



*Biancospini*, by Jennifer Paziienza, Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 243.8cm, 72 x 96in

***Beautiful Dreamer: Landscape and Memory***

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***Art is dream realized, and this is why we value it—as an earnest that our dreams might be realized in life ~ Wendy Steiner***



*FIGURE 1. Winter Sky 1, Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 243.8cm, 72 x 96in*

*All paintings in Beautiful Dreamer: Landscape and Memory were made by Jennifer Pazienza, unless otherwise labeled.*



FIGURE 2. New Brunswick  
Retrieved June 11, 2015, From: [http://mattbrennan.ca/2004\\_08.html](http://mattbrennan.ca/2004_08.html)

Before any talk, my First Nations friends and colleagues Dave and Imelda Perley taught me to acknowledge the land and the first peoples who occupied it wherever we are gathered. In Siracusa, it is the Siculi Italici. In New Brunswick, eastern Canada (Fig. 2) where I live it is the Wolastoqewiyik (pronounced, Woo-luss-ta-goog), the place of the beautiful and bountiful river of the Mig'maw and Maliseet peoples. Specifically Keswick Ridge (Fig. 3) the land that greets me each morning and sees me safely to sleep at night—companion to my life and work for nearly 25 years.



FIGURE 3. *Summer, 2009*, Oil on Canvas, 68.6 x 213.4cm, 27 x 84 in

Like the brick and mortar that were so fundamental to my grandfather's trade, in *Beautiful Dreamer: Landscape and Memory*, images and words, canvas and computer are my materials and tools. *Beautiful Dreamer* is a privileged site of old and new construction, of continual renovations characterized by layer upon layer of active waiting, breathing through thresholds, imagining and re-imagining possible worlds. It is where I labor, in gratitude, to understand and heal the psychic havoc wrought by early loss, domestic violence and Kantian aesthetics.



FIGURE 4. *Face in the Moon*  
Oil on canvas, 21.9 x 152.4 cm, 48 x 60 in

Reconstructing or mapping physical artistic processes and psychological experiences—slivers of insight, fragments of living an examined life—can coalesce in myriad ways. For me it is a matter of submitting myself again and again to the intrigue of a kind of hermeneutic hall of mirrors where ideas bounce off brush strokes and swirls of reading paint text. There, divine light illuminates memory and faith stares down doubt. In the air beautiful voices, long overshadowed by

fear and anxiety, sing their songs of possibility, while others caution not to mistake pointing to the moon for the moon (Fig. 4).

*Beautiful Dreamer* began long ago, in what at times seems like a land far, far away, but there was a decisive moment. My husband Gerry Clarke and I were attending a gallery opening for an emerging artist when a fellow in the community asked, “So Jenn, how do you stay hungry when as a professor you make...” then caught himself. “Do you mean, since as a professor I make a healthy income, what keeps me making paintings?” Scrambling to find solid ground I spat out, “Hunger can take many forms you know!” That ended the conversation and Gerry and I went to supper! Days later however, I still couldn’t shake the memory of that encounter.



FIGURE 5. *Landscape, Love & Longing*, University of New Brunswick Arts Centre

Curiosity, the human impulse to know why, as Alberto Manguel (2015) so lovingly recounts in his latest book with that title, got the better of me. Thus

began my quest to answer, “Why do I paint and why do they look as they do?”

That was eight years ago. This morning, with works from my series *Landscape—Love & Longing* (Fig. 5), I ask, in a world fraught with polluted politics, global environmental degradation and economic greed—a world where the race to keep up with the next best technological bell and whistle is often run against the well-being of its citizenry—of what value is a painting practice, particularly one with an eye for landscape and beauty?”

### **The Idea of Landscape**

The book *Landscape Theory* (DeLue & Elkins, 2008) recounts the events of an international art seminar that took place in Ireland in 2006. Artists, art historians, architects, geographers, architectural historians, cartographers and others--all with a stake in landscape--came together to discuss how the much-contested category could be interpreted (Fig. 6). Their point of entry was Dennis E. Cosgrove’s (1984) groundbreaking book, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*, in which he explains how land has been socially appropriated and



FIGURE 6. *Giallo*  
Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 137.2cm, 72 x 54 in

valued for feudal use or capital exchange, which he then connects to a landscape idea in the West (Cosgrove, 1984, pp.22-3). "It is an unalienated, insider's apprehension of the land, of nature and the sense of place, together with a more critical, socially conscious, outsider's perspective: what he calls, a *landscape way of seeing*." Here landscapes are interpreted iconographically, while maintaining respect for the everyday experience of landscape as the setting for life and work (Cosgrove, 1984, p. xi). Cosgrove traces this landscape way of seeing, that began in the fifteenth century with the technology of perspective, through to contemporary technologies. He writes, "virtual landscapes" represent the furthest extension so far of the idea of landscape as a distanced way of seeing" (Cosgrove, 1984, pp. xxiv-v).

