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THE DREAM BEAST
-MANIFESTATIONS-

BY

Robert Bleifer

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM
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The Dream Beast -Manifestations-

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"The first part of life is a long sleep-dream. We fall asleep the moment we are born and do not wake up until the Dream Beast calls us. The Dream Beast is real. It is not just a dream image, but a physical being that wakes us from our sleep-dream. The Dream Beast can be anything from a dragon fly to a jaguar or even a person, though they will always be an outsider. When the beast calls you, you go into the forest to meet him. The beast wakes you up, shows you who you are, and teaches you your place in the land."
In order to better understand this work, it is important to know about Isabelle Garcia and our relationship. Isabelle, a woman originally from the rain forest, was my dream beast. My awakening began around the time of my twelfth birthday, when we first met, and finished after her death more than ten years later. During this time I learned about the myths and mysticism of the rain forest and its people and created an inner world from the tales of Isabelle. This inner world began with the wonderment and awe of a boy and is still growing through the eyes of an adult. The work produced during the past few years is about this inner world and is a celebration of it.

In Anne Rice’s most recent novel "The Tale of the Body Thief" she presented her interpretation of Rembrandt:

"He was searching for an inner divinity. He could see it, paint it, and allow his knowledge of it and faith in it to suffuse the whole. With each portrait he understood the capacity which resides in every soul. The flash of the infinite became ever more subtle as he continued. The faces Rembrandt painted were not flesh-and-blood faces at all, they were spiritual countenances, portraits of what lay within the body of the man or woman." 2

With a slight reworking, this could describe my experience with this exhibit. My images of wood are about having been awakened by the Dream Beast. They are not "portraits" of wood, but a search for the spirituality of what lies within me and the wood made manifest in my images. With each new image, I understood more about myself and therefore, mankind.
After travelling for days and spending her life savings on the way from Guatemala, Isabelle with a group of a dozen or so others entered the country illegally through Mexico. They walked day and night with all of their worldly possessions in small bags. They were chased by border patrol dogs and hid from the helicopters looking for groups like theirs. By the end of the last night, Isabelle was too exhausted to continue and collapsed in a river. One of the young men in the group carried her on his back over the last few miles until they reached safety. A few months later my family and I met Isabelle. Close friends of my parents told them of an incredible woman who needed a place to work and live. She was unable to get a "real" job, as she did not have a green card and had recently been working "off the books" somewhere, but two of her co-workers stole her pay and threatened to turn her in to the authorities if she complained. She was terrified of this happening again and was looking for safer working conditions.

My parents agreed to take her in at least temporarily. Isabelle helped out around the house, watched after me and my sister, and taught us how to cook some of her native cuisine. She instantly became one of the family and the two of us became especially close. As a result of the difference in our
ages, she was like a second mother to me. My parents taught me the ways of middle class suburbia, while Isabelle taught me the mysticism of the jungle.

We often spent hours talking about our lives in both Spanish and English. These conversations ranged from the mythologies of her people to her actual experiences, as well as my daily experiences and worries. Her tales often relieved my teenaged angst, as they either made me forget my problems, or provided metaphorical answers in an enthralling fashion. When she first told me the myths of the jungle, I was old enough to understand their meaning and to see them as stories, yet young enough to visualize and believe in this fantastic and mystical place. As I grew older, even though I knew how fanciful these tales were, they continued to add depth and dimension to the inner world she helped me to create. These stories are an integral part of who I am.

The rain forest to me is this inner world created in a teenage boy under the guidance of a middle age rain forest woman. It is a place I visit whenever I need to. It is a special place of tremendous spirituality that transcends culture, creed, and religion. It is not a physical landscape, but a metaphysical place that is visually accessible to me on the surface of wood. This world can be a protective cocoon or a source of strength in the face of a challenge. I can bring the people of Isabelle's myths to life and have instant friends who unburden me of sorrow and pain. When I'm lost it
helps me find the path and when I’m confused it provides clarity. It is my heart and soul.

