

Figure 1: "The Crossed Rivers" Mandala: The cover of the book Martha's Mandala published by Spuyten Duyvil, NY, 2015

Martha's Mandala

By Martha Oliver-Smith

I would like to begin by explaining a few things about how *Martha's Mandala* came to be a book. The text seen on this mandala comes from an essay called "Time," written by my grandmother. Both her words and the image of the mandala itself, whirling on in its endless circle, seem to be telling the story. Her words and the image itself.

It is the story of Martha Stringham Bacon, my grandmother, who was an artist, though she was reluctant to call herself that. She was never formally trained though she took art classes after high school and in her early married life. Her work was highly illustrative and influenced by other illustrators such as N.C. Wyeth, Arthur Rackham and Kai Neilson. She was a fine draftsman with a gorgeous sense of color. Perhaps due to her lack of formal education, she was extremely self-deprecating about her work and for the most part kept it to herself and her family.

I spent much of my childhood living in her house and growing up in her care. Over the years, she told me much of the story, her ideas, dreams and visions. She showed me her paintings and drawings; she also read to me and taught me to read. From there I was launched into the world of fairy tales, mythology, and poetry, onward to reading and studying novels and other literary forms, and thus to a long and rewarding career teaching English to high school and college students. Ultimately, because of my grandmother's influence, I would eventually find my own rather tortuous way to my own writing.

As a child, I was unaware of how unusual my grandmother's story was. Much later, when I was in my forties, I came across a letter when I was visiting my Aunt Alice, the youngest Bacon daughter. I found it in a paper box moldering in a damp storage shed in Princeton, New Jersey. Left in that shed for almost

thirty years, Aunt Alice had finally allowed me to wade through the sea of archival materials after many years of me gently but persistently trying to persuade her to let me look through the papers and drawings. The letter, floating loose among the old envelopes and scraps of drawings was from Carl Jung.

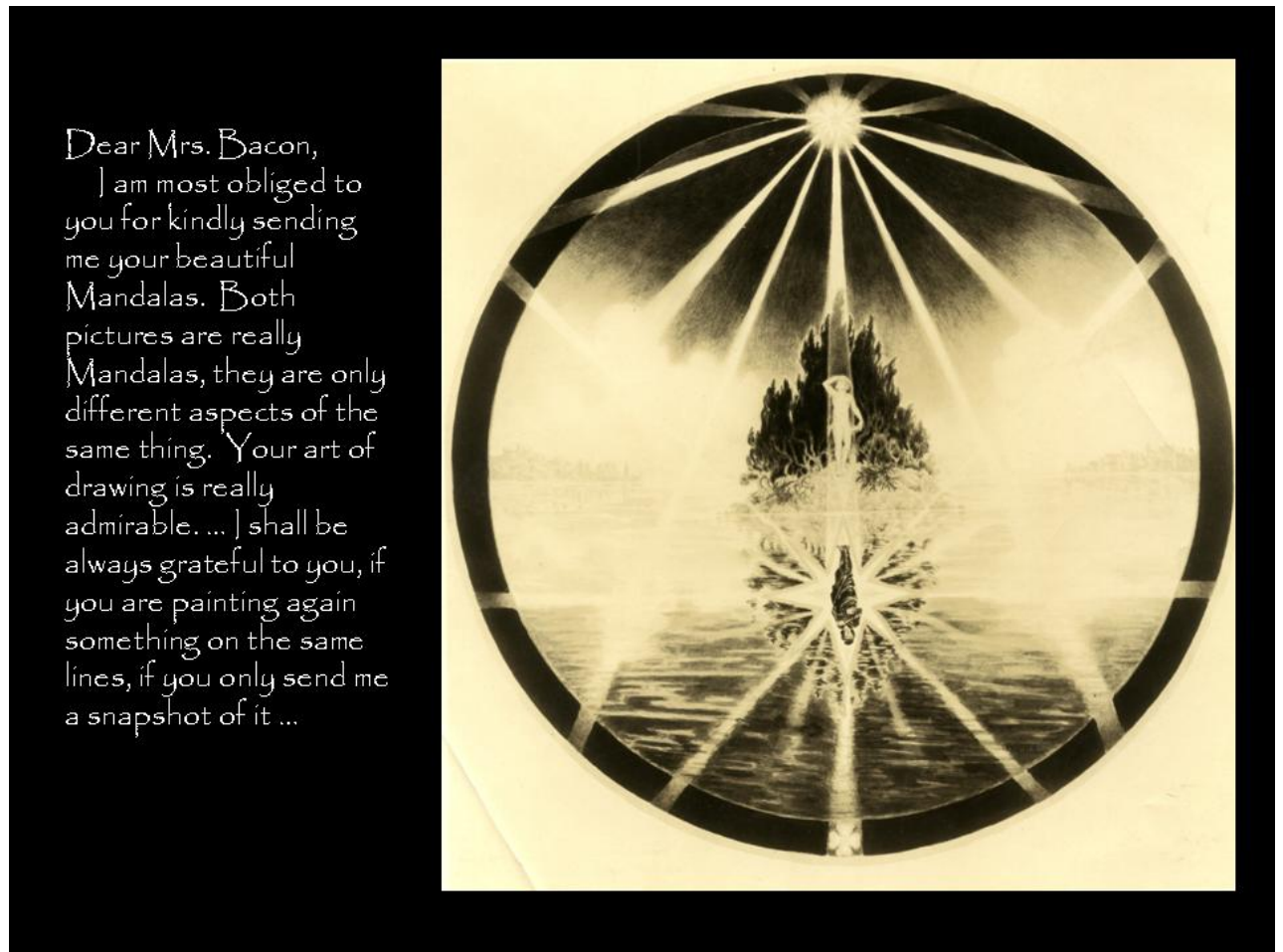


Figure 2: Photograph of Mandala sent to Jung.

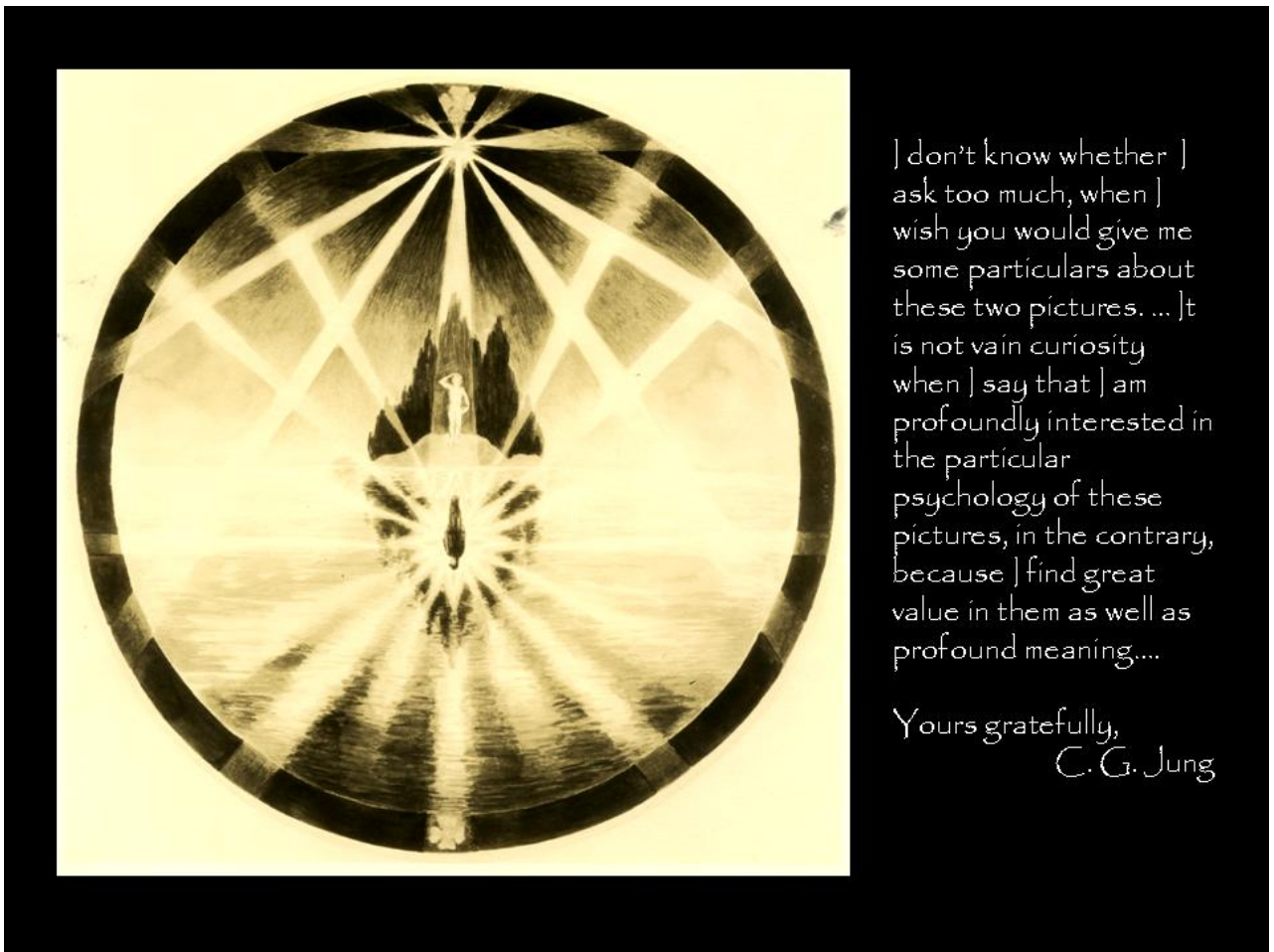


Figure 3: Photograph of Mandala sent to Jung.

