

### **Introductory Remarks**

Welcome. I'd like to tell you a little about how I use my artwork and storytelling skills in conjunction with multi-modal Expressive Arts techniques.

The panels you see around you are reproductions of acrylic paintings. They are designed to create a beautiful and safe space for empowerment workshops using a ritual format drawn from the images artifacts and structural elements associated with the Women's Spirituality Movement(1)

The ritual pattern is common to many gatherings: A procession and purification, followed by invocation, storytelling and meditation. These then give content to some form of expressive arts which are succeeded by sharing and personal commitment. There is always an opportunity for participants to speak uninterrupted and to share leadership. The final stages include releasing, grounding and celebration. In this way we move through the stages of separation, transformation and reintegration.

For more than 25 years I have participated in women's circles. We have danced, sung, and told our truths in stories and artwork. We have opened and grown, come to know and accept ourselves, moved through ill health, tragedy, births and deaths. In my doctoral research I examined some of the extensive literature written over the last two decades validating what I knew to be true from my own experience, the therapeutic potential of imagery, visualization and healing stories for self-discovery and empowerment.

It seemed only natural to share these possibilities with those outside of women's circles-to men, women, and children in crisis. I soon realized, however, that the unaesthetic utilitarian and often noisy settings in which I found these participants made the process of going inward almost impossible. So I created this "Have ritual will travel" portable installation to bring to institutional spaces a transformative environment creating the sense of "making special" that Ellen Dissanayake describes as the core art experience and one of our basic human needs. (2)

These panels have traveled to all manner of public buildings, prisons, homeless shelters, battered women's centers, schools and hospitals like this one. Sometimes I use them in full rituals, often one or two as a focus for meditation or as a starting point for a participatory storytelling performance. In every case I try to allow art and myth to inform all of my actions.

In keeping with this concept, today I will present a prose poem describing my sources of inspiration and my process. This will be followed by an interactive demonstration using a responsive storytelling reading and Expressive Arts (3).For any definitions and references that might not be familiar to you, I have prepared a list of endnotes. I also have self-published workbooks with descriptions of the symbolism of the images, sample stories, words to chants and songs and helpful resources. There are several copies for sale and a demonstration copy for you to look through. These will be available with a price list for the paintings and the lists of the various citations from this presentation on the desk next to me. You are also invited to visit my website which holds more of my images.

You will not need the paper and the chalk until the end of the program, so please just put them down, plant you feet and get comfortable.

### Presentation

In the deep purple light that glows at the dawn of being comes forth She Who Thinks, the Hopi Spiderwoman (4).

From her own luminous being she brings forth a silvery thread which she casts from the East to the West.

And another which she casts to the North and the South.

And there in the Center, where the two threads meet

She sings the Song of Life in a voice that is at once beautiful, deep and sweet.

This is the voice of the Ancient Crone who still listens and responds.

It is the voice in the mirror reassuring us that we are the fairest of them all,

Granting even our harmful, destructive wishes.

So that twelve strong sons may instantly become wild swans (5),

Only to be redeemed by the work of the maiden, Kore, Persephone (6),

The alchemical Rose of Grimm's fairy tales (7)

She reensouls her brothers with her weaving

At the cost of her most precious gift,

Her voice and her own destiny.

Through Ritual Art we revive that voice

Reenter our bodies, reclaim our emotions

Without judging, without competing,

"Expiring a love breath the lets you open infinitely" (8)

We form our circles in the mythic time outside of time where Art happens.

Our portals of healing are stories and images

We are birthed by mothers of every form, every gender

Dark seers holding the serpent's wisdom (9),

Powerful queens who protectively love their princely sons so well that they will not share them,

Mothers who cast their children to the mercy of the woods (10),

Mothers who nurture the orphans and whose wild wolf howls can be heard from the hillsides. (11)

There are mothers of monsters,

Mothers of saviors and

Mothers of tricksters (12).

And there are those who would keep us safe,

Warriors, guardians and wandering mages (13)

Whose traveling suggestions we promptly ignore;

We invoke the divine in all its forms

The blessed ones

*Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inanna* (14)

Isis healed even the sun God's ills (15)

In return, of course,

For the power of naming,

This is the naming we use to restore serenity and balance  
With our shapeshifting between the worlds.

