

**THE POETICS OF ART AND EDUCATION FROM THE ONEIRIC PLACE:
BACHELARD, STUDIO PRACTICE AND I**

Claudine Ascher

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in
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of
Art Education**

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ABSTRACT

THE POETICS OF ART AND EDUCATION FROM THE ONEIRIC PLACE: BACHELARD, STUDIO PRACTICE AND I

Claudine Ascher

In this thesis, I present the idea that the acquisition of self-knowledge is especially important for artists as they are called upon to expose personal truth as a means to express collective truth. For this reason, I engage in a dialogue with phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard through my own, qualitative, in-studio practice as it relates to his imaging and creation theories of 'poetic reverie' and 'the oneiric house'. I focus on my 'reveries' about how my life experience inspires my art, and how my actions as an art student, a teacher and a gallery curator frame my work. Following Bachelard's example as he responds to poetry which resonates philosophically for him, I also conduct a 'poetic exploration' of works by artists Lucien Freud, Paula Rego, David Hockney, Alice Neel, Joe Fafard, William Kentridge and Xenia Hausner as examples of self-informed practices. My purpose is to consider the implications of this research for my teaching practice.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated

to my mother

Sarah Mary Arditti Ascher

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I thank my father Elie Ascher for the workmanship and beauty of in his designs and his pride in his work.

I thank Marion Wagschal for the strength and depth of her imagery. Her focus and honesty as an artist have been an inspiration.

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I also express my wish for the talented youth in my life, with whom I have shared art, stories and love, James, Thomas, Jessica, Vanessa, Jordan, Ariel and Jacob Ascher, and Diego Cezer, that they will dedicate themselves to that which inspires passion, courage and conviction in their lives.

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INTRODUCTION

As a practicing artist who is also an art educator, I am especially concerned with teaching artists to develop a meaningful body of work based on self-determined themes, subjects, styles and media. Making art as a professional, and teaching art techniques to adults for the past eighteen years has taught me this: skill development, the acquisition of technique, free expression as a discovery method and spontaneous, unplanned exploration with materials or media are not 'enough' art education. Neither are aesthetic discussions, historical or social study or the deliberate selection of a conceptual framework before creation 'enough'. For what we call 'art' to happen, the end result of artistic education must be an artist's discovery of her / his individual artistic voice, purpose or style. In fact, my adult classes in art centres outside the educational system are constantly filled with would-be artists who tell me they are at a loss to solve technical problems, to select subject matter or to find inspiration when they work without the guidance of teachers.

Ultimately, art is 'about' personal choice. The 'art milieu' is fraught with contradictions and conflicting agendas: is art practice a selfish, ego-centered self-indulgence or is it the answer to all the world's social and political problems? Is it about 'just' sensory and emotional experience or about philosophical and psychological truth? Is it recreation or is it profession? Is it better 'popular', or Post-modern, or conceptual, a term often confused with 'contemporary'; should it be technically proficient and respectful of history or expressive and unselfconsciously revolutionary? Is it an innate talent, or is it something that can be learned? Persons can choose their own answers or stances either consciously or instinctively, because the 'right' answer is: all of the above and more.

My choices are these: I am an artist who has long mined my own life experience to extract the thematic raw material that defines it. I use this self-referential material because I explore 'the human condition' in my work. I work figuratively and representationally, but don't intend the work to be expository or descriptive. I don't presume I 'speak for' others, nor am I out to change society. I don't wish to promote a single subject, aesthetic or agenda. While I am

cynical about many things, the value of art - its impact, its power, and its potential – is not one of them. I do rely on art to express my connections to my fellows; art is the bond that strengthens and informs, that creates empathy and complicity.

Because I think and remember best in images, and because I have a vivid and associative visual imagination, I wish simply to engage in the practice of image making and the conversation about it that began with the first mark made by the first human hand to wield a tool expressively. My brain is large enough to accommodate a huge variety of imagery and ideas at once, albeit sometimes chaotically, which for an artist is a good thing, I've discovered. I suspect this is because the inner vision on which I as an artist focus is perhaps more perceptive than the outer. What my mind's eye (or my third eye) 'sees' is not just what my physical eyes see, but is the result of all my senses, plus memory, the intellect and the imagination 'seeing' in concert.

Using imaging and creation techniques I learned during my dance, creative writing and theater studies and practices, which subsequently merged in my visual arts practice, I create imagery that blurs the boundary between inner, or subconscious, and outer, or conscious realities. It is also influenced by the many cultures of which I am a product, and the experience of being an immigrant many times over. My work has at different times been called 'magic realism', 'psychological narrative' or 'conceptual representation'.

Upon hearing that I was beginning research into my artistic discovery process by watching myself as I engaged in my studio practice, Julie Cezer, a long-time friend and dance collaborator, sent me a copy of the book *The Poetics of Space* by Gaston Bachelard. She is familiar with my art; she saw the compatibility between his theories and my practice. As I read this text, I felt I had met a kindred spirit and engaged in a virtual conversation with him. He provided the theoretical, phenomenological framework by which I could proceed with my qualitative, in-studio research: I set out to observe and document the methods I use to 'see' my imagery and discover its meaning as I created work in the form of drawings, sculpture, photographic collage, performance and text, and in preparation for a solo exhibition which was held in May of 2004. During this process, at the suggestion of Professor Lorrie Blair, I also referred to Bachelard's *The Poetics of Reverie*.

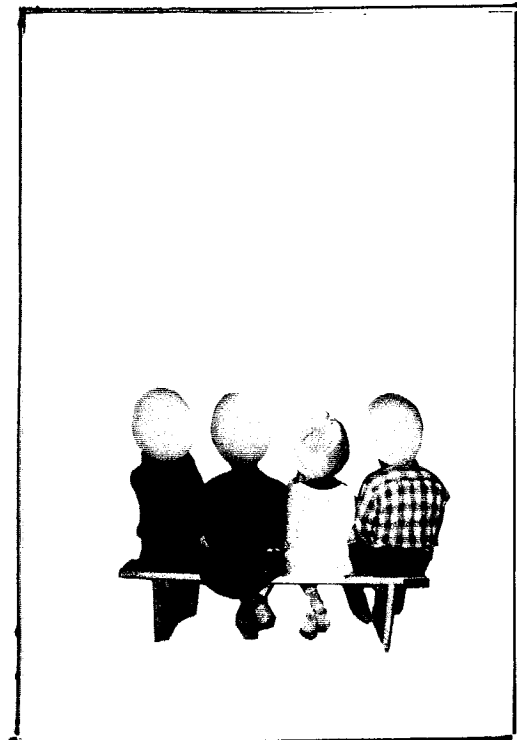
As a conversation, my practice also engaged the work of a number of artists whose imagery is based on representation, specifically the human figure, but who create similarly psychological or philosophical spaces through and for their subjects. Classically competent but making contemporary, aesthetic choices, they use their techniques to externalize their inner vision of the human psyche as it experiences and is formed by the phenomena of living. Of the many excellent figurative artists whom I consider kindred spirits, both historical and contemporary, I interacted for this research with works by: Lucian Freud and Paula Rego (England), David Hockney and Alice Neel (United States), Joe Fafard (Canada), William Kentridge (South Africa) and Xenia Hausner (Austria).

The question upon which I based my in-studio self-observational research was therefore this:

What connections can I make between my professional studio practice and Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological theories about the creation process, and what implications does this have for my teaching practice in the visual arts?

Image 1

Performance Anxiety
2004
original images
colour photo collage
30.5 x 23 cm



CHAPTER ONE: THE GROUND

Image 2:

Once Refuge
1999
talc body clay,
underglazes, glazes;
45.5 x 47 x 33 cm



Image 3:

Contemplating Flight
2000
colour pencil on paper
56.5 x 76.5 cm



FOUNDATIONS: The Influence of Dance, Theater and Creative Writing

In 1974, I graduated from McGill University with a Bachelor of Arts degree for which my main fields of study were performance through theater and dance, and literature and creative writing. I was especially interested in the theater's power to reveal layers of meaning in even the most mundane of human acts, in dance's ability to inspire deep levels of emotion, and in the writer's mantra: 'write about what you know'.

I learned that theater does what it does in various ways, the most direct being to cut out a slice of life and isolate it on a stage, By the very choice of what is put on stage, and the careful emphasis on such things as aspects of characterization, staging, lighting, costume, make-up and sound, the director subtly but precisely plays with the audience's senses and emotions. This draws its attention to specific elements of the unfolding action, revealing secrets and exposing truths sometimes even in counterpoint to what the characters are saying or doing. The beauty is that the characters, like anyone who is unaware that someone is watching, are themselves so engaged in their 'life' that they do not guard themselves against this self-revelation.

How do the actors do it? I asked. They are actors; they certainly know they are being watched. Yet, on stage, they have to become people who do not, whose actions are as unselfconscious as anyone's engaged in life (unless self-consciousness is a trait of the character being created or a theme being explored). I wondered how those actors who can perform truthfully and without compromising their character's reality avoid the posturing, and the self-consciousness, self-defensiveness or the self-disguise mechanisms we all use to protect ourselves?

I was shown that actors learn to engage in a self-reflective self-analysis as a way to relive moments in their own lives that echo their characters' experiences. They begin by remembering, then recreating and finally re-experiencing these moments in a state of attentive self-awareness. They must not justify or judge their actions, censure or edit them, anticipate or second guess themselves but simply observe, empathize, feel and remember.

By thus 'witnessing' their own actions and emotions, actors can reposition themselves in a past moment, relive it AS themselves, and then re-live it in character, bringing true emotion

and true awareness to the stage. In this way, actors can share the insights they gain about specific experiences with viewers through the characters they create. This approach has its origin in the self-reflective research method developed by Konstantin Stanislavsky, and described in his book *An Actor Prepares* (1863, translation 1938).

As I learned these acting techniques, I was also engaged in studying dance. While as a child I'd begun dance training in the classical school, and learned there the value of masterful technique and the power of tradition, it's in the modern school I later joined that I learned self-reflective improvisational techniques leading to the creation of new choreographies.

Self-reflective dance improvisation achieves two aims: first, it leads dancers to expand their movement vocabulary by encouraging them to 'discover' movement natural to their own bodies rather than constantly impose movement on their bodies from the outside. In other words, dancers must 'own', not just borrow movement. Secondly, it helps dancers find 'truth' in their movement: they learn to integrate and trust their technique by allowing a free flow of energy to guide their bodies. They learn to land, balance, shift, ricochet, fall, recover, etc. with fluidity, leaving their minds open to receive commands from their instincts and emotions rather than just from their intellect.

This leads the dancer into interpretative territory that makes of the dance a life experience rather than a contrived performance for both dancer and viewer. Because dancers must trust the audience, or at least be willing to put themselves on stage unguarded, the dance becomes more than display or entertainment. It creates emotional connections and intimacy with audiences, encouraging them to engage on equal footing.

As in theater, the aim is for performers to inhabit the moment, to feel it personally on deeply meaningful levels. This helps them to communicate honesty, without self-consciousness and generously in performance. In dance, these techniques began with the work of Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham, and have progressed to what is now called 'authentic movement' techniques.

While I practiced acting and dance on serious amateur and semi-professional levels for a time after graduating, my terrible memory for lines and complicated choreographies made me

too nervous prior to the drawing of the curtain to consider public performance my ideal expressive vehicle. At any rate, I was drawn to using rather than being media. I learned that I preferred to work with my hands on objects that, while expressive and communicative, could become physically independent of me, of my body, of my voice, and of my person. I became adept at prop and set design and construction in many different media.

As I worked part-time backstage creating props, set elements or designing sets, I found I enjoyed the solitude and the focus. I also found myself more and more drawn to the potential of the images and objects I created to express my meaning rather than extend a playwright's or a director's. This led me in 1980 to return to university, to Concordia this time, for a Bachelor of Fine Arts Studio degree, which I completed in 1983.

I had a meagre fund of art education behind me upon entering university, little in terms of the studio techniques specific to art making for its own sake. All I had were the very limited, very playful explorations I did in my elementary education, one grade ten class dedicated to politicized poster art, and the art practice and research I had engaged in independently since childhood which were highly influenced by 'classical', 'folk' and 'decorative' arts.

I had little formal training in 'contemporary' visual arts practices, in other words, in media-based art practice or in the concept-based approaches like abstract expressionism and minimalism popular at that time. As a result, what I brought to my studio practice besides my experience with a variety of materials is my theater and dance training, specifically this self-referential, self-revealing approach. This created conflict for me: who determines the value of a style and approach? Who controls the choice of image? Is it the 'authority' or the artist? I concluded it is the artist.

As a result, my art practice has always been 'about' how the 'I' of a person experiences specific events, is marked by them, subconsciously sifts out and processes the most personally significant aspects, visualizes them as coded images and expresses them as symbols which become metaphors for the life defining human experiences. My efforts at acquiring skill and technique are aimed at achieving the level of confidence and facility required for me to create work that does justice to my inner vision and, when I remove the work from my studio, which can

stand beside that of other artists whether unapologetically, as my version of human truth, or competitively, in the 'art market'.

Now, as I complete my Concordia University Art Education Masters program in 2005, I see that this technique has been brought into the discourse about the self-discovery processes, again via psychology. Clark Moustakas calls it *Heuristic Research* in his book by that name (Moustakas, 1990). Though he does not connect his self-revealing method to theater, dance or creative writing, or those practices to psychology, the progression of the research is very similar. He identifies it with these terms and in this sequence: initial engagement, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis. He uses it to engage people psychologically with a process of self-revelation, what Gaston Bachelard called 'poetic reverie' (Bachelard, 1958, 1960).

In this paper, as an artist and an art teacher, I refer specifically to Bachelard because, like phenomenological methodologists in theater and dance, he is concerned with self-reflection as an artistic and communicative creation process centered in philosophy, not as a psychological (or psychiatric) process. He also gives a specific place from which to begin this exploration, a metaphoric place full of symbols that everyone knows, that anyone can inhabit and from which the individual can both safely and honestly progress outwards into the world as a creator.

In addition, by positioning the self-reflection 'in' a 'place', the oneiric house, Bachelard emphasizes the physicality and the gestural qualities inherent in the creative process. Even though the person engaged in the type of self-reflection he proposes does so while in a virtual, imagined place, it is nevertheless one which must have tactile and spatial presence, which the person must explore with the movements and gestures stored in memory. These are what create the source impressions on which the self-reflection is based. The poet knows this. The artist does as well: the discovery journey poets undertake in exploring philosophical space mirrors the physical process undertaken by artists as they give perceptible form to their 'discoveries'.

Image 4:

Autobiography

1982

assembled piece

desk: 12 parts

objects: 40 parts

talk body clay,

underglazes,

glazes, lustres

130 x 120 x 64 cm



Image 5:

If Narcissus Could See Me Now

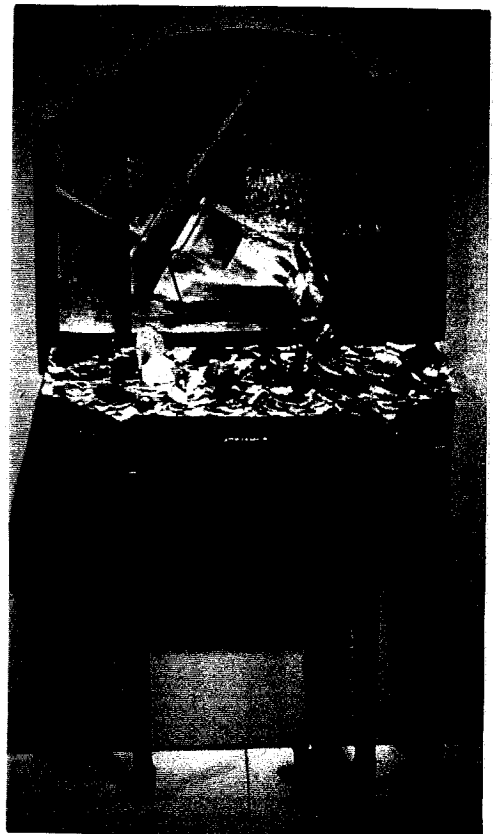
1983

assembled piece in 7 parts

talk body clay, underglazes,

glazes, lustre

112 x 61 x 30 cm



BACHELARD, THE POETICS OF SPACE AND OF REVERIE

In this précis of Gaston Bachelard's concepts, while I am especially engaged with *The Poetics of Space*, I occasionally also refer to *The Poetics of Reverie*, conjoining the theories he presents and elaborates. Unless otherwise specified, quotes/page numbers are from the former.

Gaston Bachelard (French; 1884-1962) had devoted his life to the philosophical study of science and the scientific way, when, in his late thirties, he became especially interested in the poet, and on the poet's ability to inspire insight and discovery through the use of word-based imagery. He found that poet's mind is much like scientist's in its level of attention; neither takes anything for granted, neither ignores even the most apparently insignificant detail, each is easily led by curiosity. Where they diverge is that while the scientist seeks understanding to have an effect, the poet seeks to feel the effect of understanding.

To Gaston Bachelard, phenomenology is a philosophical analysis of life-defining events, those events that, upon reflection, lead the thinker into the realm of inspired understanding. He found that the poetic thinker, not the scientific, achieves this most profoundly and consistently. This is because poets don't confine their understanding in a solid, deliberate or 'scientific' structure of thought, but refer it to an interpretative one. While the scientist believes in a defined and described Truth, and seeks to make it universally useful, the poet touches suggestive, fluid truth, making it broadly meaningful.

Bachelard insists that poems cannot be understood through principle, criticism, observation or judgement. They cannot be created through logic or objective analysis. The poet works personally, instinctively, led by an 'inner vision' (xxi), trusting the lessons learned through life's experiences, emotionally engaged. The poet, in direct opposition to the scientist, creates without imposing structures based on proof, repetition and generalization, asking the reader to 'consider an image not as an object and even less as a substitute for an object, but to seize its specific reality' (p. xix). In other words, the poem is like the rabbit in Alice in Wonderland: through it, readers follow poets into their psychic realm of evocative imagery to experience meaning from a new point of view.

Creative products such as poems, Bachelard insists, are effective because of what he calls their 'transsubjectivity' and in respect of their inspiring 'variational responses' (p. xix). Poetry is effective because its truth can be understood through suggestion and association, empathy and extrapolation. Its truth can take many forms and apply to many situations yet still touch and enlighten because while human experience is shared, life is experienced in infinite variety. The laboratory manipulation of physical forces and properties is replaced, in Bachelard's phenomenological study, by the contemplation of symbolic imagery: life as interpreted by a lucid, informed mind in a state of free association, or what he calls 'poetic reverie'.

Bachelard believes that 'poetic reverie' is the psychic state that allows a thinker to follow new mental paths, to uncover the deep, previously hidden or unknown connections among seemingly dissimilar things. It is these connections that allow us to fully experience the world as we live in it, and to understand the workings of our minds as we do so. This is true whether we are physical scientists focused on 'discovery', social engineers seeking to create bridges between people, religious thinkers trying to decipher 'divine' truth or artists seeking to express human truths.

Thus, Bachelard defines 'creativity' in any field as the ability of the thinker to ponder reality as 'relative'. It is not linear like a road, but, like water or space, made up of undulating, overlapping, interconnected and simultaneous currents, much like Einstein's universe is defined by the relativity of time and space. Truth is relative to the thinker's experience of life, and the thinker is a resident of life for the entire, impressionable and imaginative span of a lifetime. Impression and imagination are what define individual reality, symbolic imagery is what expresses it, and 'reverberation' (p. xvi), or the power of poetic imagery to trigger the mechanisms of association and self-recognition in the reader, is what communicates it.

The experience of the creative spark, that 'ah' (not necessarily the 'aha!') moment, Bachelard identifies by Eugène Minkauski's definition, that is, as the 'élan vital' (p xvi). For Bachelard, the 'élan vital' is not only the 'dynamic origin of human life' (p xvi), but it is also what inspires 'poetic reverie'. It happens when the person begins the process of self-reflection in the place Bachelard calls the 'oneiric house'. This is the psychic place where each person's

memories, thoughts and sensations are safely housed, from the earliest childhood to the moment of contemplation and beyond into speculation.

In psychology, to which Bachelard turns for his term, oneirism refers to a condition in which a person's consciousness straddles the dreaming and waking states. This 'oneiric house' is therefore a virtual place, situated in the thinker's psyche and straddling the boundary between external and internal spaces. It is a metaphor for the thinker's safe haven, a place that is a composite of the childhood home where thought first took form and the ideal home, the home the thinker would build if she/he ever finished designing and redesigning it to accommodate each new life experience and memory.

The 'oneiric house' is the place the poetic thinker visits – or in which she/he hides – when engaged in 'poetic reverie'. It is private and solitary, where free association can occur without distraction or the influence of others' needs or demands. It is built in the image of the perfect house, the individual's Shangri La, with hallways, attics, basements, nooks and crannies, bedrooms and kitchens, all the 'places' one associates with intimacy, all the 'spaces' where meaningful memories and sensations are stored. For instance, for Bachelard, the corner by the large open fireplace, under an overhanging bookshelf and behind the big leather chair where the child version of the poetic thinker might have often sat playfully or in fear could be the symbol for the secret pleasure spot, or the place where foreboding dwells. It can reveal what the person longs for or fears, and represent metaphorically human longing and fear.

The design of the house, each room, each nook and cranny, even the association of imagined elements as they are located in the house and in relation to each other, represents a significant event or reality that helped shape the person. The house itself as it is situated in an environment, and its relationship to the elements outside represent the thinker's attitudes and perceptions. Visualizing them, engaging in a virtual contact with them, allows the person to remember and review the phenomena of her/his life and come to deepen her/his comprehension of their significance and impact. For the poet, this in turn inspires the creation of expressive, suggestive but also deeply felt poetry that then acts as a guide or companion for the reader in his/her explorations of his/her own oneiric house.

Throughout his two books, Bachelard demonstrates the power of such poetry to act as a guide for the reader. He refers to and quotes from poems in which the poet has expressed the deep, personal meaning of these places, these objects, these memories and these associations. In allowing himself to be led through different poets' personal spaces, he shares in the discovery of his own. Together, they build the essence of the oneiric house, display it like the child showing a friend through his/her home, and extend an invitation to readers to visit and discover their own. The specific symbol of home becomes the metaphor for the universal 'home' becomes the memory of the individual home, becomes the home of the self. In Karl Jung's 'collective unconscious', where is housed the symbolic imagery all humans share, 'home' is how humans visualize 'self'.

The house that is home is a perfect place to symbolize the self. It is a structure in which all the physical, mental and emotional actions of existence can be enacted and represented simultaneously. Unlike an office building, recreation center, or other public structures, the private dwelling functions physically like the human body, and symbolically like the human mind.

When the first house the individual identifies as 'home' is loved, cozy, sheltering, then subsequent images of 'home' will mirror its design. If the first house was unhappy, unsafe or uncomfortable, then subsequent images of 'home' will be redesigned, though they will inevitably include spaces where the unhappy things will be stored, which the poetic thinker may avoid in daily life, but which during 'poetic reverie' the person will explore. The design and redesign of the 'oneiric house' is a lifetime's achievement and it is never limited by actual physical reality. In the imagination, in the core of the living self, everything is possible, and the 'oneiric house' is always under construction.

