CM

Dorit Brauer is an abstract painter and author living in Pittsburgh. The style of Dorit's work has shifted and evolved, mirroring stages of her life. As the founder of The Brauer Institute of Holistic Medicine, her work in this domain is deeply interwoven with her creative practice.

DORIT BRAUER

AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY

During the pandemic, the aesthetic style of Dorit's painting shifted dramatically. Inspired to create work that was calm and soothing, she created a series of blue and silver paintings titled the Cosmic Resurgence Series. On the first layer of the artwork that came to be titled Storm Temple, she wrote the Hebrew word **אֱמֶת** Emet, Truth. Over this, she painted another layer with abstract symbolic forms where 'wild stormy waves and twigs of branches blowing across the surface cover the truth, yet underneath the calm true place prevails.'

While quietly contemplating the finished artwork, Dorit suddenly felt a strong impulse to make a few final brushstrokes with the white paint remaining on her palette. This was not a carefully considered aesthetic decision or a conscious movement; she followed an intuitive felt-sense that guided her to a very particular area on the canvas. Moving back to observe the painting in its altered state, she experienced a powerful sense that she was looking at a sacred temple. Then, a face of a young man began to emerge in the form of those final brush strokes, becoming more prominent and three-dimensional as the oil paint slowly dried. Dorit had a strong feeling of wonder at the appearance of this man, who had appeared 'gazing at the viewer across time and space.'

For Dorit, this was an extraordinary and meaningful experience. On one level it was a symbolic representation of her fascination with the unknown, and the mysterious aspects of life that resist comprehension. As well as being fascinated by what happened, she also describes it as baffling. Even though unexpected developments often unfold through her creative process, this particular occurrence felt like a direct connection to a mysterious source, beyond the material world. Dorit has chosen to keep Storm Temple in her home because she feels that she is evolving with it. Looking at the painting also reconnects her to the uplifting emotions that arose during its creation. When she sees the face of the young man she sometimes has chills and feels connected to a higher presence. Ultimately, Dorit feels that the resulting revelation has opened a pathway leading to another stage in her spiritual and creative journey.

BACKGROUND

Growing up on a secluded dairy farm in Rees, in the Rhine Valley, Dorit's vision was to be an artist and writer. Her parents had a more traditional outlook, and she was encouraged to pursue a conventional path. After trying various different things, and feeling unsatisfied, she embarked on a back-packing trip to Brazil. On this journey, Dorit met a group of Israeli travellers and discovered that her name, which was unusual in Germany at the time, was of Hebrew origin. Learning this fostered a curiosity that led her to move to Tel Aviv where she studied Hebrew, enrolled in art school, and took courses in holistic medicine.

Dorit admired abstract art, particularly the work of Joseph Beuys, Lea Nickel and Moshe Gershuni. Although she strove to paint in this style herself, it didn't flow naturally, and she was more at ease creating figurative and landscape art. After attending a class in bio-energetic medicine that involved working on energy fields, there was a dramatic shift. The painting she created after this class emerged intuitively, and she recalls feeling as if she had found her language. Something had occurred that enabled her to tune into and follow an inner flow that facilitated free expression. She believes that this same process can bring unexpected solutions in other situations, "just that openness, something will come to you that suddenly pops and you're not the same person anymore, and things work." In life, and art, she sees this quality of receptivity as key.

Although living in Tel Aviv was a transformative experience, it was also tumultuous. Dorit was there during the Gulf War, and recalls scud missiles dropping during the military operation, Desert Storm. Painting became a way of processing the intense events and terrorism she lived with at the time. Following a knife attack near her home, she covered a canvas in black paint, inscribed the Hebrew letters that convey the concept of original chaos, spattering the canvas with red blotches to represent blood (Tohuwabohu - shown on the next page).

During her time in Israel, Dorit also received tragic news that her friend, Holger, had died of an overdose. To process this personal loss she created a triptych, titled *Three Paintings For Holger* (shown on page 28). Seventeen years later, while working on a book, she attended non-fiction and poetry classes. Searching for a subject to write about she began to reflect on her time in Israel. This resulted in a poem that interweaves aspects of the narrative surrounding Holger's death with the content and creation of the three paintings, and the reactions of other people to the imagery.



TOHUWABOHU, OIL ON CANVAS, 150CM X 120CM



THREE PAINTINGS FOR HOLGER, OIL ON CANVAS, 210CM X 140CM

While in Israel, Dorit's artwork also explored her identity as a non-Jewish German person and her sense of belonging was deeply torn. In addition to feeling uprooted, she was struggling with feelings of guilt related to the historical trauma between these two countries. However, on returning home to Germany after eight and a half years, she discovered that she was no longer content there and intended to move back to Israel. Her plans changed when she met an American, the man who would become her husband, and she moved to Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania. Even though she and her husband later separated, Dorit has remained living there for twenty three years.

In stark contrast to the experience of living in Tel Aviv, Dorit describes Pittsburgh as very peaceful. Although many miles from her place of birth, she feels a sense of having returned to her roots because she spends a lot of time in nature. Now, instead of a tool to process the darker aspects of life, her artwork aims to communicate a sense of joy and peace, and convey the innate healing power that exists within us all. Over time, her meditation practice had cultivated a calm centre of inner peace that can be used as a resource, even when life is in turmoil.

Three Paintings for My Friend Holger

A light blue air mail letter
two pages long and at the end three words
Holger is dead.

Holger
always curious about the world beyond
recommended Carlos Castaneda, Don Juan and peyote.
Three abstract oil paintings follow:

Earth,
your body
disintegrates.
A friend sees a pregnancy
a womb and a fetus.
Is there rebirth after death?
Two faces
a man and a woman
making love.

My hand shakes as I phone my mom.
What happened? I ask.
He OD'd, was found with the needle still in his arm.
I knew you would hurt.

Light,
an unfathomable revelation.
Many years later a friend
recognizes the features of Hitler:
his eyes nose mustache.
I am shocked
unable to escape my German roots.
I see people afraid to fly.

I paint and remember a dream days
before the letter arrived.
You came to me to say good-bye, hugged me:
We will not see each other again in this life.

Heaven,
Too much red in retrospect
red love red pain
a woman prays on her knees.
Two men engage in casual conversation
misplaced in a bubble of blue amidst the red
unaware of their surroundings
smoking pipes.



FLYING KING (UNWINDING SERIES)
OIL ON CANVAS, 152.5 CM x 123 CM

The colourful paintings in the Unwinding Series were inspired by a vivid dream where Dorit's father guided her to a studio filled with a cornucopia of art materials. Bringing this meaningful dream to life, Dorit gathered supplies and began recreating the abstract art that she had been shown in her night-time vision. This series, which is awash swirling colours from across the spectrum, is intended to connect with the concept of unwinding in holistic medicine. Dorit views unwinding as a shift into a more expansive movement, and a release of past emotions such as stress, fear, and worry that have been stored in the body and become restrictive.

In 2020, the pandemic and resulting lockdown catalysed a significant life shift for Dorit. Her holistic medicine centre had to be closed due to

the restrictions, and she became increasingly aware of her immigrant status in the US. This became an introspective, solitary time when she deepened her meditation practice, and focused on painting. The ebullient style of her recent work no longer felt attuned to the atmosphere that was prevalent at this time, and so the Cosmic Resurgence Series emerged with shades of blue and silver. As well as a colour that was connected to many positive shifts in her life, Dorit felt that blue was a protective, soothing colour that would express peace, confidence and trust. Silver, which Dorit associates with the crown chakra, was also prominent to emphasise a higher spiritual dimension.

The deeper meaning of colour is an important aspect of Dorit's artistic practice and her mindful painting classes. This concept originally came to her attention while in holistic medicine school in Tel Aviv. When the teacher asked the students to report on their least favourite colour, he was amused when Dorit shared her strong aversion to red. He explained that red was connected to the root chakra and advised her to get more exposure to this colour, such as wearing red clothing. Although initially very resistant to the advice, Dorit eventually bought a cheap red t-shirt at a

market and only wore it at night. It was only after several months, and enduring pressure from her teacher, before she could wear it to class. On reflection, she came to understand that this was likely related to her sense of upheaval after leaving her German roots. Since embracing red helped to heal this inner trauma, she now believes that including all colours is extremely powerful tool, and also an analogy for an accepting and inclusive attitude to all aspects of life.

At the age of forty, Dorit embarked on a solo cross-country motorbike trip across the US, to walk labyrinths. While in California, she crashed her bike, and as a result of the trauma and pain on impact, had an out of body experience. Although she had previously experienced a sense of detachment from her physicality during deep meditation, this was different. It was the first time she had experienced her consciousness as being completely disconnected from her body, as if it was located somewhere entirely different. This event left her with a strong conviction that consciousness continues after death. After this journey, she shifted to writing as a new form of creative expression and spent six years writing her award-winning autobiography, *Girls Don't Ride Motorbikes: A Spiritual Adventure Into Life's Labyrinth*.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Dorit feels that her meditation and painting practices work in synergy, and that her work in holistic medicine nourishes her art. Considering the creation of art to be a sacred process, she only begins painting when she is “in an inner state of unity, which transcends polarity and feels like an elevated state of mind.” To cultivate this state, Dorit typically spends time in meditative preparation, including contemplation, sketching, and reflective journaling.



SOUL GARDEN

OIL ON CANVAS, 102 CM x 102 CM

For Dorit, the process of being receptive and present in the moment creates the opportunity for the unexpected to arise in her paintings. She sees this open awareness as a way to allow creative inspiration to flow through her. Words she uses to describe this process are: happy, in the flow, in the moment, connected, peaceful, ecstatic, and surprised. The process is similar with her other creative endeavours, and she finds that writing by hand, rather than using a computer, is the key to connecting to her natural flow. If she has writer’s block she will keep her pen to the page, and begin to scribble or make sketches, until the flow returns.

When she is not in her studio, Dorit is always gathering information, and believes that all her experiences contribute to her art. In respect to this, she shares the German word *Lebenskünstler*, meaning to be an artist of life. This is a concept that she feels is essential because it relates to conscious living, “imagining your life as a blank canvas and then how do you paint it?” In this way, she says, your whole life becomes a work of art.

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

Dorit started meditating at the age of fifteen, after losing a childhood friend to lung cancer. Struggling to find answers from her family, or at church, she began to find wisdom in books. The local librarian introduced her to various authors writing on subjects such as reincarnation and life after death. As a result, she was exposed to different theories and perspectives at an early age, reading Elizabeth Kubler Ross, Raymond Moody, Edgar Cayce and Ian Stevenson. When she came across meditation exercises in the books, and began to try them out of curiosity, she was surprised at the ease with which visions would appear in her mind's eye. Having now meditated for over forty years, Dorit has become very attuned to her inner world. She does guided imagery meditations daily, and believes that this long-standing practice has changed her perception of reality. Experiencing a sense of unity through meditation has led to an embodied sense of a space beyond polarity. She takes time to regularly check-in with herself, and views this as essential to escaping the negative trance of mass consciousness. When she experiences difficult emotions like fear, anger, or worry she feels equipped to return to a peaceful state with more ease.



FOREVER PILGRIM
OIL ON CANVAS, 102 CM x 102 CM

Although her father was initially apprehensive about Dorit's interest in energy medicine, and questioned what good could come of it, he later confided that he had an unusual ability. From a young child he had been able to identify when women were pregnant, despite there being no visible sign. The first time this occurred was when he was five years old, but it was summarily dismissed as childish imaginings. Later, his knowledge got him into a few troublesome situations and so he learned to keep it to himself. When asked to explain how he could identify pregnancy, he simply said that the light changes around the woman. Reflecting on her dad's abilities, and her own path into energy work which included developing the ability to see auras, Dorit wonders if there could be other links to this throughout her family's lineage.

Dorit is very conscious of her inner space. She finds being in crowds challenging, and avoids being around too many people, which can be exhausting. Superficial connections can also be draining, and she prefers one to one interactions and deep conversations. As she gets older, she is discovering how essential it for her to take solitary time to recharge. Spending time in nature is essential for her wellbeing and she finds it rejuvenating.

For the last thirty years, Dorit has studied the Kabbalah. In line with these wisdom teachings, she views the external world as a reflection of the inner self. She considers her inner world and external world to be interwoven, and of equal significance in facilitating her personal growth. Although she does not see a separation between the inner and outer, she feels grounded and has a strong discernment of where she is in the present moment.



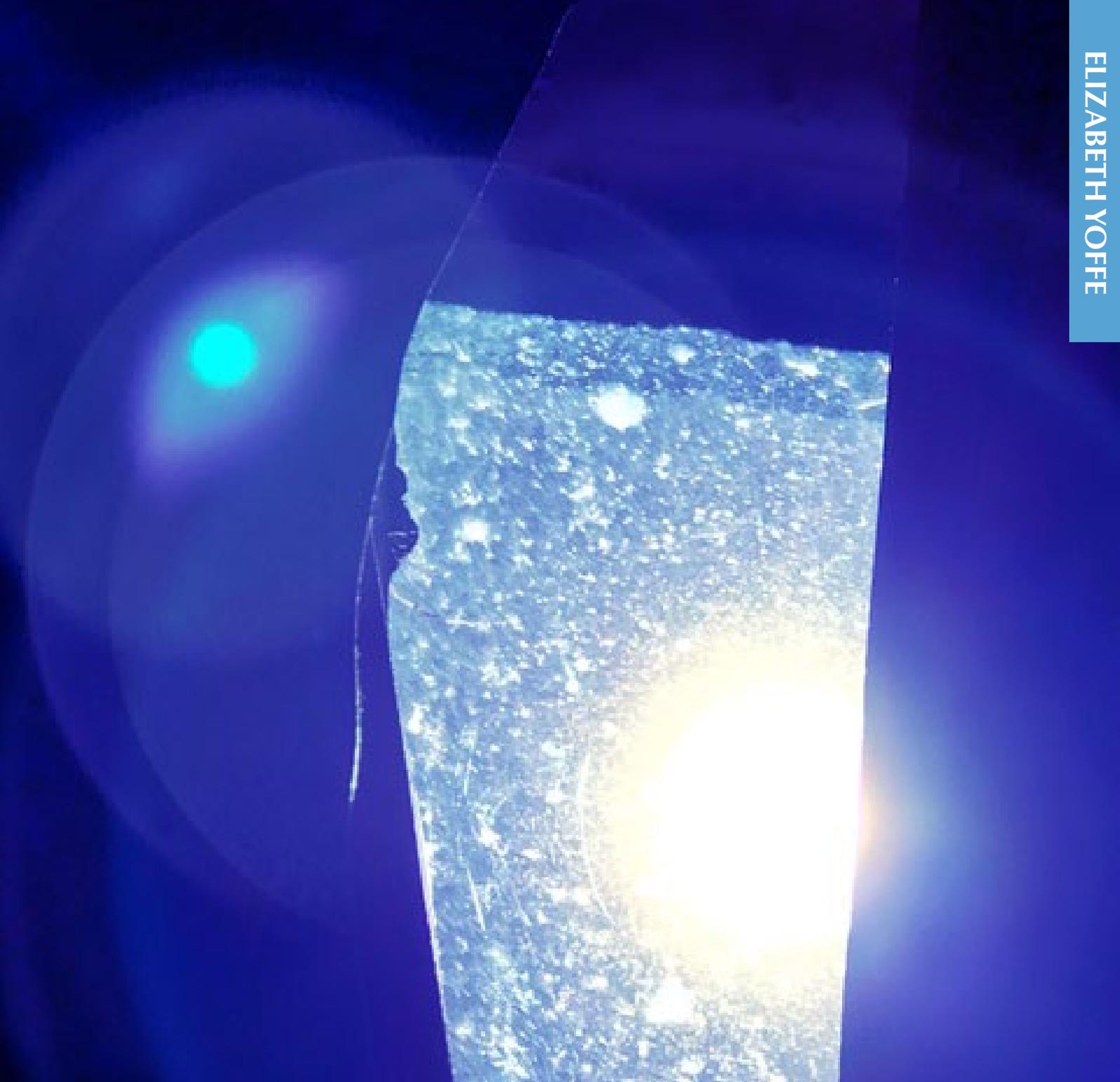
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NOTHING IS LOST JUST TRANSFORMED

Elizabeth Yoffe is an artist and media producer living on the East Coast of America. Her light art photography evokes a sacred quality through colour, form and luminescence. As a synaesthete, her senses are blended and she feels colour, light, and sound as bodily sensations.

