The Evolutionary History of My Work With Circles

LAS Essay

Carrie Mae Kreyche

October 21, 2002
Sharing my artwork with people is a way of disclosing and communicating the symbols I value. There are many layers and subtle meanings in the particular objects I choose and the shapes thus created with them. This last spring, I began passionately working with circles. The circle is an archetypal shape that has been interpreted in many cultures to signify wholeness. I believe my desire to create objects with circular unity is a reflection of my need for a sense of harmony and perfection in the outside world. My own search for wholeness is being manifested through my art.

My attraction to the circle has led me to notice other cultures around the world that use circles in artwork and as a healing symbol. I am particularly interested in East Indian philosophy and the ways art and consciousness blend themselves in their visual expressions. Tantric art, in the form of yantras, are created as an act of prayer and meditation.

“The Yantra is an archetypal unit, and in the making of every new yantra the archetypal activity and the divine revelations repeat themselves. Each yantra’s consecrated place acts as a dwelling for the gods, a space where movement from the level of profane existence to the level of profound realities is made possible. Symbol and meaning blend so closely that they are one reality, indistinguishable from one another.” (page 30 Yantra)

I feel as though my own work with circles taps into a deep well of ancient knowledge that I am just beginning to drink from. The serenity I feel when I gaze on an array of symmetrical circles is amazing and deeply soothing. Words do not quite capture the visual vibrations that settle into my psyche. The following description presents a partial glimpse of the immeasurable symbolism the circle holds.
“...the circle represents the cyclical forces, the contraction and expansion of astronomical revolutions, and the round of cosmic rhythms. Within this image lies the notion that time has no beginning and no end. The farthest region of space and the innermost nucleus of an atomic structure are bound by the constant flow of life and the rhythmic energy of creation. The circle may also be considered, in its concentrated form, as a bindu, or in galactic proportions as the expanding universe; its numerical counterpart is the zero.” (page 32 Yantra)

Numerous synchronistic events occurred this last spring that were significant in directing my creative path. I felt the universe was continually affirming and presenting me towards people and books that were aligned with my interests. The first occurrence was when I was working with a mentor, Diane Gilbert, in a Cloth and Cut Paper course, and we were discussing my process of creating a piece I call Suckulent. She discovered that the century plant stalks I sewed in a circle numbered sixteen, a number I arbitrarily picked because the design looked best with that amount of stalks. Sixteen happens to be the number of perfect unity in ancient Indian cosmology.

The second event evolved over the month of May 2002. I traveled to visit my sister in New York and I drew a chalk mandala of circles and geometric designs on the cement sidewalk in front of her house. My parents snapped a picture of it for me and I hung it on my refrigerator. Again my mentor, Diane, visited and later she brought me a book Painted Prayers: Women's Art in Village India by Stephen P. Huyler. The photograph reminded her of an image from this book. The next images demonstrate our amazing similarity of design.
Another time I was in a local bakery and began a conversation about circle mandalas with a man who had just read a book by Joseph Campbell that explored the ideas about when and why mandalas began appearing in the history of art. I was curious, so he lent me the book *The Flight of the Wild Gander: Explorations in the Mythological*
Dimensions of Fairy Tales, Legends, and Symbols by Joseph Campbell. He suggests that the appearance of the mandala began after the passing of the hunting age and with the development of agriculture.

“The problem of existing as a mere fraction instead of as a whole imposes certain stresses on the psyche which no primitive hunter ever had to endure, and consequently the symbols giving structure and support to the development of the primitive hunter’s psychological balance were radically different from those that arose in the settled villages.” (page 144 The Flight of the Wild Gander)

Campbell suggests people began create mandalas when they could no longer take care of all of their own needs and were required to be interdependent with others. We no longer can fully complete the cycle of our own lives without outside help. The average person cannot grow all their own food, spin their own wool, sew their own clothing, create tools and utensils, refine gas, fix vehicles, and the list goes on and on. So as a member of modern society, I crave the experience of completion. My circle mandalas are created out of the tension Campbell speaks of.

“And we may ask, also, then, whether today, when that economy is giving way to one based on industry, and the cosmological image commensurate with an agricultural horizon has been shattered for us forever- whether today, in this next age of great transformation, the images generated in that earlier period of crisis still are of use, and if so for whom, and why?” (page 146 The Flight of the Wild Gander)

Some of my most recent images resonate intensely with the images of ‘that earlier period of crisis’ and so I believe my own experiences have answered this question adequately.
Yes, these images are valuable. They have deep meaning for those people who are willing to slow down enough to be stimulated by visual splendor. Not everyone can be lifted to new realms by visual awe; some need the lift to be auditory, others by massage or delicate flavors.

Another layer to the symbolism of my art is the fact that my images are created with recycled materials, ordinary resources, and objects from nature. This choice of materials challenges the aesthetics of our modern culture by creating beauty out of the ordinary garbage and waste most people step on, over look and toss out. I use hard rusty metal bullets mixed with soft feathery light cloth, sharp cactus spines intermingled with layers of thin reflective dry cleaner bags, and golden baby bottle nipples placed with tea bag wrappers. Though the use of textured materials, I explore the dualities of chaos/simplicity, lightness/darkness, and masculinity/femininity.

The path of an artist becomes a full circle when one shares the privately created work with the public. I received the gift of sharing artwork with my community at my senior show, Impeccable Assumptions, June 16-18, 2002. This dialogue with my audience is the last step I witness in the process that really never ends.

“Underwear- nipples- cow patties- agave- tea bags- paper- seat belts- paint- box springs- bullets- beads and hair- these are the things that inspire Carrie Mae- but she is inspired by more than this- a woman whose body finds its place in her art- the fluid and clay of her spirit draw in from the periphery of the world around her and extend into these pieces of beauty we see- they are all her, and we find ourselves in them.” Angela Stott June 18, 2002
“This is exquisite!!! It is profoundly beautiful. Thank you for your courage, wit
and vision.” Ellen Greenblum June 18, 2002

“These ‘artifacts’ of our commercial culture and nature are wedded in aesthetic
bliss by your artistic eye. These are unique and I predict will elevate ‘used’
objects to a new plain/practice of respect. These will make you rightfully famous.
Thanks for your resourceressness- a good model for us all in pursuit of a more
sustainable world.” Terril Shorb June 16, 2002

For me creating art is about connecting to the infinite through finite materials.
My trust grows as I continue with this work, as I capture and access the magic the ancient
Indian philosophers recognize as available to someone willing to focus and spend time in
reflective, creative time. As I create my art, I create myself.
Bibliography

