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Mysterium tremendum et fascinans

Babette Augustin Gabriele

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MYSTERIUM TREMENDUM ET FASCINANS

by

BABETTE GABRIELE AUGUSTIN

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Fine Arts

Thesis Report

MFA Photography Program
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, New York
October 24, 1989

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THESIS PROPOSAL
July 1, 1988

Purpose

To create a body of work externalizing visceral impressions of the visually unsettling and ethereal in going beyond the realm of mere literal referents. I seek to explore my role as instinctual animator of the tense netherworld which surrounds us.

Background

I came to R.I.T. a photojournalist, armed with a portfolio of primarily environmental portraits. Black and white and color, they were what I deemed to be good photographs, fulfilling all of the standard editorial requirements: interesting, informative and in focus. Most importantly, I considered them to be true—I still do.

During the past 19 months I have, however, found other approaches also to be valid. My visual forays have run the gamut: collage, non-silver, hand-applied color, video, animation, computer animation, the Widelux, toy cameras and xerography, in addition to their respective histories. Predictably, I struggled, trying to hang my proverbial hat on a “medium hook.”

Yet, looking back through the work itself, I have come to realize an inclination, on my part, towards the intense, the off-kilter, in short, the visually perturbing. Indeed, these elements support both my journalistic and impressionistic bodies of work. It is, however, without the photojournalistic
constraints I came here with, that I find myself most free and spontaneous, relying instead on pure intuition and emotion, which, in turn sparks the animation of my amorphic fears and tensions. The transference of extreme emotional states to organic (concrete) elements is certainly not new. Primitive as well as modern cultures, have long put into visual form, their collective “demons” in order to satisfy a very basic need to bind ethereal anxieties with tangible forms.

My goal is to give life and substance to my netherworld, a world I suspect is universal.

**Procedure**

Subject matter for the thesis will focus on the living form, human and otherwise. It is important to note here that I am not interested in the recording of photographic fact. Rather, it is the instinctual interaction with and manipulation of that initial fact that results in visual manifestations independent of the photographic document. These images will exist entirely in and of themselves, exciting new emotional realities within myself as well as in the viewer, if my premise of universality holds true.

Production of the visual work will be accompanied by readings on symbolism, mysticism and surrealism. Sources for this material will include thesis board members, the R.I.T. and University of Rochester libraries, Visual Studies workshop and Writers and Books. Visual research will include painting, photography and film/video.

Images will be produced at R.I.T. during the summer and fall quarters of 1988, with monthly board contact, leading to an installation in November 1988 of work, including, but not limited to the aforementioned media (see Background).
Selected Bibliography


INTRODUCTION
"The spirit has its homeland, which is the realm of the meaning of things."

Saint-Exupery
—The Wisdom of the Sands

Indeed, it is from that homeland that I now speak. I have come to acknowledge an essentially vital liaison to a netherworld that goes well beyond my personal/literal experience. It is the ethereal realm shared by all, cross-culturally, in what Jung calls the collective unconscious, which, in turn, Joseph Campbell refers to as a “mysterium tremendum et fascinans — a mystery — tremendous and horrific; because it smashes all of your fixed notions of things, and at the same time utterly fascinating, because it is of your own nature and being.”

It was with this other 'world' in mind that I set out on my search for the visually instinctive embodiment of that which transcends its literal being and ultimately leads to an unsettling enlightenment, i.e. a “breakthrough...from biography to metaphysics, accomplished via the dissolution of time, which opens the prospect of an occult power shaping our lives that is at once the universe and each of us....”

The journey to my aforementioned 'homeland' was not an easy one, and certainly predates the thesis proposal. In fact, by virtue of research and hindsight, I can say that my fascination with the ethereal coincides with my first memories: the tales of monsters, fairies and God. I am not alone in this experience, for it is a core element of childhood. It is as adults that we deny


ourselves “what psychologists call psychic identity, or 'mystical participation'. But it is exactly this halo of unconscious associations that gives a colourful and fantastic aspect to the primitive's world. We have lost it to such a degree that we do not recognize it when we meet it again. With us such things are kept below the threshold;....”\(^3\)

It was my innate need to go beyond the threshold of simple experience to a land, not of never-never, but of ethereality, that lead to “Mysterium Tremendum et Fascinans.” (Thesis show installation, December 10, 1988)

The two greatest visual factors in my metamorphosis were the elements of collage and the toy camera. Collage offered me, a photojournalist, a welcomed respite, for I was not bound by a precise moment of simple vision, a fait accompli, as it were. Rather, I was given the freedom to pluck from my surroundings those peculiar elements which excited my spirit, and to subsequently resequence those bits, according to both my referential and intuitive tendencies.