In *The Poetics of Reverie*, Bachelard proposes two mental attitudes to adopt to prepare for and have access to this type of poetic imaging. First, he identifies the open-minded process of image-based free association, of 'poetic reverie' in the womb-like privacy of the 'oneiric house' as the feminine part of the analytical process. By positioning themselves in this 'feminine' mode, people engaged in this process open themselves to fresh ideas and leaps of logic that open previously unseen conceptual doors to new hallways of understanding. The imaging here is

empathetic, associative and divergent, and without pre-determined intent, though it is specific to the experiences of each person's life. These include all life's nuances, from language spoken, especially the 'mother tongue', to books read to places visited and objects saved and treasured, to conversations shared to education to hardships endured to gifts received or squandered and so on.

Secondly, people are never as open and receptive as when they are children. Bachelard therefore simultaneously repositions the person engaged in poetic reverie in the attitude of the child for whom every event, good or bad, every emotion, joyous or traumatic, every discovery, amazing or shocking, is fresh and full of potential. Adult notions of time, when events are trapped in 'The Past', and all adult mental filing systems, where events are labelled 'To Be Denied' or 'Suppress! Suppress!' are set aside. Even though the experience is remembered and relived, it is AS IF the adult is a child again, experiencing EVERYTHING for the first time.

The difference is that as adults engaged in poetic reverie, people can discover themes and link experiences together in ways that they cannot when they are being 'scientific', when they are dreaming or when they are children in the throws of the experience. They can therefore perceive VALUES, what experiences have added to or how they've positioned 'the self' in life.

By speaking of 'values', Bachelard does not mean 'judgements' but the texture, colour and weight of the effect /affect that even the most minor event may have on us. Every detail of our lives, no matter how apparently modest or cosmically insignificant, has equal weight in shaping who we are as individuals. He values each one for its impact, how it affected us as we lived it, what influence it had on our perception and subsequent actions, and the long-term effect it has on our attitudes, tastes, needs and beliefs. For our experience of a colour (perhaps a particular turquoise green puts me in mind of the colour of the ocean as I swam joyfully in it when I was a child; warm in its warmth, buoyed by its waves, carried by its currents; perhaps that turquoise is the colour I associate with warmth and comfort, with joy; perhaps that is why I surround myself with it now that I live far from the ocean...), our experience of a sound, taste, feel, smell, of the actions we took and the movements or rhythms we felt often are among the things that configure the specificity of our lives.

Image 6.

Brain

1996

clay, underglaze,
glaze

40 x 17 x 26 cm

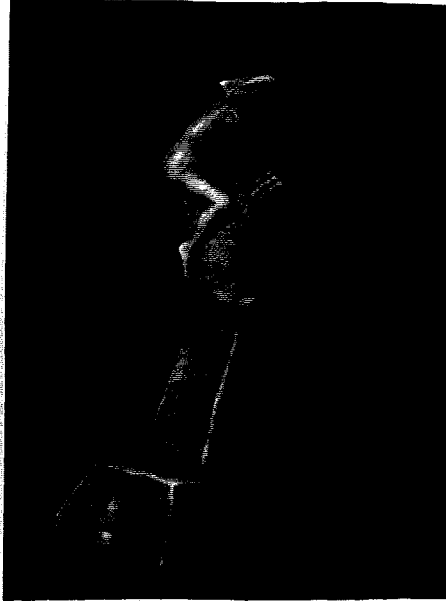


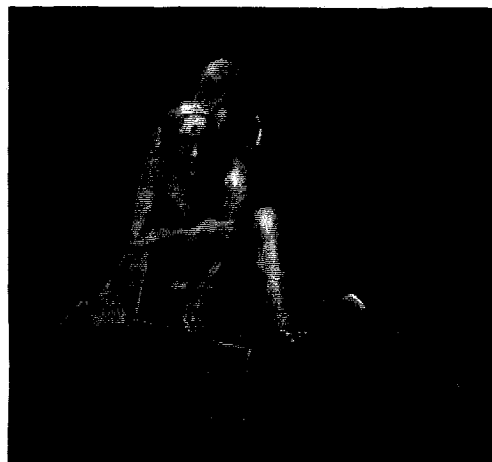
Image 7

Rib

1996

clay, underglaze,
glaze

35 x 17 x 34 cm



THE TROUBLE WITH METAPHORS

What is a metaphor? Simply put, it is a comparison between things. Unlike the simile, which compares things that are alike and makes the comparison obvious with words such as 'like' or 'as', the metaphor compares things not usually associated to each other, and does so without warning or identifying itself. I can say my uncle is like a bull in a china cabinet, or I can tell a story about a destructive bull that suggests my uncle to anyone who knows him (but doesn't make it easy for him to sue me for Defamation of Character) and lets readers associate it with bullish people in their lives. This takes me further in meaning than a simile, because, suddenly, the bull image connects me to Greek mythology, to paganism, to the work of Pablo Picasso, to bull fights, to the stock market, to secret societies, to male virility, and to many other culturally identified metaphoric associations. The simile, therefore, is directive; the metaphor is suggestive. The simile is specific, the metaphor open-ended.

These terms, simile and metaphor, apply directly to the visual arts because images have an effect whether they are expressed in words or rendered in media. I consider, for instance, a realistic portrait as a simile because it is like the sitter, the intent is for me to capture the sitter's likeness and express what I see of her/his character or condition in a way that makes her/him recognizable to viewers other than myself. I can, however, 'use' the sitter's image simultaneously or exclusively to express my own meaning (again, hopefully without incurring a lawsuit and under the protection of 'artistic freedom') but skilfully enough to make the image metaphorically suggestive to other viewers; or I can refer metaphorically to the sitter whose likeness becomes a way for me to symbolize something other altogether.

In other words, I can create portraits of Hindu Nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi or of American President George W. Bush. Rendered realistically, they can 'read' as representations: one is 'like' Gandhi, another 'like' Bush. Here, I am comparing my image of them to themselves. I can also create a Gandhi and give him a halo, making him 'like' a saint, and a Bush with horns, making him 'like' a devil, associating them to Christian-based metaphors for 'good' and 'bad'. Or, I can create a blue field painting and call it Gandhi, and a red field painting and call it Bush. These paintings become my metaphors for the men, for their ideologies and for my perception of

the concepts of 'peace' and 'war, if I associate the former with sky and the latter with fire, for instance. Whether representational or abstract, put side by side, they are no longer similies; they become antonyms and metaphors for opposing ideologies.

The strength of the visual metaphor, as opposed to the one expressed in words, is that the viewer is not limited to the language in which it is expressed. While there are styles in the visual arts, and while there are meanings and interpretations that are specific to different cultural or ethnic groups, the visual metaphor is suggestive and effective even without contextualization or 'translation'. My image of a snarling dog or of an arrangement of colours applied gesturally will be evocative regardless of the person's linguistic or cultural background, though it may be differently evocative for those of other cultures than I experience it from mine.

For me, the key to using Bachelard's 'poetic reverie' and 'oneiric house' concepts as creation processes in the visual arts is to understand them as associative imaging processes in the literary sense, as he does. If the aim of reverie is expression for its own sake, only nostalgic, if it is only a rehashing of established ideas, or if it generalizes experience, then it is not 'poetic'. Bachelard, through his visits to the intimate spaces of the many poets he quotes and the poems he uses as inspiration for his perambulations through the 'oneiric house', makes clear what he demands: that reverie take the thinker past established social, psychological, psychoanalytic or conceptual explanations into the larger, philosophical issues as suggestive, inspiring images, not to solve but to consider, not to know but to feel, not to tell but to show, not to finish but to connect, not to equalize but to share.

I especially value Bachelard's warning in *The Poetics of Space* that 'the metaphor is 'a false image' (p. 77). When it is a deliberate creation, it 'gives concrete substance to an impression that is difficult to express' (p. 74), whereas the image 'is a phenomenon of being specific to the speaking creature' (ibid). When people draw a dove to represent peace, a four-leaf clover to signify luck, or a stylized heart to embody love, they may be using generalized, mass appropriated, stereotypical symbols. They may not be tapping into their own experiences to identify their own symbols for these psychic elements, 'peace' 'luck' or 'love', but be parroting pre-packaged ones, as if they have been programmed.

When I used the bull metaphor earlier, I was referring to a long established metaphor, understood since pagan times. My use of it is deliberate, calculated to demonstrate an idea. While the first person to associate the bull to virility, the first person to categorize the market as 'bullish', or the first person to call a clumsy man a bull might have first 'seen' these images in a state of poetic reverie, my use of them is not poetic by Bachelard's definition. However, in poetic reverie I may 'see' the bull, clearly an image that resonates in our collective unconscious since it appears and reappears in cultures throughout history and around the world, in an altogether 'new' light.

In other words, Bachelard warns that the manufactured, generalized, democratized, mass-produced, generally accepted metaphor communicates CONCEPT and 'concept becomes lifeless thinking since, by definition, it is classified thinking' (p. 75). The poetic image on the other hand is LIKE the dream image in that it is specific to the dreamer, or personal, comes unbidden and flows organically. The difference is that, unlike the dream, the poem captures it in words so that it may be revisited and re-experienced, its effect can linger in the imagination, last, reverberate, and thus be illuminating.

Bachelard focuses his analysis of the process he calls 'poetic reverie' on the poet, that is, on the artist who creates suggestive, symbolic imagery through written words that reverberate evocatively in the reader. He does this to illuminate his concept of the phenomenon that is creative thought. He values creative thought for its ability to transport the thinker beyond concrete, pragmatically-defined reality, for using the images inspired by reality but reinterpreting them through what I call the emotional imagination. This process is what he believes leads to interpretation and inspired understanding. This process is what he believes leads to the continued understanding of life events as phenomena, neither as mundane, thoughtless or meaningless existence, nor as self-conscious, planned, and programmed existence.

This is exactly what I believe a dedicated, technically proficient art practice achieves. I don't mean by this what is called 'conceptual' art in contemporary art criticism, which demands a focus on concept as the source of imaging rather than on image as the inspiration for metaphor which in turn inspires concept. In fact, I have observed that what contemporary commentators

and educators often forget is that the best art, whether it is classical or contemporary, representational or abstract, whatever its 'ism', leads the viewer through the many levels of response, technical/sensory, literal/sensual, associative/aesthetic, imaginative/psychological, conceptual/philosophical and variations thereof. It does not 'skip' any level.

In fact, Bachelard emphasizes that this inspired understanding born of 'poetic reverie' is not really an out-of-nowhere invention. It is, rather, the review of accumulated experience AS images and the gaining of an awareness of links or interactions between seemingly unconnected things to arrive at enlightenment (not to be confused with 'knowledge' in the scientific sense). To perceive these links, the thinker must not only be free of expectations, directions or agendas (social or political), in a private place among the clutter of a life, but also to be prepared to articulate and communicate them, no matter how unusual or unexpected they may seem to others who are 'foreign to the process of creation' (xvii), that is, to people who are not 'poets'

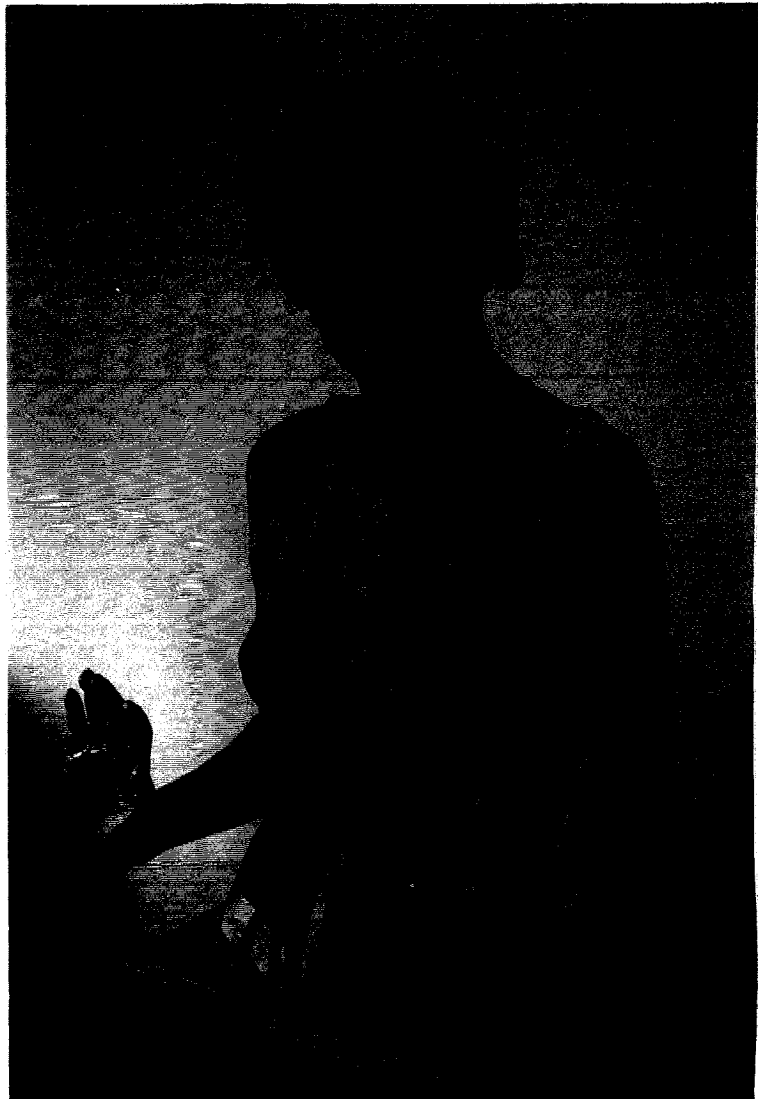
Bachelard refers to Karl Jung to point out that our shared human unconscious will guarantee the 'communicability of an unusual image' (xvii). In the case of 'home', physically, all humans need and seek shelter; all humans find, assemble or construct their shelter, whether it is modest or opulent, wherever it is situated. On psychic levels, we as humans not only carry our homes on our backs wherever we go, we ARE our homes. The idea of 'home' is therefore complex and layered, and can appear representationally or in deconstructed form. There is the child's memory of home, the parent's, the traveller's, the homeless person's, the outsider's; because we have all been these things and more in our lives, each of these resonates (reverberates) emotionally for us, each comes in different forms and carries multiple levels of overt and covert meanings. Our 'oneiric house' has elements of them all.

Poets trust that through the word images they create based on their inner visions readers will 'understand' their poems on many levels rather than only intellectual. Bachelard in turn trusts that these images will enlighten and inspire on broadly philosophical levels. The concepts of poetic reverie, of the oneiric house, and of the power of this image to reverberate meaningfully, are to Bachelard the realm and the language of the poet.

I believe they are the realm and the language of all artists who render the images they see with their inner eye to convey meaning. Whether they use words, paint, tell stones, act or dance, whatever their medium, their best art, no matter what its form, is 'poetic' in Bachelard's sense of that word. As an art educator focused on teaching the techniques of image making that lead to the discovery of symbolic meaning, I therefore believe that the exploration of the 'oneiric house' in a state of 'poetic reverie' is an ideal way to lead students to 'see' with their inner vision as they develop the skills to render these images truthfully and with confidence. As an example, I will therefore situate my-in-studio poetic reverie in the vicinity of my own oneiric house and try as much as possible to record my observations in 'poetic' form.

Image 8

Straddling the Fine Line
1989
clay, underglazes, glaze
67 x 54 36 cm



BACHELARD AND I

As a child, I imagined my address thus: Claudia (my birth certificate name), followed by: Livorno, Italia, + 5, rue Citadelle, Alexandrie, Egypte, Afrique, + 142 Enrique Monteiro, Sao Paolo, Brazil, Sud America, + 11207 James Morris, Montreal, Canada, North America, Earth, Solar System, Universe, Humanity, Life. Unlike Gaston Bachelard, who was not an immigrant, I was a multiple immigrant. Unlike Bachelard, as an immigrant, I was a member of numerous minorities. Unlike Bachelard, I did not pass my childhood living and thinking in my 'mother tongue' but had to wrap my mouth and mind around many languages at once. Unlike Bachelard, I was a girl, and an artistic one to boot. He died in 1962, the year I came to Canada at the end of my eleventh year.

Yet, like Bachelard, the concept of 'home' became pivotal to my understanding of my place in the universe. While my religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds gave me connections to many places on earth simultaneously and made me loyal to them all, for the longest time, I didn't feel I had 'a home'. I couldn't even imagine it. If I dreamt of it, I didn't have dreams I had nightmares. This, of course, made 'home' the most desirable and illusive place in the world, because the longer I felt disconnected from a place, the place, to which I definitively belonged, which was my refuge and place of departure, the less I belonged anywhere.

I did find my 'home', or at least I know 'where' it is located now. Reading Bachelard, therefore, I felt 'at home' in the oneiric house the minute I set foot in it.

Image 9:

Turtle
1999
clay, underglazes
glaze
27 x 49 x 31 cm



Story 1

The Immigrant (1999; excerpt)

There is a typical conversation I had constantly upon arriving in Canada and for years after. It went something like this:

Stranger: You're not from here, are you?
Me: No, from Brazil.
Stranger: Ah, you're Brazilian!
Me: No, Italian.
Stranger: Italian? Where in Italy?
Me: Leghorn
Stranger: Born in Leghorn, Italy.
Me: No, I was born in Alexandria, Egypt.
Stranger: Egyptian then.
Me: Italian. Now Canadian.
Stranger: (changing tack) Mother tongue Arabic.
Me: No. French, from France. And Ladino, from Spain.
Stranger: (sceptical) Not Italian?
Me: Italian is my Father tongue. And Arabic.
Stranger: Catholic, surely.
Me: Sorry, Jewish.
Stranger: Well, you don't LOOK Jewish.

My parents might as well have packed me up and shipped me to Mars; it would have been an easier place to adapt to: Being an alien there would have been more natural.

Martian: You're not from here, are you?
Me: No, Earth.
Martian: Earthling? You poor thing!

I took refuge from my difference at first in books. They don't ask questions, though they don't listen either. Then I discovered clay. It responds without question, it communicates regardless. Modelling it, I finally felt I had come home.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

To gather the data for this paper, I conducted qualitative research based on self-observation in the controlled environment of my studio as I worked to create the sculptures, drawings, photo-collages, a performance piece and texts for a solo, in-gallery, and professional exhibition. I did this while reading Gaston Bachelard's two books, *The Poetics of Space* and *The Poetics of Reverie*, and while engaged in my self-reflective creation process, the process I came to identify by Bachelard's term of 'poetic reverie'.

Basing myself on the idea of the 'oneiric house', I positioned my imagination in mine to reflect on my origins, the formative experiences of my life and to consider their influence on my imagery. I sought to allow the free-flow of thoughts, memories, ideas, sensations, and impressions to direct my hands as I worked and to reveal the meaning of the images that emerged. This means that I did not necessarily follow a specified, chronological time line, nor did I rely on the physical reality of an atlas or map.

Random associations, divergent thinking, and the dream-like experience of space, time and substance were my guides. I try to remain true to the feeling of these experiences as I write this text, all the while trying, when the two are not conflicting, to preserve an aspect of exposition or 'academic writing'.

While the visual work I did is representational, in keeping with the images I 'see' in my dreams or in my imagination, they are not literal. They are 'poetic'. However, in respect to interpreting my discoveries, I did not limit myself to two or three-dimensional imagery; theater, dance, story telling, creative writing and diary keeping have been important and integral parts of my life. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, my visual approach and vocabulary are highly influenced by those practices, and this is reflected in the ensuing work. I cannot include all the pieces I created. I will therefore focus on the process resulting in the major pieces, many of which that formed the exhibition entitled "Reverie" and held in May of 2004 at Galerie de la Ville in Dollard des Ormeaux (Quebec, Canada).

I went back into my past as far as I remembered, then beyond to what I sensed. Since many important aspects of my childhood were feelings rather than remembrance, I enhanced my experience with a variety of triggers. I surrounded myself with artefacts both personal and familial, I played records, I questioned family members, I contemplated photographs and I revisited artists, images or books that influenced me or with which I felt an affinity.

I am a figurative, representational artist. Through aspects of portraiture, narrative, symbolism, metaphoric imaging and the influence of the various cultures to which I belong, I explore the human condition. To hone my skills and expand my experience, I hire professional and amateur models alike. For this research, I sought models who would best symbolize my

child self, or my virtual self as she journeyed in time and space. I also worked with models who might symbolize other people in my past, or whose poses, attitudes or expressions might become the metaphors for states of being or experiences. I worked as well with self-portraits.

As I worked and simultaneously read and wrote, I realized that a large part of my past is centered on my aspirations as an artist, on my artistic education, and on the huge gaps in it by the time I acted on my aspirations. It is also highly influenced by the role my teaching art has played in both my technical and philosophical development.

I include my images, stories and diary entries selectively but I do not date the diary entries as the ideas they explore have been simmering in my soul since my childhood when I first looked upon Michelangelo's 'David' in one of my father's prized art books and began imagining myself as 'an artist'. I date the images, stories and poems for copyright purposes only.

Image 10

Watch
2004
colour pencil on paper
76.5 x 56.5 cm



CHAPTER TWO: BUILDING THE HOUSE

Poem

Keeping the Plot Simple, 1985

Say two characters, no more.
A quiet place, by the sea.
Begin the action with a conversation

They converse, the characters
as travellers crossing paths
glad to shed solitude awhile
but stranger facing stranger
They talk of their journeys
the points where these began
one broke an ashtray into shards
the other lost a child, cries
and for a moment they stand
awkward, conscious of the miles
caked upon their feet, conscious
of the rising tide and of the detritus
along the beach.

One sighs,
the other hangs her head
one adjusts his heavy pack
the other kicks the sand
they wish to speak but words...
echoes, cries of cackling seagulls
distant, haunting, strange.
Imprint of anger, brand of pain.
In my womb, no one rocks the bed
In my tomb, no one disturbs the dead
and the characters surrender
to discord.

They argue, voices brittle
unconscious of the sea beside
of the leaking skies
the churning waters rising
a lapping, a wave, a flood
between their feet
the tide rising, they scream
until they forget they spoke in anger
think they wished to touch
beneath the torrent, upon the tide.

They awake, they stand alone
the miles washed off their feet
on either side of a great river
pouring into the silent sea
washing memories from the beach
washing anger from the breach
while they stand mindless
ears full of fading echoes

thinking of a dream
fearing he has seen a ghost,
fearing she has been an apparition.

She turns, too small to hear the
noise he thought was conversation
noise like shattering glass
or the cries of a lost child and
sets upon her journey, sightless.

Make them suffer loneliness
And wish to meet a fellow traveller
Upon the lengthy road
towards a house long gone
towards a waking dream..