As I canvass these scholars' conversations, the question, Elkins and Cosgrove (2008) pose to the group: "Whether or not landscape painting can still be practiced by people seriously engaged with the history of art, or does it have to find expression in various local and regional contexts" (p. 119) has traveled with me my whole aesthetic life. Elkins (2008) wants, a new kind of art theory: one that is open-ended, inconclusive, combative, and as diverse as we can possibly make it . . . one that move[s] away from the kind of art theory that has been practiced since the 1960s. I couldn't agree more, but he needs to re-think the binary construction of the question and his desire for combat. Still, with these scholars' work as the ridge from which I reflect on my own, I ask what landscape as ideology, the political or landscape as phenomenology, the poetic, can teach me? How do my paintings unearth or bury the substrata of power relations? How do they reveal, conceal and construct my own artistic formation? How do the

paintings call forth landscape as myth and memory, the spiritual and aesthetic, the beautiful and the sublime? Finally, how are my paintings emblematic of “an exemplary encounter with [my own] subjectivity” (Elkins, 2008, p. 103), with my own psyche?

The idea that Anne Whiston Spirn, (2008) from Architecture and Urban Studies at MIT, brought to the folks at the seminar rings true for me—that at “landscape”’s Nordic and Germanic root meanings, *land-skabe* or *land-schaften*, “there is a notion, embedded in the original word, of a mutual association, a shaping of people and place where people shape the land, and the land shapes people” (p. 92) Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the first wave of southern Italian immigrants, my Sicilian grandfather arrived at Ellis Island. Some years later, a stonemason with a young family, he and his countrymen, from the vantage point of Brooklyn, acting on an impulse to recreate something of the landscapes they left behind, looked west and set their sites on New Jersey, the Garden State.



FIGURE 7. 142 Grove Street

Don't you just love the Google Map, street view? This photo (Fig. 7) depicts 142 Grove Street as I found it online; it is the house I grew up in during the middle 50s-early 60s. Of course like Jason's

Argo it has undergone a number of modifications since *mio nonno*, Epifanio Marchione, built it in 1924. The version I lived in had a huge maple tree in front (Fig. 8). Who would have thought then, that I would move to a country with a maple leaf as its symbol? In any case, I loved that tree. “The house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace,” writes Gaston Bachelard (1964, p. 6), in *The Poetics of Space*. We marked the seasons together, tree standing through all kinds of weather: snow-covered branches in winter, abundant pink spring buds, the promise of summer’s verdant greens, and the magical explosion of reds and yellows in autumn, me within the shelter and safety of our sun-porch with its charming French pane windows; the one room un-shadowed by domestic violence. It was for me, a place for daydreaming. I wish I had my childhood drawings to show you. They were filled with blue skies, trees and mountains in summer, children gleefully skating on woodland frozen ponds in winter.



FIGURE 8. *Albero Rosso*, Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 243.8cm, 72 x 96in

How it is my paintings are filled with the stuff of the natural world has long been a mystery to me. Although I was born in urban Newark, I did experience my formative years in suburban Bloomfield, on Grove Street, at the corner of Elmwood Avenue. Denis Dutton (2009) in *The art instinct: beauty, pleasure, & human evolution*, helps me here. Without rejecting social constructivist explanations, he asks us to consider biology in our understanding



FIGURE 9. *Early Spring*  
Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 137.2cm, 72 x 54 in

of the complex relationship between aesthetics and survival. The perception of beauty found in particular landscapes, understood as places of refuge certainly resonates with my young drawings and in my adult paintings. That, “the arts are beyond the reach of evolution is a mistake overdue for correction,” he writes.(Dutton, 2009, p.2) Worldwide preferences for landscape are not only the effects of cultural influence. They are also a matter of prehistoric tastes and are “notably specific” (Dutton,2009, pp.

3 & 19). Most important is mystery. A sense of mystery implies the future, the wonder of what might be found if we were to travel deeper into the scene (Fig. 9). “Mystery stirs human imagination and as such is vitally important to landscape as an art form” (Kaplan & Kaplan,1982). A sense of prospect and refuge, the ability to see without being seen is fundamental to the attractiveness of a

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landscape. A cave on the side of a mountain, a house on the Ridge, my childhood sun porch, my Keswick Ridge studio, some sense of being safe from observation or attack from behind (Appleton, 1975, p. 21). Looking at my practice through Dutton's biological lens, the instinctual desire I have for re-creating illusionistic space on the one hand, and the critical chatter in my head that says, "but it should look like" or "conform to" the still present modernist ideal of flatness and non-representation on the other, comes into sharp focus. This is a consequence of the overwhelming effects of my 60's-70's artistic formation that continues to pervade contemporary aesthetics.

