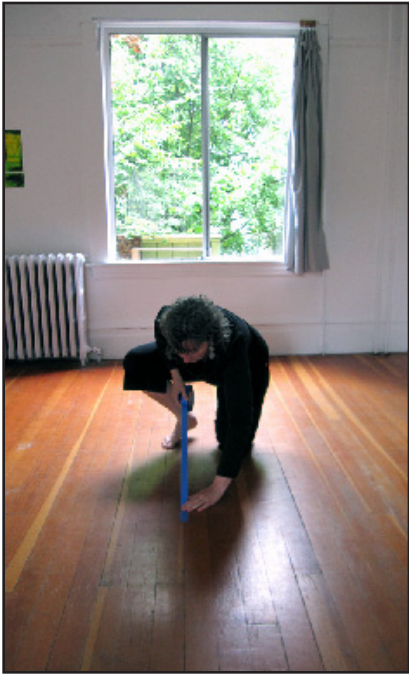




**ORACULAR
Co-ENCOUNTERS**

**BARBARA
BICKEL**



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**Writings
on
Oracular
Co-Encounters**



Sounding, The Labyrinth, Art & Gifts of the Unexpected

An Introduction

Sounding, as I experienced it, is a speech act that creates a conduit between consciousnesses, one which cannot be contained or confined to language as we understand it. It is a conversation in resonance. By opening our throats to speak, sing, howl and whisper we create a reverberation to which we attune, and through which a circuit is generated. We “hear” as we sound. The remarkable oracular phenomena which emerges from the act of sounding into the artworks of Barbara Bickel pictured and discussed within this volume are in fact conversations with an intimate yet unknown place that is both within and without these artworks. As we sound, we wander through twists and turns into these works, quite literally walking a labyrinthine path which we barely recognize upon our return. To be transported by Art is in of itself a familiar enough event. What is humbling about Bickel’s work is the intentionality of its construction and the degree to which it accomplishes the impossible work of forging a path for communication.



The Labyrinth is understood not to be a maze whose design entraps and confuses the wanderer, but a journey with only one path which invariably leads to a hidden center... and of course out from that center as well. The inward journey signified by the labyrinth can carry a wealth of simultaneous meanings and a multitude of destinations. It is the path of study and meditation; a return to the earth-womb of creation; a heroine’s journey into mystery and the realm of shadow. As feminist researcher and writer Barbara G. Walker reminds us, the labyrinth in myth “was the palace of Minos, ‘Moon-King,’ whose spirit dwelt in the sacred bull, the Minotaur or Moon-bull” and whose mystic meaning “was a journey into the otherworld and out again.”¹ Art, in its creation and engagement, forms itself along this labyrinthine path, drawing us deep into an unknown and hidden realm of experience and knowledge.

Art works to open space in our material sphere which otherwise might not find embodiment in the realm of the senses. It tends to be anthropomorphic, dependent upon the human person that would presumably encounter the art work, dependent upon the human ways of knowing and experiencing an “other.” This is why most art depends upon the senses we most strongly associate with observation, with receiving information. Sight first and foremost, hearing and touch

as well. Even within these limitations we

are corralled by socially constructed understandings of how to look, how to listen, how to touch. It's understood that children have often failed to internalize these restraints (we're told to "keep an eye on your child" in galleries and museums) and we are often embarrassed or moved by the awakening of our own inner-child in the face of an artwork for this reason.

We are gifted with a multitude of senses and a multitude of ways of engaging those senses and it is a part of Art's work to awaken us to this by its demand that we engage sensually with it in a way that might be taboo in our everyday life.

Gifts of the unexpected, such as we might always hope for when engaging an oracle, an artwork or a strange encounter, are perhaps one of the primary rewards that we as the care-takers of the STAG have received. It is true in terms of the persons who arrive, who walk through our door on any occasion.



It is true of the work that is created here when a space such as this is opened up to visionary and passionate people. It is true of the persons who have contacted us and asked to participate in the co-creation of this space. More than any of these collaborators, Barbara Bickel, her community and the Oracular Co-encounters which

she facilitated through her residency have borne themselves as unexpected gifts. For this we are incredibly grateful. It has shown us the power of opening our doors to possibility, to communication and communion with mysterious others. It has shown us that the path leading down our laneway, up our steps and into our home can be - under the right circumstances - another twist and turn in our collective journey through labyrinths of our own (co)making.

Gabriel Saloman

The Strathcona Art Gallery /
STAG Library
Spring 2012



Oracular Co-Encounters

An Art Installation by Barbara Bickel

The STAG residency with its mandate of freeing art was 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-psychic 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.¹

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 were 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 the gallery 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. The installation invited those who entered the space 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 is always potentially present.

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. Oracular Co-Encounters is one such moment.

Barbara Bickel, July 21, 2011
Strathcona Art Gallery & Residency
Vancouver, BC, Canada

Endnotes:

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



Inter-Psychic-Communication-Through Matrixial Mediators¹

As I encounter the momentarily opened spaces of the borderlines that separate me from communication with others.... As I draw and sound my way through/with/beyond/behind this series.... returning us to precious aesthetic and ethical moments of inter-connectivity, and jointness.²

Who-what-is-present-has-been-before the official art opening of Oracular Co-Encounters?³

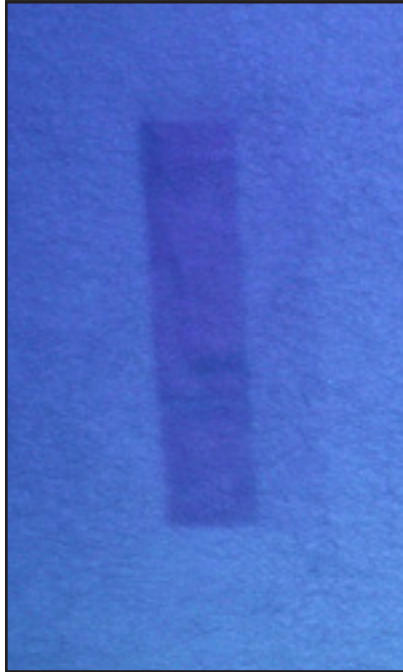
Erotic antennae⁴ sway in current-of-air (not-yet-bodies)... multiply-applied... without witnesses-yet-to-enter... at silence-resting spaces... before... the opening-already already-made-ground... and peacefully, waiting upon.

How is this a freeing art? Or more...

A political doctoring has occurred-- once called decolonizing the Divine.⁵ Referencing Bickel's doctoral research, this show is a finer feminine-surgery removing signifiers of political correctness and replacing that-which-is-left-remains... as traumatic traces for wit(h)nessing to Being-close-to "that-which-regions," as Heidegger's return to a matrixial-like "meditative

thinking"⁶ from aging patriarchal-worn years.

The pre-showing of Bickel's art, before the crowd-herd, is... just is... and, labored-is, thus inherently collaborative as pervasive co-encounter thinking in a context... a context-filled thought-less borderspace, before... the official opening, and gathering of audience.



What has been gathered before this anticipation? Commemoration: with-in-visible matrixial screen. Semi-white translucent longing as interstitial veils inter-dispensing succulent secret chambers... of worship... idometrically pre-pared at-once for immediate re-cognitive re-sonance, as prescient... of themselves-archetypal, necessary anti-oedipal... pastures... and pastiches... archaic, premodern, modern, postmodern, post-postmodern, integral...

Horizons upsurging... vertiginous for even falcons... ... there's something definitively royal here.

Cry of ages... a feminine gaze diffracts the art-on-the-wall through fine-cut portals⁷... a dreaming, lucid-lightening... far from flaccid Zeusian-excess-waste allowed... or enabled... a counter-hegemonic non-disposable meaningfulness usurps the mists of her pre-verbal linguistic artworkings. She's a lover-of-languages-matrixial-made.

Is this another Bickel collage, now directed-with-in-somatic theatre-of-the-absurd... made flesh? Artful-wounding... caution... appearing assaue?

Designed traumatic post-fascinance-abiding... hanging heart-i-mentarily... dripping... encaved... stalagmitic chills... from Malta⁸ (?) and beyond...

Bow-to-holes at facade fronts, confronting... but soft, beyond soft... breaths of ancient forces. Blowing in oppositions tamed yet not disappeared... by denial-asked-to-eternal-relief. DESPAIR... "Because the phallus cannot master the Matrixial."⁹

The room, lit before lights, is not of electric phallus-pulses.¹⁰ It oraculates, rather... simultaneous spread, perpetuates borderlines submerged... beneath care and compassion already-joint-and-several.

Beyond appearances, they say: "this is really vulnerable contemporary art." The end, with nothing left to say for an art world (once The ArtWorld) left-bereft-of-language-of ...

