

The image of the human form in some way is in every painting in the series of seven. In the first one, a very expressive, small squatting figure with oversized eyes is vomiting a series of interlocking circles. He or she is *getting it out, for god's sake!* This first of the seven is about sounds, my voice, my language. I found myself in graduate school struggling with integrating the language I spoke in the corporate world with the language of art, and confused as to how to embrace all parts of myself and incorporate them. The painting process helped me realize that I

#1

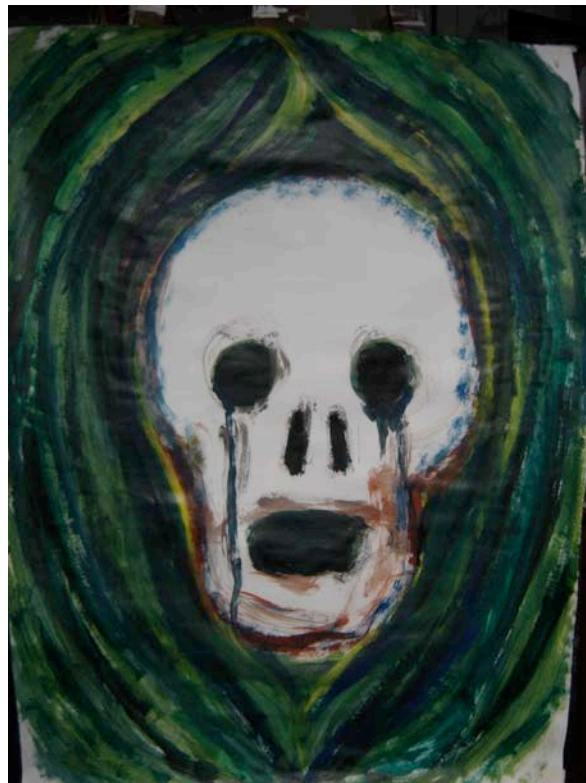


am allowed to draw from my corporate experience, in fact, I must. *It is part of where I come from and I can not deny, ignore, or pretend it doesn't exist.* To do so would make me sick, and was actually making me sick. This is the first step in a seven week cycle of painting where integration was a major theme.

It is interesting to note that this painting and the last in the series both show something coming out of the “stomach” of a figure. In #1, what is coming out of the mouth is symbolic of sound. In #7, an Earth Baby has been born.

The life form shows up in the third painting as a crying skull. This was a breakthrough and a turning point because I tapped into a very old feeling that had been left unresolved for years. It was the feeling of mortification. The painting process connected me to long suppressed feelings of shock, horror and sadness at having been intentionally mortified by my peers when I was a child. Intellectually I knew I experienced this and often felt confused and angry about it, but I had never fully reconciled it because I was previously unable to go back there and really feel it. This traumatic experience profoundly affected my life. I adopted mostly unhealthy coping skills in response to the actions of my peers in order to try to ensure my safety. I realize now that my feelings of confusion were about my anger at having not received any protection

#3



from their torment. My need for feeling safe was unfulfilled and this left a hole inside of me. Although sad, it was a relief to feel these things, and make the connection that what I lacked was feeling cared for. It helped me realize there was nothing wrong with *me* but with a system that could allow this to occur, namely an educational system. This is what I wrote in class in

response to the painting: “What I needed but did not get was a feeling of safety within my connections to others, to my peers. Also, I did not receive safety in the form of protection from life threatening situations. Two types of safety, but it is really the same sense of safety I expected to receive, felt entitled to, as everyone else, but it was stripped from me, completely.”

In painting #3, I went far back, into the depths, to retrieve the old feelings, and process them. This is what the crying skull represents, I believe, a return to my core to access something old and bring it forth, review it, know it, feel it, embrace it and move on. After the third painting, my brushstroke began to change. It became looser and the consistency of the paint got thinner. However, the symbolism of the skull showed up again the following week in painting #4, although less skeletal looking. *I am letting go. I am colorful. Complex. I am busy.* I also got a sense of feeling overwhelmed as I looked at this painting. When I wrote from the paintings’ voice, I referenced letting go of old things – ways of thinking and doing that are not working for

#4



me anymore. I think the square shapes represent the loosening grip of bad habits and patterns. These things are lifting up and out of me and flushing away, represented by the spiral. I wrote about no longer needing the affirmation of others nor needing to impress people. What I need is to know who I am from the positive side and understand sometimes others may want me to feel uncomfortable perhaps out of some unrealistic threat on their part and not, as I usually assume, because I don't measure up. I tend to come from a place of not feeling good enough. *Perhaps the "problem" is that I am good.*

#5



The change in the brushstroke and paint consistency continued for the rest of the series, as do the appearance of human form, life. In painting #5, I continue to deal with life long, negative, habitual ways of thinking, core-limiting beliefs about myself. I thought it was very sad immediately after I painted it. But then I came to see a great deal of joy within it. The figures are very active, most with outstretched arms that are moving upward. This indicates joy and happiness. The figures in the immediate foreground are in action. It is as if they have arrived

into the present and are now going about their business, assuredly. Feet are evident and appear to be firmly planted. Some figures look like they are walking somewhere, with a sense of purpose. I also see the symbol of the cross all over this painting. There is a direction or wish within it that reflects my need to integrate, resolve conflict, connect with others, to be valued for what I have to give. This is my greatest desire, to integrate my inner knowings, life experiences, and gifts with my outer situations, with my world.

At the time of processing the painting in class, I thought it represented all the defects of my character that I've carried with me, and perhaps that is partly true. But it also represents the many facets of me that yearn to join together, synthesize, and become a complete whole human being, one I can embrace, love, and work with. What I am working on is intimacy. An intimate relationship with myself in which there is unconditional acceptance of all of the parts of me.