While Isabelle and I were quite open with each other, there was much about her life that she never revealed. She occasionally mentioned the armed trucks that often passed through her village and forced people to remain indoors after dark. I know she had a husband who vanished. She never said whether or not he abandoned her, or truly vanished under presumed "evil" circumstances. There was a non-surgical knife wound on her back, that I once made the mistake of asking about when I was younger. The subject was quickly changed and by the look on her face I knew never to mention it again. It was not until my first visit home from college that she told us of her harrowing illegal entry into the states. This was such an emotionally charged conversation that she had to speak in Spanish and have me translate for the rest of the family. If I did not know better, I would have sworn that I was listening to a fictional account. She was literally days away from finally becoming a legal citizen when she passed away four years ago. She was still living with my parents at the time of her death.

Over the ensuing weeks after her death, without realizing why at the time, the subject matter of my work shifted to the rain forest. I had been a strictly black and white street
photographer whose major influences were Ralph Gibson, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and David Hockney. During the past four years, as I became more aware of Isabelle's influence on me, the focus of my work shifted from the rain forest itself, to the tales and mysticism brought to me by one of its exceptional denizens.

During this period I worked extensively with wood, while continuing my education of the recorded mythology of the Americas. This initial attraction to wood stemmed from a few basic elements. First is the literal connection between the rain forest and trees. Second is the fact that many of her myths involved trees. Last is her belief that trees are the living tombs of imprisoned spirits.

Isabelle's horror stories, about which she could not speak, created a negative aura of the rain forest, which is not a part of my inner world, but exists separately. While it was the driving force behind my earlier work, it was not and is not an integral part of me. It was something I learned and studied. Having wanted to know more about the real "dark side" of the jungle, I began to study the history of rain forest countries. It proved to be quite disturbing and made me want to address it in my work. I dealt with issues ranging from deforestation, to the cattle industry, to the murder and sub-human treatment of indigenous people. The way twentieth century man has treated the rain forest natives has strongly and disturbingly mirrored the treatment of Native Americans.
This parallel is what first extended my area of interest from the rain forest to Native Americans.

My study of rain forest people inevitably led me to Chico Mendez. He was a native Brazilian rubber tapper who educated his fellow rubber tappers and organized their resistance against those who would destroy their land. When he became too powerful, he was murdered by those in control. His early life turned out to be similar to Isabelle’s, not just in coming from the jungle, but in their backgrounds. Neither one attended school, but were educated at home or by mentors while working to support their families. The major difference being that as a woman in an extremely male dominated society, Isabelle was completely powerless to fight the destruction of her homeland and family. Her only option was escape. I was so struck by his life and death, that I based a few pieces on him, including a performance piece entitled Trans-Amazon Highway.

The life and stories of Isabelle, as well as my later studies are what led my work to be both politically and spiritually motivated. The emotional, celebratory elements were ingrained in me and came naturally from my inner world. On the other hand, the political elements, which I learned from my studies, were intellectually and externally applied to the work. In the early stages, photographs of the rain forest and its people were applied to the surface of wood and saw blades through the use of liquid emulsions. I was intrigued
by the juxtaposition of those images and the representative objects of the rain forests' resources and destruction. Through time as I began to explore the materials I was using as support, my work became more three dimensional and less photographic, before it evolved into completely non-photographic installations. These installations were primarily rough in texture or appearance, while at the same time being inviting to all of the senses.

Midway through the process I stepped back to analyze where the work was coming from and what I was trying to say. I realized that I wanted to celebrate the rain forest, my inner world, and Isabelle, rather than to be political. This was more natural for me, since the celebration was of my inner world, while the politicality was of a physical place to which I have never been. At this time I also realized that I was simply using wood as a building material instead of truly seeing it. The myths and mysticism brought to me by Isabelle began to manifest themselves to me on the surface of wood. These manifestations "call out to me" when I look at wood. Seemingly innocuous grain patterns become mystic landscapes and mythological representations. By photographing these manifestations, I have become able to both celebrate the rain forest and to share in its mysticism. Photography had become the voice through which I could pass on these myths.
The myths that Isabelle related to me are from South America and Central America. They were a continuation of the oral tradition and were not recorded until now. Through the oral tradition tales are passed from either parent to child or tribal elder to the young. Isabelle had no children and I am the closest thing to a child she would ever know. She passed her knowledge on to me and it is now my turn to pass this knowledge on to future generations. If I have children of my own, or find myself in a relationship similar to that between Isabelle and myself, I intend to continue this tradition. Fortunately, my work as an artist provides me with another forum, with a potentially much larger audience.

