

A human being is part of the whole called by us, universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. The true value of a human being is determined by the measure and the sense in which they have obtained liberation from the self. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive.

-Albert Einstein, 1954

“All things come out of the One and the One out of all things.”

-Heraclitus, 500 B.C.

Some ideas are timeless. Despite the fact that Einstein and Heraclitus existed separately on earth, 2,500 years and half a world away from one another, a bridge through time and space exists on the basis of their shared belief. Ironically, their connection is forged through a realization that the entirety of existence is interconnected. This idea can be found again and again throughout history, in the writings of all major spiritual teachings, philosophies, and in the work of the most distinguished scientists and physicists. Somehow, however, this precious gem of an idea that “to experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest [of existence is] a kind of optical delusion of consciousness,” has slipped through the cracks, and remains hidden from the majority of people in industrialized nations. To our detriment, we deny or repress this scientific, spiritual truth that holds the capability of shifting one’s consciousness and possibly changing the world, as we now know it. As a result, the human world is filled with pain, suffering, hatred, torture, depression, and anxiety. Humans consistently inflict pain and destruction on other life forms as a physical manifestation of our mental afflictions. I have long been puzzled as to why we collectively create so much pain and

suffering for ourselves and others. It has been a topic of research I have returned to again and again since I was a young teenager.

We believe ourselves to be the most advanced, most highly evolved creatures on the planet. This status can be largely credited to our comparably large brain size. While it is obvious that our high functioning brains have served us in creating the incredible lifestyle we have achieved, and of which we are very proud, I have come to question if having large, complex brains can be, at least in the way they are most often used at this point in time, as much of a blessing as a curse. It is surely wonderful to enjoy all of the benefits of the countless technological inventions and innovations developed over time, such as central heating and cooling, abundant, delicious food, and endless entertainment. At the same time, however, other inventions provide the capability to torture and destroy countless innocent people and other life forms at the touch of a button or the pull of a trigger. New cases of depression, murder, and suicide occur daily. I find it important to examine the ways in which we have evolved and I seek to humbly learn from the wise few, such as Einstein and Heraclitus, whose message of interconnection continues to be overlooked.

The work I make allows me to focus on the theory of interconnected existence and contemplate freedom from “the delusion that I am separate from the rest of existence. It is an arduous challenge to train one’s mind to truly comprehend and integrate into action, a worldview that was not taught at a young age. I was unaware of this notion of interconnection until just a few years ago, yet it speaks to me in a way that no other philosophy ever has. It is evident in so many aspects of life and thought, especially in the fields of science and anthropology, which are critical to understanding life and human interaction.

In my search for understanding the virtues and vices of the human condition, I make attempts to understand the basics in the field of neuroscience. Neuroscientists are revealing fascinating discoveries about the mechanics of the brain, which serve to shed light on how and why people think and act the way they do. From my limited understanding, I have come to learn that thoughts are, on the physical level, a series of chemicals and electrical charges shooting back and forth throughout different areas of the brain. As Barbara Stafford explains in her book, *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the Art of Connecting*, “The world-generating power of neural nets transforms electric patterns excited in the receptor organs into internal representations. The brain, as a vast collection of systems, is constantly deploying the images that constitute our thoughts as it interacts with the body and the outside world.” (Stafford, 164) Understanding the mechanics of the brain assures me that, with patience and dedication, this worldview of interconnection is becoming embedded in my neural networks (or “memory banks”) and shaping my reflex perceptions. Through creating drawings that document my experimental ideas on interconnection and the human condition, my mind focuses, the inner “chatter” quiets, and I feel “liberation from the self.” Because I deeply value and cherish the fascinating experience of being alive, I seek to embrace this “new manner of thinking” put forth by the wisdom of thinkers like Einstein. I do this so that I might contribute to the survival of humanity, which appears to be on the brink of inevitable, massive change. In a series of four sections, I will explain my work from process to concept to the forecasted direction my work will take in the future, and note how the themes of interconnection and the human condition emerge throughout.