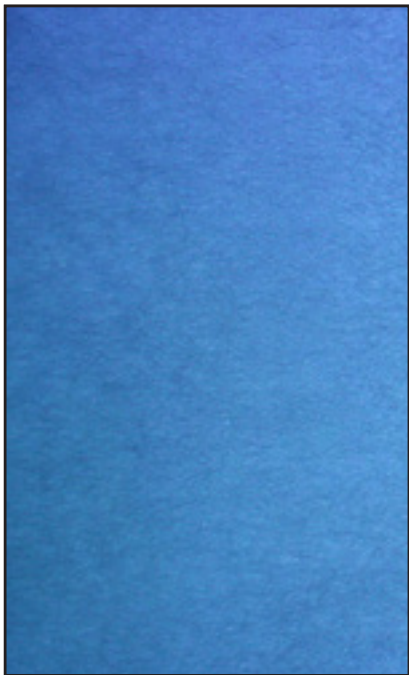
She is a lover of languages matrixial made. Her matured handling of aesthetic materials, as social practice, represents a worthy experimental-document of woman-seamstress¹¹-designer-art-ist-researcher-educator. Grandmother now...

The official OPENING METRAMORPHOSIS would proceed... is mass communication, with a critical-edge most people at-first won't imagine or encounter. Her hand-made-building- tools for feminine architecture-as-event¹² —as love¹³— leave most un-thought-less and served by her art, more so, than of service to the artwork itself. Few are ready for epistemological and moral demands like that...

Easily fooled by walls and rooms dotted with evocative objects (art)--because walking into them, with and without others, at art gallery-openings... usually leaves us wrapped en-cloistered in objectivism a phallic object-centrism of separations... what results from pre-registered cultural auras of "high art," at once... subverting unconscious... free art.

Bickel's frees her own inner-space first, in trance, and working-with-others. Beyond the ego-bounded artist-heroic, she's calling it wombspace, and border-space—a simple congregation... affordable to the disabled-art-viewer... looking for what they know not what... call it mystery... in their habitus of thoughtlessness.¹⁴ Art-for-art-sake, is taken leave through Bickel's sensible-hands... as competent priestess... once again. Awe is filled-in... naturally... as people wander through the spaces of a matrixial community co-mediation.

But if there is one obvious matrixial mediator in her magic bag, it is of late the universal labyrinth structure. Taped on the gallery floor, or on the roof of her mind, she never lets us forget her walking pedagogical strategy. The device, she prefers to call a process, is custom-ready-made for her feminine architectures, in installations, in her articles for academic journals, in and for/with her leading in the world of transformations. However different each of her art shows is, her basic premise is printed on paper dress... patterns of feminine-M/Other desire—a labyrinthian purse refrain, and chorus... a place and space... to ever-slide with-in and with-out ourselves. Combin



ing this structure with viewing art in galleries is one of her unique contributions to contemporary art, yet, well aware she is of its origins in ancient church ideations before, and after The Church. Her work is for walking pilgrims.¹⁵

If there is one less obvious matrixial mediator, too many to describe here, it is ritual. The filming movements and voicings from her “oracles” present self-reflexive ghosts on screen-webs, echoing her hanging screens before the art-on-the-walls. They lay themselves and present themselves, to be stained with erotic inter-psychoic communications. Her radical trust, not based on fear or any flight... is not that something will be communicated but that something will be stained, thoughtful- upon, and rested. She calls this restorative learning,¹⁶ as first step-perhaps-before-and-with transformative learning. Her philosophia-percept is sharpened here and ritually-contrived without coercion—a real-life-virtual-game. She is shap-iest, in/with this artist-at-play.

Many won't see that assertive-part-in-whole—her, otherwise feminine-open-works—best called a paradigm shift-of-architectural-urban-gaze, towards what Nava called a “visceral cosmopolitanism”¹⁷—arrested in-from a sense of pre-verbal-relationality—Ettinger's Matrixial sphere.

Luxury... her?—this subtle sublime—intervention? It may be... but it has cost her the entry of privilege... and loss... in juxtaposition to a hegemonic un-sacred phallic sphere of un-free-art, which has, oppositely benefitted, via commodified-acceptance as ArtWorld. There

is nothing normal, nor new-normal. There is no-thing to sell. That's where Bickel's art career seems heading, ahead of her always, and lingering in the severality of its audiences past, present, and future. One has to look, with any honesty, there's an eruption coming in woman's land. And, not a moment too early, as the world unravels with little grace or order.

Oracular Co-Encounters, prepared with love, will surely launch a new era in Bickel's aesthetic social practice and ethical inquiry. It has been incubating for decades, from those marginal drawings inscribed in patriarchal bibles, from art studios in basement furnace rooms... the feminine won't be stopped, only temporarily re-routed... from its loving metamorphic imperative.

We ought to feel brightly blessed. SHE has shown us the way...



R. Michael Fisher

Carbondale, IL
September 9, 2011

Endnotes:

1. Matrixial mediators- are attentional-devices-as-processes of matrixial artworking, designed for the purpose of metamorphosis (a la Bracha L. Ettinger); hence, as mediators between/with/relational dynamics of Phallic and Matrixial spheres; and thus, as aesthetic vehicles of transport of trauma and jouissance for healing the feminine-masculine wounding.

2. Barbara Bickel, July 17, 2011; excerpt from artist statement "Oracular Co-Encounters: A Multi-media Visual and Sound Installation, Strathcona Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC, Canada.

3. Having been unable to attend the art show, it seemed the easiest space for me to enter this writing on the art show was in the moments, when all was hung and ready, before anyone came.

4. A term used by Bracha L. Ettinger, artist-psychoanalyst-activist.

5. This is from the title of Bickel's May 10, 2011 interview with me, and her presentation, for the Center for Spiritual Inquiry and Integral Education. See "CSIE Event(1): Decolonizing the Divine" @ <http://fearlessnessteach.blogspot.com>.

6. Excerpts are Martin Heidegger's, cited from John M. Anderson. Introduction. Martin Heidegger: Discourse on Thinking. NY: Harper and Row, 1966, p. 35. According to Anderson, Heidegger's "Meditative thinking as an openness and opening may be said to be grounded in that-which-regions as undisclosed, as veiled" (p. 35).

7. Portals here refers to the cut out vertical rectangles in the veils hung in front of the art pieces on the wall. The architectural reference here is to the apse in buildings, of which Bickel's installation creates a feminine apse as performative stage for her invitation to others to sound into the oracle, portal, or apse as sacred ritual co-encounter in/with the art and architecture of the gallery space.

8. This is referencing the oracle holes (apses) found in the ancient temples, sometimes cave walls in Malta and the Mediterranean region (see for e.g., <http://wendebartleytempleproject>.

blogspot.com), of which some would argue are sites of goddess religions.

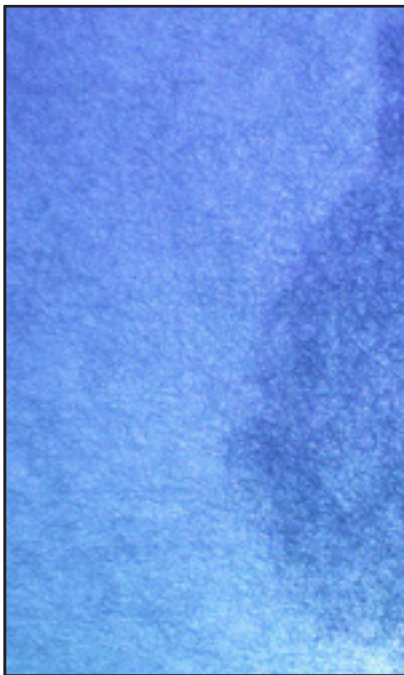
9. From Bracha L. Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace*. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005, p. 117.

10. This is in referencing, as counter-discourse, to the likes of many male contemporary artists' works of spectacle (e.g., fireworks) such as Cai Guo-Qiang and other grandiose, expensive projects.

11. This references Bickel's long-tradition of sewing, but also plays on the alternative to "tailor" (i.e., as architect of clothing); whereas seamstress is more a practice of border-linkings (i.e., sewing seams), the latter thus, more in keeping with an Ettingerian matrixial practice.

12. The emphasis here is more on place in Bickel's art-design-architectural musings, and as such "is the idea of architecture as event. Rejecting the paradigm of architecture as 'the trial of the monumental moment' (where the monument connotes something stubbornly closed in and on itself in accordance with a fixed arch and telos)..." Quote from E. S. Casey. *The fate of place: A philosophical history*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998, p. 312.