Intention is the key to our magical remaking.  
Impeccable intention.

We have only to construct a boundary and animate its center of power.  
For it to become our spirit of place, our sacred space (16).

Around you is my theater of possibilities.  
A circle dance of 13 panels with an altar at the center  
They wait to be charged and to charge us.

As we open our body-mind-spirit to the dynamic flow  
We test the safety of our container all senses engaged  
Breathing, toning, chanting, drumming and movement  
Even the most damaged may be carried into the inner light  
between and beyond the Cartesian framework  
(which I will call fretwork because we fret over it so much.)

Those that choose to make the passage  
Return with renewed energy,  
They return with a sense of empowerment  
And guidance for self-healing and growth.

And also with a heightened awareness  
Of the preciousness of all creation  
Awestruck, attuned  
We conjure ourselves  
Protectors, co-creators,  
Embodied incarnations of Gaia (17),

We become the Great Goddess of Valiente's Charge (18)

*...the beauty of the green earth, and the white moon among the stars, and the mystery of the waters... (19)*

Inanna lives among us

*Great Innana, beckoning, abandoning heaven abandoning earth from the Great Above to the Great Below, guide and pilgrim on the inner quest (20)*

This is the inspiration for my artwork: the voices that speak in the Dark.  
Literally and metaphorically they have called me to  
A profound reverence for the earth,  
A longing to enter her mysteries and  
A desire through ritualizing  
To re-story the feminist partnership paradigm (21).

My process mines the realms of science, religion, and psychology,  
Archaeo-mythology, fantasy and folklore.  
Like the Sufi's golden chain (22)  
its antecedents stretch deep into the past.

Always there are descent mysteries  
Whose common inheritance connect Eleusinian truths (23)  
With the hydraulic high wires of Cirque du Soleil (24).

In them is the reenactment of Eliade's eternal return (25)  
The golden dream of creation  
Harrison's "words said over the deeds" (26)

My teachers begin with my feminist roots  
Matilda Joslyn Gage is my sister.  
And in her words:

*We are the thoughts of our mothers and grandmothers, embodied and made alive (27)*

Marija Gimbutas (28), Gerda Lerner (29), Merlin Stone (30)  
Presente!

I follow tested paths opened by Jung's active imagination and retrace his progeny: (31)  
Hillman's imaginal psychology (32)  
Watkins's waking dream states (33)  
Beyond duality to Achterberg's healing imagery (34)  
and finally now to Gotterner-Abendroth's matriarchal aesthetic (35).  
Other journeys lead to the spirit entities and animal allies  
of core shamanism (36) through Sandra's Ingerman's earth soul retrieval (37)  
and adapters of indigenous wisdom,  
my medicine teachers  
Dhyani Ywahoo (38), Josie Raven Wing (39), and Brooke Medicine Eagle (40)

Along the way I have been schooled in the discourse of cultural appropriation  
--objections to ritual practices by those concerned for traditional wisdom.  
They caution about the dangers of neo-colonialism.  
We must not arrogantly assume the availability of a universal body of direct experience.  
We must not misuse indigenous cultural property  
This will undermine unique tribal teachings.

So I try always to remember to wake up different  
To make each choice wisely  
Each decision for seven generations (41)  
In the everyday sacred of the small details

I rely on the loose blending of the rituals of the Women's Spirituality Movement,  
mindful of my debt to the many traditions  
from which they have been brewed.

You will recognize my simple guidelines as a mantra of respect:

*Honor the ancestors,  
Take only what is freely given,  
Become a hollow bone,  
Give back to the People,  
Serve without attachment,  
Listen.*

Or if you prefer these words found carved on a rock in Minneapolis:

*Accept fragility, Return love, Imagine justice, Breathe (42)*

Our rituals have been honed at performance and pageant,  
The eight pointed star of the pagan year; (43)  
And at drummings and dances and demonstrations

Loved and well-fed  
Battered and abused,  
We are all wounded healers  
In communities of resistance

Befriending struggle  
We spark to Starhawk's spiral dance (44)  
As we traverse the mysteries of the present  
Sorrow, pain, and dis-ease  
exploitation, domination,  
The legacy of patriarchy  
Each survivor a testimony of courage.