Process

At its most basic level, my process involves a period of preliminary sketching, followed by the translation of the sketch with gouache and graphite on paper to create a finished drawing, which is then researched, written about and titled. Before I begin to compose my images, I search through my collection of used books and magazines, carefully cutting out and collecting images that catch my attention. Next, I clear a space on the floor and lay out several sheets of paper. I pull out my collection of imagery and begin slowly placing and arranging the images on the sheets of paper. I take breaks, cut out more images, throw out old images, return and shift them around some more. This process goes on for a period of several days.

During this process, I am operating from a place in my mind that is different from my ordinary frame of mind. It is the intuitive, visual, preconscious part of my mind, most often referred to as the left hemisphere of the brain. It feels primordial, like a completely natural, preverbal state that is always with me, but stays dormant while engaged in the activities of everyday life. It operates without the “mental chatter” that can be associated with the brain’s right hemisphere. I begin composing with a quiet, open mind, without a predetermined image or message to convey. The spiritual teacher, Eckhart Tolle, echoes a major theme in the Buddhist religion when he urges people to “Be present.” I endeavor to keep my mind focused only on the present moment, and at times I feel as though I am watching myself compose from an outside view. This is the basis for the title of my exhibition, Giving Presence. In this state, I am curious and experiment without harsh judgment or inner-criticism. I purposefully refrain from guiding the collages to relate a specific meaning during the composition stage, as this tends to awaken the mental chatter

and pulls me out of the silent focus of the present moment. Years of experimenting with different approaches have proven this method to be the most successful for me.

When this process is complete, I usually end up with three or four collage sketches. I do not glue the collage elements to the paper, so they might be incorporated into future sketches. The collage only exists temporarily and slowly deteriorates as the drawing builds toward completion. Documentation and maps are made of the ephemeral sketches to ensure accuracy in the translation from collage to gouache and graphite. After remapping the image in its entirety on the paper, I begin with one component at a time and render it as tightly as I can so that it achieves the trompe l'oeil appearance of the cut out image. I recreate the images to scale, and because they come from books and magazines, they are quite small and require the smallest implements I can find. I occasionally use a magnifying glass to ensure accurate execution. During this stage of creation, my mind is quiet again, focused intently on the image on which I am working and the image from which it is derived. Eventually, the entire collage is translated into a unified drawing and the picture is finished.

At this point in my explanation, I believe it becomes clear as to why I spend the time recreating the images as opposed to allowing them to exist as the preliminary collage on which they are based. The process of drawing these tiny images requires a vast amount of time, concentration, and dedication to the image. It is slow, tedious, and the images are very small, garnering less initial attention than a large-scale work. They also run the risk of being overlooked as “simply a collage.” While collage is an art form I deeply respect and closely identify with, it lacks the conviction I need my work to convey. Because technology is causing our world to become exponentially fast-paced and demanding of speed and efficiency, the counter-action of my process forces me to disidentify with this

intense realm and connect with a more natural state of being where the mind is not focused on future tasks and obligations. It is my hope that viewers who happen upon my work will do the same, giving more time to examine my technique, and understanding the time and exertion that went into the piece. I hope this will invite them to spend a longer period appreciating the image than they would if it was a traditional collage. During this time, the viewer's themselves may be caught in the present moment as well, briefly released from the outside pressures of the world.

The last step in my process involves research and writing to reveal an intriguing interpretation of the work, based on symbolism culled from a wide range of sources from various cultures and time periods. I utilize the Internet and several symbolism dictionaries to define each component in the drawing. I then create a word document listing the defined symbolisms, and contemplate how all of the individual meanings work together. In the same way the collage components come together to create one cohesive image, the individual symbolic meanings meld into a single narrative or "reading" for the image, though they remain hidden from the viewer. Without fail, the interpretation that emerges from the interconnection of symbolisms reveals an intensely insightful, personal message that is relevant to my life situation in one way or another. My desire is to do what the artist, Joseph Cornell, has been credited with doing, namely to "give palpable shape to intensely personal emotions...[and] turn indescribable intimacies into publicly sharable analogies" (156).

