



Alchemy of Light by Mary Conover, 2003. Oil pastel on paper, 24 cm x 17 cm.

Living Light

A Video with Mary Conover

Stacy Hassen, PhD

It is the function of consciousness not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateways of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within

Jung, CW 8 §342

Liberating the Soul in Matter

A quality of tenderness permeates the interaction of an artist with an analyst in the video, “Gathering of Light: Mary Conover in conversation with Nancy Furlotti.”

Recorded in the artist’s Aspen, Colorado studio before the Art & Psyche Conference in Santa Barbara in 2019, the interaction reveals the cornerstone of a shared love for the wisdom of the unconscious and explores the symbolism of light as consciousness, which has an evolutionary quality. Both women have dedicated themselves to alchemically transforming the matter of the *prima materia* from lead into gold; of liberating the light of the soul hidden in matter. Their work shares a common thread of active imagination, of engaging the silence and listening; of entering the depths and being with the unknown to receive psyche’s revelations. Nancy Furlotti taps into this wisdom mainly in working with the inner world through dreams, tending symbols as messengers of consciousness from the unconscious. She makes this material available in a variety of forms including: books, presentations, online interviews, and film. Mary Conover has also brought the invisible into visible reality through a variety of forms including mixed media. Being a visionary artist, Mary’s primary method directly engages the soul of nature in the open air. Amidst the raw elements of water and sunlight, curving winds and sensuous landscapes, she contemplates the world without to

access the world within. Unburdening herself of a sense of duality, she connects directly to the light within life and translates this into a living poetry of images. Though the outer forms appear as a painting, pastel landscape, mixed media image, a video, interview, or art exhibit, the inner expression contains the dialogue of light present in the psyche and the natural world. These expressions of creativity bridge a subtle experience that touches the most secret space in the heart because they are created from its vastness. This video gives glimpses of the shared creativity of these two women through the experience of light in nature as a portal to the soul.

Relationship of Light to Life

A sense of peace is present where these two luminary women stand in the temenos of Mary's studio, as they engage in dialogue about light and the way consciousness informs painting and creativity as a conduit to something deeper and more vast. A felt sense of the feminine sensibility and capacity for relatedness reveals itself in the ease of the moment, in the cup of tea Nancy holds, in the quickening of the heart even as the pace of life seems to relax, slow, center, and ground in the interaction. In this space where artist and analyst meet and relate, a shared thread of connection to Jung's work and writings along with that of others "advancing the fields of psychology, philosophy, alchemy" (Bollingen, 52) acknowledges an ancestral element. Nancy's analytic training relied upon the wisdom conveyed in Jung's writings and those of concentric luminaries of that time. Her work as a Jungian analyst and further roles has focused on and the material of those whose explorations engage and expand awareness of the psyche. Part of Jung's

development included an instrumental role in the Eranos lecture series where his work and that of other visionaries: scholars and philosophers, Indologists and mythologists, was presented. These gatherings, orchestrated and hosted by Olga Froebe-Kapteyn, the founder of ARAS, created a space where archetypal forces were honored and engaged. Eranos provided a place where nourishment for the soul was an abundant banquet and cornucopia. At Eranos, living into the imaginal realm and being present at the place where the known and unknown meet was encouraged. This freedom from cultural constraints allowed the inspiration to flow and the light of consciousness to dance among the roots of both the land and those attending.

Like Nancy, Mary's connection to Eranos, Jung, and alchemy, also relies upon the books in her library. Many of these have been inherited and hold a charge of connectivity through a legacy that flows in her blood. The root of legacy, from Proto-Indo-European **leg*, means "to collect, to gather" (<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=legacy>) and her legacy stems from her grandmother, Mary Conover Mellon, whose endeavors in the field of consciousness created a wave that ripples to this day. In April 1940, during an inspiring visit with Jung at his stone-hewn tower retreat on the shores at Bollingen, Mary Mellon proposed her plan to him to translate writings and publish books for English readers, with his works being central to this effort. She named the venture Bollingen. The work included translating and disseminating key writings of the past and present including: The I Ching, the work of Maud Oakes, Erich Neumann, Mircea Eliade, Heinrich Zimmer, and authors dedicated to furthering the awareness in the world.

