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Symbiosis

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Art and Design

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art

by

Jeri Allison

August 2008

Anita DeAngelis, Chair

Catherine Murray

David Dixon

keywords: elephant, drawing, anthropomorphism, chakra, charcoal, symbiosis

ABSTRACT

Symbiosis

by

Jeri Allison

The artist discusses her Master of Fine Arts exhibition, *Symbiosis*, hosted by the Natural History Museum in Gray, Tennessee, from May 1st, through August 1st 2008. The exhibit includes works produced during the artist's three years of study at East Tennessee State University.

The subject of the exhibition consists of drawings of the elephant's place in history through its relationship with humans. Topics explored include the elephant as victim, servant, god, prey, and ultimately as teacher. Discussion will also include artistic influences such as Sue Coe, Deborah Butterfield, Franz Marc, and Frank Noelker as well as theoretical influences by Carl G. Jung, James Hillman, and Jerome S. Bernstein.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First acknowledgments go to my committee members: Anita DeAngelis, Catherine Murray, and David Dixon. To Anita, I am grateful for her encouragement and ability to see what I could not. Her shared knowledge has been invaluable. Catherine Murray was a constant source of guidance and support and David Dixon brought humor and his inimitable perspective on life and art.

I am especially indebted to John Hilton for his willingness to share his thoughts, time, and wit. I am also appreciative to Gilda Morina Syverson and Judy Tudiver for their wisdom. I would like to offer many thanks to Jerome S. Bernstein for his vision and sensitivity into the realm of the Borderland and fellow artists and friends: David Mazure, Kyra Dosch-Klemer, Mary Nees, and Jessica Rae Evans.

Most importantly I want to recognize my family: Maye Allison, B.J. Allison, Berry Allison, and Faye Coulter.

This work is dedicated to my mother, Maye L. Allison, who always encouraged me as an artist and taught me of the love of animals.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My interest in mixed media began in undergraduate school. I have always had a passion for the process of drawing in a tightly rendered manner, but to introduce various media into a seemingly traditional medium allowed me to explore and experiment in ways I had never tried. It allowed me the opportunity to make mistakes, to make discoveries, and to expand my ability to speak through drawing. From a very young age, I took private art lessons. During each class we would pour over a mountain of random images from magazine clippings. We were then instructed to duplicate the image in our chosen medium. While this enhanced my technical skills greatly, it did nothing for my creative abilities. Adhering to traditional choices in media kept me bound in a box. I wanted to be more spontaneous and free with the artistic process but had no idea how to go about it. Combining media was the vehicle I needed to allow myself this spontaneity. It banished the rules and allowed me to express myself more freely. In doing so, I learned that the process was just as important as the product.

During the ten years between my undergraduate and graduate studies, I worked as a faux finisher. I learned various techniques for duplicating textures and surfaces such as marble, stucco, and leather. Once accepted to graduate school, I never intended to use these skills again. However, my advisor, Anita DeAngelis, suggested I bring some of that knowledge to my drawings. I found through experimentation that I particularly enjoyed the use of texture and layering as a ground for my drawings. I now use many of the same tools and products in my drawings that I used as a faux finisher. I also began to explore

the use of text in my work. I have a borderline obsession with books and take pleasure in reading and learning. To be able to incorporate the written word into my work is almost a necessity for me, as it is such an important part of my life.

My first semester at ETSU I took a book arts class. I found myself particularly attracted to the overabundance of decorative papers available to the book artist. I was consumed by the variety of textures, patterns, and colors available. I am sure this attraction is a result of the many hours I spent as a child in fabric stores. My mother would study the pattern books and multihued fabrics. The experience was very sensual as I can remember the smell, the sound of cutting scissors, and the explosion of color and texture surrounding me. This love of printed fabrics is still with me today; it is only natural then that I am so drawn to decorative papers. After taking the book arts class, I wanted to incorporate these papers into my work in some manner. I eventually began applying them to my drawing paper and using them as a surface to draw on. They also provided an alternative means for achieving texture in my work.

Toward the end of my undergraduate studies, I began incorporating animals into my work. I completed a mixed media series on the exploitation of farm animals. This series led me toward the work I would eventually do in graduate school. Upon entering graduate school, I knew I wanted to use my drawings as a means to speak about animals and their importance in our lives. I wanted to articulate the cruelties against them as well as the joys they bestow upon us, but how does one do this without being sentimental or on the other hand a sensationalist? Artist Deborah Butterfield clarified this issue for me and helped me to let go of this concern. Speaking on her sculptures of horses she states:

. . . sometimes I make work that's perhaps verging on the sentimental, but if everything I made were really tough, that would have no meaning; you have to allow yourself to be who you are at that moment, because without sappy, tough doesn't mean anything. I think making something sappy at this point is a whole lot riskier than making something really tough.¹

Catherine Murray was a great support during this time as I was feeling confused about the direction I would take. She urged me not to let my fear of sentimentality stand in the way of the work I was producing.

CHAPTER 2

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

I have greatly admired the courage of artist Sue Coe for her ability to go into the slaughterhouse and record with seeming stoicism what is before her. I have no doubt that I feel just as strongly as she does about the injustices committed upon animals, but I know without a doubt I would crumble under such circumstances.

Sue Coe's work has had a profound influence on me as a person and an artist. An advocate for animal and human rights, Coe addresses themes of cruelty and victimization. The success of her work stems from her ability to leave her viewers disturbed by the consequences of their daily lives. For example, her series of drawings entitled *Porkopolis* forces the viewer to witness the horrors of the abattoir.

In general, Coe's works locate us between a rock that is our self-proclaimed beliefs, and a hard place of our actual practice. Her steadfast refusal to lighten her imagery asks us to personally take responsibility rather than to be contemplatively detached.²

While some may label Coe as a sensationalist, I find her work to be enlightening and based on truth as her images are taken from direct observation. We are a society that lives in ignorance. We often choose ignorance over knowledge because it is simply too painful to address reality. We've become champions at hiding the truth whether it is animal cruelty, poverty, or a myriad of other injustices.

Other artists who have influenced my work include Franz Marc, Frank Noelker, Deborah Butterfield, and Deborah Mae Broad. Franz Marc's ideas more than his style have inspired me as an artist. Marc was a German Expressionist painter born in 1880. Early on in his career the artist developed a preoccupation with animal subjects and their

relationship to humans and the divine. For Marc, animals possessed a spiritual quality.