Image 11

Time Out

2004

colour pencil on paper

56.5 x 76.5 cm



REVERIE 1: Giving Presents

There is an image that floats in and out of my mind. As my body moves, I am transported out of time and place, out of self, out of consciousness. My being stands still, in perfect balance on that spot between the action of my body and the response of the substance

beneath my feet. As I move, I look down at the marks I am making with my toes, with my heels; they are constantly filled with gurgling, laughing water and swallowed by the sea. "Are you dancing?" someone asks. I laugh joyously, with the abandon only a three-year old can feel who knows such joy. "Giving presents!" I yell in answer, as another wave rolls in to accept my offering.

DIARY ENTRY 1: Just Do It

It is difficult for me to imagine myself anywhere but in art.

When I'm in my physical studio and making an image concrete, I am immersed in the making. It's a spiritual experience (not to be read, under any circumstances, as a 'religious' experience), a dialogue between me and the forces, imagination, memory, phobias, humour, waves of emotion, thought, intent, technical challenges, skill level, affection for the material, engagement with the actions, sheer sensory enjoyment, that animate my hands. While I work, I am alone as the universe, at one with it.

Sorry Bachelard, I can't sit still, especially if I am 'poetic reverieing' (I create words too). My body is as much a part of this as my imagination. Maybe it's because I'm left-handed?

To be honest, though, I can't pretend that I'm 'just doing it' anymore, or that my creation process is still the result of innocent, mindless play, accidental discovery and the whims of my media. I don't think anyone can. It would in fact be dishonest to claim that anyone does. Well, maybe the child orphaned at birth on a desert island and raised by whatever mammal might have adopted it, assuming the child's mother lived alone on that island during her pregnancy and was mute to boot. Unlike that child, I am not a blank slate as I create, nor am I purposeless because I am a conscious product. I am, in fact, a rather complex interplay, one could call it a comedy, of influences, external and internal, each of which wants a say in directing my hands as I work. All I can do is set the stage, let the play unfold and see what comes of it. Whether I want it or not, the result will be unique. It will also be revealing.

I can't claim innocence on technical or aesthetic levels either. Now, today, I am proficient in various media and can create in a variety of styles. I have extensive art history, art theory and

philosophy, and art education backgrounds. In fact, when I consider the question of what goes into each work I produce, I have to answer, in all sincerity: all my life.

The point here is to be immersed in image, not thought. That's a tough one.

I don't think Bachelard meant for poetic reverie to be the same as mindless expression, the kind that today has some galleries promoting marks made by monkeys or elephants as equal to human art; on the contrary. He attributes it to the creation of poetry by the poet. It is the poet's attitude to creation that is childlike, not the poet who is childish.

Yet, children make art that has all the qualities of Art. Or is it that Art has adopted qualities from children's art that it challenges artists to emulate? When I watch children create, I see focus, I see intent, I see deliberation. I think we've done them a terrible disservice to focus solely on their innocence and lack of experience as artists. If Bachelard returns us to childhood to begin our contemplation, if the poet or artist returns to the 'first home' as the template for the 'oneiric home' is it not as much because the child MUST wait to have the experience before analyzing its value?

Image 12

**Woman
with Orchid**
1994
talc body clay,
underglaze,
glaze
38x23x23 cm

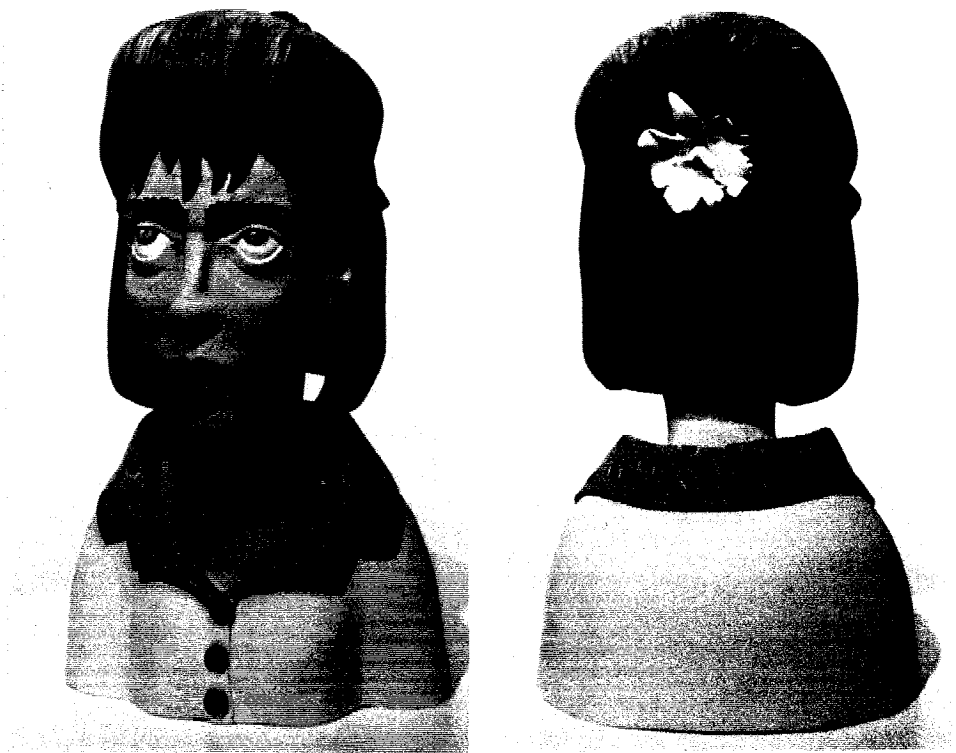


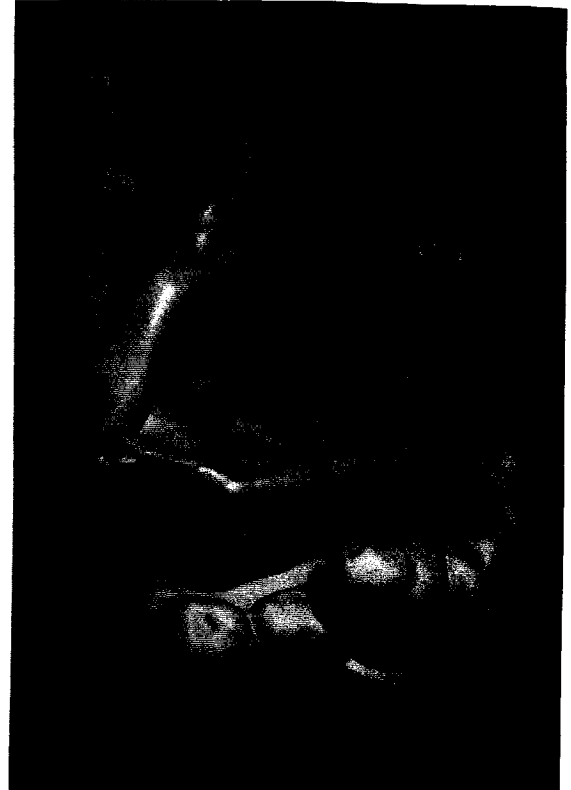
Image 13

Falling Angel: The Belly Flop

1992

talc body clay, underglazes, glaze

66 x 64 x 64 cm



REVERIE 2: The Porcelain Horse

The hand-sized porcelain horse stood among the pretty, fragile pieces of the collection, with dancing ladies in crinoline skirts, pink-cheeked, smiling cherubs holding flowering branches, groomed dogs and cats with flowing ribbons around their necks. I looked at her huge, sharp hooves, at the muscled sweep of her belly as she reared, at the insane waving of her mane, at her lips curled back over her teeth, at the wild and staring eyes as she hovered over the coiled, open-mouthed snake, about to crush it. She didn't belong either, but she was there. And she was powerful.

And I rejoiced.

DIARY ENTRY 2: The Birth of Artist

Bachelard was a philosopher concerned with science and became a philosopher concerned with the imagination and poetic creation. I wish he'd been my teacher.

There I was, in high school at last. I was informed that scientists want to improve the world, and I was encouraged to become one. I tried, in fact, to please and live up to expectations. Science IS fascinating. Then I realized that it didn't really address the important questions the way I felt they should be addressed. Hiroshima. Nagasaki. 'Improving' the world isn't necessarily what it does in its applied form. At any rate, that's not what I wanted for myself, if only because science relies heavily on memory, and mine is divergent, interpretative and sometimes confused, and not at all convinced by facts and figures.

I don't recall anyone ever encouraging me to be an artist, though I remember always being praised for being artistic. In fact, all my student life, I was warned not to be an artist because ultimately, I gathered, being an artist is like being a bomb dismantler, dangerously unpredictable, and it's selfish to boot. Look at Vincent Van Gogh, I was told; look at Pablo Picasso.

I did. I loved their work; I was transported by their work, Pablo with his increasingly broken universe reassembled and glued together by his anger, frustration and desire, Vincent moved by the storms of his passion and his gut-wrenching joy in creation. I shared those passions. Their art improved MY world. Selfish though either Pablo or Vincent may have been as people, there is nothing selfish about their art. Mad, maybe, misogynist, maybe, but those are other stories.

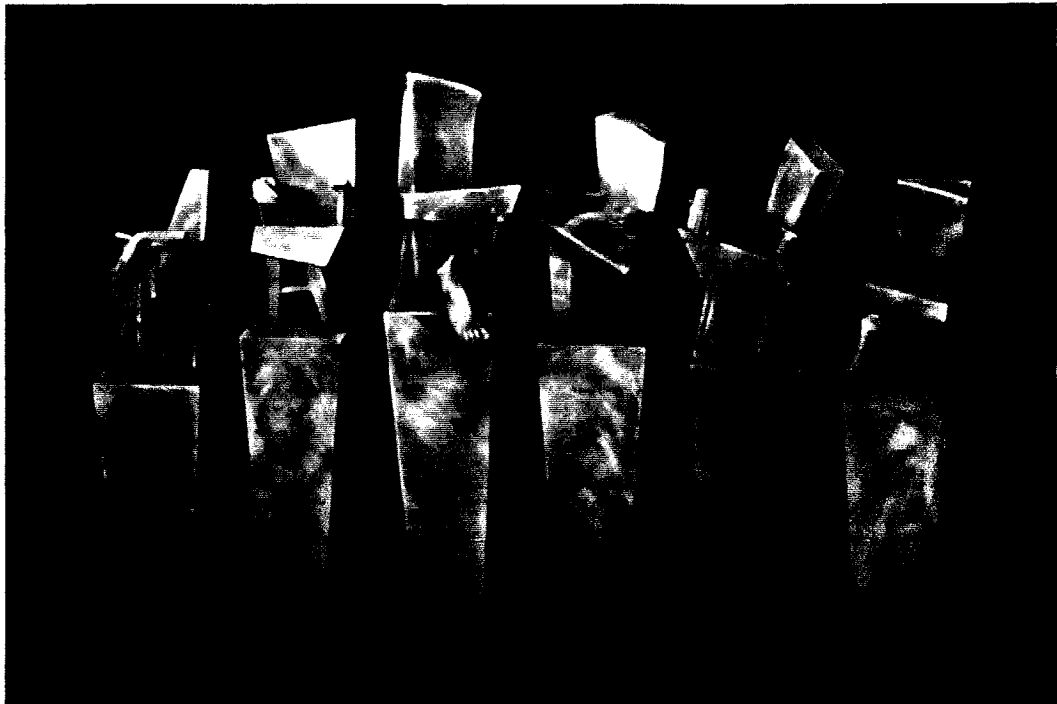
I was told that only geniuses or madmen could be 'serious' Artists, everyone else could only play with art, be entertained by it. Artists are born, they can't be taught, I was told. Sorry? I thought. I was born an Italian. Before I came to Canada, I knew this was true only when there are no teachers who are also artists and no dedicated art schools with an image-making educational philosophy and curriculum, or if the students can't afford to go to those that do. Or when the student isn't interested in learning.

I'm not a genius (I've been wrong before). I make art because I have to; it's the only thing that unscrambles my brain. I think in 'art'. Why? Maybe it's because my inner life is as vivid as the 'real' world; as a child, I spent as much time 'there' as 'here', made little distinction between them. Ok, I still do. Maybe it's because, when I'm making, I'm using body and mind equally, not creating a dichotomy. Maybe it's because it gives me the feeling that I'm adding to the world, not just consuming it.

Once it's made, I hope people will be inspired by what I make, as I am when I look at some of the amazing, wonderful, thoughtful things others make. I hope so. If my work isn't a tornado that lifts people off their feet, or even the proverbial 'breath of fresh air' that wakes them up, then maybe it will be like an insidious, subtle little scent, quietly evocative.

Image 14

The Waiting Room
1996, six-part
clay, underglazes, glazes
62 x 102 x 21 cm



REVERIE 3: Family Album

I am looking through pictures. What did the house into which I was born actually look like? I have no memory of it. Alas, there seems to be no picture of it either. No picture, no place. How strange.

In fact, there is no specific place I call my first home. The very idea of it is hopelessly entangled in a mess of family history, parental memory and that scant collection of old family pictures. These might as well be of moonscapes or of Martian vistas, since the most cherished are from a period before my birth. In many of those that I appear, if I appear in them at all, it is as the smallest element in the image, a bundle in my parent's arms as they stand in some exotic location, or as my older brother's sidekick.

While perfectly normal as family pictures of that period go, they don't resonate for me. I don't recognize myself in them.

According to my parents, there was the Egypt home first. I was born in Alexandria. I wasn't Egyptian, though. Thanks to some issue regarding Egypt's religious laws and my father's nationality, I was Italian, though I'd never been to Italy. We left Egypt when I was around one year old. My parents remember it not only fondly, but also vividly. They lived there for happy, prosperous years before I was born. Their oft-repeated stories of that life made me regard it as a kind of fairy tale location where they lived, like Aladdin, under an enchantment.

Objects they prized and which were off limits to clumsy child hands confirmed the reality of the place, a hookah, a brass teapot, the pictures, one of my mother holding a baby – apparently me - while sitting on a camel, the Gyza pyramid behind them.

Then there are pictures of people on a dock, waving and looking up at the camera, which must be on the boat. Are we leaving or saying goodbye? My parents, I know, were driven from Egypt by the political and religious upheavals of the 50's. They fled, forced to leave home, family, friends and most of their valuable and meaningful things appropriated by strangers. As a baby, I was a passenger in their arms during what appear to be the worst years of their lives.

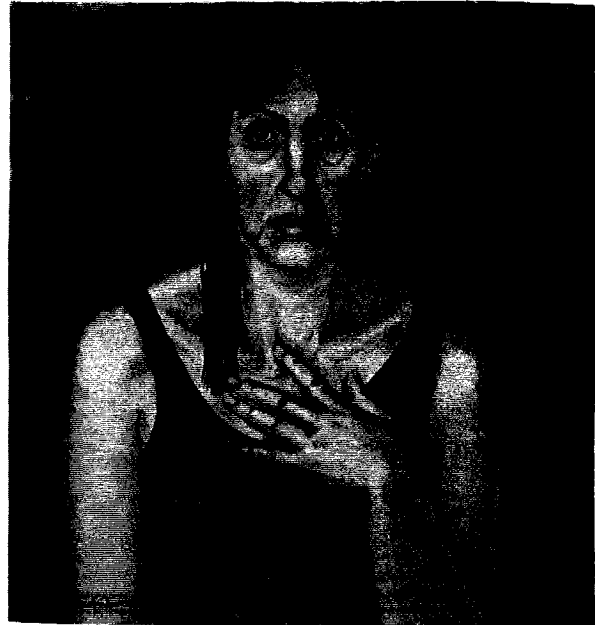
Is this why fear is my first memory? It is my first 'home'. It is a big, spacious fear full of trap doors and dark nooks and crannies. It is not of anything concrete but of shadows, of things

predatory and hungry, things that inhabited my dreams for much of my childhood, waiting for me to fall asleep so that they might catch me.

For me, the idea of that first house is full not of the sunshine and colour my parents remember, but of a sense of loss, of shattered possibilities, of betrayal and sadness. These were the undercurrents I felt as they recounted even their happiest memories.

Image 15

Evermore
2000
coloured pencil on paper
57 x 55 cm



REVERIE 4: Photographs

I see pictures of myself in Egypt, in France; I am held by people I don't know.

We've arrived in Canada. We're visiting. A woman who smells of rosewater is giving me a kiss. She is old. I am told she is my grandmother, my father's mother. Two men and a woman standing beside her are apparently my uncles and my aunt. They are exclaiming that I have grown. They tell stories. 'Remember when?' they say. They look at me. "You haven't changed!" they say. My parents laugh. They don't protest, they interject their memories instead, confirming the stories are not make-believe. These new/old relatives of mine pull out pictures; I've never seen them before, though they are similar to the ones my parents have shown me. I am

suspicious. To my eye, I've changed a lot in eleven years, how could they not know this if they really knew me?

How strange it is to meet people who have memories of me, who claim to know me well, but who are complete strangers to me. I am disturbed. Their stories about me have nothing to do with what I know. Their pictures confirm their claims, disputing my knowledge of my own life. The pictures are indisputable proof, aren't they – how can I not believe that I am the little person shown there?

DIARY ENTRY 3: What if No One Gets It

Does anybody get it? Maybe my art won't touch anyone else the way it touches me. It's personal, after all, not 'about' medium or technique or aesthetics, though they are important aspects of it. People who buy my art say it doesn't just sit quietly on a podium or hang demurely on their walls, it demands attention, sometimes disturbingly. I don't set out to disturb. Maybe it's the immigrant thing. Maybe living with my art is like having the first immigrant in the neighbourhood as your neighbour.

This body of work I'm making, will anyone else see meaning in it if it's not contextualized, mediated, explained? Nothing in it is meant to describe reality. Bachelard describes the philosophical meaning of elements in the poetic houses he visits. A lamp, for instance, is intellectual illumination, and the arc of light it casts or its brilliance signify the depth of insight it affords (p.34). I illuminate my figures and my environments with this in mind, as did artists since the Renaissance, in fact. I don't want the 'place' they inhabit to 'read' as real or actual. Coloured pencils allow for a translucency and graininess perfect for creating the ethereal, dream-like quality I seek. Talk to David Hockney about that!

What if no one got my work? Would I stop making it? Would I stop showing it? No. After all, before deciding to become 'an artist' – I was an adult in my thirties, a high school English teacher, when it occurred to me that I could have a go at making a so-called living at it – I did it by myself, for myself, whatever that means. As a child, how many hours did I spend alone in my

room enjoying the images I created? I'm used to being an outsider, besides. Immigrating has turned out to be the best lesson for me as an artist.

Though it's difficult not to be discouraged if the work does not inspire. Many artists I meet are. As a gallery curator at Galerie de la Ville in Dollard des Ormeaux, (Quebec), I watch those who don't sell or who are not picked up by a gallery or who are ignored (by family or friends, the public or critics) produce less and less as they age; this even when they claim not to make their work 'for' others. Excuses for this abound: their studio is becoming crowded with old work; the old work isn't that good after all; they become involved with activities ABOUT art, or other people's art, and accept to live vicariously through it.

Sad, since it's common knowledge that an artist usually finds a voice, one that others can hear, only after a lifetime of growth and learning and making.

Or this excuse: I overheard a conversation recently. A group of women were talking about their aspirations as artists. They ultimately agreed it's hard to produce artwork because they are so busy. They all bemoaned the lack time for it, life is so full and all-consuming it just eats up artistic intentions something awful. They concluded that it doesn't matter, whether they make art or not, being an artist is about living creatively. They asserted they are artists because their lives as they seek to find and define themselves are works of art, and congratulated each other for it.

I thought I was going to be sick. Why? As a teacher, do I not wish to encourage my students to 'live creatively'? I want more than that. I'm interested in art, not 'artistic', in creation, not 'creative', in expression, not 'expressive'. I'm interested in the kind of practice and communication about art that produced artists like Lucian Freud, Alice Neel, Paula Rego, William Kentridge, Joe Fafard, David Hockney, Xenia Housner, to name a few of those dealing with the human condition, as I strive to do. I want people to live by creation, to make art that will both express their individual experience of life and 'speak' with those who need to share their discoveries as they try to understand themselves and their world. It's aesthetics and technique, yes, it's firmly planted in art historical soil, of course, but it is also personal.

I think Bachelard would approve.

REVERIE 5: Pictures

I remember my room in Brazil, small, narrow, hanging over the driveway. The bed was nestled in a corner. There was a night table. There was a small two-door cabinet my father designed hanging over the bed. The window faced the bed. It looked out onto the metal gate and the street. I can't find a picture showing the window or the gate, is that why I can't visualize them? There is a picture of me sitting on my bed, table and cabinet plainly in view, is that why I can visualize them?

Why can't I remember that room as a complete place, but only in its details? It was my room for at least six years. I was sick there, spent many a solitary hour recounting my dreams to my dolls, or playing theater and school with them. I know I did this; I can relive the nightmares I recounted, and the plays and the lessons I invented in vivid detail. I simply have no sensation of being 'anywhere' as I did this.

I suspect it's because my actual memories of that room are images no one else can see. I couldn't share them. It's as though I lived in a different world than my family. Only my silent dolls shared it with me. When my parents awakened me to release me from my nightmares they listened to my rants about dangerous places, monsters, conflicts and death, but they didn't really understand where I had been, what I had seen or what had happened to me there. Oral language failed me miserably, since it proved a woefully inadequate way for me to convey the deep things, the scary or important things that had little relation to what anyone else seemed to regard as 'normal'.

Words created comical versions of my reality, for they made people laugh or dismissive, which made them safe. Images would have been more communicative, more expressive of the true experience, but my crude drawings were silent because they were considered 'ugly'. It was assumed that it was because I had no skill in rendering and needed correcting and instruction. That made me feel worse than any nightmare. I couldn't make them understand that 'ugly' was EXACTLY what they were about, that my drawings were beautiful because they were exact portraits of the creatures I saw, and exact renditions of the experiences I'd had.

I found myself wishing someone would invent a camera I could take into my world with me. THEN they would believe. Then they would understand. Didn't they use pictures to prove a whole chapter of my life to me?

DIARY ENTRY 4: Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

I have resolved to teach my art students the Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde approach. Or the Van Gogh and Picasso approach. I have to tell my students what I told myself after graduating with a BFA in 1983: "Even if they aren't considered 'in', learn as much as you can about your medium, your style, your subjects, your themes and work, work, work. Learn as much as you can about what others around you are doing, what others who came before did, why they do/did it and how they sustain/ed it IN THEIR OWN WORDS as much as possible; study the art environment, participate in it on as many levels as possible, the 'avant garde', the marketplace, the recreational; be entrepreneurial, promote yourself and your work vigorously; stick to it as the most important thing you do, the only thing you can possibly do, defend it passionately if you must.

"If you still 'fail' to be admitted into 'the art world', then believe it is an old boy's or old girl's network and keep working, defending your vision as aggressively as you must. Believe that posterity will vindicate you. You won't be around to be disappointed if it doesn't."

Image 16

Erato Adrift
1999
clay, underglaze
glaze
27 x 49 x 31 cm



DIARY ENTRY 5: To Art or Not to Art?

