



Art, Love and Psyche

Penelope Dinsmore

“I will remove you from a heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”

In the beginning there was no love of the kind I now know is possible. It just was not there. There is no blame for that. My parents accepted what they got and did the best they could, living in the wild twenties followed by the depression and World War 2.

My father was a well known Maine artist who was married five times. My mother turned to alcohol for help. Mother’s mother was an accomplished painter. I grew up in an aesthetic atmosphere. There was not a great deal of feeling. Dr. Henderson explains this kind of surrounding in his book *Cultural Attitudes in Psychological Perspective*.

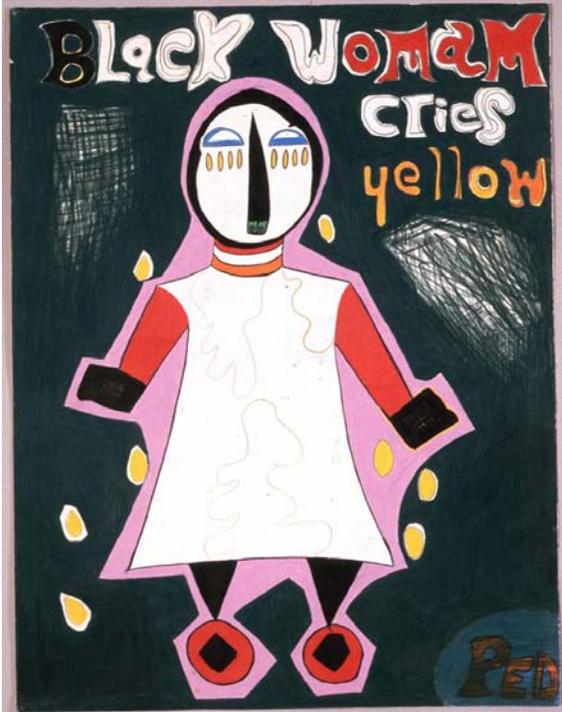
“Marriage is a brutal reality,” I remember Jung saying. By the time I was 40, I had had three marriages, three divorces and three children. I had traveled from the East to the West coast, living five years in between in Aspen, Colorado, where I flew a plane, drove fast cars, had my own ski hill, and no love. I have been married now for thirty-eight years. Love, real love has come slowly, slowly with great difficulty. Art and dreams and Jungian psychology have made this possible. That is my experience. That is what I know.

In sharing these images, done over the past 40 years, I hope to show something of how my work brought with it an experience of a numinous and a sacred mystery I felt within. This then allowed me to eventually accept myself with some compassion, and to love those close to me as I had needed to be loved. It is a struggle still. It always will be for me, but you cannot know heaven until you are quite familiar with hell. Again that is my experience.



I begin with two images that I did in a life drawing class at the San Francisco Art Institute in the 1960's. I graduated in 1968. It was an exciting time to be there. There was very little structure in the classes. Turning inward was encouraged. It was the time of Rothko, Pollack, Picasso. I had no idea where I was going or what I was doing, but we did have a model in life drawing. In both of these images the women are on the right. They are within an inner world.

After I graduated I no longer had support from the other students and teachers at school. I remained friends with Julius Hatofsky and Jack Jefferson, my most important teachers and that was very helpful.