Martha Stringham Bacon sent the black and white photos to Jung in 1932. He would eventually see the originals in 1936 on a visit to her Rhode Island home when he was in the U.S. for the Harvard lectures. This early work depicts a theme and imagery that she would revisit in several paintings and also in her writing: one or more figures, surrounded by light but split into opposite positions and depicted above and below or in relation to a body of water. Both paintings are lost, though I remember that the darker figures under the water were red in each version. In the more dynamic version, the figure was scarlet and in the more subdued, vermilion.

At the time I discovered Jung's letter, which was around twenty years ago, I remembered that my grandmother often spoke about Jung. He seemed a kind of deity in the house so often was he a subject of conversation. I absorbed on a daily basis certain Jungian terms and phrases (introvert/extrovert/synchronicity, pairs of opposites etc.) and a particular reverence for dreams, fantasies, and visions. Although my reading of his work and the early infusion of Jungian lore did not make me an expert on Jung or his ideas, it did profoundly influence my thinking and feeling – my world view - in ways that I am only recently conscious of. After discovering the letter, I worked on and off for the next 18 years on putting together the pieces of the story, following the trail of the Bacon family circle through voluminous archival materials; letters to and from hundreds of people, journals, paintings, drawings, stories, essays, lists, poetry by my grandfather, Leonard Bacon and his autobiography as well as interviews with those still alive who remembered my grandparents and their world.

Besides the primary sources, I also relied on memory, however quixotic this can be at times, and based on this I have written of my short role in her story and her large one in mine. I have also imagined what I could not verify with primary sources, or could know, from the years before I was born. To use a new age term, I “channeled” my grandmother from memory and her writings, and recreated or imagined some pieces of her story that way.



Figure 4: Martha Stringham Bacon: possibly her engagement photo.

Martha Stringham Bacon was born in 1892 in Berkeley, CA to a UC Berkeley mathematics professor and his wife, also named Martha. She met my grandfather, Leonard Bacon, a native of Peace Dale, Rhode Island, when he was a young English professor and poet at the university. He was born in 1887 into the Hazard family, a wealthy New England clan who owned woolen mills, railroad properties and founded Allied Chemical. Leonard and Patty (as she was called) married in 1912 and had three daughters (another Martha (my mother), Helen and Alice).

During their time in California, my grandfather befriended Chauncey and Henriette Goodrich, who were followers of Jung. When my grandfather was

suffering from a deep “melancholia” as he termed it, they recommended that he go to Zurich to see Dr. Jung. After some resistance to this suggestion, he traveled there in 1926 and went into analysis with Toni Wolff. He returned the following year and stayed for three months, bringing my grandmother with him. Jung and my grandfather maintained a (mostly) friendly correspondence over the course of the next twenty years. Leonard Bacon returned rejuvenated, and feeling transformed, went on to pursue life in the literary spotlight in the 1930s and 40s. He won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1941.

Ironically, it was my grandmother who would have benefitted most from psychoanalysis. While Leonard was an exuberant extrovert, Patty Bacon was a painfully shy introvert, and a covert artist, who struggled profoundly with a conflict between her creative nature and her sense of duty to her family. She had a severe breakdown in 1923 (well before Leonard went to Zurich) in which she heard violent voices that told her to kill her children. She would turn to painting mandalas, a form she discovered through the visions she experienced during her breakdown or her “Tidal Wave” as she called it.



Figure 5: Martha (Patty) and Leonard with their first daughter, also named Martha (my mother) 1917.



Figure 6: Leonard Bacon in Zurich with Carl Jung, Peter Baynes and Paul Radin (1926 or 27). Courtesy of the Beinecke Library at Yale University.



Figure 7: The Acorns, in Peace Dale, RI, the Bacon family home that Jung would visit in 1936, and where I and my siblings grew up.



***Figure 8: A Bacon Family Portrait: ca. 1922 just prior to the “Tidal Wave.”
Front row L to R: Marnie and Helen Bacon, Margaret Keith;
Back Row: Susan Bacon Keith with infant Nancy; Patty Bacon, Leonard Bacon,
Helen Hazard Bacon, Nathaniel Terry Bacon.***



Figure 9: Leonard at his desk in the writing/painting studio he called "Martha's Vineyard," a place he had built for my grandmother to paint, though he was the one who would use it.



Figure 10: Leonard by the fireplace in "The Vineyard." This was the room where Martha's (Patty's) paintings would be displayed for Jung to see in 1936.



Figure 11: Crossed Rivers Mandala.

The following is an extract from the book, *Martha's Mandala*, pp. 1-3:

Peace Dale, Rhode Island - July – 1965:

My grandmother, MayMay, as we call her, hides her drawings and paintings in a small room tucked under the eaves of the attic in her house. Some are stacked on a large table or stashed in portfolios leaning against the walls. A Japanese Tansu chest holds palettes and tin boxes of dried up watercolor paints,

brushes of all sizes with bristles now sparse and splayed, and yellowing paper of varying sizes layered in narrow drawers. An easel stands waiting in shafts of dust motes by a window that looks down on the fields behind the house. MayMay has not painted or drawn anything for years, not since my grandfather died in 1954. She leads me up three flights of stairs to her studio on the morning of my wedding. I am eighteen and pregnant, terrified and yet triumphant that I have caused much consternation and embarrassment to my mother and stepfather. Mine will be the first shotgun wedding in all the generations of this family of properly raised and educated men and women. The consequences of the heedless way I have managed to get out from under what I consider extreme parental tyranny have only just begun to dawn on me: marriage to a boy I've known for one semester, my education side-lined, no income, a baby due in early March. My young husband to be and I are both still in college – I'm just finished my freshman year, not very successfully – but this "situation" in 1965 requires us to marry so my mother and stepfather can save face – as I see it.

I am afraid, but I'm ready to escape, to have my own life. I believe I'll have my own life because the baby is still a romantic notion. As an eighteen-year-old English major, I have few to no domestic or marketable skills and no idea of how to manage money. All I know is that I will be leaving The Acorns, the home that had always been a sanctuary, until my mother's third husband moved in several months ago.

I am familiar with the attic room and its contents, having spent hours here as a young child. My grandmother showed all of us – my brother and sister and me - her watercolors and drawings, illustrations for children's stories she had written and read to us, portraits of family and friends, sketches of landscapes,

and versions of her finished mandalas. This morning in the midst of the chaotic preparations for the hastily planned event, she has taken me aside.

Almost silent in the past few months, she has been watching, enduring the battle of wills in the house, some of them silent skirmishes, some of them briefly loud – a single bullet bark from my stepfather putting an argument to death. It has been ages since I have taken time to stop and acknowledge her with more than a quick hello and a kiss. MayMay, always small and fragile, seems more frail than usual. She is pale, unsteady on her feet, clearly unwell. Living in this house taken over by my mother and new husband, a stuffy and rigid retired British army officer, has taken its toll on all of us, but my grandmother's surrender to the force of their combined wills has diminished her almost to the point of invisibility.

Now however, she wants to know what I would like for a wedding present. Some protective daemon speaks for me before I can think of a toaster or a baby crib. The answer just comes to me without a conscious thought:

“A painting, I want one of your paintings.” At first she shakes her head, “They're no good,” and then after a pause, “Why would you want one?”

It seems obvious to me. The paintings are beautiful; they are part of my childhood landscape, but I can't find the words to explain. Finally I tell her that I just want to have one of her paintings so I can look at it every day.

When she asks which one, I request the large black and white one of seven star clusters shaped like hearts arced in a semi-circle around a woman reclining in dark space. The fine lines of the woman's figure and the stars are drawn in white ink on the black background. But MayMay says she can't give this one away – “it is one of my visions.”

Though disappointed, I don't try to persuade her. For someone usually so accommodating, her response is clear and firm. Instead, I ask her to choose the one she thinks I should have. She stands very still for a few moments before she pulls out a large watercolor from one of a few paintings stacked against a wall – her final mandala. It is one of thirteen she painted in the 1930s, and though I hadn't known it before, it is exactly the one I want. I have always loved its finely drawn concentric circles with two green rivers flowing across them to meet at the center and flow out to the four corners of picture.

She explains the imagery detailed into its pale green underwater light, its ghostly architectural structures, and the rings of blue and rose-pink filled with diaphanous male and female figures. These are my grandmother's people and dwellings. In the foreground below the circles, a tiny figure stands on heavy boulders partially submerged under dark blue water. The figure gazes up at the circles, arms outstretched, one raised - the other lowered with the hand open at a narrow hip. An invisible breeze blows the filmy fabric that partially covers the androgynous body. My grandmother tells me this is her creative spirit.

