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Art as an Expression of the Unconscious:
A Look at One Person's Work and Its Meaning

By
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THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

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MASTER'S LEGAL CONFERENCE

MAY 15, 1987

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, with love, for teaching me
to follow my heart.

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I would like to express my appreciation to a number of people whose kindness and generosity served as a constant source of strength to me. First, thanks to my friends Allison and Alan for their gentleness and continuous, unconditional support throughout these past three years. Their faith in me and this recent project at times outmatched my own. May the future hold all that you both deserve.

Bay Area artist Pegan Brooke was kind enough to find time in her busy schedule to open her studio to me and share her thoughts and feelings about her paintings. In addition, Brooke generously lent slides of her work and gave me written material about the same; she is organized, professional, and clear. The thesis would lack the life it has if it were not for this artist's input. I would especially like to thank Brooke for allowing me to use her beautiful paintings to grace the pages of my paper; they speak more powerfully than a text ever could.

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BEGINNINGS

In the summer of 1986 I traveled to Alaska, having just completed my second year of medical school. Much of the trip was spent moving slowly by foot, boat, and ferry; this provided much needed tranquility and the freedom to unwind. Over time, suppressed thoughts and feelings began to surface. One day while hiking a mountain trail in Juneau I continued to reflect on my experience of the past two years. The expanse of the mountain, the range of the view, and the wonder of the air provided poetic contrast to much of what those two years had been about for me. What I had hoped would be an education in the classical sense in fact turned into a seemingly endless and meaningless task of memorizing huge amounts of detail for tests; the information disembodied from the context in which I yearned to work. In the beauty and the openness I realized that this experience had been constricting and stultifying; my mind and body felt spiritually neglected and literally out of balance. I felt like rational mind personified, it was as if an entire portion of my being laid dormant. As I climbed I contemplated finding a path to greater personal balance and fuller expression of myself.

It was on the way down that I was joined by a lone fellow hiker, Loren. In response to his questions, I told him what I had been thinking. What followed was a long conversation about creativity, left and right brain function, and the importance of using both hemispheres for optimal health and happiness. I

slowly started to realize that there is little if any creativity in being a medical student, and that this was the missing element in my life: the means of a creative expression. The dreamer and the artist go largely untaught in education. Loren had been a medical student earlier in his life and dropped out in despair to become an artist; he understood what I felt all too well.

In this way I experienced the Jungian concept of synchronicity as many times before. I realized that I had to begin to liberate my creative potential, and that the thesis requirement provided a good means from which to start the process.

Creativity may be defined as the "ability to find new solutions to a problem or new modes of expression; the bringing into existence of something new to the individual" . (25) Intimately related to the creative process is intuition which is "direct and apparently unmediated knowledge; a judgment, meaning, or idea that occurs to a person without any known process of reflective thinking. The knowledge is often reached as a result of minimal cues and seems to come from nowhere". (25) This way of knowing is the opposite of rational thought.

The brain is comprised of two hemispheres, the left is the major hemisphere and highly verbal. It processes information in a logical, analytic, and computer-like fashion. The right brain is nonverbal and synthesizes information concerning spatial and perceptual input. Researchers have found that the language of the left brain is inadequate for the rapid and complex

synthesis achieved by the right hemisphere. It was found that the two modes of processing information tend to interfere with each other and that the educational system cultivates verbal and rational thought at the expense of creativity and intuition. To develop these the neglected right brain, which is relational and which regards things without naming or cataloguing, must be attended to.

As a child, art was one of my great passions, but somewhere in the years of schooling it had all but disappeared from my life. What remained was a love of looking at paintings, yet I knew very little about what I saw. I decided that part of the thesis project would entail beginning the long process of learning how to appreciate art. Toward this end I read, visited all the museums and galleries I could, sat in on a class in art analysis, and spoke to various painters. The real task is in learning how to see anew and in developing a nonverbal vocabulary. Thus, much of what I learned cannot be conveyed by the written word. What part I can articulate is presented in the essay on Pegan Brooke and her paintings, the rest is stashed deep within my nonverbal mind for me alone to enjoy as a refuge.

One reason I appreciate paintings is that they often seem to be a magical representation of the unconscious mind. The forms, colors, and textures convey a personal psychic reality via a nonverbal realm. During the last two years I have become increasingly interested in psychoanalytic theory and in the process of free association and dream interpretation. It occurred to me that just

as free associations and dreams are largely the product of the primary process, so might be painting. This is what led me to research and write the section on the psychoanalytic theory of the creative process.

From this you have my point of departure. It has been a challenge and a frustration to put clearly into words my understanding of what cannot be spoken. Writing about the subject is analagous to the Mobius strip graphically, or verbally, to what the Chinese mean when they say "the Tao of which we speak is not the real Tao". In spite of these limitations, the project has worked beautifully and given me what I wanted. May the reader gain from my process, too.

PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS:
ART AS AN EXPRESSION OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

In thinking about the creative process that produces a painting one has to consider both the formal issues and content of art which together gives the work its meaning. Formal aspects of a painting include composition, color, line, and contrast; in short, its form. Naturally, everything that an artist has ever thought, seen, felt or been influenced by figures into their work, whether they are conscious of it or not. While a painter can easily describe known influences, and the viewer can detect the same via imagery, composition, etc., I believe it is the deeper meaning of the painting that gives it what magic it holds. This deeper significance cannot be known consciously by the painter at the time the work is made and in fact, may never be fully comprehended. It is the aspect of painting that comes from unconscious sources that I am concerned with here, and hope at least in part to explain on a theoretical level. However, I approach this task with the acknowledgement that the existence of any unconscious structure or content can only be inferred by a representation thereof, and not shown directly. Because of this, much of the following is speculative.

The content of art as well as of dreams is assumed to be the product of both primary process, which forms unconscious fantasy, and of secondary process. Freud demonstrated that dreams have a latent content within the seemingly

nonsensical presentation which when understood, reveals the material of the unconscious. Unconscious fantasy as represented in dreams does not articulate time and space as we know it and allows boundaries to melt in a chaotic mingling of forms. To me, painting too often seemed arbitrary in appearance, yet I suspected it was only because the "language" and form of art were foreign to me, just as dream language once was. In viewing paintings I often wondered how the artist went about choosing exactly where to put the next brush stroke of color, what the guiding internal vision was. As I have always been drawn to look at paintings it seemed that a greater appreciation of the creative process in general would help me understand this intriguing foreign world and language.