Dutton's words echo Elaine Scarry's (1999) in her book, *On Beauty and Being Just* where we learn what is at stake in the interdependent pact between the beholder and the beheld, and "one's own responsibility for the continuity of existence" (p.92). With their voices I can



FIGURE 10. Beauty Books

better say why I have never been able to turn a deaf ear to the call of beauty and its articulation in landscape imagery. In their writing I find language that speaks to my experience.

### **On Beauty and Non-Duality**

Beauty is a hot topic these days (Fig. 10), not only in art and academic contexts but in business, neuroscience and contemporary and historical fiction.

My love of beauty however, began over 60 years ago.

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FIGURE 11. *Ginestre*  
Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 137.2cm, 72 x 54in

“Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the earth” (Rumi & Barks, 1997) are lines from a Rumi poem that point to a perspective on art and life that has long been in the making. My lifelong relationship with beauty I owe to my short-lived life with my mother. While washing my hair she would rinse away my soapy tears with, “Sorry Jennifer, but you have to suffer to be beautiful.” At bedtime, her mezzo-soprano voice would lull me to sleep with verses from “Beautiful Dreamer:”

*Beautiful dreamer, wake unto me,  
Starlight and dewdrops are waiting for thee;  
Sounds of the rude world, heard in the day,  
Lull'd by the moonlight have all pass'd away!*

Early on I witnessed the aesthetic power that rivulets of glistening, green olive oil in cadmium red tomato gravies can have on the lives of working class Italian immigrants (Fig. 11). In our house beauty was something practiced, something made and consumed, a relationship we entered into. In equally exquisite measures so too was the ugly, served up by the fall-out of my family's post WWII domestic violence—a kind of performance art where sauce-stained walls and scattered dish shards invited no encore. At the same time, within the

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encroaching urban landscape that was our Jersey home, an enormous peach tree, flower, herb and vegetable garden, grape vines and rose-arbor filled the backyard and provided entrees into the natural world. Built from nature, it was a world built from culture too, in the way that Simon Schama (1995) explains in *Landscape and Memory*, that landscape is made from culture and nature. Each exhibited their own versions of the beautiful and the ugly, the just and the unjust. The mistake of course, would be to align the beautiful with the natural and the ugly with the built. It is this tricky relationship between shifting perceptions of beautiful things and beautiful actions, ugly things and ugly actions that contributed to the near total dismissal of any talk of beauty in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Humanities. Of all the themes that emerged at the landscape seminar, it was beauty that caused the greatest consternation and one the participants agreed they had skirted around. Conceived as real or ideal, secular (as in Dave Hickey's (2012) *Invisible Dragon*) or sacred (as in John O'Donohue's (2005) *The Invisible Embrace*), unable to define beauty's value with any certainty, some artists, critics, and educators ignore it, or see beauty as potentially dangerous. In short, the argument goes something like this:

The sublime rejects beauty on the grounds it is diminutive, dismissible, not powerful enough. The political rejects beauty on the grounds that it is too powerful...both in its ability to visit harm on objects and subjects looked at and in its ability to so overwhelm our attention that we cannot free our eyes long enough to look at injustice. (Scarry, 1999, p. 85)

Owing to Kantian aesthetics and feminist critical theory, in this passage, beauty functions as a *quality* of objects and subjects. You may recall it is

earthbound Psyche gazing upon her beloved Cupid that gets her into trouble. Wendy Steiner (2001) in *Venus in Exile: The Rejection of Beauty in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art*, borrowing from the Hellenistic past skillfully recasts the story of Psyche and Cupid for a 21<sup>st</sup> century myth of beauty and, through Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, provides a powerful critique of Kantian aesthetics. For Steiner, beauty is relation and communication and value is central. An allegory of aesthetic pleasure, the soul moved by beauty becomes worthy of love. Beauty is "a particular interaction between two beings, a self and an Other" where a generous mutuality can be achieved. Sympathy features big (Steiner, 2001, pp. xxiii-xxv) as both parties become aligned in value and in some sense equal. "Creators and creations echo each other in this model, and are tied in a bond of love that involves self-realization" (Steiner, 2001, p. 14). To overcome the dehumanizing, alienating effects of 20<sup>th</sup> century modernist aesthetics, Steiner (2001) says, "It is the task of contemporary art criticism to imagine beauty as an experience of empathy and equality" (p. xxv).