ELIZABETH YOFFE

A RECONNECTION WITH LIGHT

Elizabeth has very early memories of light patterns. She recalls being enthralled by sunlight reflecting on walls, and headlights from passing cars sweeping across the room. Although it was not possible to articulate how she felt about these experiences as a child, she sensed that something deeper was at play. The light felt like ‘luminous stories’ containing something mysterious that might be revealed. For Elizabeth, this was an implicit, pre-verbal sense of knowing rather than a conscious thought process.

Decades later, on a winter morning, Elizabeth was lying in bed. Having recently gone through a divorce, and with the threat of the pandemic looming, she unexpectedly found herself mesmerised by patterns of light in the same way that it had captivated her attention as a child. Observing the sunlight coming through the curtains, Elizabeth noticed a ‘gentle, slowly undulating pattern on the wall.’ She felt compelled to capture this beautiful effect with the camera on her phone and, as she guided the lens towards the light source, a striking light flare appeared on the screen. Continuing to take photos, she was amazed that the camera lens could capture the same luminosity and colour effects that she saw. The light vibrated in the room and, as it began to pulse, Elizabeth recorded the effect on video. It seemed that the room had shifted from stillness into an expansive energetic space imbued with the vitality of light.

The spontaneous nature of this experience was divine inspiration to Elizabeth. She felt that the light guided her through the process, creating a connection to a transcendent source. She experienced a strong sense of an angelic or spiritual presence in the room. From that day, she developed a ‘creative relationship with the light’ - a meaningful reciprocal exchange through a visual and vibrational language. For Elizabeth, re-establishing her childhood affinity with the light and allowing it to guide her creative process, reconnected her to a vital part of herself.

BACKGROUND

Elizabeth enjoyed drawing and painting as a child, but her creativity was mainly expressed through writing. Words flowed to her with ease, and entire poems often appeared in her mind as if they were being dictated to her. She experienced her early life in a dream-like ‘semi-mystical state’, with a notably heightened perception that continued until adolescence.



HIGHER SELF

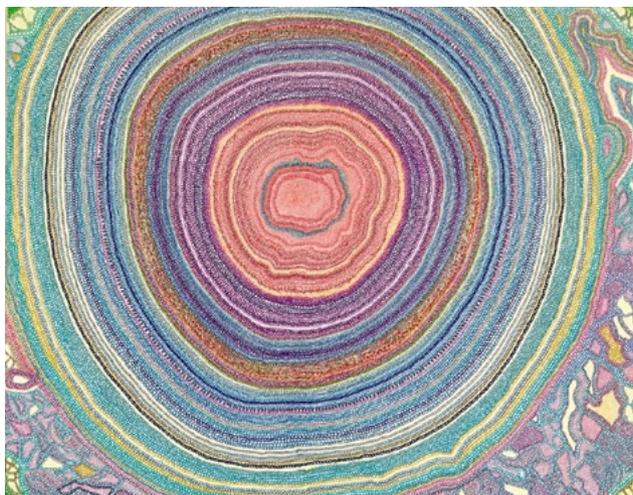
that she could retrain her brain and establish a new connection with her body. By using the fully functioning right side of her body, she began to train the damaged left side.

As part of her healing process, Elizabeth intentionally internalised the inner movements of other people. Shifting her state of consciousness between physical and non-physical states made a significant therapeutic contribution to her recovery. Dance, visualisation, and meditation were key aspects of her rehabilitation. Contrary to medical advice that stated her arm and leg were likely to be irrevocably damaged, Elizabeth made a remarkable recovery. Most people are completely unaware of her past health challenges and, aside from a slight irregularity in her walk, she has regained full mobility and functionality of the left side of her body.

At the age of 30, Elizabeth suffered from a stroke, which completely paralysed the left side of her body. She was advised by doctors that she would be unlikely to have use of her left arm or hand again and, if she managed to walk, it would be with a brace or cane. Neuroplasticity, the brain’s ability to continually adapt and grow, is now widely known but when Elizabeth received medical care in the 1990’s it was not taken into consideration.

Following her stroke, Elizabeth researched different approaches to medicine and healing and began to create her own recuperation strategy. She studied the function of the brain to better understand her condition and explore possibilities for recovery. The concept of mirror neurons resonated deeply. By tapping into her inner knowing and body wisdom, Elizabeth discovered

Before starting her light artwork, Elizabeth created a series of incredibly detailed and intricate ink drawings. This practice started while she was producing a documentary and recording a lot of data on an extensive spreadsheet, a task she found monotonous and tedious. Aware that she needed to find an outlet for her stifled creative energy, she decided to take the concept of detail and transfer it to a more fluid, organic process. She began drawing very small circles overlapping other shapes, which led towards increasing geometric abstraction.



CALLING, 19" x 24"
VELLUM PAPER, INK, COLOURED PENCIL

Creating each drawing became an intensely focused, time-consuming process that generated a feeling Elizabeth describes as “drawing myself, from the inside out.” This aspect of her arts practice was also a vital part of her recovery, helping her to feel grounded by reminding her of her physicality. The inter-relationship between creativity and bodily awareness was made clear to Elizabeth through an embodied knowing of how meditative drawing practice supported her own healing.

Elizabeth also considers her drawings to be an externalisation of herself, perhaps revealing aspects of her inner nature that are not evident in the way she presents herself in daily life. Reflecting on an alternate reality, perhaps as part of a younger generation, she thinks that her drawings might otherwise be expressed as tattoos all over her body, like a “snake-goddess”. At the same time, she is pleased that her outward appearance belies a complexity that is only revealed if she chooses to do so.

Over the years, Elizabeth has been involved in various types of creative work. She considers her background in media production as a more ‘concrete’ expression of her creativity and a way to help shape other people’s creativity. Although grounding herself has been challenging, in her work as a producer Elizabeth has tended to be the ‘grounding force’ for other people. With her former partner, also a highly creative individual, her role leaned towards the practical aspects of their collaboration. In doing so, she felt like a container and supporting force for his creative energy,

and this became a successful partnership. For this reason she has been inclined to team up with other people. At the same time, she is aware that her own creativity can become dormant in the process of championing the visions of others. With her light art photography, Elizabeth has found a way to express her innermost experience while also balancing the creative and pragmatic parts of her nature.



CAMBRIAN EXPLOSION, 18" x 18"
VELLUM PAPER, INK, COLOURED PENCIL

CREATIVE PROCESS

For Elizabeth, the creation of her light art photography is a numinous process. She wonders whether it relates to her higher self, explaining that it feels like there is ‘a force, or a multiplicity of forces... there to help guide me.’ Connecting with the light and capturing the imagery feels sacred to Elizabeth, as if her participation is enabling transcendent energy to manifest itself in a visible form. A doorway into an altered state is opened from within this interaction. At the stage of making digital adjustments her synaesthesia creates a multi-sensory response, and she experiences the colour and light in her body as sound and sensory input. She describes the process as ‘vibrational’ and feels a confirmational buzz reverberate in her body when the tone and brightness is right.



INSIGHT LIGHT VIBRATION

While the initial connection with the light and early development of the image is characterised by an intuitive flow, the translation of the digital images into a final piece of art takes time and methodical consideration. Elizabeth sees this as an essential stage that grounds the more creative aspects of the process. Without envisaging an application or purpose for her creative energy, she can become blocked. The final pieces are developed through careful consideration of scale, printing medium, and framing. Elizabeth continually experiments through testing different options and thinking deeply about the overall aesthetic quality. Although this latter stage is largely a cognitive process, it also has an intuitive aspect; Elizabeth considers the options about how to proceed from the perspective of the artwork itself, tapping into

how *it* wants to be presented. Test prints of her light art were initially made on paper, canvas, glass, and backlit vinyl. Printing on metal finally enabled Elizabeth to retain the essential quality of luminosity that is integral to her photographic work.

As with her light art, Elizabeth's drawings are deeply intertwined with her sense of self, and influenced by her synaesthesia. In contrast to the ethereal nature of her photography, the drawings have a different quality - a 'delicious, tactile, bodily-thing'. While working on them Elizabeth has an interoceptive awareness of the rhythm of the piece and experiences the response from her body as a synergistic process. Her smaller Miro-esque gestural drawings (as shown on the right) also offer a way to loosen up and connect with creative flow.



IT IS WHAT IT IS

Elizabeth has always yearned to be a musician. Although she did not feel skilled enough in this area to pursue it as a career, there is an integral auditory component to her visual art. Music becomes more than a listening process because she feels that the sounds are moving within her body, as if she is 'an instrument... that's being played.' When listening to music while drawing, the music becomes expressed in the artwork through movement and gesture. Collaborating with a musician enabled her light artwork to be translated into audio tracks that Elizabeth describes as otherworldly, odd and intense; qualities that capture her felt sense of creating the imagery.

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

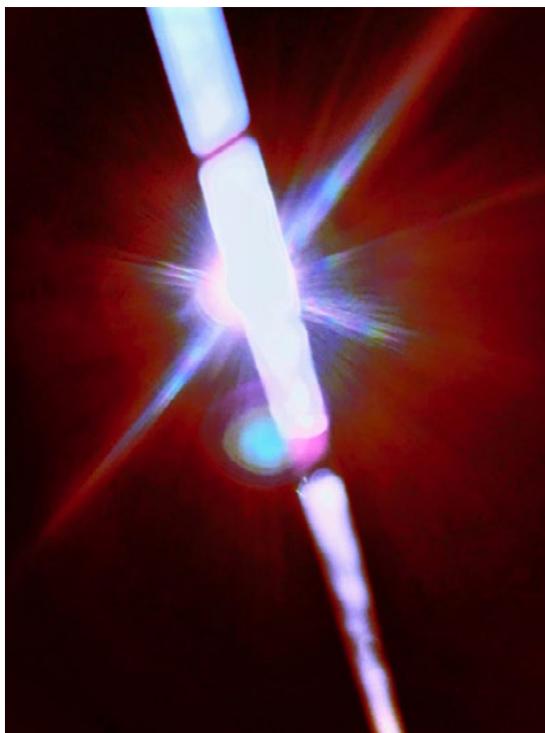
Observing her own face in the mirror as a child, Elizabeth would enter a trance state and see her features morphing into other beings. A heightened awareness of visual patterns meant that she would frequently see faces and creatures appearing on seemingly mundane surfaces. This tendency to detect shapes and patterns was simply a natural part of her life. Later, Elizabeth discovered an explanation for this phenomenon; pareidolia. Although seeing faces and beings on inanimate objects is experienced by most people at some time, for Elizabeth it occurred regularly and with intensity. At night, a vivid kaleidoscope of patterns and creatures would be animated in her vision when she closed her eyes. It was only after she shared her experience at a party, and the collective response was bewilderment, she realised not everyone encountered such moments. Over time, Elizabeth became increasingly aware that the way she perceived the world was different.



Elizabeth has also explored her experience of pareidolia through drawing. Observing the surface texture of paper, and following the forms with her pen as they emerge, creates a visual representation of this spontaneously generated imagery. The drawing on the left provides insight into Elizabeth's perception.

Throughout her life, Elizabeth often had the sense that she could ‘almost jump into someone else’s body and, for a second, get a sense of what it felt like to be them.’ Having always experienced this energetic fluidity with her identity, she feels a resonance with the concept of non-binary. Her sense of the boundaries between her inner and outer worlds as being ‘permeable’ may explain the ease with which she can sense things beneath the surface.

As a child, Elizabeth had a strong desire to be a cat. Walking on all fours and drinking milk from a dish enabled her to create a sense of safety that she did not feel in the human world. The shape-shifting realms of mythology also had immense appeal, and seemed to align more closely with her experience.



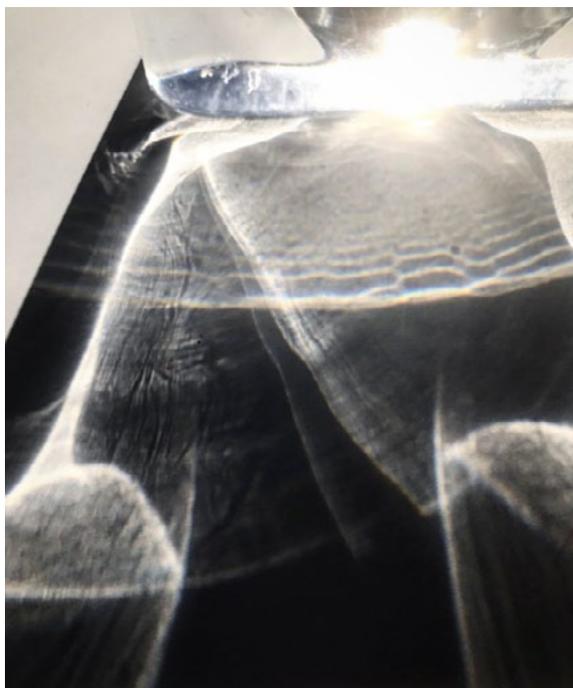
SUDDEN MANIFESTATION

Being grounded does not come naturally to Elizabeth. Her inner world typically feels more alive than the external world. She avoids consciousness-expanding drugs because her heightened perception is ‘naturally psychedelic’ and facilitates a shift into altered states with ease. She can effortlessly drift into a state of absorption while looking at light and shadows.