Imagery

The imagery in my drawings are derived from a collected library of second hand books and magazines, including nature encyclopedias, science, psychology, and medical

textbooks, children's books, textile and pattern books, vintage cookbooks, fashion, popular culture, and National Geographic magazines. The subjects of these books appeal to my broad range of interests and curiosities about the world. I am drawn to the diverse range of images inherent in these resources. Encompassing a spectrum of wild animals, insects, outer space, microscopic organisms, organic and manufactured objects, colors, patterns, and food, among other imagery, my collection seeks to represent the strata of forms in existence. Though I am drawn to certain forms over others as a matter of personal relevance and aesthetic, a broad survey of imagery is covered. As my collection of work grows, it becomes clear that I am attracted to images of large wildcats, mushrooms, women's mouths, insects, flat shapes of intense colors, small rodents, fish, fruit, birds, star clusters, and industrial objects like cars and televisions. I seek images that I find beautiful, endearing, powerful, exotic, mysterious, or nostalgic. Because I am intensely fascinated with the natural world, the majority of my images are nature-based. However, I am drawn to remove them from any type of environment and juxtapose them with graphic forms and manmade objects so that they float in clusters on an otherwise blank page. I find that this format enforces the theme of interconnection through the lack of excess background information. Each component in the piece carries greater visual weight and conceptual significance, and exudes a stronger symbolic presence.

Conceptual Intentions

Uniting these wide-ranging images provides for an exciting experience involving experimentation and intuition. It is a meditation on creating and realizing interconnection within a collection of seemingly unrelated images. It is my way of "widening [my] circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty" as

Einstein states. I feel a kinship between my compositions and 17th century Cabinets of Curiosity. In a way, both are culminations of strange and disjunctive subjects that provoke the imagination to appreciate the beauty and strangeness of nature, and serve to create connections between different forms.

I am intensely fascinated by the human compulsion to invent a meaning for everything in the world, for every object and experience that is witnessed. Moreover, there are as many meanings as there are people. Every single mind interprets subjects and occurrences in a unique way. This leads me to research the fields of psychology, mythology, symbolism, and neuroscience to discover fascinating intricacies of this notion. The media of collage allows for a limitless set of images to be recontextualized, creating new meanings, associations, and connections to contemplate. It is an engaging activity to research the history behind cultural symbolism and mythology to understand how and why certain objects, such as flowers and animals, came to represent certain ideas, values, or historical moments.

The invention of symbols also occurs on a personal level in addition to the cultural level. Whether it happens consciously or not, every image a person ingests is colored by the unique set of experiences that comprise their personal history. This causes every person to have an idiosyncratic association to and interpretation of the visual stimuli they encounter. This meaning is compounded onto the cultural symbolism with which they identify. Barbara Stafford explains, “The human conjunctive faculty is simultaneously individual and global, specific and general, and manifests in analogy. Analogy provokes a comparative drive to map across knowledge systems integrating disconnected components into a whole (142).

So, while I create a personalized meaning for my works, it is my desire that viewers develop their own connections and interpretations of the work. Sometimes a dialog arises between viewers, evoking an interaction of shared interpretations. This may foster new realizations about oneself or forge a new social connection. Stafford states, “How we couple representations in space is the key to understanding selfhood. The activity of linking has an emotional component, fitting our desires to an expanding universe of events in which both self and others are mutually transformed” (141). Because we spend so much time focused on the outer world, it is important to be in touch with one’s inner world to feel psychically balanced. I ask, “What can this mean?” to spark contemplation and imagination. This is far more valuable to me than hoping a viewer understands the meaning I have prescribed. Like the artist Fred Tomaselli states, I am interested in “...how the work of art [is] influencing the viewer, treating them more as a participant than a spectator” (Singh, 54). Multiple interpretations are guaranteed in any work of art. I encourage this so that a more personal experience might be achieved.

