Art for healing; Art for consciousness change

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Abstract

From a very early age I have been drawn to create art. I have followed this passion closely throughout my entire life. After acquiring a master’s degree in art education, and subsequently, teaching high school art for 3 years I was compelled to enter the MFA program at Rochester Institute of Technology with a concentration in painting and new forms. Through this process, I discovered a great calling.

After the first year of study in the MFA program I traveled to Tibet. This journey was instrumental in the formation of my thesis: Art for Healing, Art for Consciousness Change, as was my marriage to my partner Daixin whom I met in China 3 years ago. With her as the narrative model found in each painting, I created an installation of 8, 4x8 ft paintings based upon a myriad of concepts taken from Tibetan Buddhism, my personal insights and experiences, and the book Prometheus Rising, by Robert Anton Wilson, which outlines his 8-Circuits of Human Consciousness.

The installation I created, Daixin’s 8-Circuit Path to Light, followed a symbolic model of the human Chakra system as a guide for each of the 8-Circuits to explore imagery evoked in my mind through the correlations I drew as I progressed through my understanding of the human body as an energy system. During this process I was able to bring myself from a very graphic and unsure use of oil paint, to a masterful level, capable of captivating audiences, and stimulating the minds of those who viewed my work. Such is the effect of the work of visionary artist Alex Grey, who is the single greatest western influence on my artistic path.

The experience of completing this work brought me balance in terms of my perceptions of religion, spirituality, and my artistic pursuits. I gained a deep desire to create art that is supportive of the Tibetan culture and their prophetic understanding of consciousness. This calling is supported by my everlasting desire to create works inspired by all my travels throughout the world for the purpose of bringing healing elements to the areas in which my work is displayed.
Background Influence

Painting: a profound medium for exploration of consciousness, of the human subconscious, and, until the introduction of the computer, the prominent way people portrayed the mystery of the human mind. The cave paintings at Lascaux, which date back some 35,000 years, show just how far back our artistic passions go. “…Our ancestors, even at this early date, were considering how to use abstract symbols rather than realistic pictures…it was a way of communicating information in a concise way.”¹ It is in our nature it seems, to use pictures to express more than we can with words, to use an image to mean something more. "The best art contains the whole world… in Buddhist terms, communicates with the real 'you' as a never born, never dying consciousness…beyond any judgment of form as 'art'..."² I have spent much time developing artistic skills to better express and explore; searching for clarity in my thoughts and creative expression. I have found this search was more than just a mission to obtain the necessary artistic tools. It was a search for something more, something bursting from within me, yearning to be expressed. It has always seemed that the more I created, the more “in tune” I was, the better I felt, and the happier I was.

Painting, and in the general sense, art, has always been my “eye in the pyramid”. Throughout my life I have experienced an enormous amount of positive growth (both within me, and within the lives of those around me) as a result of the process of art. From my time as a teacher aid, working with Functional Skills Development students for 5 years making art with them, to my time running artistically based programs for the City of Rochester over the course of three years, to the 4 years as an art and design teacher for the Rochester City School District, I have seen the transformation that the process of art bestows on both the artist and the viewer.

Additionally, there is one specific expression of art that in terms of its healing qualities has always been an influence on my work. “In Buddhism the mandala stands alone as the outstanding symbol of the universe, time, space, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. It is integral to the dharma. It represents the integration of human and divine realms, and is not only an artistic creation, but also a map to enlightenment.”² One could say this is where you unite with the big mind, the universal consciousness.

Art, and the act of creation can affect our world in profound ways. Presently I am interested in the way in which art can positively effect people, their emotions, and even their healing processes, and how art making or art viewing can evoke a consciousness change, in both the maker and viewer.

My first attempt at making art was a picture of a baby chicken hatching out of an egg, scrawled at the tender age of 1. I am still intrigued by metamorphosis, change, and evolution, 32 years later. I have always been captivated by mystery, the unexplained, and far-reaching possibilities. Art has followed me closely throughout my life, constantly an expression of my reflections and thoughts of all that I explore. Now I can visually communicate my thoughts and intentions; the picture I see in my mind; the emotion, with a level of profoundness that speaks to the nature of the subject I am constantly drawn to, consciousness.

My first real artistic calling was to paint murals, and that is what I have worked towards since. Murals called to me primarily because they tend to reflect the ideology of the local community, or the struggles of a specific group. This environment can be a primary place where healing, where evolution, where peace can begin. Murals also use scale more so than other types of painting to reflect importance, meaning, and the beauty of local customs and beliefs.

Painting should be an all-encompassing experience; it should take the viewer completely into the world created. Paintings produced on a large scale immediately have the ability to engage the viewer from a great distance; and engage the viewer is, indeed, what artists want to do. My attraction to the use of a larger than life scale is that it is a true commitment. The work must stand out, and thus the quality of the work will also stand out. Small paintings strike me as cute, but not invigorating, certainly not awe inspiring.

With all that is involved in the process of creating art (specifically painting) the use of color was my greatest challenge. It was around the age of 20, that I began to understand some of the intricacies involved with the use of color; however, I could only delineate the steps needed to achieve a quality image through the use of color pencil. Paint was still a mystery to me. “The Scream” by Edvard Munch perplexed me for quite some time. I couldn’t comprehend how the artist used paint in that way. Therefore, I trudged my way through the overlapping of different transparencies to achieve a rich colorful feel. Even with this medium, I wanted to make large pieces. Working with color pencil and pen to create large format imagery takes a lot of time and patience. As time progressed I learned to work fast. This is what my first 2 years of college for commercial art amounted to.

I always wanted to be an inspiring painter, like Van Gogh. My father, and fellow artist David Neill introduced me to many of the classic European artists as a child. He also introduced me to what would later become my closest faith, Tibetan Buddhism. Both of these were actually a cause of much frustration for me early on, as I was always searching for the way to create images like the great artists of old. I also longed for enlightenment, to learn to meditate like a monk and have that peace. Van Gogh was the first painter to show me how much I wanted to use paint. The feeling he evokes in his work, such as the way he portrays a sunflower (I had one of these hanging in my house for over 10 years and have spent countless hours looking at it) is truly what I wanted to portray in my own work.
Paint is the purest art for me. An artist can use paint to make something from the depths of their mind look real, even beyond to surreal. Through Trompe l’oeil the artist can draw the viewer into another world. Unfortunately for me, by the age of 22, it looked like that might not be possible. I still could not paint that well. I found many related fields at which I could excel more quickly and feel more confident. I went to school for Illustration, learned how to use the computer and acquired my BFA from RIT in 2002. I found that the computer opened many doors for me artistically and I began to shift my focus from the fine arts to the digital.

Adobe Illustrator opened my eyes. With the use of this program I could understand the application methods of color pencil and how this translated into forming the illusion of a 3-dimensional environment on a 2 dimensional surface. With the computer I was able to zoom in, go back a step, even change, and/or add a color with just a click of the mouse. This was how I really began to learn to justify space with colors. This was a catalyst for a great change in my life. The computer offered me a kind of structure I had never experienced before. The computer helped balance my brain. It pulled me to the left side and I was able to redirect my focus not just with art but also with my life in general. I began to write.

Writing opened many doors as well, and from this came a true transformation for me. I saw the importance of service. Soon after I enrolled in graduate school for art education I thrust myself whole-heartedly into learning the many facets of this art form. I worked, I studied, and I grew. At the age of 25, I spiritually embraced my Buddhist roots. I began to live as I had aspired to in my youth and I watched my entire life evolve before my eyes.

**Service**

Service is the most important thing a person can give in their life. This can take on many forms: a volunteer, a teacher, a friend, a stranger. As life progressed into my twenties, I was overcome with a growing desire to help others. I thought that, instead of painting and living the artist life, I would give to the world through volunteering and teaching. I had success with designing educational programs and I embraced this newfound passion.

The left brained life was challenging at first, but it was completely necessary for my evolution. I learned how to construct lesson plans, how to order and scaffold information, organize, and plan for the unforeseen. I volunteered many hours during graduate school to schools and community-based organization; I found myself greatly inspired in helping others learn about art.

**Employment**

I was hired to teach graphic design, a different content area than what I had just spent two years learning about. Through this content area and environment I clearly saw the extent of influence “image” has on our culture, and how easily we are manipulated by it. I saw just how obsessed our society is with the look of everything, and how this construct seems more like a cheap hologram than the metaphysical reality I tended to see the world
through. We are such a content-based society. I struggled with the ramifications of this internally as I contemplated what sort of materials to present to my students. It seemed rather paradoxical. I had to teach students how to become good at, and thus support a part of a system that fundamentally I was really questioning. To compensate, I always gravitated towards utilizing the fine arts when explaining modern day graphics concepts. I believe there is a certain hierarchy that exists within the visual arts where graphic design falls under painting. Thus, as I taught, I still had room to improve my painting.

**Teaching**

Teaching High School demands understanding of a subject matter and required a step away from the lifestyle I had known before. Schools are set up to use, almost exclusively, the left-brain. This is not the way it should be. Students are taught to simply memorize, and then puke the information back. The better you puke, the better your grade (ridiculous). However, this did force me to fully learn many processes of production that I had only been slightly aware of. I couldn’t “cheat” anymore; I really had to understand what I was doing. One cannot stand in front of a class of city high school students and not have some sort of plan and some classroom management strategies. I really had to learn the computer well; both platforms (PC and Mac), and I had to be well versed in IT.

During the time I was teaching, I concentrated on polishing my renditions of the figure. As soon as I had developed a decent sense of proportion, I set my next goal on creating larger compositions in every way I could imagine. As I became engrossed in education, I also became interested in murals as a way to teach, and to inspire various subjects in the minds of students. Murals are something I have always been particularly fond of and are a huge success in the classroom, as were my memories of the Sistine Chapel when I visited Rome at the age of 16, and the study of Diego Rivera and the WPA mural artists. I was attracted to the concept of a group of artists struggling during the depression, attempting to bring some element of joy to the beaten down masses. It was healing art of sorts, the closest our society would allow at that time. This interest was also supported by a huge fascination with surrealism (Salvador Dali) and Trompe l'oeil, which takes the viewer outside the confines of reality into a super-reality. With all of these influences I set out to make murals.

**Public Art**

Through teaching I was able to play with large-scale painting in a capacity that I otherwise could not have afforded. I ran several programs for the City of Rochester that produced several successful large-scale 3-D mural installations. The largest and most successful of these was a project known as The Flower of Life (the name taken from the titled expression of sacred geometry). This was a 30ft flower constructed from wood, with seven petals, each 6feet high. Each petal contained a separate mural design on each side for a total of 14 individual murals. The murals explored the various aspects of the vast cultures of the earth. The exploration was divided into 7 distinct categories. -Art and architecture, language and symbols, music and dance, food and clothing, sports and games, and religion and beliefs. In all over 50 people from all walks of life participated in
this 6-month program. It was truly rewarding to be granted the honor to design such a program for my community.


The Flower of Life at The Blue Cross Arena, November, 2005

Photo by Robyn Neill


**Innovation**

I explored the concept of community-produced art further, combining it with computer technology to produce a truly innovative program known as the Digital Ripple. ([http://rochesterdigitalripple.com/](http://rochesterdigitalripple.com/)) This 30-day program of an entrepreneurial nature taught students how to create, build and implement a free municipal Wi-Fi network that served as the pilot program for the assessment of the feasibility of such technology for deployment throughout the City of Rochester, NY. I created a 360 page curriculum so that this sort of effort, to give those of low income, the ability to communicate, could be replicated anywhere. Our collective evolution, our consciousness change cannot occur without this. It seems, those without money are always left behind and that is unacceptable.

**Travel to China**

When I first traveled to China during the summer of 2008, it was to be a two-week trip. I ended up staying there for two months. I was overwhelmed by the ancient culture. Beijing seemed like another world to me. I had no idea what people were saying or what their culture was like except from the few snippets of Hollywood fantasy I had seen in movies, or the second-hand writings of some author in a book. After my first trip traveling across the land, I was left with a great love and respect in my heart for the Chinese people.
The next year my wife and I traveled there again. I was given an in-depth look into their customs, and beliefs through her family and friends. I began to wonder what really makes us so different.