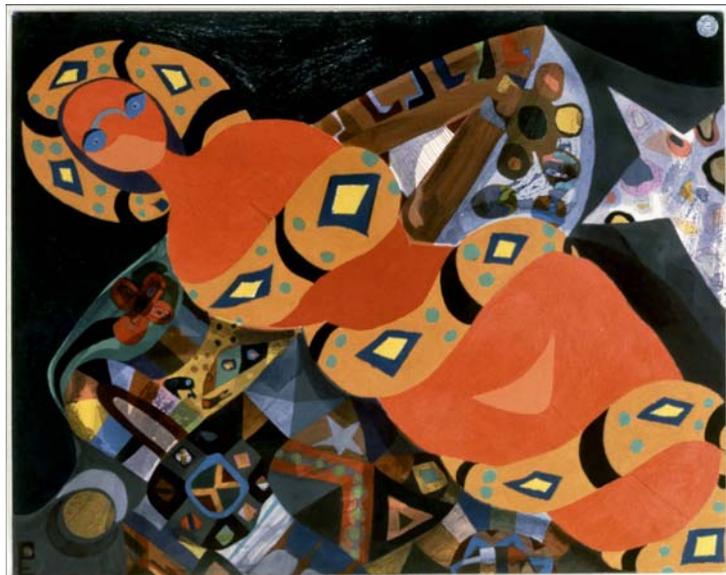
This image of Black Woman Crying Yellow done in prismacolor pencils was not related in any way to what I learned in art school. I was ashamed and embarrassed by this approach and style and would not show it. The content was disturbing. I had been in Jungian analysis for some years when I did this image. It shows clearly, I feel, an inner self who was

frozen, unable to move. There are no hands, feet or a mouth, and I know her heart was frozen as well. I am sure of that.

When I showed this image in pencil to Dr. Henderson, who was my Jungian analyst at that time, he explained that the rigid black wave held the lively joyful things of life in its sinister grip.

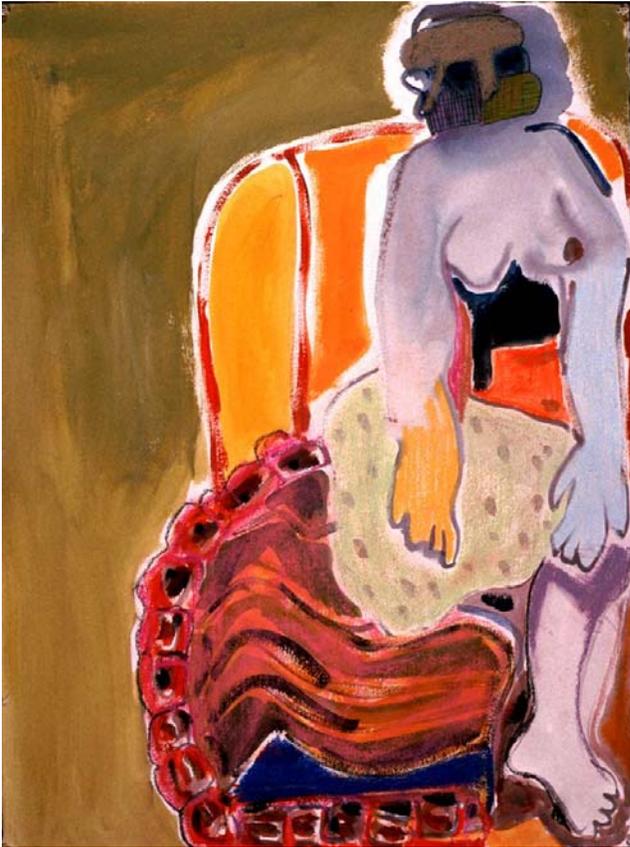
Jung describes it this way: “Image and meaning are identical; and as the first takes shape so the latter becomes clear.”

In this drawing a huge snake has the woman firmly



held. The struggle to free herself will be hard. Free will is an odd idea when you

know how you can feel powerless in the grip of a complex. I value my ego now, knowing it is the only tool I have with which to free myself. And, of course, there is always The Other there as well... the inner Other. The inner brings me to love. The inner makes it possible. It is the source.