It was with the toy camera that I learned to act on instinct. I no longer looked through the viewfinder, I no longer focused, and I no longer carried 25 pounds of camera equipment. I was free to indulge, free to look past the act of photography, to the subject itself, to its environment and my relationship to that scenario. In short, I began to photograph with my soul.

The toy camera-collage transition came at a relatively late date within the thesis timeline. I had fallen back into the single image trap, seduced by the 'ethereal' quality of the toy camera images. The source of that aspect was, however, merely a result of their being soft, i.e. out-of-focus and therefore

\(^3\)Campbell and Moyers, "The Power of Myth," p. 31.
ghostly. The images themselves did not inspire transcendence, instead they left me wanting.

I had spent the summer months photographing both in black and white and colour, and found by early September that I had, indeed, two independent bodies of work. The colour group, which went on to become my creatures, and the black and white selection, which I hand-coloured in order to activate their netherworldliness. (The best analogy is that of viewing clouds and identifying both particular shapes and narratives, this process being predicated on a mental image enhancement. The hand-colouring process was simply the physical image transfiguration.)

Both groups of work dealt with essentially similar subject matter, in addition to relying, to some degree, upon the psychology of photographic fact (photograph as evidence of physical being). Yet, the hand-coloured pieces remained static, behind mats, whereas the colour creations promised an entirely kinetic and unpredictable future.

I did not come to this revelation on my own; I have my thesis board to thank for that. Three months prior to show date, I presented the first of the larger assemblages (Sucking Pigs into Slaughter), in addition to the smaller mock-ups, two black and white hand-coloured toy camera photographs, and several video stills, which were also in my repertoire of the ethereal and unsettling. It was at that point I learned, that clinging to what is safe and predictable would not compel me to move forward; rather, in committing myself to the personal unknown, I have discovered my artistic self. “It is a fact that in addition to memories from a long-distant conscious past, completely new thoughts and creative ideas can also present themselves from the unconscious—thoughts and ideas that have never been conscious before. They grow up from the dark depths of the mind like a lotus and form a most
important part of the subliminal psyche....The ability to reach a rich vein of such material and to translate it effectively into philosophy, literature, music or scientific discovery is one of the hallmarks of what is commonly called genius."\(^4\) I would add here, that genius is the Latin term for guardian spirit, and that my pieces are, in fact, genii, for "as threshold figures, these are of two worlds at once: temporal in the human appeal of their pictured denotations, while by connotation opening to eternity."\(^5\)

As vital as the intuitive imagemaking process has been, of equal stature has been the academic research, for it has lead me to fully understand what I have accomplished visually and psychologically, while describing what my artistic future forebodes: the revelations of a new mythology.

For "myth must be kept alive. The people who can keep it alive are artists of one kind or another. The function of the artist is the mythologization of the environment and the world."\(^6\)


\(^5\)Campbell, "The Inner Reaches of Outer Space," p. 69.

ETHEREALITY
The goal of art is to reveal unearthly life dwelling behind everything, to break the mirror of life so we may look being in the face.  

Franz Marc  

Every object has two aspects: The common aspect, which is seen by everyone, and the ghostly and metaphysical aspect, which only rare individuals see at moments of clairvoyance and metaphysical meditation. A work of art must relate something that does not appear in its visible form.  

Giorgio de Chirico  

I would argue against Chirico's assertion that this 'netherworld' is apprehended by 'only rare individuals, at moments of clairvoyance.' The popularity of science fiction and horror thrillers attest to the millions who seek to look into the chasm of their own mortality. This genre of entertainment provides a constant reminder that all is not what it seems in the literal world. For, as Jung points out, "...every concept in our conscious mind, ..., has its own psychic associations. While such associations may vary in intensity (according to the relative importance of the concept to our own personality, or according to the other ideas and even complexes to which it is associated in our unconscious), they are capable of changing the "normal" character of that concept. It may even become something quite different as it drifts below the level of consciousness." 

