

Manifesto 2009

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Let me tell you a story.

I'll mime the instant replay.

And see, here it is from the back.

Here's its fiery underbelly.

Here, from the top.

Watch again. And again.

There! There's the moment! It bursts into flame.

Watch again. And again.

That! There! You see God's back side¹.

This semester I've been painting and drawing images based on performances. The performances they describe are invented rituals. The paintings and drawings don't pretend to document the performances. Rather, they're somewhere between

instructions

directions

diagrams

and mystical narratives.

Each ritual is described through a whole series – a collection, really – of pictures². I arrange and rearrange them. I assign meaning to them, and I elucidate relationships between them.

FULL SPECTRUM AUTO-BAPTISM³

¹ About having seen God's back side:

Exodus 33: **18**And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory. **19**And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. **20**And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. **21**And the LORD said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: **22**And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: **23**And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen. And Exodus 34: **28**And he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments. **29**And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. Finally, ECCLESIASTES, OR, THE PREACHER. CHAPTER 8: *None have power to avoid death—It shall not be well with the wicked; he turns to pleasure and cannot find wisdom.* 1 Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed.

² THE PROBLEM WITH CANVAS

A canvas is a window. Its painter confronts the contradiction between flat painted surface and the illusion of space. She remembers her fellow artists' battles with this same problem.

Canvas carries too much tradition. Sometimes I want to paint a painting that isn't weighed down by everything every other painter has ever done. Sometimes I want to communicate a thought. An image. I want it to be clear and whole and direct. An egg. You can hold the whole thing in your mind at once. It would take too many words to put this image in your mind. The thing doesn't exist, or else I would photograph it. The thing exists in too many places simultaneously. I want to make a lovely, bright object. You'll look at it, and it'll implant my lovely, bright idea in your brain. An egg.

Six women rise up out of the sea. They wear long white dresses. The women step onto the shore, picking up their skirt hems, sure of their roles. They stop, standing all in a line, parallel to the shore, in six depressions in the sand.

Slowly, silently, color begins to seep up from their ankles. Color stains their white dresses, climbs slowly up their skirts in an inevitable capillary action. From time to time the women look down. They hum. They hold hands. The dye has reached their thighs, now their hips, now their bellies. They're baptized with a dye that rises up from the earth. Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Purple. Where once they were almost indistinguishable, white and unformed, now they are brilliant and powerful.

One woman stands naked in a desert. Her feet are buried in the sand. She's motionless, unflinching as her skin pinkens, and then reddens⁴. She is pure, burned clean.

She's a kind of prophet.
She'll share her wisdom.

Images accumulate to describe these events:
our dresses make us classical painting subjects
(we're on display)
we're stained once all's done. our feet retain their dyed hues.
we're like celery sticks -- we choose what we absorb
we start pure. we start indistinguishable.

DANGER: FREE SUN TEA

She sits on the side of the road, cross legged behind a table. Arranged on the table are a dozen glass jars, each containing a subtly different shade of red tea⁵.

³ The Life of the Great Martyr Thecla of Iconium, Equal to the Apostles, as recorded in the Acts of Paul Translated probably by Jeremiah Jones (1693-1724) Chapter 9: 1. Then Thecla was taken out of the hand of Tryphaena, stripped naked, had an encircling cloth put on, and was thrown into the place appointed for fighting with the beasts. Then the lions and the bears were let loose upon her. 2. But a she-lion, which was of all the most fierce, ran to Thecla and fell down at her feet. At that, the multitude of women shouted aloud. 3. Then a she-bear ran fiercely toward her; but the she-lion met the bear and tore it to pieces. 4. Again, a he-lion who had been accustomed to devour men, and which belonged to Alexander, ran toward her; but the she-lion encountered the he-lion, and they killed each other. 5. Then the women had a greater concern because the she-lion that had helped Thecla was dead. 6. Afterwards they brought out many other wild beasts, but Thecla stood with her hands stretched towards heaven and prayed. When she finished praying, she turned about and saw a pit of water and said, Now is a proper time for me to be baptized. 7. Accordingly she threw herself into the water and said, In your name, O my Lord Jesus Christ, I am this last day baptized. Upon seeing this, the women and the people cried out and said, Do not throw yourself into the water. And the governor himself cried out to think that the sea-calves were likely to devour so much beauty. 8. Notwithstanding all this, Thecla threw herself into the water in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9. But when the sea-calves saw the lightning and fire, they were killed and floated dead on the surface of the water, and a cloud of fire surrounded Thecla so the beasts could not come near her, and the people could not see her nakedness. 10. Yet they turned other wild beasts upon her, at which the women made a very mournful outcry. Some of them scattered spikenard, others cassia, others amomus, others ointment; so that the quantity of ointment was large in proportion to the number of people; and upon this all the beasts lay as though they had been fast asleep and did not touch Thecla.

⁴ You can't share a sunburn. It's an almost indescribable experience. Words and images don't communicate the pain of it.
Sunburn marks experience.