I began to see a real commonality in people throughout the world. Indeed, there are some things that vary from land to land, but we are basically all the same. We all have the same emotions. We all want to feel good, to be successful on our individual paths. We all are afraid of things, and we all dream. We all experience the push and pull of human life. Throughout the last 2000 years of history we were led to believe that the world is so vast and contains mysterious enigmas within cultures that are beyond our comprehension. Well, the world is vast, but the mysteries I think are within the individual and within a person’s own personal fears, biases, and misinterpretations towards others. It seems all of the larger cultures of the world commit atrocities towards other human beings, whether it is towards their own cultural kind, or by invading a foreign land. I can’t think of any that are free from this. Therefore, to point fingers, to blame others for brutality and intolerance serves no real purpose, and we all seem to be doing more and more of that as time passes on. As it says in the Christian text, “let he who is without sin cast the first stone”. We should all be reminded of this in the west when we continually look at the wrong doings of others without truly looking at ourselves. We think we are so right, so righteous, and so free.

Surprisingly, in many ways the people in communist China are much more free than we are in the democratic United States. We have an illusion of free choice in the US, a concept of democracy so twisted that when people in the media, or in the community call out with grandeur that they live in the freest country in the world I am left with a puzzled look, asking myself a question for which I already have an answer. “Is that really true?” I think not. We have a one party system.
Leap of Faith

As my teaching career continued into the 3rd year, my personal art production slowed, and the urge to do my own artwork increased and soon became hard to ignore. It weighed on my heart as did my disgust with the lies teachers are forced to teach in the classroom. History is not like the textbooks say. Further, administrators for the most part want to look good first and don’t truly care about every individual student. I began to feel as if I might be in the wrong place and depression set in. This forced me to reassess my outlook on life and what it was that I was truly here to do. Teaching is honorable, service is a necessity, but I wasn’t even teaching art, and the city school district where I taught was failing on many levels. I knew I couldn’t spend the next 30 years in the classroom, I thought my life would become robotic and soulless. The only thing that kept me in the game was a steady paycheck, but in actuality, is that a reason to do something? I had avoided the path of the true fine artist’s life because I always felt somewhat inadequate in my painting skills to properly portray what was in my mind (and survive). Now, however, I thought that it was indeed within my grasp. At least I could find work as a digital artist if all else failed, but still, the gnawing inside to paint. It is fascinating to me how we can continually redefine ourselves, how we can reprogram our mind as we grow and evolve and that which you might have thought of as impossible a year ago, could now be natural.

Enter the MFA Program at R.I.T

My MFA studies marked the 9th and 10th year of college for me. My mission was now clear and my tools were strong. I entered R.I.T. with one goal, to refine my painting skills. I soon realized that this experience, a transformation, would include a vigorous exploration of my consciousness. As I began to paint I began to ask some real questions about the world, about greed, about humility, about sacrifice, about all the suffering in the world. These questions, however, led me to the desire to alleviate the suffering from within myself first. To do this, I thought it would serve me well to understand the different emotional energy centers we as humans have, what this means, and how to utilize it.

I began to meditate with success. I studied the works of Eckhart Tolle who taught me the importance of presence in life. From this point I was able to begin my spiritual learning in a more definitive way. I began to think of art as a training program for a search for consciousness change, a tool that could be used by everyone.

I experimented with form. I began with something different than the way I previously worked. I wanted to use a large-scale format in a form other than the conventional rectangle. I also wanted to create these paintings with oil paint. Until this point, all of my large-scale mural painting had been created using latex paint. So, for the first 6 months of my MFA studies, I played with the format by cutting out forms from wood. This process is quite natural for me as I have been involved in carpentry since about the age of 10. I honed my use of oils for use on a large scale with a particular attention to an even more realistic rendition of the human form.
Two months into my first quarter at RIT came an opportunity to use my digital skills once again, this time through an internship as a designer for a health art company. This consisted of using natural imagery (photographs) combined in different ways based on inherent archetypes and geometric patterns to produce calming effects for clients or audiences. This process involved several people including, doctors, therapists, and me, the designer, with the end result being large-scale digitally produced installations. This was extremely gratifying and educational for me.

When I took this influence and then combined it with my research into consciousness, my increased love of meditation and my practice of Tibetan Buddhism, all built upon my previous artistic experiences; I clearly saw my artistic path, the creation of large-scale imagery that could help heal or have some type of positive influence on the viewer. Art is a spiritual practice of the highest degree that helps the artist and the viewer understand the human psyche and the mystery of consciousness.

**Style and Influence**

As a child of the 80’s I was fortunate enough to grow up where kids still played outside after school (and changed into play clothes), video games had just come out, and most importantly, we still used our imagination. As was the case with most kids in my small town area, I read comic books. I looked at all the Todd McFarlane renditions of spider man that I could. Comics were the major influence on my artwork until about the age of 18. It is still a quality that is easy to see in my work: the use of line, outline, and graphic scenes of a story board-type.
Another great influence in my teen years was Boris Vallejo. I viewed his fantasy work as a more evolved style of the comic book artists and I really began to look at more realistic human form. I am also a detail-oriented person, fascinated with mathematics and geometry, and was inspired by M.C. Escher. I have always loved pen and ink.

The most influential artist on my artistic path has been the artist Alex Grey, arguably the leading visionary artist of the world today. His contributions to the field of sacred art are unparalleled. Like the shaman’s of many ancient societies, Grey uses art as a means for helping his audience gain some introspection into their own personal quest for self-awareness and spirituality. Having his influences deeply rooted in mysticism and Tibetan Buddhism, Grey is able to bring “otherworldly” concepts into a visual form by showing us, what lies beneath this materialistic “physical” world: our spirit, our higher self, and the experiences we as human beings have while working towards the awareness of our true self. Truly, I resonated with him immediately. I bought his books. I read all I could of his evolution and saw through the spiritual struggles, reflected in his work, a synchronicity.

Creator: Alex Grey, Title: Contemplation Work Type: Paintings Date 2002 Location: Exhibited at Feature Inc., Fall 2002 Material: oil paint on wood Measurements: 20 x 20 inches Photographer: Larry Qualls ARTstor Collection Contemporary Art (Larry Qualls Archive) Source Image and original data provided by Larry Qualls.

We both use art for personal healing as well as for potentially contributing to the healing of others. After teaching and subsequently running my spirit into the ground, my salvation came through the paintbrush. Grey’s artistic evolution clearly mirrors his personal evolution. In the beginning he focused on themes ranging from duality to death and the raw grotesqueness present in his mind and in our society. His paintings were clearly insightful and provocative, but the darkness that progressively encased them could
be too much for some art viewers to bear. It certainly had its shock value. This work was more difficult for his audience than the work he created after the mid 70’s and several mystical experiences. Grey transformed himself and his art into a visionary quest to deconstruct the many layers of consciousness we as human beings have explored for thousands of years. It is of no surprise that Grey’s practice has been related to that of shamans. Both seek to help people spiritually and physically. Through a sacred performance of or the construction of something sacred under sacred conditions, the shaman eases the illness of the individual in need. It is not so hard to believe, then that this practice could have a profound effect on our whole society. By healing himself through the practice of sacred art, Grey has transformed his inward search for the meaning of death and duality into an outward, guided discovery of human consciousness and our existential existence; to help, heal and inspire mankind. I wish to do the same.

The single greatest influence for my art has been traveling to Tibet and throughout China over the past 3 years. Viewing the Thankga paintings of the Tibetan masters, and the paintings adorning the many temple walls in China changed my art considerably.

“Thangka painting is a uniquely Tibetan tradition that evolved between the 7th and 12th centuries. Its origins lay in Indian religious art, but Nepalese, Chinese and Kashmiri styles also influenced its development.”

I had the opportunity during my visit to Tibet, to share some of my work with a Tibetan master Thangka painter. He was in charge of a school with approximately 10 students. To communicate I had to tell my wife what I wanted to say. She in turn would translate into Mandarin. One of the master’s students would then translate the mandarin into Tibetan. It was an enlightening experience. At the end of our conversation he presented me with a gift, a picture of him with an amazing Thangka painting he had created years ago. This was a significant experience for me and for my artistic direction.

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“A Thangka may portray the Buddha or some other deity, or a concept in Tibetan cosmology, astrology or medicine. The iconography of the Thangka is rich in information about the spiritual practice of Buddhists and the Tibetan worldview. A Thangka can help a meditator to learn and emulate the qualities of a particular deity... to overcome difficulties such as sickness.”

To see the Buddha in a Thangka painting is a profound experience like non other. Temples that are giant paintings and sculptures honoring the Buddhas are creations that bring their audience into a sublime state of consciousness. From these influences I feel compelled to be a bridge between Thangka painting, mural painting, and the graphic novel style of visual story telling that I used in my own work for quite some time. Thus, I have defined my painting style as a fusion of Tibetan, Chinese, and western-graphic styles, expressed through a metaphysical perspective.

**A Trip to the Holy land**

It was during the summer of 2010 (after my first year of my MFA studies) that I traveled with my wife, Daixin, her father, and uncle to the land of Tibet. For me this place is the holy land, the land of the roots of the faith closest to my heart. I spent most of June their traveling to the many temples, and Mt. Everest. It was a life changing experience. I had never before been so at peace. It was through this experience that I was able to ask and answer one of the great debates of my heart and truly come to terms with myself.
What is prayer? I have prayed off and on my whole life, initially, asking for something I desired. As a child, I was raised to believe in the Christian faith. By the age of 12, however, I found myself becoming more and more inclined to follow my father’s faith of Tibetan Buddhism. I knew nothing of this faith other than it offered me different opportunities than Christianity. The idea of having to believe in one white-looking guy, as the Son of God, seemed really outlandish. My parents where both very worldly people and highly educated, so, I was exposed to many aspects of our world at a young age. The first question that rose from this was, “If Christianity is truly the only answer, then, what about the other 5 billion people”? “Are they all going to hell?” This I could not believe and, thus, the idea of the “Christian only” philosophy quickly began to dissolve in my mind. So much death has come about as a result of this Christian philosophy, and other “members only clubs” that it could not be so.

Prayer is humbleness; prayer is thanks; it is not a selfish act. Praying for material things for pure self-benefit is wasted energy in my opinion; it serves no higher purpose. Prayer, for me, is a process of becoming one with a single thought. For me it seems that praying for love for humankind is the gateway into other circuits or rings from which I am seeking freedom, such as anger, jealousy, ignorance, or greed, or selfishness. By asking for love for all of us, these poisons become more and more obsolete for they cannot exist with true unconditional love. In the Tibetan faith, they believe mankind is somewhat controlled and seeks freedom from three poisons: greed, hatred, and delusion/ignorance. These poisons are what most directly keep us from our full potential; from vibrating faster with each reincarnation we experience as our genetic vector travels through space-time. We are locked into a series of rings of suffering or hell, which we must break through on our road to Buddhahood. I find an interesting correlation between these rings of hell, our Chakra points, and my own conclusions through the 8 circuits of consciousness that I explored for my MFA thesis.
I think that each one of our circuits or Chakras are gateways to free ourselves from the predetermined suffering that we are locked into as we progress through our various experiences of reincarnation as we co-create form through the breath of Brahman. (Brahman is the breath of creation put forth by the Hindu belief system from which much of Buddhism was adapted). Brahma plays with form from formlessness. We are single drops from the ocean of expression of Brahman. We are here to gain experiences to bring back to the source through the continuous cycle of breath; creation-destruction, birth-death, and beginning-end. We are all a splinter of the one. You and me, there is no difference, just different experiences that separate us in our minds because of our limited interpretation of these experiences, caught in the physical, 3-dimensional form of space that many believe is the end to our existence.