13. Bickel's work is fast moving into the worlds of design and architecture, and urban planning theory. She is creating, through her matrixial mediators as social architecture of human fulfillment, infused with grace and order, within the idiomorphic tradition of great aesthetic-humanistic leaders like Leonardo da Vinci, R. Buckminster Fuller and Margaret Mead, among others—what some radical architectural theorists and educators are calling an "architecture of love." See August T. Jaccaci. *Call for a New Story of the Cosmos*. In A. T. Jaccaci and S. B. Gault (Eds.), *CEO: Chief Evolutionary Officer: Leaders Mapping the Future*. Butterworth-Heinemann, 1999, p. 158.

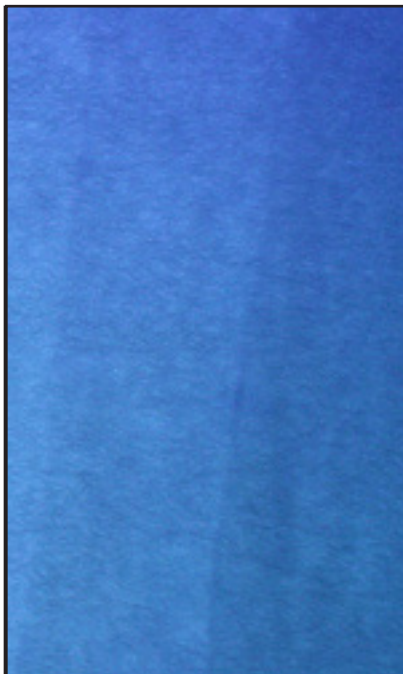


14. The fine-edge between “unthought thought” of a matrixial mediator and unthoughtfulness is my referencing the sordid state of society in general, as with the critique that Heidegger wrote: “Thoughtlessness [i.e., “flight from thinking”] is an uncanny visitor who comes and goes everywhere in today’s world. For nowadays we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly. Thus one gathering follows on the heels of another. Commemorative celebrations [like ArtWorld exhibits] grow poorer and poorer in thought. Commemoration and thoughtlessness are found side by side” (p. 45). See Martin Heidegger, *Memorial Address*. In *Martin Heidegger: Discourse on Thinking*. NY: Harper and Row, p. 45.

15. This references the many pilgrim-based healing churches as sacred sites in the tradition of ecclesiastical architecture and art in 18th century Europe—e.g., in Bavaria, The Pilgrimage Church of Wies (German: Wieskirche) and its use of interior apses and rococo style for creating movement and interior-self-conscious reflection of the path in/with the Divine, as immanent ‘good works’ (ethics) as much as spiritual revelation and transcendence.

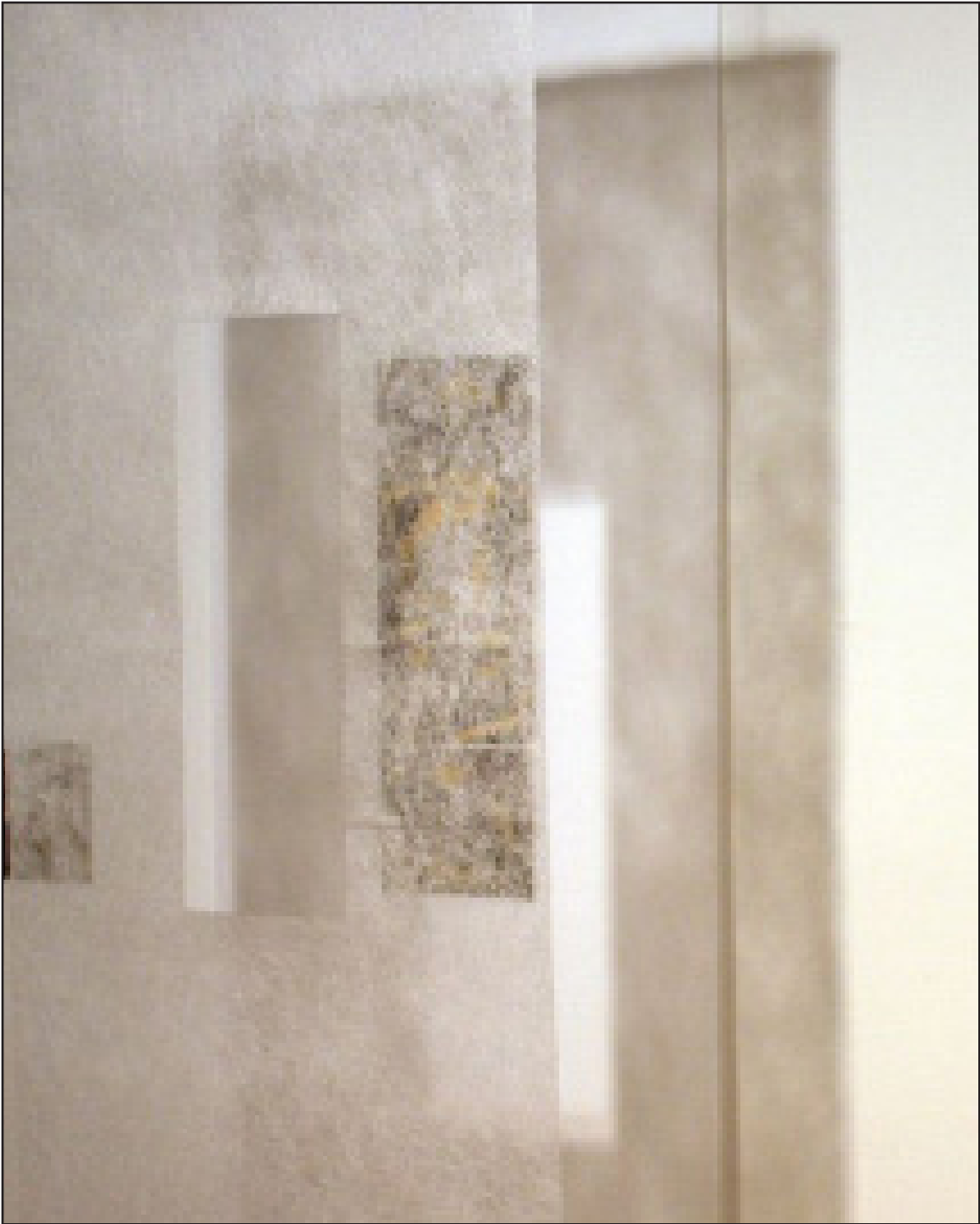
16. This refers to the naming of this type of learning by educator-scholar Elizabeth A. Lange.

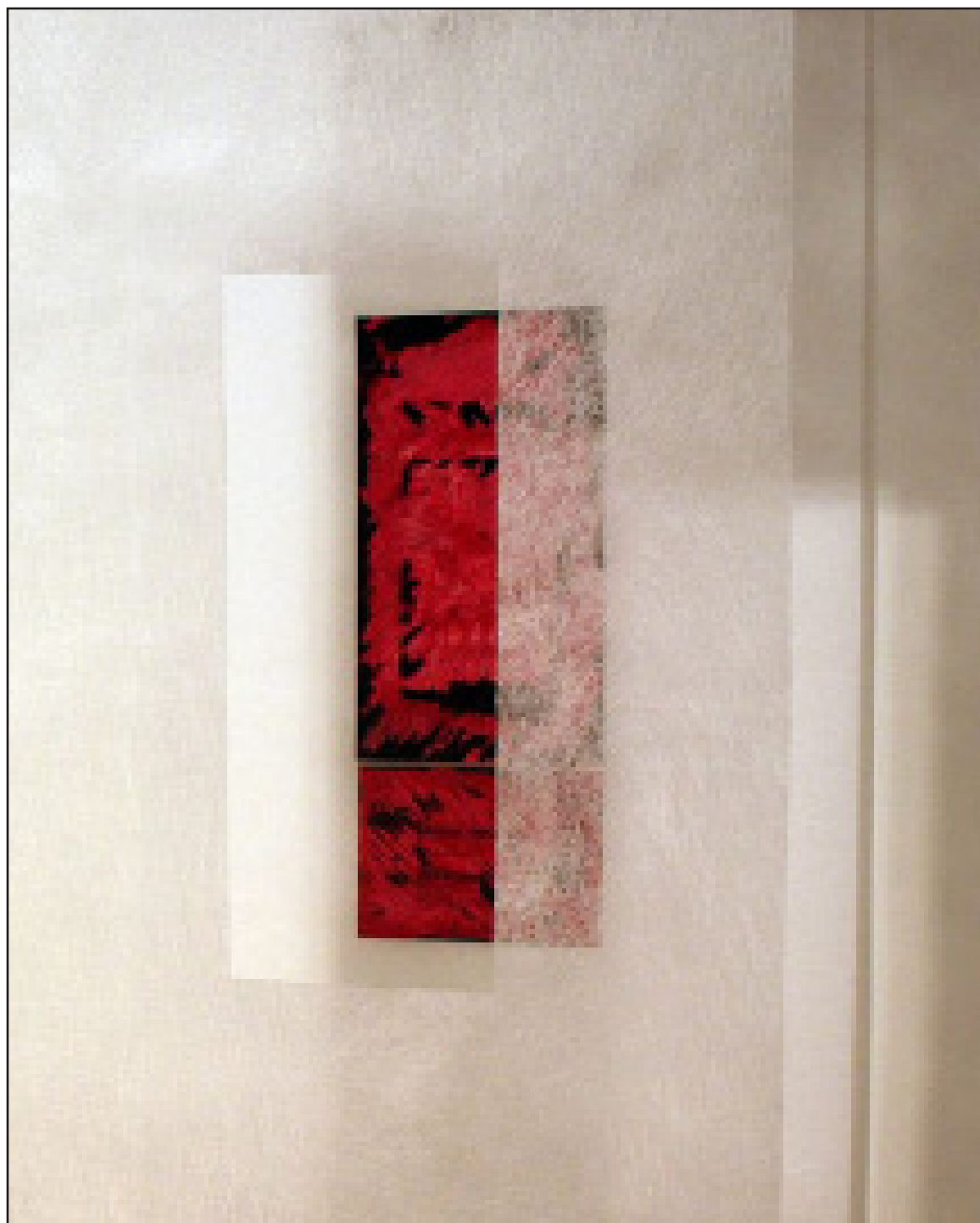
17. From Mica Nava, *Visceral Cosmopolitanism: Gender, Culture and the Normalisation of Difference*. Berg, 2007.