For Elaine Scarry (1999), beauty compels replication, a begetting, the means by which we renew our search for truth and our concern for justice, what throughout my career I have called *re-creation* (Pazienza, 1989). John Navone's (1999) *Enjoying God's Beauty* helps me understand further the role of love in beauty begetting beauty, as in Steiner's Psyche and Cupid and the offspring of their union, the divine child, Pleasure. Whether replication or re-creation, "the generative object continues, in some sense, to be present in the newly begotten object" (Scarry, 1999, p. 9). At its heart *re-creation* relies on *interdependence*, on non-duality.

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Until *Beautiful Dreamer*, I restricted the theory of re-creation to art curriculum practices (Pazienza, 1989). Believing that I painted from natural, rather than symbolic worlds, I could not see how my art making was a matter of re-creating worlds (Goodman, 1978). Unwittingly, certain modernist dualities—the sensorial and the symbolic, the actual and the aesthetic—were still influencing my thinking. That changed in another decisive moment when, about five years after a major illness, surgery and lengthy recovery, I served as artist and educator in residence for New Brunswick’s provincial art gallery, The Beaverbrook (Fig. 12, Lindsay West 2007). There I was, working away, when without warning a docent came into the open studio. At the sound of his voice, the glass bubble I was painting in came crashing down around me. In a heartbeat, I recognized I needed a different way of *being* or I would forever be sweeping up shards. I pondered Thich Naht-Hanh’s (1987) mindfulness practice, inter-being, a posture that dissolves boundaries and creates spaces where reverie and presence can co-exist.



**FIGURE 12.** Artist in Residence  
The Beaverbrook Art Gallery (photo by Lindsay West)

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I began to see a relationship between my yoga and painting practices. Reflecting on that rupture in my life and its reawakening of past injuries, it occurred to me that God and the Yoga Sutras had more to do with returning me to wholeness than the surgical sutures I sustained. Piero Ferrucci (2009) in *Beauty and the Soul* affirms my belief in the healing power of beauty and the natural world. Further, the constructivist worldview I had crafted, with its emphasis on symbolic re-creation, ignored its estranged relation perception, ignored the body, my body. Now, with David Abram (1996) author of *Spell of the Sensuous*, informed by Merleau-Ponty's (1945) *Phenomenology of Perception*, I see the dynamic participation between my body and things, I can discern within the act of perception, a participation between the various sensory systems of the body itself. Indeed these events are not separable,

*“for the intertwining of my body with the things it perceives is effected only through the interweaving of my senses, and vice versa... this body is a form destined to the world...a sort of open circuit that completes itself only in things, in others, in the encompassing earth.”*  
(Abram, 1996, p. 62)



FIGURE13. *Winter Sky*  
Oil on canvas, 243.8 x 182.9cm, 96 x 72in

In January, the holidays behind us, I traded my kitchen studio for my

painting studio. Looking up at the 8 x 6 foot canvas I asked, “What do you want from me?” As is my practice, I looked out the window and loaded my brushes. About five hours later *Winter Sky 1* (Fig. 13) was well underway. Just 10 inches from the bottom of the canvas, an ache in my back awakened me from my reverie. Like “wax on, wax off” in the *Karate Kid* (1984) of my generation, it took another two and a half weeks of “paint on, paint off” for me to ground the sky and call the painting finished.

### **Ugly, Flat and Gendered Spaces**

And what about the ugly? Much has been made from the phrase, the cult of the ugly, coined by Ezra Pound in 1913, prophetic in its proximity to World War I. Like beauty, here ugly is seen as the property of things. As a quality that compels relationship and action, however, it is not that far a leap to see how ugliness, the prized anti-aesthetic of the day, contributed to, and was then confirmed by the events of WW1.

Meaning to mark the aesthetic change away from the cult of beauty, Pound promoted the ugly as a medical diagnosis and beauty as a medical cure. This conceit is alive and well 100 years later. For example, in the Rennie Airth detective novels, the male protagonist, a wounded, widowed, WWI vet, the product of Kantian-informed militaristic decision-making, falls in love with a female physician who through her love, heals him. Airth describes her as smart and beautiful in mind, body and spirit.

However, it was Pound's responding to ideas laid down in the previous two centuries that made his conceptualizing of the cult of the ugly possible. This is

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particularly true with Immanuel Kant's introduction of gender in 1764, where juxtaposing the sublime and the beautiful we learn,

*The sublime is male and the beautiful female. The sublime is English, Spanish and German; the beautiful is French and Italian. The sublime resides in mountains... tall oaks in a sacred grove; the beautiful in Elysian meadows. The sublime is night, the beautiful day. The sublime moves and astonishes... Beauty charms.... The sublime is principled, noble, righteous' the beautiful is compassionate and good-hearted.*

In each of the opposing pairs, as Scarry reminds us, because [the beautiful] was almost always the diminutive member it was also the dismissible member. (Scarry, 2000, p.84)

Interestingly, here, like beauty, certain landscapes are feminized and therefore dismissible. Is it any surprise that just as there has been a raft of exhibitions on beauty in the last fifteen years, we now see a return to the idea of landscape in contemporary art?