A painting can be technically good, and still lack the power, or personal infusion that is needed to make it great. A painter clearly needs to know the largely objective field of formal criticism and the principles that dictate the making of sound paintings. Yet, once this frame of reference is acquired, the artist moves freely between objectivity and subjectivity while working, which correlate roughly to conscious and unconscious processes. Although the following discussion focuses on the unconscious processes that help give art its form I do not mean to imply that this is the exclusive dynamic taking place while a painter works. It is simply the area that holds the greatest personal interest for me.

It is my contention here that the form of art as well as its content is largely

the product of primary process and that the manifest form ultimately reveals a hidden substructure of the unconscious. Briefly, there is order in seeming chaos and the unconscious mind uses a primitive method of scanning in order to make choices which is superior to rational thought. The ability to trust this deep level of awareness, which seems to be essentially intuition, is the basis of all creativity.

In the following consideration of the creative process existing psychoanalytic concepts are used in an expanded way. At the end of the discussion there is an overview of how existing terms are used in this paper, readers are encouraged to refer to it as they see fit.

In thinking about where creative forces operate within the psyche it is helpful to consider what Freud learned about dreams. Dream interpretation has concerned the content, but not the form of either dreams or art. (9) The analysis of art may be able to continue where the analysis of the dream left off. If the symbolism of art wells up from the deep unconscious levels of the mind, it follows that art structure should carry the imprint of the unconscious mind as well. After all, in painting every detail is firmly related to the overall structure and this constitutes the enormous complexity of the work of art. It becomes obvious that the form is not random, and that there is a way that the entire work is held in the mind while being made, with many options held open simultaneously.

Classical psychoanalytic theory of aesthetics has attributed form largely to the secondary process. (7) This implies that the primary process supplies raw

material which has to be molded by secondary processes in order to be aesthetically enjoyed. Yet it is probably due to a more integrated approach of unconscious form and content working together to be expressed conjointly. Evidence is provided as important parts of the structure of the work of art may emerge as from nowhere without the artist's volition and often against his intentions, and demand to be accepted as an integral part of the composition. These types of form elements bear the mark of unconscious origin by being spontaneous, sudden, intrusive, and apparently "accidental" in appearance.

For example, painter Francis Bacon relies heavily on what he calls "the accident" when he works. (2) Says he: "In my case, I feel that anything I have ever liked at all has been the result of an accident on which I've been able to work". The "accident" occurs in his painting when he makes "involuntary marks" upon the canvas. Bacon says that his "instinct" then finds in those marks a way of developing the image.

Art may be compared to the joke, on which Freud wrote extensively, and whose structure is the work of the primary process. The joke leaves a misleading impression with its nonsensical condensations, displacements, and representation by the opposite. Yet, this impression is deceptive. Once its partially concealed point is realized its formulation and organization appears strikingly cogent.

The theory that the form of a painting is primarily the result of secondary process is further challenged by the observation that the conscious mind has a compulsion to differentiate the visual field into figure and ground. (32) The

artist cannot afford to bisect the picture plane into significant and insignificant areas while working. An artist will agree with the psychoanalyst that nothing can be deemed incidental and that superficially insignificant looking detail may in fact carry the most important symbolism. A work of painting is dependent on its brush work for a large part of its substance. (31) Thus, there is a need for the artist to stay diffusely focused on the complexity of the work in progress.

Unconscious vision can hold complexities in a single unfocused gaze, regarding figure and ground simultaneously. One painter, Paul Klee, wrote of two kinds of attention practiced by the artist. (28) The normal type of attention focuses on the positive figure which a line encloses or else, with an effort, on the negative shape which the figure cuts out from the ground. Klee spoke of the endotopic (inside) area and the exotopic (outside) area of the picture plane. He says that the artist can either focus his attention on one (endotopic or exotopic) side of the line he draws; or else he can scatter his attention and watch the simultaneous shaping of inside and outside areas on either side of the line. It is this second kind of attention which we are concerned with here.

Also, experiments using Rubin's famous double profiles show that subliminal vision takes in the whole and holds opposites together at once. (32) In art and in dreams what we may be seeing is the representation of a less differentiated structure than what consciousness holds. The unconscious may be doing many things at once and holding opposites in a delicate balance at the same time. Precise space, time and opposites are not differentiated at this level of consciousness, much like in dreams.

I am talking then about a kind of attention needed for a creative search which varies from the sort of attention that goes with rational, logical thought. This undifferentiated perception can grasp in a single act of comprehension information that to conscious perception would be incompatible, and is capable of exploring many avenues at once while keeping contradicting options open. Paradoxically, the undifferentiation of unconscious vision turns into an instrument of precision when used for a creative purpose such as painting. A creative search resembles a maze with many nodal points; from each of these points many possible pathways radiate in all directions. Each choice appears equally crucial for further successful progress. Choices would be easy one had an overview of the entire network of nodal points and radiating pathways still lying ahead. Yet this is never the case and the creative thinker needs to make a decision about his route without having the full information about what will result from that specific choice. Too, if at the crucial moment of choice there is an attempt to size up a situation too clearly (as in thinking about the brush stroke rationally as opposed to intuiting it) the scope of attention will automatically narrow and the result may be felt to be dishonest, or wrong. Of course, there are many times when a painter will consciously choose a course to take, I am speaking here of the problem of working from a process that is too rational.

This process describes as well what a mathematician must do in finding a creative solution to a problem. Note that he must work within the laws of mathematics just as a painter must work within the laws of the picture. The

mathematician Hademard states that any attempt at visualizing too far ahead only leads a person astray, so he must sit back and trust his unconscious to make the "correct" choices at the appropriate time. I like to think of the "appropriate time" as that point in time when the next move feels right, intuitively; when you have the vision and information needed to make the choice. Progress, then, is not seen as something occurring in a linear fashion but rather within a complex serial structure that overflows the narrow focus of usual attention. This type of unconscious visualization seems better equipped and more trustworthy of producing an art that is un-self conscious; work that is truer to the artist's real self than any conscious attention is capable of alone. The key to working from the soul seems to be a deep trust in one's instinct and intuition.

Working creatively is not accomplished by simply blotting out or ignoring conscious attention, though. Certain principles of painting must be learned and steps checked accordingly. In Wittgenstein's words: the view must be comprehensive though not clear in detail.