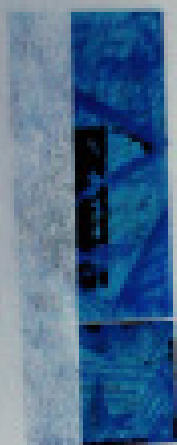


Oracle Sounding

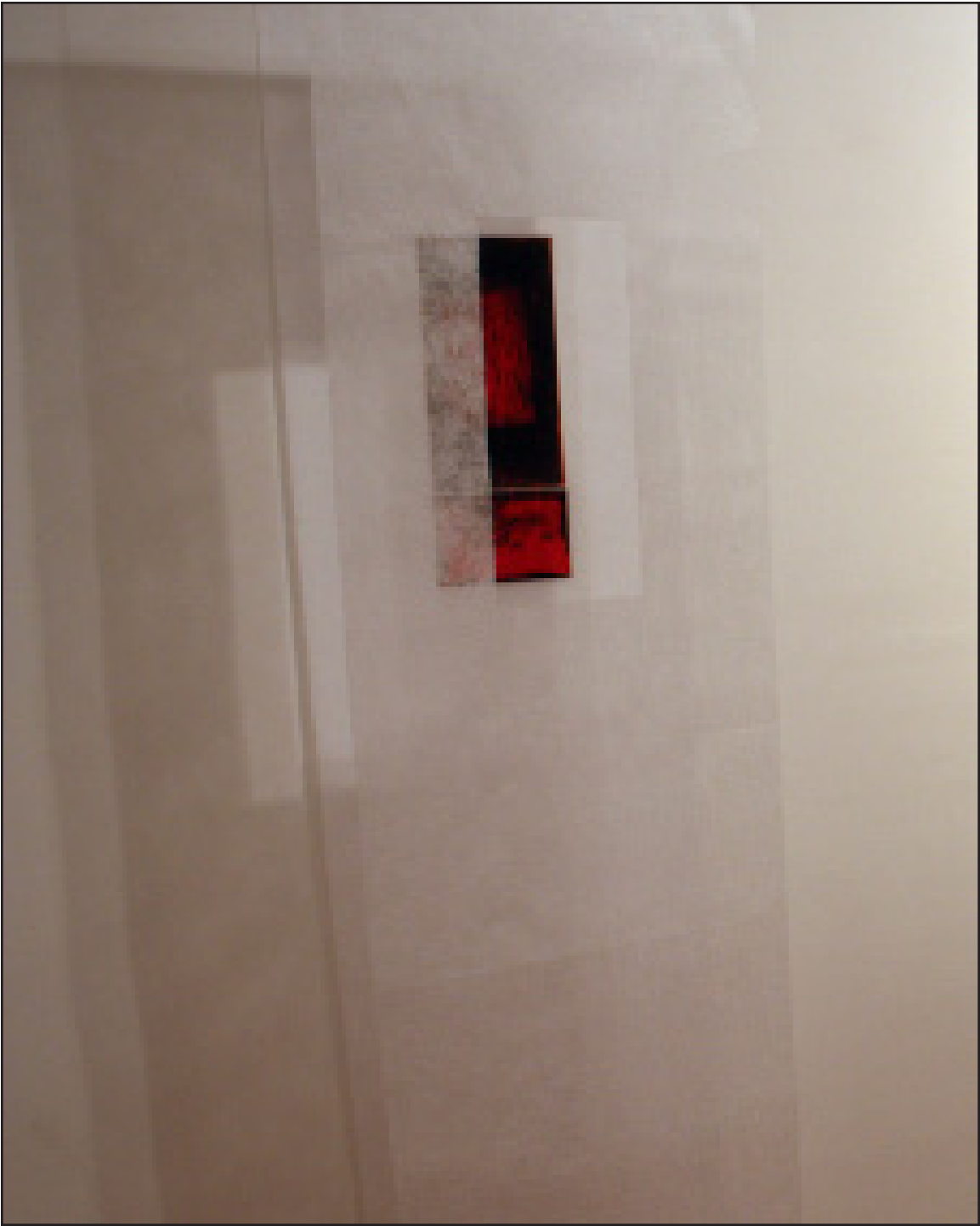
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**Responses
to
Oracular
Co-Encounters**



My first encounter with the oracular images came when Barbara posted three of them as 'border crossings' on our Gestare Art Collective website. She described them as three diptychs reminiscent of the oracle holes found in the temples of Malta which had emerged from an art-working using prepaid return cards from art magazines. The cards had evoked a spontaneous intense response to the commercialized phallic driven world of contemporary art. As Barbara's densely physical lines of oil pastel colours blocked out the return postage and address, she found herself emitting non-verbal acoustic sounds and layered them into the images.

Barbara's description of this matrixial co-encounter called back my own memories of sounding in the cavernous underground chambers of Malta's Hypogeum. Sensuous womblike walls contained oracle holes, resonant openings through which our acoustic offerings evoked imaginings of the prophetess/seer whose messages would pass from chamber to chamber eerily echoing through/with/in the deep underground passageways.

In June as we were planning for our annual residencies, I received an invitation from Barbara to send her more art magazine cards and to offer feedback on her application of Ettinger's* matrixial language in the artist statement about the blue 'border crossing' diptych which had been selected for the cover of The Journal of Critical Inquiry, a new publication in Pakistan. A larger image of the art piece accompanied the statement and I was drawn further into the metamorphic communication and transformation process borderlinking me to Barbara's work.

Barbara's residency was in process the July day I arrived at the STAG. On entering the studio space I encountered three of the diptychs mounted and unveiled at this point on the wall facing me and gasped 'Oh they are amazing!' to which Barbara replied 'That is exactly the right response!'. Thus began the next phase of my journey with these artbeings with whom I already felt a strong connection and was about to become more intimately involved.

During each of our annual residencies I have enjoyed opportunities for co-engagement with Barbara and her work and this year was no exception. My sewing fingers, my photographer's lens, and my spontaneous responses drew me deeper into relationship with the five oracular representations. As they were mounted on heavy interfacing panels and re-hung on the studio walls their dimensionality began to emerge emitting a magnetic attraction force calling me towards/in/to relationship with the oracular energies within each artbeing. With the hanging of the window panels, the spatial relationships between the oracular images and the vibrational space of the studio established an ongoing co-vi-

brational simultaneous presencing of the oracles' voices from the past with the acoustic exhalations of our own voices as we worked with the installation's daily progress.

Barbara's invitation to a day long oracular sounding co-event gave space for further exploration into my relationship with the oracular installations. I moved from wit(h)nessing the installation in process to encountering the art and the space through/with/in my own oracular experi-

Intimacy In Resonant Relationship

***Medwyn
McConachy***



ence. Crossing into the matrixial borderlinking presence of two other women artists at the STAG I began to prepare myself for a direct encounter with one of the art pieces.

ORACULAR

The five oracular veils hang motionless holding the perimeter of the room, anchoring the space for the bright blue lines that define the three circuit labyrinth in the centre of the studio floor. A floor that moans with the weight of each footstep taken through the labyrinth and creaks as I come to stillness before the oracles.

As I encounter each piece, gazing at it through the window in the veil, I am reminded of my annual journeys through the mists crossing the veil between the worlds to visit with the spirits of my ancestors. My body resonates with each encounter and soon guides me to the oracle with whom I am to journey on this day.