He wrote,

People with their lack of piety, especially men, never touch my true feelings. But animals with their virginal sense of life awakened all that is good in me.³

Author Gabi La Cava states:

This often-cited quotation by Marc, stating his belief that animals are purer and more beautiful than man, begins to explain why he chose to focus on animals for the majority of his artistic output. It should be said that Marc was a deeply religious person and that he is said to have spoken in terms of ‘pantheistic empathy’ with regard to his objectives in representing animals and nature.⁴

Marc appears to have had a near obsession with animals. I can understand this feeling wholeheartedly. The unadulterated essence of animals seems at times to border on the ethereal in comparison to the superficial concerns of humans. Buddhism teaches us to live in the present, taking part in life fully. We are encouraged to release the desires of the ego and relish what is before us. This is what I see in the behavior of animals. They have a relationship with the divine that the ordinary person seems to be lacking. They are content with their existence, without question. I think Marc may have seen animals from this vantage point. His primary concern was “with representing the spirit and thus the beauty of the animals, in order to represent a sense of the pantheistic”⁵

Frank Noelker is a contemporary photographer of animals.

Over the course of seven years, Noelker visited over 300 zoos, spending hours watching, waiting, being with each individual, witnessing their daily lives. The work is lonely and heartbreaking. It offers very rare connections with the creatures we incarcerate in the name of education, conservation or entertainment. Many have garish colorful landscapes painted in the background and coarsely chopped logs and tree stumps, enrichment more for our comfort and reference than theirs.⁶

An artist by training, Noelker comes from a tradition of what he calls 'Concerned Photographers,' documenting wrongs in the world to make people aware and create change. His 'heroes' include Lewis Hine, whose photos of child laborers in the early 20th century instigated social reform, and artist Sue Coe.⁷

Noelker sees his work as a commentary on our relationship to the natural world.

His work depicts the isolation of captivity. Some have criticized Noelker for the subtlety of his message but he feels it is important to capture the beauty of the animal as well as its living conditions. I found myself in a similar situation as well. In my attempt to open the viewer's eyes, I wanted them to not only see the predicament of the situation but also the connection we have with the animal kingdom. In some ways, graphic representation can put people off rather quickly, never allowing the work to penetrate the viewer's thoughts.

Completed in 2006, Noelker did a series of portraits of chimpanzees in refuges.

The chimps were rescued or retired from either research facilities or the entertainment industry.

I'm doing 3'x3' portraits of their faces that more or less look like studio portraits. I try to photograph them with the same respect and dignity and formal tools as you would photograph a president or other dignitary. And I never show them without telling their stories - having their teeth taken out with crowbars or hammer and chisel, or having doses of HIV shot into their bloodstream 10,000 times stronger than would kill a human, the Hepatitis B research, and the open liver biopsies, etc. That's what the work is about. It's an incredibly intense experience. They have individual identities; people read their stories and read their names and feel it. On an emotional and artistic level, I want people to look into their eyes and connect to them.⁸

Again, Noelker has used subtlety to convey his message; however, in this series he has included the use of text to inform his work. Here one can find the shocking details of each animal's story by means of the text. I find this approach to be successful in that the artist breaks down the wall between subject and observer. And through the means of text

he conveys the animal's history while presenting a portrait that is moving and poignant. Noelker doesn't alarm the observer by depicting the gruesome details. Instead, he draws the viewer in by his sensitive portrayals and allows the text to expand on the imagery.

Sculptor Deborah Butterfield is best known for her large constructions of horses built from casts of found objects, steel, and bronze. In an interview Butterfield explains her intent in the following sentence:

Everyone has different problems to solve in their lives, and I think that empathy would be one of them. For me, it's really what my work is about, because I not only want people to see them through my eyes, but I also want to try to talk about language with another species, which happens to be the horse, and perhaps to gain more and different information by transferring or becoming empathetic to another creature.⁹

Being a horse enthusiast myself, I have admired Butterfield's work for many years. Her work speaks volumes about the species and our relationship with them through her ability to depict the form, carriage, and emotion of this elegant creature.

Deborah Mae Broad has influenced my work both technically speaking and through her use of animals as subject matter. Her works are humorous and satirical adaptations of fables depicting animals in unusual circumstances. Her use of animals naturally appeals to me and the placement of them in predicaments faced by humans brings them to a level humans can identify with. Her artistic style as a printmaker and painter is simultaneously whimsical and representational.

Technically speaking, I am influenced by artists Barry Moser, Sarah Simblet, Chris Van Allsburg, Tim Bower, Paul Cadmus, Laura Orchard, and D. Jeffrey Mims. All of these artists have the ability to exquisitely render their subject matter in a way that is not only realistic but also intriguing. I appreciate Barry Moser for his use of strong contrast, line, and animal subject matter. As you view my drawings, you will see that

line variation and the use of robust lights and darks are an integral element of my work. Sarah Simblet's use of line variation has made a great impression on me as well. Her line drawings are simultaneously fragile and powerful. Chris Van Allsburg, known for his children's books, has influenced me tremendously. His earlier illustrations in particular were meticulously drawn in pencil. His use of strong light sources, pattern, unusual view points, and mystery combine to create a powerful break from traditional representational drawings. In fact, my advisor Anita DeAngelis emphasized this use of mystery as a tool in creating a work that not only draws the interest of the viewer but also invites him or her to ponder the subject matter. In the past I had a tendency to elucidate my content. Through the example of Chris Van Allsburg, I learned that there is a fine line between overtly narrative work and that which leaves room for contemplation. Tim Bower's use of mixed media, sharp contrasts, textured backgrounds, and representational style all inspire me and their direct influence can be seen repeatedly throughout my drawings. Paul Cadmus, Laura Orchard, and D. Jeffrey Mims, I respect simply for their stunning technical abilities and compositions.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL INFLUENCES

I have always felt this deep kinship with animals and nature. In recent years, I felt the need to find a deeper explanation for this bond. I know I feel this empathy for the natural world, but why? Why can some people simply cut down a tree or abandon a dog with no remorse? Aside from the usual justifications, I felt there must be some explanation for these feelings I have. Through my devotion to books and the works of psychotherapist Carl Jung, I have found various interpretations for this affinity but none explained it better than a book entitled *Living in the Borderland: The Evolution of Consciousness and the Challenge of Healing Trauma* by Jungian analyst, Jerome S. Bernstein. In 2004 I was fortunate enough to take part in the editing of this book. His theory, in a few insufficient words, proposes that certain individuals feel the pain of others and the planet more intensely than others. This empathy may lead the individual to withdraw from life in order to avoid the constant onslaught of emotions and despair. To quote Bernstein, “I have described the ‘Borderland personality’ as someone who psychically straddles the split between the developed, rational mind and nature in the western psyche, and one who holds and carries the tension of that split and an emergent reconciliation of that split at one and the same time.”¹⁰

Borderland people *personally* experience, and must live out, the split from nature on which the western ego, as we know it, has been built. They feel (not feel about) the extinction of species; they feel (not feel about) the plight of animals that are no longer permitted to live by their own instincts, and which survive only in domesticated states to be used as pets or food.¹¹

When I first read Bernstein’s theories, I was dumbfounded. I felt as though he was writing about me. I immediately wrote him and that is how I came to be a part of this

book. I am one of the case studies in the book. Bernstein has helped me to accept this sadness I feel for the natural world. Before reading his book, I cursed my sensitivity and saw it as a hindrance to a fulfilling life. Now, I can embrace it and use it and art making as a path to help animals. His explanation of the Borderlander seems a fitting one for many sensitive artist types and while I don't condone stereotyping, it is true that many so-called "sensitive types" are artists.