In contrast to what happens in illness, creative work succeeds in coordinating the results of unconscious undifferentiation and conscious differentiation. In illness there is an imbalance in id drives and ego function with a resultant loss of integration. Under extreme circumstances, as in schizophrenia, a breakthrough of undifferentiated fantasy brings about the chaos we associate with the primary process. The chaos may not be inherent in the undifferentiated structure of the primary process but may result from the

impact of unconscious form and content on pathologically rigid and dissociated surface functions and from a severe ego defect leading to loss of integration.

Clinical work in psychoanalysis has revealed little about how creative sublimation works because it is largely concerned with interpreting and translating the contents of unconscious fantasy as a means of curing illness. Freud discovered the inarticulate structure (ie., not verbal and not organized according to logical tenets) of the depth mind through his work on dreams but became busy with the therapeutic results of translating the dream thought into rational language and so, never really explained the importance of the very structure of the processes which he himself had discovered. (25) While this neglect mattered little in clinical work, it matters in aesthetics where form is depicted graphically. In current thought, unconscious conflicts are resolved and are seen to be left to the automatic action of the ego which sublimates the drives into useful creative work. The study of an unconscious substructure as revealed in works of art and of the scanning processes used in art and science offers the opportunity for observing creative techniques of the ego and the way in which it makes use of the dispersed structure of unconscious perception.

In creativity, outer and inner reality are organized together by an indivisible process. (9) The artist and the scientist have to face chaos in their work before the unconscious scanning method brings about the integration of his work as well as his own personality. A person creating is always shattered in some way, to be put together newly as the work is completed. Just as the analysand is transformed by his free associations, however slowly, so is the

painter transformed by his work. And, both artist and analysand are at times led by what their unconscious suddenly discloses, for the information is being made conscious for the first time. A situation exists where a person is continuously revealing parts of self hidden from conscious knowledge and previously knowable by feeling and intuition only.

The concept of undifferentiation as distinct from chaos is not easy to grasp. In order to do this it is helpful to look at developmental psychology as the undifferentiated structure of primary process fantasy corresponds to the primitive and still undifferentiated structure of the child's vision of the world.

Piaget uses the term syncretistic vision to describe the distinctive quality of children's vision and art. (7) Syncretistic vision is primitive and global and does not differentiate abstract detail. This results in a lack of self consciousness on the part of the child and great freedom of expression. Bold experimentation with form and color resulting in truly original depiction of objects is common. At around age eight, though, the child begins to analyse the shapes he produces and to compare them to those he sees in books and magazines, the products of adults. At this point a certain honesty and vigor is lost and an inhibiting self consciousness sets in.

The younger child's vision takes in the entire whole, which remains undifferentiated as to its component details. He has the freedom to distort color and shapes in an imaginative way. This syncretistic neglect of precise detail in grasping a total object is not crude but rather, freer from the intellectual and rational censor of the older child. E.H. Gombrich in his book

Art and Illusion shows that realism in art does not simply copy the artist's subjective and conscious perceptions. He speaks of the initial "making" (an intuitive act) of the schema which has to be justified by "matching" the tentative result against reality. This matching can either be analytic or syncretistic, the latter method a much freer and seemingly more arbitrary one.

As an example, we can look at Picasso's portraits which cannot be analytically matched due to the jumbling and distortion of the details of the face. How powerful and convincing the portrait is no longer can be judged by analysis of single features, instead it is grasped intuitively as an indivisible whole that works better than if it were painted "realistically". A specific example would be one of the last portraits Picasso painted of the Spanish writer Sabartes: the sitter's spectacles are upside down, and the face "scrambled". The whole holds together, though, and one realizes that only superficially does the portrait lack proper differentiation, the spatial coherence seem chaotic, and the arrangement seem arbitrary. The resemblance achieved by this syncretistic portrait relies on a subtle balance which is not amenable to conscious analysis. A hidden order guides the viewer, working much like the young child's grasp of reality. Detail may be neglected yet the power of recognition is fresh and original.

The question is, then, how to raise children to be more creative as they pass through Piaget's stages of development. It seems as if the child who has been properly supported in his aesthetic standards on the syncretistic level will be spared the potential harm of the later awakening of his analytic self criticism.

Perhaps this can be done by surrounding the child with an environment of works by highly spontaneous artists. (7) An environment needs to be created which can sustain the syncretistic vision side by side with the new analytic awareness.

Yet it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe the exact functioning of this type of attention that is so far removed from direct introspection. I maintain that the control which any artist must exert in building the complex structure of a painting utilizes a mixture of conscious awareness, and both unconscious scanning and awareness. Form may be rigidly learned and described, but it becomes absorbed, integrated and used unconsciously.

In viewing a painting, the pattern of analytic perception entails starting from a mosaic in the visual field then, the selection of a figure on which to focus attention; the rest recedes and fuses. The plastic reality of our external perceptions is directly related to our personal wealth of unconscious fantasies. (12) It is the magic of the artist to be able to combine the ambiguity of dreaming with the tensions of being fully awake. The plastic quality of pictorial space in painting can be taken as a conscious signal of a vast unconscious substructure. (9) Learning to truly see involves developing an ability to absorb the picture as a whole.

The paradox of syncretistic vision can be explained because although it appears empty of precise detail it in fact is merely undifferentiated. Through this lack it can accommodate a wide range of incompatible forms, for instance, all the possible distortions of a face within a good caricature.

A student in any creative endeavor must learn to resist becoming attached to some detail achieved too early, and must be able to destroy it in order to safeguard the integrity of the whole composition. Too deliberate of a use of elements prevents the development of the intuitive, or syncretistic capacity. In art and in psychoanalysis accidents may occur; these happen when unconscious fantasy causes or uses a breakdown of conscious planning to infiltrate life. An artist needs to stay flexible and to take note of, and use, these accidental intrusions.

There exists a conversation between an artist and his work, and if an idea is new, one cannot predict how it will be realized. Part of the conversation is due to a beneficial conflict between the artist's point of departure and the resisting medium, another way to look at it is that the dialogue is also between different parts of the artist's self. Art ends up being a dream dreamt by the artist which we never see in its entirety, due to our inability to witness its process.

