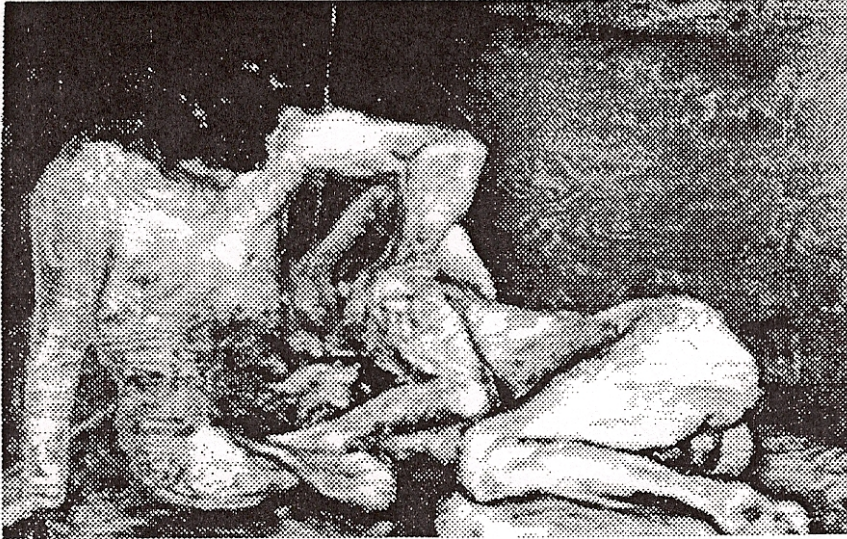


Article

Birthing the Masculine

by Barbara Bickel



As patriarchy has long oppressed males in our society, I have suppressed the masculine energies within myself. In the last year I have consciously made the decision to explore, meet and get to know the masculine within and outside of myself, realizing that I had banished to the dark shadow deep within me a key part of myself.

I have painted the male nude figure in my "Men as Birthers" series as a means to uncover and rediscover for myself the masculine qualities of beauty, vulnerability and creativity. Inviting fourteen men to share their journey and experience with me as co-creators in the paintings opened me to receiving their humanness. I have been amazed at and encouraged by the support of men and women in the carrying out of this project. The reactions from people upon viewing the paintings have varied from "disturbing" and "painful" to "beautiful" and "spiritual." The paintings have the ability to evoke all of these qualities and emotions. Somehow the emotions that go hand-in-hand with being human are captured within the human form.

Rebirthing of the masculine within me has been a fearful and exciting experience. Removing the barrier of the 'costume' (clothes) has allowed me in a different way to connect with the male soul,

outside of stereotypical and sexist roles. In most cases it has allowed me to glimpse the 'inner male,' courageously liberating himself, allowing himself to be in an open and vulnerable place of creation-in-the-making.

Each painting that has been created has been a birth, exhausting and somewhat fear-filled. But as I stood with each man looking at the finished painting, we experienced the sense of awe and pride that accompanies a new birth.

The darkness from which these paintings emerge represents for me the 'hidden' place where I have suppressed the masculine. I also see it as the earth's womb and being connected to our source of life. It can also be symbolic of the closed emotional space where men have been "forced" to remain strong and silent. As I reintegrate the powerful masculine energies within myself, these men are opening themselves to the feminine energies within themselves.

Working with the grain of the wood, the qualities of water and earth emerged unconsciously in the paintings. They are the organic and transforming qualities of the dream state (non-ordinary reality). Healing transformation requires a non-ordinary reality in our concrete and scientific world. These paintings act as a catalyst to dissolving the polarization of men and women in our society. I celebrate the conscious sharing of the Self that I have experienced with each man that has joined me on this journey. It has reinforced for me that we no longer need to be alone and isolated as we explore all parts of our Self on our journey to wholeness.

Barbara Bickel is a local artist who started this project last summer. Some of her paintings will be on display at the April 14th Monthly Gathering at McKay House, 3800 Point McKay Drive N.W., at 7 pm. She will present a slide show and talk, and answer questions. Some of the men in the paintings will also be there.

Along with the showing at the MENS Network Monthly Gathering, the paintings will be exhibited at:

Turacos Gallery

1312 - 9th Ave., S.E. Tel. 233-0395

Opening on Friday, May 14th, 6-10 pm (artist in attendance)

Exhibition dates are May 8 to June 19th

Gallery Hours:

Tue - Thu 10am - 6 pm

Fri 10 am - 9 pm

Sat 10 am - 6 pm

Sun noon - 5 pm