During my search, I also considered the fact that I have always had a tendency to see human characteristics in animals. Given the label anthropomorphism by the scientific community, this practice is often looked down upon as being overly sentimental and emotional. However, I find it to be a necessity if one is to try and understand the animal experience. The book *Dream Animals* is a compilation of writings by author James Hillman and paintings by artist Margot McLean. In a dialogue between the two, Hillman states: "Unless we anthropomorphize, we are doomed to read a horse's gambol not as its joy but as our projection, a stray dog's whining not as its desperation but as our sentimental identification with its plight, a 'coon's thrashing in a trap not as its fear but as our own claustrophobia and victimization."¹² MacLean responds with:

I believe a little anthropomorphizing is necessary. For me to be inside means entering the animal's body and trying to see the world from there. It simply does not make sense to separate ourselves from the animal world when there are far too many concrete similarities¹³

Deborah Butterfield also comments on how anthropomorphism reveals itself through her work.

For example, my horse and I were riding down this road, and we both saw a wild boar coming up at us out of the ditch, and we both nearly had heart failure. We regained our composure and both of us realized that it was a log on the side of the road with sort of earlike things and an open mouth. And then we were both totally sheepish and embarrassed but our hearts were pounding for about another half-

mile. That we both perceived the same inanimate object at the same time and were both afraid for our lives is sort of what I'm trying to do. I'm trying to get that kind of...anthropomorphism, projecting life into inanimate objects....I'm trying to get the viewer to project himself or herself into the form of the horse. I want people to actually be able to crawl into that shape and inhabit it, and to perceive in a different way. ¹⁴

As mentioned in Bernstein's definition of the "Borderland personality", I believe our lack of empathy toward animals and nature has much to do with our modern psychic split from the natural world. As a result, we have learned to distrust our intuitions and insight. It is only in recent years that animals have become a prominent part of human consciousness in modern society. In his introduction, Bernstein writes:

A psychotherapist whom I supervise opened our supervisory session with the following: 'So what's with all the animals out there? Everyone in my practice is coming in and talking about animals. What's going on?' I replied that I think that what's going on is that the western psyche is being reconnected to nature, and that nature themes in general, and animal themes in particular, reflect what I have called 'Borderland consciousness,' a phenomenon that is emergent in the culture and becoming increasingly prevalent in clinical settings.¹⁵

Margot McLean says:

... it's rare to see an animal in a painting during the great hundred years of modern art, from 1860 to 1960, say from Monet and Cezanne through Rothko. You see little dogs, carriage horses, and hunting scenes—and there are always major exceptions like Picasso and Franz Marc—but it's interesting how much animals have been left out.¹⁶

Hillman responds by saying:

And now as they are disappearing, they have found their way back into the imagination. The secret of the imagination is the disappearance of the actual. So, what I am saying is their actual death is bringing them back to life, and depicting that 'death', that absence, maybe the best way to do 'enough' for them. ¹⁷

CHAPTER 4

THE ELEPHANT

As mentioned earlier, my undergraduate work dealt with the use of animals in factory farms. While this subject matter was of great interest to me, upon entering graduate school I felt I wanted to take a different direction. Among the options I considered were domesticated animals, endangered animals, hunted animals, lab animals, and animals used for entertainment. The choices were endless, but ultimately I chose the elephant. As I would soon learn, the elephant fit all but one of these categories: He or she is domesticated, hunted, endangered, and used for entertainment purposes. The elephant is also intelligent and emotionally sensitive; two qualities humans can identify with. The realm of the elephant is virtually interminable. This curiosity about elephants began when I viewed a television special about an African sanctuary for baby elephants orphaned by the ivory trade. Run by Dr. Daphne Sheldrick, the sanctuary works in conjunction with the Tsavo National Park in Kenya to rehabilitate and release the orphans. Shortly thereafter, I found myself researching this captivating species. In doing so, I learned that the elephant's personality and intelligence, its complex social life, the way it nurtures its young and grieves for its dead, and its sophisticated communication are all traits that set the elephant apart from other animals.

At approximately 9 to 13 pounds, the elephant's brain size is the largest among land animals. Elephants are known for their remarkable intelligence.

In Asia, young working elephants learned to stuff the wooden bells around their necks with mud to stop them from ringing. They could then steal silently into farmers' fields at night to take bananas. Elephants have been known to hold tree branches in their trunks in order to scratch hard-to-reach spots or remove

parasites. Matriarchs...can remember and guide their families to prime feeding areas and watering holes-even if years have passed since their last visit.¹⁸

Their capacity for memory is twelve times that of a human. Carol Buckley of Hohenwold, Tennessee is the founder of a sanctuary for elderly and ailing elephants from zoos and circuses. She has seen first hand proof of the elephant's remarkable memory.

On July 6, 1999, National Geographic was at the sanctuary to film the arrival of Shirley, a 52-year-old Asian elephant that had been living alone in a Monroe, La., zoo for 22 years. The TV crew had left for the day when Jenny, a 30-year-old gimp with arthritis, wandered into the barn from a day outdoors. Seeing Shirley in a barn stall, Jenny began wailing with such passion that Blais (sanctuary co-founder) grabbed his own video recorder. 'Jenny knew right away who Shirley was and was wailing and screaming,' Buckley said. 'Shirley wasn't quite sure how to take the attention; then all of a sudden we saw her eyes got big, like there was a jolt of recognition as she remembered who Jenny was.' Buckley knew that in 1976, the two elephants had briefly been owned by the same circus. It turned out Shirley, an adult, had been housed with younger elephants while recovering from a broken leg. Jenny, then 7, was in that group and immediately solicited mothering from Shirley. They were together only a few weeks before each was leased to a different circus. As the reunited elephants bellowed 23 years later, keepers put them in adjoining stalls. They tenderly entwined their trunks between the bars. The next day, released into the outdoors, they were inseparable. When they weren't using their trunks to caress each other, they were raising them to trumpet their joy. The moving reunion became the centerpiece of a National Geographic documentary on captive elephants that won an Emmy and brought international fame and donations to the sanctuary.¹⁹