The creative artist must resist being seduced by the wish to visualize final appearances, by the wish to control the painting, and must continue to work along the raw substructure. He must work in stages, using interim decisions. Maximum intellectual control is also desired, paradoxically, along with this deep trust of personal intuition. The point where any kind of creative work starts being accomplished, is where our power of free choice comes to an end. Thus, while training the intellect, the artist must learn to rely on his low level sensibilities; his intuition.

An unconscious fear of losing control in a person attempting creative work

can lead to a personal rigidity. A work of art develops an independent life of its own as it is made. An excessive wish to control it prevents the development of a passive watchfulness towards the work in progress that is needed for scanning half consciously its still scattered and fragmented structure.

"Accidents" can be the expression of parts of the artist's personality split off and dissociated from the rest of the self. This must be able to be tolerated in order to integrate the total structure through countless unconscious cross ties that bind every element to any other one in the work. The final integrated structure is taken back (re-introjected) into the artist's ego and contributes to a better integration of the split off parts of self.

The creative process may be seen as having three stages, according to Ehrenzweig. (7) The initial stage consists of projecting fragmented parts of the self into the work. Unacknowledged split off elements will easily appear accidental, fragmented, unwanted and persecutory. The second phase is a "manic" one which initiates unconscious scanning that integrates art's substructure. In the third stage there is a re-introjection of the work, including the substructure, back into the artist's ego on a higher mental level. Because the undifferentiated substructure appears chaotic to this conscious analysis, the third stage too may be accompanied by anxiety. This may or may not be persecutory, tends to be depressive, mixed with an acceptance of imperfection and hope for future integration. This dual rhythm of projection-introjection can be conceived as an alternation between the paranoid-schizophrenic and depressive positions of Melanie Klein. Too, movement through the stages,

which overlap one another, is not seen to be linear but rather oscillatory.

The second stage of scanning is when art's undifferentiated substructure is formed, and where the bulk of creative work is done. The creative differentiation tends towards a manic-oceanic limit where inside and outside worlds begin to merge and the difference between ego and superego becomes attenuated. During the intuitive stage of creation all accidents seem to be right, and all fragmentation resolved. The movement from manic to depressive phase is hard to bear; it is a common experience to look at work the "morning after", suddenly noticing previously ignored gaps, fragmentation, and the apparent chaos of undifferentiation which pushes its way into consciousness. A large part of creative capacity is having the strength to resist the disgust that might lead to destroying the work at this point.

There continues the triple rhythm of projection, differentiation, and re-introjection. Klein's theory of projective identification suggests that human interaction involves the projection of scattered parts of one's self into another person. In a good relationship, the other is willing to accept the projections and make them a part of self. The good nursing mother, according to W. R. Bion, is capable of a reverie (an undifferentiated state of consciousness much like daydreaming) in which she literally nurses her child's projections. This occurs when the child has felt the split off material to be dangerous; the mother assimilates it due to her more mature personality. The child can then re-introject the split material in an enriched, more integrated form which is more tolerable. Thus, projection and re-introjection may lead to growth and

greater ego strength. This model of the good personal relationship corresponds to the artist's relationship with his work.

During the first phase of creative work, the artist's unconscious projections may be felt as fragmented, accidental, and alien. In the second phase the work acts as a sort of "womb", at first receiving, and then containing a process. Through the artist's unconscious scanning of the work, integration of the fragments into a coherent whole which is the substructure or matrix of the work of art occurs. At the third phase, the artist can re-introject the work on a near conscious level of awareness; if so his surface ego is enriched and strengthened. At the same time secondary processes of revision articulate previously unconscious components of the work, thereby becoming part of art's conscious superstructure. In this way, a full exchange occurs between the conscious and unconscious components of the work, as well as between the artist's conscious and unconscious levels of perception. His own unconscious also serves as a "womb" to receive split off and repressed parts of the conscious self. The external and internal processes of integration are different aspects of the same indivisible process of creativity.

Creativity is dependent on a greater than usual tolerance of anxiety because of the need to work through one's total personality; the process also requires considerable ego strength. (12) D.W. Winnicott stresses the importance of a creative ego being able to suspend the boundaries between self and nonself in order to work within the world of reality, where objects and self are clearly held apart. The creative process requires cooperation between two attitudes:

creative depression allows the ego nuclei which are split apart on a conscious level to be contained and held together, while creative mania swings down to an undifferentiated level of awareness and resolves the sterilizing dissociation between many levels. Depression achieves the ego's horizontal integration, while mania leads to vertical integration by joining surface imagery to its unconscious matrix. Together the two bring about the basic rhythm on which the ego's health depends.

The psychoanalytic concept of creative sublimation implies that one of the highest human achievements, the creation of art, is linked directly with what is most primitive in ourselves. Many years ago, the artist Courbet said that art is "the most complete expression of an existing thing". In understanding what he meant the key word is complete, as he was comparing art to any hierarchical system or to any culture which ends up diminishing or denying the expression of a large part of what exists. (24) I now more fully appreciate what I have always sensed in paintings. They represent a fusion of the workings of the highest intellectual processes with the most deeply held instinct and intuition. The nonverbal imagery, color, composition and texture speak of private psychic realities and represent a person's effort to get beyond self in an ever slowly proceeding process of growth and transformation. A painting is the full expression of a person's existence which eclipses the painter's conscious self while inviting the viewer to do the same.

USE OF TERMINOLOGY

Unconscious: This adjective typically refers to psychic material which is hidden from the conscious self, and which includes the drives and fantasies that are repressed and made unconscious due to their unacceptable content. Within this paper it is held that images and fantasies can become unconscious because of undifferentiated structure alone. Thus, two main characteristics of the unconscious are its tendency to make itself known spontaneously by "the accident", and its lack of differentiation.

Conscious: Describes that working of the mind that is characterized by sharply focused and highly differentiated mental processes; it is that which is known to an individual. Unconscious contents may be made conscious in varying ways (psychotherapy and analysis, for example), and movement between the two must happen in an integrated fashion for optimal mental health. Psychoses results when a person succumbs to tension between the two different processes in the psyche.

Undifferentiated: This refers to the static structure of unconscious image making.

Differentiated: This refers to a dynamic process by which the ego scatters and represses surface imagery.

Id and Ego: The id serves as a repository of unconscious drives while the ego integrates, or structures and channels the unorganized id drives and fantasies. The structure of art and the creative process suggests that the ego alternates between differentiation (decomposition) and redifferentiation without the prompting of the id. The concept of the ego moving between varying levels of differentiation implies that ego functions may result in integration or, alternatively, in a certain amount of conflict with each other.

The paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions of Melanie Klein: Melanie Klein was much concerned with the maturation of human relationships. In her view, early infancy and the relationship between baby and mother is deeply colored by near psychotic fantasies. The child's fantasies alternate between two "positions" named after the two main types of psychoses; schizophrenia and manic depression. In the first position, which is called paranoid-schizoid, extensive splitting is thought to occur. The child splits the mother into good and bad mothers, who are imagined to be different persons. The child also tends to split off what he feels to be bad parts of himself and projects them into his mother, who is then imagined to be a persecutor. Projections lead to introjections in the opposite direction, so the child may

incorporate the bad persecuting mother figure. This leads to renewed tension within the child's personality and to renewed splitting and outward projection. A type of vicious cycle operates until the situation is relieved by the coming of the depressive position. At this time the child realizes that the good and bad mother figures are in fact one and the same person. This realization leads to an increased power for integration of experience both in the inner and outer world. The "depression" is a consequence of the new understanding that any injury the child had wanted to inflict on the bad mother figure in fact harmed the good mother also. Guilt ensues within the child and reparation is necessary. The capacity for reparation is the foundation of all creative work, which is felt unconsciously as helping the restoration of the good mother.

Oceanic mania: The "oceanic" feeling Freud spoke of refers to the mystic who feels at one with the universe. This may be a reexperience of a primitive state of mind felt by a child who is not yet aware of his separateness, and feels at one with his mother. It is now thought that creative as well as religious experience can produce an oceanic state. This state may or may not be due to a regression to an infantile state and may be a product of the extreme differentiation in lower levels of the ego. As differentiation suspends many boundaries and distinctions it may remove the boundaries of individual existence at times, resulting in a mystic oceanic feeling.

By "mania" I am referring to a tendency to suspend or deny the distinctions between opposites which guides our normal rationality. Instead, in this state, a

different perception is relied on; one which allows the grasp of the total indivisible structure of the work of art, disallowing conventional distinctions. The artist instead has to trust the deeper unconscious. On this level ego differentiation does not deny but transforms reality according to the structural principles valid on those levels. Hence, the reality may be manic-oceanic, yet not a pathological denial of reality due to the mere suspension of an awareness of distinctions.

PEGAN BROOKE: A LOOK AT HER WORK AND ITS MEANING

Pegan Brooke is a 36 year old painter who has lived and worked in the Bay Area since 1981. Brooke's work was chosen for this essay because it is art with an individualistic and personal nature. My approach has been to try to understand the artist and consequently, her work as an extension and expression of the person. Thus, the following has been compiled from conversations with the artist, written reviews of the work, and personal observation.

Brooke was born and raised in Orange, California surrounded by both land and horses that she loved. Her maternal grandfather moved to northern Mexico at the turn-of-the-century and these Mexican familial roots have been both felt and explored by the artist since she was young. Travel to Mexico, Central and South America through the years has been one method of exploration, while earning an undergraduate degree in Spanish Literature from the University of California, San Diego in 1972 was another. This mind and body travel has been influential particularly in Brooke's later work yielding a metaphorical vocabulary of forms and color that radiates intense tropical heat and richness.

Though Brooke had always been drawn to painting, she began to paint full time while living in rural Iowa as a young woman in the mid-1970's (1973-78), leaving writing behind. Her first seven years as a painter were devoted to

intensive academic training leading to an undergraduate degree in art from Drake University (1976), and graduate degrees from the University of Iowa (1977), and Stanford University (1980). Following completion of the final degree Brooke spent one year living and working alone in a studio overlooking the sea in Mendocino before settling in the Bay Area. This essay is chiefly concerned with her work from 1979 to the present, acknowledging that manifest within each piece is the sum of all that Brooke has lived, felt and experienced up to that time.

Major influences in Brooke's work include a love and concern for nature that has grown with time, and deepened as man's assault on the planet becomes increasingly menacing. Nature is loved for itself and also for its representation of all that is organic and intuitive. Brooke has lived near the ocean for much of her life and many of her paintings include some representation of the sea. As in Zen Buddhism the ocean is used as a metaphor for the universal place from which we all came, and to where we will return. A love of animals and instinct also figure prominently throughout the work, in both realistic and more symbolic depiction. While living in Iowa, Brooke tended a herd of sixty-five Angus cattle every season and life, birth, and death was experienced at a very basic level. Thus, an earthy appreciation of the universally cyclical nature of being was felt. This has been more recently expanded and reinforced by the birth of her first child, a son, two and one half years ago. This particular creation is felt by Brooke to be "the most important event in my life".

Another influence which figures prominently in the paintings is extensive past travel in Latin America, specifically through Inca and Mayan ruins. Her heritage, spiritual symbolism and vibrant jungle color permeate much of the work of 1981-1985. Brooke derived a great deal of imagery from this travel; one image which surfaces repeatedly is that of the reed boats of Lake Titicaca (Figure 4). More generally, iconic totem animals which guard the entrance to some paintings, and lush plantlife brings the viewer the color, heat and mysterious spirit of those jungle bound ruins. As one would expect, then, environment, experience, and a native self that includes the content of the conscious and unconscious mind combine in providing a powerful influence in her work.

Brooke states that the actual process she experiences while painting has changed through the years as her work has evolved. At first, she painted what she saw directly. This was followed by a period of abstraction when the painting "all happened on the picture plane" (Figure 1). More recently, the imagery in her work is a hybrid of "everything she has ever seen, subconsciously or unconsciously; drawings and photos from nature and collages I've made". The images evolve while painting until they are felt to be honest; until Brooke relates to them on a deep enough level to keep them in the picture. An example is the evolution of the reed boats of Lake Titicaca which grew animal heads over the course of a number of paintings. Brooke did not consciously choose to make this image, it just appeared and was felt to be right. Interestingly, months later Brooke noticed a forgotten piece of African sculpture which had been in her house for years and which embodied the

crescent boat shape and animal head. That image had evidently become subliminal in her mind, joining forces with whatever else wanted the boats to metamorphose into animals.