Cranberry apple. Rooibus. Hibiscus and acai. She prized the cheap grocery store teas as highly as the pure, exotic ones. She cares about color most of all. She's posted brightly painted signs all around her. They read, "Danger. Free sun tea⁶." She's got cups, ice cubes, lemon slices, sugar and honey. The prophet wants to share her redness⁷.

SWIMMING POOL, BATH TUB

She sends you a letter. A set of instructions. You're to buy a little red fish. You'll fill your tub with water and accustom the fish to this extraordinary tank. At the appointed time, you'll slip into the tub and sit with the fish.

At the appointed time, she'll be swimming, too. She'll wear a snorkel, so she can stay submerged. Maybe she'll wear a red swimming suit. Maybe she'll skinnydip. This ritual is transubstantiative. For its duration at least, the fish and the swimming woman are the same. The swimming woman joins you in your tub⁸.

⁵ When I'm menstruating I drink hot red teas. I savor the colorful flow as it steeps and spreads into the water.

I also like to tell bad taste bleeding jokes like "What do Vampires use for tea bags?"

Yurok Ritual: These rules say that when a woman is menstruating she is very powerful, and she should isolate herself at this time so that she should not waste her energy on every day matters, or have her concentration broken by members of the opposite sex. She learned that all of her energy should go toward meditating on the purpose of her life, and the gathering of her spiritual energy. The menstrual shelter is the equivalent of the men's sweathouse, a place where you go to look into yourself and make yourself stronger. They believe the flow of blood helps purify a woman's body for spiritual tasks. During this time a woman must use a special scratching stick instead of absentmindedly scratching herself with her fingers because she must focus her whole attention on her body by making her conscious of even the most natural actions. She be aware of her entire body all of the time.

⁶ (It's a Southern thing.) Put several tea bags into a clean glass container. Fill with water and cap. Place outside where the sunlight can strike the container for about 3 to 5 hours. When the tea has reached its desired strength, remove from sun and put it in the refrigerator. The tea will probably taste more mellow than what you are used to from using boiling water. The slow seeping has a way of bringing out a slightly different flavor. (from

http://www.elise.com/recipes/archives/001287sun_tea.php)

however,

According to the Centers for Disease Control, using the sun's rays to make tea can facilitate the growth of bacteria. Tea steeped in a jar on your porch won't get any hotter than 130° Fahrenheit, about the temperature of a really hot bath and not nearly hot enough to kill nasties lurking either in the water or on the tea itself. For that, water needs to be heated to 195° Fahrenheit for three to five minutes.

Alcaligenes viscolactis, a bacteria commonly found in water, consequently turns up in sun tea. While the caffeine in black tea will help prevent that microbe from flourishing for a few hours, its effects won't last beyond that. Herbal teas are an even worse bet for brewing in sunlight because they tend to lack caffeine, which means even that barrier to *Alcaligenes viscolactis* turning your summertime drink into its own breeding ground is missing. (from <http://www.snopes.com/food/prepare/suntea.asp>)

⁷ wisdom. experience. essentially unshareable.

⁸ A transporter is a fictional teleportation machine used in the Star Trek universe. Transporters convert a person or object into an energy pattern (a process called dematerialization), then "beam" it to a target, where it is reconverted into matter (rematerialization). The term transporter accident is a catch-all term for when a person or object does not rematerialize correctly.

this isn't our pattern;
this is an expression of our basic humanity,
**a design invented repeatedly
in different places
different times**

this is our pattern;
our finger muscles know the feel of the arcs
the swoops
the whorls

"They all speak of sleepless nights
spent in thinking of designs for the pot to be decorated in the morning,
of dreams of new patterns
which on waking they try and often fail to recapture."

"I make up all my designs and never copy.
I learned this design from my mother.
I learned most of my designs from my mother."
**(she doesn't know the rational structure of her own system,
but she follows it intuitively)**

"Of course, considered objectively, dreamed designs are no less traditional
than designs learned from the potter's mother."

"it is a sensual rather than an intellectual experience. "

"I should not tell her what to paint but she will know."

**only for God's sake learn your roots.
know your ancestors' passions.**

simultaneous silence
concentration
participation in this ancient practice
believe completely that you are the first creator
believe completely that you are the last in an endless line of apprentices.

I repeat a thing again and again. over and over.

I translate the thing into pictures.

into forms.

into sounds.

(whispers and moans)

Repetition and translation and imagination and time change the thing.

Wear it away until its

glowing

contradicting

deceitful

mystical

essence appears.

Think of a fisherman: His trout grows a few inches every time he tells his story. The telling of the story replaces the original event in his memory. His story becomes the only truth he has.

(I control WHAT HAPPENED as much as I control WHAT WILL HAPPEN.)

Art gives meaning to stories⁹. I'll repeat and refine my rituals and lists and routines until their meaning emerges. I'll burnish life until its glowing heart parades forth garbed only in light and music. Feeding life through different mediums, different languages, different senses transforms it.

⁹ I'm for contradicting, overlapping, not-quite-jiving stories. Let multiple witnesses fight for their conflicting memories.

I want near-repetition.

I want

proof of transcendence

deceit

paradox
I want an ever-expanding aesthetic.