Elephants, when left to their own devices, are profoundly social creatures. A herd of them is in essence, one incomprehensibly massive elephant: a somewhat loosely bound and yet intricately interconnected, tensile organism. Young elephants are raised within an extended, multitiered network of doting female caregivers that includes the birth mother, grandmothers, aunts and friends. These relations are maintained over a life span as long as 70 years. Studies of established herds have shown that young elephants stay within 15 feet of their mothers for nearly all of their first eight years of life, after which young females are socialized into the matriarchal network, while young males go off for a time into an all-male social group before coming back into the fold as mature adults. When an elephant dies, its family members engage in intense mourning and burial rituals, conducting weeklong vigils over the body, carefully covering it with earth and brush, revisiting the bones for years afterward, caressing the bones with their trunks, often taking turns rubbing their trunks along the teeth of a skull's lower jaw, the way living elephants do in greeting. If harm comes to a member of an

elephant group, all the other elephants are aware of it. This sense of cohesion is further enforced by the elaborate communication system that elephants use. In close proximity they employ a range of vocalizations, from low-frequency rumbles to higher-pitched screams and trumpets, along with a variety of visual signals, from the waiving of their trunks to subtle anglings of the head, body, feet and tail. When communicating over long distances – in order to pass along, for example, news about imminent threats, a sudden change of plans or, of the utmost importance to elephants, the death of a community member – they use patterns of subsonic vibrations that are felt as far as several miles away by exquisitely tuned sensors in the padding of their feet.²⁰

I chose the elephant for my subject matter specifically because I believe we as a separate species can learn from these creatures what it is to live purposefully with compassion at our center. James Hillman writes:

The idea that we know ourselves through animals appears again and again in the theories of the origins of consciousness. Some peoples say the animals once had all the knowledge and transmitted it to us.²¹

As a result of learning about and drawing elephants, I've come to realize that in many ways I identify with the hardships and joys of being an elephant. I have come to realize that I identify with this creature in all its magnificence. I feel compassion and empathy for the enslaved elephant. I feel awe and wonder at the intelligence of the elephant and I feel respect and admiration for the elephant as a deity. I have come to see myself in the elephant and I have come to see as the elephant sees. In a word, I have experienced anthropomorphism.

CHAPTER 5

DRAWINGS

Early on I found a poem by Rudyard Kipling, entitled “ The Elephant“. It describes the seeming despair of an elephant in captivity. I was very moved by the poem and chose to use it as the background text and inspiration for my first drawing, *I Will Remember* (Fig.1).

I will remember what I was, I am sick of rope and chain-
I will remember my old strength and all my forest-affairs.
I will not sell my back to man for a bundle of sugar-cane.
I will go out to my own kind, and the wood-folk in their lairs.

I will go out until the day, until the morning break,
Out to the winds' untainted kiss, the waters' clean caress;
I will forget my ankle-ring and snap my picket-stake.
I will revisit my lost loves, and playmates masterless!

My reading went on to include the use of elephants in captivity. Author Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson writes of the trauma of confinement in elephants:

Zoo keepers report that captive elephants are subject to ‘sudden-death syndrome’ or ‘broken-heart syndrome,’ which happens (most often with young elephants) when they are separated from their social group or put in a new enclosure by themselves. Jack Adams of the Center for the Study of Elephants ascribes this to ‘gripping fear.’²²

In my opinion, the use of animals in circuses and zoos benefits humans far more than it ever could the animals involved. While zoos may at times benefit endangered animals by perpetuating the species, the use of animals in circuses is completely unnecessary.

Masson’s quote reminds us of the importance of familial and societal ties within the elephant’s way of life. That humans find it so easy to disregard this need is beyond insensitive and cruel.

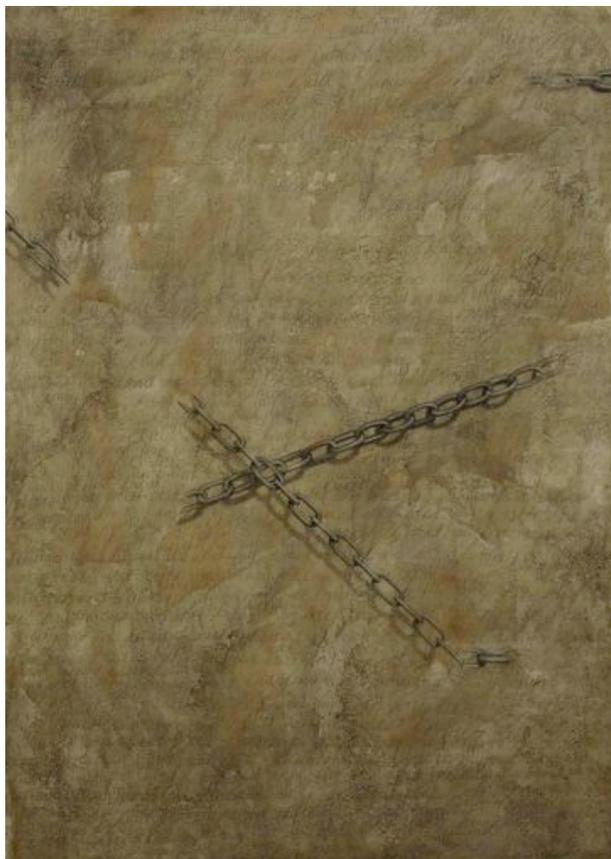


Fig. 1. *I Will Remember*, 2006, mixed media, 40” x 30”

I Will Remember depicts a chain stretched across handwritten text to imply the concept of captivity. I drew the chain in a *trompe l'oeil* style in hopes that the viewer would acquire a convincing sense of the chain. *Trompe l'oeil* is a French term meaning “fool the eye”. The artist renders an object in a highly representational manner in an attempt to create the illusion of three-dimensional objects. The intersection of the chains provided tension. I kept the drawing to a minimum so as not to compete too much with the ground. I was also experimenting with the notion that less is more. As mentioned earlier, Anita had called my attention to the importance of mystery in a drawing. As a

result I merely drew the implication of the chain. There was no need to draw the entire chain as the suggestion had been made.

Using the techniques described earlier, I prepared my paper with plaster, matte medium, and watered down India ink. I also used instant coffee diluted in water to give a warm earthy tone to the paper. I first learned about using coffee to tint paper in a watercolor class. The color of diluted coffee is unlike any found in paint. It has an almost iridescent quality to it. I then began to write the poem, “The Elephant” repeatedly over the entire page. I felt I was infusing the page with the words. It was very powerful for me. I felt the sorrow and isolation of the elephant. The process became as important to me as the act of drawing. My original intent was to complete a full scale drawing on top of the text. However, I was quite satisfied with the piece as it was. I pondered whether or not I should take the piece any further. I was somewhat concerned that drawing on this textured surface would be difficult but the many layers of matte medium that I applied in an attempt to create depth had also lent a wonderful, smooth surface to draw on that allowed for much control.