I do not condemn any faith; I celebrate them all. They are all a part of us. I have had to search hard for a path that will work for me based on the information and feelings I have experienced. I will never say that Christianity is not good, that Islam is not good, that Judaism is not good, or Wicca, Shinto, Sheik, Jainism, Sufi, tribal, or anything else for that matter. I think that through history many of the great truths that are completely cross-cultural have been misrepresented and manipulated for greed, power, and control. People willing or needing to follow, take these manipulated truths and run wild. Religion is not the enemy at all. Some men’s evil actions and intentions are. I love the interlocking chain of faith that unites our world and I hope that all of these varied beliefs will, in fact, do just that, unite us, rather than divide us.

**Crystallize**

*Upon my return from Tibet, everything became clear.*

When I returned from Tibet everything was clear. Like the comic book and the Tibetan Thangka painters, I love to use art to tell stories and give messages. It seems, for me, to be the only reason to make art. Now rather than teach art, I can teach through my art and through public art installations. I can express myself and keep the calling of service close to my everyday life.

While traveling through China on four occasions over the past 3 years I found myself eager to engage in any situation that lent me the opportunity to share art, especially with the young. I am reminded of my first tea-house experience in Tibet where I saw art transcend the language barrier between my wife, myself, and several Tibetan children eager to investigate the foreigners. On this particular occasion I saw the faces of the locals in the tea shop transform from one of reservation to one of pure joy and acceptance through the simple act of drawing together. This is a small example of the connection we, as humans, share through art. It is a common ground for us all and one that we can all utilize to communicate with one another. In this way, I will use painting to communicate concepts for spiritual awareness and growth.
A note to the critic: To sit and debate whether is or is not art is irrelevant in my opinion.

It is possible that the significance of art in life, the release of creation we crave as artists, truly isn’t the piece of art created at all. It is the intention of creating something, the surging, electric charge emitted from the creative mind manifesting itself into our reality as an ever-evolving expression of the artist’s seduction of humanity into their universe. The intention, free of the self-imposed construct of the “I”, could be called pure art. Art created without a specific intention of self-identification.

Nothing exists without intent. Intention is the catalyst of the creation, and therefore the intention of creating art for others is the intention of creating an experience for others to glimpse a part of the creator spirit, our collective connection to creation. Art is universal and is within us all. This is our gift, our treasure.

The ultimate treasure! The answer to the big riddle is you; there is no need to search. We all create our own reality and experience the entire universe through this lens. Every individual’s universe is “user specific”. Therefore, you truly are the source or conduit for all that is possible within our universe.


Introduction

Robert Anton Wilson is a remarkable author and philosopher, who profoundly affected my path for knowledge and understanding. I was first introduced to him 2 years ago, and since that time, I have spent much of my creative time contemplating many ideas surrounding the initial concept of consciousness through the process of painting. I came to this exploration by way of a conflict that arose for me through Wilson’s teachings, that of the clear understanding and acceptance of others. So often, others misinterpret us, so often, our own ideas are lost to the confusion of interpretation. Therefore, how can we ever have peace; how can we ever unite as a human race if we cannot understand one another. This dilemma exists within a concept introduced to me through Wilson, taken from a work by another great mind, Alfred Korzybski, in his book titled Science and Sanity where Korzybski outlines his theory of general semantics.

General semantics is the study of the relations between language, 'thought' and behavior: between how we talk, therefore how we 'think', and therefore how we act. It deals not only with words, assertions, and their referents in nature but also with their effects on human behavior. For a 'general semanticist', communication is not merely words in proper order properly inflected (as for the grammarian) or assertions in proper relation to each other (as for the logician) or assertions in proper relation to referents (as for the semanticist), but all these, together with the reactions...
of the nervous systems of the human beings involved in the
communication.4

Art is a Universal Language

“Thought is impossible without an image. The soul never thinks without an image.”
—Aristotle

Language and even just words create a map of symbols in our mind, our concept of the
universe. This map we build with words is completely user specific. Consider this: A cup.
Now, for me, a cup is a picture I have in my head of a generic plastic blue cup that was
always around when I was a child. For you the word cup is very likely based on a
completely different set of experiences in life that together produce what you define as a
cup. Just the single word “cup”, contains vast meanings and implications. “As words are
not the things we speak about, and structure is the only link between them, structure
becomes the only content of knowledge. If we gamble on verbal structures that have no
observable empirical structures, such gambling can never give us any structural
information about the world. Therefore such verbal structures are structurally obsolete,
and if we believe in them, they induce delusions or other semantic disturbances.”5

In turn, these words or labels completely influence our perceptions, actions, and our
“map” formed by language. This map is only a small fraction of something far more
complex than we allow ourselves to see when making use of these labels or symbols. We
then find ourselves caught in a circumstance. We need a way to express ideas, to
communicate. We need a means of expression that transcends the limitations of written
language or verbal language derived from it if we are to evolve and heal as a species.

We misunderstand one another constantly because of words. Because of our reliance on
language, many of our thoughts, our beliefs, cannot be properly conveyed to one another.
Words are limiting. Artistic expressions are not. Art can enlighten an individual
instantaneously and large groups simultaneously. Our current society is bombarded with
words, with uneducated, limiting words and consumer-based commercial imagery
designed to keep society in a constant excited and numb state, therefore ignoring the idea
of really being present and aware. Always in the future, looking ahead, fearful, and so
concerned with the mechanical clock.

Art Inspires Consciousness Growth

Art, sacred art, and in particular the practice there of, take the practitioner out of the
“normal” experience of space-time. Time is no longer a constant and thus the perceptual
doorways are opened and the artist can begin to experience a connection with the
universal field of consciousness that we humans all share with one another. Author and

library/203.html>.
5 Korzybski, Alfred. Science and sanity: an introduction to non-Aristotelian systems and general
biologist Rupert Sheldrake best popularized the idea of a universal consciousness connection, or a shared field of energy called a morphogenetic field\(^6\). Our individual morphic fields\(^7\) are connected through the subconscious of mankind (the morphogenetic field) through all of our cumulative experiences, which in turn shapes our particular morphic resonance\(^8\).

Our universal subconscious can seep through the canvass into the mind of the viewer. This recognition of our universal subconscious will allow the viewer to enter this space, a place outside of our normal space-time where time seems to have no meaning. We all experience this at some point. This state of consciousness is the ideal state for reprogramming and evolution, more in tune with our higher self and openness to other possibilities. There is much “generally accepted truth” that is really not truth at all; much of it, in fact, is completely false. In a state of consciousness, the false truth around us becomes transparent. This has been my experience as I created this thesis work.

Image; art, the oldest mode for the transfer of knowledge, has the potential to effect a much larger populous of our planet than that of words. Art is not limited by language barriers or by location. It is, and always has been humankinds’ tool for recording and enticing evolution. From the earliest remnants of earths lost civilizations we can see that man has been drawn to record and communicate through pictures. Although the current society’s definition of the image has evolved, we still use this form of art in so much of our lives. Our pictures, in a large way, help others to define who we are.

In modern days, I would say unfortunately we have turned darker in our use of this tool. Instead of a record or a celebration, it has turned more towards a tool for manipulation. And we have been programmed by this tool, much of it to our collective and individual detriment. Its hard to escape the flashing signs put forth by our moronic modern day media such as a twelve year old being a learned sexual symbol, and that this craziness is OK. It becomes OK slowly through various types of programming and it seeps into our collective unconscious (consciousness). Why is something so wondrous as the act of creation, then used for such morally depraved and disgusting things?

**Art Heals**

There is another side. We can also use the power of imagery to heal. “Physicians and nurses are discovering that art, music, dance and poetry can all have profound healing

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\(^6\) Fields that play a causal role in morphogenesis. This term, first proposed in the 1920s, is now widely used by developmental biologists, but the nature of morphogenetic fields has remained obscure. On the hypothesis of formative causation, they are regarded as morphic fields stabilized by morphic resonance.

\(^7\) A field within and around a morphic unit which organizes its characteristic structure and pattern of activity. Morphic fields underlie the form and behavior of holons or morphic units at all levels of complexity. The term morphic field includes morphogenetic, behavioral, social, cultural, and mental fields. Morphic fields are shaped and stabilized by morphic resonance from previous similar morphic units, which were under the influence of fields of the same kind. They consequently contain a kind of cumulative memory and tend to become increasingly habitual.

effects on their patients. Art brings to the human spirit a sense of freedom and joy. The spirit freed helps the body heal. Replacing fear with hope and darkness with light is the essence of modern body-mind-spirit medicine."\(^9\), to elevate humankind, to educate conceptually, and to bring a higher truth to the masses that is being shadowed over and outrightly driven from society. Consciousness, presence, mindfulness, and most importantly compassion are easily shown through imagery. As a society we should utilize this powerful tool much more, just as it has been used for many thousands of years before, across many hundreds of ancient societies, to heal and connect with our higher self, to help others do the same, to give to our human race. Our modern day society is not so far from this, art as a guiding force for human consciousness change. There are many artists already on this path.

Acts of creating art “reflect our consciousness…making our inner spiritual essence visible. In religious and psychotherapeutic traditions worldwide…help the process of wholeness, healing and spiritual transformation.”\(^{10}\) For me this path was shown to me through the union with my wife Daixin, and the experiences we have shared together. It is from this place that I drew the motivation, strength and inspiration to complete my thesis.

**General Process Overview for the Thesis**

Working with these experiences and ideas, I created the following series of works from February 2010, to January 2011. I have based these paintings on the imagery evoked within me through studying the 8-circuit model of human consciousness set forth by Robert Anton Wilson in his book *Prometheus Rising*. I have utilized imagery from my travels to China and Tibet, and placed my wife Daixin as the character narrator for this series. Her posed form helps to define the emotional context for the attributes/characteristics associated with each circuit.

The 8 paintings were constructed with the use of \(\frac{3}{4}\) inch white birch plywood, primed, and then painted with oil paint. For this thesis, I have employed some of Wilson’s explanations of each circuit and married these with my personal beliefs regarding each circuit. These observations are then, related back to the paintings I created to describe the experience my wife endures with each of the 8 circuits. This will be outlined in the *Explanation* portion.

My process, and general execution remained fairly consistent through the series. For this thesis, I focused on the *Digital Sketch* and *Painting* portions of my process. Included in the *Digital Sketch* portion of the description for each painting, I incorporated descriptions of the *Notes*, *Sketches*, and *Photography* portions for that particular painting’s process. For the *Painting* portion, I have included the *sketch*, *gesso*, and *painting* components.

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associated with the painting described. Below is a general overview of the complete process I followed for each painting.

*Note: the words Chakra and Circuit are used interchangeably throughout this thesis to describe the energy resonance of a particular part of the human energy system.*

**Notes**

I began designing each piece with a series of notes taken from various explanations Wilson gave for the 8-circuit model. After I collected enough data, I proceeded to consider the elements present and then I expanded upon these elements by interpreting them through the perspective of a symbolic journey utilizing more, concepts, symbolism, and imagery from Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism.

**Sketches**

I then created a series of simple sketches drawn in pen or pencil on 8 1/2 x 11 paper for each circuit. I worked with these sketches until they resonated completely with what I wished to portray. Compared to my past experiences in designing paintings, I was more thorough with the preparation for these paintings.

**Photography**

Photography by default has increasingly become a large part of my artistic process. Since high school art class, I have always tried to acquire references for a design. This led to photographing my own references with a point and shoot camera by about the age of 20. As my designs continued to evolve over the years, my photography skills evolved as well. Now after about 15 years of photographic experience, I use a canon 7d with a 28-300 77mm lens. Getting the right reference shot has become one of the most vital components to my process.

Using my wife as the model was inspirational and clarity became vital to me. I took several pictures for each of the poses for each of the paintings. Sometimes I would exceed 100 references before I was able to obtain the ‘shot’ that I needed.