Below the level of consciousness we have the land of dream and collective and personal myth. There one is encircled by demons, angels and, spirits et al.; metaphors for literal and amorphic anxieties and tensions each of us plays host too.


“Something that is of a more or less unknown nature is intuitively grasped by the unconscious and submitted to an archetypal treatment. This suggests that, instead of the process of reasoning that conscious thought would have applied, the archetypal mind has stepped in and taken over the task of prognostication. The archetypes thus have their own initiative and their own specific energy.”

My pieces embody these energies.

“And as the insubstantial shapes of dream arise from the formative ground of the individual will, so do all the passing shapes of the physical world arise....from a universal morphogenetic ground that is made known to the mind through the figurations of myth. These mythic figurations are the 'ancestral forms', the insubstantial archetypes, of all that is beheld by the eye as physically substantial, material things being understood as ephemeral concretions, out of these energies of these noumena.”

In short, each of us listens to the whispers of a netherworld populated by personal myths, as individual as genetic make-up and, by the same token, part and parcel of the greater collective unconscious. The collective aspect is fueled, I suggest, by histories of art, religion and music, as well as by “a single psychophysiological source - namely, the human imagination, moved by the conflicting urgencies of the organs (including the brain) of the human body, of which the anatomy has remained pretty much the same since c. 40,000 B.C.”

Yet, not everyone chooses to recognize this 'other' realm. In fact, "contemporary man, in order to sustain his creed (of rationality) pays the

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price in a remarkable lack of introspection. He is blind to the fact that with all his rationality and efficiency, he is possessed by 'powers' that are beyond his control. His gods and demons have not disappeared at all; they have merely got new names. They keep him on the run with restlessness, vague apprehensions, physiological complications and an insatiable need for pills, alcohol, tobacco, food, and, above all, a large array of neuroses."13

Jung goes on to suggest that "modern man does not understand how much his 'rationalism' (which has destroyed his capacity to respond to numinous symbols and ideas) has put him at the mercy of the psychic 'underworld'. He has freed himself from 'superstition' (or so he believes), but in the process he has lost his spiritual values to a positively dangerous degree. His moral and spiritual tradition has disintegrated, and he is now paying the price for this breakup in world-wide disorientation and dissociation."14

It seems as if Chirico was correct in his assertion that only rare individuals are given the sight. But not all is what it seems. I point again to the conscious feeding of the unconscious with the fantastic archetypes presented in the arts (film, literature, art, music). For it was that type of stimulus which ultimately pushed me to see over the edge, into my own abyss, pulsing with fear, anxiety and hope.

"If the shadow figure contains valuable vital forces, they ought to be assimilated into actual experience and not repressed. It is up to the ego to give up its pride and priggishness and to live out something that seems to be dark, but actually may not be."15

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14 Jung et al., "Man and His Symbols," p. 84.

I am certainly not alone in the opinion that the search into the shadow figure, (the unconscious Self), is absolutely essential in the processes of individuation, as well as in the area of general health.

“For the sake of mental stability and even physiological health, the unconscious and the conscious must be integrally connected and thus move on parallel lines. If they are split or “dissociated”, psychological disturbance follows. In this respect, dream symbols are the essential message carriers from the instinctive to the rational parts of the human mind, and their interpretation enriches the poverty of consciousness so that it learns to understand again the forgotten language of the instincts.”16

Ultimately, my creations are daydream revelations of my “shadow figure”; a configuration which crosses from the intimately particular to the archetypes of a collective unconscious imaging system. They have come to frighten me, possess and enthrall me. They are aspects of my ethereal self; a self we all seek: the immortal, the eternally transcendent, experiencing all and nothing.