I believe this is one of the more successful pieces I’ve drawn while in graduate school. This is in part due to the minimal content as well as the contrast between the highly rendered drawing of the chain against the textured, nonfigurative background. In undergraduate school, my painting professor, Robert Tynes, worked on large canvases consisting of trompe l’oeil images set against abstracted backgrounds. I appreciate his ability to meld super realism with abstraction and believe his work had some influence on this piece.

In my second piece entitled *Until the Day* (Fig.2), I again incorporated the Kipling poem. While pondering how to depict the elephant in this next project, I discovered a painting of an elephant by Alexander Von Eikh. The energy, movement, and power of the artist's portrayal struck me. I decided to paint this next elephant in a similar manner. Anita suggested I do this by working on larger paper. I had previously limited most of my drawings to 18 x 24. It is somewhat difficult to get this sense of magnitude and command on a small sheet of paper. I painted the elephant in motion. He is approaching the picture plane with speed and purpose. I created a halo effect around the elephant in order to illuminate him.



Fig. 2. *Until the Day*, 2006, mixed media, 40" x 32"

Initially I was very pleased with this work. I felt I was successful in depicting the elephant in motion. I also enjoyed the way he was emerging from a light as if to suggest he was rising from the ashes of defeat. The disappearing text reminded me of the fact that this elephant resisted the fate of the elephant in the poem. This painting was a breaking point away from my tendency to centrally locate my subject matter. Being an admirer of iconic imagery, I had a relentless habit of centrally locating my subject matter. Anita called my attention to this, and *Until the Day* was my first piece in which I made a sincere effort to break that pattern. The elephant is almost centrally located but he looks off to your right. The black on the left side of the image balances his weight.

Now, when I view this piece I am troubled by the placement of the text. I was careful to keep the rows of wording evenly spaced but it appears that the words on the left of the page tilt down. That is the difficulty of trying to maintain too much control. Small mistakes are prominent. I could have avoided this had I let go of my need to restrain the creative process. It has been an ongoing battle for me to allow myself to sometimes draw with abandon.

And the Elephant Sings (Fig. 3) is a portrayal of the emotional side of the elephant. I chose an excerpt of a poem by Ted Hughes entitled “Crow’s Elephant Totem Song”.

.....
And the Elephant sings deep in the forest-maze
About a star of deathless and painless peace
But no astronomer can find where it is.

The poem has nothing to do with the plight of elephants. But this one stanza spoke to me, and I felt it was strong enough to stand on its own. For me it speaks of the indifference humans often have toward the suffering of elephants. The drawing itself suggests the strong familial and emotional aspect of elephants. In this drawing I returned to the idea of focusing in on the most important aspect of the image. The embracing trunks were the message. It was not necessary to draw the entire elephant. Much like the chains of the earlier image, I allowed the trunks to gradually disappear from the page. The motion of the entwined trunks creates the circle, archetypal symbol of wholeness.

Dr. M.-L von Franz has explained the circle (or sphere) as a symbol of the Self. It expresses the totality of the psyche in all its aspects, including the relationship between man and the whole of nature. Whether the symbol of the circle appears in primitive sun worship or modern religion, in myths or dreams, in the mandalas drawn by Tibetan monks, in the ground plans of cities, or in the spherical concepts of early astronomer, it always points to the single most vital aspect of life - its ultimate wholeness.²³

At the time, I was experimenting with the use of transferred text as opposed to handwritten text. John Hilton taught me how to apply matt medium to text printed on paper from an ink jet printer. The paper is then turned face down onto the drawing surface and burnished with a bone folder. After approximately a minute, the sheet of text is lifted leaving behind the transferred words on the drawing surface. It is important to type the verse in reverse so that your text will read properly. The positioning of the type in this particular drawing was of concern. I didn't want it to appear too placed. I ultimately chose to arrange verses from the stanza sporadically across the page leaving areas of the textured background prevalent. Applying additional layers of matte medium and stain softened the words themselves. This prevented them from being too pronounced. I found that drawing on this coarse background provided an excellent

surface for mimicking the quality of elephant skin. I was also reminded of the beauty of drawing on a middle toned paper. Strong contrasts occur when set against the soft earthy tones of coffee. The need for drawing middle tones vanishes. The use of the deep, dark blacks of charcoal and vivid whites of Rembrandt pastels create distinction. This use of middle toned paper would become my favorite means of working.



Fig. 3. *And the Elephant Sings*, 2006, mixed media, 44” x 32

Around this time, David Dixon and I had a conversation concerning the necessity of suffering in art. I began to contemplate my need to focus on the negative aspects of the elephant’s existence. At the time, I was also reading about the Law of Attraction and quantum physics.

The Law of Attraction teaches that we attract into our lives whatever we focus on. Quantum Physics teaches that nothing is fixed, that there are no limitations, that everything is vibrating Energy. By understanding that everything is Energy in a state of potential and by applying the Law of Attraction to bring into our lives what we focus on, it is never necessary to feel stuck with an undesirable life.²⁴

While it may sound somewhat esoteric, I couldn't help but wonder if I was in some remote way contributing to the suffering of elephants by choosing to focus on their misfortunes. Philosopher, Edward Casey wrote:

Landscape painting not only locates things; it also *relocates* them. It gives to things—concrete or abstract as they may be—*somewhere else to be*. Somewhere else than the natural world (if they are physical things) and somewhere else than the ethereal world (if they are objects of cerebration or contemplation). Somewhere else, in other hands, than the simple location in which they are 'originally' or 'appropriately' or 'for the most part' located. Another place means another life—a second life. Thus things (including experiences of things) are not merely represented or remembered in paintings; they 'sur-vive' there in the sense of living on, literally living *over* their first, proper life.²⁵

If one considers this, could I not recreate an elephant's life through more positive imagery? This provided for me something to contemplate. If this notion is plausible, it endows one with great power. From there I made the choice to learn more about what I perceived to be the positive side of being an elephant.

I have studied eastern religions and philosophies for many years. Over the summer, I chose to do some extensive research into the Indian philosophy of chakras. According to this theory, we possess seven major chakras and several minor. The disc-like balls of energy are spaced from the base of the spinal column upward to the crown of the head. Each is represented by a specific color and symbol.

Chakras are organizing centers for the reception, assimilation, and transmission of life energies. Our chakras, as core centers, form the coordinating network of our complicated mind/body system. From instinctual behavior to consciously planned strategies, from emotions to artistic creations, the chakras are the master programs that govern our life, loves, learning and illumination. As seven vibratory modalities, the

chakras form a mythical *Rainbow Bridge*, a connecting channel linking Heaven and Earth, mind and body, spirit and matter, past and future.²⁶

As my research progressed, I learned that the first and fifth chakras are associated with elephants. The first chakra is Muladhara meaning root support. It is located at the base of the spine.