**Digital Design**

From this point I would design the painting in Adobe Photoshop. I designed each piece at a 4 x 8 inch scale, in direct proportion to the size of the plywood panels. This was a longer process than shooting the references. I spent between 2 and 3 days working each digital reference until, like the photographs, it resonated with me. Sometimes 2-3 different digital compositions where created in the process. After completing one, I would sit with it for a day or so and, if I were still satisfied, I would begin painting. If, not I would re-analyze my data and re-design the piece from a slightly different perspective to see where my conflict with the design was.
Project

When I was completely satisfied with the digital composition, I connected my computer to my digital projector and projected the image onto the plywood surface. I found I could line up the projected image with the surface of the wood exactly, which proved to be quite a time saver. This component of my process increased in duration as I progressed through the series.

Sketch

I then sketched out my composition with pencil. This component of my process diminished as I progressed through the circuits. By the time I reached circuit 6 it had all but left my process entirely. A sketch was not present in the seventh or eighth paintings in the series. (Note: I completed these paintings in order from one to eight.)

Gesso

I then mixed gesso in a 50/50 solution with hot water. I didn’t mix it completely though, and allowed a concentration of gesso to form on the bottom of the container I used to hold the solution. At this point I began the priming. I used the gesso as one would to create a monochromatic painting, building lights and darks with the gesso. This component of my process varied from painting to painting as I searched for the most effective way to utilize the primer coat. I also found that using hot water instead of cold helped the gesso bond better to the wood and allowed the wood to absorb more of the water than gesso into it, which in turn allowed me to use 3 coats of gesso, instead of the 4-5 coats I needed when using cold water.

Paint

I then began painting. My intention with building the digital references was to allow me to concentrate on developing my painting skills, staying very close to the sketch rather than having to begin with the initial design. I found, however, that this resulted in the digital design becoming a jumping off point for the painting rather than a fixed schematic. As I progressed through the circuits, my painting resonated more and more clearly with the digital sketch. When laying down the foundation for the first several pieces, I mixed the oil paint with refined linseed oil. I created an almost watercolor like mixture with the oil and laid out the entire composition in this manner. I then decreased the amount of linseed oil I used as I applied further coats. Throughout the entire painting process, I continued to utilize my digital sketch, by way of placing my laptop cart, next to the painting. This allowed me to zoom in and out of my digital references to obtain a higher degree of detail. This process was instrumental in my understanding of color as I progressed through the series.

A Thought…

As I created this series, the evolution in qualit and content mirrored the evolution of consciousness portrayed through the ascension through the 8-Circuits of Consciousness. It was, in this way, completely harmonious and the perfect topic for me to choose as my
thesis. It allowed me a continuous flow and development within the confines of a single, yet, almost limitless concept that, by its very nature, is about growth and evolution.

I have found that art is not a mystery only to be understood by the elite few ordained art ministers. It truly is for each person; for it is each person in us, around us, everywhere. Some may call this concept energy, some may call it Prana or Chi, or possibly Orgone… many call it God. Personally, I like to think of it as art, the art of the universe, and the greatest masterpiece of all.

*The Endless Knot*
(A Tibetan Symbol)
CIRCUIT 1: GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND THE PRIMORDIAL GROUND

Planet: The Moon
Color: Red
Day of the Week: Monday

February 2010, Oil on Wood 4x8 ft
The Explanation

The first circuit is characterized as an “acute imprint vulnerability period”\textsuperscript{11}, \textit{a forward and backward, 1-dimensional motion on a red Monday}. Each Chakra point is commonly associated with a specific color. In Wilson’s 8-circuit model, each Chakra corresponds to a day of the week. This first circuit, the root Chakra, represents a newborn’s first experience with the world. Immediately after birth, the newborn bonds with the mother and receives nourishment and her protection. At this point the child gains his or her first imprint from the world. The child is able to make certain determinations through this initial experience that the world is a really great and safe place, or the world is a really awful and dangerous place. The historical context of this experience can be aligned with the symbol of the moon, the mother goddess, and the all provider. I chose to characterize this circuit as a positive experience for the viewer, although for many it may not be. During this infancy we shape our reality for the first time. We define our reality in terms of the love and support we are given. It is a reactionary time of our life; “go forward to the nourishing, the protective, or go back, away from the threatening, the predatory.”\textsuperscript{12} It can be awesome; it can be horrifying; it is an ingrained emotional response that, later in life we may be completely unaware of.

To become aware through meditation, the act of grounding is at the forefront. To sit on the ground connecting with mother earth, for me, was the ideal imagery to portray the first Chakra. I also considered the creation ideas from the Hindu and Christian belief systems. I reflected upon the premise that we originated in Africa. Eventually I stumbled upon a creation story from a South African shaman named Credo Mutwa.

In summation, he states that we humans are a genetically engineered worker race, created by an ancient reptilian race that secretly controls our lives on an emotional level to harvest our energy as food. He further states that we were originally a hermaphroditic race, and that we were given gender as a result of further reptilian manipulations. This occurred by sending the early hermaphroditic humans into one of two caves. Each cave gave off a glow from the inside, one red, and the other green. Those who went into the red cave came out as male, and those who went into the green cave came out as female.\textsuperscript{13} This story fascinated me as I had heard of the reptilian creation myth in my youth. I took this story as inspiration to create this piece.

I considered many different ideas of human origin. I think many of the various creation myths from all over the world are really part of a larger truth. We accept some stories, and reject others. We are told what to believe at first, and slowly we come to think of these ideas as the basis for whom, we are. Then, we stack our gained experiences on top of this base as we grow. Therefore, I think it is important to consider things outside of our belief system. We all have them, different ones, and no one can say who has it “right”.

\textsuperscript{11} Wilson, Robert Anton. Interview by Sounds True. session 3. CD. 8 Apr 2011.
\textsuperscript{13} Mutwa, Credo. \textit{Credo Mutwa presents: The True History of Africa}. Interview by David Icke. 2007. Film. 8 Apr 2011.
For this first painting, I adapted the red and green symbolism to dominate the ground, the base, from which my wife emerged. I stylized a sunset background to align with the archetypal image of the African Savannah sunset. I considered the state of vulnerability one is in at this stage in development, somewhat like the herds at risk from the lion’s attack. Much love is needed to give the person a feeling of safety and security. I have found this to also be true when creating “healing art” for hospitals. Doctors refer to the African Savannah as the archetypal image of peace, calmness, and serenity. From here the individual can feel safe in venturing out from the protection of his or her safe place. This is also true with individuals of any age. When we feel love, and are balanced and safe, we tend to be happier and more willing to be open and put ourselves outside of our normal comfort zone.

In the theory of The 8 Circuit Model of Consciousness, Wilson states that this is the hardest circuit to re-imprint\(^{14}\). It is the result of a newborn’s first experiences with life. It resides within us as our deepest, hard wiring. I would hypothesize that the ill formation of this circuit is responsible for most addictive tendencies and compulsions we experience as individuals. \textit{If you don’t get what you need when you are born, you might spend your entire life searching for that fulfillment.}

We need to be aware of our root compulsions in our daily lives. It is possible for these tendencies to overtake our lives and begin to control our thoughts and behaviors, placing us in a static state and resulting in the true self being cut off at the first Chakra point.

In this image, my wife seated on the ground, is joyful and connected with the red-green earth. She is grounded and, through this grounding experience, her higher self is evident. I have portrayed her higher self in a pose representing compassion and the elusion to the breast, the first element of nurturing and safety in the life of an infant and arguably the most important bonding experience in our lives. I have chosen to depart from realism in the portrayal of the ground, for it is the beginning and a primordial state.

I wanted to give the feeling that Daixin was participating in the environment and, more over, that she influenced the nature of her nature. The colors red and green come together in many areas of the painting and represent the fusion of the male and female during conception and creation. The flower found in the bottom right represents my desire to remind the viewer of a great truth, the truth of the flower in its stillness and perfect beauty. This theme is combined with the theme of the fusion of the male and female, once again, by the phallic form found to the left of the flower, almost penetrating the flower’s petals. Erect phallic symbols are found everywhere; our society is overrun with giant penises, so, instead of portraying this form in a ‘salutatory’ nature, I created it going side to side.

\(^{14}\) Wilson, Robert Anton. Interview by Sounds True. session 3. CD. 8 Apr 2011.
The Process

The Digital Sketch

Notes/Sketch: When reflecting on the first circuit, the most prevalent imagery evoked in my mind was that of a mother and the grass covered ground. In meditation, one “grounds” by sitting on the ground, connecting the first circuit, or Chakra (the base of the spine) to the earth. This action centers us with the earth, where our energy is from. I thought this concept was the best place to start: sitting on the ground, in the midst of raw creation. I drew 3 different sketches to outline the photographs I would need to take.

Photography: Based on the mothering concept, I took a picture of my wife in a self-nurturing position. I wanted her to indicate her breast subtly, as this is a widely, culturally accepted icon of the mother concept. I also wanted to indicate nurturing through a holding type pose to support the smaller figure. The smaller picture of her sitting on the ground, needed to capture a sense of awe, of shock, and amazement.

I then took a picture of the sunset out my back window and altered the color balance, intensity, and saturation of the image, and stretched it. I then added a found picture of a dandelion field.

Digital Design: I combined these all in Photoshop over the course of about a day. As the dandelion field was not my image, I felt a strong need to radically depart from this image in the painting and that is evident in the final product. It was at this point that I established what would be the recurring theme in the series, that of two images of my wife together. This is a familiar concept for me and came into play quite naturally; however, I found this experience took me far beyond any such previous endeavor. The use of two figures represents: the dual nature of man, along with the creative and the rational sides of the brain. Still yet is the notion of the self, and the higher self, or the self and the guardian, or the yin and yang. All of these are acceptable interpretations for the use of this aspect of my designs.
The Painting

**Sketch:** I spent about 8 hrs sketching in my design from the projection. I fully developed many of the highlights and shadows; a portion of my process I soon found to be a waste of time. I viewed it as a holistic process; to create a finished pencil drawing on which to paint, could result in a much more real and detailed painting. Each component should be a finished piece.

**Gesso:** I used a much higher concentration of gesso in the background, mostly to avoid the loss of detail in the sketch that I thought would be extremely important for my painting process. This was another component of my process that I later found to be detrimental.

**Paint:** I began painting on February 21st, 2010. This was the first painting in the series and, in many ways, the most difficult to complete. I had just spent the past six months creating paintings on forms cut from plywood. Therefore, when I set out to fill a full rectangular format with paint, I found myself challenged to develop the entire space. I did not, yet, understand the atmospheric elements in creating the illusion of a 3-dimensional space.

As I began to paint I was overwhelmed by color. I could not differentiate foreground and background with subtlety, and relied more on scale and overlapping to achieve a 3-dimensional feel. I used a heavy concentration of cold pressed linseed oil to dilute the oil paint to an almost watercolor-like consistency. As my painting progressed I found myself utilizing white to brighten the color and brown or black to give a color its shadow, becoming another painting challenge for me to overcome.

I worked solely on this painting until March 30th, at which point, I began work on the second piece.
CIRCUIT 2: LOVE, WAR, AND ELECTRICITY

Planet: Mars
Color: Orange
Day of the Week: Tuesday

April 2010, Oil on Wood 4x8 ft
The Explanation

“The second circuit, the emotional-territorial networks of the brain, is concerned entirely with the power of politics”.15 This second Chakra is the feeling circuit, *an up and down, two-dimensional motion on an orange Tuesday*. This is the point in life where one begins to develop opinions and feelings towards people and the world. *I like this, I don’t like that* is the basic polarity associated with this circuit. It is also associated with the war god and, therefore, the planet Mars. It is building on the individual’s connection to the world through the first circuit. Therefore, depending on how safe the individual perceives the world around him or her, an individual’s response will vary on whether they like something or don’t like something. Already one can see how personalities of the individual begin to form at a very basic level, the 2-dimensional existence.

It is this point in a person’s development when the emergence of the authoritarian structure takes place. You see where you fit into the hierarchy of authority in the household, who you can bully and who bullies you. Based on these descriptions, I chose the symbols of the spear and shield; as they are the classic symbols for war. Found on the shield, is the symbol for Odin, the god of war. This shield sits above the passageway through the roman arch, which is guarded by the bird and lizard men.