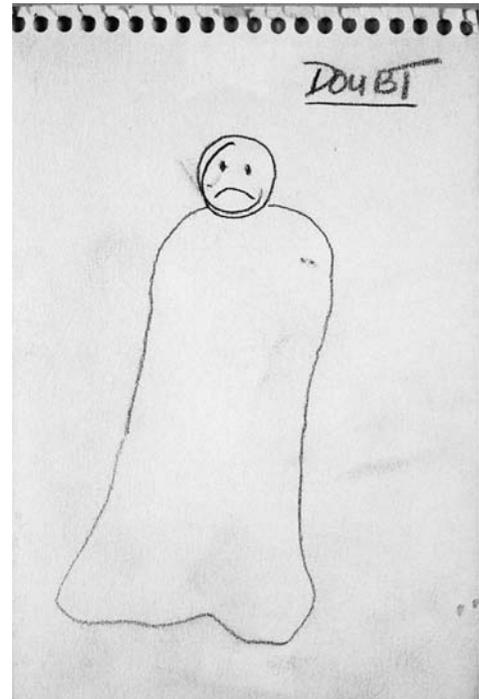
Here the woman has a black empty hole in the center of her limp body. This image tells me again how I felt then, without bone. I still remember the feeling of the black empty hole with some fear.

Here she is once more limp and seated. I gave a presentation at an ARAS meeting in San Francisco years ago around the reality of Bone. It was important to understand what bones meant to me. When I asked Neil Russack, a Jungian analyst, what he thought a bone means he said, “Bone is the living essence of man... his essential being.” I like that.

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“The journey through the planetary houses, signifies the overcoming of a psychic obstacle, or of an autonomous complex, suitably represented by a planetary god or demon.”

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These drawings show some of the obstacles. They are the reality. Here is the work. In a book called *The Unfolding God of Jung and Milton* James Driscoll writes “Satan also includes and demonstrates the most undermining and distress–provoking of the seven deadly sins, envy. The envious person not only wants what the other has, but is propelled by the attacking nature of envy to discredit the person possessing what is desired. In Satan, envy was the essential death–dealing factor in his make up as the killer of love.”...“In the treatment lies the possibility of surmounting the obstacle” says Jung. It was the work on my dreams with Dr. Henderson over many years that was very helpful. Also the connection I felt to the inner world in making my images.

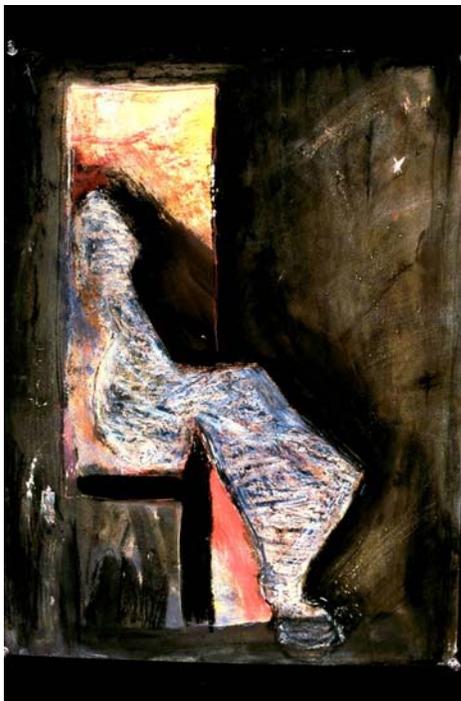
Rilke observed that “doubt can become a good quality if you train it. It must become knowing, it must become critical.” Does insight perhaps come from doubt? It was true for me. It was helpful when I identified with an archetype as I

drew it and became inflated as a result. The doubt that followed was very useful then.

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“For Rothko black represented darkness and fertility, earth and night.”

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I like this image very much. The woman is seated facing a star. She is comfortable in her inner blackness. It may be a lode star for her, light as the offspring of night maybe? Bachofen says, “Death then is not the opposite but the helper of life.” This is a very big idea. It helps me with my fear of death.



This image shows a sort of Cycladic figure and her subtle body. Such figures were found on the Cyclades Islands in the Aegean Sea, dating from 3,300 B.C.E. They were related to burials and placed in graves. They must have given comfort and meaning at a time of great loss.



This chalk figure in the circle is reaching and trying from deep within. Who is it, what is it, why is it? I don't know.

A crucifixion. How things felt and still do many times. It is agony to stay on the cross between the opposites. "The cross as a form of suffering expresses psychic reality," I remember Jung saying. Dr. Henderson told me that analysis shows that the process of transformation is never-ending, but there are points of reconciliation. He said analysis is made up of expectations, resistances and illusions, all of which must be incorporated like the last supper.



