

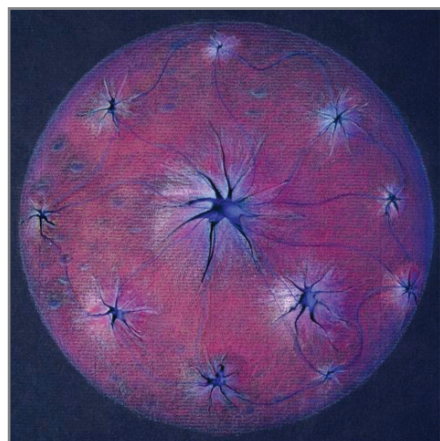
Artists AND Writers

...IN THEIR OWN WORDS

I have known Sali Taylor for several years, I went to her "Secrets of The Circle" Mandala exhibition where a Buddhist blessing ceremony was performed at the opening. Last spring we went to an Andy Goldsworthy exhibit together and began talking about doing this interview.

Mandala making is a sacred art form that has been used for centuries as a meditative focus for healing and personal transformation. It seems the perfect symbol for a conversation about the dance of life. Sali's work is a modern interpretation of this ancient art form that Tibetan Buddhists referred to as a map of the cosmos and as a prayer wheel symbolizing the impermanent nature of life and the need for letting go. A map and a prayer — perhaps all we need as we negotiate the dance of life.

Perry: For almost ten years you have been making mandalas and leading workshops. You put aside your art degrees and started approaching your art from a spiritual perspective. Tell me how that came about?



"String Theory IX", 2000. Colored pencil, thread on paper. 9" x 9" x 1/2"

But it was from studying the work of psychologist Carl Jung and artist-teacher Judith Cornell that I discovered the transformative power of the mandala. I was intrigued with the thought of "coming to wholeness" through creating sacred circles. I started making mandalas as a way to heal the fear that was holding me back in my life and in my artwork. The circle became the crucible into which I could throw all my judgments and insecurities. Through meditation and asking for assistance, I learned to transform these obstacles into symbolic images that gave me strength and confidence.

Perry: Do you think the ten-year focus and the circular form helped to facilitate the meditative and healing aspect of your work? Couldn't any form or subject in a way be a mandala if you set the right intentions?

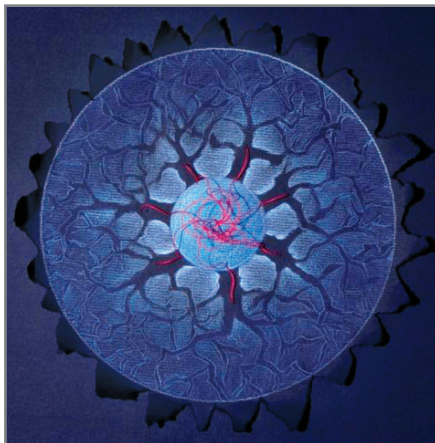
Taylor: Absolutely. It is not necessary to work with any particular format or medium. I work with people in all the arts. Any creative act, writing, acting, dancing, etc., can have the same transforming results. But for me, the circle is like a nurturing womb cradling the developing artforms. Entering that black-paper void is a little bit like Alice going down the rabbit hole, it has helped me to find my own center and have the courage to penetrate more deeply into life's mysteries.

Perry: It seems as though you have used your art practice to help come to some understanding of yourself and what your life is about. Bringing yourself to the work seems important.

Interviews

by Judy Perry

Sali Taylor is an artist and Creative Life Coach. She majored in painting in college and received an M.A. in Art History in 1973. For many years, Sali taught art and with her husband raised two boys and had a working farm in rural Vermont. In 1999 they moved to New York City, where she maintains a studio, teaches Mandala Making and Chakra Healing workshops and has a coaching practice helping individuals to more easily access and express their creative spirit.



"String Theory V", 2000. Colored pencil, thread on paper. 9" x 9" x 1/2"

Perry: How does Buddhism and other teachings manifest itself in the studio?