Rome, for me, is the classic symbol for war and also depicts the idea of conquering others. This fit nicely with the idea of the dog mentality of marking territory. It is what we humans tend to do, plant a spear in the ground and call it our own. This of coarse is ridiculous since we never really own anything. We just use things for a short time, borrowing them during our life here.

In the first painting, red and green were central colors to my design. For this painting, it was orange and black. I was concerned about the implications of Halloween at first, but as I progressed through the painting, this actually worked for me. My wife stands divided in this painting: one side, a warm feeling side, and the other, a fierce dictatorial side. She is a guardian. On the arch behind her are the bird and the reptilian guards ready to assault those who try to enter. Between the guards is found a shield with the symbol for Odin, the Norse god of war. War, it seems, goes hand in hand with politics.

Electricity is feeling; and this stood out as the prominent visual for this piece.

Based on my interpretations of this circuit I would surmise that this is the emergence of the ego. It is a state of conflict, although I can say that while experiencing the full force resonance of this Chakra, one is not very aware of it. This, in many ways, represents the pattern of our current global political paradigm, a blissful ignorance to the real state of affairs.

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The Process

The Digital Sketch

**Notes/Sketch:** Conflict, selfishness, excretion on the ground to mark your territory; how on earth can I portray this symbolic, uplifting way? I focused on trying to come up with a way to show my wife as the guardian of her world, ready to defend what is hers. With this, however, is a saturated feeling of temporary happiness. This concept, I thought, was reflected in images I had seen of Chinese countryside girls looking up with a smile in a sense of wonder, happiness and amazement. This, paired with electricity was a solid expression of “feeling”.

**Photography:** Daixin had a great outfit that I bought her last summer in Guangzhou. It reminded me very much of a pilot suit; so this was perfect attire for the soldier of war idea that resonated with me as the figurative expression for this circuit. Although this circuit seemed to me to be a very conflicting aspect of our lives, I wanted to capture Daixin’s emotional state, being the feeling of happiness and wonder found in depictions of girls from the countryside in China. For the other image, I wanted her to appear fierce and somewhat foreboding, defiant as she slams her spear into the ground. For the image of the surface of Mars, I was forced to use section of a photograph I found on-line as I do not have a telescope with a camera. I only used a portion from a picture of the full planet, therefore, in some way, protecting the integrity of the photographer.

**Digital Design:** I did not spend a lot of time on this digital design. I was anxious to get into the second painting. I see that this was somewhat of a pivotal moment for me, as the screw up I was about to make, would ultimately help me to grow a lot with my use of paint. I just used a flat black fill for the background in the design to indicate outer space; however, this proved problematic for me as I entered the painting stage.
The Painting

**Sketch:** I diminished this portion of my process for the second piece. I found that the extreme development of the sketch portion proved to be unnecessary. In fact, I did find myself competing against my sketch during the first painting; so, for this painting, I utilized outline

**Gesso:** I put two even coats of gesso (diluted) over the entire surface. I was slightly obsessed with the idea of “slick” surfaces and wanted the surface of this painting to me completely smooth.

**Paint:** As I began this painting I reflected on the concepts of war, death, blackness, and the void. I started with black. I felt it needed to be the first paint to touch the surface of this wood. I filled in all the areas to be left void. This was a mistake. Due to my lack of preplanning in the digital image stage, the black I was recreating with paint was void for sure, void of the variations that make a photograph of space appear real.

This application of black was something I had to fight against the entire way through this painting. It seemed to grow over the whole painting, consuming the other parts. I eventually began to view the painting of this circuit as much more a graphic design than a painting. It was, in some ways, a step back from the clarity and life-like use of the paint that I had been pushing for.

This frustration mirrored well some of the difficulties associated with this circuit, and I embraced them wholeheartedly despite the awareness that this painting felt as though it was not in line with what I thought my progressive path should be. I found myself scraping off portions of the painting if the paint did not set right, a technique that is not possible on canvass, and a reason why I continued to use wood as my painting surface.
CIRCUIT 3: MAKE A MAP, TEST YOUR MODEL

Planet: Mercury
Color: Yellow
Day of the Week: Wednesday

August 2010, Oil on Wood 4x 8ft
The Explanation

I began work on this piece two weeks after a two-month stay abroad. During that time I had the opportunity to travel through Tibet. This journey was instrumental in helping me shape my thesis. It filled in the cracks and gave me an over-all vantage point from which to discuss my interpretations for each of the higher circuits (5-8). This fit into place quite nicely as the circuits become more and more abstract as they ascend, which allowed more personally based interpretations to evolve naturally.

Enter symbolism and formation of 3-dimensional space. The Third Circuit, or Chakra, is a right-left, 3-dimensional motion on a yellow Wednesday. “The third semantic circuit handles artifacts and makes a “map” (reality tunnel) which can be passed on to others…” As I began painting I felt the need to capture a greater degree of realism in the rendering of my wife. I felt anxiety, as I knew in my heart this painting needed an element of realism I had not yet achieved. I needed to reflect the time in biological development when we understand the concept of our 3-dimensional world. Because of this, the figures in the painting needed to stand out from the previous paintings as an allusion to volume, to space, appearing to be real.

During my summer visit to China I visited a Taoist temple where I was able to settle my astrological conflicts for the upcoming year. I also wanted to free myself from the conflicts arising in my painting as well. I tried to gain a greater sense of realism. I aligned the formation of 3-d space in the brain with the concept of an awaking of sorts, from a flat 2-dimensional form, to a full, 3-d form, full of color and bold. I added several colors to my restricted color palette and found that rather than offer a challenge to me, integrating new colors comfortably, became easier. I still restrained myself somewhat and projected adding a few more colors with each piece, as I wanted to aid in the visual component of an evolution.

“Human beings (domesticated primates) are symbol-using creatures; which means, as the pioneers semanticist, Korzybski, noted, that those who rule symbols, rule us.” This circuit is the center of reason for us in our daily lives. I compare this experience of this yellow circuit to that of the continuous flow of consciousness that we all experience every moment of every day. If untamed, this circuit can be directly responsible for an immeasurable amount of suffering in the mind. This is the circuit where the introduction of meditation and presence should begin.

I chose to represent this circuit with my wife in a state of wonder as she attempts to place the materialized and paradoxical Penrose triangle into her map of the world. In the bottom half of the painting you can find my wife again, this time seated in front of the Taoist temple in China, a place that we visited together. This symbolism reflects my feelings regarding the current state of our world, a paradox.

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16 Wilson, Robert Anton. Prometheus Rising. 5th. Las Vegas: New Falcon, 1983. 94. Print
17 Wilson, Robert Anton. Prometheus Rising. 5th. Las Vegas: New Falcon, 1983. 95. Print
The Process
The Digital Sketch

Notes/Sketch: After a 2-month hiatus from painting, time spent reflecting on my first two paintings, I knew I had to take my rendering abilities to the next level. I needed to mold the forms found on the 2-d surface. I was drawn to create a composition that included more of my wife’s skin, which would allow me to develop my figure rendering. I was also drawn to a more complex and colorful architectural form than the dull roman arch from the previous piece.

Photography: I took about 15 pictures to acquire the shot I needed. This piece, I felt, needed to put my wife in her native land of China, as it is the time in one’s evolution, where they recognize 3-dimensional space. Because of this I also used a picture that I took at a Taoist temple near her home in Foshan, China.

Digital Design: After I gathered the pictures I searched out an image of a map of the world, specifically, one with lines of latitude and longitude. I felt this would be a good element to incorporate into the painting. The use of the line, functions as a path for the viewer’s eyes through a design.

I added the image of the Penrose triangle. I have always admired this form since I was first introduced to it through the work of M.C. Escher. For me this symbol represents the way in which our world operates at the present moment. It represents the paradoxical road we travel, on the way to our own demise. Our habits, our compulsions, our violence towards one another, will not help our species survive and, in fact, contradict our own desire to live and to evolve.
The Painting

**Sketch:** As I began the process of creating this piece, I was far more focused and direct. I just made an outline sketch and did not develop any light or shadow.

**Gesso:** I applied two coats of gesso for the figures and temple, and one coat for the background elements. I thought this experiment might aid in the formulation of depth.

**Paint:** I found myself calm and relaxed after a two-month break from painting. I felt clear. Instead of trying to lay down more of a foundation of color to the original white surface of the wood, I tried to capture as much realism in the first coat as I could. In this, I found that I really enjoy the smooth transfer from one color family to the next without any linear element involved. The realization that painting a face, painting skin, had to be painted as if it were skin, smooth and complete.

I had captured this in isolated instances throughout previous works but I still had relied more on the linear qualities to establish depth. Now, I began to make far more use of blending and tone. I re-worked the background of this piece 4 times, at one point, taking a turpentine soaked rag, and scrubbing off several layers of paint. I found this very pleasing, as it was the most challenging part of the painting for me. The rest of the work went quite well. I found that I was able to really develop the larger head to level I had not previously achieved with paint. I also found that achieving this realism was a delicate process. Timing was crucial to work color over color, layering colors into others while the bottom layer was dry enough to resist smudging, but still wet enough to be moistened effectively and reworked. I found that with the concentration of cold pressed linseed oil I used on this painting diminished dramatically from the last painting. I had a window of about a day and a half, after a 24-hour initial dry time to rework the wet paint. After this point it would become a completely separate coat of paint.
CIRCUIT 4: SEXUALITY AND THE SYSTEM

Planet: Jupiter
Color: Green
Day of the Week: Thursday

September 2010, Oil on Wood, 4x8 ft
The Explanation

This fourth “circuit is activated and imprinted at adolescence, when the DNA awakens the sexual apparatus.”\(^\text{18}\) The heart Chakra is a green Thursday, and the last circuit of the “everyday life system”, that is, we operate our daily lives in the first, second, third and fourth circuits. This is the guilt center of our body where “almost everybody, almost everywhere, is quite busy hiding their real sexual profile and miming the ‘accepted sex role’ for their gender in their tribe.”\(^\text{19}\) which is a torturous existence to say the least. It is fitting that this circuit is really the gateway, to the higher circuits. The first four circuits may be viewed as one system; whereas, the fifth through the eighth circuits can be viewed as a higher system of the first four circuits. The key here is to close down these first four circuits so the energy of the Kundalini can rise.

Kundalini is a Sanskrit or Eastern word meaning ‘that which is coiled’. It can also translate to mean ‘Serpent power’ or ‘Serpent fire,’ and is the supreme spiritual power in the human body. It lies dormant, coiled asleep at the base of the spine until it is awakened. When it wakes through spiritual development, it rises and pierces the six external energy centers, known as Chakras, along the spine rising to emerge out through the seventh Chakra like a fountain, causing what people believe to be called ‘enlightenment,’ or ‘spiritual awakening\(^\text{20}\)

\textit{This is why so many schools of spiritual thought promote celibacy while in training.}

As a younger man in my 20’s I remember so much confusion and guilt surrounding my sexuality. In our society today sexuality has been really inflated to such a degree that it overwhelms many aspects of our culture. I recall using alcohol a lot in my 20’s to cope with this confusion. Here we see the division within us between the person we present to others, and the person who we believe ourselves to be behind the shield of our projected personality.

I felt that this circuit, the heart Chakra, was and remains the Chakra in the direst need of attention for everyone on our planet earth. Our hearts are where we store our guilt, and not just from our own deliberate actions, but the guilt of generations, of our ancestors, of our genetic line. There is so much violence, pain and suffering in our world that we really need to heal.