I do, however, hope my work can sometimes emit a theme interconnection, even if it comes across subconsciously. Because I couple images of creatures and objects that would never be seen together in the outside world, the viewer is forced to create a connection between them. For example, in *Penguin Totem*, a family of penguins stands under nearly tree-sized mushrooms, along with comparatively large deviled eggs, while a woman aims at them with an oversized revolver. There is no environment to support the figures, so every component in the image holds a more powerful presence. They are dependent upon one another for the piece to be whole, and this compositional device begs the viewer to solve the riddle of why these images exist together. One might wonder why the woman has a gun aimed at the penguins, provoking a further contemplation of gun

violence in general. “Why mushrooms?” or “What do the deviled eggs have to do with anything?” they may ask. It is up to them to answer their own questions.

When truly seeking to understand an image, the viewer accesses their memory banks and endows the images with symbolic qualities that work together on some level to compose a reading of the piece. New connections are made between the forms in the image. When this happens, on a physical level, the brain creates a new connection called a synapse, which now connects penguins to mushrooms, for example. The complex study of neuroscience is fascinating and nurtures my craving to form new connections between disparate forms ad infinitum. It increases the capacity of the imagination and fosters creative thinking.

Barbara Stafford also speaks of the Genome Project “whose intention is to map all sequences and all possible relations of the three billion base pairs typically found in the genetic material in the chromosome of any particular person. The rise of new, coordinated creation myths and the return of a recombinant cosmology- prompted by the interlace of hybrid DNA- suggest that human beings might start to treasure their plaited history not just as distinctive members of a specific nation, ethnic group, class or gender, but as a boundary-straddling species belonging to a vast, interconnected, and ancient gene pool” (181). It is exciting how different fields of study are working toward the same ultimate goal. Perhaps Einstein, Heraclitus and the others’ message is finally receiving the attention it deserves.

Influences and Direction

Aside from the thinkers mentioned above, I am influenced by a variety of theorists, spiritual teachers, scientists, musicians, and visual artists. Beginning with non-artists, the

materials that are most influential to shaping my worldview are the 2004 movie, *What the Bleep do We Know?* and Eckhart Tolle's book, *The Power of Now*. These two sources offer mind-expanding alternatives for contemplating the mind, the soul, the universe, and all of existence. With a blend of science, spiritual teachings, and psychoanalysis, they have inspired me to view the world and approach my work with an understanding of connection beyond word and form.

I also value the writings and lectures of Dr. Joseph Campbell. He illustrates the psychic evolution of the human race, and emphasizes how ancient humans sought spiritual guidance through the stuff of the world around them. He brings insight to the ways in which modern people still seek out philosophical and spiritual meaning on some level. Campbell recognizes that contemporary society has replaced ancient gods with science and technology, causing a spiritual void to exist, and sees the need for a balance to be restored. This thought urges me to study the ancient myths and shed the light of their teachings onto my work.

Carl Jung is another influence. I am intrigued by his belief that dreams and myths are constellations of archetypal images. His notion of the collective unconscious influences my view of interconnection and fosters my desire to liken my images to dreamscapes.

Contemporary artistic influences include James Rosenquist, Max Ernst, John Rappleye, Wangechi Mutu, the lesser known Mars-1, Heimir Bjorgulfsson, and Richard Coleman, and most recently and importantly, Fred Tomaselli, Phillip Taaffe, and Harry Smith. While the styles of these artists cover a broad range, common denominators do exist. Most of them work in a style that includes representational subject matter existing in a dreamlike or non-objective space. Several combine disjunctive imagery with collage, or they are informed by the collage aesthetic. I am attracted to the alternate realities they

create, as well as their various techniques and processes. They inspire me to push my work further and continuously explore new visual possibilities.

Works by Fred Tomaselli, John Rappleye, and Mars-1, a San Francisco-based “Low-brow” artist, allow the viewer to “lose yourself” as Tomaselli puts it, and enter a transportive visual experience that is sometimes described as psychedelic or trance-inducing. I desire to bring that effect into my own work to further push out the tendency for the mind to think on a verbal level and become captivated by the visual stimuli. As I mentioned above, one of my goals is for the viewer to be removed from the pressures of the outside world and have an intimate experience with my work. I am drawn to the way John Rappleye merges different animals together to create new creatures in his drawings. They capture an “air of magic and unreality to familiar things.” They are regarded as “homespun fairy tales,” and “explorations of cultural folklore and his own personal mythology... [existing in a] dream world landscape” (<http://baileygallery.com>).