Conservative art critics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century reinforced the exchange of the Academic ideal of beauty for ugliness when they framed works meant to challenge and replace talk of beauty with talk of social relevance, such as Manet's, (1863) *De jéneur sur l'herbe*, (Fig. 14). That talk, however, was silenced too since, working for the state's interest in maintaining social control, their art criticism was reduced to talk of the formal qualities of the work; its painterly techniques and an ever-flattening treatment of pictorial space.

Today, for American critic Dave Hickey (2012), the perceptual shortening



FIGURE 14. De jéneur sur l'herbe, Edouard Manet, 1863. Retrieved June 9, 2015 From: [http://www.museeorsay.fr/index.php?id=851&L=1&tx\\_commentaire\\_pi1\[showUid\]=7123](http://www.museeorsay.fr/index.php?id=851&L=1&tx_commentaire_pi1[showUid]=7123).

of recessed or illusionistic space in painting-- over some 400 years since the Renaissance-- to flat space, signals a shift in how that space is gendered and ultimately valued or devalued. The *aesthetic of flatness* owing to art critic Clement

Greenberg, who admonished painters in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century that there shall be “No

‘painterly’ striving for emotional or atmospheric effects, no recognizable images, and above all no illusionistic spatial depth that might divert attention from the essential *flatness* of the canvas... “(Steiner, 2001, p.112) is for Hickey, and for me largely equated with the male, heterosexual artist and a homophobic response to the “lovely”, or stereotypically “effeminate” in art. It is an art criticism “that portrays a virile struggle and ultimate triumph over the effeminacy of illusionistic space and all other devices to ingratiate the beholder” (Hickey, 2012, p. 38). High Modernism then, lays waste to the pre-modern, [three-way, *ménage a trois*] relationship of the artist, artwork, and viewer. It renders the viewer a “non-participatory observer or objective moral observer” or worse, for Hickey, “recast as an irresponsible, alienated, elitist voyeur” (pp. 38-39). The antithesis to Dennis Cosgrove’s (1984) *unalienated landscape way of seeing*, where spatial interaction is a requisite component of self-invention and re-invention, identity and citizenship (p.192) and Steiner’s (2001) aesthetics of relation,

communication and self-realization. It is not the artworks themselves. It is the assumptions underlying modern art criticism and their effects that concern me. Talk of structural formation in paintings extends to, and constructs social formations and social arrangements; what it is we individually and collectively believe and value and how we interact. How can art have broad inclusive relevance, a prerequisite to living healthy, just lives, if the rhetoric surrounding it prevents most of its citizenry access to it? Left unchallenged, the viewer is left flat with the ground pulled out from under her.

Take for example, American Abstract artist Barnett Newman's (1967) *Voice of Fire* (Fig. 15) commissioned for Expo '67, for the

U.S. Pavilion at the Montreal International and Universal Exhibition. Purchased by the National Gallery of Canada in 1989, it created quite a stir, with folks asking about what meaning and import it could have for their lives, not the least of



FIGURE 15. *Voice of Fire*, Barnett Newman, 1967. Retrieved June 9, 2015. From: <http://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artwork.php?key=35828>

which was the perennial problem of Canadian identity, and of course there was the question of the \$1.8 million dollars paid for it. Five years later the National Gallery acquired Canada's Anishinabe artist Robert Houle's (1993) *Kanata* (Fig. 16) a re-creation of Benjamin West's (1770), *The Death of General Wolfe* (Fig. 17).



FIGURE 16. *Kanata*, Robert Houle, 1993. Retrieved June 9, 2015. From: [http://www.gallery.ca/en/search?ga\\_search=kanata&ga\\_category=Entire-Site](http://www.gallery.ca/en/search?ga_search=kanata&ga_category=Entire-Site)



FIGURE 17. *The Death of Wolfe*, Benjamin West  
Retrieved June 9, 2015. From: <http://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artwork.php?mkey=5363>

In it Houle conveys his concern for the status of First Nation's (i.e., native Canadians) historical identity. About Kanata he says,

*Maybe somehow...I can...say to the viewer, 'Look, as Native people we are just voyeurs in the history of this country.' [In "Kanata"] the Indian is in parentheses, the Indian is surrounded by this gigantic red and this gigantic blue and is sandwiched in that environment...And that is reality because the English and the French are still the major players in the making of this history, history as it was. That is what I would like to get across.*

Kanata, critiques Canadian history, but also modern art criticism. The blue and red on the satchel adorning the kneeling indigenous figure, a formal ploy, visually links the triptych and certainly speaks to First Nations' French and English historic and psychic baggage. But when Houle re-locates the exquisitely rendered center between the blue and red panels, he also suggests how an aesthetic of flatness can prevent the very re-writing of those histories and questions the place of Aboriginal art in Western Art History.