As I began work on this piece my wife and I listened to the Tibetan \textit{heart sutra}. I felt a strong desire to properly examine the experiences in my life that have resulted in my present persona. To accept who I presently was, not “the me” I wanted others to see, but who I was, apart from any physical attribute, any manifestation of inflated ego-based,

false-character personas. This was a purifying and cleansing experience for me, and therefore the reason why I placed my wife in water for this painting. It is also why the smaller figure can be seen seated in prayer behind the incense bowl at the bottom of the painting. Here she is asking through prayer, for the healing of her genetic line and a resolution to the conflicts that lie in the heart of her and her ancestors. I feel this process of self-examination and of healing translated into my painting during this time. I became less concerned with results, and what I needed to do to get there and much more focused on the art of the moment in every day that I painted.

There was a deep sensation that I attribute to this process of healing, a sense of a deep truth that was infinite, dense like the mountain stone and thunderous. Thursday represents the thunder god and the planet Jupiter found in the upper left corner of the painting with the left being the feminine side. In the upper right corner of the painting can be found the symbol of the Kalachakra.

The “Kalachakra means Time-Wheel, as ‘Kāla’ is Sanskrit for Time and "Chakra" (or Cakra) is Wheel in Sanskrit (In Tibetan his name is dus.'khor). It is also translated as Time-Cycles. Much in this tradition revolves around the concept of time and cycles: from the cycles of the planets, to the cycles of our breath and the practice of controlling the most subtle energies within one's body on the path to enlightenment.\(^{21}\)

This painting, therefore, became a prayer in itself for healing for both my wife for me and for me.

From the Tibetan Heart Sutra:

Know then:

form does not differ from emptiness
emptiness does not differ from form
that which is form is emptiness, that which
is emptiness is form, these same are true of
feelings, perceptions, impulses, consciousness;
all dharmas are marked with emptiness
they do not appear or disappear, are not
tainted or pure, do not increase or
decrease, therefore in emptiness, no form,
no feeling, no impulses, no perception,
no consciousness, no eyes, no ears
no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind
no color, no sound, no smell, no taste,
no touch, no object of mind, no realm of sensing,
go forth until no realm of consciousness

no ignorance and no extinction of it, and
so forth until no death, no holding,
no extinction of them, no suffering,
no origination, no stopping, no path,
no cognition, also no attainment with nothing to attain.
the bodhisattva deepens on Prashna Paramita
and the mind is no hindrance
without any hindrance, no fears exist,
for apart from every perverted view
the bodhisattva dwells in nirvana, in
the three worlds, all Buddhas deepens on
Prashna Paramita and attain the unsurpassed
complete perfect enlightenment
Therefore know the Prashna Paramita is
the great transcendent mantra, is the great
bright mantra, is the utmost mantra, is
the supreme mantra which is able to release
all suffering and pain, so proclaim
the Prashna Paramita mantra, proclaim
the mantra
gate gate para gate, para sum gate
bodhi savra

22 Edward Conze (1959) Buddhist Scriptures; Penguin pp162-164
The Process

The Digital Sketch

Notes/Sketch: This was one of the more difficult pieces to design initially. I needed to make my wife sexy, but as I considered various compositions, I found it difficult to settle on a design that in my mind did not exploit her in any way. I designed 3 entirely different compositions before arriving at this one. Initially I was drawn to the idea of her lying on a bed in a sensual pose, but I later abandoned that idea for a more direct approach. I realized the best way for me to achieve a balance was to tease the imagination of the viewer; something I learned goes a long way toward enticing the audience into your work.

Photography: I took 41 pictures to construct this composition. My wife was certainly tired after this shoot, but was understandably willing to help me bring her to the best light. This digital design spanned the longest time frame of any of the digital designs I created, taking nearly a week to complete.

Digital Design: I combined the images of my wife with an image of burning incense placed inside a singing bowl that is found on our sacred alter in our home. I then used a portion of a found image of the sky, however, this was a daytime shot that I edited to appear darker. I also incorporated a found image of Jupiter and an image of the Tibetan Kalachakra, a recognizable symbol in Tibetan Buddhism. Together with these I then added the final component of water. I used an image from a lake in Tibet, which I then edited and turned increasingly green, to emulate the color associated with this circuit.
**The Painting**

**Sketch:** I spent about 4 hrs sketching in the main components. I was anxious to begin the painting. However, I felt somewhat relieved as I had another painting I was working on at the same time. I found that this increased my productivity.

**Gesso:** I used a light wash to color my sketch initially and then added 2 subsequent coats within the sketch to the highlight areas.

**Paint:** I began painting this piece while the gesso was still wet. The over-all flow for the series was beginning to take shape in my mind and I felt an explosion inside of me. For this piece I centered on achieving the same sense of realism I had achieved in the last painting, which represented a fairly significant departure from my previous, more graphic style. I really wanted the photo-realism element to be strong in this painting, while still maintaining a link to the graphic elements that were so prevalent before.

I began with the background elements but soon was drawn to paint the large figure. (In my planning stage I set this portion of the painting last). The painting went fairly quick. I began painting on September 6th, and continuing steadily until the end of September. I was watching my time frame closely as it was my goal to achieve the ability to paint a painting at this scale in one week. This being the half waypoint, I had cut my time from the production of the first painting (which was a little over two months, to just over 4 weeks.

As with the last piece (*Make a Map, Test Your Model*) I continued to let go of a lot of the outline elements, and in this vein I wanted to continue with regard to the figure. I found this contrast appealing and was eager to take it further.
CIRCUIT 5: RELEASE

**Planet:** Venus

**Color:** Turquoise Blue

**Day of the Week:** Friday

*October 2010, Oil on Wood, 4x8 ft*
The Explanation

The fifth circuit is “non-linear” and “global”. That is, not limited by the one-thing-at-a-time sequences of the semantic circuit; it *thinks in gestalts*. This is why it is so often connected with “intuition,” which is a way of thinking between and around data-points on the perceptual screen—sensing what total field the points must be a part of.\textsuperscript{23}

The fifth Chakra is a holistic experience in our mind where we can stand in awe of everything, “A hedonistic turn-on occurs, a rapturous amusement…a break from the compulsions of the previous four circuits”\textsuperscript{24}, and we sense our place in that moment and in the world. *This is a turquoise Friday of the throat.* I have found this experience to be a release, a freedom and the first expression of our higher self.

This painting was created to honor my experiences in Tibet, with the people, and was meant to be an expression of my gratitude for the freedom I was given from this holiest of places. While in Tibet I visited many temples, and spoke with many people regarding my thoughts for this thesis. I was met with kindness, interest, and sincere support. I visited Thangka painting studios, and was able to experience a profound enrichment of what art making meant to me. I prayed every day before painting this piece, giving thanks to the Tara we acquired in Tibet. As my spiritual experience with the painting increased, I found myself making decisions differently within my paintings. At the two-week mark with this painting I felt my motivation to complete this one diminishing, so I left it and started the sixth painting in the series. After a week or so with the sixth painting I came back to this one and finished it.

*I paid close attention to my intuition with this painting, painting only when it felt right.*

I found an interesting irony in the fact that I was creating a painting about freedom brought about by my experiences and illustrated with symbolism from Tibet, through a painting of my wife as the narrator, who is from China.

This circuit for me was about letting go and being humble. I was beginning to paint well now, in such a short time, and I knew that this leap was aided by all of the experiences I had while in Tibet. I was very grateful, and in this state of gratitude, I felt peace and a lasting connection to all of those experiences that had helped shape my painting. Instead of painting a picture of something or even trying to embody the spirit of something in a painting, I was painting to give thanks for the gifts I had received in my life. It was a definite switch, as if the painting wasn’t about me. It was a very different feeling, but in this, I really felt I knew more of what was possible and the reasons why.

\textsuperscript{23} Wilson, Robert Anton. *Prometheus Rising*. 5th. Las Vegas: New Falcon, 1983. 183-. Print

\textsuperscript{24} Wilson, Robert Anton. Interview by Sounds True. session 3. CD. 8 Apr 2011
The Process

The Digital Sketch

Notes/Sketch: I had originally drawn a lotus flower behind the large figure in my first sketch. However, when I placed the Tibetan temple on the mountains in the background I decided that it would overwhelm the space to attempt this so I abandoned the lotus flower idea. Other than this change, the initial sketch was the most complete and detailed when compared to the finished painting. I had worked on this sketch while in China during the summer and I was determined to make it shine with the essence of Tibet.

Photography: My wife dressed in an outfit I bought for her in Tibet. 22 pictures in total were taken for this design, I felt the two most important elements for the large figure were 1: the angle, tilt, and proportion of the head and smile, and 2: the perspective of the left knee as it needed to almost come out of the composition in a Trompe l'oeil fashion. This was the key to the concept of freedom and breaking free.

Digital Design: This design was the most complex to this point in the process of the thesis, and took 2-3 days to complete. I observed that in the last piece (Sexuality and the System), I still had not achieved the amount of spatial depth I was looking for. The mountains in the background of this piece gave me a good opportunity to do so. I used a picture of the mountains in Tibet that I took, and spliced it together with another picture of the sacred lake Yamdrok-Tso. I then placed the figures into this space, and added the DNA helix. I then used a found picture of the light refracted off a prism, after removing the prism from the image, and finally I added a found picture of a group of butterflies, which were orange in appearance. I edited them to be a turquoise-blue, emulating the color associated with the 5th Chakra.
The Painting

**Sketch:** I spent nearly two days completing this sketch, and as I finished, I decided that this had been far too time consuming. I concluded that for the next painting I would try to leave out the sketch component as much as possible. I was beginning to view this stage as distraction from the process and the essence of painting. The sketch almost seemed to get in the way.

**Gesso:** In contrast to the previous paintings, I paid little attention to establishing the lights with gesso. I felt that to develop any one particular area initially, would unfairly exaggerate portions of the painting. I wanted to embody a holistic approach to this painting, working on the entire painting evenly, at the same time, with no credence given to a hierarchy of importance, something that I tended to do and wanted to free myself from in this painting as it was a picture depicting the holy land.

**Paint:** I wasn’t over analyzing my approach any more. I noticed that I easily went from place to place, working continuously across much of the painting at once. Instead of using one, two, or three brushes at once, I was beginning to group my brushes into small arrays for each color in the painting. I found that initially I was mixing color less and the mixing that did occur was the result of the application of the paint to the painted surface of the wood, blended into the existing color. I found this rather surprising because I had considered the way to get to the bold realism I desired involved mixing complex solutions of paint; when in fact many times, I was simply combining variations of two colors mixed for almost every color in the painting.

*Because I viewed this painting as connecting with the holy land of Tibet in many ways, I was reluctant to photograph my process. I thought it was disrespectful. As a result, only one process picture was taken of this piece*
CIRCUIT 6: THIRD EYE; CIRCUIT CONTROL

Planet: Saturn
Color: Indigo
Day of the Week: Saturday

November 2010, Oil on Wood, 4x8 ft
The Explanation

The Third Eye, the Sixth Circuit, opens on an indigo blue Saturday—“when the nervous system begins to receive signals from within the individual neuron—from RNA-DNA “dialogue,” the nuero genetic feedback system.”

The sixth Chakra is a concept I had addressed several times in the past in my art. It addresses the idea of mastery of the mind, as a computer system bursting with electricity. This piece represented true clarity and an understanding of the nature of things and the thunderous bolt of enlightenment, symbolized by the Vajra and the bell in Tibetan Buddhism.

*Vajra*, in Sanskrit, has both the meanings of “thunderbolt” and “diamond.” Like the thunderbolt, the *vajra* cleaves through ignorance. The thunderbolt was originally the symbol of the Hindu rain god Indra (who became the Buddhist Šakra) and was employed by the 8th-century Tantric (esoteric) master Padmasambhava to conquer the non-Buddhist deities of Tibet. Like the diamond, the *vajra* destroys but is itself indestructible and is thus likened to *śūnyā* (the all-inclusive void).

The Vajra, in Tibetan Buddhism “*dorje*”, was paired with a ritual bell (ghanta), which represented clarity and the everlasting vibration of everything. I felt I had properly transformed the idea Wilson set forth about this circuit into a visionary painting using the ancient Buddhist symbols to illustrate the conceptual nature of this state of mind. As I painted my wife’s full standing body in this painting I felt like a true painter.

