

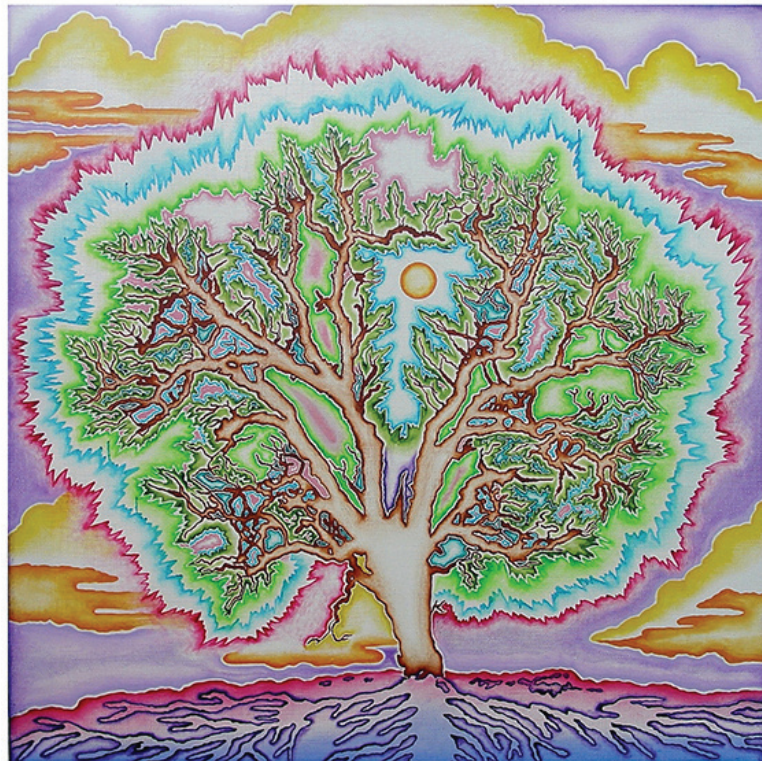


KCET, November 22, 2013 "Tapping the Third Realm: Artists Exploring Spiritual Dimensions," by Tyler Stallings
<https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/tapping-the-third-realm-artists-exploring-spiritual-dimensions>



Tapping the Third Realm: Artists Exploring Spiritual Dimensions

Tyler Stallings | November 21, 2013



Linda Vallejo, "Arco Iris," 2008, oil on canvas, 36 x 36 inches | Image courtesy of the artist.

A sprawling, wondrous exhibition, "Tapping the Third Realm" presents the work of thirty-four artists who deal with ideas of spirituality through four main avenues, as stated by the curators, and include "conjuring, communication, collaboration and chance." The exhibition explores how artists tap into another dimension, whether it is a place of spirits, ideas of heaven, or the collective unconscious. "Elements of magic, witchcraft, and profound attention or intuition are evident in the artists' creative processes," say the curators. In this collection of work there are portals to the spirit world, communications with the dead, spells manifested in glass, prayers as drawings, potions as paintings, and dreams transformed into sculpture. "Tapping the Third Realm" is co-curated by Meg Linton, Director of Galleries and Exhibitions, Ben Maltz Gallery, Otis College of Art and Design & Carolyn Peter, Director and Curator, Laband Art Gallery, Loyola Marymount University, and is on view through December 8, 2013.



Clodagh Emoe, "Parodos," 2009, video, 5:43, lent by the artist | Image courtesy of the artist.

Is this the first collaboration between Otis and Loyola? How did you and Carolyn Peter decide on the theme of the show and then how did you go about selecting artists?

Meg Linton: Yes, it is the first collaboration. She and I had been meeting regularly at a local Italian restaurant for the last six years to talk about art, culture and community on our campuses. It was during one of these lunches in October 2012 that we realized our exhibition schedules would actually be in sync for Fall 2013. It was at this point that I enticed Carolyn to be my co-conspirator/curator of "Tapping the Third Realm." Shortly after that meeting I shared all my research to date (bibliography, notes, lists of artists, etc.) and we began looking at work and doing studio visits together. I was really the one who decided upon the initial theme of the show, which is summed up in the first paragraph of our curators' statement:

The "third realm," is the space between life and death and art and life. It is the realm of the invisible, subconscious, intuitive, non-rational, and uncanny. It is what Carlos Castaneda refers to as "states of non-ordinary reality," where seemingly irrational and esoteric types of knowledge may be discovered, communicated, and received. Not unlike the Zen notion "silence is thunder" it is a sphere where opposites can coalesce into an integrated whole to reveal alternate possibilities. It is a place of chance and collaboration, where two are conjured into three. As William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin advocate, "No two minds ever come together without, thereby, creating a third, invisible, intangible force which may be likened to a third mind." This ethereal threshold between the knowable and inconceivable is a space where many artists find their inspiration and flex their imagination.