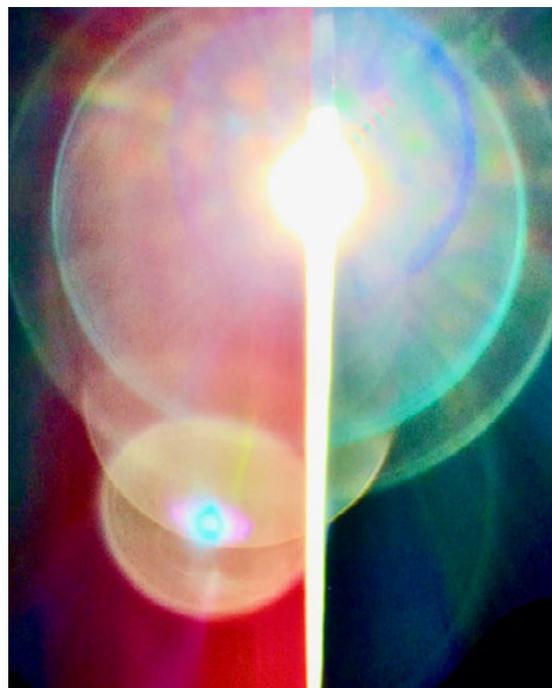
The rhythmic allure of a noise in the periphery of her awareness can also draw her into an altered state. By placing her attention on sounds or visual effects, they start to ‘open up’. As her perception becomes more expansive, Elizabeth feels like she is processing multiple strands of experience simultaneously. Sometimes this can become too intense and she intentionally closes down her senses by bringing her attention back to the present moment.

Although she considers herself to be spiritual rather than religious, Elizabeth is wistful about the lives of the anchorites. These religious devotees withdrew from everyday life and surrendered themselves to a permanent cell or enclosure within a church where they spent the rest of their lives in meditative contemplation and prayer. While her own life journey has been focused on learning to live an embodied existence, she feels more attuned to expansive or non-material states of awareness. Speaking of the tension she experiences between these two ways of being, Elizabeth shares, ‘What I’ve had to learn, throughout my life, is how to care enough about the outside world, to bring myself into it.’

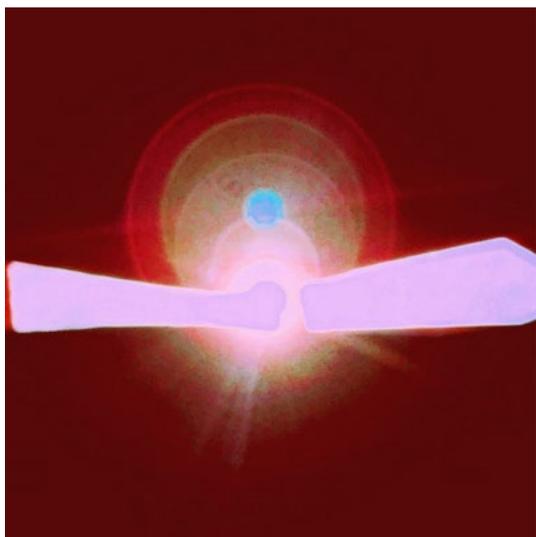
Elizabeth considers her stroke to be an event that changed her focus, and required her to deal with her body and the necessity of the material world. Although her inner world remains a priority, it is important to her that her imagination and creative mind are utilised in tangible ways. It is essential for Elizabeth to have time alone because this is the primary influence on her ability to access altered states of awareness. The one exception to this is when she is involved in a creative collaboration with someone close to her and connecting through a shared state facilitates a deeper conversation about the project. Otherwise, the influence of another person is likely to have too strong an impact on her own identity. She describes her permeability through a visual analogy, explaining that if she was the colour yellow, and a blue energy came in, there would be an inevitable mixing of the colours that would affect her. It is often necessary for Elizabeth to attend to physical boundaries in order to maintain energetic boundaries. Spending time in solitude helps her to remain in alignment with her true self.



IN LIGHT I TRUST



THE SOUND OF LIGHT



SAMADHI

When Elizabeth intentionally strengthens her boundaries, she feels less affected by external influences but is also more detached from her emotional state. In some ways this is beneficial because it enables her to focus on what needs to be done, and is ‘more comfortable than letting the boundary down and feeling all the fields.’ Although this can protect from negative influences, it can also affect the amount of positive energy she can access, so Elizabeth strives to find the right balance between openness and self-containment. Some of her light artwork reflects these two polarised aspects of her experience and relates to what happened at the time of her stroke. At that time, losing connection with her physical body, she no longer had a sense of being in the material world and felt as if she was dissolving. Even though she remained conscious, it felt ‘like a tide being pulled out’ and Elizabeth faced the stark reality that she may be about to die. In order to regain a hold on materiality she had to focus intensely on her physical existence. In her artwork titled Samadhi (shown left), earthly bone-like elements interact with the light yet retain their structure, reminding Elizabeth of this experience and how the body acts as a corporeal boundary.



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THE LIGHTNESS OF BEING, DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTWORK

Eva Marschan-Hayes is a neurodivergent artist and poet living in the historical town of Lewes, East Sussex. She works mainly with photography, often in combination with other techniques, to bring about surreal or dream-like effects. Eva creates images to inspire the imagination, exploring spirituality, emotions, memory, and fantasy. She is also a group facilitator and mentor, teaching creative methods for self-discovery and to enhance wellbeing.

EVA MARSCHAN-HAYES

A SYNCHRONISTIC REUNION

In the *Lightness of Being*, delicate flowers and feathers float in a yellow light, surrounded by a pale blue vignette. The transcendent quality of the artwork, part of a series called *Light and Delicate*, belies the fact that Eva created it during a particularly challenging year. Eva became a carer for a close family member and her mum's health began to deteriorate. In addition, she was struggling with her own chronic health issues.

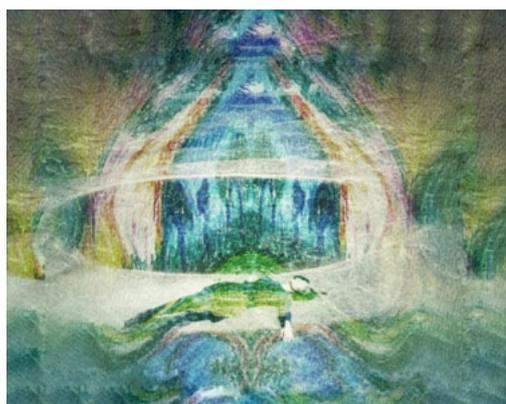
While creating the artwork, Eva felt that she was truly in the moment. The fragrance of the flowers she collected from her garden, and the textural quality of the feathers, were vital experiential elements of her creative process. The artwork emerged through surrendering to an intuitive flow. What transpired was a piece that, for Eva, represented the transition from a body, and the density of the material world, to a lighter spiritual dimension. Having endured a long period of illness and ongoing stress, she felt a yearning to dissolve into a more ethereal space. Emphasising that she was not suicidal, Eva said that she simply 'wanted to float out... to go towards the light' and the artwork enabled her to embody this feeling in a positive way.

The *Lightness of Being* was displayed in Eva's mum's bedroom in a care home in Germany. After her mum passed away, Eva asked if the artwork could be returned to her but was told that it was no longer there. Four years later, while exhibiting in the *Lewes Art Wave*, Eva was talking to visitors about the history of *The Lightness of Being*. Shortly after her presentation, a friend from Germany sent a photo of the artwork. Her husband had just started working at the care facility where Eva's mum had stayed and had discovered the painting. The timing was very meaningful to Eva and she decided to leave the artwork there to let the 'light shine to those who need it the most.' She believes that nothing is ever really lost because at a deeper level we are all connected.

BACKGROUND

Eva has been passionate about creating art for as long as she can remember. Throughout her childhood she created detailed, colourful drawings inspired by fairy tales, poetry, biblical paintings, and her vivid imagination. As a young adult she used art to work through childhood trauma and found this to be a healing process. During this period she experimented with different mediums including oil, acrylic, pastels, ink, watercolour and photography. Eva's earlier works have been referred to as landscapes of the soul.

From the age of eleven Eva kept a detailed diary, recording what people said, to 'capture those little moments' in everyday life. Her first story, about growing up, was in the form of a handwritten and illustrated book. As a teenager Eva began writing poetry that questioned inequalities, neoliberal politics, and societal norms. John Lennon was one of her main inspirations during this time.



IN BETWEEN WORLDS, 2022
DIGITAL ARTWORK

Eva dreamed of attending university, but traumatic experiences disrupted her early education. After being hospitalised and diagnosed with psychosis, she was given medication. This dulled her critical thinking abilities and creativity, making her feel 'dead inside.' While in a youth hospital she was taught English, her favourite subject, but she struggled to absorb any information. Later, a report from a psychologist advised against Eva returning to high school. Despite this setback she made several attempts to continue her education. Each time she failed because the medication made it impossible to follow the lessons and to articulate herself, making her feel humiliated and stuck.

The loss of her loving grandmother affected Eva deeply. This was compounded by a lack of nurture and support from her family. While grieving she suffered abuse from her mum's partner. Between the ages of 16 and 21 Eva experienced three severe episodes of psychosis and was hospitalised over longer periods of time. Later, reflecting on the underlying causes of her psychosis, she considered it to be her mind's attempt to process and integrate earlier trauma.

In her late twenties, shortly after moving to England, Eva met her husband, Phil. One year later their daughter Keira was born. Eva and her family moved to the historic market town of Lewes. This was a place where she had dreamed of living. With its pleasing mediaeval features and a castle on the hill, she feels that the town reflects the imaginings and drawings she created as a child. Having now lived there for thirty years, Eva feels happy and connected, and has ‘grown roots’ within the Lewesian community.

With support from her husband, Eva spent several years revisiting her earlier experiences using role play and art as therapeutic and healing tools. Engaging in creative play as a process of self-analysis, and a way to mirror her inner world, helped her to reclaim lost parts of herself. During this time Eva continued her High School education, completing A levels in Psychology and Art and Design. She also worked as a volunteer in a day care centre for people experiencing mental health challenges.

After a period of introspection, Eva felt the need to focus more on the outside world. She began to regularly visit her local Crown Court and studied for an A Level in Law, then a degree in Law and Criminology. She became passionate about criminal justice and won a scholarship to Birkbeck College. This enabled her to do formal research at the Crown Court. When she achieved a PhD in Socio-Legal Studies, Eva felt that another level of inner healing had taken place.



FRAGILITY, 2022
DIGITAL ARTWORK

Shortly after graduating, Eva had to take on additional responsibilities caring for a family member, and was fortunate to get a short-term academic position that enabled her to work from home. When the contract ended she experienced the loss as a ‘big hole in her life, almost like a bereavement’ and was motivated to return to artistic pursuits. She created a collage each day, using organic materials, and photographed it. During this time she felt that her creativity was expressed by ‘an inner world with a grounded centre.’ Eva noticed a shift from introspection into playful spontaneity, inspired by the natural world and the beauty of light.

After Eva returned to her creative practice, an ambition coach helped her to formulate the goals for her next journey. Her hopes at this time are reflected in an excerpt from one of her poems: ‘What I wanted to grow was to let my inner artist show, and to connect with kindred spirits too. Help those in need in the community, to have a voice with art and connect with heart.’ Eva designed an art workshop, which she voluntarily offered in two local community centres, and had her first three local exhibitions. Her endeavours were supported by the arts organisation, Outside In, which helped her to gain the skills she needed to run workshops and work as a peer mentor.

Supporting people in challenging circumstances and encouraging their creative endeavours is immensely rewarding for Eva, a transformative shift that is acknowledged in a later part of her poem, ‘This time I am the mentor, passing my knowledge on, assisting someone else to grow, what a beautiful circle flow.’ As a creative wellbeing facilitator, Eva helps her participants to feel more at ease and connect with their authentic creative self through guided visualisation techniques. Since she began living her life as an artist and poet, she feels more balanced and grounded. Joining more organisations and gaining a supportive network led to collaborative projects, book publications, and regular exhibitions in the UK and mainland Europe.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Eva's creative process is very physical and involves all her senses. When taking photographs she avoids using a tripod, preferring to use her body when capturing an image. She goes walking every day, immersing herself in the natural environment, and never leaving home without at least one camera. In addition to photographing stills, she records the sounds and movement on videos that she can watch at home. When a beautiful scene in nature catches her eye, she enters a heightened state and is completely absorbed in the process of capturing the effect of the light.



PASSAGE OF TIME
DIGITALLY ALTERED PHOTOGRAPH

Eva considers the combined conditions of a sunny, misty and icy day to be perfect. She takes a multitude of images and will sift through them later to select her favourite photographs. Photo editing software allows her to experiment with different effects and refine the image. Eva also experiments with mixed media and often combines handmade and digital approaches. For a recent series she combined drawing, double exposure photography, and digital manipulation techniques. Eva prints all of her artwork at

home. For some of her images she uses canvas or cotton paper to reinforce a painterly rather than photo-realistic image, a technique that she finds exciting because it is not always possible to know how the image will be transformed.

Feeling unrestricted and able to go with the creative flow is essential to Eva's creative process. Themes usually emerge after the images have been created and continue to develop when she reflects on her art, or is in the process of writing a poem. Eva considers the meaning of her artwork as fluid rather than fixed. She encourages people to use her work to spark their own imagination, and is pleased when it is used as a starting point for other creative work. Comments on her social media posts often include stories of people's dreams and childhood memories.

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

Eva's spirituality is an integral part of her life and creative process. She has always had a strong relationship with her inner world and has spent a lot of time reflecting on how it connects with the external world. In her youth Eva kept a detailed dream journal and noticed that several of her dreams were precognitive.

Synchronicities occur quite frequently in Eva's life, often in the form of opportunities or as solutions to problems. Eva considers the creations of the mind to be connected to external events and views the imagination as having potential to manifest things in the material world. Rather than having a routine meditation practice, Eva spontaneously engages with her inner world, incorporating visual metaphors into her everyday life through creative visualisation. Imagining herself as a tree with well-nourished roots, protective branches, and abundant fruits to share increases her feelings of being grounded, and creates a sense of a reciprocal energy flow. Another of her visualisation techniques is to imagine herself walking on a tightrope, whilst skilfully juggling and performing magical tricks. As someone who is often balancing multiple projects, these visualisations help Eva to bolster her inner strength and confidence in her ability to cope with whatever arises. When she notices negative or repetitive thoughts, she releases them from her mind by using imaginary scissors to snip them off.