I understood how to use the paint. Instead of trying to always mix darkness and lightness into a color to push it forward or backward in space, using the actual raw color gives the desired effect. Blending these raw colors together on the surface makes for richness and vitality in the image produced; unlike my previous work. Another key element to this process was the use of the warm and cool color schemes in transparent layers over designated areas. This increased the push and pull effect in an alternate way, providing variety for the viewers’ eye, giving the feeling of completeness, wholeness, and creating an actual world on the surface of a piece of wood.

Another realization was letting go of certain areas. In being precise with the initial coat of paint, I could allow for a dissolved effect especially on the circuitry found in the circuit board and in the circuit-type extensions found around the larger head of my wife, with her third eye opened. Layering the area of the circuit board in the far distance with multiple layers of green, blue, and brown. That was a surprise, *brown is excellent for adding shadow to green*. This theology transferred across the painting spectrum for me from this point on and I felt a great deal of freedom with paint.

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The Process
The Digital Sketch

Notes/Sketch: I sketched this familiar concept for about a minute before I decided to move to designing this straight from the computer.

Photography: 11 pictures were taken to create this composition. The only image in this digital design that I did not take is the background cosmos for obvious reasons. I have found that I really disliked having to use any image other than one taken by me, however in cases like this, I have no means at this point to photograph distant galaxies, so I am at the mercy of those who do.

Digital Design: I found an image of the cosmos. It was important that there be a center point of light in the image and so I aligned the background first. I placed the images of my wife into the cosmos. As I added the lightning bolts to her fingers, I was struck with the images of the Vajra and the bell. I felt that these two Buddhist symbols were important to convey this stage of enlightenment that is that of a thunderous awakening. I then added an image of a circuit board. The image was originally a straight down shot that I then warped using perspective to give the illusion of the board going back into space. Finally, I added the purple effect to contrast with the orange-yellow found in the cosmos behind.

I then copied my wife’s eye and added it to her forehead to show her third eye. And finally added a found image of lightening from the sky that I cut out of the sky and then edited to the desired shape.
The Painting

**Sketch:** I had a good idea of what this painting would be before I began painting on October 24th. The sketch for this piece was merely a record of this concept, which I have explored several dozen times over my artistic career, the image of a figure, floating over a circuit board.

I sketched only the small head on the wood surface before I began this piece; then I painted through the projection of the image on the wood. It was slightly confusing at first, but I found that I appreciated this method of transfer more than the pencil sketch. The pencil began to feel separate from the process and not really something that belonged with the paint. Additionally, painting through cast light was exciting.

**Gesso:** I used very little gesso on this piece, just one even, consistent coat. I wanted to build the piece out of the same space, rather than having that space predetermined by opacity of white.

**Paint:** After some good success with depth in the last painting I wanted to push that effect further in this piece. I discovered that changes in tone due to light, shade and shadow were not best achieved by simply manipulating the base color.

A major shift occurred for me here in terms of my use of paint. The hard edges dissipated to a degree and became more inferred. I also discovered a new layer, in terms of how many coats of paint I used. I reworked everything and began to see the dimensions within each layer of paint, instead of looking to the combined layers of paint to create dimensionality. I let go of my preconceived notions of the image and had the richest experience painting here during the course of the entire series. I had no reservation about painting anything after this piece.
CIRCUIT 7: TAH-RA

Planet: The Sun
Color: Violet
Day of the Week: Sunday

December 2010, Oil on Wood, 4x8 ft
The Explanation

Take refuge in the Three Jewels, the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangna.
I did not question or hesitate, I just painted.

The meta-programming circuit known as the “soul” in Gnosticism, the “no mind” (wushin) in China, the White Light of the Void in Tibetan Buddhism, Shiva-darshana in Hinduism, the True intellectual center in Gurdjieff—simply represents the brain becoming aware of itself. The artist seeing himself in his painting seeing himself seeing himself in his painting...²⁷

Enter the Seventh Circuit, the Crown Chakra, and the brilliant violet Sunday of the Buddha-mind.

Enter my wife as the Green Tah-ra. While in Tibet my wife and I acquired a beautiful statue of the Green Tah-ra. Like the Tibetans, I personally take great refuge in this female deity. She was also the favorite deity of my late father David Neill.

When called upon, she instantaneously saves us from eight specific calamities...The First Dalai Lama lists the 8, and interprets them as representative of corresponding defects, flaws, or obscurations: 1) lions and pride, 2) wild elephants and delusions, 3) forest fires and hatred, 4) snakes and envy, 5) robbers and fanatical views, 6) prisons and avarice, 7) floods and lust, and 8) demons and doubt.²⁸

As the Tah-ra, my wife guards the geometric equivalent of her path through the previous circuits on her way to enlightenment...The Stupa.

As the receptacle of Buddha’s enlightened mind the Stupa encapsulates a multitude of symbolic meanings that reveal his enlightened qualities. Firstly, although it is not actually described in any Tibetan text on Stupa Symbolism, the Stupa has ‘assumed’ the representation of the five purified elements. The square base or lion throne represents the four cardinal sides and four intercardinal corners of the element earth. The hemispherical dome or vase (Tib. Bum pa) represents the circle or drop of the element water. The conical Spire of thirteen umbrellas represents the element of fire. The upper lotus parasol and crescent moon represent the element of air; and the sun and dissolving point, the element of space.²⁹

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Behind Tah-ra and the Stupa are the Himalayas, the most awe-inspiring site I have ever seen. It provided the perfect setting for my wife in her ascension to Buddhahood.

Filling the top left quadrant of the scene, Daixin’s face can be seen across the sky as she experiences the enlightened state.

The Process

The Digital Sketch

Notes/Sketch: I prayed a lot. I asked for guidance, I asked that I be given the insight to portray these important components of Tibetan Buddhism in the manner in which they deserved to be shown.

Photography: I was able to create this montage using images I took while in Tibet, and the image of the Tah-ra statue my wife and I acquired while on our trek. In total I took 35 pictures to achieve this design.

Digital Design: This design took 3 days to complete. I had to place my wife’s head within the picture of the Tara statue in just the right way; otherwise it would not appear natural. This took roughly a day to get exactly the way I wanted it. I then added the image of the Stupa. This one in particular is unlike any of the other Stupas found in Tibet. It had an interesting, almost alien-like quality to it that I found extremely appealing.

The large head of my wife was then added and scaled to be the largest I had attempted to date. As this series progressed, I worked with an increase in scale for the images of my wife. This afforded me the opportunity to teach myself how to paint larger and larger human faces. A calling that still remains

The background is from an image of a mountain near Mt. Everest. I witnessed this site as the sun rose over the Himalayas one morning in June of 2010.
The Painting

**Sketch:** I did not sketch any portion of this painting. Instead I painted through the projection cast on the wood surface.

**Gesso:** Before the painting began, I applied gesso to the major areas. For the area where the Tara was, I used 3 coats, the Stupa, two coats, and the mountain, one coat. This was extremely effective in establishing the depth found in this painting.

**Paint:** I began painting the Tah-ra on November 7th, a Sunday. I worked until the 24th of November at which point I stopped work on this and went back to the previous painting.

This painting moved far from the definitive line. There was no sketch and no line, just shapes meeting shapes and color next to color. It was quite an interesting thing to get used to, painting in the dark with only the light cast by the digital projector. I had to calculate color a bit more through knowledge rather than my sight because all of the colors looked quite a bit different under the extreme light on both the palette and the wood surface. I enjoyed this aspect thoroughly and decided that I would approach the last painting in the same manner.

The scale I was able to achieve with the large, cropped head was the most comfortable face for me to paint in the entire series. I feel that I have a calling to work with a larger scale. I am hopeful that one day I will have the opportunity to paint the entire side of a high-rise building.

I found that the softness that I realized in the last painting (third eye: circuit control) carried over, into the use of paint on the mountain in this painting. The key was being fluid, while remaining articulate and mindful in the application of the paint. The color used for areas in the distance, should not be a harsh or bold and it needed to diffuse. Using more paint for things close-up, and less for those things further away, seemed to be an effective method for working.
CIRCUIT 8: GALACTIC OVERMIND

**Planet:** Universal  
**Color:** Shimmering Gold (portrayed as white light)  
**Day of the Week:** Out of Time

January 2011, Oil on Wood, 4x8
The Explanation

Out of time and, an infinite Chakra point, shared by everyone everyday. I began painting the last piece in the series on December 10th. I felt very at ease with my process. It was exiting and I remember that I didn’t question my decisions with the paint anymore. It was a dance with paint, a continuous flow of thought transferred into colors, shapes and form, applied with the sentiment of each momentary flux in emotion. Painting the Tibetan deity Vajrapani represented a further departure from the previous paintings. Until this point I had relied solely on depictions of my wife, to carry the character content of each painting. I now felt comfortable with expanding this to include non-human entities.

The system itself is not the end. It describes what was created. This is the essence of the eighth circuit. The architect of the system, a consciousness that exists everywhere, throughout all time, without anything, containing everything, always and forevermore...

The dark void, the white light of nothingness, the space between everything, infinitely...

Wilson helps define this concept through the following experience:

Example: One day in 1973, during a nuero-programming experiment, I “saw” something happening to my son at exactly that time in Arizona, over 500 miles away.

We can process this datum in various ways. We can say that my “astral body” actually traveled to Arizona; this is the occultist theory. We can more conservatively say that I developed extra-sensory perception and “saw” Arizona without going there; there are many parapsychologists who prefer this third-circuit map of the 8th-Circuit experience. We can try to aver that I only “happened” to think of that scene while it was happening, by synchronicity; this is the Jungian approach. Or we can sweep it under the carpet by muttering “mere coincidence” or “sheer coincidence;” which is the traditional Rationalist approach.

There are many vantage points from which this event can be seen, much like the various religions of the world, each a different perspective on the same universal concept of something more than “us”. For my wife to assume this ascended position I thought it best to portray her on top of the world, a symbol of her perspective, outside of the confines of her formal existence as a human. She has grown wings and is the master of her Dharma wheel, or Darmachakra. It is here in the heavens that she encountered her guardian and protector:

30 Wilson, Robert Anton. Prometheus Rising. 5th. Las Vegas: New Falcon, 1983. 267-. Print
Vajrapani represents the power aspect of complete enlightenment, and known as Guhyapati (Tibetan: sang wa’i dag po), he is the 'Lord of Secrets' - the keeper of all the tantras of Vajrayana Buddhism. As a bodhisattva, like Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara, he dwells on the 10th bodhisattva level just prior to attaining complete Buddhahood. In actuality all three were completely enlightened eons ago and only appear, for the sake of training others, in the guise of bodhisattvas.  

*Vajrapani* comes in two forms, a peaceful form and a wrathful and fierce form (shown in the painting) where he can be seen holding the Vajra, ready to unleash the lightning of righteousness.

\[\text{“om va jra pā ni hūṃ”}\]

Over both *Vajrapani* and the enlightened Daixin, can be found the true essence of the eighth circuit, a higher Daixin emulating *Indra’s net.*

In Hinduism and Buddhism in the heaven of Indra, there is a vast net or web of silken strands which spans across space infinitely in every direction. Every intersection hosts a shining luminous pearl. The surface of every pearl completely reflects every other, and the net as a whole. Likewise, each reflected pearl in itself reflects every other, with the process continuing ad infinitum. Indra's Net is alternatively known as *Indra's Pearls* or the *Jewel Net of Indra.*

It is said that the pearls themselves represent the souls of animated life. Within each such pearl, there is a virtually infinite universe of images - experiences, since all souls are connected. The whole network is illuminated by a single light source, metaphorically *The First Cause.*

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The Process

The Digital Sketch

Notes/Sketch: I had made a few notes, such as “universal”, “Indra’s Net”, and “the space between”. I thought about these concepts and once again, I prayed before I painted.

Photography: Sometimes the first picture is the best one. I took the picture of my wife shown (seated). Initially I thought the resolution was not high enough to allow a clean and precise transfer. However, after shooting nearly 40 alternate pictures of the same pose, I realized that I was never going to achieve the spontaneity that was present in the first picture, so with some regret, I used it.