#6



Another symbol that appears in the series and in the sixth painting is the circle. One may see these as eggs, or disks. After processing it on the day that it was completed, I felt it was mostly about anxiety, specifically, my struggle to adopt an outlook of ease. I tend to operate

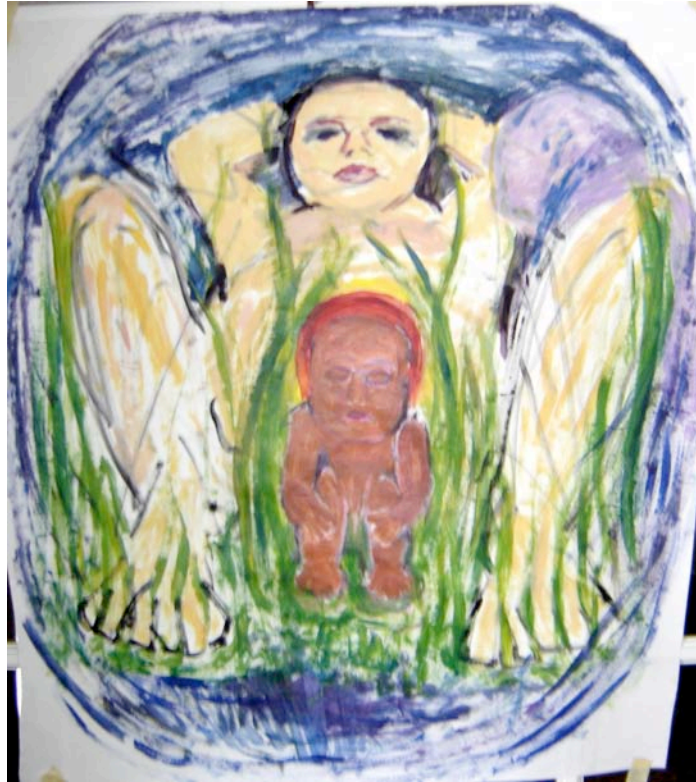
from a feeling of apprehension so that I make sure I get things done. This painting reflects my desire to feel confident, and trust that I can get the important things done and not have to take on an anxious attitude to ensure that I do so. *Know that I will.* The Tarot card I received for this painting was the Queen of Disks. There are five disk shapes in my painting. What struck me about the Queen of Disks is that the Queen is taking rest in a lush garden – she is relaxing. At the same time she is looking out over a vast desert which represents the trials and tribulations she has recently overcome. There is a new road ahead, but she is taking the time to care for herself, and savor her accomplishments. The connection between my painting and this card was significant. My desire to stop and nurture and care for myself is evident to me now.

This painting revealed a fertilization process leading to the “birth” shown in painting #7, the last painting in the series. This painting was hard for me to actually do. I had the image in my head, but I had trouble allowing myself to put it on the paper, to make the birth happen. I am pleased that the “mother” seems so relaxed, peaceful, aware and confident. I struggle bringing forth my creative. I don’t know exactly what it looks like, yet. My preconceived notions about my creativity – what it should be or look like, may be off-base. *How do I clear away what I thought my creative was in order to allow what it actually is to emerge?*

I love the fact that the “baby” is brown because it is of the Earth. It is the new beginning. There is also a wispy purple figure in the scene. I don’t know who it is, but it is related to protection. Do I need its protection or do I need protection from it? When writing about this piece from the painting’s voice, it spoke of birthing out a human being. The painting also said “I am a whole person” and “I am a wish for something or some things”. The Tarot card for this painting was Fortune X/ I found it is about unexpected fortune, a new beginning, expansion, creativity, self-realization, a big breakthrough. The card suggests that one ask themselves “Am I ready for great fortune? What is standing in the way?” Myself of course! I am hesitant to move forward and receive. The affirmation suggested was: “I am now ready for the miracle of my life.” I like this affirmation for this painting. I think that for my entire series of paintings point to an earnest desire to move beyond my limitations and to allow what is to be

to come forth. I am working on fortifying myself so I can receive it, and deal with the changes that will come. *I support my creative coming forth.*

#7



Conclusion: My task now is to not stand in my own way. I am tired of trying to make up for lost time. My youth was not well nurtured and my young adulthood was often spent feeling lost and confused. I cannot get those years back. A good wish for me would be to find peace with this. The years are gone, so be it. I think the frenetic nature of my paintings speak to a desire to make up for lost time, and this makes me anxious. It can't be done. I can only honor myself where I am now, *accept my past and my present*. Trust. Let the future unfold.

My painting series is about human life, struggle and desire. Of course it is specific to my condition, but all of us on the planet share in the human experience. We all have unique struggles, hopes, dreams, aspirations, fears, flaws, strengths, and talents. The spontaneous painting process these past weeks, taught me the importance of my voice, of feeling safe, letting go, integration, being valued, taking it easy, caring for myself, my creativity, and my purpose.

These are also universal needs. Now that I have explored their meanings for myself, I bring a renewed and deeper understanding of these things to my own life, and to all lives I interact with. Do we share in a common soul? I think so. As I have explored my needs and values more closely, where they have been met or not met, I gain a deeper knowledge of the student and his or her human experience. I can now better create an effective environment for teaching. One that is safe, protective, and allows students to put voice to their feelings, thoughts, and curiosities. As I better know my struggles, I can better understand those of my students. I feel the passion burning in my heart more deeply, so I now feel theirs more deeply. I don't even have to know them yet, who they are, but I already know them.