

On Art and Psyche

A summary of the dialogue between Fred Martin and Joseph L. Henderson written by Daniel S. Benveniste, Ph.D.

It took place on April 5, 1992 at the San Francisco Art Institute. The Event was entitled "Art and Psyche."

On April 5, 1992 the San Francisco Art Institute and the Friends of ARAS came together to sponsor a dialogue between Fred Martin and Joseph L. Henderson. Fred Martin is a painter and Dean of Academic Affairs at the San Francisco Art Institute. Joseph L. Henderson is a senior Jungian analyst and a founding member of the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco. The following lecture summary includes comments that the speakers made in dialogue with each other and with the audience following their formal presentations.

Fred Martin began his lecture by orienting us to his own background and training, noting that it was David Park who introduced him to the works of C.G. Jung, and Mark Rothko who taught him the importance of searching for the unknown. (See supplemental reading: [Archetypes in the Studio by Fred Martin](#)).



Figure 1 *Untitled (Red)* by Mark Rothko, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 1956, USA. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia, (EA1-1982).

Mr. Martin went on to muse about a fantasized "great museum of the world" where all the pictures of all our lives and all the millennia adorn the walls.



Figure 2 "Cabinet of Curiosities" in *Dell' Historia Naturale* by Ferrante Imperato, engraving, Naples, 1599.



Figure 3 *Venus of Willendorf*, limestone, ca. 30,000 BP, Willendorf, Austria. Natural History Museum, Vienna, Austria.

Using this image of "the great museum of the world" as a metaphor for the collective unconscious he went on to trace the changing images of Earth-and-Woman from the Paleolithic Venus carvings to Silbury Hill to Diana of Ephesus to the Madonna and on to contemporary representations of woman. He then traced the changing images of Sky-and-Man from a Paleolithic painting of a male cave dweller to representations of Paris at a shrine to Priapus to Theseus to Christ and on to contemporary representations of man.



Figure 4 Diana of Ephesian Artemis, marble and bronze, Roman era copy of the 2nd century BCE



Figure 5 *Madonna of Mercy* (central panel) by Piero della Francesca, , tempera and oil on panel, 1460-62. Museo Civico di Sansepolcro, Italy.

It was noted that the ways of artists have also changed throughout history. Art before the post-modern era was described as a way of depicting from without. It is a style that depicts the preconceived, the pre-drawn, the pre-visualized. It is an art of the exterior. This style was counterpoised to a 20th century art form conceived of as a depiction from within. It is an art that depicts impressions, emotion, and memory. It is an art of living people, real people who breathe, suffer, and love. As such the artist's work is no longer

conceived of as an endeavor to produce a product but rather as the traces left behind by the artist in his/her participation in a process. This then is seen as a return to a Paleolithic artistic style when art appears to have been, similarly, more closely associated with process than product.

Mr. Martin stated, "Whenever I've started off with a fully preconceived idea about a piece of art, it has always turned into a fiasco. It doesn't work at all. But art tends to be perceived, psychologically, as a largely passive symptom rather than an active agent, and while the "symptom approach" may be one way of looking at art, it seems to overlook the artist's active role in creation. It overlooks the dialogue between conscious and unconscious aspects in the process of creation." (FM)

"We are surrounded by tens of thousands of negative images everyday. Could it be that if we made positive images the world would not be so negative? Can art be used as a force to change things or must it always simply represent symptomatically? Can it be used as an action? And if it is, will it inevitably turn into something similar to Soviet Socialist Realism?" (FM)



Figure 6 “Defend Our Home: Moscow” by unknown artist, political poster, 1941.

Image source: *Russia Beyond*.

"Some people will downward and others will upward. I'm not sure if it comes from early childhood training or religious aspiration. But I think it's a hell of a lot easier to manipulate emotions downward than upward. You can make horror shows really fast and cop shows one a week and they hook your emotions every time. Personally, I think it's poison. Yet the alternative is Soviet Socialist Realism so I don't have any answers."
(FM)

Yet without offering answers, Mr. Martin's thought-provoking presentation, complete with slides, drew the audience directly into the heart of the dialogue between conscious and unconscious aspects in the creative process - a process similar to what Jung referred to as "active imagination."



Figure 7 Detail of an illustration of a solar barge on page 55 of Carl Jung's *The Red Book*.

In Joseph Henderson's presentation we were treated to an explication of Jung's "picture method" discovered and described by Jung in the early 1930s. The "picture method" refers to the way in which some patients choose to draw or paint pictures in a non-directive fashion during the course of therapy, as an avenue of further self-exploration. It is not a therapeutic technique as much as it is a "recognition that a picture-forming ability exists in many people which may develop under favorable circumstances." (JLH) The art productions derived in this process are not evaluated in terms of technique but

rather are seen as "pictorial representations of psychic processes." (JLH) Dr. Henderson learned of the "picture method" directly from C.G. Jung in the early 1930s when Jung was first formulating his observations of this process. Henderson later wrote about it in ["The Picture Method in Jungian Psychotherapy"](#) published in *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, Vol. 1, pp. 135-140.

Following his definition of the "picture method" Dr. Henderson led us through a series of drawings that one of Jung's women patients had drawn over a period of time. The colorful slides graphically illustrated a process the patient had gone through. This process began with a breaking up of an old-world view that no longer worked for her and was represented by a bolt of lightning breaking up a rocky matrix.