Through our sharing we remake our stories .  
We wear the faces we wore before we were born.  
Retrieving and renaming ourselves  
And in each place the veil is lifted  
We reframe fear of the Burning Times (45)  
That may yet come again.

My paintings emerge from the circle.  
Cast in the visible and invisible realms  
They are portals for the uninitiated and way stations for seasoned travelers.  
Filled with powerful beings in visionary worlds.

Fragmented images call us to complete them.  
Figures fade and emerge  
When the viewer is ready, the multiple layers appear.  
There are symbols crossing time and story maps  
Dancing, laughing, furious and passionate beings  
Archetypes from the inner core

And practical aspects of ritual. (46)  
Each contains a spiral: it is the journey through the womb  
They hold the numinous.  
Inward and outward passage of memory  
They hold the threshold.  
A path demanding flexibility and the acceptance of uncertainty.  
They hold stories that come to us and through us

Spin the wheel and take your chance,  
each time deeper  
subtly changed

*She changes everything she touches, and everything she touches changes (47).*

### The panels

The panels are arranged in three groups.

Four panels of origins create a birth canal as they guide us through the entrance to the ceremonial circle. These relate to the emergence of the cosmos (48), the earth and the cycles of growth (49), the animate world (50), and the garden of humankind (51).

Five directional panels relate to the sacred dimensions of the universe. They are placed in the North (52), East (53), South (54), and West (55) corners with Center, the Spirit Blessing (56) located on the side opposite the entrance to the circle. They represent the assembly of concepts and images associated with earth prayer, the powers of air, fire dance, and water's flow.

Four panels of women's rites are interspersed between the directions. Cave Portal (of womb and creation) (57), The Golden Heart of the Dark Goddess (of death and rebirth) (58), Butterfly rhythms become labrys (of transformation) (59), and Magical Circle - A Medicine Dream (of actualized power) (60).

*And this is the one I would like to speak to you about.*

Magical Circle - Medicine Dream shows a ring of figures raising power around a series of concentric circles at its feet.

The circle symbolizes the experience of unity,  
An image of the universe outside, and the sense of perfection within.

The other fundamental elements of iconography are scattered in a moving landscape of streaming clouds and spiraling energy. There are Triangles and squares flowing through space, an equidistant cross with a circle in the center, a fetus in a womb, stars, a labyrinth, doubled spiraled breasts at sunset, and the phases of the moon.

Enter into the visionary work  
In symbolic language, rebuild a world!

### Demonstration Ritual

How many people here have participated in Neo-Pagan Rituals?

Please take these a hand our a black paper, a piece of cardboard to lean on, a few pieces of colored chalk and a plate to hold them. Then return to your seats by traveling clockwise around the circle. When you have reached your place, please put your art supplies at your feet with the hand out on top.

In our next few minutes I would like to take you through a series of exercises framed by the structure of ritual.

Casting the circle We begin by creating a circle of light, casting out negativity and welcoming only friendly, positive energy.

*hand and hand we cast the circle*

Who will call the directions with sound?

*East (Ring), South (Ring), West (Ring), and North (Ring), Center (Ring),*

Storytelling with gusto and intent-read loudly, clearly slowly and pause often.

Twelve Wild Swans: Each reads a segment and then I read a segment.

Discussion of love elements in story

Select the type of love that represents an incident, a painful moment or an unresolved issue that troubles you from your life story

Turn that issue into a question ex: How can I deal with my possessive mother?

Now find a panel to which you are drawn

Meditation

Breathing Exercise: Place your feet on the floor and relax into your chair. Close your eyes and take several slow deep breaths and try to still your inner chatter

Now open your eyes and find one of the images that seems to speak to you.

Perhaps you are drawn to the color, the design, Or something reminds you of a detail of your life.

Enter into the panel and ask your question and see what bubbles up

Now take chalk and black paper and draw your message or experience

Choose a word or phrase that expresses this for you

Sharing

Small group Divide into Groups of 2, 3 5 where a situation of trust has been built. Option to pass.

share if you choose the story of your question and what resulted in it. .

Larger group: Would some of you like to share with the larger group what resonated deeply for you or some insight you have had?