For the Bollingen Series publications, Mary Mellon chose the gnostic cross as its guiding symbol with the four elements together in a balanced mandala as the quintessence; as the world. The mandala contains an esoteric meaning as *gnosis*, the gift of philosophic wisdom from the inner depths. This is the light of consciousness that is both required when one engages the unconscious and what is born from the interconnectivity. Mary Mellon's original intention and efforts essentially ensured the seeds of light were sent on the winds of inspiration to flow where needed. Some obviously landed by way of love in the soul of her granddaughter. This honoring recalls the deeper ancestral impulse, like Jung's 2,000,000-year-old man, and reconnects to the archetypal force of consciousness as the unconscious coming to know itself. This is the true *gnosis*, the inherited wisdom born of the depths revealing itself.

The Animation of Light

The seven minute twenty-seven second video functions as a container, vehicle, and form of art that translates the *poesis*, the expression of the soul as a living symbol of light with a communicative nature. As a vehicle, the video explores light's presence in the conversation and in the images it weaves. With sights and sounds actual and implied – the cry of gull and scent of sea air fresh after rain, it induces a sense of peace while it inspires in beauty that touches the soul. It offers a sense of being present in the moment, a sense of being moved by the refined sensuality of the paintings and pastels and the natural world that inspired, even directed, their creation. There is an impression and a feeling of being part of the conversation. In this way, the video offers itself - like Mary's art on canvas – as a catalyst, a way to see, that restores the natural dialogue of light's

interconnective play in and through the world. In its unfolding, there exists both stillness and an experience of the morphing interaction of images, which amplifies the possibility for integrating the external forms of light and shadow. Its multi-dimensional view unites outer and inner worlds. By its nature, this *record*, which means a “remembrance” and “restoring of the heart”

(<https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=record>), presents a world alive, inspired, animated, full of soul, of *anima*, that serves the alchemical goal to restore the light of the soul of the world, the *Anima Mundi*.

Alchemical Art: Conduit to Higher Consciousness

“the fiery sparks of the world soul, i.e. the light of nature ... dispersed or sprinkled throughout the structure of the great world into all fruits of the elements everywhere”

Jung, CW 8 §388

In creating from an inner space, seeing with the eyes of the heart, listening deeply and tending to flashes of inspiration, one opens to the mystery of being. This allows for a rooting down, reaching in, that returns an alignment with the axis mundi and the sacred nature of creation. In this space, cultural mindsets and doubts lose their hold and fall away. Inner attunement creates a centering pole and grounding of being. The elements of earth, water, air, and fire return to natural balance. Their union creates the quintessence, the *lumen naturae*, the generative light of nature and her sacred soul essence. When this light is remembered as sacred, whole, holy, it has a vivifying effect. When an artist creates with reverence and love, in accordance with the light and its

instruction, its guidance, it brings a healing and restorative response to the outer world. This living light is an essence, powerful, invaluable and precious for it is the golden light of the world soul. Its expansiveness works directly upon the heart, upon the creation of peace and reconciliation with the higher Self.

Bibliography

McGuire, William. *Bollingen: An Adventure in Collecting the Past*. Princeton UP, 1982.

Stacy Hassen, PhD, curator of ARAS (Archive for Research in Archetypal Symbolism) and faculty at the C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco for more than thirteen years, writes and gives presentations on the importance of the archetypes; the union of inner and outer worlds and the Anima Mundi; alchemy as a psychological process; and the transformative power of symbols. Her work focuses on what seeds the emerging consciousness of oneness and renews our relationship with the sacred in life.

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