Jung tells us we must be able to suffer God. Only then is the *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, the mystical union, possible. This is not easy. But Rilke writes “There I speak to you further of life and of death and of how both are great and splendid.”



This figure is of mud and bones and darkness. It is a struggle towards the light. When I read about a religious exercise called The Rite of Chod, it reminded me of this drawing. It is practiced in Tibet under Llamist Buddhism. The initiate carries a dagger bell and a human femur. What is called the black meal is the initiate

imagining himself (or herself) as a small heap of charred human bones that emerge from a lake of black mud. The useless bones symbolize the destruction of his phantom “I” and show how important dismemberment is in gaining a new understanding. I am however, unsure about getting rid of the “I”!

I bought a skeleton of real bone in 1972. Her name was Claudia. She caused quite a stir on the drive home from San Francisco, sitting in the passenger’s seat of my car. In the painting there are a great many bones and a fish and butterfly seem to emerge from her left shoulder. Perhaps death connects

to life here. It is said, that a “memento mori” helps an overly youthful attitude toward life...a puer or puella who might need to grow up some. I think it was so in my case.



The Night Sea Journey in pencil and Light Entering from Left. The serpent carries the little human body with the eye of God watching over all.

Black is a color I am close to. I noticed as I prepared this material that there were recurring themes of darkness and light. It seemed to me over time that if I could hold the darkness, endure it, then light would come as the needed consciousness. The experience of a transcendent function that would bring resolution to the pain of the struggle in my art or in my life sustained me many times.



I was drawn to the color black. It led me to the inner place I needed to find and hold. Without black...blackness there would have been for me no life, no light. I needed depression, despair, grief, emptiness. They were and are, even now, necessary for change. They will not leave for good. They lead me. Over time I have accepted them with somewhat less anxiety. And the black of death can be seen as a final, even positive, resolution of one's whole life. I imagine that life joins death in a *Mysterium Coniunctionis* that is beyond imagining.

Black means many things for me. I like black. I also fear black.