Slipping easily into an anchoring attendance to the co-encounters of the other artists, I immerse myself in the resonant container of our co-formed metramorphic harmonics.

Stone and wood, paper, plastic and human flesh emit sonic waves. Vibrant vocal threads sear their keening through/around/ behind/within the space as artist enters art.

Microphone attached, camera positioned I step up already full of resonant sensation, wondering what will come through/to me from the dark intense purple and black convergent lines of the oracle. Images emerge of ancestral beings whose wisdom

ENCOUNTER



comes to me through the shadowy mists of the 'other-world'. My breath deepens into my belly and in return come sounds, mirroring the intensity of line in the oracular art. I lean into the evocative interplay between body, sound and image, a communion in time/space, alive with compassionate hospitality.

My voice in-voking the M/other on an-other co-plane, co-dimension below/above/beside/within the I of my own knowing.

My gaze affixed to the oracle draws forth a deep longing, loving, grieving sound vocalizing heart and womb together, a combining of earth M/other energies borne of both/other worlds.

I feel my flesh wrapped upon bone encasing the throbbing pulsing blood of my body.

I feel my throat open and raw from the heartsound pouring forth resounding off the pure clear white walls of this sacred oracular wombspace.

I watch as my sounds weave through lines and colours. A flash of light.

A disappearing into the dark, the dark inside me, my womb, my flesh, my blood, my form my being.

A transgression with/in-to/through oracular artbeing.

Exhilarate annihilate..... exhale..... inhale
breath mouthing around sound soul song
spoken into/surrounding sounding
intense.....in-sense.....sensing
evoking.....voicing.....invoking
calling sound song

September 29, 2011



There I was on the 17th July, 2011, making oracular utterances that, according to Wikipedia, in extended use, make me an oracle.¹ I now review and reflect on my experience.

The warm summer afternoon brings a collegial atmosphere to the undertaking of the video documentation of Barbara Bickel's Oracular Co-encounters' performance installation. There is friendly banter, equipment location and relocation, Cindy-Lou's labyrinth walk, video tripod placement consultations with adjustments, and Medwyn's soup for lunch, while the suspended fabric-based art pieces breathe their responses to gentle drafts, giving them a sense of the ephemeral, as per Barbara's invitation to participate.

These works though, are solidly grounded in theory, notably that of: artist, psychoanalyst and theorist Bracha L. Ettinger (2004) who has developed a theory based in matrixial borderspaces, offer[ing] an aesthetic and ethical feminine-based embodied and relational language to articulate what has been suppressed and lost within the phallic sphere...

This theory takes the shape in Barbara's handling, of the removal of mail-in subscription card inserts from five art magazines, each detaching into two parts to become five pairs of substrates, one oblong 9 x 3.5" and the other 3 x 3.5", on which Bickel obliterates the texts with black and blue, red, pink, green, purple and yellow oil pastels.

The longer card of each pair is stitched verti-

cally onto a five and one quarter foot length of white, non-fusible interfacing, referencing "women's work," with the smaller being stitched horizontally directly below, creating a dramatic patch of scribbled colour against a delicate white ground. Several dualities exist here:

*The firmer, less flexible card stock
/ the drape that breathes according to gentle drafts.
The striking colours
/ the virginal white.*

The violence of the obliterating marks / the tenderness of the fabric.

The patriarchal (phallic) dominance / the matrixial response.

Given the verticality, this whole may be interpreted as a token crucifixion of the visual art establishment, but this is not enough.

Bickel adds a second layer of meaning, both physically and metaphorically, to her expression, by hanging another length of interfacing,

nine inches in front of the first, this time with a vertical aperture, replicating the space and positioning of the distressed magazine excerpts behind. Now, not only scribbled, obscured, erased and distressed, but isolated, only to be voyeuristically peered at through the aperture, just as the patron peered from behind the bushes, up the petticoats of Fragonard's "The Girl on the Swing," late 18th C.

With the cultural norms now reversed, Bickel scores her coupe de grace with her oracular

A Dramatic Dimension

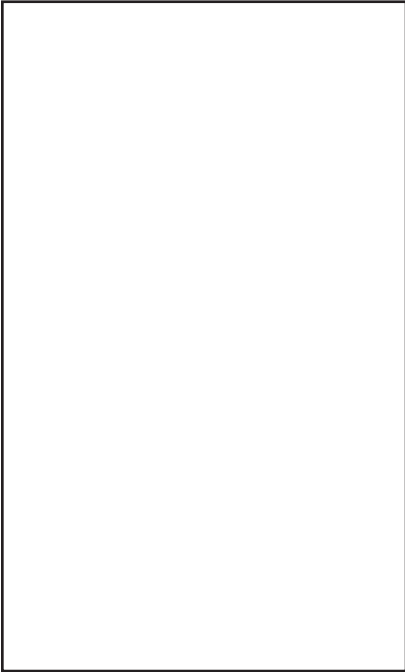
Mary Blaze



soundings concept. This is where I and four other co-creators enter independently into her matrixial world, as video evidenced in performance.

How would this new dimension of my own art practice reveal itself, I wondered?

Feeling the need for props, I gather a few rocks and stones as pieces of the natural world within my grasp, and to cradle, as I become the classical oracle of antiquity, as wise counsel of prophetic opinion,² able to whistle, whine and click my utterances through the aperture directly at the scribbled patriarchal representations. Meanwhile, I release my rocks and stones one by one, into a resonant wooden bowl, creating an intonation



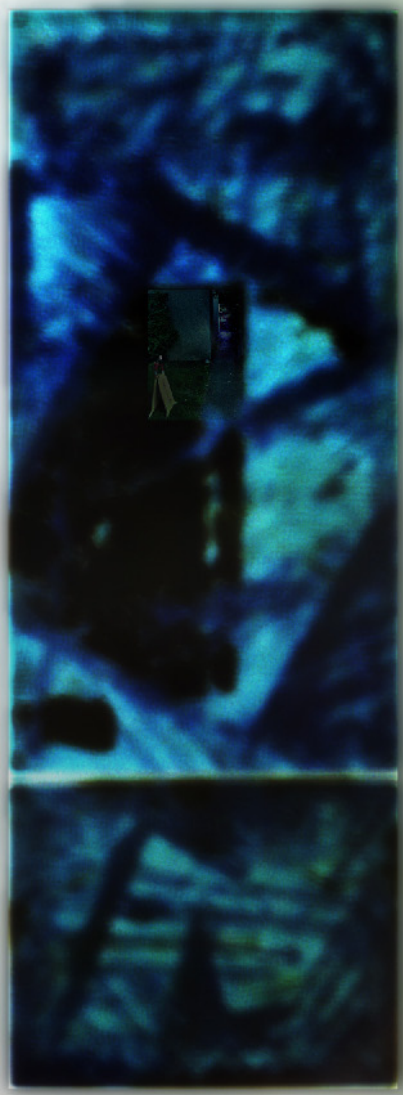
as if inspired by the gods.

While apprehensive at the outset, I engage fully without self-consciousness, deliberately at times forcing my soundings onto the fabric for its movement, in the spirit of mystical undercurrents.

I question whether these acts make me either a legitimate oracle or a performance artist, however, through my faithfulness to Barbara's concept, I extend my art practice into performance art, take my place amongst a team of respected artists, enjoy the companionship of collaboration and add my voice to ever louder utterances for a gender-balanced society. I am grateful to Barbara for this journey towards that destination.

Endnotes:

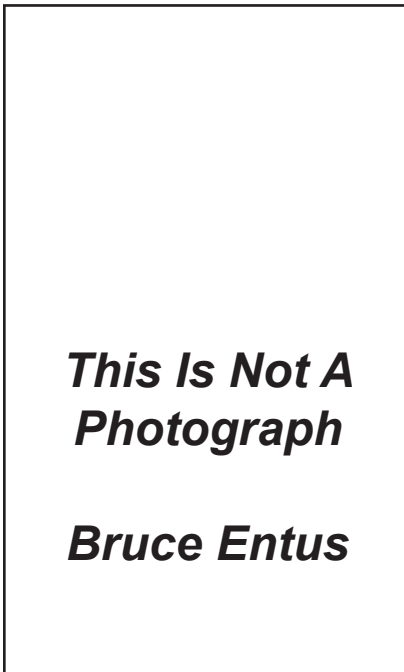
- 1. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/oracle: . . . oracle may also refer to the site of the oracle, and to the oracular utterances themselves. . . .
- 2. Ibid.



This is not a photograph
This is not a reproduction
This is...

I'd seen these cards before, on a table, without
the space or framing.
I liked the blue one best.

My path to see their installation at The Stag
a labyrinth around the rail yard
over scattered streets
stressed and late.