At the center of the innermost circle where the two rivers cross, a white flower, cruciform and stylized glows, its four petals open and flat, pistils and stamens so tiny they look at first glance like the folds of a navel. Surrounding the flower are her most important symbols - a three-masted sailing ship, an arrow, a Pegasus, a chalice, a glistening starry jewel, the same as the one in the black painting, a butterfly, a dove, a rose, a Christ child. Many of these images were established and repeated in earlier painting, especially Wings, Birds, Water/Rivers, Ships, Jewels, Arrows, the White Flower, the Rose, Christ Child, and the Creative Spirit (s).

I cannot identify the flower as a particular species, but it could be the dogwood bloom – a symbol of Christian sacrifice. I think my grandmother would not have described it as such, nor was she religious in the conventional sense. I have no memory of her ever going to church. While the symbols are archetypal, they are also very personal.

I wish I could remember all that she told me of her images. At eighteen, I didn't think to write down what each image stood for, nor did I recognize at the time that my grandmother's wedding present came with certain responsibilities. I knew I would always care for the painting, but I had to learn how to use it for its intended purpose. The final task, which I would come to understand as I grew older, was a compelling desire to discover the mandala's story and to complete the task of telling that story. Perhaps because we share the same name, Martha, and the same nickname, Patty, she designated me for the role, knowing that I would come around to fulfilling the task.

One concept that most distressed my grandmother but that ultimately fascinated her was the nature of Time, its elusiveness as well as its all-pervasiveness. In later life she would write an illustrated essay about Time and how it affected her so profoundly that she felt persecuted by it.

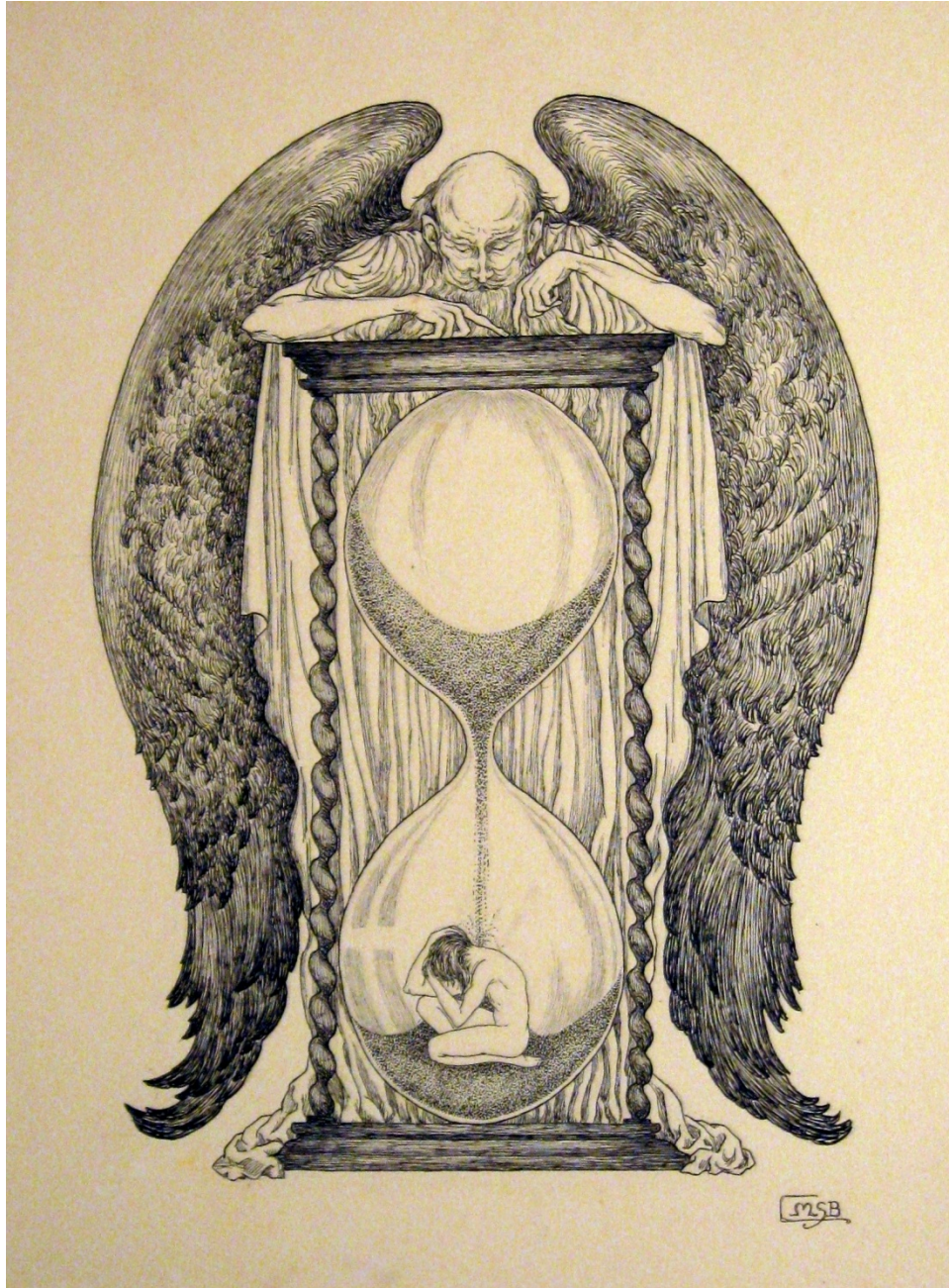


Figure 12: The woman is trapped in the hourglass, the sands relentlessly beating down on the back of her delicate neck. She seems further imprisoned, by a “Father Time” archangel as he leans on the hour glass, his robes shrouding and obscuring her life.



Figure 13: This piece is also one of the illustrations for the Time essay. Here a woman in her scarlet cloak sits on the ground sheltering a sphere that contains a peaceable kingdom – a sort of fairy talk castle in a rich green world. Behind her looms another sphere, earth-like, as if viewed from space. It is filled with pale swirling figures of women that appear to be trying to escape.

The following is an extract from the book, *Martha's Mandala*, pp 25-30:

When the voices first came to her in 1922, she was thirty. Her children were very small – all three girls under six. They were living in Berkeley then; Leonard was teaching full time and feeling frustrated about his writing. They had a place at the edge of campus next door to the house where she grew up, a place owned by her family. It was a solid California bungalow with deep eaves, cool dark rooms and hardwood floors. The garden, full of jasmine, camellia bushes, a flowering mulberry and a lemon tree, all enclosed by a redwood fence were the best part of it. There were shady places to sit and enough laurel hedges for the

children to hide in. Patty could sit outside and draw while keeping an eye on them.

But sometimes she felt overwhelmed dealing with the children, trying to meet Leonard's needs, while also helping her mother who wasn't well and Harriet who constantly demanded attention. That's when she had begun to think and write a story - what became *the* story. She felt that she was not a writer, had no claim to be a writer, but the characters of the story compelled her. She even told Leonard - who *was* a writer - as they lay in bed together one night in each other's arms. He was interested, sympathetic, encouraged her to write it down, which she did – a little at a time when she could find a few quiet moments.

But soon, the people of the story seemed irresistibly alive, even audible. They whispered at first, words run together, indistinguishable and muffled. But a word or phrase would emerge, a low-pitched laugh. They charmed her, asked favors of her.

She knew she had yielded to something; but, unaware of the danger, she encouraged them. At family dinners, she would find herself slipping away, though still seated at the table, listening to their voices and losing the thread of conversations around her. One voice told her about the river door in a mountain under water. Or she would stop in the middle of bathing a child to summon a presence - a beautiful epicene figure – was it male or female? – whose tenor/alto voice sang to her. Only the piercing shriek of a child with soap stinging her eyes would distract her from following the music. But it wasn't long before these characters became a demanding chorus with voices like crows and quarreling jays. Persistently they called to her – to each other; sometimes they whispered

insistently – cruel, violent things. Only one soft voice – a woman’s – tried to turn back the “tidal wave.” Somewhere beneath the cacophony, she could hear a whispered counterpoint – “Peril, peril, peril,”

But it was too late. She was lost, almost without resistance, in their universe as if she had fallen into the curl of the wave, pulled back from the shore, tumbling into the sea. She never actually harmed anyone; but she was not herself – her own self; not Leonard’s wife; nor her children’s mother.

Someone – one of the women in the chorus – perhaps the one who sometimes softly whispered, “Peril,” walked and talked for her. She, not Patty, presided over making beds – being sure to change the sheets every week. She picked up after the children, taught them manners, made sure they ate their vegetables; it was her voice that sang French songs when she tucked them in at night. This “other” served tea with thin slices of lemon in gold-rimmed teacups to visiting ladies at four on Sunday afternoons. She presided over dinners with Leonard’s colleagues from the English department when the talk went on into the night. Without complaint this competent woman directed the maid, conferred with the cook; kept social engagements; wrote thank you notes, did errands, shared Leonard’s bed. But she, *herself*, did not sleep, tasted nothing if she ate at all. Her only quiet moments came when she stole time to draw late at night or early in the morning when everyone was asleep. She was exhausted, but she needed to imagine from the sound of their voices - these people, their eyes, torsos, toes, hair – Hylas – he was the hero; Beatrix, the princess, and golden-haired Sophie who hid from Beatrix. There was Leo, a dark, angry boy and the

sylph in his/her fluttering rags. Only in the drawing, shading and posing of figures was her mind quiet.