Releasing the quarters

Grounding

Celebration

*We'll stop now and ask for questions.*

Sources for Further Reading about Names, Quotes, and Concepts Presented in  
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The Charge of the Goddess  
(Excerpt from Starhawk's adaptation of Doreen Valiente)  
*I who am the beauty of the green earth, and the white moon among the stars, and the mystery of the waters, I call upon your soul to arise and come unto me. For I am the soul of nature, who gives life to the universe. From Me all things proceed, and unto Me they must return. Let My worship be in the heart that rejoices, for behold--all acts of love and pleasure are My rituals. Let there be beauty and strength, power and compassion, honor and humility, mirth and reverence within you. And you who seek to know Me, know that your seeking and*

*yearning will avail you not, unless you know the mystery: for if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without. For behold, I have been with you from the beginning; and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.*

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48. “Origins: Emergence of the Cosmos”:  
This panel shows the shape of a spiral galaxy in the form of a *yoni*, a giant vulva, (vagina) overlaid with an image of stars and lines referring to constellations, mythology, and star charts. It speaks of maps and messages in infinite realms through which we inscribe the records of personal journey. It's Shakti seashell contains a spiral within its hollow to draw the connection between emergence, the sea, and the feminine source of animating consciousness.
49. “Origins: The Cycles of Growth”:  
This panel shows the elements of creation and fertility. It can be used to present the constellation of basic ritual images. The plants, seed, root, and fruit refer to the parallels between human and plant cycles. Spiderwoman's web holds together the sun and moon intertwined by a double helix of serpents and speaks to the interrelation and obligation of all life. At the base from a woven basket and a cauldron of plenty emerge squash blossoms and the Green Corn Goddess stretching upward into the heavens. The web imagery is particularly appropriate for women's ritual art because throughout history women have been the literal and metaphoric spinners and weavers of cloth and culture. The web of sisterhood is a useful tool for examining which threads are strong, and how we might mend and weave the world anew.
50. “Origins: The Animate World”:  
This panel may be used to focus on the chain of life and humankind's place in it. A belief in the land as a living goddess and the animate sentience of every part of creation is central to the Women's Spirituality Movement. Here cliffs and cave, rocks and rolling hills become animal shapes. Trees and cactus change into animate beings. These are images of my own spirit helpers placed here in order that they be present, guarding and guiding.
51. “Origins: The Garden of Humankind”:  
This panel shows a basic series of symbols which are found linked together in the creation myths of many cultures: moon, rain, fertility, woman, snake, death, and periodic regeneration. The tree of life, with its roots in the underworld and its branches in the heavens, represents the *axis mundi*, the world tree passing from pole to pole. I have included this panel for use with meditations in which participants are asked to visualize a beautiful,

tranquil place from which to start their inward healing journey. It is meant to encourage a sense of security and ease by suggesting the many sacred spaces in the natural world that the participants might choose to imagine for their own sacred space.

52. “North/Earth Prayer”:

In this panel monumental *menhirs* stand in a circle, the cap stones fallen to the ground. They are the ancient stone bones of the earth, the forms suggesting primordial female figures arrayed before a cave mouth in a landscape of rocks and sand by the sea. This image symbolizes the northern wisdom of the bedrock, the alchemical *petra genetrix*, or generative stone. It is in each of us as unformed stones and unformed initiates linking through the primal material to the strength, dignity, and wisdom of prehistory.

53. “East/The Power of Air”:

This panel is one of wild wings, air and inspiration. A flight of birds carry a vine of magical objects through the sun-filled air. In the bottom right we see the mountains of wisdom topped by the phases of the moon, and on the left there is a spiral leading into a doorway. The morning light brings the breath of hope to the dark visions of the night. The flight of birds refers to the wings of prayers, and symbolizes the ability which carries our prayer ties and amulets on leafy vines to the spirit realm. They embody our desire to banish gravity and take flight into the imagination. If we could fly, where would we go? What would we see?

54. “South/Fire Dancing”:

This panel shows jagged lightning spirals and pyramidal symbols of energy in an explosion of light and flames. It is the direction of fire, heat, and motivation, the power of will to joyously and passionately direct the energy of destruction and transformative healing. I have chosen to represent fire as an abstraction of movement and power. I do not wish to distract from the shape-shifting nature of the flames with too many literal references. This panel is intended to be used to recall associations with the participants’ own stories, echoing the way one sees images while staring into a fire.