This is the foundation of our entire system—the building block on which all the other chakras must rest—so this chakra is of crucial importance. It relates to the element earth, and all solid, earthly things, such as our bodies, our health, our survival, our material and monetary existence, and our ability to focus and manifest our needs. It is the manifestation of consciousness in its final form—solid and tangible. It is our need to stay alive and be healthy, and the acceptance of limitation and discipline so crucial to manifestation.²⁷

The symbol for Muladhara consists of a lotus of four petals within which is a square. Inside the square is a seven-trunked elephant known as Airavata. This elephant represents

. . . the heavy, matter-like quality of this chakra and the seven pathways out of it, which correspond to the seven chakras. We may also associate the elephant-headed God, *Ganesha*, Lord of Obstacles, with this center, as he is grounded, full bellied, and happy with his physicality.²⁸

The fifth chakra known as Vishuddhi meaning purification is located in the region of the neck and shoulders. To successfully open the fifth and subsequent chakras the body must attain a certain level of purification. Sound as a vibration, has a purifying nature that affects the cellular structure of matter, hence the location of this chakra at the throat. An additional function of this chakra

. . . is to reveal to us the divine within the earthly realm. This enigmatic reality – (Carl) Jung calls it the “psychic reality” – is just as real as the superficial, material reality that is encountered in the root chakra. The elephant now appearing for the second time expresses this. The seven trunks show that this development also involves all seven chakras. Jung writes the following about this elephant; The elephant appears again in Vishuddhi. Here we encounter anew the force that has supported us in the world, the insurmountable, sanctifying power of the

animal...So the products of our minds are therefore also reality...These are things that the elephant bears in Vishuddhi and turns into reality.²⁹

At the time I found it more than coincidental that the elephant was appearing in my readings on the chakra system. I originally had no intention of tying this material to my artwork but as my reading continued, I could not ignore the recurrence of the elephant in Hindu mythology. Indians consider the elephant to be the most intelligent of all animals.

This animal-friendly religious background has encouraged the special esteem and veneration which the elephant enjoys, as the animal which even the gods have taken into heavenly service.”³⁰ In the book of Old Indian elephant lore, a quote reads; “ An elephant mounted by a king is radiant; a king mounted on an elephant is resplendent, neither of the two outshines the other, elephants are consubstantial with kings...The creator of the world created the regal elephant for the salvation of the world, and endowed him with majestic power and splendor. A king earnestly intent on promoting the welfare of elephants holds victory in his grasp...Thus elephants should be protected like the life of a king.”³¹

Ganesh or Ganesha is this veneration of the elephant personified.

He is one of the best known of the Hindu gods, and his elephant-headed effigy is usually found guarding the door of shrines sacred to Shiva. This alludes to his power to remove obstacles to one’s true purpose; on temples and shrines he represents the removal of any hindrance to true worship and spiritual enlightenment. Ganesh is the god of intelligence, and hence the patron of students and teachers.³²

As I read on this subject I pondered the polarized view of elephants in eastern and western cultures. While Indians worship the animal, Westerners tend to admire the elephant merely for its use as a commodity in the entertainment industry. However, I would later learn that throughout history the Asian and African elephant has been assigned to servitude for agricultural purposes as well.

Ganesha (Fig. 4) was born out of my research and a conscious attempt to celebrate the elephant. I chose to incorporate into this drawing, a Hindu poem to Ganesha. It addresses his powerful nature as remover of obstacles.

You of the twisted trunk and the massive body,
with the dazzle and light of millions of suns;
lead me on a path that has no obstacles nor hindrances.
Clearing the way in all that I do, ever and always.



Fig. 4. *Ganesha*, 2007, mixed media, 30" x 40"

As my reading progressed, I found that Ganesha could be a force in my own life as I embarked upon the seeming obstacles of daily living. I incorporated the fifth chakra into this piece by placing the gold leaf circular image to the right of the drawing. As mentioned earlier, the fifth chakra, or Vishuddhi is associated with transformation into

the spiritual realm and the circle is an archetypal symbol of wholeness. My use of gold was a reference to royalty and the alchemical process of transformation.

Carl Jung referred to gold as the symbolic end product of inner alchemical transformation. Passage through the chakras is an alchemical process of increasing refinement, which unites light and shadow, male and female, spirit and matter, all in the crucible of the body and psyche. The pot of gold is indeed the elusive philosopher's stone which lures us into the heroic journey of transformation.³³

With regard to my process of drawing *Ganesha*, I chose to concentrate on the legs of the elephant to imply its power and enormity. Amazingly enough, an average Asian elephant stands approximately ten feet tall. As for the text, I used the technique described earlier in which I transferred the words from paper to drawing surface by means of matt medium. After doing so, I was disturbed by the severe linear nature of the horizontal writing juxtaposed against the vertical legs. In response I subdued the text by applying layers of coffee, matt medium, and India ink. This action eased the linear tension that I had inadvertently created. The use of a previous thin layer of plaster allowed for a surface conducive to imitating the texture of the elephant's skin with charcoal. At the time I was working on a separate project using colored pencils. David Dixon taught me how to use Turpenoid Natural, a nontoxic oil paint solvent, to achieve a blending effect of the layers of pencil. Through experimentation, I found that if I applied Turpenoid to this drawing and followed that by scraping it with a razor blade I could achieve an even higher degree of texture for the elephant's skin.

My ambivalence over the portrayal of the elephant can be found in *Full Circle*. (Fig.5) Despite my earlier decision to focus on the elephant as deity, I found myself returning to the concept of the wounded elephant. In a petition to the viewer, I painted the elephant gazing outward. I began writing a poem of the elephant's lament on the

surface of the painting and ended up with one of my own. At the time I was dealing with anger over a past relationship. I used the surface to vent my feelings. I took on the roll of victim for approximately thirty minutes and found myself weaving between the injustices committed on the elephant and those upon myself. I eventually came full circle with my focus returning to the elephant.

As can be seen, the text was written in a freeform manner. This was a much more liberating experience in comparison to my earlier works using text. It allowed me to engage in the process without limitations. Ultimately the text became indecipherable through the layering of words perhaps in an attempt to keep my private thoughts to myself.



Fig. 5. *Full Circle*, 2007, mixed media, 30" x 40"

At this time, I was looking at the work of artist, Cy Twombly. I was specifically interested in a series done by him in the early 1970s. While working on this series, he was delving into the concept of automatic writing, a technique originally used by Sigmund Freud to unleash the mysterious ramblings of the unconscious mind. Having a great interest in the writings of Freud's colleague, Carl Jung, I am intrigued by the workings of the unconscious and the concept of automatic writing. This in some sense can be found in this last drawing as I used the surface to "free associate" or practice automatic writing by venting whatever thoughts came to mind. This work was also influenced by Frank Noelker's series of chimp portraits. Like his photos, this drawing depicts the elephant appealing to the viewer. His use of text to inform the viewer of the history of the chimps is similar to my use of text.