Had none of the people around her noticed what was going on? Not her mother, not Leonard, not all the faces and bodies who passed through her daily life. Sometimes she thought she could hear her own, old voice calling out – “I’m drowning!” But no sounds emerged from her lips and tongue straining to make words.

One afternoon – after three days of rain with the children indoors, she was helping Marnie and Helen make paper dolls – two princesses, one with black hair, one with gold - Rose Red and Rose White from *The Blue Fairy Book*. She had drawn and painted them with watercolors according to the girls’ directions, but they were *her* beautiful paper dolls. Rose Red’s smiling dark eyes and black tresses waved unfettered around her face and shoulders, contrasting with her pale skin and delicate, pink cheeks. She wore a light, filmy tunic and a red ribbon sash criss-crossed at her waist, fluttering as if blown by a breeze. Rose Red now lay on the table, waiting for the paint to dry so she could be cut away from the paper. Picking up the scissors, Patty fit her thumb and finger firmly in their ornate gold loops molded in the shape of curved wings and the long neck of a crane. They were a present from Leonard – a fanciful gift, one of many for her birthday -accompanied by a poem he’d written about birds. Carefully she began to cut through the paper, around the delicate form of Rose White whose paint had dried. With her yellow hair and blue eyes, she looked like one of her own girls – a little Botticelli nymph - her tunic decorated with blue ribbons.

Marnie and Helen began to quarrel about who would get which doll. Marnie pulled Helen's hair, and Helen pinched Marnie hard on the arm. Alice, the baby, fretful and feverish all day with a cold, climbed onto the table, tipping over a glass full of paint water and soaking brushes. A pool of red liquid spread over the cluttered table, a vermilion tide, moving across the table to cover Rose Red. The voices, restive all afternoon in her head, exploded into a riot – its clamor obliterating the shrieks and wails of the children. Another wail, slow and high, penetrated her aching head, a terrible voice –was it hers? - with terrible words: “You bloody children, I hate you - look what you did. Another voice howled: “Get rid of them- or leave.” Still another voice – whose was it? “Kill them – those scissors in your hand – do it now.” “Drown them out drownthemdrownthem.” screamed the voices. She looked at the long scissors in her hand – their blades open like the sharp beak of a crane, and then closed them slowly across the thin white neck - slashing metallic bird notes- like a jay's cry. Paper feathers drifted around the room, settled in the red pool still spreading on the table, landing in the children's hair – Rose White.

Another inconsolable voice moaned at the rising tide that began to fill the room, covering her ankles, knees, hips. How heavy the sea was; she could not move her feet. The scissors fell from her hand, sinking beneath the thick green water to bounce on the patterned rug. Three small, terror-stricken faces floated before her like lopped off flower heads –blanched white as camellias – as she began to slip under the water, viscous, green, irresistible. Someone came into the room, took her hands, pulled her from the drag of the wave, held her, led her away.

I picture my grandmother, age thirty-one, giving up the struggle to protect her known universe – her children, marriage, home - from an assault by beings lying deep inside herself. They ambushed her, arriving like Greeks in the Trojan horse, a gift of seemingly innocent characters in a story, wearing benign masks to hide their dark desires. I see her as she lies in a narrow white bed in the small private hospital where she will begin to recover from the “tidal wave.” The sheets, white and sterile, are tucked so tightly around her she feels mummified as she listens to the moans and curses of her voices. She cannot move her arms or legs – though she rolls her head from side to side in her distress. These bindings at least seem to keep her parts – her bones and hair – her skin - from floating away. Immobilized, Patty dissolves instead within – deep down to a universe beneath the sea, where she sleeps for hours and days until she dreams.

A dark chasm like a well seems to be inside of her, miles deep – but she can't see the end of it, the faint gleam, not of water, but of moistened earth like garden soil. Out of it blows a small gust of wind - sweet, intoxicating. A clod of earth rolls back to expose the tip of a tight, white bud. The bud grows larger, while another clod moves, crumbles, spraying tiny pellets that scatter down its sides. One immaculate petal slowly frees itself and springs up, slowly exposing its creamy surface exuding a faint, sweet breath; then another petal unfurls, and another until there are four.

When she wakes, she senses a change. The sheets have come loose - resting lightly and cool around her as if she has sloughed them off like an old skin. The feeling in the flower dream remains strong within her. She knows it to be a promise of something to guide her through this nightmare – a benign

presence, a friend in her unconscious mind. The image of the white flower pushing through the damp earth at the bottom of the deep well, opening and freeing its essence into the air calms her. She will later discover the dream-image as a reality again and again. It is not a metaphor, not a concept or a riddle. She will find it in books and in her own paintings. She will explore it and write it all down eventually, but at the moment of waking, freed from the binding sheets the white flower is a mystery.

I imagine the psychiatrist who interviewed her in the hospital room, as a small man balding like a monk with a tonsure. He might have stood by her bed peering over her in his long white coat and rimless spectacles murmuring questions: Was she angry with her mother? Did she have nightmares about her father? She did her best to answer his questions: No she was not angry with anyone; no she'd had no nightmares; only the voices that told her to do awful things. She had been overcome by the voices.

They told her to kill her children. Had she almost done that? The memory sickened her. She didn't mention her flower dream. The psychiatrist told poor terrified Leonard that she was suffering from neurasthenia but that she would work through the trouble if she followed Dr. S. Weir Mitchell's Rest Cure for a month or two. This meant she had to rest for days and weeks with no reading, writing or painting. She had to follow a strict diet of bland, healthy foods and drink lots of milk. The doctor said nothing to *her*. In fact, he never came back.

She stayed for five weeks in the hospital wrestling with the voices: Never had she been so alone, but the voices receded, dwindling mostly to murmurs, as she returned over and over to the comfort of the white flower. She

had begun to think of it as her friend. When a voice would intrude –a rasping whisper in her ears - she would summon the image of the flower – its candle bud emerging from the earth, unfolding each of its four petals one by one.

After my grandmother began to recover from her “tidal wave,” a slow process during which she continued to hear one of the voices warning her or “peril,” she began to paint. Her first attempts to paint her experience led her to work in circles, but she didn’t know about the concept of mandalas. She was compelled to paint two visions she had experienced during her illness. One of them was the star cluster vision, the painting I had asked for as a wedding gift.



Figure 14: Star Cluster vision painting

She placed her dreaming self in the center of the circle of which the dreamer and the viewer see an arc of seven glistening heart shaped jewels.

The second vision was the Rose Mandala (see the text in the close-up).



Figure 15: Rose Mandala

The giant flower encircled me, I lay resting in it, and shadows on its petals were angels' wings, sharp – pointed like the wings in the Dore-Dante Paradisal Rose. Perhaps memory influenced the vision, but memory and apparition were not identical. This rose was not white but rose-colored, purple shadowed. It was deep like a tunnel and its distant heart toward which I floated was a golden sea. Drifting and resting, I heard the Voice, consoling, promising; and what it promised came to pass.



Figure 16: Rose Mandala with text

She never felt that she had expressed the beauty of either vision but she wanted to capture some of their essence. She would continue working with the mandala form for the next 20 years.



Figure 17: “Kubla Kahn” mandala

This piece she referred to as her “Kubla Kahn” mandala with its “stately pleasure dome” and “sacred rivers.” The images in the center would later find their way along with the river and the boulders in the foreground into the mandala she gave me.



Figure 18: Final mandala



Figure 19: Final mandala detail

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I believe this painting is actually her final mandala (I had once thought the painting she gave me was her last one). This piece is more kaleidoscopic and stylized than the others, the colors more intense, and the symbols have shifted to more abstract forms with the exception of the figure in the center that is clearly representational. Previously, the center of the mandalas were connected to the white flower image (the flower of integration as Martha Stringham Bacon thought of it), but in this painting, she has moved the little figure of the “creative spirit” from the boulders in the watery foreground to the center of the painting where he is extremely dynamic, indeed central.

My mother gave this mandala to the Special Collections Library at Rhode Island College where it can be seen in the Ballinger Reading Room.

Martha Stringham Bacon worked out her ideas about Jungian concepts not only in her painting, but also in her personal journals, of which there were many over the years. This example and the following paintings/drawings indicate how she transformed into images her interpretations of Jung’s ideas and how they shifted and changed.



Figure 20: Animus and Anima

The anima and animus piece recalls both the creative spirit (which to her was connected to animus) and the female dreamer (anima), now standing upright and gazing across the river of the star cluster vision.