This is best explained in “Schopenhauer’s own crucial contribution,....that whereas our outer eyes do indeed behold only phenomenal appearances (Vorstellungen) within a three-dimensional field of space—time (Die Welt als Vorstellung), the inward experience of each and every one of those appearances is of him-, her-, or itself as a willing subject (Die Welt als Wille), this inward experience of the will to live then being, in fact, a veiled experience within oneself of the energy of atman-brahman, the universal self, as linked however to the samsara (the temporal, apparitional field) by the

apparition's own fear of death and desire for continued apparitional existence."17

We are at once one and many. Balance within that understanding is crucial. I am a case-in-point. I was torn between my conscious, single image, 'is-as-it-was' representation gridlock, and the non-representational (amorphous) toy camera photographs that were, at that point, also single images. The inherent geometry of the photographic space became a barrier I was not willing break now, despite the fact that I had done so in the past.

Extreme distress set in. I doubted my inspirational abilities as an imagemaker and questioned the honesty of my being. But, as is well documented, "creative ideas or solutions to problems do not arrive gratis, without the cost of hard work; on the contrary, it is most often after intense but unsuccessful efforts to generate a fresh artistic idea or to find a new solution to a problem that one unexpectedly appears in a moment of exhaustion and relaxation, when the mind is floating free."18 I have gone into my ethereality and returned far more alive, having met the 'gods' in my Self head on.

"In popular beliefs there is everywhere, of course, the notion of gods as living entities inhabiting a mythological zone beyond time. But that timeless zone is everywhere conceived to be the informing spirituality of the visible world itself. In dream and vision one enters into it, and on waking returns. Moreover, as such inward experiences have let us know, its apparitions are of

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a self-luminous substance revelatory of the vital energies, not only of ourselves, but of all living things."19

Having, naturally, researched the surrealist movements during the thesis, I have concluded that we share a common goal: "the collapse of the distinction between imagination and reality,... one that Freud analyzes as the primitive belief in magic—animism, and narcissistic omnipotence, are all potential triggers of that metaphysical shudder that is the uncanny. For they represent the breakthrough, itself the evidence of a compulsion to repeat, the subject is stabbed and wounded by the experience of death."20

One might well use the term 'new surrealism' to describe the images that are destined to become part of the new mythological systems (see Introduction); however, it's inherent historical connotations tether it to overly intellectualized strategies, which, in turn, may cloud artistic perceptions. Instead, I propose the term ethereality, for it is precisely the unworldly and spiritual, otherwise referred to as the unconscious Self, that is at issue in the essential search of one's own reality. It follows that, without recognition of an ethereality there can be no new mythology, for "..., in the way of the method of art, the features of an environment become transparent to transcendence, which is the way of vision of myth."21

"Myths are the clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life."22

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"The history of symbolism shows that everything can assume symbolic significance: natural objects (like stones, plants, animals, men, mountains and valleys, sun and moon, wind, water and fire), or man-made things (like houses, boats or cars), or even abstract forms (like numbers, or the triangle, the square, and the circle). In fact the whole cosmos is a potential symbol."\(^{23}\) And it is with symbols that all forms of communication are made viable. Symbols, unlike signs, go beyond the literal definition of an element's objectness to higher levels of spiritual empathy/compassion.

"The sign is always less than the concept it represents, while a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. Symbols, moreover, are natural and spontaneous products.... In dreams, symbols occur spontaneously, for dreams happen and are not invented; they are therefore, the main source of all our knowledge about symbolism. But symbols, I must point out, do not occur solely in dreams. They appear in all kinds of psychic manifestations.... It seems that even inanimate objects cooperate with the unconscious in the arrangement of symbolic pattern."\(^{24}\)

The act of collage is, in an of itself, a most eloquent form of visual discourse, making full use of the varied connotations symbols carry into their resequenced scenarios. The power and complexity of the medium, and the extended artistic involvement it offers, made it a cornerstone of the final thesis process. Instead of being bound, hand and eye, to the photographic instant, I could go on beyond the photographic sign to the psychological symbol, which, in turn, lead to surprising revelations within my unconscious Self.

\(^{23}\)Jung et al., "Man and His Symbols," p. 257.