It's easier to connect through writing, in some ways. Take written poetry. It can theoretically be printed in innumerable copies and disseminated to libraries and bookstores all over the place. Many people can experience it. There is no question of whether it is the original or a copy, no technical problems associated with colour matching or the misrepresentation of scale, no need for special furniture or dedicated environments. All those who read it are potentially having the same experience. Or are they?

Think of all the conditions and variables for that to be true. For instance: what is its context? Is it being read in its 'mother tongue' or in translation? Is it in a format the reader is educated to? Is it considered 'popular' fiction or high poetry? The conditions are as complicated as those relating to images in visual art form.

Which is why I read Bachelard as meaning POETIC IMAGERY, not just not words, and not explanatory words.

REVERIE 6: The Ant and the Cicada

I am six, seven? I have just heard the fable about the ant and the cicada by I don't remember who. The ant works hard all summer while the cicada sings and when winter comes, the cicada asks to be sheltered but is refused admission into the anthill and dies in the snow. I know that ants eat cicadas; the cicada wouldn't last the winter in the anthill. The teacher (I think this is a teacher) makes it clear the point of the fable is to condemn the cicada's laziness, lack of forethought and irresponsibility. The point is that the cicada is the bad guy. She deserves to die.

I don't dare put up my hand again. I am traumatized. Secretly, I think the teacher's wrong. I think the ant is the bad guy, not because it is heartless and without charity, which it is. It enjoyed the cicada's singing all summer, it probably worked better for it, carried by the rhythm of the song and distracted by it from the monotony of its labours. But it refuses to pay the cicada for it, or even to acknowledge the cicada's work. The ant is a dirty thief hiding behind its anthill door, maybe a murderer. It should be arrested.

DIARY ENTRY 6: I'll Huff and I'll Puff....

In class, during a so-called 'critique', an expressive painter called a realist 'anal' because the realist attended to details, as if this were a crime. The realist defended herself by accusing the expressive artist of being decorative, as if this were an insult. The abstract and conceptualist artists in the class agreed that realism and expressionism are passé, as if this were true, but argued about the need for technique and skill, as if this were debatable. I wanted to go home, shut my studio door and just work, alone, in the relative peace and quiet of my imagination.

Art, like poetry, is a product of individual creativity as it processes life experience and expresses human truth. To judge a work as the students did today by its 'ism' is judgement not criticism, censorship not exchange. The comments they made were not about art, they were about politics, the kind of judgements colonialists make when they 'educate' the people they have colonized to abandon their culture and accept conversion to the colonists' beliefs and way of life. "My oneiric house is better than yours, nah, nah nahnahnah"

Paulo Freire addressed the political nature of education in his work, and reading *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* while I was doing my Diploma of Education at McGill in 1976, I understood that as a teacher especially – I subsequently taught English literature and composition at MacDonald High School in Ste Anne de Bellevue for three years - it is my responsibility to allow students to express their reality, whatever that may be. It is also my responsibility to help those who want to be artists to identify their 'where', 'why' and 'how', and become eloquent in realizing the images they perceive as a result.

Bachelard says: the imagination is never wrong, since it does not have to confront an image with an objective reality" (p. 132, *The Poetics of Reverie*).

I guess the 'right'/'wrong' thing is not about art at all but about territorialism. When they choose a medium, a style or a particular 'ism' as better than all others, artists are barricading THEIR 'oneiric house', and protecting it from the storms choice and difference create. Bachelard relates this stormy mental weather and the aggression we perceive in outside forces to the animal instincts we all share. The poetry he quotes includes legends, fairy tales and fables to which poets often allude. In this case, I think of the three little pigs and the wolf huffing and

puffing at their door, of Little Red Riding Hood thinking she's safe in Grandma's house, of the Cicada perceived by the ant as an unwelcome invader when she comes knocking at the anthill door.

There's too much huffing and puffing going on. I'd rather do the Hobbit thing. Go for a friendly visit and consider it an adventure. Come for a psychic meal in my oneiric house!

DIARY ENTRY 7: The Visit

A dream.

A Shaman is conducting a ritual by a tree. Very old, he is, but strong like rock, like wind, like fire. He looks intently at the circle of people standing around, selects me to come forward. Hesitation. Why me? I remember the longing to be picked as a teen, waiting to be invited into the game and being passed by because I was different, foreign. Now I feel suspicion, mistrust.

The Shaman is gesturing, chanting. His invitation seems sincere. More, I recognize him, or his movements, his song. They are strangely familiar to me as nothing has been this long while. I realize he speaks the language I speak when I sleep but which I don't understand when I awake. It doesn't matter that I've forgotten the meaning of his words; their sense is in me, their truth is in me; my eyes see him and my inner sight perceives him, revealing his presence in my past.

A wave of familiarity washes over me, I am comforted as if I have dived into the ocean of my childhood, the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Brazil. All resistance washed away, I move forward, am caught by strong arms and laid gently on the ground.

I am aware of the people standing around, watchers. There is a veil of something between us, a diaphanous otherness, a distance. They fade, and disappear. The Shaman is asking me a question; my eyes are drawn to him. His are smiling. I nod. I feel his dance. Drifting, drifting, I hear the song that is swelling in my feet: mulhé, mulhé rendeira, mulhé, mulhé renda...

When my eyes open, I think I am awake. The watchers are gone. The Shaman is gone. A dream? I stand. I am standing in a stream, my bare feet tapping an eager rhythm on the rocks. An old woman is there; her fingers and toes are roots, her hair green moss. She helps me pack

by lifting things onto my back. My shoulders hurt, my back hurts, my knees hurt, but not as my heart hurt before the Shaman. I think: my bones are mountains, my blood rivers, my guts the deep caverns where the mutations of my transplanted life hide. My heart's wounds are the openings from which they may escape into the light. My dance will lure them out.

There is much to take. There are no clothes among the things we pack onto my back, only the rocks, stones, veined and coloured, heavy but fragile. They are things of sustenance and creation as I begin my journey. It is my joy to carry them. I am telling the woman I can carry more such weight on my back when the alarm sounds.

Education begins at home. How to do this without forgetting I am keeping my teacher's eye as open as my artist's? Perhaps by using the immigrant's, and, co-incidentally the artist's best weapon: transformation (assimilation is not inevitable, resistance is not futile; it just needs to be devious) Shamanism and what North Americans identify as 'witchcraft' are, after all, part of my narrative and philosophical heritage.

IMAGE 17:

Trinity
2004
original images
colour photo collage
30.5 x 23 cm



REVERIE 7: Time is of the Essence

Learning. I'm supposed to be learning, but my tutor is getting very impatient with me. She's not mean, but I can feel she's frustrated. I want to learn. I'm trying, but she keeps asking me trick questions. Oh, no, she's starting from the beginning again!

"The small hand, the short hand, tells THE HOUR', she says, and I add:

"The thinnest hand is called La Trotteuse in French, because it trots around the clock face to count the seconds", I like that, I see a little elf running like crazy to pass each little number: 3, 4, 5, 6....

"Claudine! Pay attention. You forgot the Minute Hand." I look at her, contrite. "So", she says, "what Time is it?" I've been dreading that question. I look at the clock face; I watch that poor little second hand running eternally, the responsibility of keeping time chasing her like a monster.

"I don't know", I say.

Now my tutor is exasperated. "Ok", she says and stands up. I think she's going to leave, tell my mother I'm too dumb to learn. Then she seems to think of something. She turns to me. "What is it exactly you don't understand?" she asks.

"How can I read time on this clock when Time doesn't exist?" I finally dare ask back.

She stares at me for a long time. She opens her mouth, closes it again. She sits down beside me. There is silence. "Well", she says finally, "We PRETEND to tell time".

"Oh, well" I say, "in that case, it's..."

DIARY ENTRY 8: The Trouble with Difference

I am left-handed.

That caused me a world of problems. Learning to tie shoelaces when my teacher was right-handed. That was one. I still have trouble getting the bow to hold. Another was having my arm tied behind my back during writing class and being forced to use my right. I learned to use it, all right, except I wrote upside down and backward with it. If I was a Devil child because I was left-handed, imagine the impression writing upside down and backwards made. A third was

always getting cut, or sprained, or sore, because all the tools, from scissors to pencil sharpeners, were for right-handed people. Another: I could never find the light switches when I walked into a dark room, not until I stopped and thought about it.

It goes on and on.

The best? I was rarely picked for sports teams; at least until they remembered I was from Brazil. I finally got to play goalie for the boy's soccer team for a while, the logic being that as a Brazilian person I must be a great player, whatever my sex. Thank you Pél ! In gratitude, I defended that goal with Latin fervour and became 'one of the guys', to the envy of the other girls.

I thought: if my strength is Brazilian then, why am I trying to 'be' Canadian??

Image 18

Pining for Carmen
2004
original images
colour photo collage
30.5 x 23 cm



REVERIE 8: Thrown to the Wolves

There is this memory: I am twelve. I have been in Canada two months. I speak ten words in English because I have learned to count to ten yet inexplicably, I am in an English school. I am standing at the blackboard chalk in hand. Teacher is mad at me for doing my division 'wrong', not like the example on the board but inverted, in the European way. It's because I'm trying to point out the mistake she's made in her example, and don't yet know the 'Canadian' way to divide. I do my calculation, underlining the answer I calculated, but all she sees is my insubordination. She's talking loudly at me in English; I can tell she's REALLY mad, her face has gone red and it's all puckered in a frown. She will not look at my answer, will not understand what I'm trying to communicate though I point and point. The rest of the class is silent; the other students might as well not exist.

In absolute frustration, I mutter 'Merde!' under my breath. Of all the things she hears and understands, she has to hear and understand that. I am a shy, insecure kid. I am mortified. The principal is called in; a short, dark-haired woman accompanies him. I imagine myself in the kind of windowless, locked closet the principal at my school in Brazil used to discipline bad children. They stand before me. The dark-haired woman touches my arm gently. She says: "Tu parle français?" She speaks French! And she points out the teacher's mistake to her when I breathlessly explain. All I can do is fling myself at her and hug her tight like a drowning person hugs a buoy.

While my teacher finally understands I wasn't being 'bad', when I go home that afternoon, all I want to do is lock myself in my room and visualize myself at home in Brazil. I float in its warm, embracing ocean, I lie among its scented, colourful flowers, I feel the sun on my skin. Again, there is nothing of 'home' in language.

DIARY ENTRY 9: Wordless

In the Poetics of Reverie, Bachelard couples the poetic expression born of reverie with remembering in one's mother tongue. His is French, and its gender specific objects – a river is

feminine (p.30) and for him it relates to the currents of life. What is my mother tongue? How do I think?

My mother's tongue wasn't mine. She spoke French and Ladino. Neither was my father's. His were Italian and Arabic, I think, though he too spoke French. In fact, both my parents spoke to my brother and me in French when we lived in Brazil, we answered in Brasileiro, or Brazilian Portuguese. A person educated in France French thinks differently than one educated and living in Brasileiro. There is a level of communication that doesn't seem to happen: I often felt there were things I was told, or was it the way I was told, that I wasn't understanding as they were meant. When I consider there was also Arabic and Italian in my house, which I didn't speak but which my parents spoke often between themselves, it gets a little complicated. Then we came to Canada, to Quebec. My brothers and I went to English schools, in our neighbourhood we were surrounded by Italian and Québécois, at home my parents spoke to us in what turned out to be 'the wrong' French for Quebec....

That memory triggers another. The first teacher I remember with affection is deaf and mute. I can see him as if he's standing before me, his hair plastered to his face, his lean, wiry body in its sopping shorts-as-bathing suit, his big, open smile, his dancing eyes. He's standing by the pool, inviting my older brother and me to dive in. My excitement makes my belly itch.

He is one of my swimming instructors when I am what, seven or eight, and living in Brazil. He shows my older brother and I the strokes and the forms by swimming and diving for us, both in and out of the water. He shows us that: inattentiveness + unengaged energy + sloppy alignment = awkward (comical) movement, compromised speed, possible danger (as in injury or death). Alertness + careful alignment + engaged energy = graceful movement, harmony with the water, safety and enjoyment.. He helps us find the best movement for our bodies by gentle, suggestive touch: We learn by paying attention, seeing details, feeling difference. No word is ever exchanged, or needed.

The second teacher I remember is the wood carver in my father's cabinet-making shop, though he isn't a teacher in the conventional sense of that word. He is Native Brazilian. He uses his knife to form the sculpted wood elements for the cabinets my father designs. This is an

impression my father confirms when I ask him for confirmation. I'm sorry I don't see him clearly, but the feeling of him is strong in my sense of myself.

What I remember is his relationship with both his tool and his material. It is magical. He doesn't need to explain what he feels or thinks, or describe it as he works. Watching him, I can feel his love for the wood, his respect for his long knife, his reverence for the process in which he is engaged. This, I learn, is what gives life, or meaning, to his product, both as a merging of cultures – the loincloth-wearing Brazilian Indio wielding a killing knife to delicately carve French Provincial legs for a television cabinet - and as an expression of his relationship to the world.

I think: they taught me that it's a question of passion and the dedication to become as eloquent as possible **WHITH YOUR HANDS AND BODY** if you are to be an artist, and a question of attentiveness and receptivity if you are the learner or the audience. They trusted their knowledge and their skill. They trusted the process. They trusted the product. They trusted me to have the respect to be attentive, receptive and responsive.

So this: if my oneiric house is my studio and my poetic reverie is my art, then my 'mother tongue' is imaging.

Image 19:

Crossroads Ahead

1999

talca body clay, underglazes, glazes

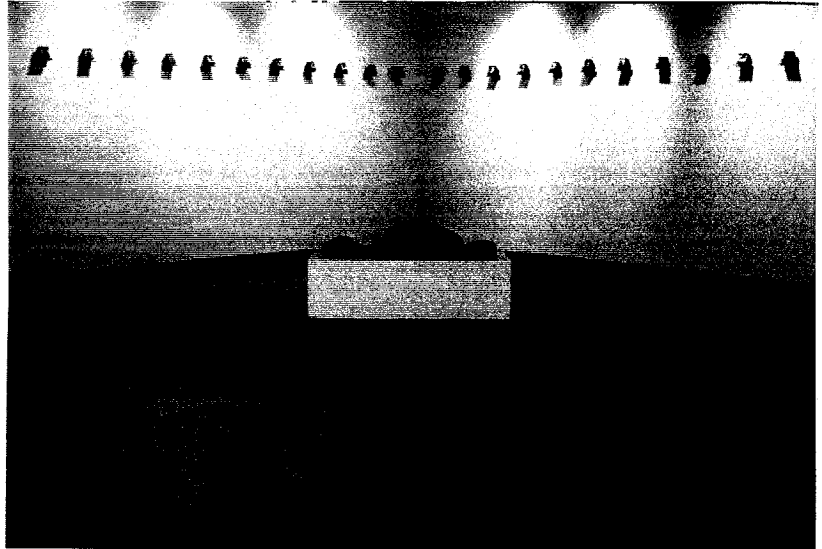
41.5 x 28.5 x 28 cm



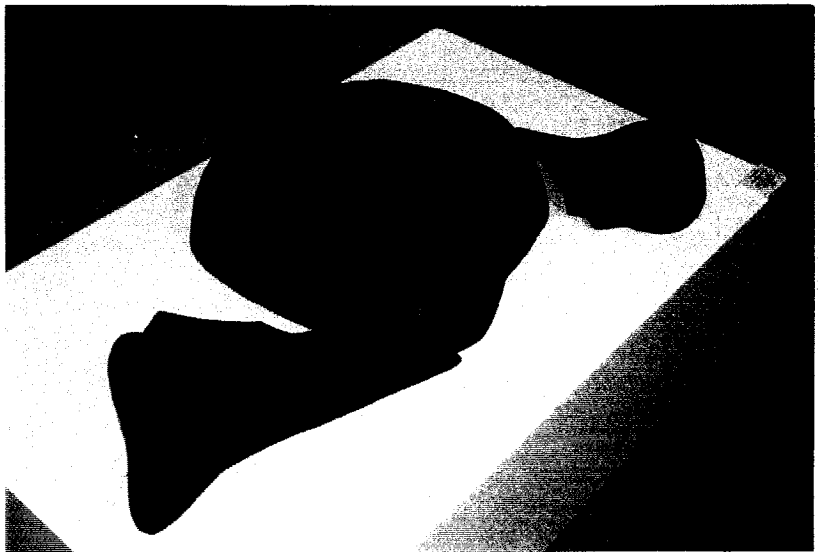
IMAGE 20

Landscape with Clocks
1999, assemblage 51 pieces
talc body clay, underglazes, glazes

Installed
244 x 488 x 488 cm



Detail 1:
clay figure:
in three parts
112x82x46 cm



Detail 2:
24 clay 'clocks'
on 'shelves'
each 15x15x10 cm



DIARY ENTRY 10: Bearing Witness

I keep taking note of what happens when I limit my criticism of artwork to an interpretative response, as does Bachelard to the poems he reads. It is non-judgemental and it relates to the 'pure' effect the evolving work has in terms of meaning, not on comparative or judgemental aesthetic or technical terms.

As both teacher and curator, I keep setting up situations where I assume, and I encourage others to assume, that whatever is in the work, good or bad, successful or not, is part of the intent of the artist, that everything I see is there because the artist must have it there that exact way. There are no 'mistakes', no 'failures'; the image I see is the result of the artist's rendering of an inner vision, my role is to describe what I see, what it makes me think of and how it makes me feel, and to lead artists (students) to describe and compare that to how they feel and think about it. I don't judge or impose, I respond, and let the artist to whom I speak decide whether what I describe and respond to is what was intended or wanted.

Image 21

Lover's Touch
2000
coloured pencil on paper
76.5 x 56.5 cm



REVERIE 9: A Journey

I am cleaning house. It is a house dedicated to my new life, the one in which I am not an immigrant, a high school teacher, a dancer, a writer or a set designer, but in which I am an artist, all those things combined and more. This is more my true self than any of my other selves were, and in this house, with my studio, my kiln and all my tools and boxes of clay in the basement, I am at last at home. But the upstairs it is messy. In clearing it, I've opened this closet and found the old trunk. It's not been opened for so long I don't remember what it contains.

I pull the trunk out. It has an old leather smell, heavy and somnolent. I untie the stiff leather strap circling it, unlatch the metal clasps and lift the lid. The trunk is full of dolls, lying one atop the other, their faces upturned, their eyes closed. As I gaze at them, I am swept by a wave of...what is it I am feeling? It is as though the tuner on an old radio is being turned at high speed, at maximum loudness, so that what the speakers emit is a crackle and spit of overlapping sounds.

I feel a hundred emotions in one split second, not one fixed or still long enough for me to know what it is or when it comes from. This lasts a barely perceptible moment, and then slows. It is followed by a moment of disorientation, when I move through multiple realities simultaneously, as though in slow motion. I take a deep breath and reach into the trunk to touch the topmost doll. The finger I touch breaks off.

I stand up suddenly, the blood rushes to my head. Leaving the trunk as it is, I walk out of the room to pace the hall. I need more distance. I go down to the kitchen and prepare a cup of coffee. I sit there, thinking. I can't physically see the trunk, but its image fills my mind. What do the dolls inspire other than the specific memory of myself receiving them, playing with them, packing them for the move from one continent to another, one familiar world to an alien one, forgetting them?

Dolls are not meant to lie forgotten. They are meant to live in the child's house, her companions. Outside that house, what can they be but ambassadors to the adult's world?

I think that for me now, it's not the dolls in themselves that have meaning. I know that socially, for girls of my generation anyway, they are meant as training, the baby doll, the bride

doll, they are also pretend children, trainers for the adult mother-to-be. The training was lost on me; I became not a mother but an artist. Neither do I experience them nostalgically. They resemble corpses to me now, corpses decaying in a coffin. Or are they mummies? Relics of a past based on hopes or on beliefs long since discredited and abandoned?

I have no answers, but I have images.

Image 22::

Virtual Madonna,
2001

Lullaby

First Step

Watchful Eye:

coloured pencil on paper

each 112 x 76.5 cm

Wish:

wire, 59 x 44 x 36 cm



DIARY ENTRY 11: Coping Mechanism

The creative writer's dictum is: "write about what you know". Why are visual artists taught technique and meaning, process and product separately, then sent out into a world that judges the work by a fixed aesthetic? Why was I taught that expressiveness itself IS meaning, "the medium is the message", that my material and my gesture are more important than who and what I am and what I know and think? Writers have used lived experience, self-observation and self-examination extensively to access authentic experience for the purpose of creation, something not taught or discussed in the visual arts during my artistic education. I automatically transferred research methods proper to fiction writing practices to conduct my search for two and three-dimensional imagery.

Not that I did this consciously. I have always been interested in the human psyche, and in the movements created by our inner realities. I wanted my artwork to be based on 'body' and 'mind', in it, to pit 'real' space, as I understood it, against 'inner' 'space, as I visualized it. To do that, I needed the same level of knowledge of body I had as a dancer, the same level of understanding of space I had as a set designer, but as someone who draws, paints and sculpts.

I cannot describe the level of frustration I experienced when the knowledge I wanted was nowhere to be learned in Montreal. I swore that 'when' I taught art, it would not be by the demeaning of any medium, subject or style.

I had no money for models. Throughout my life, and privately during university, I posed for myself to learn to render the human body. That practice began for purely practical reasons: the act of physical self-examination for the purpose of self-teaching human anatomy. I was particularly interested in being able to create living faces with animated eyes, the single most difficult thing when creating 'people' in art. I wanted as well to learn to give movement to my figurative clay sculptures, both physical and emotional. Before I knew it, I was creating autobiographical work.

The problem is that you can't see the back of the body when you model for yourself. A dilemma. No money for models and big gaps in my knowledge. What to do? I know, I thought in 1987: I'll offer to teach a sculpting the model class and learn as I teach. Brilliant!

There was an amazing side effect. I've never considered models as visual objects or simply as subjects. I think of them as people collaborating with me through their poses to help me create my images. I encourage them to talk about themselves before and after posing, to ask questions, to participate in discussions and critiques with me. Doing this in my classes as well, I discovered that the images students create gain dimension for them. Suddenly, their images have meaning beyond that of a class exercise.

DIARY ENTRY 12: Accepting 'Artist'

There is a place on Tunnel Mountain in Banff National Park, not far from the Banff Centre for the Arts where I sit to just be. I used to do so physically, now I do it in reverie. I learned there how to do that. Not by effort. It's not by design that mystics end up sitting on mountaintops; they are drawn to the heights. Rather than feel dwarfed or insignificant faced with the majesty, power and eternity of mountains, I imagine mystics feel as I do: time ceases to exist, self ceases to be confined by ego or narcissism, skin expands, as if being is the totality of sky, mountain, ground and person, in the form of birds, animals, plants, trees, rocks, waters, and human being, sitting there embraced. It's the most amazing feeling; it's truly feeling 'at home' in the world.

At the center itself, where I was a studio artist in the ceramic department from 1983 to 1985 (exceptionally), I learned to come to a similar level of calm. It's remarkable. The environment was partly responsible. I worked facing a wall of windows, the Rocky Mountains rising before me, the glorious light playing with forms and carving out details, herds of majestic elk grazing lazily on the lawn just outside.