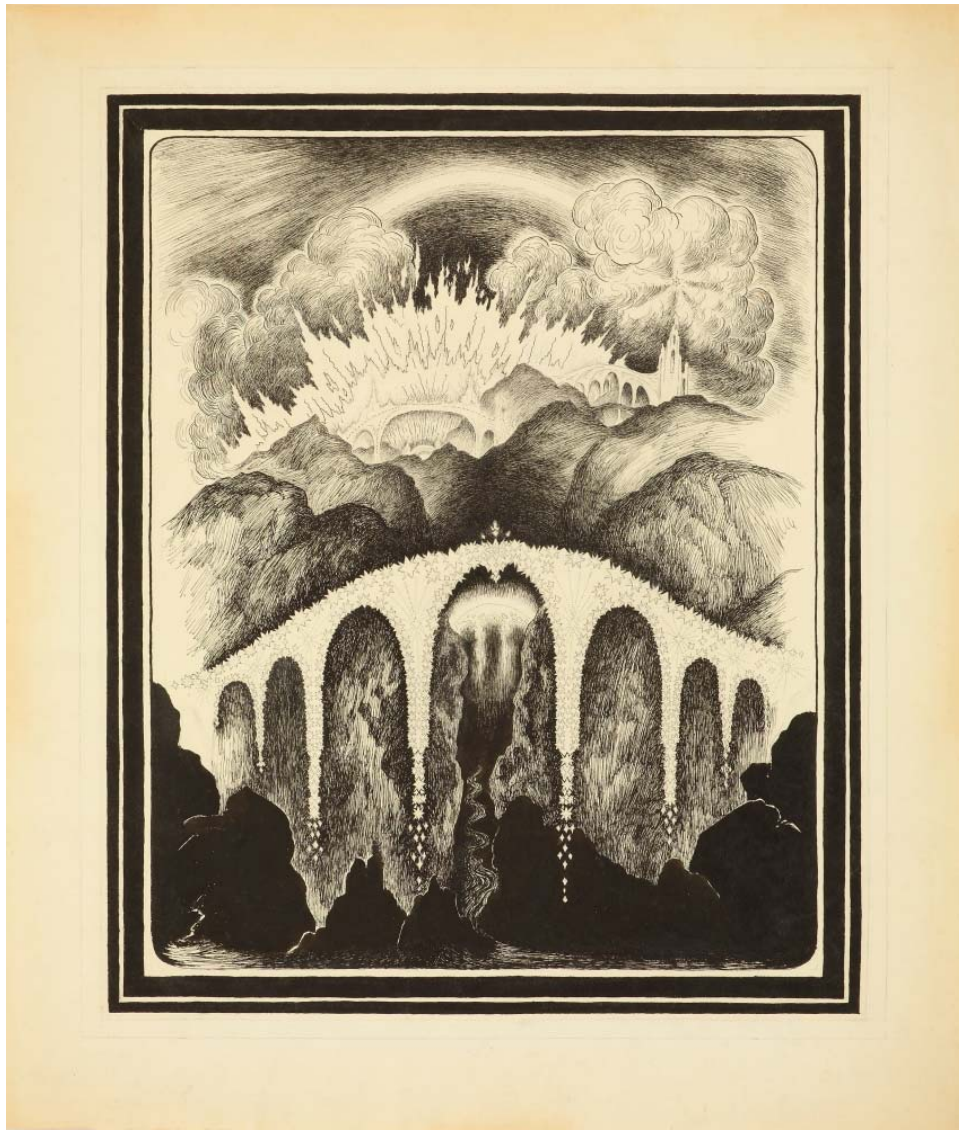


Figure 21: Star Bridge

There are several iterations of the star bridges as well. Note the figures in the star bridge among the boulders, which represent the unconscious. Though difficult to see, there is also a small figure (creative spirit) on one of the boulders on the left.



Figure 22: Star Bridge

A small, early mandala (10”x 10”), perhaps her first. (Unfortunately she didn’t date them, though two or three she mentions in her journals). Her concern for the environment, something I remember her speaking about when I was a very young child, is evident in the outer rim of the mandala. It is an urban landscape full of smoke and smog, a conglomeration of cities, one of which is Florence (see the Duomo) where the Bacon family lived for four years in the late 20s and early 30s.

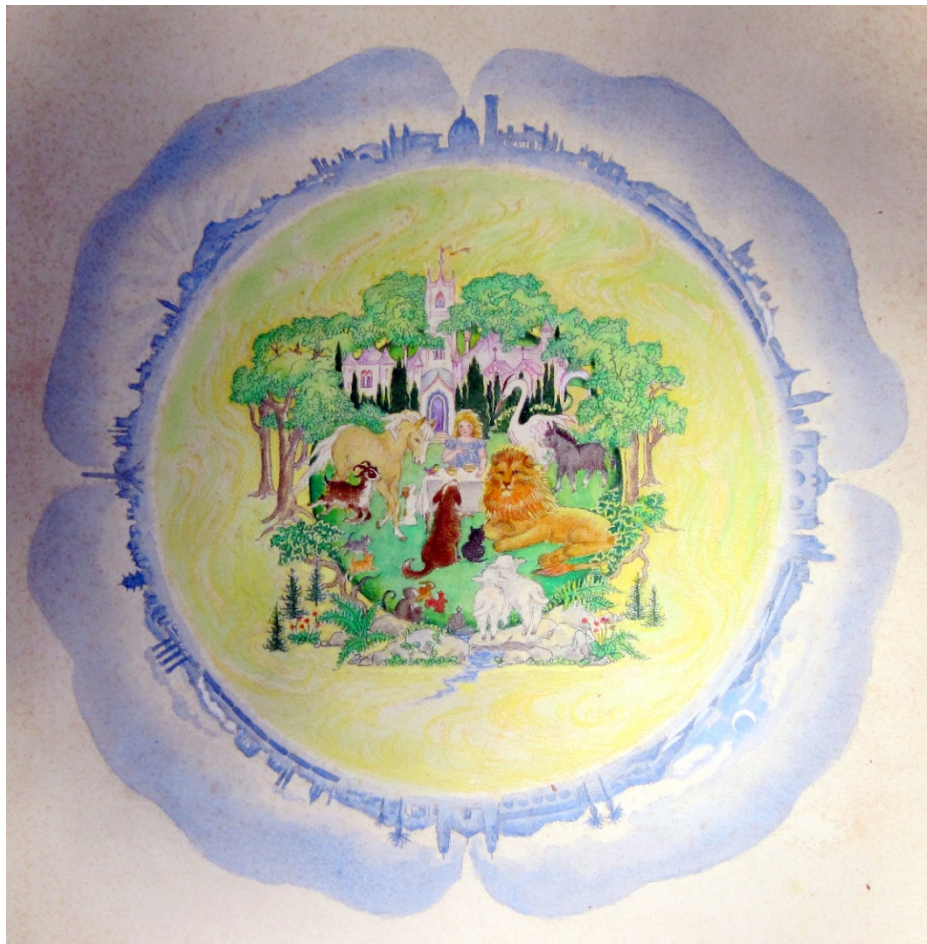


Figure 23

The larger inner circle contains a peaceable kingdom, similar to that of the circle within the red-cloaked woman in the “Time” essay illustration.

Figure 24, another small mandala (10”x10”), magnifies one of Martha Stringham Bacon’s favorite motifs, that of wings. They pour out and multiply or

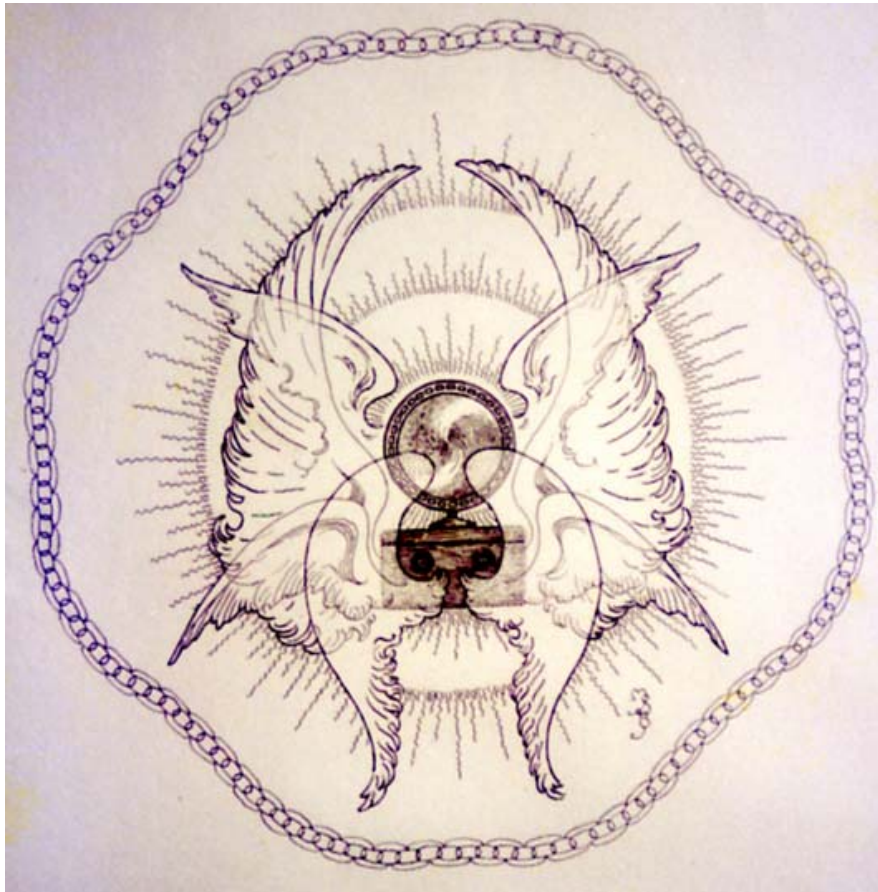


Figure 24

reverberate like sound waves from the center of the mandala, which is an old-fashioned cathedral radio. My grandmother loved music as much as she loved art and poetry – perhaps more. She played the violin and piano and spent many musical evenings with family and friends who played in a small chamber group. She eventually stopped playing when her hands became crippled with arthritis. I remember her spending Saturday afternoons listening to the radio station WQXR’s Saturday opera broadcasts. This little pen and ink piece expresses her joyful experience of the opera.