55 “West/Water Song”:

This panel represents the watery deep and is associated with emotion, feelings, dreaming, nurturing, and intuitive understanding. Blues and grays outline an underwater temple with a triple spiral, web, and labyrinth petroglyph carved on the rock before the entrance. Waves swirl with energy above and below the dark mouth of the temple’s cave-like opening. The moon’s reflection is seen in the lighted areas, and sea creatures lurk in the shadowy depths. I have chosen to show the waters in this panel covering a sunken temple in order to honor the submerged worship of the maternal and its incipient power to bring forth messages. The structure shown is like those off the shores of Malta. On these isles, the temples were shaped in the form of the body of the Great Goddess. This is the type of visualization I imagine when I descend into the underworld in meditative trance; a portal into an altered state of consciousness.

56. “Center: Spirit Blessing”:

This panel shows a triple spiral, a crescent moon cradles the suggestion of a starry galaxy with a growing fetus in its hollow. The red, black, and white of the spirals also contain

reference to the European fairy tale colors for the Maiden, with skin as white as snow, the Mother, with lips as red as blood, and the Crone, with hair as black as the raven's wing. I have chosen the triple spiral image because for me it represents the journey to the triple Goddess through the spiral journey of life, death, and rebirth. Within this pattern swirl all of life's mysteries and so I see it as the central element of all transformative work.

57. "Women's Rites: Into the Cave Portal":

This image allows movement into the cave womb of creation found in numerous origin myths and the site of rituals performed by the Neolithic people from the Dordogne valley in France as far east as Lake Baikal. Similarly, tombs and temples carved into caves in India (Ajanta) and the Middle East (Petra) represented the concept of sanctuaries and entrances into spiritual realms. The cave imagery aids the participants in imagining an entrance into the underworld to meet their spirit guides.

58. "Women's Rites: The Golden Heart of the Dark Goddess":

In this panel a fiery golden Goddess with her child and maiden self within her, stretches her arms to encompass the dark moon and stars. It speaks of dark of the moon rituals of death and rebirth, and the merging of opposites fundamental to the essence of being. I have chosen to show the triune Goddess in her dark aspect because I believe she is essential today in helping us face our fears and name them in order to break through the patterns that paralyze us with despair. We follow Her through the dark passageways and into the night, stripping away false images of the crone to see Her luminous creative inspiration within ourselves.

59. "Women's Rites: Butterfly Rhythms Become Labrys":

This panel contains the double-headed axe, called a *labrys* which transforms into a butterfly with its wings outspread. It is the paradoxical message of death in life: each life begins to die the moment it is born. We see this both in the stages of the butterfly's life, and in its meaning of new birth. The axe contains a dual message as a tool for planting or carpentry, and as a tool for destruction that cuts in two directions. Its two whetted blades in the shape of the crescent moon reinforce the lunar message of death and rebirth seen in the waxing, waning, and dying moon.

I have chosen these two symbols as powerful representatives of the beauty of transformation. The labrys is important to the contemporary Women's Spirituality Movement and especially its Dianic and lesbian adherents who have adopted it as their symbol. By including it here, I honor the all-female community of Lesbos and its Goddess followers as well as the Goddess women who are reclaiming its mysteries.

60. "Women's Rites: Magical Circle ~ Medicine Dream":

This panel shows a ring of figures raising power around a series of concentric circles at its feet. The circle symbolizes the experience of unity, an image of the universe outside, and the sense of perfection within. Other fundamental elements of iconography are scattered in a moving landscape of streaming clouds and spiraling energy. There are triangles and squares, an equidistant cross with a circle in the center, a fetus in a womb, stars, a labyrinth, several double-spiraled breast symbols, and the phases of the moon. This panel represents wholeness and the actualization of personal power. The images develop a common symbolic language that can be used to interpret other spiritually-inspired artwork. They are also important to me personally in my own visioning. Concentration on their form and

content aid in the meditations of the viewer; the circle can lead to a sense of at-oneness with the world, and ready the participant for visualization of action.