

## **Oracular Co-Encounters** **An Art Installation by Barbara Bickel**

The STAG residency with its mandate of freeing art has been an opportunity to complete an installation of spontaneous artworkings that respond to the commercialized phallic driven world of contemporary art. In the initial art pieces, intense physical gestures allowed me to draw and move within the trauma of the art world's edges, tracing and retracing the rectangular form of the mail-in subscription card found within the art magazine.

Densely drawn lines of black and blue, red, pink, green, purple and yellow oil pastel colours mask the return postage emblem and blanket the publisher's address. Its intended transport and return, with the promise of payment for future connection to the art world, is interrupted and rerouted back to its matrixial origins--the sacred act itself of making art. Rendered unreadable in the (English) language of business, an oracular voice emerges in response to the artworkings. Non-verbal acoustic sounds emerge from my throat, my belly, as a layer of sound is drawn onto the image, offering compassionate counsel to those willing to listen to the submerged voice of knowing and unknowing from the matrixial sphere.

My art has been informed and extended by the art and writing of artist, psychoanalyst and theorist Bracha L. Ettinger (2004), who has developed a theory based in matrixial borderspaces. Her matrixial theory offers an aesthetic and ethical, feminine-based, embodied and relational language to articulate what has been suppressed and lost within the phallic sphere.

She validates that to be an artist operating in the matrixial sphere is a fragile endeavor where "the future traumatically meets the past... and the outside meets inside (p. 77)." As I draw and sound my way through/with/beyond/behind this series, I engage what Ettinger calls *metramorphosis*:

a process of inter-psychoic communication and transformation that transgresses borders of the individual subject and takes place between several entities. It is a joint awakening of unthoughtful-knowledge on the borderline, as well as an inscription of the encounter in traces that open a space in and along the borderline itself.

As I encounter the momentarily opened spaces of the borderlines that separate me from communication with others in the phallic sphere of the art world I reach out in these artworkings with radical trust towards the other.

It is my desire that the visual art conjoined with the oracular sound experiences be encountered and engaged by others while at the STAG. While in process, Celeste Snowber and Lynn Fels brought their graduate students from their Simon Fraser University Arts based Inquiry course for an interactive visit. Inspired by that visit I sent an invitation to friends to participate in a co-event in the gallery

where they would interact through sound with the completed and installed *Oracle Sounding* pieces. The video recordings of the co-encounters that took place during that co-eventful day are incorporated into the installation as a time-based video entitled *Oracular Co-encounter*.

On the first day of the residency I laid a blue tape labyrinth onto the gallery floor. The sounding that emerged while I sat in the center sent what viscerally felt like strong connecting roots into the earth below, anchoring me to this space and the land that the STAG resides upon. Labyrinth making and walking has been an oracular part of my art and spiritual practice for many years. The *STAG Labyrinth* serves as a sacred geomantic form activating the ground that supports us to walk in this world. It is my desire that it become a transition ground for those who find themselves walking upon it to prepare for their co-encounters with the *Oracle Sounding* pieces. In this installation the viewer is invited to reach beyond the dominant phallic sphere of visually encountering the art to move and sound within it and open to the oracular co-encounter between the phallic and matrixial sphere that awaits you.

From the borders and edges of the phallic sphere of the contemporary art world I believe oracular movements, images and sounds from the matrixial sphere continue to lead us into/through/beside/behind the trauma of erasure and separation, returning us to precious aesthetic and ethical moments of interconnectivity, and jointness in difference.

\*Ettinger, Bracha L. (2004). Weaving a woman artist with-in the matrixial encounter-event. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 21(1), 69-93.

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