Brooke feels that a good painter works in an ever subtle balance, painting from "the head, heart, and crotch at the same time". There is always an intentionality from the artist, yet she acknowledges that often the most important meaning in the work is not known by the artist, or only known much later, if ever. This is due to the deeper feeling which is the magical part of the painting, and when it is present, the life of the painting itself comes out. Because of all that goes into a painting, and due to the picture's existence independent of the artist, a painter talking about her work only scratches the surface of its full meaning. Brooke sees her paintings as an extension of herself which with time, remain either poignant or as testimony to a process which was needed to get to a new place. The really good paintings, Brooke maintains, are not always recognized by herself at the time because they are ahead of her own understanding. Because of this, a viewer is likely to see more of what is expressed about the person through the painting than the artist can consciously know.

Brooke personally values the painting process more than the final picture itself. Historically, she will struggle through a number of paintings, for example ten, and suddenly the eleventh will come out easily and naturally. The painting process on this particular one will be fun and not as hard, and this picture will tend to look the best; be the most formally elegant. THE FALL

(Figure 8) is an example of such a painting. During the course of this painting Brooke felt in full painterly control as opposed to "cranial control". The painting seemed to "just happen", the composition presented itself and the content seemed clear. The way that the composition gracefully rises and then falls again presents a gentle resolution to a new level of understanding the inevitability of the birth, life, and death cycle. Yet, this work is not felt by Brooke to be the most important personally, for it is in the preceding ten paintings that the more difficult and interesting questions were raised. The "process" paintings that led to *THE FALL* tend to be the tougher paintings and are where the personal growth takes place, while *THE FALL* remains as a graceful summation of the struggle and as an answer to many of the questions asked by the body of work preceding it.

While working, Brooke feels a sense of dialogue with the work, and often has a story line concerning the picture running through her head. She equates the relationship of picture to artist with that of two lovers: there are times of battle, of genuine closeness, times when she is saying something to the painting that should not be said, and periods when the painting fights back. In fact, she feels it is something deep within herself that she is battling at these times. A good example of this occurred while working on *TIERRA SECA* (Figure 9), which Brooke intended to be a painting of fertile green growth; of life, irrigation, and nurturance. What evolved was a continuous three month battle until there was one night of extreme catharsis. On this evening, the painting declared that it was in fact about aridness and death, not verdancy: the

painting told her what is was going to be. After that, the painting became much more brown than green; the water dried up to three small spills at the top of the painting. Brooke had been painting too much from her conscious head and the whole rest of her being was fighting back. The moral seems to be: listen to your painting; listen to yourself.

Brooke's ongoing concerns with her work include developing an ever clearer sense of honesty within herself and an increasingly effective communication with the viewer. Due in part to a middle class background, she feels it is personally important to speak to the common person. These two concerns work synergistically as she feels that the development of honest, truthful images will cut through educational and socio-economic differences. Brooke's one memory of her show at the Guggenheim consists of her pleasure in watching ordinary, plain folk appreciate her work, understanding it at a gut level. These are people, Brooke feels, that she never would have reached if it were not for her paintings.

With the above history and personal process in mind, it is interesting to look at a chronology of paintings for pictorial evidence of personal and developmental change. In 1979, Brooke was coming to the end of her academic training, specifically with Frank Lobdell of Stanford University. This earlier abstract work is characterized by a flatness and frontality and by subdued pastel color as in *MORNING MOON: SEA* (Figure 1). The influence of both Richard Diebenkorn and Mark Rothko is felt, and there is a strong geometric order. At this point Brooke felt a powerful idealistic sense of "wanting the world to be

beautiful" and painted a sort of escapism from reality. Her extensive academic training led to a structural clarity in these early paintings, yet there seems to be an absence or a veiling of the strong personal content that is present in later work. These abstract paintings of muted color were created during Brooke's twenties when she had devoted herself wholly to learning to paint well, at the expense of developing her personal self. They look literally like geometrically sound doors into both the future and a psyche that was germinating. The viewer senses the strong control that is possible in abstraction, which at this point in Brooke's development may reflect a fear of realism. Although the work conveys tranquility and hope, they also speak to a sort of awakening.

Her work begins to shift in the earlier 1980's changing from abstract to more representational, and identifiable forms such as animals and grass huts appear. The content becomes allegorical rather than abstract and the order of strict geometry shifts to newly dynamic arrangements. At this point Brooke seems to have the confidence in herself and her technique needed to embark on a more bold exploration of self within the work. *WAVE DREAM* (Figure 2) features an introduction of representational imagery in the form of gently turbulent waves or bird's heads. Also, the acrylic color becomes more alive. The picture still features a geometric window border present in earlier work, yet the framing is more dynamic.

As the work progresses, a more mythic quality is introduced. Mysterious forms, lush vegetation, tropical mountains and sea fill the space. An ambiguity which both evokes natural phenomena and refers to the interior

landscape of the self is present. There often appears to be a struggle taking place between elemental forces of nature, between nature and man, or within the inevitable birth, life, and death cycle. *BIG SEA* (Figure 3) from 1982 appears to be a transitional painting which conjures the dark side of the human mind. The sea is turbulent in the foreground and the small boat is tossed about, yet all is calm on the horizon. This effectively conveys the power of nature, which may be either benevolent or unforgiving. The forms are more threatening, as in the enormous dorsal fins which dwarf the tiny boats and their occupants. The color, still acrylic, is also more menacing and surreal. The Mayan ruins of the Yucatan and the Inca city of Macchu Picchu are seen as important sources of intense color and of inspiration, perhaps for the totemic animals guarding entrance to the spiritual world the picture embodies. The images are bolder, and becoming more stylized.

DARK SEA (Figure 4), painted in 1983, retains the intrinsic composition of the painting of the year before by using strong framing shapes. The vertical borders are formed by the curve of the water and the tall green vegetation, while the water at the bottom and the dark red rectangular shape at the top constitute horizontal borders. Here the reed boat shape begins to grow into an animal form, and the simplification of this animal speaks about all creatures in relation to nature. There is a new sense of the dynamic relation between animals and the environment and the simplicity of the message is reinforced by the use of primary colors. While working, Brooke never consciously thinks about color and maintains that "color embodies the whole spirit and comes

naturally to me". So it seems in this painting.