\(^{24}\)Jung et al., "Man and His Symbols," p. 41.
I must note here, that the process of collage does not automatically guarantee active involvement of the unconscious. Take, for example, the postmodern constructions proliferating the photographic art world today: their's (Barbara Kruger, Victor Burgin, Sherrie Levine, Richard Prince, Victor Schrager, etc.) is primarily a premeditated program, focusing on the literal semiotics of both visual and literary input. "Such a composition may grace the eye, but in itself lacks magic, or, as Joyce would say, the 'radiance' (claritas) of an achieved work of 'proper' art. One's heart is waked, not by the form of the work, but by its content...."

An undeniable factor in my understanding of the conscious-unconscious dance is the multi-step collaging method I chose: construction, deconstruction, reconstruction, deconstruction and final reconstruction of the full figures.

Step 1 requires that I enter into what is commonly referred to as a daydream state; waltzing between the unconscious and the conscious; filling conscious moments with transcriptions (miniature collages) of the symbolically transcendent visuals, drawn from what I am physically contemplating at the time, (16x20 inch, toy camera contact sheets, as was my case).

Step 2 describes the 16x20 inch print production process. Most every section of the miniature collages represents one image, resulting in a total of approximately 187 Ektacolor prints. At this stage, I was again, dealing with the single image, once removed from its most recent constellation (the miniature collages).

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I chose to concentrate first on printing and then on recollaging, because of scale and workspace considerations, in addition to preferring an entirely focused mind set for the recreation and rebirth of the figures.

Scale has necessarily played a vital role in my thesis experience. Of course, the mechanics of scale are relatively predictable, however, the emotional impact I enjoyed upon experiencing, for the first time, the large pieces, can only be described as tremendous. I felt them glowing and pulsing with their own energies, quite apart from my being. I therefore point to Step 3 as their first life's breath.

Step 4 necessitated disassembly, foam core mounting, and recutting, respectively. The psychological ramifications are quite interesting, for I was seeing them appear and disappear, thus further enhancing their apparitional existence within my own imagination of life.

The penultimate stage of reconstruction, involved the three-dimensional collaging of the foam core appendages, using a hot glue gun. The final aspect of physical being called for the application of a clay edging (Darwi-air hardening, synthetic clay made in Belgium)—a frame, as it were, around each section, eliminating the paper seam, but at the same time, emphasizing the collaged aspect of these creations. They became far more substantial (not to mention heavier), but more importantly, they transcended their photographic identity, i.e. their paper quality. The qualities ascribed to them by others include those of stained glass, metal and ceramic. Yet, for most, this is only a cursory observation, for it is the 'genius' (see Introduction) itself which compels fascination.

The hand-colouring process was initially quite important to me. Certainly, painting the clay edging was essential (it is bright white in its normal state), but as the thesis came along, I realized that not all the pieces required my
applied colour translation of shape and form, in terms of the photographic information within the aforementioned appendages, as, for instance, my black and white images had (see Introduction). The major factor in that transition being the strength of shape/form relationships within the body, emphasizing the entire being, simultaneously in its individual movements and in its total symbolic resonance as one.

I have found collage to be the truest form of unconscious transliteration, as it most closely resembles the workings of the mind. Few, after all, recall life's continuum in contact sheet form, although this is what 'straight photography' seems to support ("Celebrate the moments of your life." - Kodak advertising slogan). The fact is, however, that "the subliminal state retains ideas and images at a much lower level of tension than they possess in consciousness. In the subliminal condition they lose clarity of definition; the relations between are less consequential and more vaguely analogous, less rational and therefore more 'incomprehensible.' ....But if something happens to endow any of these images with greater tension, they become less subliminal and, as they come close to the threshold of consciousness, more sharply defined."\(^{26}\)

I suggest that instead of 'becoming more sharply defined', these images have, indeed, been acutely redefined by virtue of their passing through the ethereal portal.

My daemons too, have passed through the cranial arch, materializing as a melange of the personal and eternal mysteries writhing in my soul's flesh and blood.

\(^{26}\)Jung et al., "Man and His Symbols," p. 52.
When the toy camera was first suggested to me in the early Fall of 1987, I scoffed. I considered it too arty, and above all too inconclusive in its attempt, at best, to simulate the Pictorialists. After all, I had photographic standards. (See Proposal)

Then, one cold day, I came across a Diana-F in a junk shop. Being an impulsive shopper, I bought it. Soon, I began photographing, both in colour and black and white, although not entirely forsaking other formats (Widelux, Hasselblad, Nikon and Video). What did happen, however, was that I started to employ the aforementioned imaging systems as I did the toy camera: I relied on instinct.