Although Eva was a lively child and is extroverted by nature, she needs a lot of time alone to nurture her creativity and support her health. Living with Multiple Chemical Sensitivity means that Eva's body is reactive to low levels of exposure to environmental chemicals. Everyday household products and artificial fragrances can make her feel unwell and longer exposure can cause flu-like symptoms. This, and her inability to filter external sensory stimuli, can make it difficult for her to be in busy environments or in enclosed rooms with other people. Eva's sensitivity to noises and other external factors has intensified with age and she can easily become overloaded. When she is immersed in her photography she can process the environment at a slower pace, connecting with different perspectives. Eva's photography practice has promoted her sense of wellbeing and helped her to cope during especially difficult periods in her life.

In 2017, after Eva's mum had been in an induced coma for several weeks, Eva travelled to Germany to be with her mum and German family. Although there had been indications from medical staff that her mum might regain consciousness, when Eva arrived this was no longer the case. Eva felt that her mum had waited for her arrival.

Shortly after her mother passed away, Eva wandered through her old hometown, Oberhausen, taking photographs. For Eva, the images of shattered glass and disrepair that she captured at her old school represented the inevitable decay of aspects of her own life, including the loss of her mum. Eva returned to creative play as a way of processing the loss. Her photographic series, titled *Emotions*, was a way to express and process strong feelings of grief and witness aspects of life that were hard to accept. In contrast to her *Light and Delicate* series, the images included in *Emotions* evoke an odd and eerie atmosphere, and are focused more on the shadow aspects of life.



IMAGES OF SHATTERED GLASS FROM EVA'S OLD SCHOOL (EMOTIONS SERIES)
DIGITALLY ALTERED PHOTOGRAPHS

Following her mum's death, Eva had a strong sense of her presence. While walking near the hospital she asked for a sign from her mum and immediately saw a whole cigarette on the ground. Smoking had been one of the contributing factors to Eva's mother's death. Although Eva's rational mind dismissed this event as co-incidental, when she crossed the road she saw a newspaper on the ground. It was open at the page of her mum's obituary. Eva sensed a strong synchronicity with these combined events.



TACK'S GRAVE
DIGITALLY ALTERED PHOTOGRAPH

to death. Sitting on the grave is an angelic figure that belonged to Eva's mum. On a crisp, frosty day Eva was admiring the frozen leaves surrounding the angel. Although her thoughts turned to death and dying, she also felt a sense of happiness. As Eva took a photograph of this scene, she felt that a bridge was created between the earthly and spiritual realms. The small bird resting on the hand of the angel seemed to be a metaphorical representation of gently letting go.

Another meaningful episode occurred when Eva returned to her mum's house and spent a long-time searching for letters that related to events when she was a baby. After finding them in a suitcase, she put them carefully in a folder with other documents relating to tragic events in the family. Later, when the folder disappeared, Eva had a strong feeling that this was a message telling her that she should no longer carry the weight of these tragedies. More recently, looking at the photographs she had taken in her mum's house following her death, Eva noticed inexplicable light effects, like orbs in motion, in two of the images.

Eva has a gentle nature and feels a kinship to animals. In her garden there is a grave for one of her rescue chickens, Tack, who had died in her arms after a week-long transition



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SEEKING ONENESS

12' EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE IN SEVEN SECTIONS, BOLTED TOGETHER (ACRYLIC ON RAW CANVAS)

Irene Vincent is an intuitive painter and author living in Sedona, Arizona. Her atmospheric, otherworldly paintings are created spontaneously, and are often inspired by inner visions and contemplations. Irene sees her work as an 'intertwining of art, dreams and visions' and views the process of creation as a way to open up a conversation with a higher dimension.

IRENE VINCENT

AN UNEXPECTED MESSAGE

Irene was enjoying her morning coffee when she heard a voice giving distinct instructions for her next painting. A clear vision appeared in her mind's eye as it was described by the voice. The message was very specific; the painting should be created with seven separate canvases joined together to make a twelve foot equilateral triangle. On the side panels, a man and a woman would be reaching to the heavens. At the centre, transparent figures would represent the inner masculine and feminine, depicting a union of souls. Irene was also shown the placement of other symbols including a six-sided star, a spirit bird showering divine bliss, and a snake with its tail in its mouth. As soon as the message was delivered, Irene immediately sketched the different aspects and calculated how the equilateral triangle could be divided into seven panels.

While remaining receptive to the source of guidance, there was also a part of Irene that wondered about the meaning behind the symbolism. Later, researching the imagery, she discovered that the six-sided star was a cross-cultural symbol that portrayed the marriage of heaven and earth, and the union of feminine and masculine energies. The snake was an ouroboros, which represented time and cycles, as well as a union of opposites. Irene felt gratified to discover that each element was in harmony with the others and collectively told a story of unity. As well as being a process of learning and discovery for Irene, this unusual experience created the sense that she was 'part of a mystery.' She felt joyous, energised, and excited to be involved in the creation of something new.

The imagery in the painting, which Irene called Seeking Oneness, was also related to a question that she had been contemplating for six years; what would equality between male and female look like? Later, while on a vision quest, she had a powerful lucid dream in which she experienced unity with the universe and was suffused with feelings of love and bliss. After this experience she understood that her painting had prepared her for this ecstatic moment and she felt profoundly grateful. Irene now feels that the knowledge imparted through the vision is integrated within her whole being.

BACKGROUND

At the age of nine, Irene had a near death experience. She was at a football stadium with friends and began to choke while eating a hot dog. Scenes from her 'whole little life' flashed through her mind like a movie, and she heard an angelic voice imparting advice. Finally managing to clear her throat, and having been provided with clarity on all the detrimental decisions she had made, young Irene sat down on the bench and resolved to make new choices. Amazed by how she had witnessed her entire life being compressed into a few moments, Irene became transfixed by the power of the mind. At the time, she felt that there was no-one to share this experience with, but it was a turning point in her life that introduced her to a magical dimension of the world. She began to go to bookshops in search for answers, and was drawn to the metaphysical section. Unable to afford any of the books, and aware that the bookstore owners discouraged children from handling them, she simply stared at the titles and imagined what was inside.

Irene developed her own contemplative practice in childhood. She would select a word and then spend an entire year holding it in her mind. In high school she chose to focus on the word *relationships*. In doing so, she observed how people interacted with one another, noticing how particular actions caused certain responses, and through this learned the value of compassion. Later, she would select words and meditate on the meaning through her painting practice.

In high school, Irene excelled in math and science and was discouraged from pursuing art. Later, at college, she met musicians and artists and was confounded because her guidance counsellor had led her to believe that there was no future in these disciplines. At the age of 19, after a relationship break-up, she experienced a dark night of the soul that led her to question her identity and the direction of her life. By going through a process of self-analysis, and returning to early childhood memories, she rediscovered her enduring love for art. Following this, Irene immediately bought canvases and paints and began to create. Looking back at these first paintings, Irene can see the early adoption of symbols that would reappear in her later work. One of her earliest creations depicted two hands in the sky, one male and one female, with the sun in between representing energy.

While studying for her Bachelor of Fine Arts at Florida University, Irene was encouraged to work in an abstract style, but she had a passion for surrealism and felt a strong desire to produce political art. She felt that colourful, magical worlds that evoked the imagination could enable people to

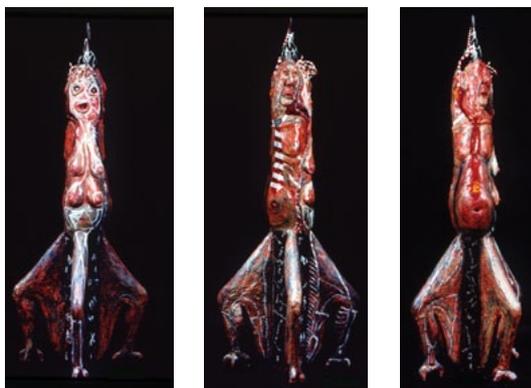
'see beauty in strangeness' and transcend cultural separation. In California, seeking to refine her drawing skills, Irene took classes with a Mexican artist, Artemio Sepulveda, who had studied under Siqueiros, the famous Mexican political muralist. Her visions flowed easily at this time. Although she had initially focused on identifying problems in the world, Irene began to contemplate what the solutions may be. Hoping to gain insight from a more expansive perspective she asked questions like: What is love beyond culture? What is Universal love? Although doubtful that she would receive a vision, the painting *Journey to the Soul* came to her shortly after. This led Irene to realise that she had to make a commitment to her soul path, prioritising the spiritual aspects of life.



JOURNEY TO THE SOUL 65" x 92"

ACRYLIC, SAND, CHEESECLOTH AND PHOTOGRAPHS ON RAW CANVAS

After painting *Journey to the Soul*, spiritual teachers started to appear in Irene's life. While listening to a yogi speak at a lecture, Irene was deeply affected by the love in the yogi's voice and left in a blissful state. During a yoga class, she felt that her heart had burst open and she became devoted to this practice. Another yogi that Irene encountered imbued her with 'waves of bliss' whenever he walked past. He visited Irene whenever he travelled to America. She felt that they had a psychic rapport because he would share spiritual stories that answered questions she had without her having to verbalise them.



MISSILE TOTEM
80" X 24" X 24"
ACRYLIC ON CARVED PLASTER



MOLTING OF THE MERMAID
14" X 19" X 28"
ACRYLIC ON FIRED SCULPTURE CLAY

Following these experiences, the style and content of Irene's work gradually shifted. *Missile Totem* (left), a political sculptural piece that was almost complete, was adapted to include spiritual symbols. She describes this as a shamanistic experience. Another clay sculpture, *Molting of the Mermaid* (below left), was intended to be a missile with a heart on a geometric time progression, but it collapsed before it was fired. For Irene, this was a relief and catalysed the end of her politically motivated art.

While creating *Awakening at Dawn* (shown on the next page), Irene had a strong precognitive sense of a pandemic. The central image of this painting was a white horse's head with the tail of a dragon, and her immediate association was of the apocalypse. At first she wondered whether she could continue working on it. Yet, although the artwork made her feel uneasy, she also identified elements of beauty and hope. Inspired to include a deity in the corner of the composition, Irene began to paint the Goddess Tara but the elephant God, Ganesh, remover of obstacles,

appeared instead. Both Ganesh, and the sun emerging from a lotus flower, provided a sense of relief. Irene felt that the underlying message of the painting was to connect with spirit and truth.



AWAKENING AT DAWN, 24" X 30"

TEMPERA GRASSA AND OIL ON GESSO-STRETCHED CANVAS

In response to frequent earthquakes that she experienced when living in California, Irene recalls saying, 'Hey God, can you please give me some pre-warning?' She explained that she would remain in the area if she could assist, but would just like some advance notice. Irene identifies this point as having 'opened some door' to information from beyond the material world. In this respect, Irene feels that the questions we ask are of great importance because, as well as directing the mind, they can create a harmonious connection to universal knowledge.

Irene's unusual dream experiences, which can be prophetic or clairvoyant, create a curiosity about the nature of the universe and whether other realities or dimensions can be accessed. Her painting

Planetary Alignment (shown on the next page) was created when her dream life became particularly active. This period lasted two years, and she wondered if it was influenced by an astrological factor. One night, before going to sleep, she asked the universe if she could be of service in dreamtime. Irene then dreamt of a young man who was contemplating suicide. After having a conversation about his situation, she offered to give him energetic healing and they placed their hands on each other's heart. The next morning Irene was overflowing with joy and bliss. Eager to delve into her dreams further she went to her bookshelf and selected a title on dreaming that she had not yet read. At lunch, she was astounded when the young man from her dream sat down at a table next to her. Although he did not appear to recognise Irene, he noticed the book and asked her if she could tell him about dreams, explaining that he had a dream that a woman had healed him. Irene did not mention her own dream because she was concerned that it might be too much for the man to take in, but she shared ways that he could begin working with his dreams.

On another occasion, while visiting an art museum, Irene struggled to find somewhere to sit and asked a man if she could join him. When she sat down, the man unexpectedly declared that she was the woman from his dreams. Irene initially thought this was a pick-up line, but it transpired that they had been having dreamtime conversations. The man was in the process of becoming a monk, and had been delving deeply into dream practices and sleeping upright. He shared that he was having doubts about his spiritual life. Although Irene did not recognise him, he explained that she had visited him on three different occasions and answered some questions he had. She joked that she hoped the universal energies were channelling knowledge through her. After this encounter, Irene and the monk corresponded with each other for a while.

Irene's dreamtime services continued avidly for two years and then tapered off. Then, during the pandemic, she asked if she could be of service again. Throughout the previous period she had only been aware of giving occasional support, but this time it was much more intense and she was conscious of helping two or three people each night. Eventually, feeling overwhelmed, Irene asked the universe to pause her offering of service so that she could take time to nurture herself and recharge.



PLANETARY ALIGNMENT, 48" x 36"
OIL PAINT ON GESSO-STRETCHED CANVAS

CREATIVE PROCESS

For Irene, the creative process is a ritual, and feels like an expansive conversation with the universe, or her higher self. The act of creative expression allows her to channel a spiritual energy, and she often uses music and movement to inspire a vision. When she had a larger studio, Irene had space to express herself while she was creating, and her whole body was involved. Working on a large scale, she mixed paint in huge jars and threw it onto the canvas. She felt like she was ‘creating the universe’ and was detached from controlling the outcome, letting the paint decide what it wanted to be.



DIVINE ECSTASY

9' CIRCULAR PAINTING WITH 5' 9" SQUARE SECTION
ACRYLIC ON RAW CANVAS

Working in a smaller studio, Irene finds that dancing to African drumming or ethereal music helps her to enter an energetic space where she can connect to the present moment in preparation for painting. Sometimes she prepares a palette of different colours and finger-paints onto the canvas, tapping into her inner child. At other times she uses two brushes and closes her eyes, allowing herself to become a conduit and following the energy as it emerges. These intuitive methods often establish the main framework of a painting which can then be finished with finer detail. Afterwards, Irene researches the meaning of the symbols that have appeared, curious about what the painting is communicating. Although this often provides some clarity, it can take a while for the underlying meaning to be unearthed.

Sometimes Irene struggles with painting, or will get to a point where she is unsure how to continue. There are also times when she experiences resistance to finishing a particular piece. When this happens she takes time to relax and breathe into it until her creativity begins to flow again. At times, she has felt that a painting was not ready to be completed, and has set it aside. Irene began painting *Divine Ecstasy* (shown on the previous page) as a way to explore how deeply she could merge with water, but she felt that this painting somehow wanted to be bigger than it was. Unsure where to take it, the artwork remained in her closet for six years. Following her experience of unity in the lucid dream, Irene came to the realisation that the underlying meaning was about ‘merging with energy and the love essence of the universe.’ Revisiting the painting, she expanded the original square panel, encompassing it within a circle which she felt was a spirit shield.