But mostly, it was the personal contact I had with a large variety of professional artists from many different disciplines, visual arts, film, music, theater, electronics, that created that feeling of expansion, of belonging. How many came to my studio, looked at and responded to my art, engaged in exchanges with me? It was incredible. They did this as equals, with no reason other than to respond and exchange.

It's not just being in a studio, making work for intense periods of time, and expressing whatever that makes you an artist. It's also knowing that you are part of a continuum, that there is a movement in and out, an ebbing and flowing of energy, not between you and the world but IN you as part of the world. There is nothing like the experience of being an artist among artists to make you feel that.

Is it possible to create such an environment in the 'regular' world? I never experienced this until Banff. How can I make my students experience it?

Image 23

Asrai Lost
2004
coloured pencil
on paper
56.5 x 76.5 cm



REVERIE 10: Historias Maravillosas

I'm looking at the picture of Shirley Temple Black on the back of the album cover I'm holding. It is the record of the Historias Maravillosas Bendix. I am transported back to the 1950's, when the Bendix Company (I see washing machines) sponsored a television series dedicated to the re-enactment of fables, legends and fairy tales. The adult Shirley Temple, minus her curls and tap shoes, was its hostess. Human actors played the heroes and heroines, monsters and

villains. The special affects were theatrical then, but I remember them as easily equal to the best of today's computer generated ones.

An image lingers more vividly than others: A girl sits on her knees by a huge, seemingly endless lake. She/I stare with horror at the perforated spoon the evil witch has given her/us after telling her/us the only way to lift the curse is to empty the lake of water.

DIARY ENTRY 13: Transformation

Imagine my surprise. I am far from any kind of Celtic. Yet I came across this:

ASRAI: According to Brian Froud and Alan Lee (1978), "the Asrai are small and delicate female faeries who melt away into a pool of water when captured or exposed to sunlight."

Transformation is the best survival strategy, but to be so fragile as to melt away altogether? Does the Asrai regain her form once the danger is past or is she gone forever? I think of the displaced person, the alienated person I became as an immigrant. My entire concept of who I was melted away when the plane that brought me landed on the new territory. It is in rebuilding a connection, creating new memories, finding common ground, learning a new language and to adapt to completely new environment that I realized I could communicate most directly through images.

I recently went on a tour of a friend's home town. We saw the house her parents lived in when she was born, the church where she was baptized, the school she went to, and we drove around the streets she navigated as a child, while she remembered the influence these fundamentally unchanged places and the experiences she had there had on her character and on her life.

That's what I do when I exhibit my work. That is my way to visit 'home' with friends, to express my origins and my configurations as a human being. Perhaps the original motivation for my art was that I can't travel to Egypt and find my roots there, those who have moved in since I left have destroyed most of its strands. If my Brazil still exists, it does so in my art as well.

Image: 24

The Magic Carpet,

2004

Anima, Seeker, Animus:

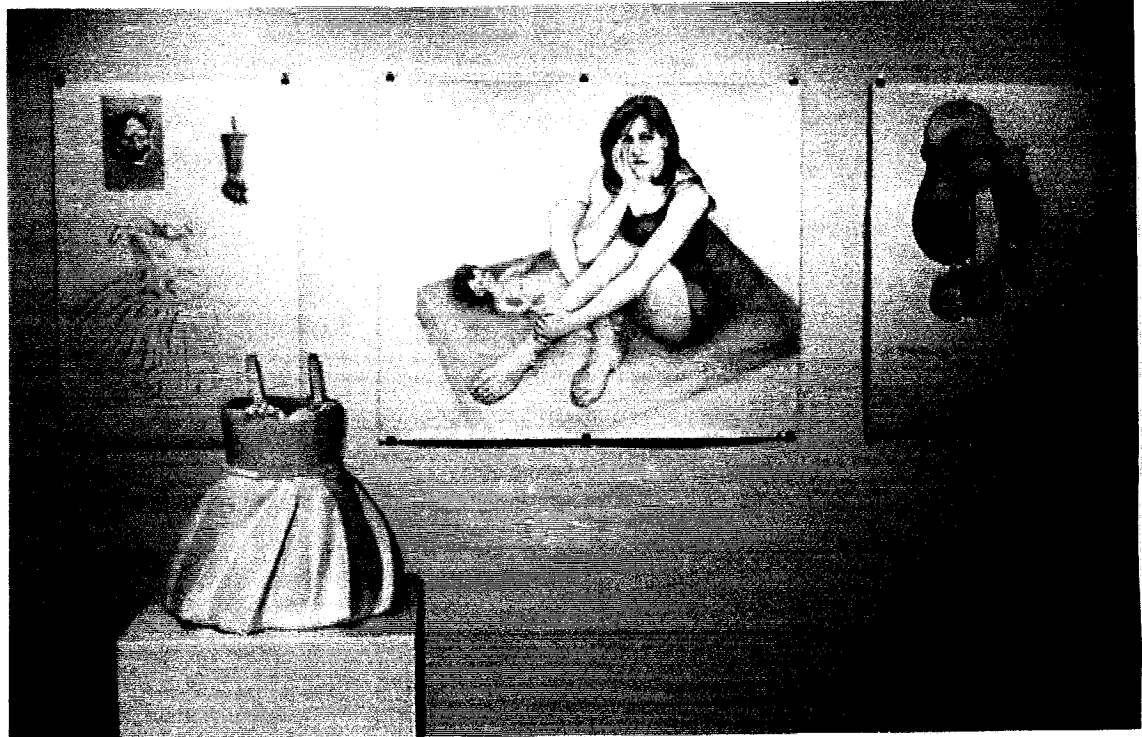
coloured pencil on paper

91x61 cm, 91x107 cm, 91x61 cm,

Dancer

talc body clay

41 x 41 x 41 cm



Detail Description:

Drawing 1:

Japanese porcelain devil mask

Figa (Brazilian good luck hand
with crossed fingers)

child's ballet dress

Drawing 2:

bride doll

woman seated on blue mat

Drawing 3:

Gaicho saddle on stand

cua (Matte cup)

cua spoon

Sculpture:

child's ballet dress

DIARY ENTRY 14: Process

I've been sitting staring at these old photographs. Pictures of me as an eight or nine year old, gangly legged and full of energy, pictures of the dolls in the trunk I opened recently. Strange. These pictures of a person and the objects pictured in them are already saturated with meaning. I don't have to do anything to or with them for that to be true. Why 'translate' these things into something that might be called 'art' when they already have a life on all kinds of levels, as images, as history, as social constructs, as representations, as concepts, even aesthetically. Why not simply place these artefacts themselves in a case, as they do all precious objects, and let them be as evocative as viewers will allow them to be? What do I want from them?

As I gaze upon these pictures, I realize it's the relationship that child had to the dolls, to all the meaningful objects in her life, that matters. It isn't 'the picture' or 'the object' I am looking at that I see. I see the distance between that child who was I and the adult that I am – thanks to the picture she is in fact brought forward to my time/place as I am transported back to hers. It is the energy linking objects, time, place, promise, memory, and us together that generates the images I seek.

Image 25:

Homeland
2004
coloured pencil
on paper
107 x 91 cm



Image 26:

The Conjurers

2004

coloured pencil on paper
91 x 107 cm



Image 27

And I, Artist

2004

original images
colour photo collage
30.5 x 23 cm



Images 28 to 34

Conjurer's Dance

Performance: April 21, 2004

Exhibition: Reverie

Galerie de la Ville

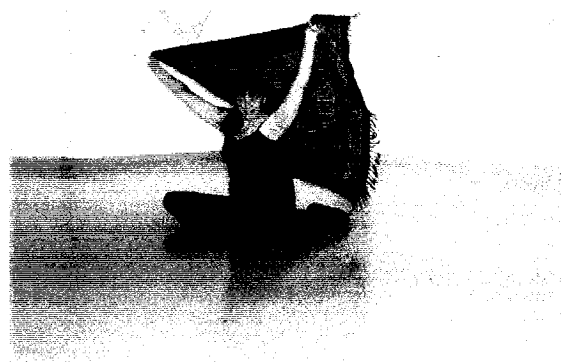
Music:

Egberto Gismonti,

Nana Vasconcelos:

Duas Voces, Side Two

Duration: approx. 20 minutes



REVELATIONS

In the end, the clear, broad themes of my life this poetic work has churned up are these: disconnection, difference, isolation, time, integration, reconciliation and transformation. The major influences: magic, story telling, learning, art, and 'place', or lack thereof.

These experiences have also broadly influenced me as an educator. My life as a learner (student, immigrant, other) has made me deeply aware of the responsibility of the 'teacher'. I am especially concerned with the terrible effect generalization and quantification have on education when these are given primary rather than auxiliary importance. This especially in the arts where time must stand still (let the Trotteuse catch her breath!) and the mind be allowed to delight in, but not worship, what the intellect would dismiss as incredible or impossible. To me, teaching THROUGH art is the greatest delusion if it is posited "as good as" teaching art because it comes too close to manipulation and propaganda.

Artists have, of course, a vision coloured with the hues of their experiences: they take social or political stances, represent their attitudes or beliefs, or express their views through their imagery. This is inevitable. It is the power of imagery to do so, whether artists intend it or not. However, by rendering images as artists, rather than as teachers, colonizers, proselytizers, advertisers or others with an agenda, they share their impressions rather than present them as templates or molds. I believe, like Bachelard, that this type of personal interpretation is our most direct access to the hidden meanings of our lives.

CHAPTER 3: THE NEIGHBOURS

BACHELARD, POETIC REVERIE AND THE OUTWARD GAZE

In Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* and *The Poetics of Reverie*, he describes the phenomenon of poetic reverie as the psychic source of revelatory associative imaging, and places the action of giving form to these images (creation) in the womb-like environment of the oneiric house. The poet forms these images through words that become guides for readers willing to enter into the oneiric house through their own images of 'home' or 'self' to discover the philosophical meanings housed there.

In *The Poetics of Space* he writes:

"First of all, these old houses can be drawn – we can make a representation that has all the characteristics of a copy. An objective drawing of this kind, independent of any daydreaming, is a forceful, reliable document that leaves its mark...

"But let this exteriorist representation manifest as an art of drawing, or a talent for representation, and it becomes insistent, inviting. Merely to judge it as a good, well executed likeness leads to contemplation and daydreaming. Daydreams return to inhabit an exact drawing and no dreamer ever remains indifferent for long to a picture of a house.

" Long before the time when I began to read poetry every day, I had often said to myself that I should like to live in a house such as one sees in old prints. I was most attracted by the bold outlines of the houses in woodcut prints which, it seemed to me, demanded simplicity. Through them, my daydreams inhabited the essential house."(ps 48, 49)

The technical demands of the woodcut printing process, even as it represented a real object, created a version of a familiar image that inspired Bachelard to set off on a personal journey of exploration of the house as a poetic image. This in turn led him to contemplate the poetic imaging process as a psychic phenomenon that leads to creative thinking and the perception of meaning. In Bachelard's experience, the actualized image, the one that gave form to the images perceived by the artist's inner eye, set the poet/philosopher in contemplative motion.

If I, a visual artist who renders images in media, had written the above, it would have read thus:

First of all, people can be drawn – we can make a representation that has all the characteristics of a portrait. An objective drawing of this kind, independent of any daydreaming,

is a forceful, reliable document that leaves its mark. But let this exteriorist representation manifest as an art of drawing, or a talent for representation, and it becomes insistent, inviting. Merely to judge it as a good, well-executed likeness leads to contemplation and daydreaming. Daydreams return to inhabit an exact drawing and this dreamer never remains indifferent for long to a picture of a person. Long before the time when I began to make art every day, I had often said to myself that I knew the people in the art I looked at. I was most attracted by the fact that they were never quite solid, which, it seemed to me, demanded complicity. Through them, my daydreams inhabited the essential humanity; the body as image of the essential house.

I engage with the work of seven artists who 'draw' people from the perspective of their oneiric house', that is, these artists use 'the portrait' to represent 'self' as a philosophical being who inhabits their world, but whom I recognize as also inhabiting mine. My relationship with this type of imaging is rooted in my own life experience. My work in theater, where 'character' is central, in dance, where the moving, living body is the vehicle, and in creative writing, where the onus is on knowing experience from the inside and the purpose to show rather than tell, have directed my attention to 'the person' as the 'home' of my images.

My work with models has had the same effect. It proved impossible for me to ignore people who sat for me, to consider them simply as a grouping of formal elements or only as a springboard for my ideas. Like the people who inhabit the work of the six artists to whom I refer, my models collaborate with me in the creation of my image by bringing their personalities, their realities and the life pulsing through their veins to the process.

OF JOE FAFARD, VAN GOGH AND ANIMA(LS)

I am looking at a picture of *Régine*, 1986 (Graham, 1996, p. 63) by Canadian sculptor Joe Fafard. She is an in-the-round bronze cow I met during a visit to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1996. She is a character. Or this sculpture expresses her character. Or it expresses Fafard's relationship to her as a character. I am led to see character in her gaze, in her stance. I inhabit Fafard's eyes as he looks fondly, intimately at her, as he remembers her, his gaze and

his memory taken out of linear time, out of the specific place in which contact occurred by the sculpture, by the sculpture in the museum, by the photograph of the sculpture in the catalogue, by my memory of her as experienced through a sculpture.

She stands, all four legs planted, interrupted in her movement, distracted from her business. She looks to the side. "What?" her gaze asks. It communicates that she'll not tolerate interference for long. She is inhabited by energy, suspended in time and captured in a glance. She is not fearful: her eyes communicate familiarity for she is in a known place, her territory, she is being seen by a trusted friend, not me but Fafard. Through his sculpture, I become the recipient of that gaze, of that trust. By her presence in the gallery, in the museum, in the city, she makes them her territory; I become her territory as well.

In my memory of my meeting with her, and with Fafard through her, I am in a Museum. I am looking at a Sculpture. I can think 'Cow'. Looking at her I can intellectualize her as a symbol of the consumed animal, conceptualize her as sustenance, as nurturing nature, as 'Mother'. However, her gaze, her representation in that stance, her very presence as an individual challenge me to even try reducing her from her personality and from herself.

She is safe; she is a milk cow, she can afford to be so superior. Not *Arthur*, 1988 (ibid, p. 66), a compressed bronze calf. He's got a similar stance, but he is a baby, stopped in his movement by something new, something curious, maybe dangerous. His large eyes convey a readiness for fear, a preparation for fun: he's ready to flee but willing to play. Little does he suspect that he, future bull, is in mortal danger. The very compression of his sculpted body suggests the compressed life he is destined to live. But the danger does not come from Fafard. Nor from me: I am not a carnivore, though, as a viewer, I am a 'consumer'. I was he, I was a child once, I know that place he inhabits between innocence and experience, that place before mistrust or cynicism. He takes me back to it.

At any rate, he too is safe now, safe forever. People can't eat bronze, though they can melt it.

So it's an illusion that bronze is more durable than clay, though clay is more obviously fragile. I look at Fafard's clay Van Goghs. A crowd of them gazing at me but seeing only

themselves, a single entity existing over time and place as interpreted by Fafard contemplating self-obsession, alienation and the artist as his own subject. In *Vincent Self Portrait Series, 1982* (ibid, p.40 - 41), forty relief heads, clay, Fafard's only access to the 'other' artist is through his self-portraits, through images of a three-dimensional person but without the physical depth. These are relief sculptures of paintings of a man gazing at himself but seeing, being his art, etching himself with his brush marks, colouring himself in his emotion. It is the reverie of the gesture that describes the man's features. It is the psychic depth that matters.

Van Gogh doesn't know, can't know that he is not alone. Or does he? His gaze is a challenge, an invitation, if one dares. Fafard is with him. I am with him. I have been the person staring at an image of myself and asking, who am I, or what am I, or what if I... I have been the child repeating 'me', 'me', 'me' again and again until I disappear and am replaced by a crowd of alternative 'me's, each an image of a feeling or thought or self-reflection. The changes wrought by life: fascinating.

I look at the flatness, this reduction of sculpture not only to 'relief', but also from three actual dimensions to two actual and one compressed dimension. This movement over Fafard's career, gradually translating mass to line, form to shape, full body to bold outlines, so much like Bachelard's 'bold outlines of the houses in woodcut prints' that attracted him. Fafard's move is from 'realism' of form to realism of feeling. I can walk around the figures but I can't get lost in the three-dimensionality of the form and forget that gaze, animal's, person's, artist's. It's my gaze now.

OF LUCIAN FREUD AND THE 'TRANSCENDENTAL GEOMETRY' OF FLESH

In *The Poetics of Space*, considering the seashell as a perfect product of 'transcendental geometry' (p, 105), Bachelard says: 'the created object itself is highly intelligible; and it is the *formation*, not the form, that remains mysterious' (p. 106). Of this carefully observed, deeply contemplated object, a spiral house built from the inside out, he says it 'turns out to be so beautiful, so deeply beautiful, that it would be a sacrilege to dream of living in it.' (p. 107)

There is a dilemma to looking at Lucian Freud's paintings of nudes, his portraits, and scenarios. It is easy to look at them as 'Art': beautifully executed, impeccably composed, connected to the history of Art but communicating a contemporary sensibility, cool, unflinching. But they are at the same time almost painfully intimate and revealing. Their forms, tones, gestures and textures bespeak a passion too intensely sensual to be intellectualized. Looking at the sprawling women with their heavy breasts and open legs, the reclining, flaccid men, the up-close portraits and the disturbingly posed, strangely intimate interior scenes is like having the audacity, and pleasure, of touching them.

These paintings protect themselves behind technique but flaunt their living energy. Through them, Freud expresses the reality of living in flesh, flesh that pulses with blood, flexible, living flesh that can adapt and contain all of life's experiences. His bodies are so comfortable in their human perfection that they can display their Art-defying imperfections with abandon: big, laden bodies, tired, lined faces, vulnerability, business-like stiffness, overflowing masses, anxiety, anger, jutting bones, challenge (could Egon Schiele - 1890-1918 - be a psychic sibling, an artistically bulimic older brother, perhaps?).

There is *Naked Girl and Egg*, 1980 (Hughes, 2000, p.64). She is lying on a bed, on top of the sheets. She is posed (exposed) sleeping there, perhaps she fell asleep from the exhaustion of holding that pose, of waiting to be built up brushstroke by brushstroke on the canvas. Her twist feels uncomfortable to me; I can feel my lower back burning and my right hip seizing in sympathy. If she is uncomfortable, her face doesn't communicate it in the picture of the painting. She is so 'gone' that the eggs in the bowl on the table in the left-hand corner of the painting are ignored. Her eyes are closed, though the eggs gaze at me the viewer wide-eyed and unblinking. They are ready to be consumed, as I watch the consummation of the marriage between a model and an artist: I see a woman and a man begetting a painting.

If the girl's eye had been open, I think they would have been the same eyes as those in *The Painter's Mother*, 1972 (ibid, p.46). Those eyes are lost in an internal world, conscious of the external world – the artist's world? - as a disturbance. Her lips are tight, her eyebrows knit. She would look hard but there is something vulnerable in the pallor of her skin. Is it the

vulnerability of a strong woman being softened by age or the hardening of a loving woman as she ages? It is the look her son gave her, that of an artist feeling love but trying to communicate 'art'.

She is perhaps self-conscious, posing for her son, supporting him, but cautions, afraid that he'll reveal too much, as he does in *The Painter's Mother Resting II*, 1976-77 (ibid, p,54). There, she looks at him – it's me, the viewer, not him that she mistrusts – her hands resting beside her face as she lies back. I read self-protection in that gesture (would she cover her aging face if she could?) and in her unfocused gaze I read a hint of impatience, of resentment; in the rough terrain of her skin I read the future of all the people Freud paints, including himself, *Reflection*, 1985 (ibid, p. 82).

There they are, in fact, in *Large Interior W 9*, 1973 (p. 48), mother and model together. The clothed old woman (mother) figure is modelling seated in padded armchair. She is central to the composition. Behind her, the nude young model is lying in a bed, lower body covered by a rust-coloured sheet. Her covered feet are not seen, the bed she lies on is partly in an alcove, as if she is a mollusc attached to its shell. It would seem the mother is keeping vigil but the two women don't interact, each stares into a different place, each inhabits a different space oblivious of the other.

Prominent in the foreground, pushed slightly under the older woman's chair is a large mortar and pestle. Something has been ground there, by the colour, the pigment for the old woman's dress. She, the artist's mother, is The Mother and the other woman is The Model, obviously two dominant aspects of Woman that inhabit Freud's oneiric house, aspects of the latter kept hidden from the former. They share the pictorial space, they are in fact in the same room in the oneiric house, but they are protected from each other, interacting only in that they are both modelled by the artist, himself a duality, Artist and Man living in psychic tension.

Home for the artist is the place where the elements of his life converge, co-exist. It is the place defined by the edges of the stretcher, but expanding emotionally and thoughtfully beyond it.

OF DAVID HOCKNEY AND INSIDE OUTSIDE

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard notices that: 'everything that comes out of a shell is dialectical. And since it does not come out entirely, the part that comes out contradicts the part that remains inside.' (p.108). If we live forever in our oneiric house, are we not all condemned to live half in, half out of our shell? But it's the act of 'emergence' (p. 109) that impresses or traumatizes us; the images conjured by the act of 'emerging', its impact on us.

I look at David Hockney's oil painting *Portrait of an Artist (Pool with Two Figures)*, 1972. (Livingstone and Heymer, 2003, p. 114 – 115). A man swims underwater, another stands on the pool's deck. The line that separates them is like a knife's edge, the boundary between liquid, enveloping place and solid, supporting place. One is the adventurer's domain, the other the settler's. Or one is the imaginative domain that is sustained by the inner vision, the other the emotional domain that looks outward to seek connection.

They are not indifferent to each other, these two men. The swimmer is about to touch the underwater wall of the pool at the standing man's feet; the standing man gazes from above at the swimmer's form below. But they don't acknowledge each other; there is in fact no actual connection between them, only the expectation of one. The swimmer looks down, is faceless, and because the water distorts his form, the standing man sees him diffracted, interpreted by the water. Behind them, a vast landscape waits as if at the edge of a stage, that sharp, horizontal line of the pool deck is like a proscenium apron. No breeze moves the vegetation or pushes a cloud across the sky; action is suspended on the cusp of a question.

That is the question. It's in all these early painted outsides and insides, these scenes where people feel as architectural as the structures depicted around them, where walls act like barriers, where spaces are like containment fields in which people are frozen, trapped, their stiff bodies or their backs communicating separation, or the artist's supposedly bloodless observations. What a sharp contrast there is between those and the photo collages. They have action, movement, and life, though they are fragmented, staccado rhythms. What a different world again than that of the ink, colour crayon and colour pencil drawings.