Since her death I have read numerous books on the mythologies of these regions and have only found some myths that have fairly similar stories to those of Isabelle. The rest seem to be combinations of other myths or are fairly unique. I am not sure if these are changes she made, or if they were made by prior generations. In any case, they mark the wonderful things that can only happen with the oral tradition.

This is also an example of what happens when knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. Each member of every new generation receives this knowledge and interprets it in a new way based on situations that change from generation to generation and from person to person. In this way, the knowledge becomes their own and is unique.
North American mythology was also included in my recent studies and I found many stories to be similar to those of Isabelle’s, although the characters and symbols changed. When my work was politically motivated, I had included not only her experiences, but the myths of people indigenous to all rain forest lands, as well as Native Americans. When the focus of my work shifted, it was not possible to remove the elements not brought to me by Isabelle. I was however, able to limit the scope to the Americas, as a result of the intense similarities in these mythologies.

According to Joseph Campbell:

"Myths are clues to the spiritual potentiality of human lives.
Myths are the experiences of being alive.
Myths represent what cannot be known.
Myths are manifestations in symbolic form of the energies within us."

These are the characteristics that are universal to all mythologies and religions. In the case of the myths of the Americas, they are more primitive and are more colorful than the teachings of the major religions, but they still impart the same elements on their believers. It is precisely this spirituality, experience, and the thrill and fear of the unknown that Isabelle brought to me and that has visually manifested itself to me.

This "primitive" mythological experience is different than any religious Sunday school teaching. While this education does bring the aforementioned elements to many people, it is based on "documented historical" events.
involving divine intervention. The mythologies however, are more mystical and at times fanciful. They are often of ordinary people who find themselves in incredible situations and must find their own power. They are of a very vivid and magical place that at times appears quite real, while at others quite unreal. It is this magical and mystical quality that provides a greater appeal and connection for a child. They are what dreams are made of. I knew that these were stories that could not have possibly happened, but did possess a wonderful teaching quality. My Sunday school teachings were contextualized in my life and education. I was born into a specific religion and these teachings helped explain what this religion means to me. Isabelle's "teachings" were completely different. They were not formal, nor did the rest of my family experience them, nor did they tell me what it means to part of my ethnic group. While they are about being part of an ethnic group, it was not mine and it in no way conflicted with my religion. They did help expand my mind and broaden my understanding of people and things.

Myths according to Jung:

"...can be interpreted as a sort of mental therapy for the sufferings and anxieties of mankind in general. These can liberate the ordinary man from his personal impotence and endow him (at least temporarily) with an almost superhuman quality." 4

This is precisely what Isabelle's myths did for me, by helping me through the awkwardness and insecurities of adolescence. I think they also enabled me to live my life on a level not
possible by most of my peers by providing me with a unique inner world that has been a tremendous source of strength.

There is also another element that the "primitive" provides us. According to Jung, what the primitive sees is real, although we cannot see it and mock it. We have simply become out of tune with this entire element of our humanity.

"In our daily experience we need to state things as accurately as possible, and we have learned to discard the trimmings of fantasy both in our language and in our thoughts - thus losing a quality that is still characteristic of the primitive mind. Most of us have consigned to the unconscious all the fantastic psychic associations that every object possesses. The primitive, on the other hand, is still aware of these psychic properties; he endows animals, plants, or stones with powers that we find strange and unacceptable... A tree may play a vital part in the life of a primitive, apparently possessing for him its own soul and voice, and the individual concerned will feel that he shares its fate." 5

It is possibly this difference in what the primitive sees and we see that has enabled twentieth century man to continue to eliminate these people without remorse. We have become so out of touch with the world around us that it is easier to get rid of the evidence, the primitives, than it is to get back in touch with this part of our humanity.

"In the primitive's world things do not have the same sharp boundaries they do in our "rational" societies. What psychologists call Psychic identity, or mystical participation, has been stripped off our world of things. But it is exactly this halo of unconscious associations that gives a colorful and fantastic aspect to the primitives 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 down below the threshold; when they occasionally reappear, we even insist that something is wrong." 6

My manifestations could be seen as a conscious tie to this element of my "non-primitive" mind, which has long since been inaccessible or dormant.