*Voice of Fire* (Newman, 1967) an exemplary work of conceptual, color-field painting is short-changed when only read from modernism's mind/body split that prefers the region from our necks up. From the standpoint of Kant's sublime, aesthetic lens and Greenberg's cry for flatness, how the pulsing ultramarine and cadmium red aligns with the beat of our hearts and the quickening of our breath is sublimated. And what of beauty and *Voice of Fire*? In her book, *Aesthetics of Uncertainty*, Janet Wolff (2012) suggests a post-critical understanding for shaping aesthetic criteria. Like Steiner (2001), Wolff's aesthetics reside "in communities, not free-floating, but grounded in structures

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and institutions of relative and differential power...” (p. 25)...Where talk of beauty returns “on the basis of a ‘principled aesthetic’ that acknowledges the complex intersections of the aesthetic and the political, as they relate to questions of gender...” (p.29). Aesthetic criteria that looks at gendered judgments, what is said as well as gendered images, what is seen (Fig. 18).



FIGURE 18. *Scuro*, Oil on canvas, 243.8 x 182.9cm, 96 x 72in

On reflection and from the ground of re-creativity, Mary Oliver's (2006) poem *Praying* (p. 37), reminds me,

It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just  
pay attention, then patch  
  
a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway  
  
into thanks, and a silence  
in which another voice may speak.

### **Beauty, Landscape and Memory**

After a long day in the studio, over a much-needed glass of wine with Gerry, I admitted to having doubts about my paintings. Frustrated with an art world that still values non-representation and favors installation, performance and digital art, I said, "Maybe the series should be called, 'It's a tree, deal with it!'"

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” This was a year or so before Jungian scholar Craig Stephenson visited my studio and introduced me to Jung’s (1967), *Philosophical Tree* essay. Today, in my imagination, Carl Jung joins me in my studio and over a cup of tea we discuss how my work may symbolize growth, protection, old age, life, death and rebirth, partialness and wholeness, immanence and transcendence. I tell him how viewers typically gravitate to the sky paintings—commenting that they can breathe in their presence—but say little or nothing about the shadowy bruised color, anxiety and tension embedded in *Scuro*, for example.

Just six months after the Beaverbrook residency and the slow, cancerous death of an artist friend, I made *Albero Nudo* (Fig. 19), the first, in my newly built studio. My year at the BAG coincided with Canada’s Year of Craft and I was asked to incorporate craft objects in my paintings such as Peter Powning’s (2004) *Crusty Branch Vessels* (Fig. 20). One morning on my yoga mat, gazing through our sun-porch windows to our grape arbor, the memory of Powning’s branches came into consciousness, most importantly, his ceramic treatment of branches. In them I saw possibilities for my paintings. Those branches both challenged me and granted me permission to paint a tree that looked like a tree. *Albero Nudo* was my first articulated tree painting since childhood. I recalled Scarry’s idea that beauty triggers memory and the search for precedents.



*FIGURE 19. Albero Nudo*  
Oil on Canvas 182.9 x 152.4 cm, 72 x 60in



*FIGURE 20. Crusty Branch Vessel, Peter Powning, 2004*  
Ceramic, 182.9 x 137.2cm, 72 x 54in, Retrieved June 9, 2015.  
From:[http://www.powning.com/peter/index.php?option=com\\_g2bridge&view=gallery&Itemid=90/&g2\\_itemId=796](http://www.powning.com/peter/index.php?option=com_g2bridge&view=gallery&Itemid=90/&g2_itemId=796).

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Around the same time (as Fig. 21), in an effort to stave off the kind of short-term memory loss I witnessed in my mother in law, I returned to memorizing poetry as we were taught to do as children. Unwittingly, I began with another Mary Oliver (2006) poem,

*When I Am Among the Trees*

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.  
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves  
and call out, "Stay awhile."  
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple they say,"  
"and you too have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled  
with light, and to shine" (p. 4).

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FIGURE 21. *Biancospini*

Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 243.8cm, 72 x 96in

Scarry (1999) writes, “Beauty brings copies of itself into being. It makes us draw it, take photographs of it, or describe it to other people” (p. 3). As a child, copying was the way I taught myself to draw. I copied comics, my older brother’s drawings, greeting cards, and actual objects near and dear to my heart.