I was pulling references from all types of sources. It was incredibly helpful to have a second person sifting through the information, as Carolyn was able to see it from a fresh perspective. She was the one to first articulate the four sub-themes we decided to focus on: Conjuring, Collaboration, Communication and Chance. We used these ideas to filter our choices, but we also consciously agreed to use our intuition and emotion in the selection process. We had more conversations about how things "felt" rather than intellectual discussions dissecting the work. Not that we don't value the intellectual, but one of our goals with this project was to avoid irony, skepticism, and pessimism. We wanted to find expressions of belief in other forms of acquiring knowledge or understanding about the human experience whether it be through organized religion, self-defined spirituality, or a profound sense or use of intuition.



Betye Saar, "Indigo Illusions," 1991, mixed media assemblage with neon, 17 1/2 x 11 1/2 x 5 inches, lent by the artist, courtesy of Roberts & Tilton, Culver City, CA | Image courtesy of the artist.



Philip Havice, "Breath is Life," 1985, acrylic on canvas, 24 x 20 inches, lent by the artist | Image courtesy of the artist.

Non-scientific, magical, and nature-centered themes have been attributed to women for millennia, usually to their detriment. Meg, we've known each other since the mid-1990s, which has given me the opportunity to follow your curatorial career. Since your arrival at Otis in 2003, I notice that you've featured a number of solo shows by women artists. And, then, perhaps the most significant historical show on feminist art that you've organized was the one connected to The Getty Foundation's Pacific Standard Time initiative, "Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at The Woman's Building." So, I'm wondering if you view "Tapping the Third Realm" as being connected to your emphasis on presenting women artists and exploring feminism?

ML: The experience of working with the women from the Woman's Building (WB) was a definite inspiration for "Tapping the Third Realm." A few strong feminists and WB alumni are included in this multi-gendered, generational, and cultural exhibition: Linda Vallejo, Cheri Gaulke, Betye Saar, Gilah Yelin Hirsch, and Ruth Ann Anderson. The conversations with them renewed and awakened my long standing interest in magic--not what you see in Hollywood with the proliferation of supernatural tween dramas like "Harry Potter," "Charmed," "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," "Vampire Diaries," and the list goes on and on--but what you experience if you awaken your third eye and pay close attention to your inner and outer worlds. It's about tuning into your circadian rhythms and acknowledging a place within nature rather than separated from nature.

I haven't really thought about the exhibition in terms of Feminism with a capital "F." I will say that many people warned me about the difficulty of doing an exhibition like this with contemporary artists because spirituality combined with sincerity and authenticity struggles against the current trends in art theory, criticism and the market place. Also, the history of spiritualism is peppered with hucksterism because it is so easy to prey on those blinded by loss and grief. So, maybe the feminist act in all of this is about shifting what is valued in the selection process for the show.



Southern California has been and still is often associated with the exploration of alternative realities and religions. They range from science-fiction author L. Ron Hubbard's establishment of the Church of Scientology in the mid-1950s, to the 1963 founding of the Esalen Institute in Big Sur that explores various states of bodily and mindful consciousness, to Carlos Castaneda's many books on his shamanistic training from the late 1960s and 70s, such as "The Teachings of Don Juan," to Terence McKenna's learning from hallucinogenic mushrooms and his notion of the "archaic revival" in the late 1970s and 80s. In this light, do you feel that "Tapping the Third Realm" does touch upon an especially Southern California sub-culture? Also, I was impressed that you selected work that reached back through the same decades that are outlined above, which provided a real depth to the theme, indicating persistent interest in "third eye" explorations. Could you discuss a little the selection process too?

ML: As part of my research for this project, I came across two fascinating books. The first, "The Crucible of Ferment: New York's 'Psychic Highway'" by Emerson Klees and the second by Michael Horowitz called the "Occult America: The Secret History of How Mysticism Shaped Our Nation." Both books investigate the religious fervor and social activism of the 19th century that began in upstate New York. Horowitz's book goes beyond and shows how ideas of spiritualism, transcendentalism, and theosophy, born on the East Coast, migrate across the country and lands in the "edenistic" (or should I say hedonistic) landscape of Southern California. A year and a half ago, in preparation for this show, I actually took a road trip along the Psychic Highway visiting places like the Oneida Community, the home of the Jemima Wilkinson (a.k.a. Publik Universal Friend), and Lily Dale (the birthplace of spiritualism).