“Feeling, as I mean it, is (like thinking) a rational (i.e. ordering) function, whereas intuition is an irrational (i.e. perceiving) function. In so far as intuition is a 'hunch', it is not the product of a voluntary act; it is rather an involuntary event, which depends upon different external or internal circumstances instead of an act of judgment. Intuition is more like a sense perception, which is also an irrational event in so far as it depends essentially upon objective stimuli, which owe their existence to physical, not mental causes.27

I ultimately chose the toy camera as my primary tool because it provokes intuitive freedom. It does not invite viewfinder perception (because what you see is what you don't get), rather, it forces one to palpably circumscribe the surroundings, recording instinctually with the camera, that which excites. “Our conscious mind continually creates the illusion of a clearly shaped, 'real' outer world that blocks off many other perceptions. Yet through our

27Jung et al., "Man and His Symbols," p. 49.
unconscious nature we are inexplicably connected to our psychic and physical environment.”28

Open to all kinds of sensory input, I took myself to natural history and art museums, to carnivals and churches, and to zoos and pet stores. I photographed almost constantly: off the television screen, in restaurants and, of course, at home with my dogs.

The result was approximately 100(±) rolls of 120 film, black and white and colour. I migrated towards the colour work as the pool from which my spirits would arise, because of the immediate colour palette experience, in addition to their capacity to inspire collage. This particular attribute was due the fact that the colour contacts were 16x20 inches and that the black and white were 8x10 inches. As a result of this latent observation on my part, I am looking forward to reexamining the black and white work, which represents a relatively sizable section of the entire thesis work.

Nevertheless, it was the colour toy camera images that first invited transcendence, enticing me beyond the borders of rationality, into a netherworld where I learned to confront my innermost anxieties about life, sex, religion, and death, which I, in turn, embodied within my creatures.

“If we are to generalize the aesthetic of surrealism (→ ethereality), the concept of convulsive beauty is at the core of its aesthetic, a concept that reduces to an experience of reality transformed into representation. Surreality is, we could say, nature convulsed (collaged) into a kind of writing.”29

28Jung et al., "Man and His Symbols," p. 221.

THE PIECES THEMSELVES
"They are, at the same time, both images and emotions. One can speak of archetype only when these two aspects are simultaneous. When there is merely the image, then there is simply a word picture of little consequence. But by being charged with emotion, the image gains numinosity (or psychic energy); it becomes dynamic, and consequences of some kind must flow from it....They are pieces of life itself—images that are integrally connected to the living individual by the bridge of emotions. That is why it is impossible to give an arbitrary (or universal) interpretation of any archetype. It must be explained in the manner indicated by the whole-life situation of the particular individual to whom it relates."30

Of course, that stipulation applies to any art-artist-audience equation. I necessarily have a different relationship to the pieces than my viewers, because the pieces are, first and foremost, my expressions of archetypes, derived from my photographs and the experiences associated with them. I know everything about them: Who-What-Where-When-Why-, and How. This naturally affected my instinctual responses to them during the collaging process.

Take, for example, "Carrion": comprised of a live steer’s head, taken at a county fair (the steer had, that day, been purchased by a local supermarket chain); a rhino skull, sighted at a garage sale; a rooster’s red and black gullet, also from the fair; a crowd scene from the protests against Scorsese’s “The Last Temptation”; a concrete mausoleum angel, and a young boy’s legs and flipper-like hands. With the benefit of hindsight, I can look at “Carrion” in relationship to its components, and read my fear and guilt concerning death

30Jung et al., "Man and His Symbols," p. 87.
as the prerequisite for life within the food chain, aching in the respective loss of innocence.

This is a conscious reading of what is a product of instinct. As an analysis, it provides me with a personal interpretation and understanding of, what Campbell refers to as, "the same dread triad of god-given urgencies, of feeding, procreating and overcoming,..."\textsuperscript{31}

However, all of that information is not essential for the audience. In fact, that kind of input is antithetical to my thesis. I am not interested in a conscious response, rather I am seeking to create visceral impressions in my audience, not dissimilar to my own, instinctual fascination with these creatures.