Digital Design: I combined the image of my wife seated on top of the world in a flowing multi-colored dress, with another image of my wife’s head, scaled larger than any other image of her face in the series. I then ran the image through several filters in Photoshop to obtain the effect seen. I then found an image of a bird wing, which I reshaped, and then copied and inverted to make the opposing wing. I then increased the exposure to lighten the appearance of the wing closest to the viewer. I found that setting up these details became increasingly important as I progressed through the series. I now relied much more on the digital projection component of my process.

I found an image of water droplets on a spider web and cropped the image to just two strands, then warped the image to foreshorten the perspective.

I added the dharma wheel that my wife, was now ready to spin. Finally, I added a picture of Vajrapani, the guardian of the Buddha (from a temple in Tibet). It was an incredible sculpture of a deity that I saw while traveling last summer. It stood over 10 feet high in the entrance to the main hall inside the temple. He was an awe-inspiring site, and a fitting image for the guardian of my ‘ascended’ wife.
The Painting

**Sketch:** As with the last painting I went from the digital design, directly to the painting. I found great enjoyment in the transfer that occurred when painting through the light of the projection. This process forced me to translate the color mixtures because I was surrounded by colored light both on the paint I was using, and on the surface of the painting itself. I found this complexity of color enhanced my motivation and for some reason, made perfect sense to me. I say this because I painted the majority of this piece in 6 days.

**Gesso:** As with the last painting (Tah-ra), I painted in a heavier consistency of gesso for areas of the painting that would be closest to the viewer, and allowed the gesso to diffuse to a single coat in the areas where it was furthest from the viewer’s perspective. This seemed to give me the best results of various approaches I experimented with during the creation of this series.

**Paint:** As with the second painting I created (*Love, War and Electricity*) I started with the background of the void of space. However, instead of using black, I used ultramarine blue, mixed with indigo. Although dark in appearance this blue content allowed the image to breathe and I avoided the same dull, motionless space I had created with the use of black in the second painting.

As I proceeded to paint I found that, although seemingly complex to achieve, the real life-like effect was not at all what I thought when I began painting this series a year ago. It really has nothing to do with the outline of the shape, and everything to do with how colors meet one another in harmony. The way in which one uses color can literally push and pull the viewer’s eye through the entire piece at the command of the artist.
The Chakra Light Base Component:

Building the Chakra Bases

I built the bases over the course of 1 week in late January. I used the same white birch plywood for the surfaces of the bases that I used to paint each of the paintings on. I felt by doing this it would deliberately tie the two together. *Now each painting had its’ own alter.* (All cuts were done freehand in my studio with a jigsaw).

The Chakra Light Symbols

The first step to complete this component was to order 8, 12x12 inch pieces of translucent fiberglass with colors, corresponding to the colors of each Chakra point. I located a
company called Delvie’s Plastics who had translucent Plexiglas in every color I needed for about 7 dollars per piece. I was pleasantly surprised. I spent two months pondering this aspect of the installation. In the beginning I was very interested in a more interactive component, something to the effect of a pressure sensitive light panel that would light up under the viewer’s feet. This changed as my paintings improved. I feel that I was trying to make up for the artwork in some way, a notion that I no longer felt by the mid-point of the series.

Next, I drew the Chakra symbols in Adobe Illustrator. This component was not a part of my initial idea at all. It wasn’t until I decided on using the Plexiglas, that the idea for the Chakra symbol came into focus. Initially I wanted to have a sound component that projected the frequency of the circuit or Chakra point. With the direction I took to not include an interactive component, so came about the dismissal of the sound idea as well. Instead I thought to really connect my paintings with the concept of Chakras/circuits, this visual symbolic expression would be far more compelling.

From the illustrator file, I created an SVG file and sent it to a company called Ponoko in California who specializes in digital fabrication. They in turn cut the forms out of 1/8 inch black acrylic plastic. When I received the symbols the form was cut, but remained within the entire sheet of acrylic. I then took the pieces out by attaching masking tape to the front side of each symbol. I then simply applied super glue to each of the pieces and then pressed the symbol to the piece of translucent Plexiglas. Later I discovered that there is specialty glue for this purpose that does not leave a white residue behind, which I found happened to me on the last 4 of the Chakra light symbols. However, it is not entirely noticeable when the symbols are illuminated and is also yet another learning experience.

Finally, I purchased 8, 1-inch deep square display frames. I took out all hardware and simply placed the Plexiglas with the glued symbol into the frame. This component really added to the over all effect of the installation and achieved exactly what I was looking for, the feeling of light and like Mark Rothko, the feeling of a temple, of meditation, within the aura of a color.

**Chakra 1:**

![Chakra 1](image1)

**Chakra 2:**

![Chakra 2](image2)
The Scrolls

There was a significant amount of research, time, travel, insight, and revelation to convey to the audience for this installation to be successful. How in the world could I condense all of that into a single page besides each painting? I debated this for about a month, but as the Chakra Light Bases and Chakra symbols came to fruition, the scroll designs began to take shape.

The scroll concept was something that I had wanted to incorporate since the very beginning of my work on this thesis. About the content, however, I was much less sure. I began by writing up a condensed version of the explanations for each circuit, but when I placed this write-up next to the piece, it seemed to take away from the experience of the painting. As with the sound component that I had decided to eliminate, I felt that trying to tell the whole story was impractical, and after some council on this matter I decided to take a different approach. I listened to Robert Anton Wilson’s explanation of each circuit once again, this time listening for words that summed up the idea of each circuit. Since my paintings were set up, surrounding me in my studio at this point, I also looked at the finished paintings. I looked for correlations. I thought of my experience in Tibet, and I made several lists and eventually narrowed down the words to 5 parts for each of the scrolls.

The first word found is the day of the week and sets the day for the viewer. I see this as the introduction to the meditation for the day. Next is a single word that is the focal point of that circuit. Then there are two groups of three words that form a poetic verse of the experience of that circuit. Found at the bottom of each scroll is a brush-stroke word. This is the syllable that correlates with each Chakra point, thus bringing the sound element back into the concept, finally, at the end.
GREAT WHITE MOTHER AND
THE PRIMORDIAL GROUND

Monday

REINCARNATE

CONCEPTION

THE WOMB

BIRTH

SENSATIONAL

SAFE

EXPLORATION

Lam
LOVE, WAR, AND ELECTRICITY

ENTER CIRCUIT 2

Tuesday

SOCIAL ORDER

LOVE

FEAR

EMOTIONAL

FEELING

INTRAPERSONAL

TERRITORY

Vam
MAKE A MAP, TEST YOUR MODEL

Wednesday

COMMUNICATION

SYMBOLISM

LANGUAGE

3-D SPACE

REASON

INFORMATION

ACCELERATION

The Scrolls

Circuit 3
SEXUALITY AND THE SYSTEM
ENTER CIRCUIT 4

Thursday
DOMESTICATION

ADULT
HEART
SHADOW-SELF

GUILT
CULTURE
SOCIALIZATION

Yam
The Scrolls

Circuit 6

Third Eye: Circuit Control

Saturday

Reprogram

Magic

Nervous System

Awareness

Cybernetic

Telepathic

Clarity

Oṃ
The Scrolls

Circuit 7

TAH-RA
ENTER CIRCUIT 7

Sunday

IMMORTAL

COMPLETE
CONSCIOUSNESS

AWARENESS

BUDDHA-MIND
RESONATING

THE GREAT WORK

Aum
The Thesis Show: March 7-23, 2011 @ Bevier Gallery

Introduction

CONSCIOUSNESS CHANGE...

I created this installation to explore the concept of the human being as an energy system. This system is comprised of several energy centers that resonate with specific frequencies, commonly referred to as chakras.

Our energy systems are affected by our environment, programmed if you will by innumerable factors, including the constant barrage by media in contemporary society. This programming can be problematic for all aspects of our lives. It influences the energy we are drawn to, that we transmit, that we receive.

While researching this topic I came across the work of author and philosopher Robert Anton Wilson. He theorizes that we are an 8-circuit being governed by imprints we receive upon these circuits, based on our experiences in life.

These programs can be rewritten by a process known as re imprinting.

Many aspects of this model resonated with me, due to the strong synergy with Tibetan Buddhism, gnosticism, and the Hindu chakra system. I set out to create an installation that blended aspects of these belief systems into one narrative journey through the circuits, offering a creative remedy to imprinting dilemma.

Through this I came to realize that the process I undertook to create this installation was a fine method for re imprinting, or as I like to think of it, for healing.

I am blessed to have a wonderful wife who has shared this experience with me, and she is your guide through this 8-circuit path to light.
The Installation

March 11th, 2011

Photos by Roby Neill
The Installation

March 11th, 2011

Photos by Roby Neill
The Installation

March 11th, 2011

Photos by Roby Neill
Conclusion

I became a learned painter through this process, and thus I was successful. I spent a year of my life living and breathing this installation and in the end I surprised myself. I was able to achieve my initial goal of rendering a 4x8 ft painting in a week, for the last painting was basically completed in six days.

The reactions to the work at my thesis show were quite positive. As a result of this two-year journey through the MFA program at RIT, I now see more clearly how the role of “the artist” pertains to my life: education of peace, of acceptance, and our oneness through the almighty image that transcends our limited words. Perhaps this has always been the artist’s role

I started out heavily based in the linear elements of design. I found joy in literally drawing the connections (through line) between the components of my work. As I progressed I found that this line became the thing I was yearning to avoid completely. To allow the connections to happen for the viewer themselves, without me needing to “direct” the whole interaction was a far more elegant and meaningful way to approach a piece of art. I also found that painting for me, was much like meditation in that it seems to be a continual process of transformation. To try and rush this process, however, will, as with meditation, produce immature results. One must practice with the true intention to create everyday. This will allow the evolutionary process to take hold naturally. As the artist, this natural flow allows you to become more of an expression of the flow of your own evolution, and more in touch with the nature of the content you portray.

When I began this series Tibet was still very much a foreign land to me. Now it is a place very close to my heart. My hope is that with my continued practice and dedication to painting, I will bring the beauty and wonder (and maybe even a transformative moment) that I experienced while visiting there, into the lives of those who choose to view the work I create. I will also continue to make use of my inquisitive nature not relying just on this one journey to inspire me, but to continue to travel, to explore, and then internalize, to create.

I think through art (the arts), we have the potential to finally stand together as a human race, rather than thinking we are so divided by infantile differences put forth by those who wish nothing more than to divide and conquer. Our greatest quest, our true path of evolution, must include coming to terms with our faults, with our misconceptions and biases, with the sometimes-horrible nature of “man”, and living together as a consciousness for all of humankind.
Footnotes:


6. Morphogenetic Fields: “Fields that play a causal role in morphogenesis. This term, first proposed in the 1920s, is now widely used by developmental biologists, but the nature of morphogenetic fields has remained obscure. On the hypothesis of formative causation, they are regarded as morphic fields stabilized by morphic resonance”.

7. Morphic Fields: “fields within and around a morphic unit which organizes its characteristic structure and pattern of activity. Morphic fields underlie the form and behavior of holons or morphic units at all levels of complexity. The term morphic field includes morphogenetic, behavioral, social, cultural, and mental fields. Morphic fields are shaped and stabilized by morphic resonance from previous similar morphic units, which were under the influence of fields of the same kind. They consequently contain a kind of cumulative memory and tend to become increasingly habitual”.


24. Wilson, Robert Anton. Interview by Sounds True. session 3. CD. 8 Apr 2011


**Work by artist Alex Grey:** Creator: Alex Grey, Title: Contemplation Work Type: Paintings Date 2002 Location: Exhibited at Feature Inc., Fall 2002 Material: oil paint on wood Measurements: 20 x 20 inches Photographer: Larry Qualls ARTstor Collection Contemporary Art (Larry Qualls Archive) Source Image and original data provided by Larry Qualls.