The pencil or pen point builds the image stroke by stroke, or in an unbroken, continuous gesture. The process is engagement, contemplation, even if the gesture is quick. It forces intimacy. It creates a fluid reality, full of revelation and discovery. The eyes must remain connected, the mind open, the attention focused and alert. There is no recanting or censorship, nothing is erased or corrected. The hand is loose, sure. The image breathes, whether the forms are designed *Mark, Suginoi Hotel*, 1971 (Luckhardt and Melia, 1995, plate 71), dense, *Marrakech*, 1971 (ibid, plate 77), 'incomplete' *Celia, Nude*, 1975 (ibid, plate 100) or impressionistic, *Il pleut sur le Pont des Arts*, 1974 (ibid, plate 94)

The portraits! They are done from the model, free hand. They are poetic reveries.

Hockney's gesture caresses the forms, models them organically, it is a dance between hand and eye so comfortable, so intimate that it captures the models' and express the artist's inside outside. *The Artist's Father*, 1972 (Luckhardt and Melia, 1995, plate 83), *Self Portrait 30th Sept. 1983*, 1983 (ibid, plate 128) , *Celia in Black Dress with Red Stockings*, 1973 (ibid, plate 90). *Celia Nude*, 1975, *Gregory I*, 1988 (ibid, plate 140) and *Gregory II*, 1988 (ibid, plate 139), *Stanley*, 1993 (ibid, plate 148), these images are true to that specific moment in time, that particular gesture, that configuration of energy that cannot be planned or reproduced. The focus is on the person. The areas or details suggested but not described position this person in a contemplative environment, and capture the moment when both artist and model meet outside of their shells.

OF XENIA HAUSNER AND THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard said: 'The surest sign of wonder is exaggeration' (p107).

Is Xenia Hausner's work exaggeration? She comes to painting from the theater. I know from my experience that scale and size are different in the theater than in life. The stage is a world where the every day is expanded, stretched to reach physically from up to downstage, from wing to wing, from floor to grid and visually from row to row in the house, To be seen and

felt from all the seats, front, back, loges and balconies, the set must project its meaning, not hold on to it. Unlike a painting, which the viewer can approach and experience alone and intimately, the stage is a shared experience, not only on it, by directors, actors, designers, builders, costumers, and so on, but before it, by a full house hopefully.

This is perhaps the influence in Hausner's work. I imagine the effect of scale. I have only seen her work in catalogues and in books. The figures in her images APPEAR monumental. They inhabit their canvases like larger-than-life beings. Ok, they are. Standing before them, the artist herself seems dwarfed. But it is more than physical scale. It is the power they barely contain, the energy they suspend to pose for the artist, which she captures in the strokes of her brush and in the intensity of her colour.

Forms are exaggerated, especially arms and hands in relation to faces. These are strong people, people of action. They are resting for the split second eternity of the painting. They are suspended in their then by the now of the artist's moment, a moment stretched into discomfort by the time it takes for the painting to be painted, and into eternity by materials that will outlast the sitters. Acrylics are plastic, what is their half-life?

The gaze of these strong, powerful people is fixed. They look out from the picture plane: they wait for me to see, like vogueurs, like models. Take a good look, they challenge. They are like the characters in an in-your-face play, but not at curtain call. When the curtain rises, they are waiting for me to enter their space, to settle into their reality, to establish my relationship to them. Even when they wait, when they are seated at their tables, *Rakete*, 1999 (Schmed, (ed.) 2001, p. 124 – 125), reclining, *Orient Express*, 2000 (ibid, p. 41) or posed in-situ, *Dear Assassins*, 1997 (ibid, p. 82 – 83), they exude expectation. They gaze at me intently. There is a challenge here: see me, feel me, know me, and move on.

There is theater in their poses. *Christina*, 1996 (ibid, p. 130), *Renate Anker*, 1992 (ibid, , *Let's Dance*, 1997 (ibid, p. 220), are characters in the artist's play, sometimes an allegory, *Death, Maiden, Red*, 1999 (ibid, 234) and *Death, Maiden*, 1999 (ibid, 235), sometimes a psychological thriller, *Artist Marriage*, 199 (ibid, 198 – 199), sometimes alluding to fairy tale or fable, *Kiss of Death*, 1996 (ibid, p. 204 – 205), . They are cast as swatches of bold energy and

strokes of living colour inhabiting a magnified world, hypersensitive to tactile and visual stimulation. They live in a glasshouse, or a house with three walls, a dollhouse for a giant mind and a hyperactive hand.

They take over their environment even as they blend into it. Patterns of light, patterns of colour, and patterns of form: colour is intensified; primaries lead, secondaries follow. Everything is dancing to the rhythm of the artist's vision, pulsating, alive. This is life, the ebbs and flows of human energy exaggerated in wonder.

OF WILLIAM KENTRIDGE AND COVERT ACTION

"In reality, as we shall see later, especially when we examine images of immenseness, tiny and immense are compatible. ... If a poet looks through a microscope or a telescope, he always sees the same thing"; and "Distance, too, creates miniatures at all points on the horizon, and the dreamer, faced with these spectacles of distant nature, picks out these miniatures as so many nests of solitude in which he dreams of living", says Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space*, (p. 172)

William Kentridge dreams his living. His work is a running, interlinked series of 'miniatures' capturing immensities, the spectacle of his life seen simultaneously through a microscope and a telescope. In it, he is himself the observed and the observer.

In fact, there is no distance at all in the mutating charcoal drawings and in this theater of sculptures that he captures as film, just the perpetual, relative movements of life. There is no space between the home and the artist, the artist and the image, and the viewer and the artist. Kentridge is living his world through his hands as his telescoping/magnifying eyes. There is no Time in his work either, no distance between 'then' and 'now'. His artist's gesture is no different than his human gesture, which is both poetic and incising.

In these drawings, sculptures and the films of their evolution as constantly altered and mutating images, gesture and action are one and the same. They bear witness to the events of his life as they happen, as they impact his heart, his soul and his mind. Place, man, and event

are commingled, there are no solid boundaries here, no fixed borders, and everything is in flux, reality segueing into impression into memory into emotion into reality eternally, without pause.

For the viewer as well, it is impossible to separate the image from the action from the emotion from the conscience of seeing Kentridge's work. It is, after all, a series of films of a series of moments in an ever-changing drawing of a life ever entwined in dualities. These dualities are often in conflict, sometimes mortal, always lyrical. Kentridge is South African, he is white, he is a 'successful artist' but he is rooted in the soil and brother to the 'other', Black South African. He is an Artist and a Businessman, a participant as a citizen and observer as a native son. He is a lover and a witness, a protester and a collaborator; his life is a dance between complicity and isolation, elation and despair.

The images as they are recorded in catalogues as 'drawings' and in stills are remarkable. The originals are made with charcoal, a material created from the death of living wood, its immolation in fire. The process of working the charcoal is essential to the images. It is a compressed but powdery substance that leaves black traces when pulled across a surface but which must be pressed and rubbed for it to cling, in this case to paper. Erasing, rubbing, spreading, each gesture leaves its trace, a ghost image of what went before remains in shades of grey, like memory spans the distance between then and now, and emotion rubs and compresses experience

A feeling of sadness, of melancholy shadows the work because of these after-images, these traces. Home is home, but there is no safety even in the oneiric space, it is full of apparitions.

In charcoal, figures can be drawn, reshaped, transformed, erased, the space they occupied can be reclaimed, re-defined, as people can be born, labelled 'other', killed, buried, forgotten, but they are ever there, ever present in conscience, in heart, reabsorbed by the land. Watch *History of the Main Complaint*, 1996, watch *Felix in Exile*, 1994, watch *Sobriety, Obesity and Growing Old*, 1991. (Tappeiner and Wulf, 1999), Kentridge creates miniatures at all points on the human horizon, personal, racial, social, national, environmental, and by so doing recreates the immensity that is 'life'.

My reality segues in and out of his as I watch his work. I live in Canada, but I grew up in Brazil. The parallels of life and death, insider, outsider, authority and citizen are striking.

OF ALICE NEEL AND THE AESTHETIC OF HOME

In *The Poetics of Reverie*, Bachelard speaks of the polarity between anima and animus. He focuses not of the conflict traditionally perceived between male and female aspects of 'self', but on the separation between the masculinity of thought and the femininity of reverie. He does this to "accentuate the separation ... between the rationalism of scientific thought and a philosophical mediation on the aestheticizing values of human nature" (p. 90)

I see Alice Neel's work as reflecting her attempt to equalize the flow between 'masculine' and 'feminine' energies on many levels. First, there is the balance between 'rational' and 'interpretative' polarities. Her work is poised between the formal qualities of traditional, realist art, studied, controlled, planned, and the inventions, improvisations and interpretations of expressive art that focuses on living in the moment.

In *Faith Ringgold, 1977* (Carr, 2002, plate 67), front and back of the seated figure are voluptuously formed but not set in space; they exist on the same plane. The shod feet are poking out below the hem of her red dress, but the distance between knee and ankle is compressed. The effect is of a comfortable person, a thinker, an impression accentuated by the sketched quality of the small hands and the contrast in treatment between them and the carefully rendered, exquisitely modelled face.

The interaction between such meaningful distortions in the sitters' bodies and in their environments, and the sensitivity of the faces and expressions can be seen in all Neel's work. There are the long, disproportionably thin arms of *Louise Lieber, 1971* (ibid, plate 84), the slightly skewed perspective of *Nancy, 1981*, and her chair (ibid, plate 70), the sketched environments of *Isabel Bishop, 1974* (ibid, plate 63), *Marilyn Symmes, 1981* (ibid, plate 69) and *Self Portrait, 1980* (ibid, plate 125)

Alice Neel is a painter, usually a portraitist. She is also a wife and mother. These two roles are equally polarized in her time and place: in her environment, they are perceived as conflicting, mutually exclusive. Her place as a wife and mother is in the home, not her studio. Irony upon irony: her home IS her studio. She poses her friends, lovers, colleagues and family members in her living spaces, on her furniture, conjoining her roles, defeating the opposition between artist and woman, and between model and friend.

She also redefines 'beauty', that bastion of rational aesthetics. She creates what I call the irrational aesthetic. Far from depicting reality through the academic, objective eye, she has interjected her fears, phobias, idiosyncrasies and complexities into her images. Through the "uglification" (my word) of the image by way of distortion, the uncorrected 'mistake', and the mixing of stylized and sketched elements with more defined, examined elements, she brings herself into the portraits of those she portrays.

How better to communicate the condition of being an artist, in her case, a wife and mother who does not isolate being an artist from the fabric of her daily life, than by allowing the constraints of working – no time to plan or correct, must act without much room to spare, in complete trust in technique and vision, no second-guessing and judgement. At any rate, she co-opts friends and colleagues to pose for her, they fill the role of model admirably, if perhaps limited by the duration of a visit or two. This is a balanced reality.

OF PAULA REGO AND THE ALLEGORY OF LIFE

There is the personal story. Paula Rego was born and grew in Portugal, she studied art in England; she now lives and works there. She was a child brought up on stories, from parables and allegories to Portuguese folk tales and fairy tales to the Wonderful World of Disney. While there were contradictions, Catholicism and chauvinism in Portuguese society versus republican liberalism in her parent's home, and a mix of them in the grandparent's, her family was comfortable, close, freethinking, educated and supportive. 'Home' was lively, creative and loving.

She listened to stories avidly, and made images compulsively under the proud family eye. Then she studied art, discovered Art Brut and Gaston Bachelard, and never lost her ability to express her life through her beloved stories. Her images retained the child's perspective, that ability to straddle real and imagined worlds without the adult's need for justification, or the thinker's need for linearity. She met and married a fellow artist and intellectual, an equal on the professional level as well. They had children, ran a household even as her career blossomed, gaining her prizes, honours and national and international recognition.

During her married life, her husband's increasingly debilitating illness and subsequent invalidity and death revealed to her the power of the caregiver. Her works, while retaining their childlike logic and understanding, gained the woman's.

I discovered Rego's work one day when I was browsing through the art section of a local bookstore. I was surprised to see her images; the bookstore shelves were usually stocked with works by more familiar names. I had never heard of her before. I was working on a series of coloured pencil drawings destined for a solo exhibition entitled 'Of Flight'. The theme was the relationship between 'person' and 'animal' as symbols of human isolation and the psychic forces that compel us out of our shells, what Native cultures might identify as 'spirit guides'. My affinity with Rego's work was profound, her way of symbolizing, her culturally positioned attitude to image, her story telling, and her sharp, incisive understanding.

Her early, more abstracted works spoke of a free mind, one allowed to roam and alight at will on imagery linked together by emotion and energy. The titles gave me a clue as to where to position my mind as I journeyed through these visual tales: *The Exile*, 1963 (McEwen, plate 62), *Stray Dogs (The Dogs of Barcelona)*, 1965 (ibid, plate 67), *The Firemen of Alifo*, 1966 (plate 72). I saw the abstraction as a type of formality, an art world device to aestheticize personal stories, disguise the individual images and obscure the specificity of the artist's experience. The oil and collage paintings strove to fracture the linearity of the narrative, to render impression expressively, to present the viewer with a window into the artist's sensory reverie.

Over time, however, it is as though the maturing artist and woman began finding the focus mechanism on her psychic imaging device. Forms began to gel. She paused, she

lingered, and she allowed the image to attain a more solid, more acknowledged form. It is as though she found the courage to allow herself, and me, to pause, to let her consciousness linger and our eyes to meet. The adult artist faced outward as she looked inward, no more need for obscuring speed or disguising abstraction. Her reverie had become poetic.

I looked at the *Girl and Dog Series*, 1986 (plates 139 to 144), of acrylic paintings, drawings, really. At last! There was the acknowledgement that the child is a much more aware and complex being than adults would like to believe. The girl playing with her dog is not always 'innocent' and without intention, she is wise in an affective way, instinctively powerful, she has a sometimes-objective curiosity, a sometimes-determined need to test her control and defy her own insecurities. This is what children do, girls or boys, but somehow society seems to fear or misunderstand the girl's motivations.

There is the woman, assisted by the girl, putting to practice her caregiver role, so avidly rehearsed. There her dolls, her dogs, are gone, in their place is the father, the husband, and the invalid: *Family*, 1988 (ibid, plate 166).

At any rate, by the time she painted the *Dog Women Series* of 1994 (ibid, plates 201 to 210) or the *Ostriches Series* in 1995 (ibid, plates 214 to 221), she seemed to face society's fear, woman's capitulation and, from the woman's point of view, the not necessarily desirable task of achieving a complete reconciliation between the dutiful woman and the free. There is indeed an animal in woman, tamed and domesticated perhaps, but not entirely denatured. She can still bay at the moon and follow her nose, or dance to the rhythms of her own moods and impulses. Though she may pose and posture, logic and objectivity have not severed her connection to nature, to life. No amount of obedience, of domesticity or of culture, whether imposed or faithfully accepted, can achieve that.

And so...

This type of imagery is 'the camera' I longed for as a child: it is the 'evidence' and 'record' needed to give reality to the inner world we all share yet which we experience and interpret so individually. This is the tool I wish to give my students.

CHAPTER 4: THE VILLAGE

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

In contemporary terms, my North American society expects me to act in my environment as a functionally creative, self-actualized and self-sufficient member of its population. For me to achieve this I need to develop a level of self-knowledge, including of geographical, historical, familial, iconographic and philosophical influences, essential to any balanced, productive life. As a student of any subject offered by a public or private school system such as exists in my community, I can therefore presumably expect to be provided not only with knowledge (facts, figures, skills), but also with such strategies as will awaken my confidence, courage, commitment and interest in why things are important to me and worthy of study or pursuit. This is especially important in the arts, where, as a creator, I am called upon to represent and express my humanity - as opposed to my intellect, faith or ingenuity - through my creation.

As an artist and educator, therefore, I am committed to the creation of image on two fronts: First, I see it as a field of research aimed at the acquisition of high levels of hands-on technique and personal imagery to develop as honest, deeply felt and eloquent a 'self-expressive' visual language as possible. Second, I define it as a culturally positioned, inter-communicative and inter-connected activity that, since it is anchored by self-knowledge, promotes flexibility, adaptability, openness and complicity in the social environment.

In my teaching practice, therefore, I try to focus on teaching students the difference in concept and practice between an approach based on the 'created' image, and one based on the programmed, 'borrowed' or 'appropriated' image. It is a subtle but important difference that rests on the understanding artists have of their influences, not just artistic but human as well, and how they as individuals integrate and reconfigure them. I demonstrate that artists who create so-called 'original art' are reinterpreting 'reality' through the filters of their own experience and personality, not just copying styles, repeating subjects or exhibiting their skill. Their work has intention and as a result, they make conscious choices even as they render their work from an

intuitive and emotional place. This makes their work both unique and an elaboration of the artistic themes that came before. This is what makes them 'talented'.

To do this, it is important for artists to devote time in their education not only for skill and technique acquisition, but also to a thorough self-reflection based on their history, including their roles as art students, viewers and members of cultural communities. This type of artistic research is as valuable for the art teacher as for the student to undertake.

A point I make in my classes is that, while many image-makers profess to be interested solely in the technical, superficially decorative, therapeutic, commercial or recreational aspects of art making, rather than on its more profound philosophical dimensions, most still want to call themselves 'artists'. No fellow artist, or person that I have met as a teacher or curator who makes images at any level (whether amateur or professional, private or public, for instance) is indifferent to the effect the work has on the viewer. I believe that this is because no person creating an image, even a copy of another work, is proceeding mechanically or objectively. The act of engaging in the creation process and finishing with a created product (whatever its form) engages the person at the most profound level, whether she/he is aware of it or not.

I therefore view the art product, whether it is realistic, representational, symbolic, expressive, abstract, or conceptual (or whatever other 'ism' it might belong to, or on whatever cultural heritage it depends) as metaphoric. Images express and represent first and foremost the artist's view of the world, through the combination of her/his choice of subject, medium, technique, style and theme. What is revealed becomes clearer with each new work produced, but is best revealed in a sustained body of work developed over an extended period of time, preferably a life-time. For me, this is the difference between an amateur and a professional artist: amateurs will work casually, reveal themselves accidentally or without being conscious of it, professionals will do so with thought, deliberation and self-determined levels of control, all the while being open to discovery and surprise.

In this regard, as an artist, part of my concern is to encourage my audiences to respond first on a personal level to my work, that is, to engage with it as if we were having an intimate, trusting, and revealing conversation. Because I am an artist who also runs a professional-level

gallery and who teaches in art centres, this is how I present the art image to my audiences and students in my roles as teacher and curator. I do this because I have discovered that viewers are too often mistrustful of their own instincts and knowledge 'about' art, so much so that they rely on mediation - by teachers, curators, critics, funding agencies, fame level, price tags - to engage with it. This leads all too often to a kind of emotional detachment, a voyeurism as opposed to a viewing, to judgement as opposed to criticism, and to an unfortunate level of cynicism when the information they are given doesn't match their emotional response.

Enter Bachelard. His writing is in fact from the receiver's point of view, the audience's, as a reader of poetry who is open, through 'reverie', to allow the poet's words to guide him, or inspire him, on his journey of meaningful discovery. The type of response he demonstrates is valuable not only for the producing artist, but as well for the artist as viewer, the art teacher, the art teacher as viewer, and for the 'innocent' or 'casual' viewer to practice.

THEORETICAL INFLUENCES AND OTHER CONNECTIONS

My teaching is aimed at engaging artists in the process Gaston Bachelard' calls 'poetic reverie'. For this reason, my advice to my new adult art students, whether they are learning to see and think in images, creating images, or exchanging ideas about images seems to run counter to many art education theories. It is this: "Put your analytical mind on the back seat of the bus" I tell them, "and discipline it to shut up, look and watch carefully, remember, and enjoy the ride." I say to them, "Leave your assumptions about style, aesthetics, politics, class, gender, your financial expectations, your beliefs about what art is or should be and what you think I want on the curb. If your ideas about these things are really informed, they'll still be there when you return. If not, be prepared to entertain new ones."

I tell my students this because my experience has shown that there is far too much thinking, talking, and writing ABOUT art in our environment, often at the expense of the art practice. As art students, the people in my classes do way too little looking, receiving and contemplating in their part as independent viewers, and feeling, connecting, and making as artists.

I tell these things to my students because I believe that art making is a function and product of being and thinking themselves. Art is indeed an 'instrumental value' (Kaufman, 1963), or a 'fundamental discipline' (Phenix in Efland, 1968). This means that the act of 'creating', whether in direct response to experience (that is, as representation), indirectly (that is, purely through invention), or in a combination of these (through observation and invention together), entails in itself a level of engagement with the world that exercises all our dualities at once: body and mind, heart and soul, conscience and expectation, narcissism and empathy, consciousness and sub consciousness, dream and memory, intent and accident, knowledge and discovery, intellect and instinct, and so on.

I believe that the inevitable by-products of art-making activities are that people, male or female, citizen or alien, are defined, actualized, empowered, sensitized, expanded and connected to their fellows at the most fundamental levels. Like Arthur Efland (Efland, 1988), I view art theory, history, criticism, education, and the social or political applications of the art product (Culture) as themselves the products of the art making activity. I too view these as 'derivative disciplines'.

Also like Efland (Efland, 1979), I believe that knowledge about art and familiarity with all its aspects, that is the sum of its techniques, styles, media, approaches, processes, history, criticism, etc., expands cognition by developing our ability to think visually – or aesthetically if taste criteria are applied - and metaphorically. This is the ability that allows us, in any field of endeavour, to make what we call discoveries, that is, to make new and unexpected connections and to see new possibilities or find new meaning even in that which we thought most familiar, or mundane, or which we believed we had depleted.

However, while knowledge of art helps us to think 'outside the box', it is the experience of externalizing these 'discoveries' by creating 'a product' and then observing its effect that expands our spatial, tactile and sense awareness, enhances our sense of ourselves as present and 'powerful' in the world, and develops our ability to visualise in our virtual world without being limited to our word-based definitions (in any language) or understanding. This is because human interaction with the world is not limited to the intellect, as importantly, it depends, as David

Howes attests (Howes, 2004), on the development and acuity of all our senses. Sense intelligence is innate in all of us, but in cultures where any of the senses are neglected other than in specialized or specific situations, they atrophy, limiting our receptivity and the depth and breadth of our experience.

All this said, to me, art is very simple. It begins with the marks made by individuals, and everything else is about the effect these have as they are received or rejected when the marks are shown to others. In my mental 'dictionary': **Aesthetics** relate to the sensory pleasure, inspiration or deep emotion people derive from the art experience. **Criticism** relates to the ideas the work generates, the expectations people come to have about it (for whatever reason), and how subsequent work exceeds, meets or falls short of these expectations. When a consensus is reached about the nature of the 'art effect', but its scope is limited by such things as 'ethnicity', race or politics, **Culture** occurs: the work is communally accepted as particularly meaningful or masterful and adopted or appropriated by a group as part of its identity, symbol system or economic structure via purchase, exchange or collection. The object becomes **iconographic**, or more universally significant when its effect and influence survive its maker, when it outlasts its maker's community, and when it becomes part of the more globally shared collection of valued or symbolic objects.