"Joyce says that you put a frame around it and see it first as one thing, and that, in seeing it as one thing, you then become aware of the relationship of part to part, each part to the whole, and the whole to each of its parts. This is the essential, aesthetic factor—rhythm, the harmonious rhythm of relationships. And when a fortunate rhythm has been struck by the artist, you experience a radiance. You are held in aesthetic arrest. That is epiphany."\textsuperscript{32}

It was the transcendence of literal fact that supported my search for the visually unsettling and ethereal. The result are my 'spirits', Frankenstein-like creations of my mind's eye.

But, "how can you behold a monster and have epiphany, Moyers asks of Campbell. "There is another emotion associated with art, which is not of the beautiful but of the sublime. What we call monsters can be experienced as

\textsuperscript{31}Campbell, "The Inner Reaches of Outer Space," p. 15.

\textsuperscript{32}Campbell and Moyers, "The Power of Myth," p. 220.
sublime. They represent power too vast for the normal forms of life to contain them....By a monster, I mean some horrendous presence or apparition that explodes all of your standards for harmony, order and ethical conduct."\(^\text{33}\)

I can honestly say, hindsight aside, that I still experience a particular thrill when I am with the work. They are alive for me. They pulse and writhe in space, partially due to their size, but more so, I believe, because of their mythic nature and their whispers of collective revelations.

Although, as I mentioned earlier, I am not necessarily in favor of prescribed reading patterns for my 'beings', I have found the research to be quite enlightening. It allows me to point to my collection as representations of the eternal collective forces which have been the subject matter of philosophies, religions and myths for millions of years.

For example, "Pillaged Rape": "...this demon is a manifestation of one's own impulse to aggression turned back on oneself, the vanquished shapes underfoot representing attachment to physical desires and the fear of physical death."\(^\text{34}\) Of course, Campbell is not referring to my vision specifically. Rather he is describing the "Indian pictorial metaphor of a wrathful deity in demonic form, wearing necklaces of severed heads, kilts of severed arms and legs, flourishing weapons and trampling down human shapes underfoot."\(^\text{35}\) Despite topical differences, I have found Campbell's psychological analysis to be relatively similar with my own intuitive perceptions of the elemental issues within that piece.


\(^{34}\)Campbell, "The Inner Reaches of Outer Space," p. 66-67.

\(^{35}\)Campbell, "The Inner Reaches of Outer Space," p. 66.
Yet another appropriate insight into the thesis group pertains to the focus on female configurations, and their transsexual attributes (there are six primary figures: Animamus, Earth Mother, Angel of Death, Mother Earth, Mary and the Trinity, and Leda into Swan).

"The female represents what in Kantian terminology we call the forms of sensibilities. She is time and space itself, and the mystery beyond her is beyond all pairs of opposites. So it isn't male and it isn't female. It neither is nor is not. But everything is within her so that the gods are her children. Everything you can think of, everything you can see, is a production of the goddess." 36

By the same token, it is obviously not a fluke that most of my pieces boast amorphous animal bodies. "The boundless profusion of animal symbolism in the religion and art of all times does not merely emphasize the importance of the symbol; it shows how vital it is for men to integrate into their lives the symbol's psychic content—instinct. In itself, an animal is neither good nor evil; it is a piece of nature. It cannot desire anything that is not in its nature. To put this another way, it obeys its instincts.

"These instincts often seem mysterious to us, but they have their parallel in human life: the foundation of human nature is instinct." 37 It was that instinct which brought to life my daemons.