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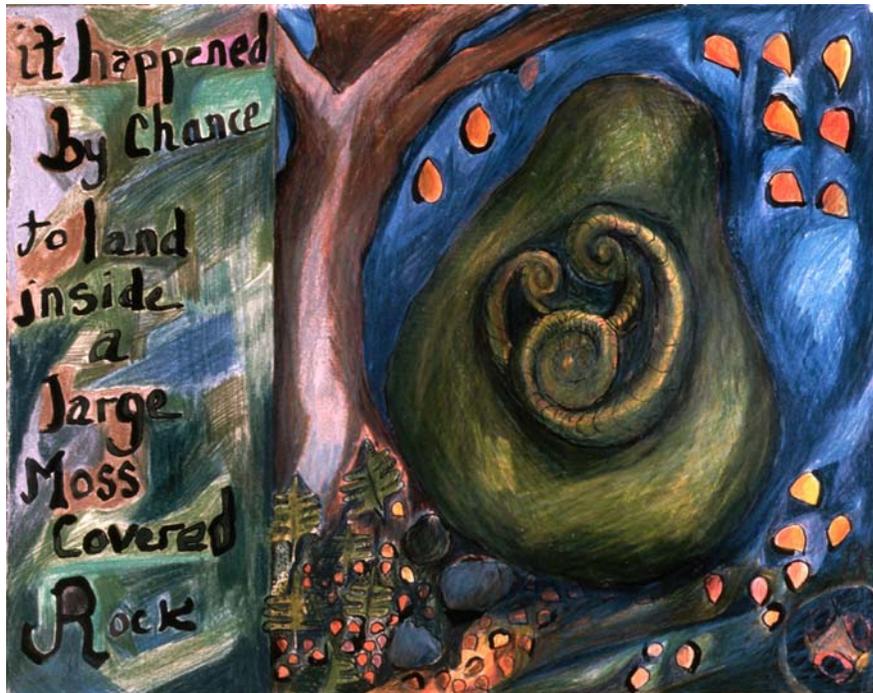
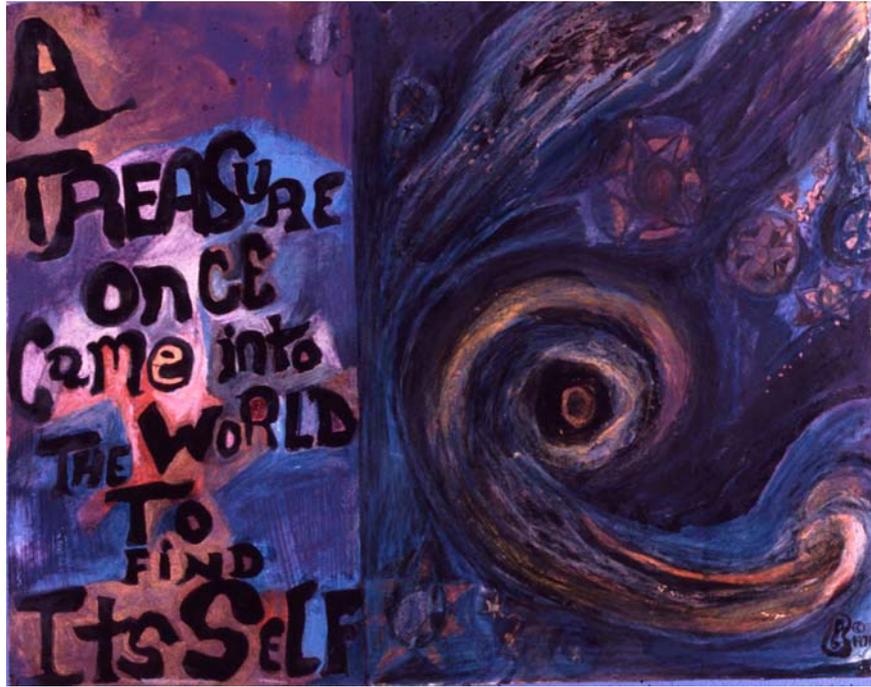
The leitmotiv is...a fundamental sadness:

“I was a treasure. I yearned to be known. That is why I produced creatures, in order to be known in them.”

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Sometime in the early 70's, I began a sort of illuminated manuscript. Again, I had no idea what I was doing. Again, I felt inadequate because I was not creating what I thought was acceptable art, but I felt I had to keep on with it although I did not value it much. It was dismissed by the people I knew in the art world. I was able to take it to Dr. Henderson however, and here was where it and I belonged. I knew that. He led me through it one page at a time, explaining and bringing each image to life for me. Then he agreed to take me on as an analysand. I was where I belonged. The feeling was huge.

My experience of light coming into me years before was finally understood in a very personal and real way. There are 37 images in the Treasure book, which is called *The Treasure That Came Into The World To Find Itself*. Here are some of those images. I also did a similar book called *Search For The Lost Egg*.