My purpose as an artist who is an art teacher is equally simple: I want to encourage people to make meaningful marks. I don't mean by this marks that simply express a particular aesthetic or political stance, that celebrate only the medium's qualities or that are the by-product of the artist's explorations with it, but work that reflects artists' thoughts, feelings and understanding about the significant events in their lives and how these fit into the puzzle that is Life. This is because I believe that the translation of personal concept or image into tangible form is the most fundamental method humans have of 'positioning themselves from within' (Armstrong and Cardinal, 1991) to then be able to find their footing in the world but also to move freely and safely among others.

The more individuals know about their marks and themselves as they make them, and the more they can control the interplay among experience, memory, observation and invention,

intent and instinct, the more they will be able to determine where along the chain of sharing and connecting they wish to situate their marks. It is this self-ease and self-awareness which will set the stage for an art practice that is confident and connected, both elements in art that has reached the status of 'cultural icon', such as the work of those we consider Masters, National Treasures or Stars.

Unfortunately, outside my classroom, the 'quality of thought and practice' aspect of the artistic product is often sacrificed to commerce, politics and for the sake of leisure. Also, if it doesn't fit into a prescribed, institutionalized, or politicized artistic discourse, it is often misunderstood, marginalized or ignored, even if it is a product of the artists' intent. This might be because there is often a great divide between the producer of art, whom I will call 'the subject', and the 'authority' of art, whom I will call 'The Subject', to borrow Foucault's terms as described by .R. M. Strozier (Strozier, 2002)

According to Strozier, Foucault identified two sides of a power structure he called 'Subjectivity': On intellectual, philosophical, knowledge, or political terms he called them 'the local' or 'the governed' on one side and 'the universal', or 'the rulers' on the other. Those who held the power to direct or influence action or thought, exercised wide-ranging moral or philosophical authority, or controlled the body of knowledge by which a system operated he called 'The Subject'. The capital S symbolized their perception of their higher power (from benevolent to megalomaniac), the self-conscious level of authority exercised by them (from beneficent to self-serving), or their consciousness of the quality of their knowledge or influence (from humble to superior to elitist).

'The Subject' determined the parameters of government, culture, knowledge and faith: they had ultimate authority, they controlled, directed. Among their ranks, Foucault included what he called the 'Universal Intellectual' who is seen to represent a 'universal consciousness'.

Those whom they directed, those without power or with limited authority or knowledge, Foucault called 'the subject', the lower-case s representing, of course, their self-aware status as followers, implementers, or small-scale enforcers or producers. Their power was singular, not plural, local, not widespread, limited, not universal, specific not general, practical not conceptual.

Among them he included what he called the Specific Intellectual, who represents a 'direct and localized' relation to knowledge.

Foucault made no value judgement between Subject and subject that I am aware of. Traditional hierarchical societies or structures of knowledge must function thus; though in discussing their origins, the kings who claimed to have been divinely appointed, there is mention of authoritarianism, dictatorship and madness. Society, certainly influenced by the all-too-often superior attitudes of 'The Subjects' themselves, is still inclined to indulge their egos (CEOs, Presidents of certain countries, Multinationals, to name a few) though real democratizing change is perhaps coming.

In approaching the heady issue of authority in art, I believe many critics; curators and educators have tried to appropriate the Universal Consciousness role, as they have tried to appropriate the art object. They have appointed themselves 'The Subject' of art. They treat artists as the 'governed' by mediating as authorities (often with upturned noses) between them and the viewers or between them and their process, imagery or 'technique'. Examples are the division that occurred in Western art criticism between art and craft, or between the maker and the conceptualist. This obscures the fact that artists can themselves express the universal consciousness, singly or as a group. Image is their language.

In this regard, my teaching aims to remind artists of their power to resist the traditionally impersonal and sometimes arbitrary authority of The Art World, or 'The Subject', and to exercise their right to 'speak' as individuals, in the capacity of master of their own images, as Subjects of their own work through their specific humanity and their particular subjectivity. Their individual ability to do so, and the level of their commitment to doing so, often determines their ability to affect the 'universal' discourse, of infecting it with divergent ideas, or deflecting it in unexpected directions.

In view of this, I feel that my first duty as a teacher is to dispel for my students the myth that any aspect of art can or should be objective. There is, for instance, no single, global aesthetic, no manual or set of formulas from which I can teach. I have yet to find the teacher's

guide that will describe the ten 'must have' features of a universally iconographic work, which students can then recreate in their studios to produce a 'successful' work of art.

If they wish to join 'the art world', they must also understand that it, in fact, doesn't exist as a single, entity with a fixed address. The most I can do in this regard is to direct them to the yellow pages where they might find a gallery operating from a compatible philosophy of art, that might accept to exhibit their work, if the dealer thinks she/he can sell it or get a grant or acclaim because of it.

As for the consensus of art teachers, critics or even professional artists relative to what constitutes the definitive 'good' work, whether historical or contemporary, well, that's a 'mission impossible'. How many national traditions are there, for instance? All I can do there is direct them to join an association of artists with like tastes and ambitions and hope these will be informed and non-competitive in their critiques and consistent in their support.

Even in the studio, even if the artist is (soi-disant) ignorant of everything else in the world and dealing with skill level, technique and process unencumbered by 'ideas', there is no fixed standard of action or behaviour, no Universal, general Rule of Manipulation. Artists will choose media and processes based on their level of physical comfort, their inclination, their taste, their freedom to work, their level of courage, strength or inventiveness, and, perhaps most importantly, their budgets. I, for instance, prefer to work standing, in a quiet, clean environment, with media which will not require an arsenal of power tools, my hands in direct contact with the materials, creating figurative or representational imagery, alone, for uninterrupted and lengthy periods of focused time.

Given this absence of universality or objectivity, the first reliable measure of an artwork's worth in the short term is the level of discovery, learning and satisfaction the artist derives from making it, and the meaning and importance it has for her/him. The second is how long that 'short term' lasts: a work which retains its meaning or importance for say five years has less impact in the artist's body of work than one that does so for the artist's entire lifetime. The third is the nature of the effect this work has upon viewers, and the longevity, mutability, type, variety and scope of their response.

Beyond that, there are many standards that artists can use to measure their level of achievement in their chosen medium, style or technique, and other artists whose works have come to epitomize them. The more familiar artists are with these in all their variety, the more capable they will be to situate themselves among them. It stands to reason that the more familiar these artists' teachers are with them, the more they will be able to help students situate themselves and plan their course of action to change their placement.

I tell my students that, in fact, the artists who have created works that the Europe / North America 'art world' has come to identify as 'masterful' were, many of them, people who brought something personal, something of themselves to their work. It is also through the liberties that artists allowed themselves, the subtle or daring, technique or process-inspired chances they took with their imagery, their media or their interpretation that caught the world's attention or imagination. It is, after all, not the technician who can reproduce or copy an image or a style who gains widespread renown as an artist, nor the one whose work is occasionally spiced with shock value or which is accidentally clever but the one who, highly technically skilled, uses technique to consistently take her/his imagery beyond the expected and the familiar.

Since I am a figurative artist, and therefore a teacher of figurative imagery, I refer my students to artists like Michelangelo, with his self-portrait in the Judgement part of the Sistine Chapel, who shocked his peers by distorting perspective to create the David, or declared The Captives finished when they still had chunks of apparently untouched rock clinging to them. I show them the works of Caravaggio, whose depiction of classical and allegorical themes was spiced up with realistic, not at all idealized elements like the bedraggled objects from his home environment, or the young boy-lovers he used as models. I introduce them to Egon Schiele, who portrayed scrawny, childlike, and sexually available but decaying people, including himself and was declared depraved. I show them Frida Kahlo, who obsessed about her injured and impotent body and thus created an allegory of and tribute to the anti-Madonna. I could go on and on.

Even Joseph Beuys, considered the father of conceptual art, used subjective lived experience to create his work. He was shot down in his First World War airplane, left for dead alone in the woods among wolves, rescued by Laplanders and saved thanks to animal fat and

skins. He subsequently coded his personal experience into metaphors about the fragility of life and the surprising things that will give it meaning. Marcel Duchamp, the progenitor of 'popular culture', brought his urinal into the gallery: how much more personal could an artist of his time get than by symbolizing his own act of male urination, putting it in the rarefied environment of an art gallery and by so doing in one fell swoop bring the gold-rimmed upper case T truth down to lower case t size? Take that, oh self-styled 'Subject' of art!

So I tell my students that all they can be responsible for is: to make the work they do meaningful to themselves; to make it at the top of their game (which will change, rise, with every new work they do and every new thing they learn) and as consistently as they can; and to be as courageous and hard headed as they need to be to avoid being destroyed by negative judgement or over-inflated by good.

I have discovered my ally in this approach. Gaston Bachelard.

BACHELARD, TEACHING AND I

What practical use is there for poetic reverie and the oneiric house in an art classroom? The very image of a classroom seems antithetic to these ideas. If I think of the typical class in which I was a student, especially as a child in the fifties and as a teen in the sixties, there was no place for daydreaming, and no time for rambling, as they were called, even in art.

The teacher always had an agenda, a plan, an assignment to direct and an exam to prepare for. Discipline and order reigned. It seemed inevitable: the class had to be managed effectively, some thirty minds directed democratically in the same direction and at the same pace; curricula had to be respected, lesson plans followed and squeezed into class times, teaching modules completed, exams had to be graded, Bell curves had to be applied and grades had to be handed in for the whole process to begin again.

Poetic reverie requires privacy. It takes time. It depends on the ability of the mind to experience and observe at the same time. It is a psychic activity that at first glance appears chaotic and undisciplined, to which concepts of 'right' and 'wrong', 'good' or 'bad', 'fact' and 'data' do not apply. The oneiric house is home to all, but it looks and feels different for each

dweller. There is no floor plan to hand out in multiple copies, no architect's blueprints to research. It is an adult place for virtual childhood. It can only be visited in the imagination and communicated in images.

A clever art teacher could plan around that, surely? "Today" my 1963 grade seven art teacher might have said, "we are going to visit the Oneiric House, specifically The Attic. The Attic symbolizes The Mind: The brighter the light there, the more Enlightenment and Spirituality is going on. I want you to visualize your attic and first draw then paint The Attic as the metaphor for Intelligence. Think of the star stencils we filled in last month: you will be marked on your ability to illuminate the objects you have stored there. Refer to last week's notes about Victorian Domestic Architecture and to these copies of Medieval Illuminated manuscripts. You'll have to share the gold paint. You have twenty minutes. Remember: neatness counts. And I don't want anyone wondering into The Cellar, do you understand, Claudine? Cellar = Failure." Ok, cancel that reverie.

How to avoid conceptualizing Bachelard's ideas as fixed metaphors, pre-defined and packaged for use across the board?

There is no need to quantify experience in art, no call to generalize or equalize, no need for statistical proof. David Ecker, in his article entitled *Toward a Philosophy of Art Education* (1983), in describing art's ability to communicate outside of logic through the creation of 'qualitative symbols' (p.6), or symbols that embody a distinctive set of qualities (pointed arch + elongated sculpture + rose window = Gothic Architecture), says: "thus art, as an intelligence (the deliberate ordering of qualitative symbols), is a communication of thought – a sharing of qualities, and thus demands a central place in the educative process" (p.8). The experiences of the person engaged in a poetic reverie from the psychic place called the oneiric house and translated into works of art communicate as qualitative symbols even though the resulting images are highly individual, apparently unstructured and have a non-linear configuration. These become the 'qualities' that unite them.

Max van Manen in his article *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (1990) puts it thus: "It is to the extent that my experience could be

our experience that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings” (p. 57). In this regard, I have discovered by teaching from the oneiric house that there are two key elements for ‘my’ experience to be ‘our’ experience: First, the class, like my artist’s studio, has to become a place where my students can lose themselves in their explorations EVEN AS they learn technique and develop skills that allow them to render their images as ‘art’. Secondly, their work must have the opportunity to ‘communicate’; I have to allow for exchange at the end of the creation process, the kind that begets recognition and complicity while eliminating judgement, especially my own, and transforming ‘criticism’ into ‘witnessing’.

Over the course of my teaching experience to artists of all ages, I have observed that they are far too often connected only judgementally to the images they create. They invariably relate to the class work or homework as ‘an assignment’, and accept to be evaluated for it *as if it were personally meaningless*. For instance, when working from life, still life or model work, they must be prodded to accept a distortion as an unconscious or subconscious interpretation. They judge it superficially, as a ‘mistake’ and automatically wish to correct it. Their fellows reinforce this judgement during critiques. They respond not to the ‘qualities’ all the elements in the work create, including distortions, or to the potential the distortions have to affect meaning, but to ‘mistakes’.

How to counter this training? Applying Bachelard’s attitude to the oneiric imaging process, I now avoid and discourage ‘correction’ because it is linked to judgement at the student level. In my drawing classes, for instance, as did Kimon Nicolaidis (Nicolaidis, 1941), the father of the blind contour and contour method of the ‘lived experience’, observational drawing, I tell my students that their eraser is a tool for creation, not a censor. I teach them to think of their gesture as a continuous flow of energy, and of their relationship to their process as a poetic reverie.

In fact, this method of approaching learning based on improvisational research methods used so extensively in theater and dance in conjunction with technique is, in my opinion, the visual equivalent of phenomenological, lived-experience methods being accepted by art educators and academics today. A comparison of the analyses in such articles as Arthur Efland’s *The Transition Continued: The emergence of an affective revolution* (1971), Christine

Thompson's *Experience and Reflection: An existential-phenomenological perspective and the education of art teachers* (1987), or Michael J. Emme's *Unruly Research: Visuality in the Academy* (1999), and the pedagogy/curriculum inherent in the artistic practice taught by Nicolaides reveals strong parallels

I tell my students that if they wish to render 'perfect' images, whatever that means to them, they must rely on their attention and focus, not on their erasers. Knowledge and control in art come from repeated experience and from attentive practice, not from after-the-fact correction. This in fact is the legacy of Expressionism, and the guiding principle behind much of contemporary art practice based on tactile media. To reinforce this, I have them work on papers that don't take well to erasing. While this makes them uncomfortable at first, they learn to accept chance and the effect of the 'here and now' on their work, and more quickly develop the assurance and confidence necessary for skilled free expression.

Where I now focus the student's attention during both the creation and the witnessing processes is on their inner vision, not only their outer. I encourage them to link what they see and what they witness to personal 'narratives', to allow the images as they are being made and as they are being looked at to act as their guides. What impression does that create? What is being revealed? Where is that image situated? What does it evoke for you? What does it suggest? Where does it take you? What was happening when you made that mark? Where were you as you created that form? What do you read as a 'mistake'? How would you have preferred it to look? Why? And so on.

Ultimately, what I'm trying to teach is trust. To me, it is what is at the core of poetic reverie and oneiric imaging. Artists especially, even when they are being 'students' have to trust their senses and their instincts, their ability to be responsive and to learn through practice, and the power of the images they create to act as paths between their oneiric houses and their neighbours'.

CONCLUSION

It is my aim as a teacher of art practice to help my students find their imagery as artists and to become as eloquent as they choose in rendering it. Whether they are adults, or, with some modification, children, I teach as a result from the assumption that they will invest time and energy to the practice of art, even so far as to make it their career.

Whether they choose to follow the artistic path all the way to the 'professional' level, or stop along that long and winding road at the amateur or semi-professional level, regardless of their style or medium, I wish to give them the tools and the understanding to make their part of the journey as revealing and rewarding as possible. Wherever they stop, my aim is to allow them to construct a version of their oneiric house that will reflect their truth at that moment, and an expanded, more completely satisfying construction at each visit to that house, or at each stop they make along that road. For this reason, I have integrated the image of the oneiric house and the engagement in poetic reverie as a creation process into my teaching.

The introduction of these approaches into my art classroom, which is neither private nor without external distraction, and which is so susceptible to the effects of systematic structuring, depends on my comfort level with the process, made greater each time I myself engage in it as an artist. Some of my students have come from 'first' homes, where the imaging begins, that have been violent, some lost, some hateful. I must constantly remind myself that his process is about creation; it is not therapy. Bachelard in fact is quite clear about the distinction between the psychological approach, fundamentally to assume that there are problems one must address, and the philosophical approach, which accepts to consider the broader meaning of the elements portrayed as human values and qualities. At any rate, I am not qualified in psychology.

In the class, I have found the approach most meaningful when time is not of the essence, and when the students can engage in both the private and the shared experience, both the creation and the witnessing experience. In fact, the art classroom is the ideal place for this with its dual nurture/critique role. There, students can not only transform their life experiences into works of art, but also have the opportunity to see the impact this work has on an audience willing to engage with it.

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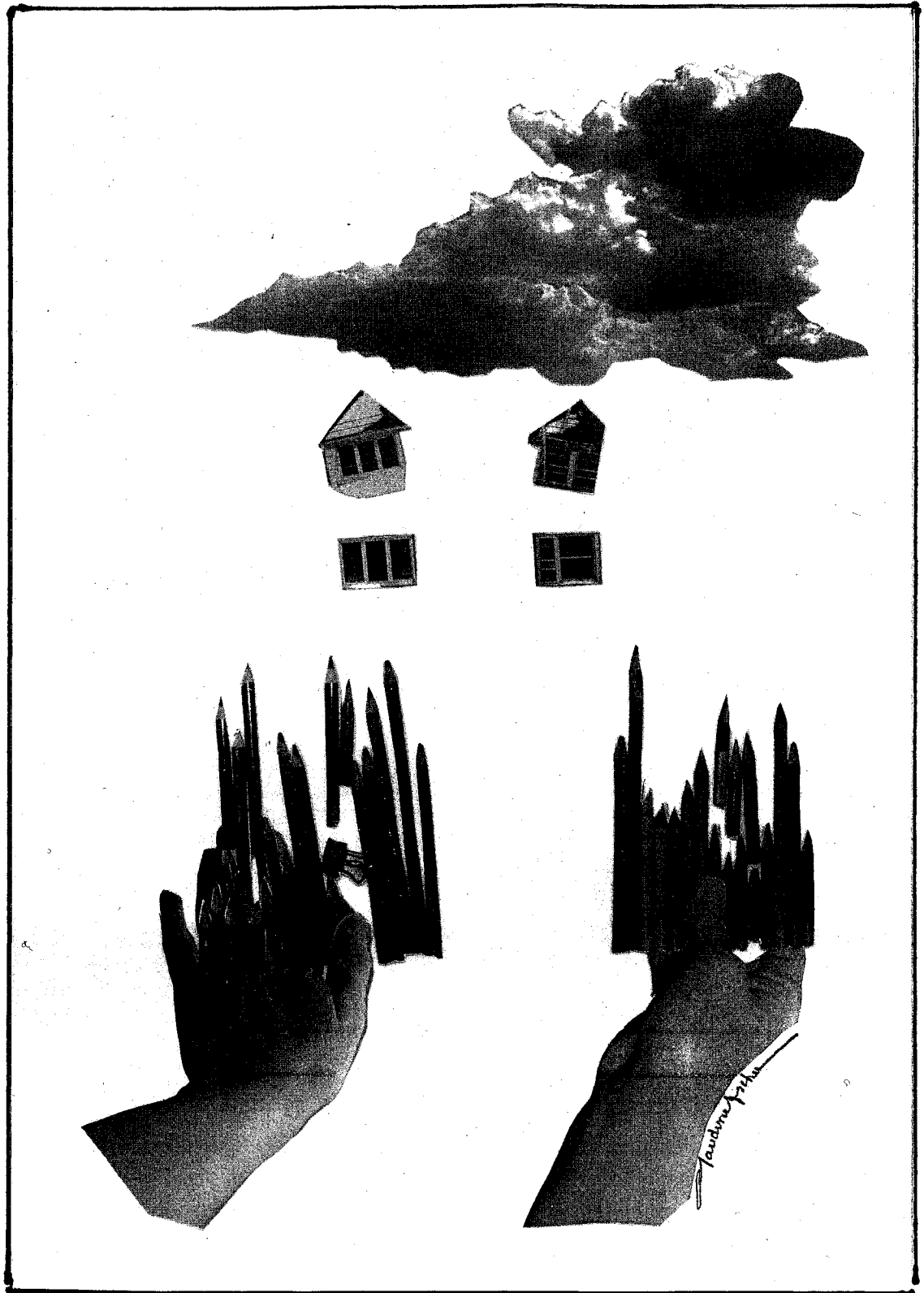
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ANNEXE I
EXHIBITION DOCUMENTATION



Reverie Invitation Card
front



Reverie Invitation Card
back

reverie

oeuvres d' de crayons de couleurs,
photo collages et argile de

works in colour pencil,
photo collage and clay by

claudine ascher

vernissage:

le mercredi 21 avril 2004 de 20h à 22h

exposition:

du jeudi 22 avril au dimanche 23 mai 2004

opening night:

wednesday, april 21, 2004 from 8 to 10 p.m.

exhibition:

thursday, april 22 to sunday, may 23, 2004

galerie de la ville

centre des arts de dollard centre for the arts
12001 de salaberry, DDO, Que., H9B 2A7

Heures d'ouverture:

du mardi au vendredi
de 14h à 17h;
samedi de 13h à 16h
dimanche de 13h à 16h
Visites guidées gratuites,
appeler 684-1012 poste 298

Opening hours:

Tuesdays to Fridays
2 to 5 p.m.
Saturdays from 1 to 4 p.m.
Sundays 1 to 4 p.m.
Free guided tours,
call 684-1012 ext. 298

Image: : PICKET FENCE, 2004, photo collage, 12"x9"

Reverie Press Release
English

Press Release

April 6, 2004

Galerie de la Ville presents in April/May an exhibition of works in various media by Montreal artist **Claudine Ascher** entitled '**Reverie**'. This artist, art teacher and curator is engaged in an ongoing, analytical exploration of the creation process. For this exhibition, she engages in the translation of personal life experience into images that have meaning as metaphor. Using coloured pencil, wire, photo collage, and clay, as well as written narratives, her reverie-style musings and creations are therefore based on three major and interconnected themes of the artist's life: memories of childhood, the immigrant's notion of 'home', and the artist's relationship to 'the model' (including herself).

Claudine Ascher has exhibited her work in numerous solo exhibitions in Montreal, Cornwall (Ont.) and Banff (Alta), and participated in group exhibitions in Canada, the U.S., the Czech Republic and elsewhere. She has been a teacher of art techniques and concepts in art centers around Montreal, The Visual Arts Centre, The Dollard Centre for the Arts, and the Saidye Bronfman Centre, among others, for the past seventeen years. Since 1988, she has exercised her role as Director/Curator of Galerie de la Ville from an artist's and educator's point of view.

The **opening reception** for this exhibition will be held on **Wednesday, April 21, 2004** from 8 to 10 p.m. The artist will be present. All are welcome.

The **exhibition** will run from **Thursday, April 22 to Sunday, May 23, 2004** at Galerie de la Ville, located in the lower level of the Dollard Cultural Centre, at 12001 de Salaberry Boul., in the borough of Dollard des Ormeaux and Roxboro. Opening hours are Tuesdays to Fridays from 2 to 5 p.m., and Saturdays and Sundays from 1 to 4 p.m.. For further information, or to arrange **free guided tours** of this exhibition for your group of six or more people, please call 684-1012, extension 298.