Unfortunately in a 1960s school art education landscape, based on abstract expressionism, copying as a way of finding my visual voice and making sense of the world was taboo. With no models at hand, but instructed to be original and imaginative, I drew on landscapes of memory; landscapes I had seen in books, or

on TV, in movies,  
 songs and poems,  
 or those I had  
 actually  
 experienced, the  
 maple tree in  
 front, the peach  
 tree in the back  
 garden, our trip to  
 the Catskill  
 Mountains, school



FIGURE 22. *Early Winter*, Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 137.2cm, 53 x 72in

assemblies where at the Thanksgiving holiday we sang (Fig. 22) “over the river and through the wood, to grandmother’s house we go; the horse knows the way to carry the sleigh through the white and drifted snow-oh!” My Sicilian grandmother lived upstairs! Or, Robert Frost’s (1967), *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. “Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village though; He will not see me stopping here to watch his woods fill up with snow” (p. 275). Or, *America the Beautiful*, the anthem we would sing at the start of the school day. “*Oh Beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain,*” ingrained in me (Fig. 23), imaginary landscapes that to this day find their way forward when needed. As have the the varied Sicilian landscapes amplified by eight stays over the last seventeen years.

## Doubt, Faith and Uncertainty

I was reading, *William James: In the Maelstrom of American Modernism*, by Robert D. Richardson (2006) when I began the series *Landscape, Love & Longing*. I had a cursory knowledge of William James--(pragmatism and stream of consciousness thinking)-- but after reading a review of Richardson's book I had a hunch that James and I had something more in common—that the blooming, buzzing, confusion (James 1890) of his life was my life too. It turns out that William James and I share a January 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. He saw himself, first and always as an artist, who thought in and between the fields of physiology, psychology and philosophy and, as I had suspected, he was well read in Buddhism, Hinduism and the Upanishads. But it was James writing about doubt, faith and belief that cemented our connection. Every time I step up to a canvas, (Fig. 24) I live his assertion

that, “doubt itself is an active state...instead of meaning a lamentable loss of certainty...doubt is the positive possibility of certainty” (p.177).

With James (1882) I see how *the element of faith...as belief in something concerning which doubt, is still theoretically*

*possible: and as the test of belief is willingness to act...faith is the readiness to*

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FIGURE 24. *Nel Cuore dell' Inverno*  
Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 137.2cm, 72 x 54in

*act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance.”*

(Richardson, 2006, pp. 202-03)

James fits well with Janet Wolff's (2008) aesthetics of uncertainty where, “Uncertainty is the home ground of the moral person and the only soil out of which morality can spring shoots and flourish” (Bauman, Z., 2003, p.11).

Connections between James, Wolf, Steiner, Scarry and Hickey become apparent in a Alexander Nehamas review (2007) when he writes,



FIGURE 25. Gioia Verde Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 137.2cm, 72x54in

*The value of beauty is as disputable as the value of each life of which it is a part and since it is a part of every life, beauty is a constant reminder that the value of life itself is a disputable matter. ...The return of the beautiful is welcome because it intimates the dawning of a new willingness to acknowledge our love of uncertainty, and the uncertainty of love.* (Nehamas, 2007, p. 403)

## **On Beauty**

At the site of beauty, what Scarry (2001) describes confirms my experience of “beauty as a greeting” (p.25) and reinforces Steiner’s (2001) beauty as relation (Fig. 25). At the moment one comes into the presence of something beautiful, it greets you. It lifts away from the neutral background as though coming forward to welcome you—as though the object were designed to “fit” your perception. In its etymology, “welcome” means that one comes with the well-

wishes or consent of the person or thing already standing on the ground. It is as though the welcoming thing has entered into, and consented to, your being in its midst. Your arrival seems contractual, not just something you want, but something the world you are now joining wants (Scarry, 2001, pp. 25-26).

How many times have I paced and prayed in a posture of reverence, petition or impatience?

Buffeted between doubt, faith and belief that the call will come, that I will again reside in the presence of that which is sacred, unprecedented, and life-affirming. My willingness to revise my



Figure 26

location in order to place myself in the path of beauty, is the basic impulse underlying education, writes Scarry (2001). One submits oneself to others minds (teachers) in order to increase the chance that we will be looking in the right direction when a comet sweeps through a certain patch of sky (Fig. 26). (p.7)

With Simone Weil (1951) and Iris Murdoch (1967), Scarry (1999) explains the perceiver's cognitive act of beholding the beautiful thing. When we are in the presence of beauty we experience a kind of radical de-centering, a giving up of ourselves as the imaginary center. We cede our ground to the thing that stands before us. "A transformation takes place at the very roots of our sensibility, in our