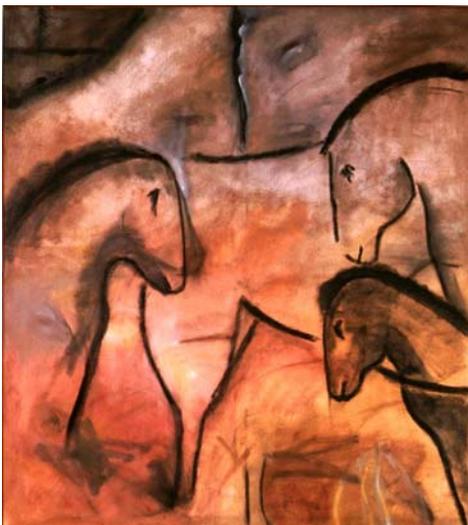
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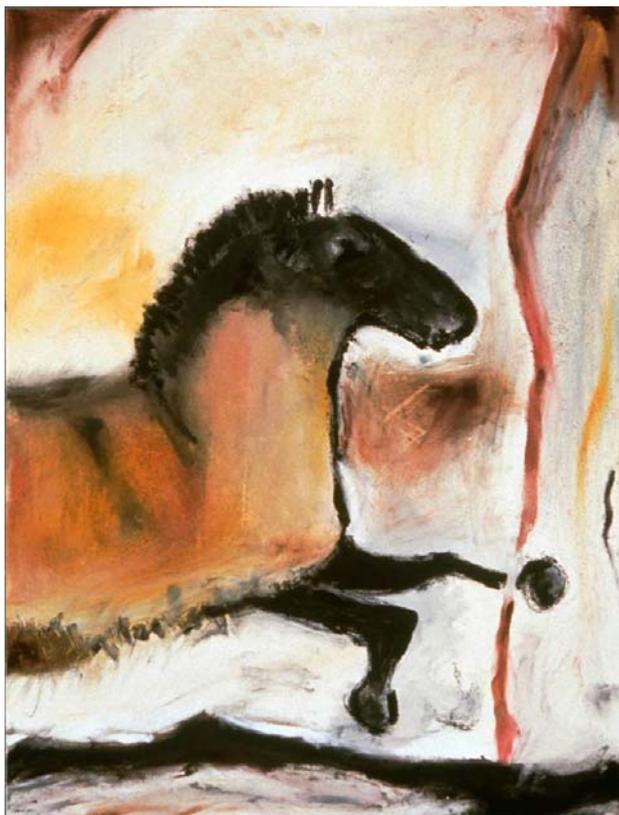
“...one feels that these animals (more intuitive, quicker and stranger than man) are the very essence of the life-force, reverentially perceived by man, as the embodiment of the force of nature, both from within and without.”

“The animal is the symbolic carrier of the Self”

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My wonder at the astonishing paintings of the cave people took me to France and Spain and I visited Lascaux just before it closed for good. The feeling of that cave and those magnificent expressions of truly sacred life in those animals, connected me to my deepest self. For me they were the first expression of connection to the numinous in the psyche as seen in the outer world. They are hugely powerful. I could not speak for some time after I left Lascaux. It is said they are near to supernatural beauty. Picasso was in awe of them. I read that Lascaux “was the first doing, the first step, the beginning.” I did a great number of paintings inspired by the caves. Here are a few of them.





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“The relation of the love-goddess to red dates back to ancient times”

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Red is feeling, emotion, life and blood. For me the reddening is not necessarily an end. Using alchemical imagery Jung tells us that “not til the rubedo is it sunrise” but each day brings a new sunrise. In the stone age graves were reddened to imitate a blood filled womb for rebirth.

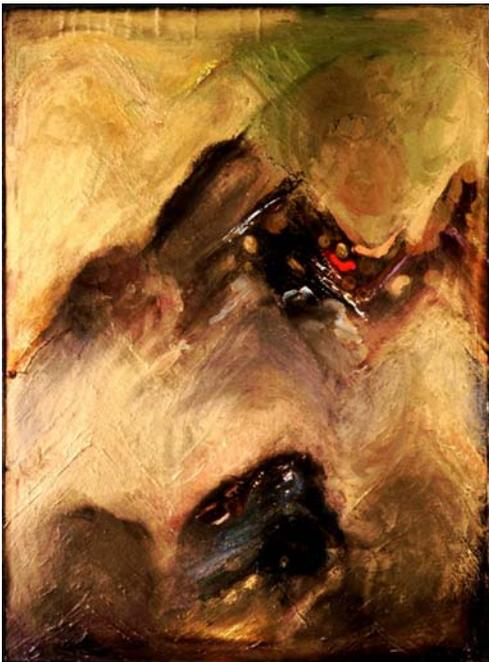
In Jung's *Psychology and Alchemy* I read "the red gum is the resin of the wise" a synonym for the transforming substance...this substance as the life force...which is the medium between mind and body and the union of both".