While Brooke had earlier painted an idealized version of the world her use of color, form, and composition has moved at this point to the other end of the continuum. The paintings still reflect a high level of internal control on the part of the artist, but in a different way. The painting begins to reflect a growing level of internal angst, and she moves to the opposite extreme in conveying the message she had previously idealized. Since leaving school Brooke had become increasingly invested not only in developing her work, but in developing a personal life, too. It seems as though the confidence this artist had in her technique and her ability to be in control permitted the exploration of inner dark sides, of worst fears. Apocalyptic themes are prominent in the work of this period.

Brooke is a supporter of Ben Shawn's theory of how formal issues relate to content: in this theory formal issues are seen as the bones on which you lay content. Thus, the strongest painting is made by a composition which supports the underlying feeling or message the artist wants to convey. Brooke has always used nature and landscape as a metaphor for internal exploration with windows and framing indicating that you have to go in: into the painting, into yourself. With this in mind, regard MOONS/BOATS (Figure 5), a painting representing her work of 1984.

In this painting is a circular composition which is present in much of her work of this time. On one level, change and time is shown to be simply cyclical. The moons have animal representation within them and so, nature

and animals are joined in union. The circle is a symbol of self; of the totality of the psyche including the relationship between man and the whole of nature. Yet the use of color, the serpentine like figures, the tension between the chaos of the peaks and swirls and the order granted by the circular flow gives the picture a certain tumultuous feel. The tropical imagery continues to be cataclysmic, and the sense of foreboding felt in DARK SEA is heightened by the composition. Brooke has described a personal fascination with elements which are "seductive and intriguing as well as potentially dangerous and unknown". This dualism is reminiscent of Franz Marc who saw nature as both regenerative and apocalyptic. Brooke feels Marc to be a kindred spirit and shares the ideals of the German Expressionism movement of which he was a part.

The art of that movement is a subjective one, revealing aspects of a hidden, unobservable world and relating unconscious or subconscious responses of the artist to his environment. The common denominator in this style of painting is the subordination of forms within nature to personal emotional perceptions; it seeks to project "emotional needs, psychological pressures and private obsessions". (15) The forms are regarded by the artists themselves as vehicles for improving the world, making it a socially involved art. The paintings reach out beyond the confines of the individual self to establish contact with the broader mass of humanity. It is an attempt to establish a harmonious relationship between the mortal isolated individual and eternity and universality. The movement was born of an intense psychological despair, and

what unifies the German Expressionists is representation of the two themes of regression and apocalypse, either consciously or unconsciously. Regression is defined as "the return to tendencies or responses appropriate to an earlier period of development". (15) In Expressionism it should be understood in the sense of a profound yearning, a longing to return to the "dim memories of the animal age, where there was as yet no 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt not' and everything just happened of itself". (15) Ultimately, the goal of Expressionism was literally to "lose it's own mind", to seek an identification with forms of pre-cognitive existence as a manifestation of its collective desire to re-enter the world of the unconscious. This is a world in which being is not encumbered by the weight of rationality and all life proceeds on the most primitive and instinctual of levels.

These artists learned that man is too an animal, yet one with an awareness of his own mortality. In other words, man is part of nature yet set apart due to the capacity for thought. The essential conflict is that of being bound to the dictates of nature and yet being free to think beyond it. The regression, then, is towards a consolidation of unity of his lost animal nature which is achieved by casting away the manacles of reason and reverting towards the bond existing between nature and its instinctual inhabitants.

The question that is raised then, is whether man has ever been within nature purely by instinct. Carl Jung states:

So long as the child is in that state of unconscious identity with the mother, he is still one with the animal and just as unconscious as it. The development of consciousness inevitably leads not only to separation from the mother, but to separation from the parents and the whole family circle and thus to a relative degree of detachment from the unconscious and the world of instinct. Yet the longing for this lost world continues, and when different adaptations are demanded, is forever tempting one to make evasions and retreats, to regress to the infantile past. (16)

From this it is clear that although on a conscious level what is sought is a return to a unity of existence within nature, on a deeper unconscious level something more intense is occurring. Jung also states that "the road of regression leads back to childhood and finally, in a manner of speaking, into the mother's body". And, most importantly for art, "regression if left undisturbed, does not stop at the mother but goes back beyond her to the prenatal realm... to the immemorial world of archetypal possibilities". (18)

What is implied in the above is a psychological representation of the birth, life and death cycle. It follows that the longing for regression, in its most extreme unconscious intensity, can lead to a longing for death: a cleansing, purification, and preparation for a breakthrough toward a higher or better form of life. When the urge toward regression reaches its peak and manifests itself as the desire for self-destruction, it is at that point that the regressive longing manifests itself in a wish for apocalypse.

Apocalypse was seen by the Expressionists as a cleansing, as a way to rid the world of all the institutions and traditions that restricted animal instinct in man. On the unconscious level apocalypse acts as a vehicle for regression, the means by which the lost unity with the world of nature could be regained. The

Expressionists never envisioned apocalypse solely as an act of careless destruction, instead they saw it as involving the redemptive aspects of death and rebirth, of a purifying cataclysm that would provide a regenerative force for the life that would follow. The themes and the intention of the German Expressionists are present throughout Pegan Brooke's work.

In addition, the animals within Brooke's work may be seen to be symbolic of man's primitive and instinctual nature. Instinct may also be thought of as psychic content, in Jungian terms, and as part of nature it is imperative that both be obeyed if a natural order and balance is to be maintained. Much of Brooke's work appears to speak to the plight of intuitive and instinctual man within the world today, and in particular, within this society which values head much more than heart. In man, the "animal being" may become dangerous if it is not integrated into life. For man is the only animal who controls instinct by his own will: he can suppress, distort, and wound it, and an animal is never more dangerous as when it is wounded. Brooke's paintings heed a warning as to the potential fate of the planet should man continue to suppress instincts and awareness of his intimate relationship to nature to the point of self destruction.

Late 1984 marked the birth of Brooke's son. The paintings from this year seem to reflect heightened anger and angst about what was happening in the world. Brooke continued to paint in bright, plastic looking colors of acrylic and some of the paintings retained the circular forms of the recent past. The birth of a first child probably evoked newfound concern that manmade and

natural forces reach some healthy balance so that he could flourish, yet at a deep level the worst was feared. It looks as though at some level she was screaming through her work. These paintings have names such as MAELSTROM NIGHT (Figure 6) and WHIRLPOOL (not pictured) reflecting forces that are powerful, swirling, and consuming in a funneling way. Still, in the course of that year plantlife of a more gentle and serene nature than before made their way into the pictures in spite of the anger. Plant like images that suggest ovaries, fallopian tubes and fertilization appeared as well as tiny forms that look like the hands of an infant. It seems that regenerativity was being felt at a newly deep level, and eventually, also hope. The work starts slowly to look more organic, less stylized, and closer to the source of where the paintings come from ie., from observed natural phenomena. NIGHTFALL (Figure 7), a transition painting from that body of work looks and feels very differently from the rest: it is mostly an earthy brown, more natural and spatially open. At the time it was painted it seemed an anomaly; Brooke was mystified and confused by its appearance. It turned out to be the bridge to the current body of work she is working on, something that became clear in retrospect.