Although Irene’s creative process involves an interplay between intuitive visions, spontaneous creation, and rational thought, some pieces require more advance planning than others. In the creation of *Seeking Oneness*, Irene felt energised by the process of formulating a plan that would enable her to realise the vision. In preparation, she completed a large scale charcoal study, and she and her boyfriend took photographs of each other to be used as references for the figures. The stretcher bars for the seven canvases were carefully designed so that they would fit together, and the painting was created on the fabric of the canvas before being stretched onto frames. When the individual canvases were bolted together, Irene ascended a ladder and worked on the piece as a whole to harmonise the colour across each canvas. Although originally inspired by a vision, the painting required dedicated work and consideration to bring it to life.

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

Being highly empathetic, Irene is attuned to other people's emotions. The room she rents out on Airbnb seems to attract a lot of young people who are looking for healing, and she is acutely aware of their anxiety and sorrow. Watching the news can also weigh heavily on Irene, and she often feels a deep sadness that information is being suppressed. She believes that love is a protecting force. To counteract the negativity she invokes light and intentionally sends out positive energy to wherever she feels it is needed.



CAT'S DREAM COMES TRUE

When she feels melancholy or overwhelmed she uses these activities to 'change the wavelength' and return to a more positive, energised state. Dancing is an activity that connects her to both the heavens and the earth, and she finds African drumming music particularly grounding. Channelling creative energy connects her to feelings of bliss.

Although she has always been responsive to energetic influences, Irene believes that awakening spiritually intensified her sensitivity because it opened up her heart. This was a positive transformation for her in many ways, but also potentially left her exposed to detrimental influences. An increased awareness of her vulnerability has led her to develop protective and cleansing visualisations that she can use when required. Irene has recently felt a need to protect her intuitive capacities from being intentionally blocked or suppressed by external influences. Imagining a sphere of light around her body helps her build an energetic field and fortify her defences.

Meditation, yoga and tai chi, are practices that Irene sees as being linked to her heart.

Irene considers her internal world and the external world to be deeply intertwined and working in synergy, viewing her inner thoughts and imaginations as a pivotal aspect in the creation of her outer reality. She describes the boundaries between her inner world and the outer world as 'slightly solid to fluid'. Irene expands on this by referring to quantum physics and the ability of photons to appear either as a particle (solid/physical) or a wave (fluid/potential). She explains that, although she knows that she needs to be a particle at times, she would prefer to be the wave.



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James Paddock is a video and installation artist living in Southampton, Hampshire. His art practice explores social issues, including his own experiences of mental health challenges. His most recent work, *Mirrored to the Core*, is an interdisciplinary, collaborative project telling the story of two individuals living with schizophrenia. He hopes this short film will help to change perceptions and myths about schizophrenia.

JAMES PADDOCK

PARALLEL DIALOGUES

James' short film, *Mirrored to the Core*, is a love story centring around the meeting between two kindred souls living with schizophrenia. Two parallel dialogues create a divergent soundscape that accompanies stark visuals. While a conversation takes place between the protagonists, operatic voices channel their inner dialogues to represent a secondary, telepathic communication.

“It’s a love story on the surface, then on another layer or level there’s a political agenda going on. Both the composer and opera director felt my scripted lines had a natural rhythm for opera.”

James wrote one of the scenes of the film when he was experiencing an episode of psychosis. This non-ordinary experience was also reflected in his approach to the script, particularly the first scene. He wanted the dialogue to be haphazard and to create a slight incoherence, whilst also leaving a thread for the viewer to follow. At one stage James was keen to rewrite some of the script, but he was encouraged by collaborators on the project to leave the lines in their original form. The composer felt that the rhythmic prose worked in synergy with the operatic narrative. A moment of inspiration occurred when one of the collaborators shared a journal article on the topic of schizophrenia and love. Aspects of this academic paper were subsequently translated into the narrative and influenced the direction of the film.

[Click here to view the film online](#)

BACKGROUND

James considers his art to be heavily influenced by the blend of divergent influences and different perspectives that he experienced from childhood onwards. He lists the people around him from birth; a Jamaican household, a family of professional boxers, and a grandfather who was a communist. The contrast between his working class background and involvement in arts and culture has also been impactful on his worldview.

James' early creative practice centred around alternative viewpoints and marginalised voices in society. His own experience in school had led him to feel rejected within a framework that he felt was unsupportive and discriminatory. Despite the struggles during his early education, he later went on to complete a foundational diploma in art and design, followed by a BA(Hons) in Fine Arts.



LOST PERSON, 2018
VIDEO INSTALLATION

In his twenties, before being diagnosed with schizophrenia, James began to hear original musical compositions in his mind, experiencing these as vivid orchestral performances. Later, after graduating from art school, he began to hear voices. James considers this stage a testing period where there was confusion between his conscious mind, his unconscious mind, and a spiritual presence. In the acute stage, which lasted for over a year, he felt as if he was in another world, which he describes as like being in a fantasy film. This heightened experience was magical at times, but could also have a disturbing undercurrent. Although this was an intense and chaotic time, James emphasises that his experience was not violent. Despite this, he spent a great deal of time in police cells while an attempt was made to get him sectioned under the Mental Health Act. On one occasion he was taken, bewildered and confused, to court where he faced a barrage of questions despite not knowing where he was. While he largely seems at peace with what happened, he remains confounded by the lack of interest or compassion expressed by anyone during this tumultuous period.

In his twenties, before being diagnosed with schizophrenia, James began to hear original musical compositions in his mind, experiencing these as vivid orchestral performances. Later, after graduating from art school, he began to hear voices. James considers this stage a testing period where there was confusion between his conscious mind, his unconscious mind, and a spiritual presence. In the acute stage, which lasted for over a year, he felt as if he was in another world, which he describes as like being in a fantasy film. This heightened

Although his condition was stabilised, James endured poor treatment within the healthcare system and was unable to continue with his creative practice for over twelve years. His psychiatrist at the time was unsympathetic and James felt ‘bogged down’ by over-medication and powerless to challenge his treatment. As well as being unable to express himself creatively, he lost his appreciation of art and music. These activities had been of immense importance to him and were essential for his wellbeing. During this time he tried alternative vocations varying from working in a horse stables to accounting. At this point his health challenges were compounded by a loss of purpose and meaning.

When his psychiatrist left the health service, James was discharged. At this point he was having up to five seizures a day which he describes as horrendous, emphasising that this was a complication unrelated to his condition. When another psychiatrist re-evaluated his situation more positively, and changed his medication, James began to rediscover his creativity.



BUS, 2018

NARRATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY

Although James’ artwork was initially focused on a socio-political commentary using conceptual wall installations, he later began working with a project manager who suggested using his creative practice to talk about his mental health challenges. As a result, James began to interweave his desire to highlight everyday societal issues, with an exploration of his own experience of schizophrenia and hearing voices. He sees this work as a combination of the surreal and the mundane.

In many ways, James feels that he has returned to his creative practice in a better place, with more insight. Keen to understand more about his condition, James has researched different perspectives on schizophrenia. At one stage, he was communicating with the late sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who sent him informative journal articles. Later, he was in touch with Professor Ann Kring at the University of California in Berkeley, who agreed that her paper on schizophrenia could be poetically translated into the *Mirrored to the Core* video installation. She kindly met up with James over Zoom, an experience that he found incredibly informative. James has also considered research that suggests his experiences could be related to pre-natal trauma or complications during his mother’s

pregnancy. He wonders whether his condition might have lain dormant for decades, and that during that time his approach to life just felt a little bit different. He points out that a lot of people in this situation tend to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs simply to get through life.



SHELLS, 2017
INSTALLATION VIEW

James is publicly open about his mental health challenges, yet he is also aware of the image, often promoted by the media, of people with schizophrenia being potentially dangerous. He isn't sure if his neighbours know about his condition, and seems uncertain about how they might react. Referring to Michel Foucault, James mentions how the perception of mental health is in flux, humorously suggesting that the future might sound like, 'Oh,

there's John over there, he's a bit eccentric, you know.' At the same time, he acknowledges that at the peak of his symptoms he needed some kind of intervention because he was 'really out there.' With medical supervision, James has significantly reduced his medication. Now, with more insight into his condition and the nature of his mind, he believes he is in a better position to maintain his mental health.

Although he hears multiple voices, James refers to his subconscious with a singular pronoun and considers it a privilege to have contact with him. He feels that developing a gentle attitude to this aspect of the mind was essential because it promotes a more balanced, harmonious connection. The positive outcome of nurturing a calm relationship with his voices is something he shares with students when he works at the Recovery College in Hampshire.

CREATIVE PROCESS



WHY? 2020
CONCEPTUAL SELF PORTRAIT

For James, tapping into his creativity always feels natural and the process is highly fluid. If he sits down at his laptop or with a sketchpad he can access a flow state with ease. He attributes this to a well-established channel of communication between his conscious and unconscious, and believes it also leads to original ideas that are untethered to external influences.

Even though James acknowledges that the quality of the output can vary at the early stages of developing an idea, the creative fluidity is always a wonderful, joyful experience for him. At the same time, the various demands and deadlines of creative projects can be highly stressful, and he sometimes feels a tightness in his chest. The time-consuming

administrative aspects of undertaking creative projects can also be a burden, though he feels that working collaboratively can help to alleviate these pressures.

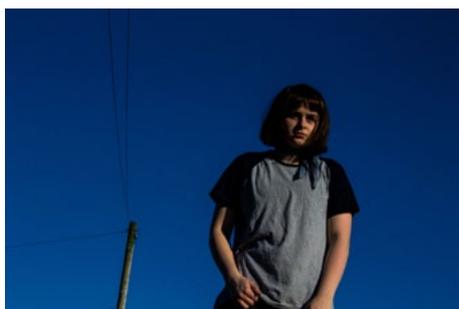
James shares that his creative practice means everything to him, and he couldn't live without it. For the twelve years that he was unable to practice, he felt as if his life was on hold. Now his lived experience of schizophrenia and his artwork are intimately interwoven. His passion for breaking down stigma and challenging mainstream thought is a long-standing aspect of his creative drive and continues to provide a deep motivation for his work. Additionally, his experiences lead him to wonder what is going on deeper in the mind, and foster his intuitive sense of a connection to a more expansive creative source. He often tells people that this same force is present within them, and to follow their instincts.



MIRRORED TO THE CORE, 2022
PRODUCTION STILL

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

As a child, James recalls spending hours staring at the flames in a gas fire. In an unsuccessful attempt to divert his attention his aunt bought him a toy, but he remained fascinated by the dancing patterns of the flames. He feels that the mundane has been heightened for him throughout his life, enabling him to notice and concentrate on subtler aspects of everyday life that might pass others by. His thought processes tend to have a momentum that can lead him to expand beyond conventional associative links. In this respect, the work of the artist Marcel Duchamp resonates



PYLON, 2019
PRODUCTION STILL



BLINDS, 2018
INSTALLATION VIEW

with James, perhaps because seemingly simple objects taken on a heightened significance and provoke inquiry. The amplified sound in French cinema ‘when you hear every pin drop’ also has immense appeal to James, and he is continually on a quest to find an arts project where this intensification of subtle sounds can be incorporated.

An aspect of James’ experience that he feels is conducive to his creativity is an acute awareness of multiple layers of information. He relates this to his experience of what he terms ‘second voice.’ During an everyday conversation this can either manifest as an awareness of another voice speaking simultaneously, or as a rhythmic counterpart to speech. This can also occur while watching the news. In this case, James becomes hyper-aware of a parallel source of information created by the voice tone and gestures of the reporter. In addition, double meanings or innuendos are sometimes prominent. In the same way, his artwork often contains layers of meaning and multiple perspectives.

James can also experience paranoia but feels more comfortable defining this as ‘sensitivity to one’s surroundings.’ Having led to challenging experiences in the past, he has now learnt to identify and question negative patterns of thought, or reach out to trusted others for an opinion on their validity. He values the upside of paranoia, which he sees as a deep instinct and awareness of potential danger that keeps him safe.

James compares the attitude of the Western world to shamanic cultures, where the ability to connect with deeper levels of the mind or a spiritual realm is celebrated rather than stigmatised. Although he was agnostic for a while, he now feels open to a spiritual dimension. His attitude towards the voices he hears has also altered. Being more aware of how his own voices interact, and speaking to other voice hearers, gives him more certainty that his unusual experiences could be indicative of an ability to communicate with other, non-physical, sources.

“The only boundaries are society and what they impose on you.”

Describing the boundaries between his inner world and the external world as ‘one existence, without borders,’ James adds that the only boundaries that exist are those imposed by society. This position is reflected in his creative practice which blurs conceptual and disciplinary boundaries. His artistic efforts to encourage discussion around mental health aims to destigmatise conditions that are deeply pathologised by acknowledging the diverse expressions of the human mind. Ultimately, James believes that his lived experience of schizophrenia has given him the strength to go against the grain.



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YELLOW FINCH, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

Linda O'Neill is an intuitive painter living in Boulder Colorado. Her abstract paintings are beautifully animated, with bursts of colour and layers of expressive brushwork. She describes the process of creating her artwork as 'an inner voice combined with a spiritual flow of energy.'

LINDA O'NEILL

AN OTHERWORLDLY VISITATION

One morning, a yellow finch appeared and tapped on Linda's bedroom window, as if trying to catch her attention. This beautiful little bird stayed for a while and, as they looked at one another, she began to sense that it was a visitation. Her father-in-law had passed away the week before, after a long period of illness, and they had been close. Linda felt that the bird was there to share a message that he was okay, and that she and her husband no longer needed to worry about him. This meaningful connection created a feeling of peace and calm. As Linda felt this reassurance the bird flew away, as if it understood that the message had been received.

Later in her studio, Linda painted in her usual way, working spontaneously and intuitively, without any preconceived ideas about the subject matter or outcome. Although there were sometimes touches of yellow in her other paintings, it was unusual for this colour to be so prominent. Without conscious awareness or intention, Linda had painted the yellow finch, capturing this meaningful experience through her creative process.

“It was truly an otherworldly feeling when I finished and realized what it was. Something had guided me to express my love and grief for this man.”

Observing the finished artwork, Linda re-experienced a sense of spiritual connection with her father-in-law. Even now, when looking at Yellow Finch she feels that there is a sacred quality to this painting, and that the spiritual dimension remains present.

BACKGROUND

During her early time at university, Linda struggled to find a major that was a good fit. In her 30's she returned to her studies, enrolling at Dominican University in California and completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts. She recalls her time there with fondness because it was a supportive environment with small classes and the environment nurtured her creativity. The programme offered a variety of liberal arts classes, and she read books that reinforced her sense of an unseen, spiritual dimension. It was at this time that she first began creating in an intuitive way. Experimenting with printmaking by combining monotype, chine collé, and drawing, fostered an instinctual way of working. The element of surprise when the final image was revealed, influenced the future direction of her creative practice.