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immediate reception of sensory and psychological impressions” (Weil, 1973, p.159). De-centering is un-selfing and the single best thing in our surroundings, which is an occasion for un-selfing is...beauty (Murdoch, 1967, p. 2). Rather than promoting the self, we become self-forgetful. All of our efforts of protecting, guarding and advancing the self are free to be in the service of something else. Christian, Buddhist, and yogic teachings come to mind and concur: un-selfing—or surrendering, leads to states of unity and equality, since it creates in us a greater capacity for attending, beyond our own self interest. (Scarry, 1999, p. 113) Scarry admits that un-selfing may seem one-sided and imbalanced and Steiner concedes, “the experience of beauty involves an exchange of power that can be disorienting, but suggests, “We would do well to recognize the meaning of our succumbing...as an opportunity for self-revelation” (Steiner, p.xxi).

When I am surrounded by the Keswick Ridge landscape scaling large canvases (Fig. 27), I am compelled—not in some false attempt at humility, or in an



Figure 27

“OMG I could fall off of this ladder kind of way—to consider the effects of connecting to something other than myself, something vast. Cosgrove’s *landscape way of seeing* comes to mind and I imagine all that has grown up in its place, particularly the meanly rooted reach of Kantian aesthetics in fields other than art, particularly the domestic. I reflect on David Abrams’ question, “How is it human nature has become so disconnected from all other natures?” Then I inhale deeply and recall that trees and I are intimately connected; we are animated by the same life force.

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FIGURE 28. *Bramosia*, Oil on canvas, 243.8 x 182.9cm, 96 x 72in

### **Psychic Healing and the Mythic Imagination**

But what meanings can my paintings have for you? I found part of the answer in West Yorkshire, the landscape that shaped my dear friend Susan

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Butterfield. Wishing to heal the wounds incurred by being uprooted as a teenager to Canada, she created Morag Walks (<http://www.moragwalks.com/>), named after her late Border Collie, gentle walking tours that would take her back to her home town of Hebden Bridge.

Poet Laureate Ted Hughes was born in Mytholmroyd, just minutes as the crow flies, from Hebden Bridge, and raised among the local farms of the Calder Valley on the Pennine moorland—the landscape that gave rise to his mythic imagination and took up residence in mine. This landscape, Gerry and I had the pleasure to stand in when I served as resident cook for the Morag Walkers at Walshaw Lodge (Fig. 29). The significance of that experience however, began months before when Susan gave me Keith Sagar’s (2006) book, *The Laughter of Foxes: A study of Ted Hughes*.



FIGURE 29. Hebden Bridge, Walshaw Lodge, Jenn & Gerry



FIGURE 30. *Coming on Summer, 2*  
Oil on canvas, 182.9 x 137.2cm, 53 x 72in

While my paintings certainly “question new art theories and provide solutions to painterly problems, they are fundamentally responses to the poetry of place and an inner landscape where I make sense of the world and my place in it” (Smart, 2010, p.7).

I have come to understand that *Landscape, Love & Longing* and its written relation, *Beautiful Dreamer: Landscape and Memory*, is the stuff of what Hughes calls a quest myth. It is the deep ecology of Hughes’ work that integrates the stratified layers of mine, the relations of living organisms with each other and their surroundings; where imaginative art seeks to re-spiritualize Nature, to heal the split in the human psyche, replacing anthropocentric with bio-centric consciousness to provide the only viable religion—*religio*— a referring backwards towards a center and a wholeness...The language of the imagination is necessarily holistic and bio-centric....grounded simultaneously in the depths of the artist’s being and in the external universe. This is the way of poetic and religious consciousness, the instinctive act of synthesis (Sagar, 2006, pp. 6-7).

Like Hughes, my dream is that you approach my paintings with “the cooperative, imaginative attitude of a co-author, to enter into as deeply as you can, [my] imaginative worlds” (Sagar, 2006, p. ix) to experience, “An imaginative connection, the engine of which is fueled by beauty” (Steiner, 2001, p.14).

It may not be every artist's experience, but what Ted Hughes expressed in a 1996 interview certainly speaks to mine (Fig. 30).

*Every work of art stems from a wound in the soul of the artist. When a person is hurt, his [their] immune system comes into operation and the self-healing process takes place, mental and physical. Art...gives expression to the healing process.*

*...there are artists who concentrate on...the damage, the blood, the mangled bones, the explosion of pain, in order to rouse and shock. And there are those who hardly mention the circumstances of the wound, they are concerned with the cure. (Sagar, 2006, p. xi)*



FIGURE 31. *Coming on Summer, 1*  
Oil on canvas, 182.9x137.2cm, 72x54in

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