These next little sketches were most likely made during the years the Bacons lived in Italy. There they lived next door to Leonard’s close friend, Frederick Faust, a poet and popular novelist who wrote under the pen-name Max Brand (Destry Rides Again and Dr. Kildare series). Faust had been a student of

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Leonard's, and they decided to become ex-patriot poets together in Italy from 1928-32. They left as the Fascists were taking over the country in 1932. It was an idyllic time for Martha Stringham Bacon and the children. She did many drawings of them and their daily activities.

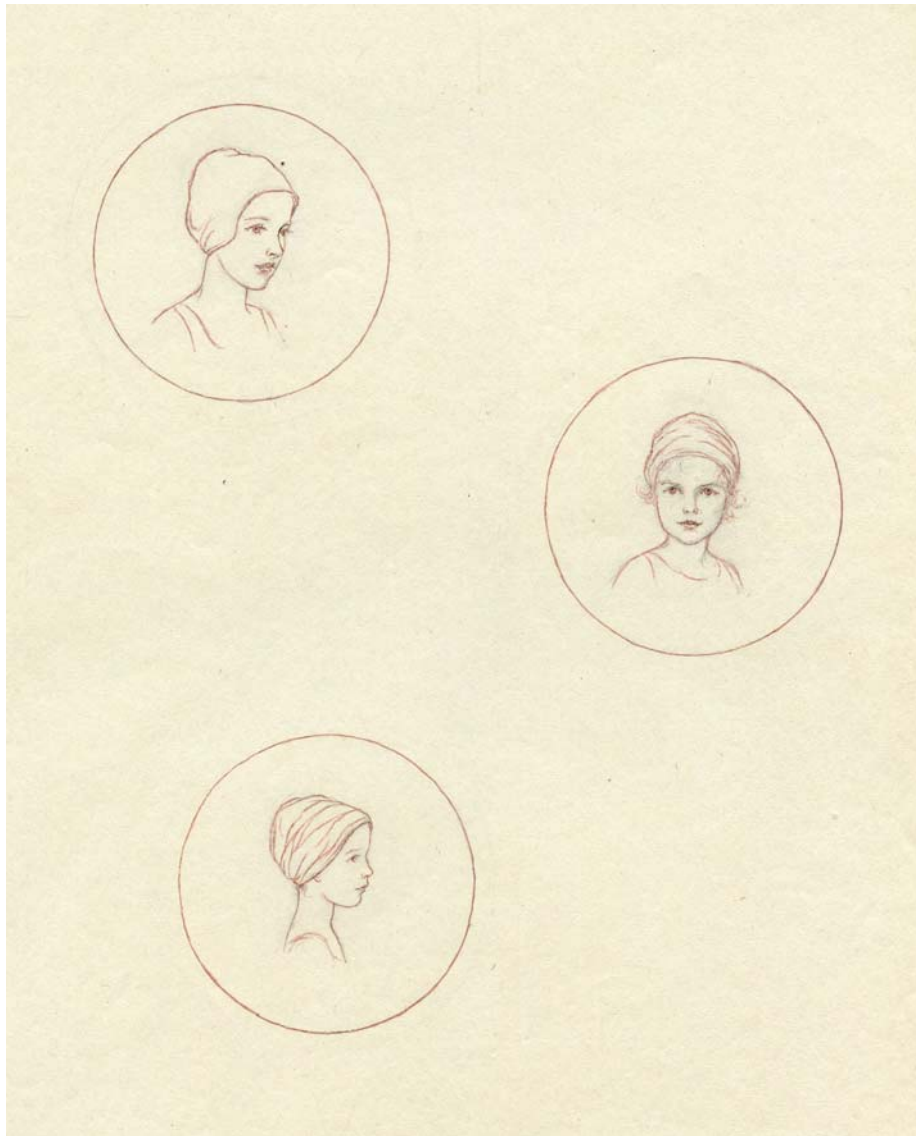


Figure 25: Top to bottom-Martha (Marnie), Helen, Alice



Figure 26: Helen, Marnie, Alice drawing, painting, playing music in Florence

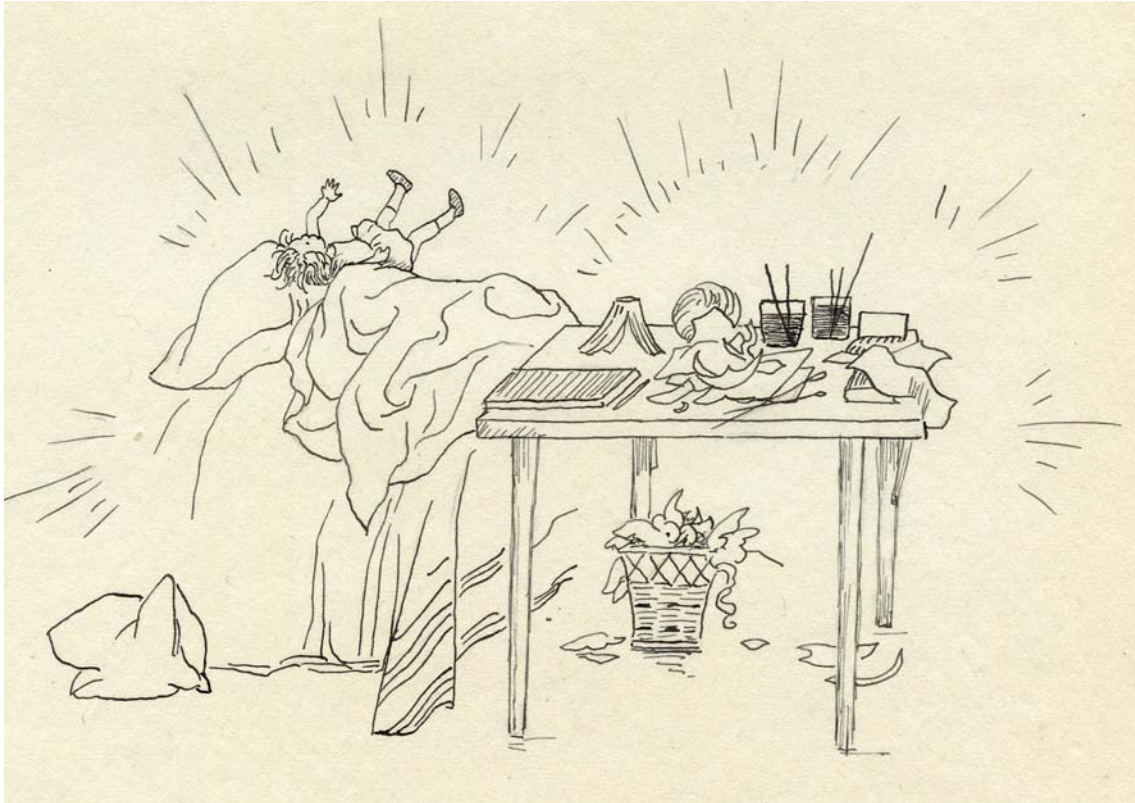


Figure 27: The children's room

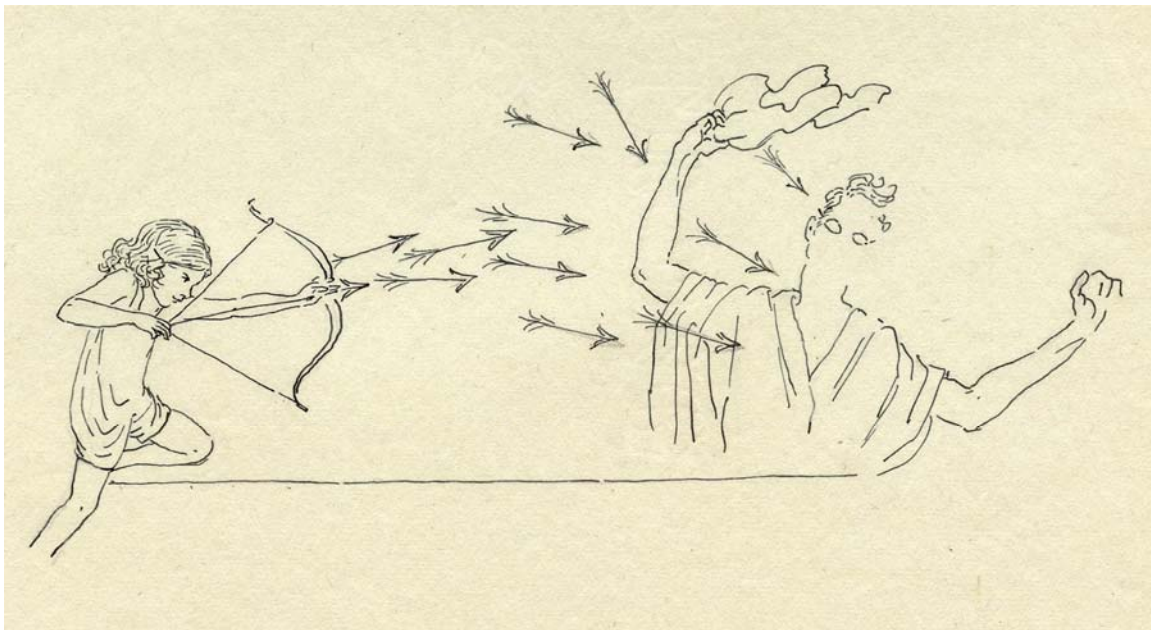


Figure 28: Helen shooting arrows at a toga-draped figure who looks a great deal like her father. Helen grew up to be a well-known classics scholar and a staunch feminist. She and her father often butted heads – apparently early on.