So, before I started this project, I had this naïve notion, maybe because I grew up here, that SoCal kind of owned this "alternative" spiritual hippy sub-culture. I think it's because of all the activity and experimentation in the mid to late 20th century that I was aware of developed alongside new forms of photographic documentation and mass media that didn't exist when all this "alternative" activity of the 19th Century was taking place on the East coast. But now, I see the legacy on the West Coast with groups like the Rosicrucians, the Philosophical Research Society in Los Feliz, and Paramahansa Yogananda's Self Realization Fellowship center that formed in the 1920s and 30s, as part of a continuum in the constant search and need to articulate the unseen or the divine. Or maybe it's like Pierre Teilhard de Chardin said, "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience."

It is this continuation we were hoping to imply by including work originated in the 1970s and 80s like the paintings, sculpture and collages by Gilah Yelin Hirsch, Philip Havice, Kenzi Shiokava, and Kyle Lind. It's an attempt to emphasize the bandwidth of this type of investigation and visual manifestation. We also went beyond Southern California in our selections by including artists from Brazil, New Zealand, Ireland, and the U.K.



Liza Ryan, "Seer," 2011, chromogenic print, 49 3/8 x 65 7/8 inches, courtesy Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles, image courtesy of the artist.



Dane Mitchell, "Portal to the Spirit World," 2008-1013, spell, stanchions, sign, dimensions variable, lent by the artist, courtesy RaebervonStenglin, Zurich, image courtesy of Otis College of Art.

How would you sort out the thirty-four artists in the show between being believers, as artists who are interested in the topic but are skeptics, and/or those who would not call themselves artists, per se, but would claim to make objects in order to bear witness to their deep and personal spiritual journeys?

ML: I would say everyone in this exhibition defines themselves as artists, believes there are limitations with what our human senses are able to perceive in this body and world, and has an open mind to the unknown and inexplicable. I'm going to quote our curators' statement again with this:

The artists included in Tapping the Third Realm use religious and secular traditions of meditation, prayer, and ritual to expand their thought, to awaken their "third eye" to conceive and produce their work. "Although the artist cannot recover the richness of inner visions in the coarse materials of the everyday world," art historian Sixten Ringbom explains "art is given a role in the quest for the spiritual. In theosophical aesthetics the work of art is in its own way a thought-form, shaped by the artist's thought vibrations and itself transmitting these vibrations to the beholder."

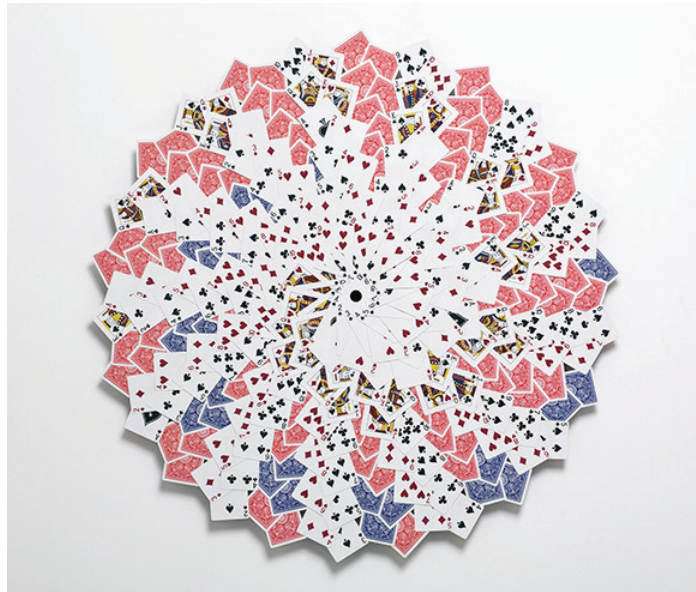
We, as the "beholders," choose whether or not to open ourselves up to receive the artists' ideas; and the objects they have imbued with energy and personal analogies in an attempt to manifest aspects of the ineffable. Philosopher and mystic Manly P. Hall wrote "The Law of Analogy is the most powerful weapon ever placed in the hands of man [and we would say artists] with which to solve the riddle of the Unknown, for by analogy he [the artist] is able to classify the orders of invisible life, and chart that vast interval between the limited human nature and the limitlessness of divine nature."