Just one sounding not yet
done
the blue one.

I had not sounded before
(or been on video either)
Without glasses, I see
the card defocused,
double edges and
new patterns.

Concentrating on these,
on chanting
on surprising resonances
and the breathing

Light emerges from the image, luminous
stained glass
or an open window on scenes soon forgotten
like a passing dream

... an approximation of the moment



These haikus are in response to my visceral interaction with the Oracular Encounters through dance, sounding and now poetry. It is also in response to taking my PhD class in Arts-Based Inquiry to the exhibit/encounter at the STAG gallery with Barbara Bickel.

These words echo the place of being in connection to art that breaks and splits one open to the interior and exterior.

~

*openings in hues
luminescent crevices
I touch my longing*

~

*inquiry in flesh
blue red yellow cries on paint
the question dances*

~

*listen to beneath
bare presence is all it asks
breath moves my sternum*

~

*art begets more art
communion of bright response
stay close to the root*

~

*she has been waiting
the sound within the color
wisdom bold as bone*

~

*raw stone of movement
emerge in layers of light
calling one back home*

~

*uncover ancient voice
sliding the belly to you
daylight hides through red*

~

*what is drawn over
is met with pristine new eyes
purple virgin sight*

~

*beauty slices raw
some wounds are made for
yellow
open to expanse*

~

*fragile sounding soars
the voice needs invitation
saturate green depths*

~

ORACULAR HAIKUS

**Celeste
Snowber**



She is Far - dark and light.

Beauty.
Forever unfolding spirit.

Lay down to me because I
think I know you.

You are the Other - unfolded
and unfolding
a script upon my skin.

I think I know you.

You are the Other who walks
just barely by my side
speaking words for my ear to
hear.

Do I know you?
I think I know you.

Skin on me.
You are skin on me - shedding skin onto skin
again.

This skinning place splits one volume by one
more – two fold.

Peeling flesh and blood and
bone.

A carrier of words seeds me
in a silent world – I come to
listen.
Her words speak to me of a
membrane memory.
A dark messenger, repeating
and unfolding – splitting a
shutter of light.

Something I want to know.
To feel the hear of a voice
upon my ear.

A sound of You.

***Cindy Lou
Griffith***

These words and the following images
are by-products of the manifest Event
produced of post-experiential somatic
systems awakened by (throat) sounding
with/in the Oracular Co-encounters STAG.







i.
deep breath limn frost

in order to go through, we encounter edges
here at the breathing space

fibrils of being
fibril mesh
diaphanous megaphone

ii.
at the edge of earth breath

inbreath

from within the larger
breathing beating body of
earthgaiadepth:
this one bronchiole of cloud
how the earth breathes
subtle tree whispers shivering
sibilant
sussurating outbreath on rippling cloudpaper
brief breath tsunamis from cloud colored
treetissues
reminding of breathing forests:
how the mountain clouds clasp tree limbs

the world has woven herself in fibrils
tightly, loosely, everything eliding and touching
elides and touches

outbreath

poised on the precipice of possibility
hawkdiving out of portalways
I waver towards the outbreathing portalway
and through: are we purposing porpoises
ancestors for/from the future
drawn across deep time junctures,
summoned by those who are to come?

***Oracular
Sounding***

***Marna
Hauk***

iii.
listening

in the time-between
possibility flying miasma
densated at
points of departure
small ribbons and weaves,
gesturing undulant
help us pause with poise

we can hear, through the
earway of spaciousness
the whisper weaves of those-
who-are-to-come

great sweeps of star fields of
possibilities
daughters of the big bang long
hence borning
gentled to soft progenic field
whispers

what do the unborn have to teach us?
can we pause to hear their summons?



iv.
doorways

sensitive tissues in sensate pulsing lifeworlds
we answer the summons of you future beings
clouds yet unfurled, possibilities of
humanwombones
long hence dreaming

still quiet silent rippling gentle
undulant oceanic drifters
across chasms of
timedistance, you no longer
speak our language, we are
dust in patterns to your bright
eyes

we can only glimpse you now
we are your blessers, so long
dead

long future distant breathing
humanwombones
we ancestor dust breath
beings live in clouds
breathed in and out by earth
breath clouds
breath of earth

we gaze down the column
hallway precipices
that have birthed you
earthward
glad hearted to feel you
across these snowlimens of time, of space

v.
oracle birth

breathing reminds me there are no happy
endings
only how rotting muckbodies of fungi will clear
the palate
after my bowstringflowbody congeals from long
flight and swerve

after we have become only
flowing skywind howling or
part of the
shine of the moon
so long after

earthgaiadepthbreath still
millennia breathings birthings
later
pauses at the orifice of
possibilities
and hollows out her
ribpluckings
upstirring expansions
with breath

shudders of color
limns through limens

she squats at the portalways
of earthbirthing
crouching for the
deepbreathing birthing breath
and outbreathing nownownow shshsh
nownownow shshsh
births the future
a brief smile flashes in her port cloud pulse



into presence

sounding alone with the art
moves me inward
to the personal

sounding while wit(h)nessed
I expand outward
to the political

“stand up to America”
is the message received

shaken
I strike my hands together
clapped
Into presence

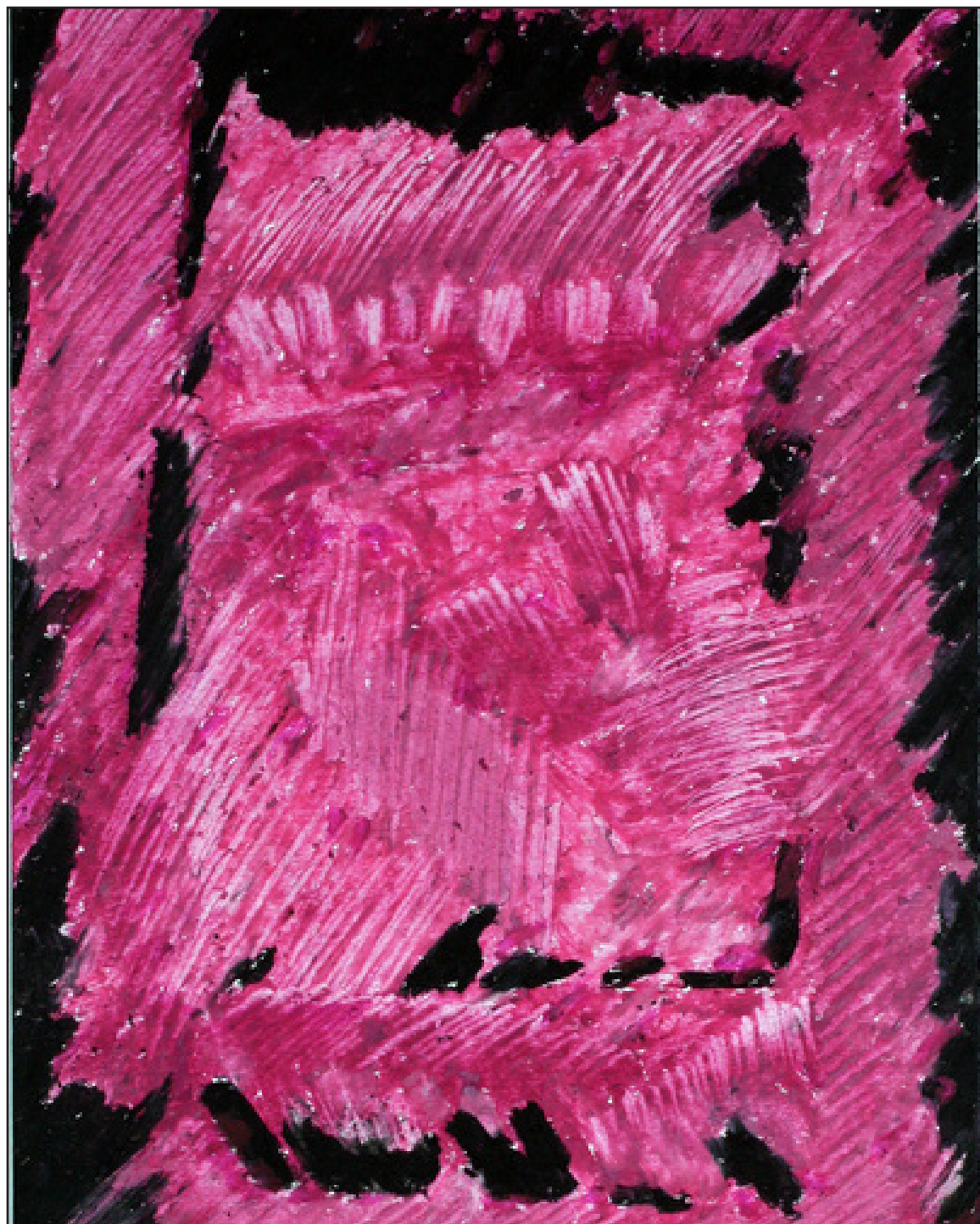
***into
presence***

***Barbara
Bickel***











Artist Biography

Barbara Bickel is a visual and performing artist, researcher, and educator. An Assistant Professor in Art Education and Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA she teaches art as an inquiry and meaning making process. Her arts-based Ph.D. in Art Education from The University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada was awarded the Arts Based Educational Research Outstanding Dissertation Award from the American Educational Research Association (ABER SIG) in 2009. Her research interests include arts-based inquiry methods, matrixial theory, collaboration, community-based art, the body voice, relational aesthetics, experimental video art, spirituality, feminism, women's leadership, restorative and transformative learning and performance ritual. Her art and performance rituals have been exhibited and performed in Canada and the US since 1991. She co-founded The Centre Gallery (1995-2001), a non-profit women's focused gallery in Calgary, Alberta. She is a co-founder and member of the Gestare Art Collective. Her articles on arts-based inquiry and a/r/tography have been published in numerous journals and book chapters. To view her art portfolio and arts-based research on-line visit <http://www.barbarabickel.com>