In January of 1941, Leonard and Patty Bacon moved to New York for the winter where they lived at The San Carlos Hotel. In the course of the first six months of that year, Leonard worked as a dictionary translator for the U.S. Army in five different languages, was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and won the 1941 Pulitzer Prize for poetry. My grandmother spent much of her time having to attend many social gatherings – which she resisted and disliked. She also spent much of her time reading, going to concerts and art galleries and keeping a journal that ended up being well over 200 pages long. I discovered the journal in the same box as the Jung letter. When I opened the cover of the notebook that contained it, I found the title page, which announced the contents to be: “An Un-Private Journal.” Clearly she wanted someone to read

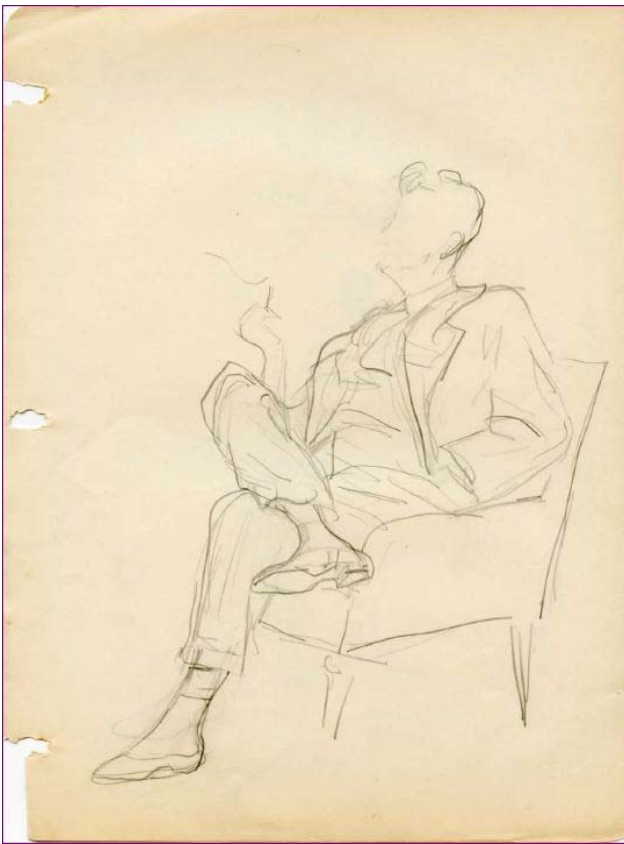


Figure 29: A portrait of Leonard. This pretty much captures the man – even without his face filled in.

it. Inside I discovered a great deal of material, including much history, art, music and literary criticism, and a wealth of personal reflection on her life in the city and life in general. I also discovered a number of pages of drawings, or “cartoons” as she called them, sketched during their time at the San Carlos Hotel.



Figure 30: A self-portrait – a small corner of the daily life series.



Figure 31: Daily life at the San Carlos.



Figure 32: Daily life at the San Carlos.

The next series of images are mostly examples of illustrations Martha Stringham Bacon created over the years from the 1920s through the 1940s. Most of them accompany children's stories.



Figure 33

This piece is the one example in this series group not attached to a children's story. The black-winged robed angel figure chased by a girl/sprite is called: "In a Dream," one of the few she titled.

These next three images are among the illustrations of a story called "The Swan's Children." The first piece (Figure 34) shows a pale form gathering in the sky, a swan's wing. The Swan is a magical being in the story who rescues a lonely little boy named Tony, who falls into a river and places him on a great rock. The swan brings him magical fruit to eat, but Tony becomes very lonely.

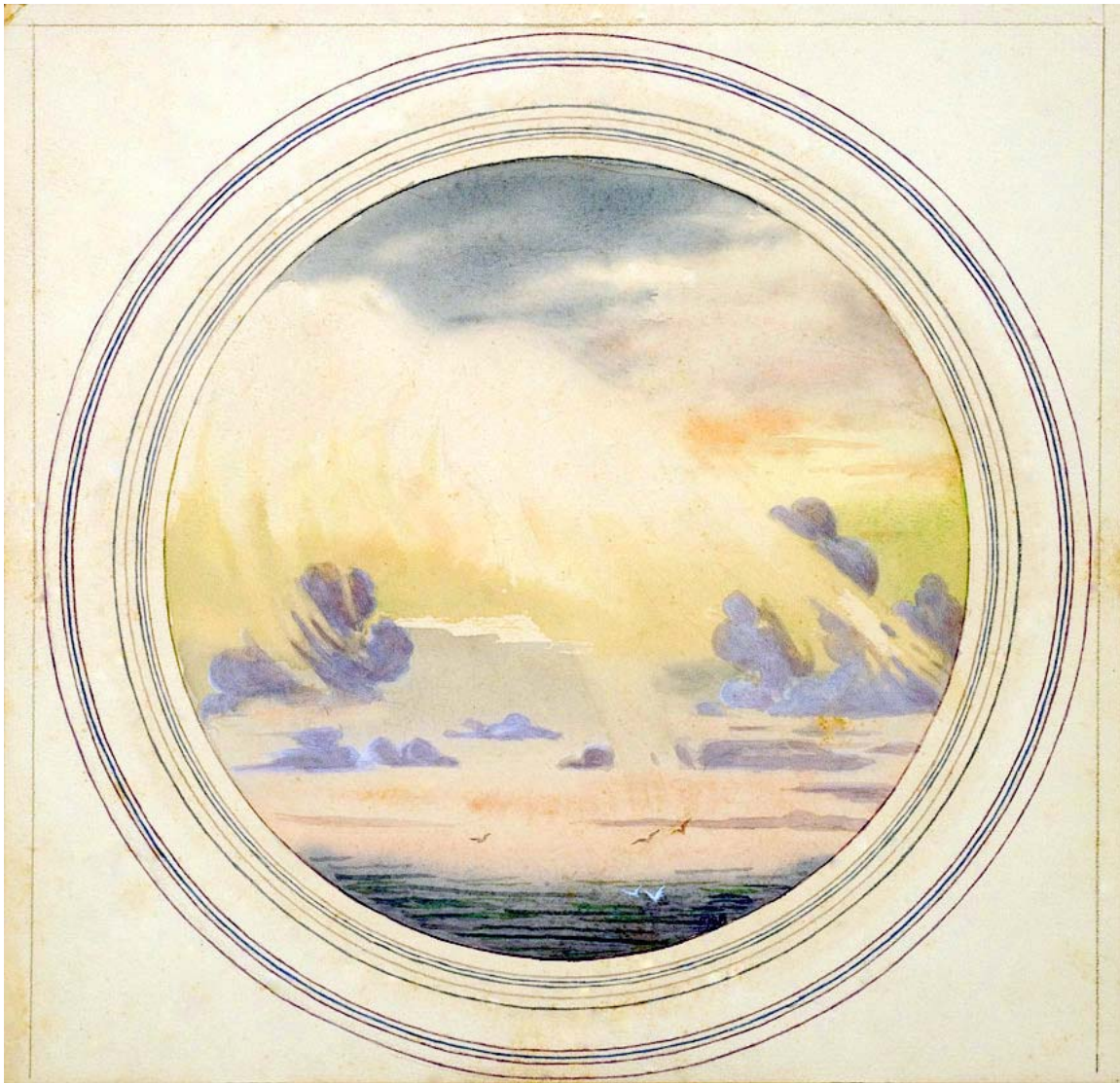


Figure 34

The Swan then leads a little girl named Tertia down the river to Tony (Figure 35). They must find a way to be together. They have tasks and setbacks, which they eventually overcome.



Figure 35



Figure 36

In the final piece (Figure 36), the Swan leads Tony and Tertia over the waters to this gorgeous enchanted castle. This story is based somewhat on what Martha Stringham Bacon called the “long story” that she attempted to write about her experience with mental illness and the breakdown. She wrote many drafts of the “long story” and gave it several different titles but never completed it – a great frustration in her life.

The next three images illustrate another children’s story called “The Color Story.” A beautiful fairy (who represents the color purple) overhears a little girl complaining about the colors that are all jumbled around in her nursery. The fairy arrives as the child is throwing a tantrum and takes her on a trip through each color of the rainbow.

