

## Sabbatical Report, JS Bird, Art and Applied Design

Sabbatical: Fall 2010

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This report is structured as follows: Written first is the intent as described on my sabbatical application. Written below that and indented is what I actually did on my sabbatical. My sabbatical was awesome and invaluable in developing a new body of art work. While some things changed in the process of the sabbatical, the overall result is entirely consistent with my conceptual intent of the sabbatical. One thing I learned, I was overly ambitious with the amount of intentions I developed. It was unreasonable to accomplish all I planned in the time allotted.

### Art:

**INTENT AND PLAN:** The main scholarship activity I will engage in is the development of a new body of artistic work, including paintings, works on paper and possibly a few installation pieces. The second aspect of building a new body of work is to learn encaustic technique and create pieces with this medium.

### Content and form:

- The body of work will further investigate a relationship between mythical male archetypes, male identity and a mythical/ spiritual relationship with the earth/environment.
- The archetypal energy includes the Magician, warrior, lover, and king.
- These archetypes are built into a symbolic landscape that reflects particular aspects and symbols of these archetypal energies.
- These mythical figures will also have interactions with other figures and animals which represent aspects of nature and the earth.

### ACTUAL ACTION:

I spent the majority of my sabbatical developing an entire body of new work. I expected the work to follow the paradigm I had established for many years previous (outlined above) of investigating male identity through the filter of mythology and spirituality (actually that is what I did, only in an entirely new form). The work I completed is as follows.

- Seven oil on canvas paintings: each 40 or more hours to complete
- Three mixed media on canvas: 10 – 25 hours each
- All images available for viewing at [jsbirdart.com](http://jsbirdart.com) (psyche)

However, my work took an altogether different direction. Influenced via two books by Robert Johnson about feminine archetypes in mythology and the coming together of feminine and masculine energy in mythology, my work took on a completely unforeseen direction. The first book, ***She***, examines the myth of Psyche and Eros, the second book, ***We***, examines the myth of Tristan and Isolde. Thus I developed, and continue to work on, a completely new body of work based on the mythical feminine presence, and more specifically the Idealized feminine presence so rampant in our media culture, as symbolized by actresses, swimsuit models, lingerie models, pornstars, etc. This mythical figure, which is actually a projection of the inner feminine Goddess energy, is symbolized so aptly in these two myths by Psyche and Isolde.

Psyche was the most beautiful woman in the world, so beautiful, in fact, no one courted her. She was thought unattainable, but she was actually lonely. Because Psyche was so beautiful, Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love, became jealous and had Psyche cursed to marry Death. She sent Eros to shoot Psyche with his arrow so that she would fall in love with Death. Eros, however, was so stunned by Psyche's beauty he became distracted and cut himself with his own arrow, thus falling in love with Psyche himself.

The West wind then carried Psyche to Eros's Eden, where she was to live with a God in paradise. There were conditions, however, and Psyche must not look upon Eros, for he was a God; and if she did look upon him she would be cursed and paradise would become lost... Of course she must see him, so one night she lit her lamp and illuminated the God, but he awakens and flies away, and then the adventure really begins...

To symbolize the Psyche archetype I use iconographic female images of Pop culture to cast in the role of Psyche, women who are culturally associated with beauty and sexuality, including adult models Jenna Jamison and Aria Giovanni, and lingerie model Adriana Lima. While these icons are associated with sexuality and fantasized about by many men, there actually is no relationship between the icon and the viewer, except what lives inside the viewer's head. In some sense there is an effort here to expose pop culture's pictorial conventions of sexuality by adopting them, while relying on context to transform the images into a form that transcends the very conventions utilized.

By choosing figures that are clearly seen as sexualized, whatever relationship the viewer sees in my work lives also in the viewer's mind, most likely long developed before seeing my work, thus the work triggers associations already developed in the viewer. Depending on the viewer, those associations may elicit anger, desire, fear, judgment of the artist, or many at once. Does one view these as women, or as shapes, color and surface, which is what they actually are? Conversely, as a man, do I react to the way I see a woman, or who she really is?

The female figure in the work is Idealized, perhaps a desirable object, a reflection of a culture of immediate gratification and male fantasy. Yet, the image does not give away itself easily for she is sexualized as a nude who is not nude. Perhaps such an overt, embellished fantasy holds within it the capacity to force the viewer to confront, rather than indulge in, one's desire.

Such is the role of Psyche, a fantasy that exists outside of the male mind, but also inside the male mind. When Eros falls in love with Psyche at first sight, he has no idea of who she is. It is a visual experience - not an emotional experience; or rather, whatever emotions are experienced is only caused by the visual relationship. This projection is what creates his desire. The male projection is symbolized by Eros's arrow, a projectile. So in many ways this relationship is self generated. Interestingly, this is the same relationship one has to art. In most cases art is neutral, it is an object, (objectified) yet the viewer creates a relationship with the art only by looking at it, the artwork does not take an active role in the relationship. Like Manet's Olympia, viewers may have to confront the very thing that is simultaneously culturally celebrated and hidden.

In both stories, the woman too, is transfixed by the God image, which she projects on to the male figure. In mythical terms, that which is being projected outward, the Goddess, lives within, and must be internalized to lose its power.

These paintings are inspired not only by the story of Psyche and media culture, but also by a variety of influences; including the Pre-Raphaelites, Rembrandt, Odd Nerdrum, and tribal-fusion belly dancing.