I could go on to clinically dissect the remainder of the creatures, but find that their titles provide as much verbal cueing as I care to offer. "Not all who perceive with their eyes the sensible products of art are affected alike by the same object, but if they know it for the outward portrayal of an archetype

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subsisting in intuition, their hearts are shaken and they recapture memory of that original."38

"This is the universal quality of the animal as a symbol of transcendence. These creatures, figuratively coming from the depths of the ancient Earth Mother, are symbolic denizens of the collective unconscious. They bring into the field of consciousness, a special chthonic (underworld) message..."39

That message varies from piece to piece, however, as a group, they are all aspect of one entity:

"The Self is often symbolized as an animal, representing our instinctive nature and its connectedness with one's surroundings."40

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A NEW MYTHOLOGY
The seat of the soul is there, where the outer and inner worlds meet. (Novalis) That is the wonderland of my myth. From the outer world the senses carry images to the mind, which do not become myth, however, until there, transformed by fusion with accordant insights, awakened as imagination from the inner world of the body.41

The creatures I have brought to live in this world, represent the major elements within my personal mythology, which, by virtue of its 'collective' resource, also speaks of cross-cultural concerns (sex, death, religion, etc.) I have taken photographs, traditionally a form of 'true' representation and appealed to their non-literal, transcendent potential. This invocation made it necessary to rely not on the rational, but on the irrational. Postmodernism's greatest failure is that it entirely forsakes the realms of the unconscious, in favor of a complicated rhetoric surrounding fairly simple observations of representation in media, advertising and politics, with a dash of Marxist theory, to make it all seem legitimate.

"Today's pitiful contracts to invent monuments commemorating local-historical events and personages are hardly comparable to the earlier challenges of art, to break window's through the walls of culture to eternity. Thus the only true service of a proper artist today will have to be to individuals: reattuning them to the forgotten archetypes, les grandes lignes de la nature, which have been lost to view behind a cloud of contending philosophies of the 'greatest economic good of the greatest number.'42

Even emotion, the most liquid of sensibilities, is clinically manipulated by postmodernists, so as to exact a precise and predictable response. In short, it is not 'proper art' as per Joyce's definition.

“For nature, as we know, is at once without and within us. Art is the mirror at the interface. So too is ritual; so also is myth. These too 'bring out the grandes lignes de la nature', and in doing so, reestablish us in our own deep truth, which is at once with that of all being. So that the artist, functioning in this 'proper' way, is the true seer and prophet of his century, the justifier of life and as such, of course, a revolutionary far more fundamental in his penetration of the social mask of his day than any fanatic idealist....”

I owe a great deal to Joseph Campbell, whose writings comprise a bulk of my research, and it is he, who most eloquently sums up the need for a new mythology:

“The new mythology, which is rapidly becoming a social as well as a spiritual necessity as the monadic structures of the past dissolve, is already implicit among us as knowledge a priori, native to the mind. Its images, recognized with rapture as radiant of that greatness which is at once below, above, to the west, to the east, to the south, and to the north of this whole new universe and of all things, will be derived from contemporary life, thought and experience, anywhere and everywhere, and the moral order to the support of which they are brought shall be the monad of mankind.”

“One cannot predict the next mythology any more than one can predict tonight's dream; for a mythology is not an ideology. It is not something

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projected from the brain, but something experienced from the heart, from recognitions of identities behind or within the appearances of nature, perceiving with love a 'thou' where there would have been otherwise only an 'it'."45

"What is a god? A god is a personification of a motivating power or value system that functions in human life and in the universe—powers of your own body and of nature. The myths are metaphorical of spiritual potentiality in the human being, and the same powers that animate our life animate the life of the world."46


TRANSPARENCIES
1. Christ Coddling the Angel Phallus  
   47" x 35"
2. Bird of Paradox  
   45" x 35"
3. Mindfuck  
   44" x 36"
4. Pillaged Rape  
   40" x 25"
5. In Domini Patri  
   39" x 47"
6. Leda Into Swan  
   60" x 40"
7. Mary and the Trinity  
   37" x 47"
8. Carrion  
   49" x 32"
9. Mother Earth  
   60" x 41"
10. Angel of Death  
    35" x 24"
11. Sucking Pigs into Slaughter  
    35" x 30"
12. Earth Mother  
    62" x 48"
13. Ascension  
    44" x 44"
14. Aboriginal Cruxifix  
    43" x 41"
15. Swallowing Dreams  
    56" x 29"
16. Animamus  
    33" x 37"
17. Spiritus Sanctus  
    36" x 44"
18. Meta  
    50" x 23"
19. Morpho  
    51" x 19"

Additional transparencies are of the show itself.