Many primitives also believe in the bush soul. This is a second soul we possess that is in an animal or tree with which we have a special psychic identity. Assuming such a thing does indeed exist, my bush soul is clearly in a tree and the Dream Beast has, at least to a small degree, brought me back in touch with the primitive aspect of my mind and revealed my bush soul to me. We need the Dream Beast to wake us up so that we can see and recognize psychic identities or the elements we have long since consigned to our unconscious.

Isabelle is my Dream Beast. She was an outsider who came to me and awakened me over the course of many years. She taught me who I am and showed me my place in the land by getting me back in touch with what Jung would call the primitive. This has not only made me more sensitive to the world around me, but has made this show possible. This sensitivity is what shaped my vision of the world. The process of awakening built my inner world and this influences all elements of my daily life.
Although this MFA exhibit looks photographic it still functions as an installation and can be seen as the myth of The Dream Beast. The walls are of a specific color meant to add to the atmosphere of rain forest mysticism. The tonality of the walls shifts in value to symbolically reflect the awakening by the Dream Beast. The viewers start at the wall painted the darkest where they encounter the beast. As the viewers progress through the exhibit they are slowly awakened and experience this physically, through the progressively lighter walls. The images of the awakening are quite open to interpretation by the viewer to help personalize and ease their awakening. A specific soundtrack combining native music and a female hispanic voice was used to help transport the viewer to this magical place.

The images in this exhibit are displayed in such a manner that they appear to be relics or icons. They are mounted in a deep frame and are raised from the back in much the same way an object would be displayed. In a sense they are actually the physical relics from my metaphysical jungle.

Most of the images were taken at two saw mills. The first is a fairly large commercial operation near Rochester. The second is a smaller one man operation in western Massachusetts. The majority of the images are of cross cut ends of trees that are stacked in piles often reaching fifty feet in height and one hundred feet in length. The remainder of the images are of segments of trees with the bark stripped.
off, or of enormous piles of sawdust. To obtain the images I was usually required to scale the faces of the stacks or climb the sides and hang off of the top. The piles are often situated approximately four feet apart. By straddling the gap from one pile to the next, I was able to position the camera the required distance from the surface of the wood so as to photograph a given manifestation. Fortunately, some of the images I wanted were close enough to ground level so that I did not always have to be a "mountain climber." When the piles of trees were covered with ice and too dangerous to climb, pieces of wood were brought into the studio and photographed. The freedom and atmosphere of the mills proved to be much more rewarding and only one of the studio images was included in the final show. The 35mm format provided me the freedom and mobility to get into awkward positions at dangerous heights and a more appropriate emulsion base. The increased graininess of 35mm negatives gave the images an added softness that helped to remove the literal reading of the images as trees as well as to add to the dream or myth quality. One of the images, the only studio image, was photographed with a 4x5 camera (see slide #6 appendix 3). It was the only image from my investigations with larger formats that did not seem hampered by the different emulsion.

There are several images that clearly marked turning points in both this exhibit and where the work will go next. The first image (see slide #1 appendix 3), taken nearly two
years ago, marked a shift from simple close-up textural shots to images clearly possessing another dimension. The image took on the quality of an aerial landscape, as well as still being readable as a close-up. It was the first of these images to have a spiritual and figurative quality. The rest of the show began to fall into place after this image.

The next image to mark a substantial change came much later (see slide #2 appendix 3). Based on the "figure" that appears in this is the image and my connection with it, this can be seen as my self-portrait. While it is not radically different the way image #1 was, it does possess a distinctly different feel and look. There are not a series of images I can directly point to as successors to this image, yet it marked a change in what I saw on wood and led to my re-exploration of barkless sections of wood.

The next shift came in the two most successful images of sections of barkless trees (see slide #3). They are extremely different in both texture and content and are the only two images mounted in the same frame. While the images are quite different from each other, there is a sameness that is a result of the textures of barkless strips as well as the different way that light is reflected from these strips than from cross-cut ends. They are responsible for my further exploration of something other than cross-cut ends and led to my investigation of sawdust.