Following graduation, Linda worked as a digital painter for Lucas Film in California, but found it challenging to be tied to a computer all day. After moving to Colorado, she began doing her own digital work including photo restoration, and accepted commissions to paint animal portraits. These paintings had an intuitive element, incorporating abstract backgrounds and unusual colours. Although



she enjoyed this way of working, she felt called to shift into painting that was entirely abstract. She sensed that, as well as providing a clear focus for her creative practice, abstract painting could lead to rediscovering the joyful surprise she had experienced when printmaking. The subject matter and style of her early paintings evolved from semi-abstract depictions of planetary systems to striking, brightly coloured floral forms.

Gradually, Linda found herself transitioning into abstract expressionist painting. One of the pivotal points in reclaiming her creative freedom and intuition occurred while working with an integrative psychiatrist. At one session, during a conversation exploring her creative blocks, Linda felt a meaningful connection with her therapist. This acted as a catalyst and Linda experienced a shift - a sudden certainty that she could overcome the blocks. Afterwards she created one of her favourite paintings 'You Can't Keep Spring From Coming' (shown on the next page).



YOU CAN'T KEEP SPRING FROM COMING
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

CREATIVE PROCESS

For Linda, intuitive painting involves paying attention to her own inner voice, along with being open and receptive to a spiritual source of guidance. Her practice is characterised by a striving for authenticity. Being in a state where she is not over-thinking or controlling the outcome is vital. Although she finds that many parts of the process can be joyful, she also feels frustrated at times. Maintaining a balance between free-flowing spontaneity and conscious attention to working skillfully with the materials is important.

“Being able to shift back and forth from intuition to discernment is essential”



ICE DANCE
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

During lockdown, Linda enrolled on an intensive three-month creative visionary program online. Although she considered the course to be enjoyable and worthwhile, her creative practice experienced a set-back. Up to this point, selecting colours had been an intuitive process. It seemed that the emphasis on theory, and a more prescriptive use of methods and materials, had impeded Linda's natural expression. Although she had overcome previous obstacles to authentic creative expression, this new block felt intractable and lasted several

An essential part of Linda's process is listening to music. This helps her to eliminate critical thinking by creating presence and an awareness of her physicality. Music transforms her energy, changes her state of consciousness, and allows her to tune into spiritual guidance. Different emotions emerge depending on the type of music, and Linda's movements and mark-making will often flow with the rhythm of the music. This helps her to move from a thinking mode to one of feeling and embodiment.

During lockdown, Linda enrolled on an intensive three-month creative visionary program online. Although she considered the course to be enjoyable and worthwhile, her creative practice experienced a set-back. Up to this point, selecting colours had

months. She found herself looking at her earlier paintings and wondering, *how did I do that?* The course tutor advised her that it was not unusual for this to happen, and it could take time to assimilate the new knowledge into her own way of working.

Many people are intimidated by a blank canvas but beginning a new painting is the part of the creative process that Linda treasures most. She loves dripping paint onto the canvas and relinquishing control over the outcome. In contrast to her home, where she prefers a simple and minimalistic style, her studio is joyfully messy and colourful. The ability to ‘throw things around and not worry about it’ is pivotal to her freedom of expression and ‘frees up the brain, somehow.’ For Linda, an intensely absorbed burst of spontaneous creation usually influences the initial framework of the composition. The next stage, which involves bringing these intuitive expressions into a cohesive aesthetic, is more challenging. After working on a painting for an extensive amount of time, Linda



A HUNDRED SWEET PROMISES
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

can start to over-think the process. To keep the momentum and energy flowing, she moves between multiple pieces and shifts between different methods. Her studio is populated with artwork on canvas and paper, in various stages of completion, which means that she can always move onto something new. If she becomes frustrated during the process, Linda will stop working on the piece for a couple of weeks. When she returns to the painting and completes it she feels an immense sense of relief, and a joyful appreciation of having endured and worked through the challenges.

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

From the age of eight years old, Linda felt a heightened sensitivity to sensory stimulation in the physical environment. She describes her early family life as turbulent, and has since struggled with OCD, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. She also has a history of migraines, an experience that she depicted in her digital painting 'Headache', created for the National Headache Foundation of Chicago.



HEADACHE

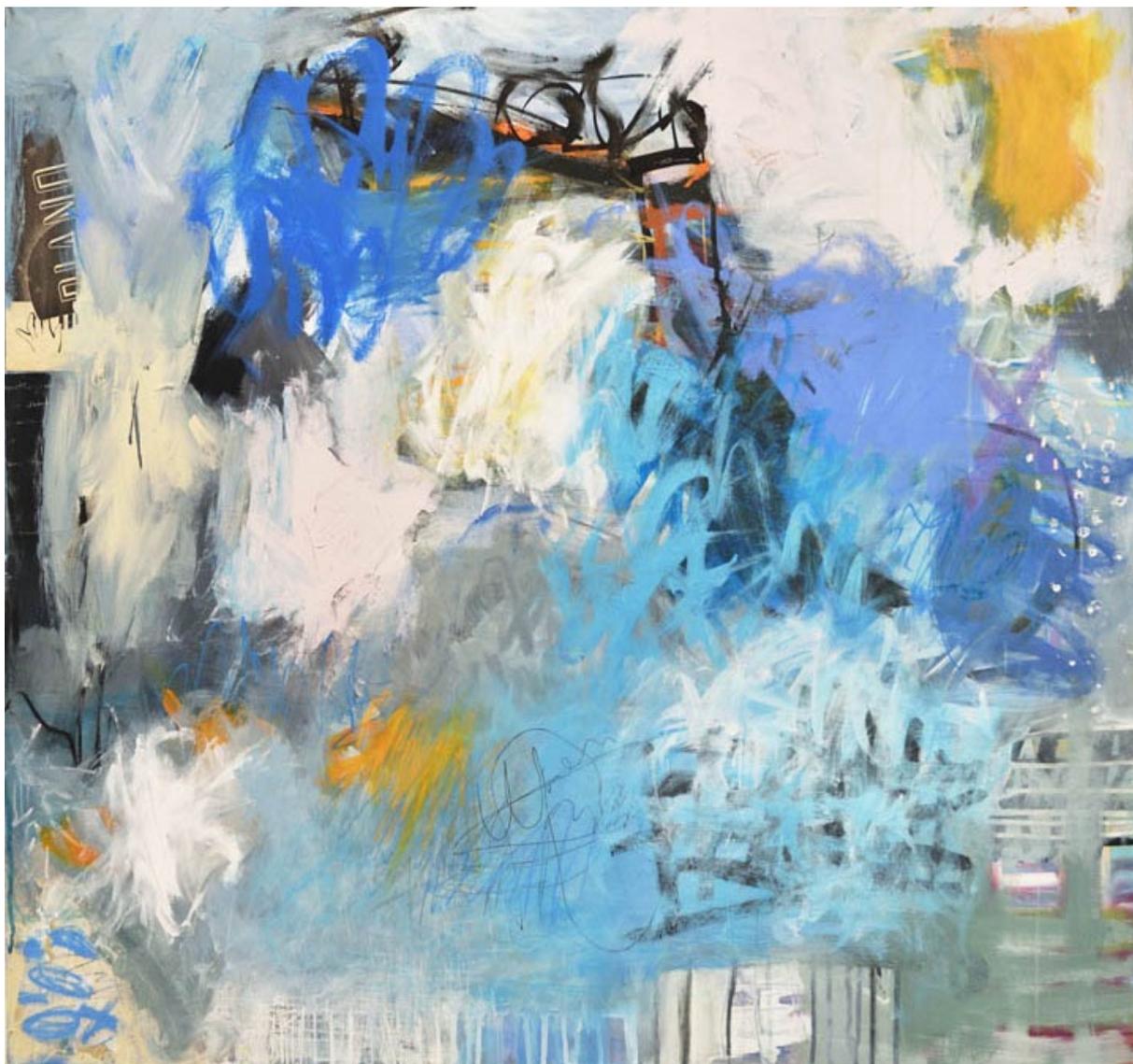
DIGITAL PAINTING

*CREATED FOR THE NATIONAL HEADACHE
FOUNDATION OF CHICAGO*

Response Prevention Therapy (ERP) which has helped to reduce her anxiety associated with particular places and situations.

Loud noises such as music and voices, bright lights, or simply being surrounded by too much activity can be overwhelming for Linda. There have been times, such as when going to a restaurant for dinner, when she felt compelled to leave because the environment was too noisy or busy. This can be worse in some situations, particularly when her anxiety level is high.

For Linda, a healthy diet and being active are important. Regular yoga practice, hiking in the mountains, and spending time in nature with her husband, James, and dog, Maisie, help to soothe her nervous system. Linda notes that many highly sensitive people have OCD. Knowing more about this condition, and understanding how the brain functions, has been reassuring. In addition to medication, her current treatment at the University of Colorado involves Exposure



FLOATING ABOVE A DIFFICULT WORLD
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

As a highly sensitive person, Linda's creativity often helps her to process difficult emotions. The tension between her inner world and the external world is a theme that appears in many of her paintings. *Floating Above A Difficult World* (pictured above) is about overcoming these challenges. For Linda, this painting has a sense of peace about it, 'almost like being in the clouds.'

As someone who has been highly functioning and successful in the external world, it is only fairly recently that Linda has felt able to open up about the challenges she has endured. Now, she is determined not to hide this aspect of herself. By sharing her story, she hopes that others may feel able to express their truth. She believes that living a life of authenticity is connected to finding creative authenticity, and is a lifelong process of adaptation.

“You are changing and your art is changing and your world is changing.”



BEYOND ORDINARY LIMITS
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS

For Linda, the inner turmoil of life is sometimes also mirrored in the creative process itself and her paintings are created through multiple layers. She often starts by writing on the canvas, expressing whatever emotion is present at that moment. Black is predominant when she experiences dark, depressing feelings, but gradually the canvas will be layered with brighter colours representing light and positivity. The layers of the painting mirror the strata of her experience, including elements that have perhaps never been seen by anyone else. People viewing her paintings often sense what Linda describes as an 'undercurrent', yet also feel that they are ultimately uplifting.

Although Linda's paintings are now predominantly abstract, objects and forms are sometimes visible. These forms were often noticed by Linda's mum who had a keen sixth sense, and with whom Linda shared a strong connection. From a young age, Linda has been aware of an energetic field. Her friends describe her as sensitive, perceptive and psychic. She often experiences an acute awareness of other people's emotions. With certain people, she feels an energetic, non-local connection and often senses when they are experiencing challenging circumstances. She has vivid dreams varying from experiences of flying, to intense and confusing dreams that can be tricky to process. The emotional content and themes from her dreams are sometimes interwoven into her art.

Another experience that Linda describes as 'otherworldly' relates to how she and her husband found their current home. Her previous house had been small, with her studio space relegated to a dark and depressing basement. Many years before, Linda and her husband had shared their wish-list with a close friend, who had since passed away. They had dreamed of finding a place by a creek with open space, privacy and an artist's studio. After looking at thirty or forty properties, and beginning to lose hope, they visited a house that was only five miles from their current location. Walking inside, they immediately knew it was right for them. The house had previously belonged to a ceramicist and Linda was amazed that there was a large studio ready for her to move into. Both Linda and her husband felt that their friend had somehow guided them to this special place.



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LULU

A JOURNEY OF THE HEART

“As you set out for Ithaca
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery”

Excerpt from first stanza of Ithaca by C. P. Cavafy

Lulu was in her forties and living in Lithuania, when she fell passionately in love. Facing insurmountable obstacles that prevented her from being with the object of her affection, she found the experience both exhilarating and painful. After moving to another country several thousand miles away, she struggled to process the separation. One day, in a state of torment, she decided to paint. Although she had not painted before, it seemed essential to work on a vast expanse ‘that would contain a story that felt larger than the universe.’ Lulu sought out the largest canvas that she could physically carry, and began a two year journey of expressing the story of her lost love in visual form.

Note - As this story was shared under a pseudonym, personal details have been omitted or changed, and the painting is not featured.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Inspired by aboriginal art, Lulu created her painting with thousands of tiny, colourful dots. It became a symbolic representation of her love, with each detail representing a memory, feeling or dream. For Lulu, two different experiences co-existed throughout the creative process; a meditative state of complete absorption in the details of the painting, and an expansive emotional high.



Although her painting was intended as a way to transmute a painful sense of loss and frustration, a tremendous vitality was generated in the process of creation. Lulu felt that something within her had been ignited with a phenomenal energy. Riding this emotional high, and surprised by her ability to paint, she began to feel capable of transcending other perceived limitations. This fuelled her to train in competitive dance and take her life in new directions.

Transferring her intense emotional experiences onto the canvas also deepened Lulu's connection with Joe, the love she had lost. Ithaca became a portal that facilitated clairvoyance. After completing the painting and hanging it in her home, she began to have vivid dreams that shared or foretold important events that were happening in Joe's life.

One night, Lulu dreamt that she arrived at Joe's home dressed completely in black, as if in mourning. He explained he couldn't see her because his father needed him. The next day, a mutual friend contacted Lulu, with the news that Joe's father had died. Other dreams about a new relationship and the birth of twins, were later confirmed as being related to events in Joe's waking life. Sometimes the communication of information through dreams was more symbolic. Lulu recalls one disturbing dream, reminiscent of *The Guernica* painting by Picasso, where Joe's body parts were displaced and disconnected. At the time, she was certain that Joe was suffering acutely, but he reassured her nothing was wrong. Years later, he confided that he had avoided telling her about the painful events in his life because he knew she would worry. It was only in retrospect that Lulu realised how closely events had unfolded in line with her intuitive senses and the precognitive nature of her dreams.

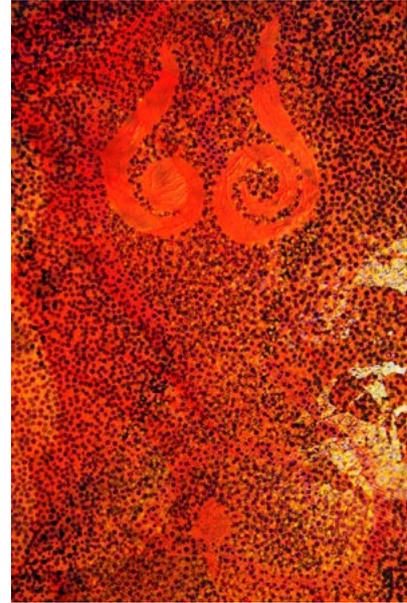
Lulu uses the analogy of cooking a nourishing pot of soup to describe the process of painting Ithaca. Even though the contents meld together as they cook, selecting the freshest ingredients and adding them with care, brings joy to her heart. With Ithaca, the qualities of loving intention were the energetic ingredients that she strove to infuse into the painting.