Barbara Bickel

Acknowledgements

Nothing is created alone and I have numerous people to thank for the coming together of the art installation and the catalogue. Both were truly formed through co-poiesis. Foundationally they would not have been possible without the STAG Residency and Gallery, and the vision holding of its stewards Aja Bond & Gabriel Mindel. My gratitude for their offering of supportive creative space in this community is immense. I also extend my thanks to Medwyn McConachy for her assistance and nurturance. Her joy in wit(h)nessing and participating in the creative process of the residency made it that much more rich. Two of my favorite Vancouver artists came to my aid in working through visual problem solving -- Mary Blaze and Cindy Lou Griffith -- you both are amazingly clear vehicles for the power of feminine visual aesthetics! I want to acknowledge Celeste and her Arts Based Inquiry Graduate class from Simon Fraser University. Their playful engaged inquiry with the installation in process inspired me to host the co-event that led to the oracular soundings and the video installation. And lastly, a very special thanks to those that engaged in the oracular co-event giving the installation its time-based video experience - Mary Blaze, Bruce Entus, Cindy Lou Griffith, Medwyn McConachy and Celeste Snowber - and as well to Marna Hauk. Your open and authentic responses to the Oracle Soundings assisted in expanding the essential co-engagement and metramorphic possibilities of these artworkings.

Oracular Co-Encounters

Art List

Oracle Sounding I, II, III, IV, & V

water colour paper, magazine subscription
card,
oil pastel, thread & boning on fabric
63 x 18 inches

Oracular Co-Encounter(s)

rear looping video projection onto fabric
32 minutes

Oracle voices

Mary Blaze
Cindy Lou Griffith
Bruce Entus
Medwyn McConachy
Barbara Bickel

Composed sounding piece

Barbara Bickel

Video editing & production

Barbara Bickel

Camera

Barbara Bickel
Cindy Lou Griffith

STAG Labyrinth

painters tape

Barbara Bickel

Born in Regina Saskatchewan, Canada, March 31, 1961

Assistant Professor in Art Education and Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Illinois USA

bickel.barbara@gmail.com

<http://www.barbarabickel.com>

<http://www.gestareartcollective.com>

Education

- 2008 Ph.D. in Education (art education: curriculum studies) The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada.
- 2004 Master of Arts in Education (curriculum & instruction) The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC,
- 1993 Bachelor of Fine Arts (painting) University of Calgary, Calgary, AB, Canada
- 1986 Bachelor of Arts (sociology, art history) University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB,

Selected Solo Art Exhibitions

- 2012 Oracular Co-Encounters, multi-media installation. Tinnin Center Gallery, Poplar Bluff, Missouri (November).
- 2012 Wit(h)nessing Eyes Closed, multi-media installation, ARC Gallery, Chicago, IL (June).
- 2011 Oracular Co-Encounters, multi-media installation. Strathcona Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC.
- 2008 Stillpoint, multi-media installation, Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts, Toronto Island, ON. & AMS Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC
- 2004 Who will read this body? multi-media installation, AMS Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC
- 2004 She Knows, Kensington Fine Art Gallery, Calgary AB
- 2003 Deepening Desire: a 10 year retrospective, Madeleine Wood curator, Vancouver E. Cultural Center Gallery, BC
- 2001 Illuminatus, The Centre Gallery, Calgary, AB
- 2000 Ancient Battlegrounds: Quest for the Woman Warrior, Bowen Is. Arts Council Gallery, Bowen Is. BC
- 1998 The Spirituality of Eroticism, The New Gallery, Calgary, AB
- 1997 Her Venus Signature, Vanderlelie Gallery, Edmonton, AB
- 1996 Her Venus Signature, The Centre Gallery, Calgary, AB
- 1996 Re-emergence, Art is Vital Gallery, Calgary, AB
- 1995 Sisters, The Centre Gallery, Calgary, AB
- 1995 Victorian Sisters, Xchanges Gallery, Victoria, BC
- 1993 Men as Birthers, not Destroyers, Turacos Gallery, Calgary, AB

Selected Two Person & Group Exhibitions

- 2011 Being Human, Union St. Gallery, Chicago Heights, IL. Juror, Dan Addington of Addington Gallery, Chicago.

- 2010 Pain: Feeling of pain in artwork of women artist-educators. Group juried exhibition. Zagreb, Izidor Kršnjavi Salon. (catalogue)
- 2010 Gestare Art Collective Studio Installation, multi-media installation with Wende Bartley, Nané Ariadne Jordan and Medwyn McConachy, Artscape Gibraltar Point. Toronto ON. (artist talk)
- 2010 Off Center, members group show. Jurors: Kathleen Carol, Aron Packer and Ann Rosen. Sponsored by The Chicago Women's Caucus for Art. Location: ARC Gallery in Chicago.
- 2009 Tracing Absence Sounding Presence, multi-media installation with Wende Bartley, Nané Ariadne Jordan and Medwyn McConachy, Gibraltar Point Centre for the Arts, Toronto Island, ON. (artist talk)
- 2009 Sacred Spaces, with Leslie Stanick & Sally Gradle, Vergette Gallery, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, IL.
- 2006 Elicit Bodies, with R. Michael Fisher & Bob Diskin, curated by Karen Green. The Diskin Galleries, Vancouver, BC (catalogue)
- 2005 Two Woman Show, with Laura Fair-Schulz, curated by Linda Hankin, The School of the Arts Gallery, Lewiston, NY
- 2002 Women "Enduring Freedom", installation with Mary Blaze, Fran Willis Gallery, Victoria, BC

Selected Multi-Media Performances

- 2011 Gestare Residency Performance Ritual, Strathcona Art Gallery, Vancouver, BC. (artist talk)
- 2010 Birth, collaborative performance ritual. Gestare Art Collective. Gibraltar Point Beach, Toronto, ON.
- 2010 M/Other Ways, collaborative performance ritual. Gestare Art Collective. Gibraltar Point Beach, Toronto, ON.
- 2010 Making Eye Contact, initiator & organizer of campus-wide performance art event with Mary Beth Edelson. Southern Illinois University Carbondale, Carbondale, IL. (video)
- 2006 Re/Turning to Her, collaborative performance ritual with Tannis Hugill, Vancouver School of Theology Labyrinth, Vancouver BC
- 2004 Who will read this body? solo multi-media performance, MA thesis, AMS Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC
- 2001 Illuminatus, solo multi-media performance, Unitarian Church of Vancouver, BC & The Centre Gallery, Calgary, AB
- 1998 The Spirituality of Eroticism, collaborative performance with movement artist Kathryn McGregor, The New Gallery, Calgary, AB
- 1996 Her Venus Signature, collaborative performance with jazz singer/ songwriter Cheryl Fisher, The Centre Gallery, Calgary, AB
- 1995 Sisters, collaborative performance with 22 of 29 female co-creators, The Centre Gallery, Calgary, AB (catalogue)

Recent Selected Conference Presentations

- 2012 Womb Walks: An Arts-based Spiritual Inquiry. Co-presenters Medwyn McConachy & Nané Jordan. American Educational Research Assoc. Spirituality SIG. Paper & visual Presentation. Vancouver, BC. Canada. April 13-16
- 2011 Holistic/Restorative Learning Through Copoiesis. Co-presenter Medwyn McConachy. American Educational Research Assoc. Holistic Education SIG. Paper & Visual Presentation. New Orleans. April 14-18.
- 2010 The Labyrinth, Chora and Matrixial Copoiesis. Co-presented with Gestare Art Collective.