My next drawing entitled "The Voiceless" (Fig. 6) came at the beginning of the fall semester of 2007. At the time I was teaching a Drawing Fundamentals class about the importance of positive and negative relationships in art. "Positive shape refers to the shape of the object drawn....negative space describes the space surrounding the positive forms. Negative space is relative to positive shapes....In real life we are conditioned to search out positive shapes, but this habit must be altered in making art. On the picture plane all shapes, both positive and negative, are equally important. Combined, they give a composition unity"³⁴

I had this concept on my mind when I found a photo of elephants huddled together around a watering hole. The image was composed of a variety of shapes in the intermingling of trunks, tusks, and earflaps. I found that if I zoomed in on the gathering I could achieve an interesting composition. The image also spoke of the familial bonds

found among elephants. As mentioned earlier, elephants are very social creatures and with the exception of older males, it is rare to find them alone in the wild.



Fig. 6. *The Voiceless*, 2007, mixed media, 30" x 40"

The poem I used for this drawing was one by Ella Wheeler Wilcox entitled “Voice of the Voiceless”:

I am the voice of the voiceless;
Through me the dumb shall speak,
Till the deaf world's ear be made to hear
The wrongs of the wordless weak.

From street, from cage, and from kennel,
From stable and zoo, the wail
Of my tortured kin proclaims the sin
Of the mighty against the frail.

Oh, shame on the mothers of mortals
Who have not stopped to teach
Of the sorrow that lies in dear, dumb eyes,
The sorrow that has no speech.

The same force formed the sparrow
That fashioned man the king;

The God of the whole gave a spark of soul
To furred and to feathered thing.

And I am my brother's keeper,
And I will fight his fight,
And speak the word for beast and bird
Till the world shall set things right."

I wrote the text in a very discreet manner, perhaps because I wanted to move away from the elephant as victim.

In an attempt to achieve sharp contrasts, I drew on toned paper with pastel and charcoal. I found a suitable brown grass paper flecked with straw, which was reminiscent of the wild savannahs where African elephants roam. As mentioned earlier, Tim Bower has influenced my work and this piece in particular. Before beginning this drawing, I looked closely at his series *Goings On About Town*. In this series, he used toned paper with what I would guess to be ink, gesso, and charcoal or pastel. I hung clippings of these drawings on the wall where I drew. Now that I've completed the piece, I see another artist's influence. A while back I found a lovely drawing of an elephant by political cartoonist and Pulitzer Prize winner Jeff MacNelly. I placed the image in my sketchbook months earlier but I believe it was present somewhere in my mind as I worked on the third elephant on the right. His is a quick, gestural elephant rendered with an emotional, poignant use of line.

Upon completion of this drawing I found that I had become so involved in the use of positive and negative shape that the drawing had become somewhat flat. When I use the term "flat", I am referring to a lack of visual depth. To achieve depth, it is important

to soften objects in the background through subdued contrast and definition. The technical term for this process is atmospheric perspective. The elephants in the image were placed in succession with the one on the left being the closest to the viewer. I realized there was no difference in contrast between the closest elephant and the one farthest from the viewer. In an attempt to correct this, I heightened the detail of the first and second elephants. The third elephant's leg was troubling as well. It appeared as one continuous white shape running vertically down the center of the picture plane. It seemed to divide the drawing in half. I tried to remedy this by toning the white down with grey pastel but I still find it to be somewhat disconcerting

After completing *The Voiceless*, I continued my research into chakras. It dawned on me one afternoon that the poem "Voice of the Voiceless" was a reflection of my interest in the fifth chakra, which as mentioned earlier is located in the throat area of the body. I was especially interested in this chakra because the entire summer I felt as though I had a lump in my throat. From my readings about the emotional aspects of chakras, I knew there was something that I needed to say or voice. My connection with the elephant as remover of obstacles assisted me in doing this by allowing me to express my grief in the earlier drawing, *Full Circle*. I realized this lump in my throat was my body's way of telling me I, not the elephant was the voiceless. For me she had become powerful through her deification. It wasn't until I realized this that I looked back at my readings on the fifth chakra and was reminded that Vishuddhi is a Sanskrit word for purification. To voice one's feelings and thoughts can be purifying indeed. Theologian Matthew Fox explains this connection between the fifth chakra and communication as follows:

This chakra represents the throat and the expressing of one's truth and wisdom. The throat lies between the heart and the mind chakra. Truth comes from both heart and mind. This chakra is also the *prophetic chakra*: The throat is the trumpet that speaks our truth, as the prophets also spoke out . . . their truth.³⁵

I also find it interesting that the fifth chakra is associated with creativity, which of course is linked with self-expression.

One other interesting discovery took place at this time. I was reading a delightful memoir by Elizabeth Gilbert entitled *Eat, Pray, Love*. She writes of her travels to Italy, India, and Bali. While in India, she lives in an ashram and pursues her spiritual quest for God. Along the way, she discovers the Sanskrit word, *antevasin*.

It means 'one who lives at the border.' In ancient times this was a literal description. It indicated a person who had left the bustling center of worldly life to go live at the edge of the forest where the spiritual masters dwelled. The *antevasin* was not one of the villagers anymore—not a householder with a conventional life. But neither was he yet a transcendent—not one of those sages who live deep in the unexplored woods, fully realized. The *antevasin* was an in-between. He was a border-dweller. He lived in sight of both worlds, but he looked toward the unknown.³⁶

Once again I found myself reminded of the idea of the Borderlander. I also related to this idea as I am a bit of a recluse. I live a somewhat secluded life near the Cherokee National Forest. My life here provides me with a much-needed escape from the chaos of everyday life. It is my sanctuary.

Still intrigued by the link between the fifth chakra and the voice, my next image entitled *Vishuddhi*" (Fig.7) depicts the elephant trumpeting in triumph. His posture reflects victory, pride, and purpose. The circular shapes are again symbolic of this chakra and the transformation into wholeness. I drew on a gold toned paper to reflect the idea of nobility. The addition of gold leaf mimics this concept as well.

Difficulties arose in the placement of the circular shapes. My original thought was to place one circle just to the left of the mouth of the elephant. But upon completion, the image appeared unbalanced. I then proceeded to add the circle behind the elephant's head but it provided little improvement. I finally added the circle to the left of image and found it to be sufficient. I painted the circles with India ink. I purposely made them different values in order to suggest varying degrees of depth. I used strong lights and darks against the gold toned paper with charcoal to create a sharp contrast. Once again, I allowed the paper to provide the middle tones.