With humour, she acknowledges that the practicalities of daily life can sometimes get in the way of feeling and expressing unconditional love. Connecting with a pure loving source that felt like she 'had just met God' helped her to embody this feeling and catalysed a transformational journey. Her creative process became charged with the desire to learn to love unconditionally, and to foster gratitude for the positive energy that she felt while expressing herself creatively.

While Ithaca was in progress, Lulu worked on other large paintings, creating around twenty in total which she describes as 'a museum to whatever it was that I was experiencing.' Although the motivation to create these other paintings was similarly rooted in the desire to process her experiences, Ithaca remains unique and deeply meaningful for Lulu. What began as a container to deposit challenging emotions, ultimately became a beautiful piece of art and a symbol of personal transformation. Originally inspired by Odysseus' journey back to his homeland of Ithaca, the meaning behind the name of the painting was later enhanced when Lulu discovered the poem Ithaca, by C. P. Cavafy. This poem is about a long journey of discovery, and the importance of focusing on the sensual experiences, treasures, and wisdom that are collected along the way. Now, when looking at her painting, Lulu sees a pathway to her own heart and understands it as a map that charts her transformative journey.

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

Lulu describes the connection between her inner and outer world as porous. A meditation practice helps her to tap into a higher consciousness and access knowledge beyond material reality. She considers her dreams to be a wellspring of guidance that tethers her to this spiritual source and helps her to navigate life. In the past she has used the power of her intention to send a message to her children, or to connect with loved ones. The embodied sense of unconditional love that she discovered through painting Ithaca, is a source of nourishment that also enables her to extend support to others when she might otherwise feel powerless. If she knows that someone is going through a difficult time she closes her eyes and consciously sends love, courage, healing, or whatever she intuitively feels is needed.



Although grounded in day to day life, Lulu is grateful that her mind and imagination are free to transcend her physicality. She feels confident in being able to perceive subtle information, and believes that an energetic connection can be created with people who are open and receptive to this concept. At the same time, it can be frustrating when her intuitive sense is dismissed by others. She shares that it can be lonely to have experiences that may be viewed by some as a delusion. Tending to retreat from people who she does not believe will be supportive, she similarly feels that the environment she is in can either disempower her, or provide the sense of freedom that nurtures her creativity. When overwhelmed, it is essential to find a space where she can hide from view and recharge. The last few years have been a difficult time for her and her family. Having a sense of support from a non-physical source 'has been a lifesaver' that has allowed her to navigate the challenges with confidence and optimism.



USHERING THE EMIGRANTS
ACRYLIC ON CANVAS, 66CM x 80CM, 2013

Mary Lou Springstead is a mixed-media artist. Originally from Florida, she now lives in Middlesbrough, England. Her artwork contains autobiographic elements alongside mythical symbolism and often touches on socio-political themes. Working spontaneously and intuitively, mysterious imagery often emerges in her paintings, creating feeling of being connected to an expansive source.

MARY LOU SPRINGSTEAD

A PROTECTIVE FORCE

After developing a meaningful long-distance friendship, Mary Lou travelled from Florida to England to meet the man who, unknown to her at the time, would become her husband. Carrying only one small item of hand luggage, she expected it to be a short visit but she did not return to her previous home. A few years later Mary Lou applied for permanent residence in the UK. Obtaining a spousal visa was a complex, time-consuming process. The stressful nature of this was compounded by the UK's decision to exit the European Union. Mary Lou sensed a xenophobic undercurrent that unsettled her and amplified concerns for her future.

Feeling a resonance with her ancestors who had moved to the US from England, Scotland, and other parts of Europe, Mary Lou began researching imagery related to the topic of emigration. A compelling photograph of Irish travellers arriving in New York became the basis for her painting, *Ushering the Emigrants*, shown left.

After depicting five figures in transit, Mary Lou spontaneously painted eyes hovering above them. These took the form of winged beings, showering golden light onto each traveller. To Mary Lou, this felt like a 'protective energy that ushered them to safety.' A human face and serpent also unexpectedly emerged at the bottom of the painting. The emergence of these mysterious images seemed to tap into into an expansive source of inspiration. Through the process of creating a symbolic refuge for the figures in her artwork, Mary Lou also began to feel protected during this stressful time in her life.

BACKGROUND

As a child, Mary Lou lived near woodland and was fortunate to spend a lot of time in nature. She was always deeply absorbed in her imagination and loved to make things. Growing up in a part of Florida that tended towards social conservatism and religious dogma, Mary Lou struggled to feel accepted and reveal her authentic self. Feeling the need to hide her true values created an underlying anxiety that was present through her adolescence and early twenties. During a particularly challenging period of her life as a teenager, Mary Lou used her love for art as a way to process emotions that she found difficult to express verbally. Discovering that her creations also elicited a positive response from other people provided motivation to continue with her artistic activities, ultimately leading her to do a BA in Fine Art. Later, she completed an MA in Art Therapy which provided a framework for understanding the relationship between creativity and the unconscious.

In the early 2000's, Mary Lou was devastated when she received news that her cousin had died of suicide. Although they had lost touch in recent years, they had been close friends as children and had spent a lot of time together. In the window of her studio there was a photograph of them standing together, holding hands. As a way to process her deep grief, Mary Lou used this image as the starting point to create a painting titled *Childhood Friends* (shown on the next page). In addition to the two childhood figures in the foreground of the painting, she added a Dakini as protection for her cousin. Painting this sacred being was a source of comfort for Mary Lou and felt like a symbolic way to guide her cousin's spirit to another world. Four little photographs of the painting are collaged at the corners of the original artwork, adding to the otherworldly atmosphere. This painting, and the process of creating it, were particularly meaningful for Mary Lou because circumstances beyond her control had prevented her from attending her cousin's funeral.

In 2010, following her move from Florida to the UK, Mary Lou completed a second MA in Future Design. After leading a visual arts programme for older people, she worked as a Learning Support Assistant at an arts college, supporting young adults who live with dyslexia, autism or other neurodevelopmental conditions. When she is not at her day job, she spends time in her studio developing her creative practice.



CHILDHOOD FRIENDS

ACRYLIC & MIXED MEDIA ON CARDBOARD, 80CM X 100CM, 2000

CREATIVE PROCESS



MEMORIES OF HOME
 ACRYLIC ON CANVAS
 81CM X 87CM, 2016

in her eyes as she paints, the process ultimately generates a positive shift in her energy. At times, something beautiful within her painting can bring her to tears. Even without a specific intention or topic in mind, the act of painting can bring memories to the surface of her awareness or reveal hidden emotions. Doodling also allows a flow of expression from a source beyond her conscious mind. This tends to be an unfolding process that continues after the painting or drawing is complete. When Mary Lou looks back at the imagery that has spontaneously emerged and reflects on the contents, she often grasps a deeper understanding of the underlying meaning.

Although some imagery and symbols reoccur in Mary Lou's artwork, other aspects that emerge are surprising and unknown. With an interest in archetypal symbolism and myth, Mary Lou has spent a lot of time researching symbols and acknowledges that

Through working intuitively and spontaneously, Mary Lou sometimes enters an altered state of consciousness when painting. An essential aspect of this process is that she is alone. This enables her to relax into a quiet, inner space. If she is surrounded by people she can feel too self-conscious. By becoming absorbed in the lines, shapes and colours of the painting, and letting go of conscious thought processes, Mary Lou enters a subtle trance state that is both focused and relaxed.

As someone who experiences powerful emotions, Mary Lou finds her arts practice a valuable way to transform difficult feelings. If she is concerned or anxious about something, turning to art can provide relief. Although she sometimes feels tears welling up



THE GUARDIAN
 ACRYLIC & MIXED MEDIA
 ON CANVAS, 2010

this can have an influence on her creative output. Yet it often seems that she has access to a more expansive source of inspiration. This has led her to wonder if she has a muse or other otherworldly support. Although Mary Lou encounters inevitable struggles in the process of creating her artwork, when it is finished she experiences ‘a feeling of peace rather than a heady, ego-driven feeling of accomplishment.’

The creative process feels very different to Mary Lou when she is doing commercial work that involves logical thought and advance planning. With her robot-themed artwork she is deeply absorbed when researching the imagery and can spend hours looking at references. While unexpected inspiration can occur during this process, Mary Lou feels that it lacks the same level of openness and playful spontaneity that is a key element of tapping into a deeper source.

SENSITIVITY & PERCEPTION

Uncertain if her intense need for time alone in a quiet space indicates a high degree of introversion, Mary Lou has wondered if she might be on the autism spectrum. Becoming more aware of the conditions that help her to flourish has been immensely valuable to her. She needs a lot of time to think, meditate, research and 'just be'. Her childhood love of nature and animals has stayed with her and, although she does not have easy access to the countryside, she believes it would be deeply restorative to spend more time in tranquil natural spaces.



PARTING OF THE WAYS
 WATERCOLOUR, ACRYLIC & INK ON PAPER
 30.5CM X 40.5CM, 2009

Even though Mary Lou sometimes loves playing her music loudly, she can be sensitive to noise. Being around too many people talking can be tiring and irritating for her. In busy situations she can easily get 'peopled-out' and feel exhausted. At work, finding five minutes to hide away somewhere can provide a much-needed opportunity to recharge when she is overwhelmed. In an unavoidable situation where she needs to talk and interact with other people for an extended time, she will find an alternative way to restore her energy.

Mary Lou has a rich inner life and a creative imagination, describing the boundaries between her inner world and the external world as a 'thin veil'. The contents of her nightly dreams are vivid and can leave an emotional residue that extends into waking life for some time. Disturbing dreams can linger on her mind; if they feature someone betraying her, she typically remains angry for an entire day, feeling the same emotions as if it had occurred in material reality.

While her imaginative abilities can be a powerful source of inspiration for her creative process, at times it takes on a negative aspect and feeds her anxiety. Mary Lou is highly empathetic and tends to feel things deeply. When others are suffering, or when she is exposed to upsetting news stories, it can be very draining for her. She often finds it necessary to put up a mental boundary as protection but, with people who she is close to, it is impossible to disconnect in that way. In certain situations, if she does not make a conscious decision to limit her involvement, she risks being overwhelmed by a vicarious emotional response. Similarly, creating socio-political themed artwork can evoke grief because she feels a deep connection to collective suffering. Although her sensitivity can make life challenging, Mary Lou is determined to ‘continue to reach for the invisible and express these visions.’

As a highly intuitive person, Mary Lou feels that her true nature is somewhat incompatible with the values of current society. She finds it difficult to reconcile the tension between a need to earn money and nurturing her creative spirit. She would love to find a job that provided the freedom to express herself fully and is jokingly wistful about the possibility of discovering an advertisement that says *Visionary Artist Wanted*. She feels strongly that a societal structure based on capitalism is detrimental to her ability to thrive. At the same time, she acknowledges that participation in these aspects of society is necessary to meet her basic survival needs. Without this, she would be unable to focus on her art.

In order to nurture her creativity it is important for Mary Lou to be well-rested and healthy, have a dedicated space for her creative practice, and have time to focus on her inner world.

Although intuition and receptivity are key aspects of her practice, she recognises that discipline and an element of obsessiveness are crucial to her work as an artist.



DRYAD 3
GELLI PRINT, ACRYLIC & INK ON PAPER
12.7CM X 17.5CM, 2022

Mary Lou is open to meaningful signs and symbols appearing in everyday life. She appreciates that they often seem to turn up when she needs encouragement, or in response to a question that she would like an answer to. These synchronicities manifest in different ways, including overheard conversations, something on TV, or an item in the street. Mary Lou recalls an especially meaningful occurrence when she felt heartbroken after losing her cousin. After spending weeks crying inconsolably, she went for a walk on a deserted beach and came across a beach ball with her cousin's name written on it. This timely encounter felt like a message from her cousin, gently reminding Mary Lou to have fun. Another time, when she was demoralised and planned to cancel her art website, she unexpectedly received an order that felt like a sign of support and an indication that she shouldn't give up. For Mary Lou, these spontaneous synchronicities are an exciting confirmation of a deeper meaning to life.



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MORE ARTISTS - CONTACT DETAILS

In addition to the artists whose stories are shared in this book, many more individuals responded to the initial survey, corresponded with me by email, and participated in an online creative exercise. I am deeply grateful. All of the information shared was worthy of further exploration and it was with regret that time limitations meant that it was not possible to interview every participant. Some of these artists are listed here and I encourage you to visit their websites.



ESME PODMORE

Esme Podmore makes mixed-media work exploring identity, memory and trauma. She is currently a student at the University of Suffolk.

- www.instagram.com/esme.is.making.art
- Current project documented at - <https://www.piecesofourselves.co.uk>



FAUSTO BINI

Fausto Bini strives to convey a vibratory excitation of the atmosphere, with forms and colours like pulsing waves of energy in constant regeneration.

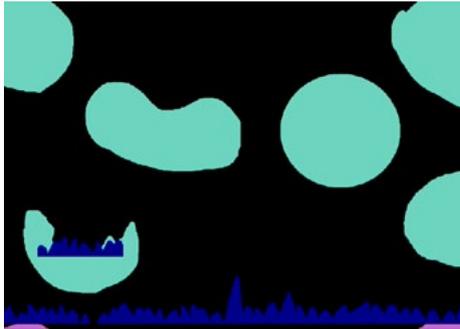
- www.artfinder.com/artist/fausto-bini
- fausto@colourambient.com



JOHN CUTTING

John Cutting is currently studying for an MFA at York St John University. His work manipulates the tactile sensibility of the senses while challenging prejudice and inequality.

- johncuttingvisualartist.co.uk
- rjcutting@outlook.com



LUCAS REBELO

Lucas Rebelo is an experimental audiovisual artist from Brazilian Amazonia working with digital art, music, video, photography and occasional writing.

- www.linktr.ee/lucasrebelo
- luqalbuq@gmail.com



ROGER GREGORY

Roger Gregory explores the human body to produce surreal art, using an abstraction process that eliminates societal labels and imposed or perceived boundaries.