Lastly, it is the philosophies of Tomaselli, Phillip Taaffe, and the late Harry Smith, whom I discovered through a published catalog of their group show, *The Heavenly Tree Grows Downward*, exhibited at James Cohen Gallery in 2002. I seek to gain additional knowledge about the themes that inform their work. Their long list is as follows: German Idealism, the botanical illustrations of Ernst Haeckel, folk art as a repository of vital forms and primordial impulses, the symbolic languages of medieval and Renaissance magic and cosmology, a search for connected cultural patterns in diverse anthropologies, the visual evocations of trance states as induced by psychoactive plants and neurostimulants, and other occult categories (Singh, 14). Thus far, I have recently begun to research the field of sacred geometry, which is intensely fascinating to me. I plan to research many of their other interests and let them work themselves into the way I compose my images. I

appreciate the use of geometric forms in their works and how they relate to historical occult practices. Their work is imbued with a transformative, sublime power that I crave in my own work. Rani Singh states, Like Smith, Taaffe and Tomaselli make works which are meant to be gazed not only upon, but through. Smith believed in the painting as oracle. To see the divine in all things was the underlying subject of all Smith's interests, be they Native American beliefs, occult philosophies, or psychedelic research. (Singh, 44.)

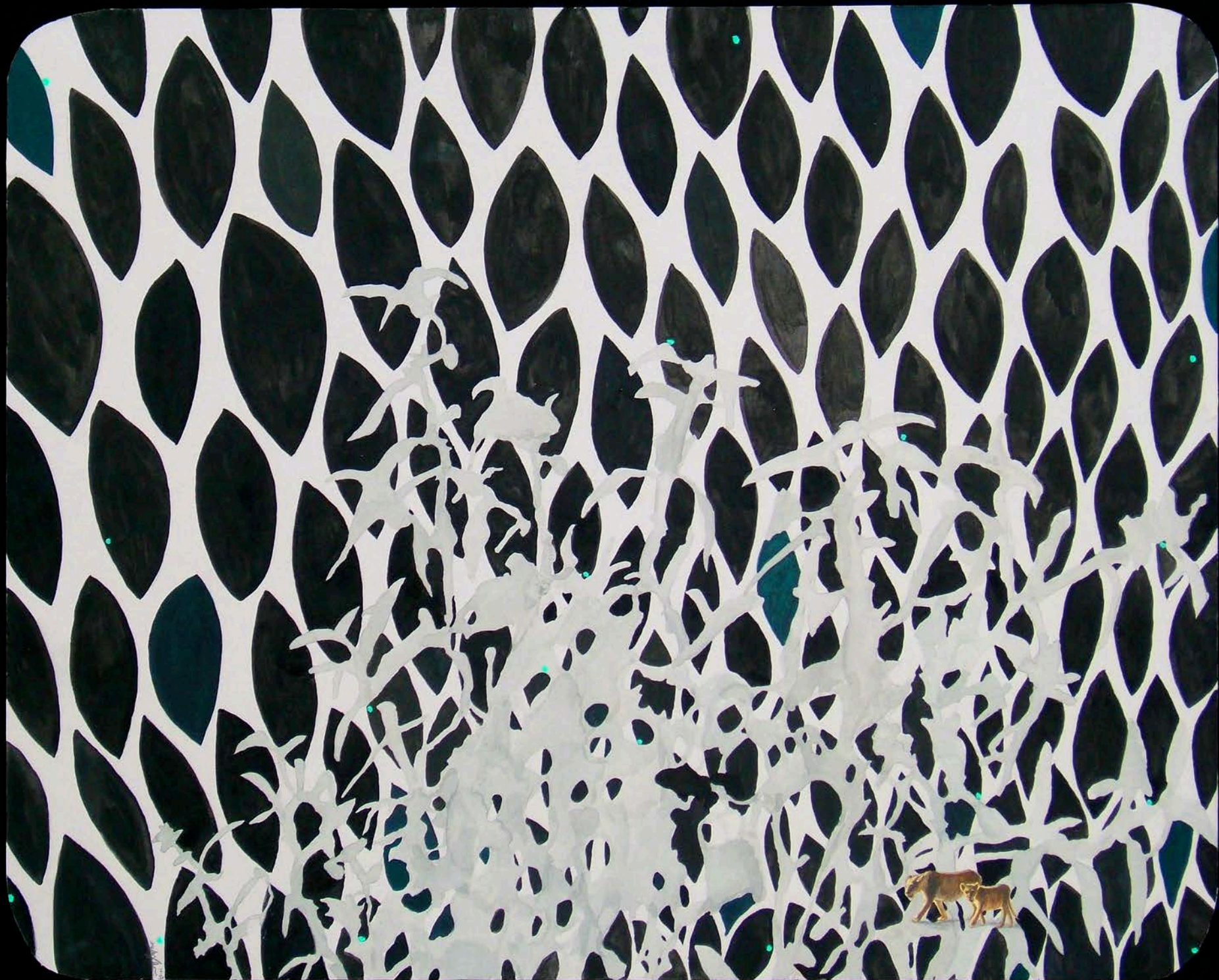
The way these artists speak about their work also resonates with me and serves to empower my attitudes toward the work I make. Tomaselli states "Most of my favorite art hits the viewer in some non-intellectual, intuitive kind of way. You can lose yourself in the work." (Singh, 51). Phillip Taaffe describes the process of his work as a ritualistic process and then states "...the important point is that as I was doing this, the language fell away and I became more interested in what I was constructing pictorially. Then I knew in my bones I was in the right place...[this was] a deeply personal activity which could take into consideration everything I cared about" (58).