International Conference on Narrative, Arts-based, and "Post" Approaches to Social Research (NAPAR), January 21-23. Sponsored by the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College. Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona.

2010 Creative Research in the 21st Century, College Art Assoc. (CAA) Education Committee Panel. Invited panelist. Feb. 10 – 13. Chicago, IL

Selected Refereed Publications

- Bickel, Barbara. (2012). Decolonizing the Divine through co-/a/r/tographic praxis in Matrixial borderspaces. *Visual Arts Research*. 38(2).
- Bickel, Barbara & Rose, Ingrid. (2011). Wom(b)en Soundings. *Women and Language* 34(2). 157 [p.1-26 online] <http://www.womenandlanguage.org/category/alternative-scholarship/>
- Bickel, Barbara & Hugill, Tannis. (2011). Re/Turning to Her: An A/r/tographic Ritual Inquiry. *Visual Culture and Gender*. 6(1), 6-12. Retrieved from <http://explorations.sva.psu.edu/vcg/>
- Bickel, B., Springgay, S., Beer, R., Irwin, R., Xiong, G. (2011) A/r/tographic collaboration as radical relatedness. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 10(1), 86-102. Retrieved from <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/issue/view/601>
- Bickel, Barbara, Nané Ariadne Jordan & McConachy, Medwyn. (2011). Gestating Art in the Matrixial Labyrinth. *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative*. 2(1).
- Bickel, Barbara & Gradle, Sally. (2010). The Unfolding Inner Teacher: Applying Holistic Ideas from Beittel & Schaefer-Simmern. *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies*. Retrieved from http://www.uwstout.edu/soe/jaaacs/vol6/Gradle_Bickel.htm
- Bickel, Barbara, & Jordan, Nane. A. (2009). Labyrinths as ritual art: A pedagogy of inquiry/witnessing/ listening to the sacred. *Educational Insights online journal* 13(2). Retrieved from <http://www.educationalinsights.ca/>
- Bickel, Barbara. (2008). Who will read this body? A/r/tographic statement. In M. Cahnmann, & R. Siegesmund (Eds.), *Arts-based inquiry in diverse learning communities: Foundations for practice* (pp 125-135). New York, NY: Routledge.
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- Bickel, Barbara. (2005). From artist to a/r/tographer; An autoethnographic ritual inquiry into writing on the body. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* 2(2), 8-17.
- Bickel, Barbara & Fisher, Vanessa. (2005). Awakening the divine feminine: A stepmother-daughter collaborative journey through art making & ritual. *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 7(1), 52-67.

Biographies

Mary Blaze

received her B.F.A. from Emily Carr University of Art and Design in 2000. In 1995 she received the West Vancouver Visual Arts Society Scholarship and in 1990 she was certified in Art Institute Print-making at Capilano College, North Vancouver, B.C. She lives in North Vancouver, BC, Canada.

Aja Rose Bond

is an interdisciplinary artist whos work incorporates sound, visual art & craft. She works extensively organizing communities and facilitating creative processes. She is a co-founder of the STAG

Bruce Entus

is a designer of high tech control systems and sometime creative photographer, who has lately ventured to the other side of the lens.

R. Mchael Fisher

is an artist, writer, independent scholar and consultant, currently Director of the Center for Spiritual Inquiry and Integral Education (www.csiie.org) Carbondale, IL. He is Bickel's life-partner of some 20 years.

Cindy Lou Griffith

utilizes auto-ethnography and sense data in production of visual and written work that she names: a symbiote consciousness.

Marna Hauk

is a published scholar, activist, artist, and author with graduate level study and teaching experience in sustainability and ecological design. She flourishes in the Pacific Cascadia bioregion summoning regenerative creativity and earth empathy with Gaian methods. She is the founder of Moonifest (www.moonifest.org) and the Institute for Earth Regenerative Studies (www.earthregenerative.org).

Medwyn McConachy

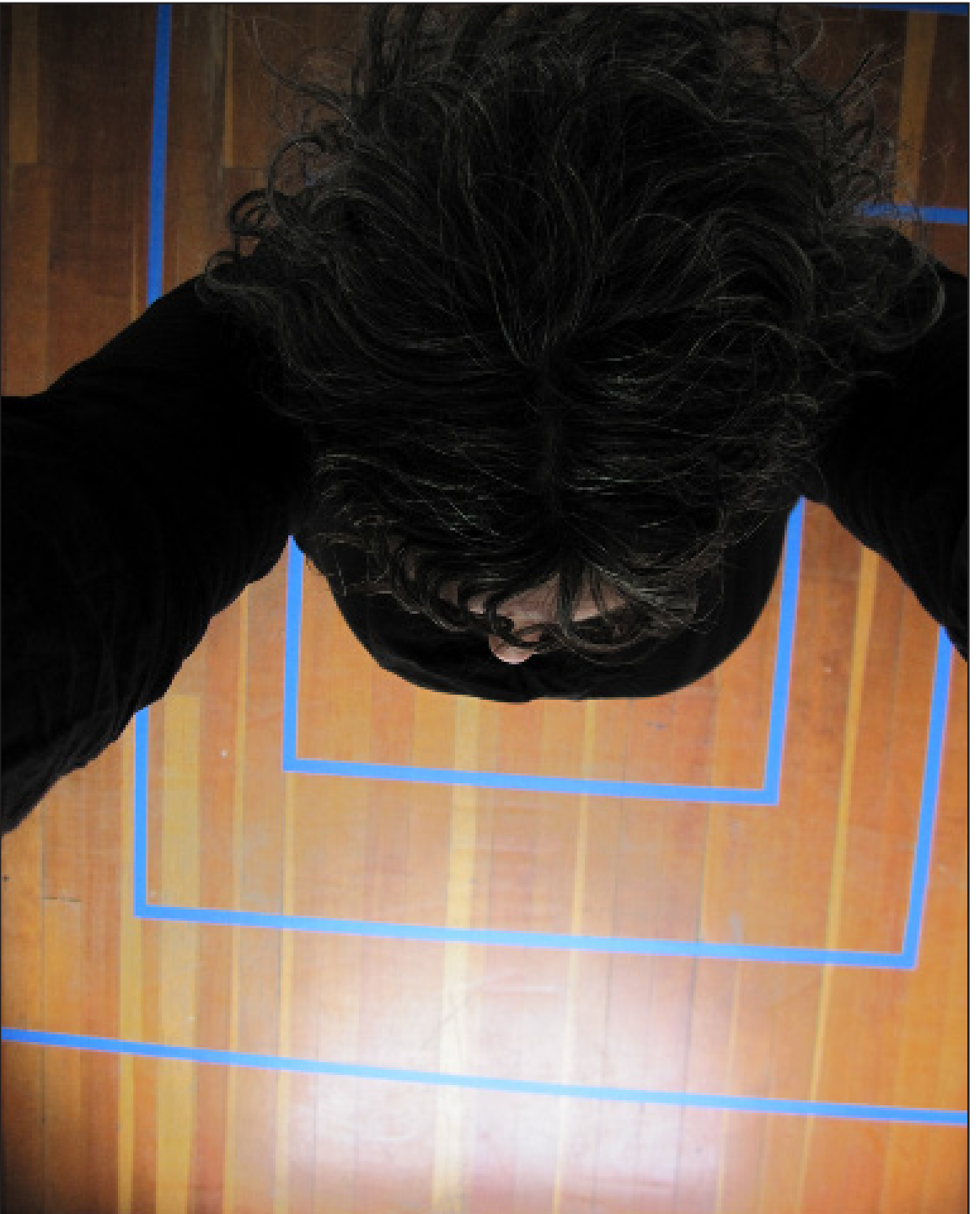
is a community artist, spiritual feminist and a crone whose work is inspired by her relationship with the natural world and her commitment to collaborative community and creative processes.

Gabriel Saloman

creates artwork which seeks the integration of sound and various socially engaged practices as a form of radical praxis. He is a co-founder of the STAG.

Celeste Snowber, PhD

is a dancer, poet/writer and educator who is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Her website is www.celestesnowber.com.









Oracular Co-Encounters

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Barbara Bickel

Gabriel Saloman

Mary Blaze

Medwyn McConachy

Oracular Painting by

Cindy Lou Griffith

Oracular Photograph by

Bruce Entus

Oracular Co-Encounters was presented at the Strathcona Art Gallery on July 21, 2011. In advance of this publication, the Oracular pieces have travelled and been exhibited partially at the Bergamo Conference in Dayton Ohio in October 2011, and at the University Museum of Southern Illinois University Carbondale in Illinois in November, 2011.

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For more information about the Strathcona Art Gallery or this publication, contact the STAG at diademdiscos@gmail.com, or visit www.strathconaartgallery.tumblr.com, or visit us at 826 E. Pender Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6A 1W1