In keeping with the natural cyclical character of life, 1986 found Brooke in a more contemplative mood and working in a more representational style. She switched from acrylic to oil paint, both as a needed change and as a challenge; she felt that it was time to work in color that was both earthier and more naturalistic than before. Gone is the acidity of the previous period and the paintings now look more realistic and grounded spatially. Brooke feels a

continued kinship with landscape painters Marsden Hartley, Albert Pinkham Ryder, George Inness and Thomas Hart Benton, aligning herself with the philosophy of fellow painters, as opposed to the way their paintings look. The landscape serves as a carrier for the content as she now paints nature truer to itself. *THE FALL* and *TIERRA SECA* (Figures 8 and 9) are examples of this period. Too, although the paintings are still framed by animal and plant imagery, the picture plane is much more open. The viewer is no longer enticed into an excursion to the dark and sometimes malevolent part of nature and self, but rather, presented with a newly mature and integrated vision.

Every artist fights a battle with control in trying to leave behind things that are familiar; in attempting to transcend the conscious mind. The point is to take the heart out of the center, and to express the core more and more directly. In considering how Brooke has evolved, the control shifted from the structure of abstract to technique: the brush strokes and composition of the paintings of the early 80's are careful and direct and the conscious narrative is seen. More recently, there is integration of more gestural brushwork and spontaneous imagery, and the control seems relaxed. *THE FALL* and *TIERRA SECA* represent growth to a higher level of transcendence of the conscious mind, and a deeper trust of the unconscious.

Brooke continues to do what she always has done, to question existence, and look for answers. She now feels a broader responsibility; to her relationship, to her son, and to art. Her work has evolved with the person, moving from technically sound abstraction in muted color to a bolder, more

stylized expression of existential despair, and finally to the most recent statements. These paintings seem closer to actual feeling and to a personal core using more naturalistic images and color and, literally, a broader perspective. The artist's maturity, growth, and hopeful acceptance of fate and inevitability is felt by the viewer.

The idealistic "doors" which may have been magically opened to find answers or alternatively shut, changed into "windows" allowing one to look into a personal and controlled psychic reality over time. Although in the last few years animals and plantlife have remained along the vertical borders to guard the private vision within, they too, are evolving to hold more integrated positions within the paintings. The most recent picture I saw is "doing something I don't understand very well" (Brooke). In this painting there are images of big volcanoes, and a composition that Brooke finds "clumsy". The volcanoes are tipped forward, and deep furrows take the eye back into the plane of the picture. As I left Brooke's studio, I realized that it was the only painting I had seen that had no framing imagery. The meaning of this will become clear over time as its lead is followed. The process of slow transformation continues as Brooke confronts herself daily through her work, striving for pureness and honesty; asking questions and finding answers. The result and reward of painting for Brooke is an increased knowledge of self and of "other" that will continue to grow for as long as she works, and the hope of an ever more effective communication through the work.

REFLECTIONS

I now understand why Milner states that a "conception of the creative process is necessary for the full understanding of Freud's work and discoveries". (25) Freud discovered free association, an instrument with which to study and heal the psyche. The patient simply had to talk without imposing any standard of logic, order, politeness or decency; the medium to be manipulated was a vocal sound. By this process patients began to discover what they really thought by gradually becoming able to hear what their inner voice was saying. Freud found that his role was simply to listen and try to help them see the implications of what they had said. On the analyst's part this requires a kind of absent-minded watchfulness much like the diffuse attention used by an artist at work.

And when things go well, the result is that patients begin to be able to relate to themselves more fully, by finding hidden creative roots and realizing what the external world has to offer. By attending to their unconscious fantasies powers of loving and working are realized.

I have long felt that there must be other roads to this transformation of self than psychoanalysis, and ones that utilize different mediums. I do not see the roads as being mutually exclusive but rather as complimentary to one another. Understanding the personal process and result of painting has helped me to understand the process of psychoanalysis, and vice versa. There are of course many differences between the two as well as similarities. Both are ways of facing oneself honestly and without artifice and both represent means of complete expression; painting via nonverbal imagery and analysis via verbal free association and later integration of the unconscious revelations.

My initial interest in artists has grown to a deep respect given what they face everyday. It must be incredibly difficult to face yourself through the paint and canvas on a daily basis; ultimately you must do the work for yourself and highly value the process. Otherwise it would not be worth it.

And as I worked on this paper I realized that the same applies to the study of medicine. I was moved and inspired by the realization that many artists work in solitude daily, getting little back from the external world. Or, as in the case of Pegan Brooke, when the attention she craved finally came (ie., art world recognition) it meant little, "she was still the same person".

In this way I feel less alone in my studies, less like it is a futile process. I understand that there will be hard, lonely, and grinding times ahead yet they will be part of a process that is necessary to get where I need to go. I am also more accepting of the fact that it may be a long time before I get anything back from medicine, and when I do, it is likely to be as sublime as Brooke's experience with the midwesterners at the Guggenheim. I now have the courage I need and value the process for its own sake having stepped out of myself to consider another way of living and working. Happily, I have rediscovered the principles of honesty, truth, and sincerity as the highest good on the way to thinking more creatively. And, finally, I have reclaimed the intuitive power I had when I walked into medical school and have come to understand my personal process as one leading to the expression of my own core more and more directly.



Figure 1
MORNING MOON: SEA
acrylic



Figure 2
WAVE DREAM
acrylic



Figure 3
BIG SEA
acrylic



Figure 4
DARK SEA
acrylic



Figure 5
MOONS/BOATS
acrylic



Figure 6
MAELSTROM NIGHT
acrylic



Figure 7
NIGHT FALL
acrylic



Figure 8
THE FALL
oil



Figure 9
TIERRA SECA
oil

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