The final shift came with the three sawdust images, in
particular, the two viewed as a diptych (see slides #4 & 5). Visually, they are noticeably different due to a further distance from camera to object, as well as a change in subject matter. They are the only images in this exhibit that are not of solid pieces of wood. This shift is most important, as it marked the release of the hold that wood has over me. As mentioned earlier, I have a special connection with wood. Whether it is caused by the Dream Beast or is due to something entirely different is not important. What is important is that I have become able to extend the vision of my inner world beyond the realm of wood. For this exhibit it was important for me to use only wood and to remain true to the initial forces that created this project, namely, Isabelle. It was also important for me not to alter the wood in any way or to have any trees cut for the purpose of my art.

The process of learning how to visually express this inner world has earned me this masters. It has not been the actual hanging of the show or even the class work and critiques, so much as it has been harnessing and mastering this ability to express myself and to see. For the first time in my life I am able to confidently express my inner self in a fashion that others can enjoy and share in. I have earned my Masters as a result of this learning process, not simply because of fulfilling the scholastic requirements or
expectations of others.

I think that Isabelle would be thrilled to know that I have related her myths and experiences in this fashion, that she had such an impact on my life, and that I am possibly opening the eyes of others to an often misunderstood part of the world.
ENDNOTES

1. The Dream Beast, a myth I remember hearing, actual origin unknown.


APPENDIX I

THE DREAM BEAST: THE STORIES

These are some of the myths and stories I remember being told by Isabelle. They were available at the thesis exhibit for viewers to take and read. These are also the myths that were read as part of the soundtrack.

THE DREAM BEAST

The first part of life is along sleep-dream. We fall asleep the moment we are born and do not wake up until the Dream Beast calls us. The Dream Beast is real. It is not just a dream image, but a physical being that wakes us from our sleep-dream. The Dream Beast can be anything from a dragon fly to a jaguar, or even a person, although they will always be an outsider. When the beast calls you, you go into the forest to meet him. The beast wakes you up, shows you who you are, and teaches you your place in the land.

THE GREAT MOTHER

At first there was nothing, just the great mother. She created the sky and the earth and with it all of the plants and animals. She then made her children, a twin brother and sister. Having shown them how to make people, she told them to make all that they wanted, but they must control them, or she would become very angry. After making her creations she was tired and went to sleep in the mountain. When she awoke she found chaos and people living like savages. She was quite angry at the mess her children had made. In a fury she killed all of the people by either burning them or turning them to stone. She then turned her children into trees and went to live in the sky. After some time, men began to emerge from the roots of one tree and women from the fruit of the other. The great mother released darkness from the gourd she kept him in and told him that he would be forever free if he promised to visit her in the sky every night. In this way the people would have to work harder by only having light for half of the day.

THE FLOOD

When first the people came to be, they could find no food. Only Jaguar knew where to find the one tree that bore foods of all kind. The people sent a bird to follow him and find the location of the tree. Upon learning its location the people set out with axes to chop it down. It was hard work and took many weeks, but when it was down, each person would take a piece to plant in his garden. When the trunk was finally cut through water began to flow out and with it came fish. The people were ready to cover it, but decided to let out more fish. When they were ready to cover it again, the water was rushing too fast and the whole world was flooded.
SURVIVORS OF THE FLOOD

Just one man and one woman survived the flood. They were childless for some time and the man began to complain that they would never repopulate the world. In her grief, she prayed to Sun for help. Sun told her that she would soon have as many children as there are fruits on the tree. This frightened her because she only had two breasts and did not know how to feed them all. She was told not to worry, the chicle tree would help her feed the children. It will have as many breasts as needed. When she awoke the next morning she saw the chicle tree filled with babies, each one on a breast. She was so excited that she woke her husband to show him the wondrous event. The chicle tree was suckling all of the children.