Source: Claudine Ascher, Galerie de la Ville

Reverie List of Works I

Galerie de la Ville
présente , presents

Claudine Ascher

Reverie

Page 1

crayons de couleurs Prismacolor sur Stonehenge : S
crayons de couleurs Prismacolor sur Arches : A

1) Watch

2003, S., 76x56.5cm / 30"x22.25", 900\$

2) Time Out

2003, S., 56.5x76cm / 22.25"x30", 900\$

3) Forbidden I

2001, A., 107x91.5cm / 42"x36", 1800\$

5), 6) Horizon I, II

diptyque / diptych

2002, S., 76.5x128cm / 30"x50.5", 1800\$

13), 14) Asrai Hidden, Asrai Lost

diptyque, avec argile / diptych, with clay

2004, S., 173x77cm / 68"x30.25", 2400\$

(Asrai : une fée qui fonds en eau si elle est capturée ou
exposée à la lumière / a female faerie which melts into
water if captured or when exposed to light)

15) The Conjurers / Mages

2004, A., 91.5x107cm / 36"x42", 1800\$

Reverie List of Works II

Galerie de la Ville
présente , presents

Claudine Ascher

Reverie

Page 2

crayons de couleurs Prismacolor sur Stonehenge : S
crayons de couleurs Prismacolor sur Arches : A

16) Homeland / Patrie

2004, A., 107cmx91.5cm / 42"x36", 1800\$

18) Having Found Godot... / Ayant trouvé Godot...

2002, A., 107x122cm / 42"x48", 2200\$

19) Blue Mat II

2003, A., 91.5x107cm / 36"x42", 1800\$

20), 21), 22), 23) Magic Carpet / Tapis Magique

triptyque, avec argile / triptych, with clay

2003, A., 91.5x234cm / 36"x92, 4000\$

2004, clay, 41x41x41cm / 16"x16"x16"

24), 25), 26), 27) Wish, Lullaby, First Step, Watchful Eye

quatre parties, avec fil de métal / four-part, with wire:

2001, S. 112x275x56.5cm / 44"x108"x22.25",

métal/wire: 59x44x36cm / 23x17x14cm, 3800\$

28) Blue Mat I

2003, A., 107x91.5cm / 42"x36", 1800\$

29) Three / Trois

2004, S., 61x128cm / 24"x50.5", 1200\$

Reverie List of Works III

Galerie de la Ville
présente , presents

Claudine Ascher

Reverie

Page 3

crayons de couleurs Prismacolor sur Stonehenge : S
crayons de couleurs Prismacolor sur Arches : A

30) Forbidden II

2004, S., 61x128cm / 24"x50.5", 1200\$

32) Listening to the Past / A l'écoute du passé

2002, A., 91.5x107cm / 36"x42", 1800\$

33) Horizon III

2004, S., 112x77cm / 44"x30.25", 1600\$

Reverie List of Works IV

**Galerie de la Ville
présente , presents**

Claudine Ascher

Reverie

Page 4

collages avec photographies sur papier pour aquarelle Canson
photo collages on Canson watercolour paper

7) Art Pilgrim's Progress

2004, 34 unités/units , chaque 30.5x23cm, chaque/each 130\$

Rangé de haut 1 / Top Row 1

1) Artifact, 2) Mixed Metaphor, 3) Requiem, 4) Brazilian,
5) Emigrant, 6) Send-Off, 7) Transcontinental

Rangé de bas 1 / Bottom Row 1

8) Nightmare, 9) Trinity, 10) Canadian, 11) New Home, 12)
Portal, 13) L'alma prende fuego, 14) Picket Fence,

Rangé de haut 2 / Top Row 2

15) Worse Things, 16) Lost, 17) Plastic, 18) Domestic,
19) Premonition,

Rangé de bas 2 / Bottom Row 2

20) First Love, 21) Good Little Girls,
22) Cold Feet, 23) Queen of Cups, 24) And I, Artist

Rangé de haut 3 / Top Row 3

25) Performance Anxiety, 26) The Idiot, 27) Peace Offering,
28) Comedia, 29) Pining for Carmen,

Rangé de bas 3 / Bottom Row 3

30) Fortune, 31) Beggar,
32) Group Project, 33) Never Too Late, 34) Dreaming

Reverie List of Works V

Galerie de la Ville
présente , presents

Claudine Ascher

Reverie

Page 5

sculpture en argile (bisque) / clay sculpture (bisque)

4) Pharaoh Goes A Sailing

2004, avec sable/with sand, 41x25.5x38cm / 16"x10"x15"

8) Jack Out of the Box

2003, 39x23x25.5cm / 15.5"x9"x10"

9) Carnaval I

2004, 25.5x20.5x11.5cm / 10"x8"x4.5", 350\$
avec sous-glacures, fil de meta l/ with underglazes, wire

10) Singles Bar

2003, 25.5x23x20.5cm / 10"x9"x8"

11) Playing with Deities

2004, 41x25.5x14cm / 16"x10"x5.5", 500\$
avec sous-glacures / with underglazes

12) Carnaval II

2004, 25.5x20.5x11.5cm / 10"x8"x4.5", 200\$
avec sous-glacures, plumes / with underglazes, feathers

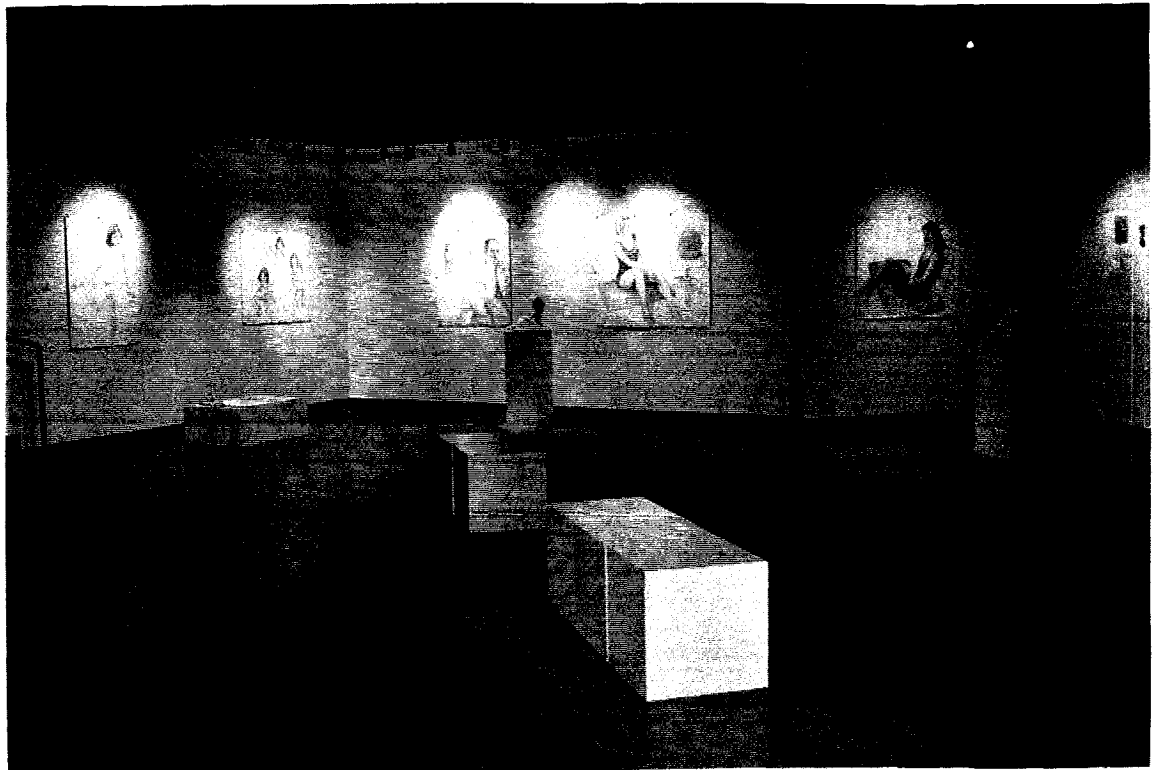
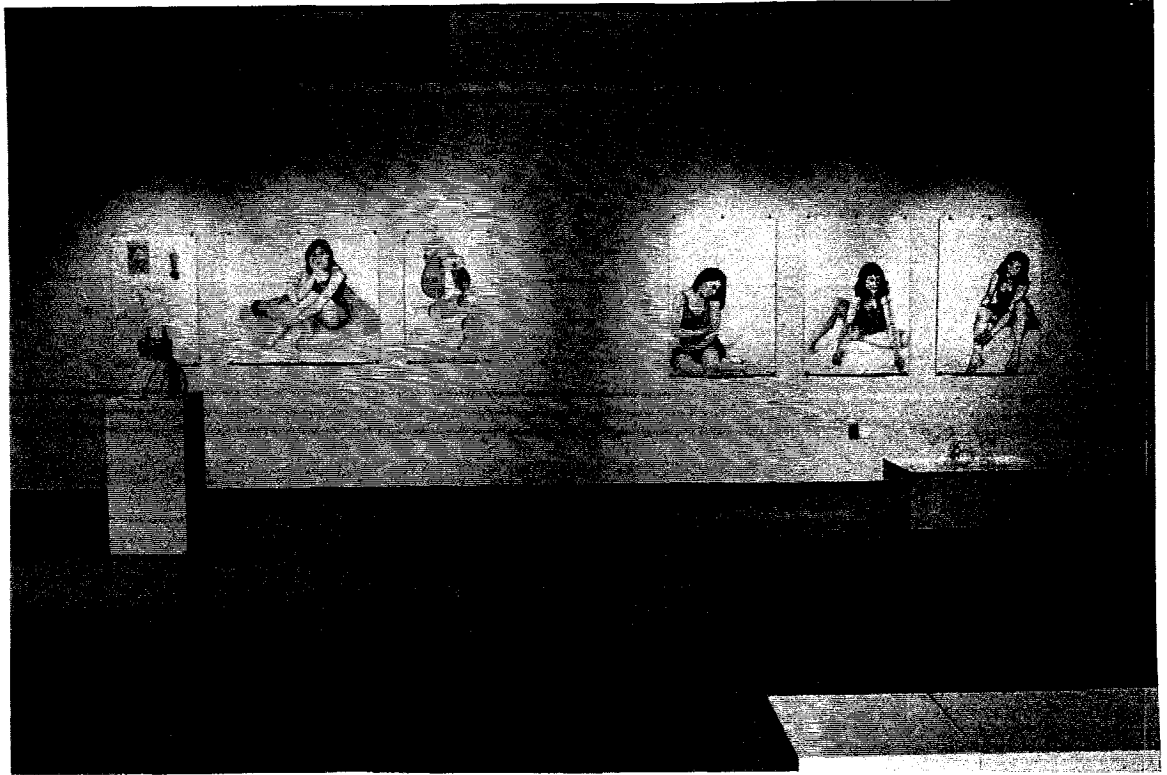
17) Turtle

2004, 33x15x35.5cm / 13"x6"x14"

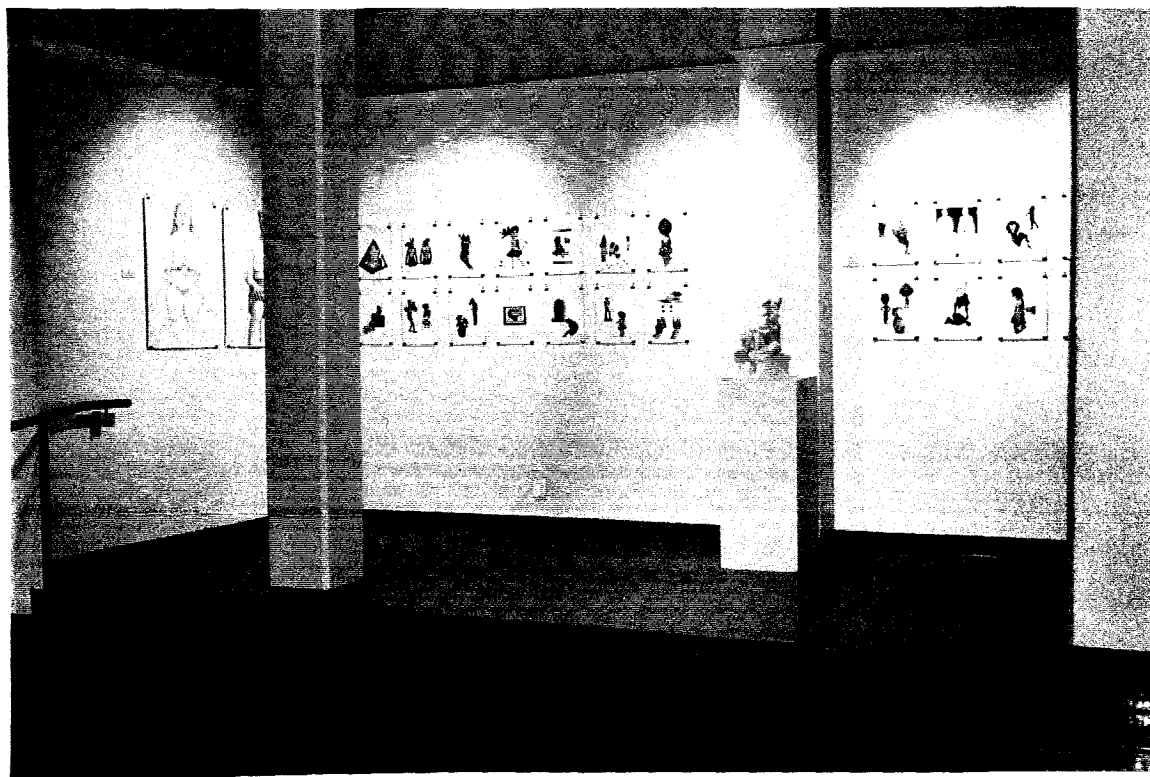
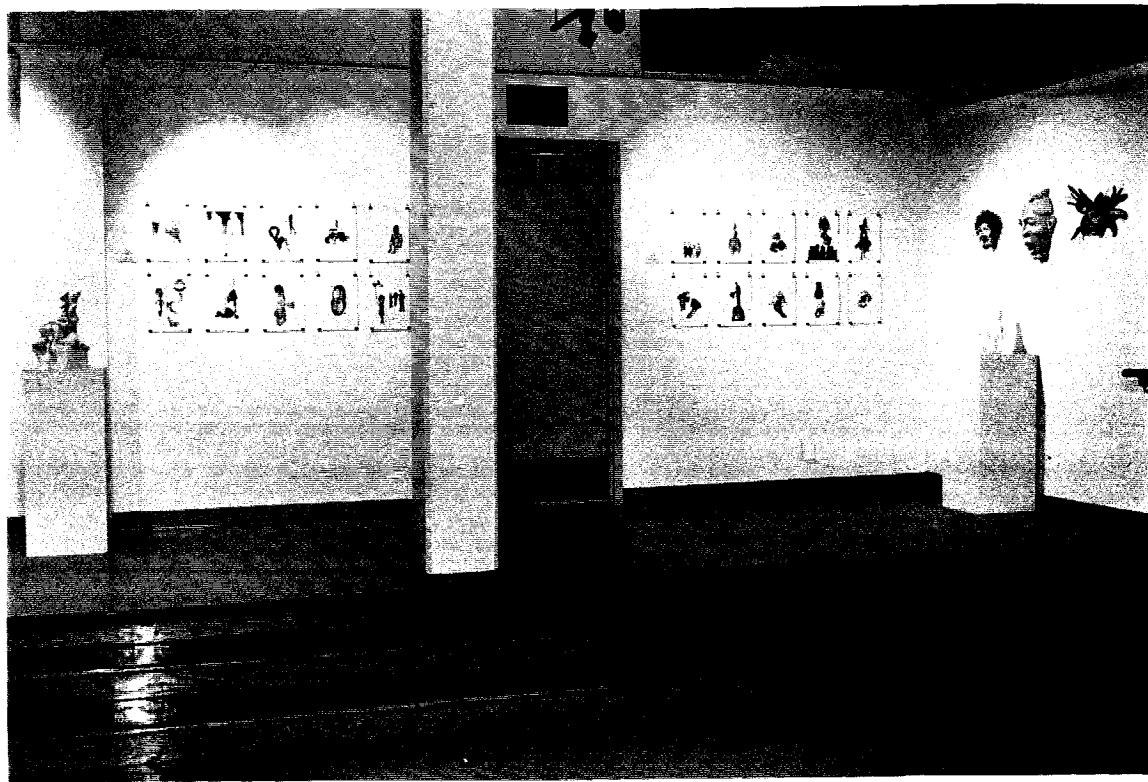
31) Leo

2003, 25.5x15.5x28cm / 10"x5"x11"

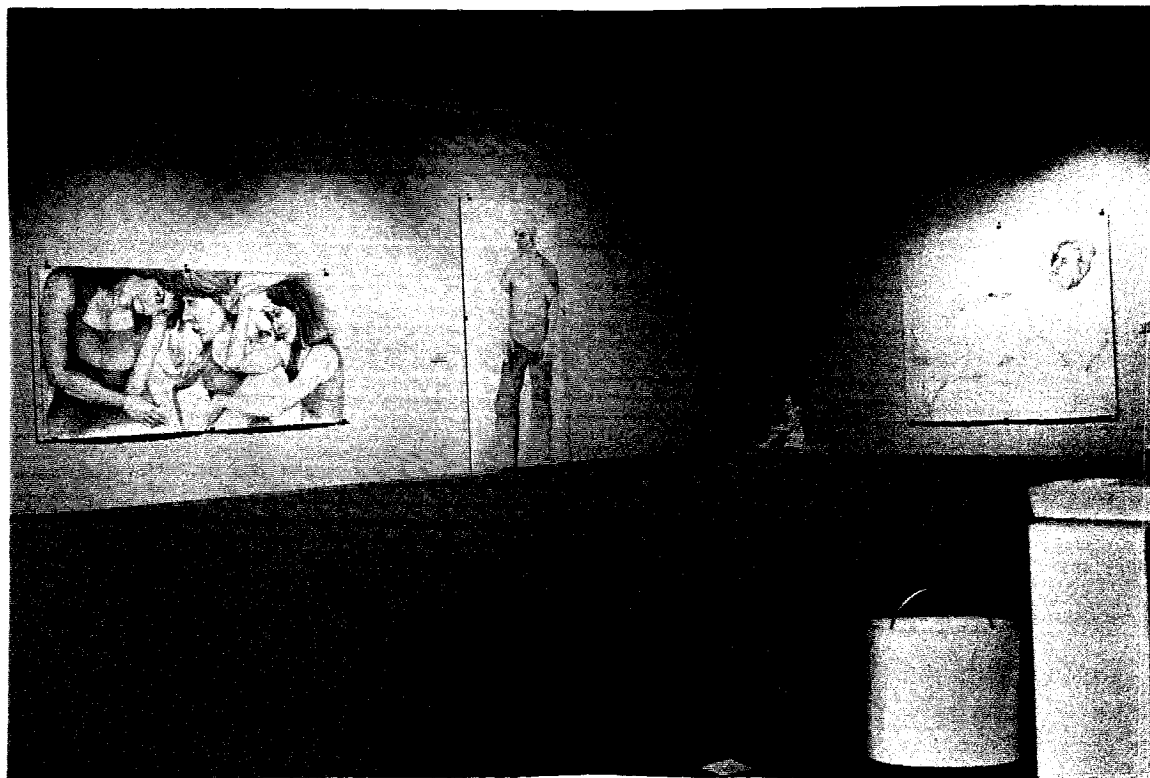
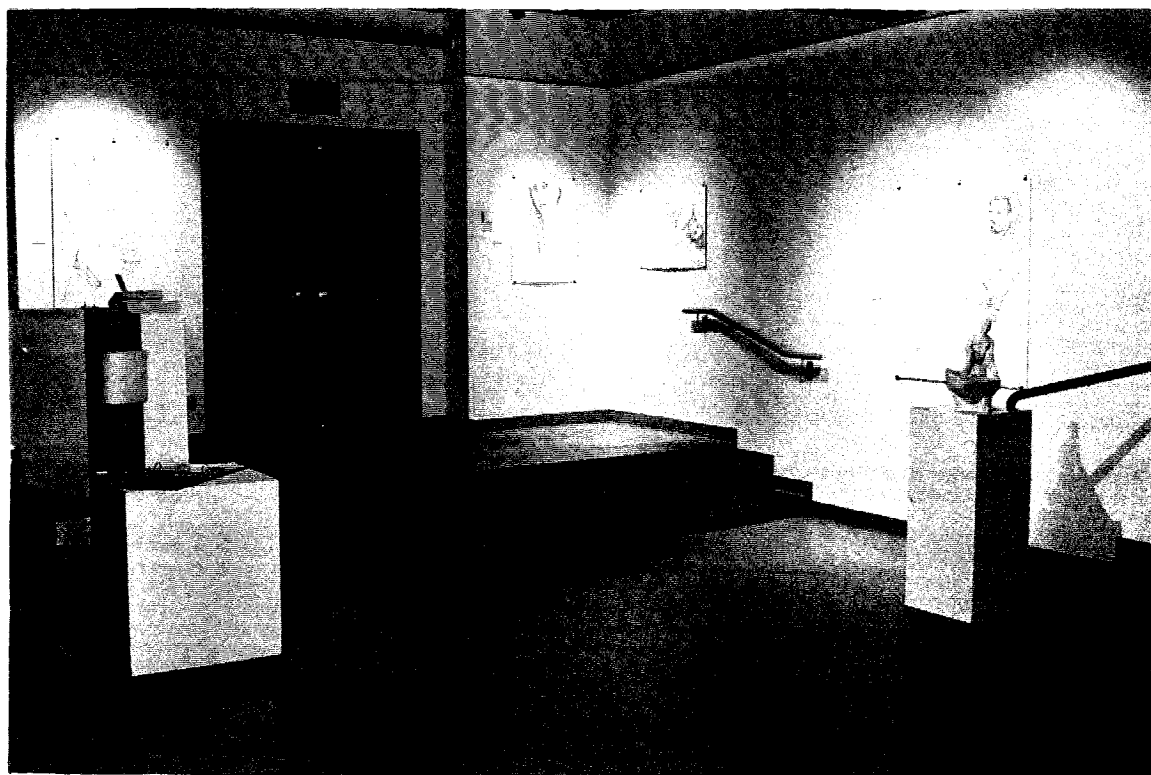
Reverie Installation I



Reverie Installation II



Reverie Installation III



Last Thought

I taught high-school English for a number of years before deciding my life's path was as an artist. I came back to teaching; it was inevitable. However, I did not come back into the school system where art must serve practical purposes but teach at art centers dedicated to art making as a life focus. My teaching is the expression of my empathy with and concern for 'the learner' as an expressive, imaginative being. On a practical level, my student is the person who doesn't know the rules that will govern her/his creative life and who must try to understand and transform them to be able to function. On a spiritual level it is the person who needs to find the skill, the courage, and the self-confidence to live life honestly and meaningfully.

To me, this is at the root of Gaston Bachelard's poetic reverie. His oneiric space is the place we can all share by rendering the images we 'see' there.

Welcome home.