Tell me more about the after effects by viewers, by you as staff who are present daily, by some of the artists, and others who may have been touched by some of the "real" incarnations in the show, such as the ritual art performance at the September reception by the Mythic Players, or the void that was created in the gallery, which is represented by a roped off area by Dane Mitchell.

ML: The interactions with the public have been positive. I think partly because of the variety of work shown in the two galleries. The opening ceremony that the Reverend Xia and her collaborator Ananda organized with the Mythic Players from the Temple of the Goddess was powerful and challenging. For people who were able to invest themselves in the language, gestures, and visuals of the ritual it connected them to the energy of the afternoon and momentum of the event. For others, it was a non-event and maybe even ridiculous because of existing stereotypes or unfamiliarity with these types of performative rituals.

Dane Mitchell, who flew in from Auckland, partnered with a local practitioner from a European pagan tradition to create the "Portal to the Spirit World" (2008-2013). Underneath the Maltz Gallery's center skylight, he roped off an area with stanchions and identified it with a sign saying, "This area has been opened as a portal to the spirit world, please do not enter." Some people immediately connect with the conceptual side of the work, while others really want to know what will happen if you enter that specific space. I have not witnessed anyone "crossing over," but I know people have tempted fate when our backs were turned. A few very sensitive viewers shared they could feel the energy of the opening between this realm and the other.



Ross Rudel, "Proprietary Dream Mandala," 2008, used casino playing cards on aluminum, 36 x 36 x 1 inches, lent by the artist, courtesy Angles Gallery, Los Angeles | Image courtesy of the artist.



As curators, do you and Carolyn feel that the show provided an opportunity for each of you to research a topic that was of personal interest? This is, of course, always the case for a curator who is presented a thematic topic, but I'm always curious about the personal motivations.

ML: This topic is definitely of personal interest to both of us. For me it resonates with the work I did on the "Doin' It in Public: Feminism and Art at the Woman's Building." From that project I developed a fascination with the history of the 1893 Woman's Building and the Parliament of the World's Religions at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Both were unprecedented organizational feats and changed people's perceptions of art made by women and opened minds to other faiths. That congress of spiritual leaders, introduced a wide range of religious and philosophical ideas to the American public including some new radical movements like spiritualism, Christian Science and the Baha'i faith. It opened up the conversation.



Installation view of "Tapping the Third Realm" at Otis College of Art and Design Ben Maltz Gallery with figurative work at center: Cliff Garten, mÜber, (mistrauen des Überbewusstseins), 2013, crystals, 75 x 24 x 16 inches, lent by the artist | Image courtesy of Otis College of Art and Design Ben Maltz Gallery.



After nearly twenty years of being a professional in the arts, I find it to be the case that young artists can rarely discuss issues of spirituality, the environment, and any topic that suggests that art can be more than about aesthetics and responding to market forces. I know that this is not the case completely. Rather, I speak to how one is taught in art schools, what one may see at art fairs, the art world that follows market trends. So, for me, "Tapping the Third Realm" is refreshing in this respect. I would like to believe that it represents not only an "archaic revival," as McKenna might suggest, but a "reenchantment of art" as art historian Suzi Gablik once discussed, also the title of a book by herin 1992, in the face of the rampant commercialization of art and lack of an overt personal voice then. What are your thoughts on this characterization of the art world and how it may relate to "Tapping the Third Realm?"

ML: The longer I'm in the art world the less I feel like I can characterize it. I yearn for conversations about art that don't end up being a discussion of the art market, but actually lead to conversation about the human attributes like courage, frailty, empathy, fear, love, loss and everything in between. There are multiple art worlds and audiences to consider and sometimes I think the academies forget this. It's interesting you bring up Suzi Gablik, because I've been thinking more and more about her book "Conversations Before the End of Time" that she published in 1997. She questions the role and meaning of art in our contemporary culture when we are facing significant global ecological, social and economic challenges. Anytime there is an economic crisis like what we've been experiencing since 2001, there is an increased awareness and participation in religion and spiritual activities. Everyone is re-evaluating everything. I see "Tapping the Third Realm" as part of this process of reevaluation and hopefully it broadens the conversation for artists and the public.

Closing reception for Tapping the Third Realm, Sunday, December 8, 12pm-4pm, Free, OTIS Ben Maltz Gallery and LMU's Laband Art Gallery, artist Amanda Yates Garcia is the City Oracle ready to answer questions at LMU while at OTIS Annie Buckley offers a brief history and readings from her new project "The People's Tarot" and Guru Rugu hosts "the experimental meditation center of los angeles" for a closing ceremony of group realm-tapping.