STAR WIFE

One night a man lay in a clearing to watch the heavens. A brilliant star he had been watching vanished and appeared next to him as a beautiful woman. They talked all night, but at dawn she had to return to the heavens. This happened for many nights, when they decided to marry so she could stay. After the wedding she went up to the sky and brought back fruits and vegetables. The people were delighted since they did not have much to eat. She soon came back with grains and nuts and taught the people how to make things with straw. The people were very happy, but her husband became disloyal and fell in love with another woman. Offended, the star wife went back to live in the heavens. Because of his unfaithfulness, people do not have all of the things that exist in heaven.

THEFT OF FIRE

One day a boy became lost in the woods after wandering too far for food. Jaguar found him and took him into his house. The boy was cold and hungry, so Jaguar gave him cooked meat and sat him in front of the fire. The fire felt very good to him, since his people did not have any. After a few days the boy decided it was time to return to his village. Jaguar gave him a basket full of cooked meat for his people, but made him promise not to reveal to anyone that he had fire, or he would eat him. His family was so impressed at how well cooked the meat was that they pressed him to tell how he accomplished it, until he finally told them about Jaguar. That night his people raided the home of Jaguar and stole his fire. When Jaguar awoke, he was cold and in the dark and vowed to eat people whenever he saw them.
LAND OF THE DEAD

A long time ago the souls of the dead inhabited the same land as the people. Many of them were jealous of the living and constantly bothered them. Some even tried to steal the bodies of the living so they could inhabit them. The people asked Moon for help. He told them to beat a huge drum for four days at which point a giant snake with three heads would appear. If they opened the mouths one at a time the spirits would be gone. After four more days of suffering and drum beating, the snake appeared. As Moon instructed, they opened the mouths one at a time. From the first mouth darkness spread everywhere confusing and scaring the spirits. From the second mouth came a great wind that blew all of the spirits into a cave. From the final mouth came twin heros. They would forever keep the spirits locked in and the people out of the cave of the dead. When the great snake left he took the wind and darkness with him.

THE DOMINATION OF MEN OVER WOMEN

A long time ago women ruled over men. They did so by trickery. The men were convinced of a great and powerful spirit that would destroy them if they looked upon it and would become angry if they did not do what the women told them. The women would make a great noise and claim that the spirit was coming and that the men should hide. Some of the women hid behind masks and ran through the village pretending to be the spirit. So it was the men who hunted, gathered and prepared the food, while the women relaxed and commanded them. One day some of the men were out hunting when they saw two of the women with the great masks washing paint off of their bodies and laughing at the men. These hunters told the others men how they were fooled and all were quite angry. The next day they ran off all of the women who knew of the treachery and kept the rest to keep their people going. The men now use the same trickery to dominate the women, although they continue to be the hunters.

THE FIRST BIRD

One day a woman was bathing in the river when she noticed a great hunter. He gave her all that he had caught and vanished into the jungle. The following day he appeared in her village with many gifts and asked to marry her. She agreed and went to live with his people. He turned out to be quite cruel and never let her out of the house. Whenever he went out he kept her tied up. She became so desperate to see the outside world again that she would remove her head and using her as wings would fly all around, always returning before her husband came home. One day however, he returned home and found her headless body. Thinking she had been killed, he burned her body. From then on she lived free, as a bird.
SCAR FACE

One day a young man saw a strange and beautiful woman that he wished to marry. He would bring her gifts and ask to marry her, but was afraid she would reject him because of the great scar on his face he received from Jaguar. When he finally asked her, she sadly said no. It was not because of his looks, but because Sun made her promise that she would never marry. He told her that he would ask Sun for permission. She consented, but told him that he must have proof that Sun agreed, otherwise she might be fooled into believing he had Sun's permission. His search for Sun lasted many weeks and took him all the way to the sea. When he was near the sea he found a young man trapped in a river. He lit a pipe and blew smoke to the trapped man until it was thick enough that he pulled himself out of the river and was safely with Scar Face. The one he rescued turned out to be the son of Sun. Sun was delighted at his deed and told him he would do anything he wished. When Scar Face told of his desire to marry the woman, Sun agreed and told him that he would find the proof he needed when he returned to the woman. He returned to the woman's house, but was nervous since he had not yet found the proof. When he told her of Sun's consent, she appeared quite shocked, because while he spoke his scar vanished. They married and had many children.