Taylor: By combining the great teachings of Native American traditions, Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh, Carl Jung and others, I began and continue to make my art process a ritual in which I constantly invoke spirit to be with me. My studio became sacred space. I light candles, offer incense and prayers and ask for guidance before beginning any project and at any point when I feel stuck.

I also find music to be an integral part of my creative process. I use opera to open my heart and access my emotions, African drums or Cuban rhythms to help me pick up the pace if I am slow or stuck and Eastern music to maintain once I am in the flow.

Perry: The idea of a circle, the dance of life— that sense of an interconnectedness is certainly apparent in Nature. You use natural materials in your work, have you always seen nature as a source?



"Wounds & Wombs IV", 2001. Colored pencil, thread, cork, leaves on burnt hand-made paper.

shelters from the sticks, stones, mud and moss.

I also discovered early on that drawing from nature always connected me to the miracle of life and gave me a direct experience of the oneness of all things. When I would draw the veins of a leaf or flower, strangely but very pleasantly, I became linked with the object. As my pencil followed on the paper each twist and turn, I almost felt like I locked onto the life-force of the plant, and lost all sense of a separate self.

Perry: And that continues?

Taylor: Yes. In my most recent work (*Wounds and Wombs* and *Natural Acts*) I have been fascinated with what comes from death and decay. I use handmade paper made from recycled materials and then I burn holes in it and fill them with natural objects from the woods

Taylor:

It's not so much bringing myself to the work as getting my 'small' self out of the work so that I can feel connected to a greater whole. I had that feeling as a child and through my meditation and mandala making I got that feeling back.

recreating those tiny, wonder-moments from childhood.

Still ponds, shinning rocks, reflecting mica bits and magnificent moss, mushrooms, lichens and fungus scavenged from the rich, dark compost of the forest floor. I also try to bring a sense of the constant movement and flow of the universe by using silk thread or actual roots as well as color and curvilinear line drawing.

Perry: Why do you think the constant movement of life is so important to you?

Taylor: I had a profound and maybe even mystical experience as a young girl when I felt clearly and unmistakably the movement and intertwining of all things, living and dead. I was lying face down on the grass helplessly sobbing about the eminent death of my father. Having cried myself out, I looked up and suddenly noticed that though it was very, very still, I was not alone, everything around me was alive and moving. There were changing cloud patterns overhead and whole miniature worlds below me: tiny hopping bugs, worms wriggling and ants moving their baby eggs from under my giant fist.



"Embracing the Dark", 1997. Colored pencil on paper. 16 1/2" x 16 1/2"

Everything was and is in constant motion and flux, being born, growing, dying and making the conditions for new life. All my work is connected to this theme in some way. Life as continuum, change, full of hope, new growth out of ashes and decay. Every-

thing changes form but is inextricably linked together forever. It was and still is a great comfort to me.

Perry: Having the awareness of your theme surely adds to the work. Your art mirrors your life. You once said that art is a clearer voice for you. It's good to have come to know that about yourself.

Taylor: Words always fall short for me in trying to intellectualize what is essentially an intuitive experience. For me the challenge has always been how to get out of my own way. My ego has constantly criticized and edited my direct experience and held me back from freely creating and expressing myself fully.

Perry: Art has been the perfect vehicle for figuring out how to dance with what life brings . . .

Taylor: Life is an ongoing struggle between spirit and me. But I do think of it now more as a dance and truthfully, more often than not, I want to lead. But at least in my art I allow Source to be my partner, to guide me around the dance floor and show me new steps. Over the almost ten years I have been doing the meditative mandala process, I have more and more connected moments when I am no longer aware of who's directing whom. We are just effortlessly waltzing about.

To learn more about Sali's work go to www.saliart.com

Judy Perry is an Artist, Writer and Consultant. Her paintings reflect an interest in relationship and connection while the writing reflects an ongoing interest in how we create our lives as artists. Her work can be seen at Gallery 407 in Rockland and on line at: www.judithperry.com. jpgpaintr@midcoast.com.