The six months spent on this work, summer and fall, was invaluable in developing the work, and I am very grateful for the opportunity. Like a scientist or researcher, significant studio investigation *is* my hypothesis, my experiments, my research. I feel I am only scratching the surface of this work.

## **INTENT**

### **Medium:**

- Participate in an encaustic workshop and develop a series of work with this medium to augment my use of acrylic, oil and mixed media pieces.

### **Studio Time:**

- In depth inquiry of painting and works on paper in my studio over a period of six months.
- Studio residency at UCross Residency Program in Wyoming or another residency center.
- Drawing Intensive at Sitka Center, Otis, OR

## **ACTUAL ACTION:**

**Medium:** I did take an encaustic class and realized quickly that the start-up cost to equip my studio to create encaustic work at the necessary scale was cost prohibitive. Secondly I was not enamored with the process or result nearly as much as I expected. Thirdly, I returned to oil painting after about a ten year hiatus and that contained plenty of technical issues to deal with in the allotted time.

**Studio Time:** I did work consistently in my studio for six months. Unfortunately I did not receive a residency at UCross; however, using the time I had available during my sabbatical, I did apply to several residencies and was awarded a residency this summer (2011) at the Morriss Graves foundation in California. I decided against the Drawing Intensive at Sitka Center, the quality of instruction and student body was not as rigorous as I desired.

## **INTENT**

**Writing.** In addition to the development of a significant body of art work I intend to work on developing a non-fiction book on creativity (working title: *Creativity as a Path to Magnificence*). I have been developing an outline and topics for this project, and working through the summer and fall will give me uninterrupted time to flesh out this project.

## **Actual Action:**

I did spend time working on this project, a bit of which can be read on my blog at [jsbirdart.com](http://jsbirdart.com). (*Why Paint?*, *Magnificence*, and *The Hero's Journey*) However, as with other things I planned, unforeseen events happened. Instead of attending the drawing intensive I attended the Willamette Valley Writers conference and met with many agents to pursue the continued development of my fiction book, ***The Boy Who Painted Fire***. I also worked with an editor and as a result of that editors input, I spent a significant time editing and rewriting that project, removing 20,000 words and rearranging the basic premise the book. This book is now in the final phases of the final editing (hopefully) and I will be attending the writer's conference again this summer in an effort to publish this book.

**INTENT:****Vision Quest: October.**

- I will be participating in a vision quest experience in the Pecos Mountains of New Mexico with a spiritual teacher, Sparrow Hart. I have worked with this man before, as have I engaged in a vision quest experience. This experience includes eleven days in the wilderness and a four day solo fast. This time of introspection, spiritual investigation, and communion with the earth will provide vital experience and content for the development of my art work.

**ACTUAL ACTION**

I did participate in the vision quest as planned. It was far more powerful than expected. While it is not appropriate to explain the experience, I can say the outcome was entirely consistent with my intention. The experience of my quest was very closely related to the mythical concept of masculine and feminine energies and how they are reflected in my own psyche. As a result of the quest I develop thirty two intentions that are directly related to the creation of my art, exhibition of my art, my teaching practice, spiritual practice, and interpersonal relationships. I am diligently working on manifesting those intentions in my life. The quest was, by far, the most profound aspect of my sabbatical.

**INTENT:****Travel to San Francisco and LA: November**

- Travel to both cities to investigate a number of prestigious art galleries for personal research of West Coast contemporary art and artistic trends, and in preparation of submission for artistic representation in these cities.

**ACTUAL ACTION:**

After researching a significant number of galleries in LA I was un-impressed and unmotivated to further investigate that market. I found Santa Fe to be much more amenable to the nature of my work. I travelled to Santa Fe and thoroughly investigated the art market that consists of over one hundred galleries. In the last decade Santa Fe has changed from a regional *Indians and desert-scape* art scene to a significant contemporary art market. Thirty million dollars of art was sold in 2010 in Santa Fe. I have identified several galleries, some which I have applied to and others yet to be applied to. I intend to travel to Santa Fe again to continue my push to be represented in this market.

San Francisco is still on the table, but I ran out of time and funds to travel there last fall.

**INTENT:**

**GROWTH: Professional Scholarship:** This time to work through the summer and into fall is invaluable in developing a significant body of new work.

- Develop a significant body of new art work.
- A re-invigoration of my studio work will provide me with a new body of work to use as a basis for exhibition in larger and more prestigious art communities
- Increase and expand my knowledge of painting and drawing materials.
- Work with other artists in an intensive workshop setting, receiving and offering critical evaluation of art work at a professional level.
- Further reflection and writing concerning the creative process and identity.
- Significant time period of uninterrupted studio pursuit.
- Spiritual investigation as part of my identity and artistic expression

**Faculty Development:** Engaging in the creative process and developing a book about that process will be invaluable in improving the facilitation of the creative endeavors of my students, and promoting my skills and pedagogy as a teacher and facilitator of the creative process and personal development both as a studio instructor and in my work in transformational/ rites of passage experiences with men and young men.

- Organize and reflect on seventeen years of studio teaching experience.
- Clarify and investigate pedagogy in relationship to creative experience.
- Continue to develop skills in facilitation with rites of passage experiences.

**ACTUAL ACTION:**

Other than not taking the drawing intensive, I believe all of the above intentions have been manifested, many in far greater context and result than I had anticipated.

**In Addition To:**

The other thing I accomplished on this sabbatical that was not part of my application was the development of my website, [jsbirdart.com](http://jsbirdart.com). I spent considerable time updating, adding, rearranging, and writing to continually improve and update my website. Check it out! (and remember to comment and sign my guestbook)