ISABELLE

After travelling for days and spending most of my savings on the way from Guatemala, I then entered the country illegally through Mexico with a group of a dozen or so others. We walked all day and night through woods and streams and often up steep slopes with all of worldly possessions in small bags. We were chased by border patrol dogs and hid from repeated passes by helicopters looking for groups like ours. By the end of the night I was too exhausted to continue and collapsed in a river. One of the young men with us carried me on his back over the last few miles until we reached safety.
APPENDIX II

THE ARTISTS STATEMENT

This is the artists statement from the exhibit, that was included in the handout containing the myths.

The first part of life is a long sleep-dream. We fall asleep the moment we are born and do not wake up until the Dream Beast calls us. The Dream Beast is real. It is not just a dream image, but a physical being that wakes us from our sleep-dream. The Dream Beast can be anything from a dragon fly to a jaguar or even a person, though they will always be an outsider. When the beast calls you, you go into the forest to meet him. The beast wakes you up, shows you who you are, and teaches you your place in the land.

Isabelle Garcia, a woman originally from the rain forest, was introduced to my family around the time of my twelfth birthday. Close friends of my parents told them of an incredible woman who needed a place to stay and work. She was unable to get a "real" job, as she did not have a green card and had recently been "working off the books" somewhere, but two of her co-workers used to steal her pay and threaten to turn her in to the authorities if she complained. She was terrified of this happening again.

My parents agreed to take her in, at least temporarily. Isabelle helped out around the house, watched after me and my sister, and showed us some of her native cuisine. She instantly became one of the family and the two of us became especially close. As a result of the difference in our ages, she was like a second mother to me. My parents taught me the ways of middle class suburbia, while Isabelle taught me the mysticism of the jungle.

We often spent hours talking about our lives in both Spanish and English. These conversations ranged from the mythologies of her people to her actual experiences, including her illegal and terrifying entry into the U.S. Her tales often relieved my teenaged angst, as they either simply made me forget my problems, or provided metaphorical answers in an enthralling fashion. When she first told me the myths of the jungle, I was old enough to understand their meaning and to see them as "stories." yet young enough to visualize and believe in this fantastic and mystical place. As I grew older, even though I knew how fanciful these tales were, they continued to add depth and dimension to the inner world she helped me to create. These stories are an integral part of who I am.

Four years ago Isabelle passed away while still living with my family. Over the ensuing weeks, without realizing why, the subject matter of my work shifted to the rain forest. During the past four years, as I became more aware of Isabelle’s influence on me, the focus of my work shifted from the rain forest itself to the tales and mysticism brought to
me by one of its exceptional denizens.

During this time period I worked extensively with wood, while continuing my education of the mythology of the Americas where Isabelle left off. This initial subconscious attraction for wood stemmed from a few basic elements. First is the literal connection of the rain forest and trees. Second is the fact that many of her myths involved trees. Last is the belief that trees are the living tombs of imprisoned spirits. The tales of a dear friend, these mythologies, have manifested themselves to me on the surface of wood. By photographing these manifestations I am able to visually celebrate these tales and to share in their mysticism.

The rain forest to me is an inner world created by a teenage boy and a middle aged rain forest woman. It is an inner place I visit whenever I need to. It is a special place of tremendous spirituality that transcends culture, creed, and religion. It is not a physical landscape, but a real metaphysical place that is visually accessible to me on the surface of wood.
APPENDIX 3

The following two pages are the slides of the framed work from the exhibit, with the addition of slide number 1, which was not included in the final exhibit. I felt it important to include the frames in the slides, since they play a crucial role in both the visual and intellectual interpretation of the pieces. The only slides numbered are the six specifically mentioned in the body of this text.


A partial list of influential authors:

Milan Kundera: all of his novels, specifically "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" & "The Book of Laughter & Forgetting."
Dan Simmons: "Hyperion."
Frank Herbert: The "Dune" series, "The Jesus Incident" & "The Soul Catcher."
Anne Rice: Everything published under the name "Anne Rice."

A partial list of influential artists:

Ralph Gibson, Aaron Siskind, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Jean-Michel Folon, Rene Magritte, Chris Burden, David Hockney, Robert Mapplethorpe, Annie Leibovitz, Marc Chagall, Fletcher Martin, and Romare Beardon.