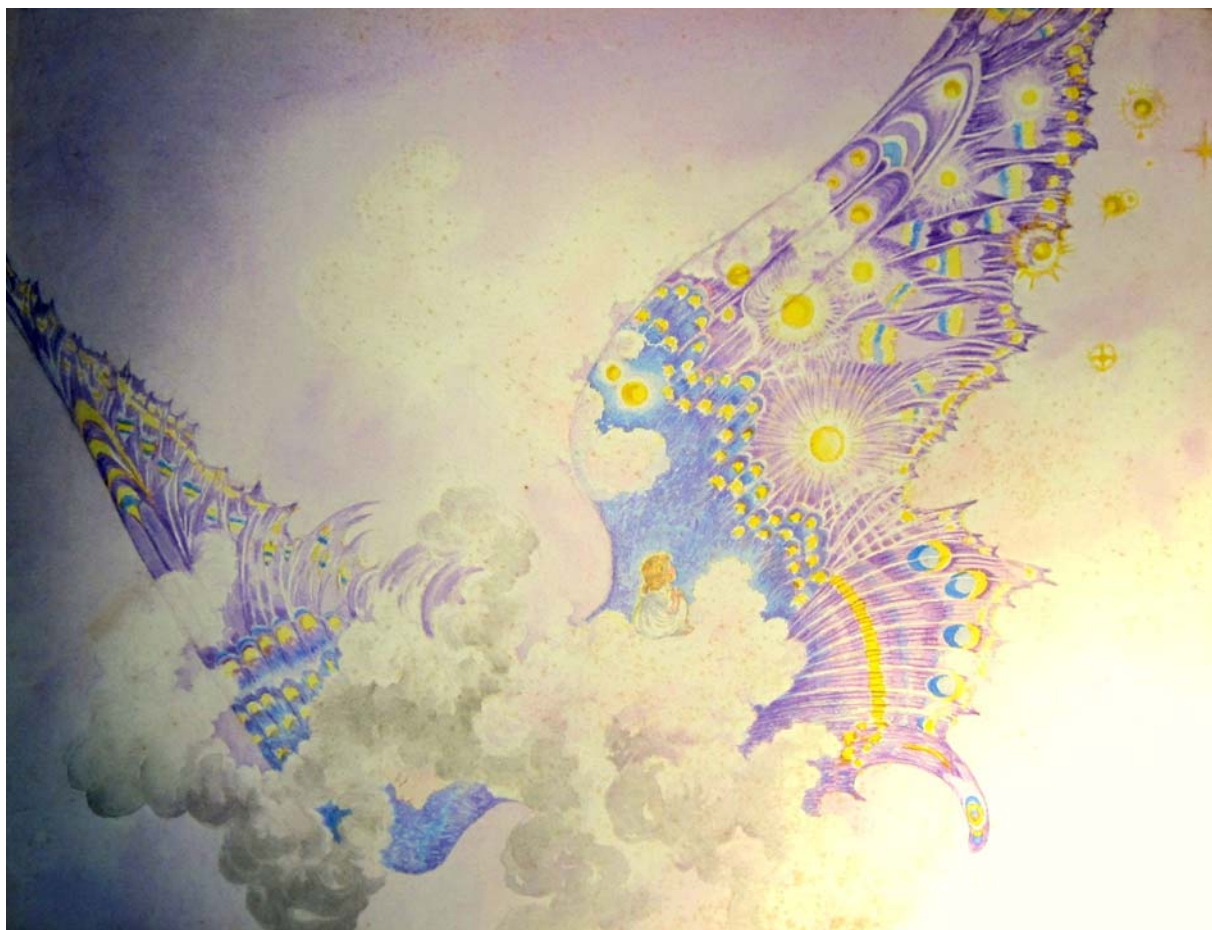


Figure 37

Figure 37 shows the little girl riding on the fairy (as butterfly);



Figure 38

Figure 38 is an illustration of the fairy in human form, and figure 39 illustrates the color Blue. There are illustrations for green, rose pink, yellow, blue and brown.



Figure 39

None of Martha Stringham Bacon's illustrated stories were published or read by anyone other than the family. Nor were most of her paintings viewed by the general public. There is a very brief record of her showing one work at an art show in Berkeley in the 1920's and another in a Wakefield, Rhode Island show in 1942. Other than that, family and close friends were her only audience. With one exception: In 1936 when Jung came to America for the Harvard Lectures, he made a quick visit to The Acorns for a weekend in late September. The Bacons arranged a viewing of the paintings as part of a dinner party gathering. My grandmother who wrote down so many of her thoughts, dreams and feelings never mentioned or described that evening with the exception of the very last page of a half-filled journal. After many blank pages, the final entry read: "1936: Jung's visit."

She also recorded a few things he said. I was able to interview my two aunts who were teenagers at the time and attended the party. Their views of the evening conflicted with each other (see *Martha's Mandala*, Chapter 3, pp 63-81). It was then left to my imagination and a few scraps of scribbled notes to piece the event together. Whether or not she was deeply disappointed, she continued to paint and draw until my grandfather died in 1954. Arthritis in her hands as well must have affected her abilities to paint and draw with the kind of precision she practiced in her art. Much of her life in the 50s and 60s was taken up with helping to raise and support her eldest daughter, Marnie's children (my siblings and me). Her quiet, self-effacing life as an artist was over. She buried the paintings and illustrations in the attic studio in The Acorns.



Figure 40: O'Keeffe's "Abstraction White Rose – 1927"

I reflect in *Martha's Mandala* about Georgia O'Keeffe, a contemporary of my grandmother, whose artistic path was directly opposite to hers. As I was working on my research I went to an exhibition of O'Keeffe's work at a local art museum

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(The Shelburne Museum in VT). I found myself staring at “Jimson Weed 1932,” one of her white flower series.

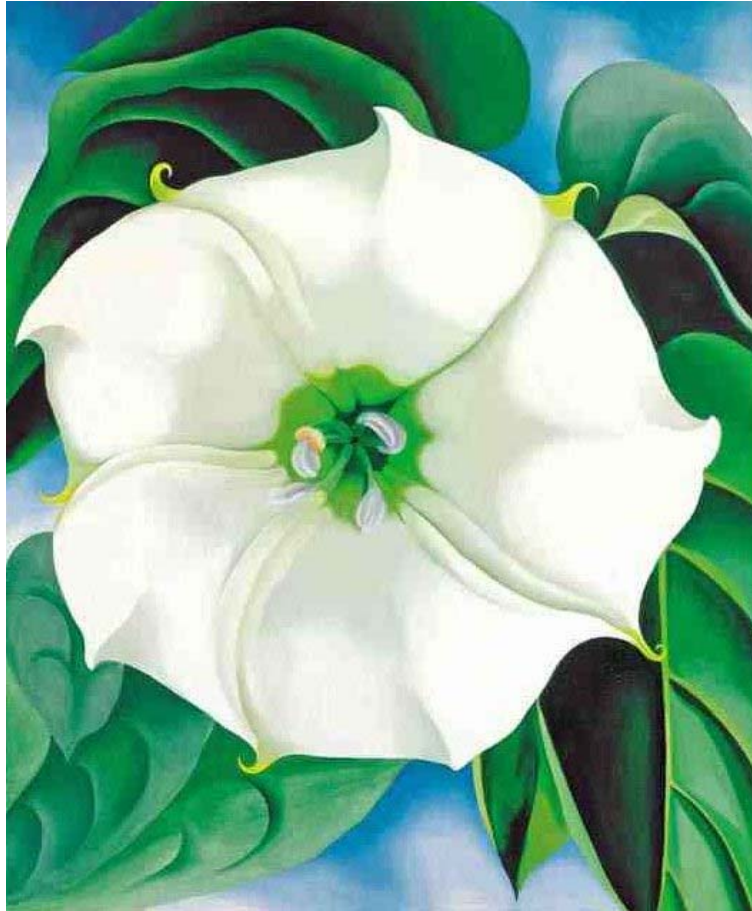


Figure 41: “Jimson Weed 1932.”

The connection leapt out at me. O’Keeffe’s white flower and Martha Stringham Bacon’s white flowers – I wondered about the significance as well as the time – 1932 – the year my grandmother corresponded with Jung. Soon I began reading through the 1941 Journal, and I came across an entry in which Martha Stringham Bacon had gone to a gallery to see a show of O’Keeffe’s paintings and commented on them.

Researching more on O’Keeffe, I discovered that in spite of the profound differences in their life experience and choices, there were some intriguing internal similarities. Comparing these two women, their personalities and their

art provided me with some insight into how the limitations of the culture and the times and the influence of the men (Carl Jung, Leonard Bacon and Steiglitz for O’Keeffe) in their lives affected the experience and artistic trajectory of these two creative and extremely introverted women. The imagery of the white flower, a center in a spiral – a mandala – emerged to express and assuage the inner struggles of each in their very different art: Georgia O’Keeffe would become a great public success. Martha Stringham Bacon would languish in private obscurity, yet she found great solace and what she considered integration as she painted her way through and out of range of the terrible voices that haunted her.

In order to remedy the lack of recognition for my grandmother’s work and her story, I have written it all down – finally. And as these last images suggest, there are numerous ways to promote art. For example, my nephew’s tattoo of his great grandmother’s drawing.



Figure 42



Figure 43

*** Most of the illustrations in this presentation appear in *Martha's Mandala*. Those not in the book are part of the Bacon archives. Figures 18 & 19 show a mandala that belongs to the Special Collections Library at Rhode Island College, in Providence RI.**