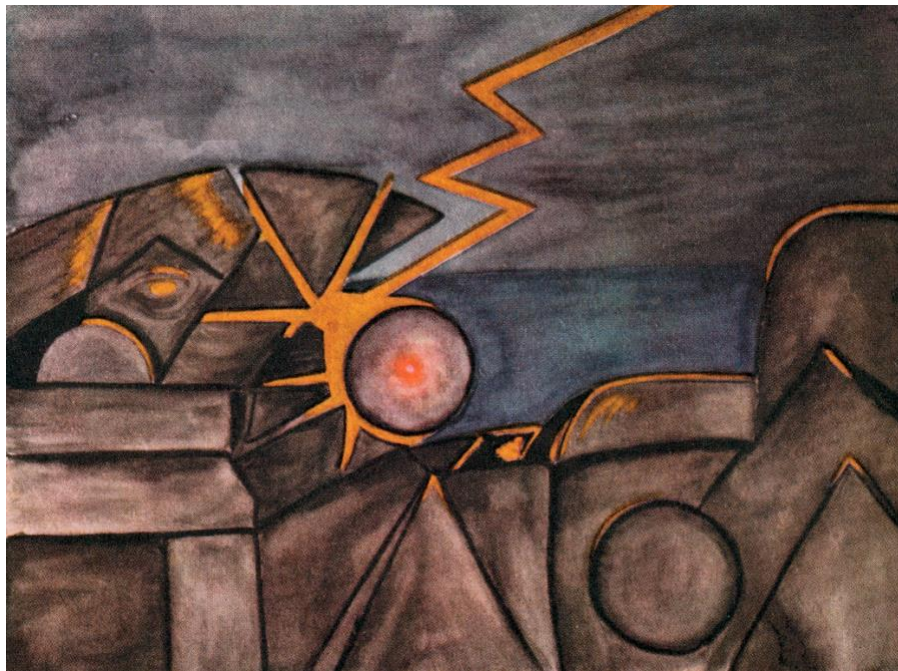


Figure 8 Picture 2 (from 1 to 24) from the chapter VI, A Study in the Process of Individuation, in "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, vol. 9i" It is a series of paintings done by Jung's patient so called "Miss X".

This was followed by a series of attempts to balance her masculine and feminine qualities as represented by highly ordered geometric forms on the one hand and scenes from nature on the other.



Figure 9 Picture 11(of 24) from the chapter VI: A Study in a Process of Individuation, in "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious"

In the final drawings of the series, we saw how this patient began to integrate the masculine and the feminine, the ethereal and the earthly, spirit and matter in colorful non-schematic representations such as that of a highly ordered circular lattice of grape vines!



Figure 10 Picture 23 (of 24) from the chapter VI: A Study in a Process of Individuation, in "The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious"

Dr. Henderson said that the difference between the art of the patient and the art of the artist is that for the artist, the content and craft are of equal importance while the patient is, almost of necessity, less interested in the craft. "In fact the good artist has to learn not to draw in order to descend to the unconscious...It seems as though some modern artists have gone through a process of learning how not to draw in order to make the content of the unconscious come forward, as was the case with Jackson Pollock." (JLH)



Figure 11 *Autumn Rhythm (Number 30)* by Jackson Pollock, 1950, enamel on canvas. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. ©2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

When asked if verbal interpretation was necessary when working with patients and their drawings. Dr. Henderson replied: "I would say that the painting is the important thing, not the interpretation. If you read Jung's book, in which these paintings are presented (see *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, by C.G. Jung, Volume 9, 1) he goes into the most elaborate interpretation you can imagine. It goes on for pages talking about the drawings of Jacob Boehme and all sorts of abstruse alchemical things that will simply send you to sleep. He's gone way off into some kind of interpretive experience of his own but I'm sure he didn't do any of that with his patient. He simply took the paintings as they came, let her talk about them, and maybe said a little something here or there. He might have had a reaction. I know I do that when my patients draw or paint. Sometimes I have strong reactions and I let them know what the reaction is but I don't interpret. I don't say this means such and such." (JLH)

"There is a place for pointing out what the artist may not have noticed. In fact, sometimes the most important thing in these kinds of drawings is what the patient didn't intend to do. And furthermore, what is left out can be just as important as what is there. The archetype announces itself as a mystery because we don't know what it is. Jung carved a block of stone at his home in Bollingen and left one side of it uncarved, presumably representing something that was a mystery to him, something he didn't know about. He referred to it as 'the cry of Merlin' meaning something that had vanished from European mythology and could no longer be represented." (JLH)



Figure 12 (One side of) Jung's carved stone showing a Homunculus in the center of alchemical mandala, 1950, at the Bollingen Tower, Zurich, Switzerland. ©Philipp Roelli (photograph)

When asked if it wasn't possible to have a dialogue between the conscious will and a more surrendering attitude of the unconscious, Henderson replied affirmatively and described the technique known as "active imagination." Active imagination is a process by which a person renders him/herself receptive to the moment by moment movements

of fantasy and gives them form in any one of the arts. Henderson, recalling Jung's advice, cautioned that once the images appear they must be evaluated by "bringing the ego into the process, to feel the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the developments. If the development is wrong or going off in some way, the ego brings it back to the center again and keeps it going in the right direction. Thus, there's a dialectic between the ego and self, between the inner and the outer, between what comes from the unconscious and what comes from the conscious." (JLH)