- www.contemporarycollage.art
- www.instagram.com/rogergregoryartist
- roger27art@icloud.com



VIV LEVER

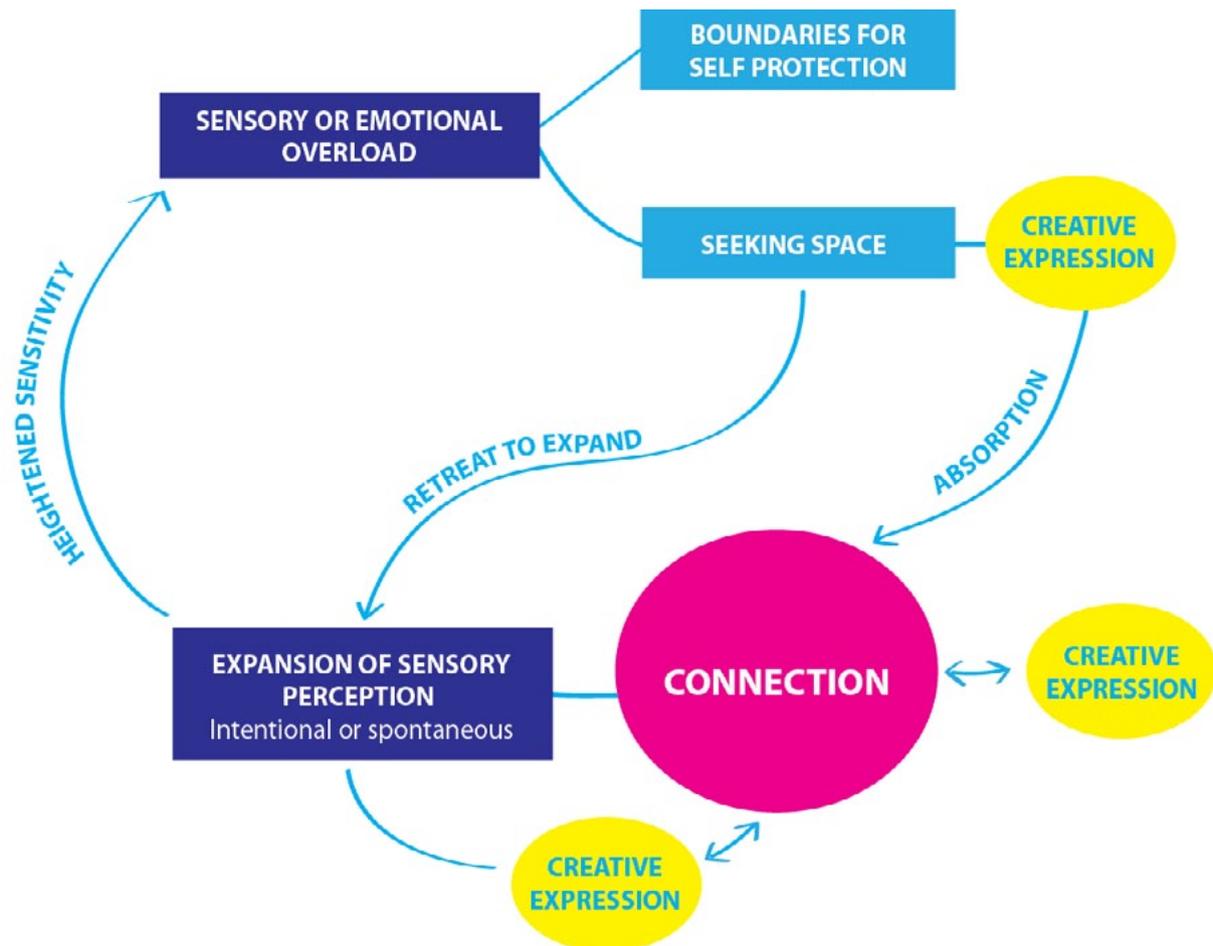
Viv Lever creates art using traditional house slates and acrylic paint. Dictated by natural striations which each slate presents, she applies colours, dots, lines and marks to create uniquely vibrant work.

- www.instagram.com/viv_leverslateartist
- vivlever@yahoo.co.uk

SECTION 2

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research was guided by Integral Inquiry, a transpersonal approach developed by William Braud. Within this framework, I used methods from Narrative Inquiry and Arts-based Research. Throughout the analysis process, varied ways of knowing were intentionally used. Shifting between analytical and intuitive methods, and using ordinary and non-ordinary states of consciousness, created multiple ways of understanding the data. In addition to an in-depth exploration of the individual stories, I conducted a cross-case analysis. A simplified version of the thematic map is below, illustrating the findings and how each theme is involved in a fluid process including expansive perception, sensory overload, creative expression and connection.



The theme that lay at the heart of the stories was Connection. This was a thread that interwove through the stories on many different layers, and was linked to various stages of the creative process. In the survey and interviews, words like ‘mysterious’, ‘otherworldly’ or ‘a presence’ were often used when referring to a connection to a transpersonal or non-physical source. In some cases, the connection was considered to be with a ‘deeper’ or ‘higher’ part of the self. Several participants also related stories where the creative process had connected them to a loved one they had lost. For others, it provided an emotional connection with someone living but who was not physically reachable.

While the sensitivity of participants often led to them experiencing Sensory or Emotional Overload, creative expression provided a way to process intense emotions and deal with challenging experiences. Managing sensory or emotional overload was typically related to a situation that was beyond control or related to overstimulation. Participants responded to Sensory or Emotional Overload by using Boundaries as Self Protection (a way of reducing stimulation), or Seeking Space (providing the opportunity to expand and typically resulting in creative expression).

Establishing mental or energetic boundaries was a way to protect the integrity of self from external influences including environmental factors, vicarious emotional experiences, or subtle energetic influences. Retreating from over-activation was often a catalyst for Expansion of Sensory Perception. Nonordinary states of consciousness often manifested as a heightened awareness (sound, colour, light, patterns, bodily awareness) and/or a more acute intuitive sense.

In most cases, nonordinary states of consciousness and nonordinary experiences were closely intertwined. Rather than preceding the artwork, the nonordinary state was typically an inherent aspect of the creative process and was characterised by receptivity, absorption and deep connection. Most participants experienced a spontaneous heightened state of awareness that, if followed into a state of absorption, opened a connection with a transpersonal source. Creative expression was often a continuation of this dynamic process. Many participants had also developed methods that enabled them to enter a nonordinary state and access creative flow. Creative expression and connection seemed to operate as a feedback loop, and participants often described other unusual experiences that were related to the artwork.

Overall, connections emerged in different ways: as a catalyst for the creative process, through the process of creation, or as an evolving relationship with the final artwork. These aspects were often intertwined, fostering an ongoing sense of connection. Art that had been created in this way often seemed to evolve over time, unfolding in tandem with aspects of the participants lives and linking with other nonordinary experiences.

In addition to psychological boundaries, many other types of boundaries were evident in the participants' stories and often shifted in ways (intentionally and unintentionally) in a process that danced between retraction and expansion. This generally related to the interaction between the participants' inner world and external world which was described in varying ways, from a harmonious sense of unity to conflict. A sense of tension was evident between; expansiveness and self-containment, authentic self and societal or cultural expectations, free creative expression and practical or commercial aspects, and spiritual and corporeal existence. In contrast, the intuitive creative process was typically characterised by a dialogic process that transcended these tensions and created a sense of connection.

DISCUSSION

This study illustrates how creativity, heightened perception and boundaries can manifest in the everyday lives of individuals. The results indicate that heightened perception was often related to sensory or emotional overload. A retreat provided the opportunity to expand and could lead to the experience of connection, often of a spiritual or transpersonal nature. Most participants used words like ‘porous’, ‘permeable’ or ‘fluid’, or suggested there was no distinction, when discussing the boundary between their inner and external worlds. This is in resonance with the concept of a filter or membrane that determines the amount of material crossing the threshold between the conscious and unconscious (Thalbourne, 2009).



Creative expression offered a way to externalize and process this material, and artmaking in this context was consistently linked with a sense of expansiveness. The compulsion to create was felt by many of the participants from a young age and typically involved various forms of creative expression. This ties in with the concept of hypergraphia, an intense drive to write or draw, which is an aspect of transliminality and connected with the temporal lobe, which is also implicated in mystical experiences (Thalbourne et al., 2003).

Hart and Ingle (2019) discuss how permeability can lead to an increased vulnerability, particularly when experiencing the emotions of other people. This was evident in many of the participants’ stories and sometimes led to the intentional creation of a protective boundary. Most talked about the importance of having time alone, either as a way to recharge or shift into an expansive state. This was also an inherent aspect of their creative practice. While the tendency to retreat was typically related to heightened sensitivity, which is an aspect of transliminality and thin boundaries (Hartmann, 1990; Thalbourne & Maltby, 2008), it also created conditions that were likely to be conducive to expansive states of awareness.

Withdrawal from sensory stimulation is linked to NSCs and nonordinary experiences (Grof, 2010), a connection that is further evidenced in studies investigating psi phenomenon. Many controlled

studies investigating psi utilise the Ganzfeld, a method of heightening subtle perception through minimising sensory input from the external world (Rabeyron et al., 2018). This resonates with the findings in the current study that quietude and solitude were often key conditions for shifts in consciousness and nonordinary experiences. Nevertheless, some participants who found busy environments or noise overwhelming also used loud music as a tool to intentionally shift state and enter creative flow. Although this may seem contradictory, evocative music is used in shamanic cultures to induce trance states (Krippner, 2000) and is a key part of Western therapeutic techniques such as Grof’s holotropic breathwork (Grof & Grof, 2010). Kreiselmayer (2016) points out the paradoxical situation that those who measure highly on transliminality tend to be both highly sensitive and sensation-seeking. Such individuals, while being susceptible to overstimulation, are also motivated to seek out stimulating sensory experiences. This theory may explain the shifting and situational responses to sensory stimuli.



Absorption is a key aspect of transliminality (Thalbourne et al., 1997), boundaries (Hartmann et al., 1991), flow states (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013), and is also related to ease in shifting state of consciousness (Pekala et al., 1985). Furthermore, Wendler and Schubert (2019) discovered strong correlations between synaesthesia and creativity, both of which have been related to transliminality (Thalbourne et al., 2003) and boundaries (Hartmann et al., 2001). Thalbourne et al. (2003) also describe the heightened connectivity between thoughts, feelings and sensory experience as “synaesthetic-like”, postulating this could be a key factor in transliminality (p. 1972). In the current study, three of the 25 survey participants identified themselves as synaesthetes. Cross-modal experiences and sensory blending were also evident in the stories of participants who did not identify as synaesthetes. An intermingling of the senses may also link to the participants’ tendency to have nonordinary experiences. Simmonds-Moore (2022) posits that synaesthesia could facilitate access to subtle,

preconscious, or non-local information and be a factor in exceptional or transpersonal experiences. There are also potential links here with Mindell's (2016) theory of a subtle flow of information that exists in a realm typically below our conscious awareness and can be tapped into through the body and intuitive senses. From a personal perspective, I can see parallels with constellation practice, where sensations in the body often lead to a creative unfolding, revealing information that appears to be beyond the limits of personal knowledge. Exciting avenues for future research could exist in exploring how expanded sensory awareness can transcend physical boundaries.



Some individuals are more likely to report psi phenomena and the paranormal, including those who are highly transliminal (Thalbourne, 2009). One explanation for this is the evidence that subtle energetic information is being processed as a natural aspect of brain function, but individual awareness varies (Don, 2010). For many of the participants in the current study, nonordinary experiences were an accepted occurrence and an integral part of their lives. Rather than one significant event, most shared multiple stories relating to occurrences that would typically be regarded as unusual. Synchronicities were also commonly reported. It would be interesting to determine whether frequency is fairly stable across the population but awareness or memories of these experiences are more readily accessible when there is less inhibition between the conscious and unconscious? It may be that art making creates an anchor that ties these experiences more securely to everyday reality, improving recollection over time.

Participant's descriptions of events often demonstrated an expansive interpretive framework and an appreciation of the symbolic, mythic, subtle, and multi-layered. As a result, events and objects in everyday life often took on a heightened significance, which was often intertwined with their creative process. Thalbourne (2009) suggests that paranormal belief could be "a form of associative creativity" while pointing out that this does not preclude the involvement of influences that transcend space and time (p. 378). Although perception could be influenced by the personal unconscious, perhaps a pathway to more expansive, transpersonal dimensions is also accessible. The theory of quantum physicist, David Bohm, parallels the perspective of ancient philosophies and mystical traditions, suggesting that the observable material world is being formed by an equally real, but hidden, reality

(Lazlo, 2020). Silberstein (2021) posits that a realm of creative inspiration may exist beyond our personal psyche, and that certain areas of the brain may mediate access or act as a filter that limits access to this and other non-material information.

For most of the interview participants, challenging circumstances were directly linked to the original story they shared. All mentioned that, at various points in their lives, art-making had provided a way to cope, to process or integrate a difficult experience, or was fundamental to their wellbeing. The creative process often provided a path to authentic self-expression and an expansion that wasn't always possible in everyday life.



Art with a sacred or spiritual dimension may have additional potential to contribute to wellbeing through the creation of meaning and connection. Facilitators and therapists who utilise the transformative and healing aspects of creative expression note how it can lead to insight into deeper or higher parts of the self (Rogers, 1999; Marlan, 2018). Participants often sensed a sacred quality to their creations. This is also evident in first-hand reports in the transpersonal literature (McIver, 2015; Linton, 2015; Herman; 2015) as well as in accounts of the lives of spiritually-influenced artists such as Emma Kunz, Georgiana

Houghton and Hilma af Klimt (Houghton et al., 2018). In these cases, and in the current study, art itself often appeared to act as a mediator between material and non-material realms, aligning with the perspective of cultures who consider art to be a “two way conduit” linking humanity with the divine (Koppman, 1999, p. 92). The autonomous quality or sentience that participants often sensed in their art created additional meaning.

In his Red Book, Jung documented the dialogues and creative work that emerged through active imagination, emphasising that the symbols and images that emerge from the unconscious are living and often connect to deep archetypal structures (Jung & Shamdasani, 2009). For most of the participants their creative practice was deeply interwoven within their lives, and many of them had an evolving supportive relationship with their creations for years, or even decades. This highlights potential for a longitudinal study that could elucidate how this connection unfolds and shifts over time.

CONCLUSION



This research supports the findings of studies indicating a connection between boundaries, heightened perception, and creativity. For the participants, creative expression was an integral part of a dialogic process between their inner world and the external world. A sense of tension or conflict tended to be experienced when there was a desire for fluidity or expansion but this was not possible because the integrity of the inner world was threatened by the intensity of the external world. In contrast, feelings of unity and harmony tended to occur during the creative process. This often evolved into a sense of a transpersonal connection. As well as a way to integrate nonordinary experiences, the creative process appears to have the potential to open a doorway to such experiences, creating a sense of otherworldly support and a sense of meaning. From a broader perspective, the experiences of participants support evidence of an underlying interconnectedness between matter and mind and the expansive nature of consciousness. Perhaps the experiences of those with less rigid boundaries are indicative of latent human potential to perceive beyond the material world.

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