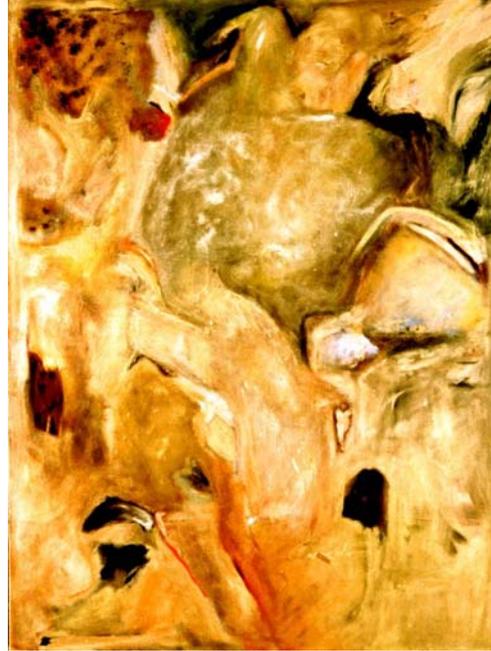
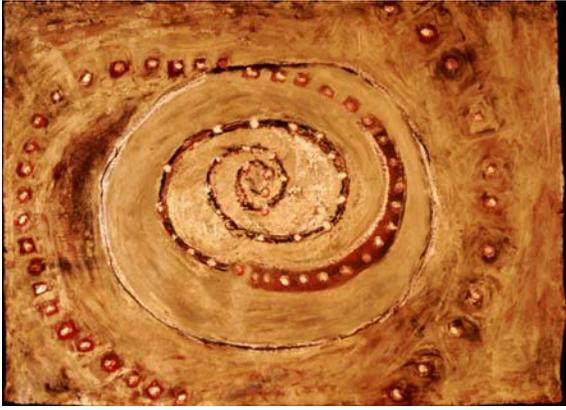
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"Gold expresses sunlight, value and divinity even."

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Gold—Gold is what I reach for so that I may come closer to the numinous. My highest value. It is the color of the Self for me. It is the mystery, the nothing, the not known everything. It is beyond words. It has to do with the magnificence as well as the horror of life. It is the treasure of life, of being alive, of being one with the stars and of being nowhere or in death.



According to Jung, "...God is known in the gold." He says that man must help God repair the damage which creation has caused.

This idea of helping god leads me to these last images, some of which involve the idea of the breaking of the vessels and the work to gather them together again in a new form maybe?





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“One becomes two, two becomes three, and out of the third comes the one as the fourth.”

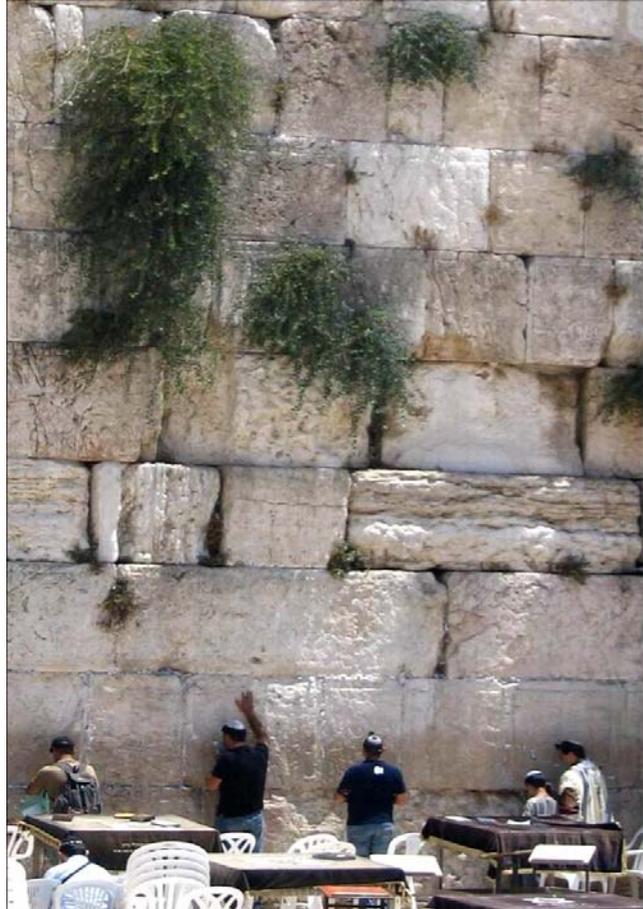
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In the past few years I found myself drawn to walls, and shards and mosaics. I don't know why. I love this image of an ancient painting on stone from a recent excavation in Turkey. I love the colors and the rectangles.