It is rare for me to hear of anyone around me speak openly about their work in this way. It is inspiring to hear well-known, "blue chip" artists seriously relate to their work as ritual, as transformative, as coming from a non-intellectual place, or rooted in a spiritual mindset. It seems to be a taboo manner of speaking about "high" art at this point in time, yet I truly feel that certain artwork can tap into the mind or the spirit in a profoundly moving way, akin to a religious experience.

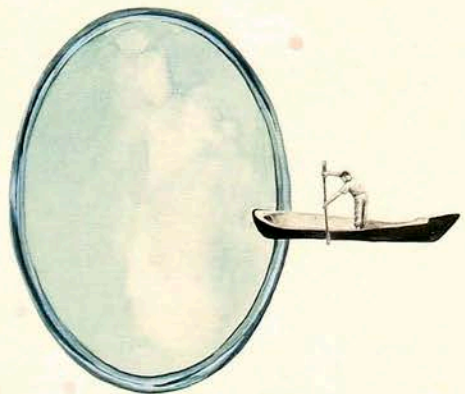
In a time when industrialization, speed, and capitalism are beginning to erode the gleaming tower of wealth and progress they themselves built, we are coming to see things in a new perspective. Values appear to be shifting, if ever so slightly. People are forced to slow down, which can provide time to look around, to contemplate. People are desperate,

losing their homes, their possessions, and their careers. When identities are being stripped in this way, there is vulnerability and fear. These volatile emotions have the capability to evoke the highest good or the very worst of the human condition. This is why it is a crucial time for all beings to seek the “wisdom of the ages” and be reminded that we are “part of the whole...a part limited in time and space...” and that our experience of ourselves as “separate from the rest... is a kind of optical delusion of consciousness.” I truly believe Einstein is speaking the truth when he says “We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if humanity is to survive.” This manner of thinking, comprised of focusing on our connections, the beauty of nature, on creativity and wholeness, is my focus. I know I am not alone in this mindset, and for this, I am grateful.













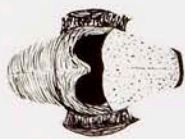








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