This image of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem really excites me, and the walls for and of the dead of Vietnam move me. These are walls of loss and memory.

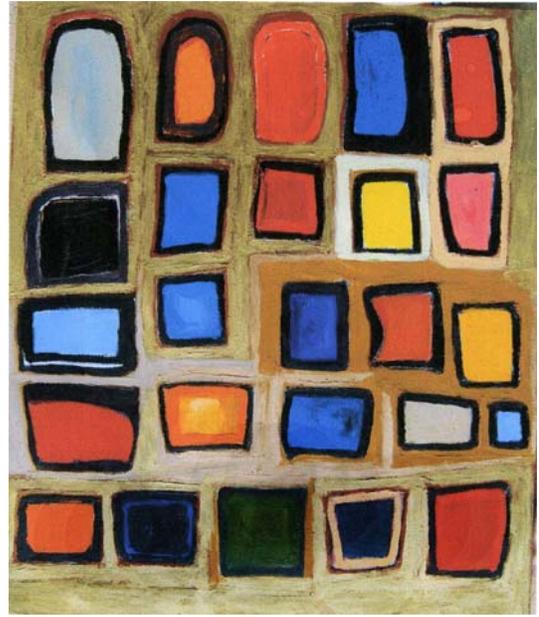
My last images circle around these concerns. I wonder about walls especially. Dr. Henderson told me he dreamt of them often in his very late life. I could not understand it then. Now I do more. Perhaps it is an effort to get beyond the wall,



finally to know the territory on the other side? What is it? Of course I cannot know, but I can imagine.







Some say the senses can be a wall to protect us from pain. This seems right. Boundaries to protect us from the self are not possible, of course, but we may want or need them at times. It is not easy.



This is an image of the shards coming together in a sort of circle of wholeness. It is not what I would call a good painting but it is important for me and I see it daily across from my bed. We are intimate. The opposites seem to dance together here.

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“Then the One, that was hidden in the shell,
Was born through the force of fiery torment.
From it there arose in the beginning love,
Which is the germ and the seed of knowledge.
The wise found the root of being in not-being
By investigating the impulses of the human heart”

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I have made art and it has made me. My dreams and Jungian analysis deepened life over time and brought meaning. I am thankful for all I received from art, psyche, and love—the greatest gift. For me it came slowly, but it did come. Before my art and my dreams, I knew only the dark in myself and in others.

I knew hate, distrust, disaster, anger, and despair.

Jung says “...during the assimilation of the unconscious, the personality passes through many transformations which show it in different lights and are followed by ever changing moods”.

I have felt this over many years.

Now I feel the light. I have love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Penelope Dinsmore is an artist living in the San Francisco Bay Area. She recently celebrated her 80th birthday and has been painting for much of her adult life.

She studied painting at the San Francisco Art Institute and comes from a family in which painting was highly valued. Her father, Stephen Morgan Etnier, was a distinguished painter in the realist tradition of New England landscape and marine subjects. Penelope, on the other hand, has dedicated herself to exploring more inner landscapes dictated by her many years of individuation through analysis with Dr. Joseph Henderson. She has followed a unique calling that has blended the skill of being a trained painter with that of being a most serious student of analytical psychology. Over the years, Penelope has presented lectures that explore her painting and accompanying psychological reflections at events sponsored by the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco "Friends of ARAS." Her presentations have always been received with great enthusiasm and respect for her depth, her directness, and her ability to bring alive the individuation process as reflected in the long practiced art of painting.