Fig. 7. *Vishuddhi*, 2007, mixed media, 30" x 40"

I mentioned earlier that prior to my admission into graduate school, I practiced faux finishing for a living. I had a technique that produced a surface similar to animal hide. Using a sheet of crumpled tissue paper, I would flatten it and adhere it with an application of glue to the support. I remembered this technique and tried it with the gold

toned decorative paper. Similar to the plaster effects I used earlier, the result of the crumpled paper gave a surface reminiscent of elephant skin. However, this was more suitable in that the wrinkles in the paper were more characteristic of elephant hide. I found it to be conducive to drawing as the charcoal caught in the creases of the paper producing interesting textures.

At this point in my research, I felt it was important to educate myself on the elephant as an endangered species. I learned that in the past century, elephant populations remaining in the wild have declined exponentially.

Demand for ivory, combined with habitat loss from human settlement, has led to a dramatic decline in elephant populations in the last few decades. In 1930, there were between 5 and 10 million African elephants. By 1979, there were 1.3 million. In 1989, when they were added to the international list of the most endangered species, there were about 600,000 remaining, less than one percent of their original number.

Asian elephants were never as abundant as their African cousins, and today they are even more endangered than African elephants. At the turn of the century, there were an estimated 200,000 Asian elephants. Today there are probably no more than 35,000 to 40,000 left in the wild.³⁷

Past, Present, Future (Fig. 8) is a result of this research. My thought was to portray the elephant disappearing over time. I drew three elephants diagonally across a vertical page with a representation of the past in the bottom left corner. This elephant was drawn clearly. The elephant in the middle of the page represents the present. I drew him with less clarity. The elephant that represents the future was drawn in the top right corner but he is barely discernable. I drew each of the elephants mid-stride to suggest their movement into the future. They also reminded me of the evolutionary charts we commonly see, in which the animal is shown in progressive stages of development. I chose to place them vertically because I felt it would lead the eye from the bottom to the top corner where the elephant is all but obliterated.

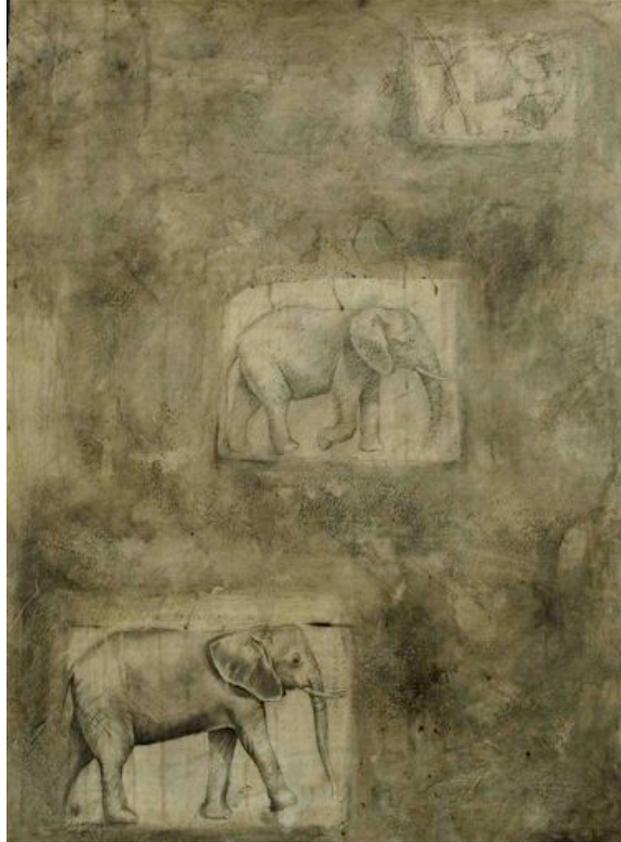


Fig. 8. *Past, Present, Future*, 2007, mixed media, 40” x 30”

The text I chose came from an essay written by the English writer George Orwell (1903-50) entitled “Shooting an Elephant”. After tracking an elephant, Orwell fires what he believes to be a fatal shot.

However, he misses: ‘...a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant. He neither stirred nor fell, but every line of his body had altered. He looked suddenly stricken, shrunken, immensely old...At last, after what seemed a long time – it might have been five seconds, I dare say – he sagged flabbily to his knees. His mouth slobbered.’ Orwell fired a second and third time: ‘That was the shot that did for him. You could see the agony of it jolt his whole body and knock the last remnant of strength from his legs. But in falling he seemed for a moment to rise, for as his hind legs collapsed beneath him he seemed to tower upward like a huge rock toppling...he trumpeted for the first and only time. And then down he came.’ The elephant, however, is still not dead. ‘Finally I fired my two remaining shots into the spot where I thought his heart must be. The thick blood welled out of him like red velvet, but still he did not die. His body did not even jerk when the

shots hit him, the tortured breathing continued without a pause. He was dying, very slowly...In the end I could not stand it any longer and went away.³⁸

As gruesome as this account is, it is based on a factual account. I found it to be relevant to the issue of endangerment in that poachers have killed so many elephants needlessly. It also seems somewhat paradoxical when you consider that “the elephant who is badly injured by the hunter and escapes into the bush is condemned to a very cruel and slow death that can last many hours, or even days and weeks”³⁹ and yet the decline of this species has taken place rather quickly.

To prepare my paper for drawing, I applied plaster with a trowel. I then coated it with a layer of watered down coffee and then gel medium. After this step, I wrote the essay in pencil. I then applied more layers of coffee and powdered graphite mixed with water which I let drip to remind the viewer of cage bars in a zoo. I rendered each elephant with charcoal. I sprayed the drawing with fixative with the hope of going over them with more layers of matt medium and coffee. Afterward, my intention was to return to the lower elephant and redraw him so that he was clearly defined. I would then reinforce the middle drawing somewhat and allow the top drawing to almost disappear so that a succession of three elephant images at differing degrees of detail would symbolically suggest extinction. I ran into difficulties though, because despite my use of fixative, the layers of matte medium were removing the charcoal drawings.

At this point, I decided to scrape the entire drawing with a razor blade and sandpaper to pull out some of the white under layer. I found that doing so was an efficient way to achieve the results I was looking for in terms of the disappearing elephants. I realized that if I sprayed the drawing with fixative and then scraped it with the blade, it

removed the top layers of charcoal but left the underneath so that the elephant was still decipherable. Ultimately, the text showed only in the areas where the elephants were drawn, as well as a few spots on the background. It was there and yet it was not easily read. This, I felt was sufficient, as it contributed to the texture and the overall spirit of the piece. My final stage was to spray the piece liberally, once again and apply a couple of coats of gel medium to add depth and a sense of cohesion.

This drawing was strongly influenced by artist Margot McLean. Her paintings are commentaries on endangered species. She paints ghost like images of various species amidst what appears to be numerous layers of paint and other media. Often times the animal is barely visible. She describes her work as follows:

. . . these paintings are not just about endangered species, they're about species . . . they are images of the spirit of the animal, with their own autonomous life, their presence and their absence. They come and go, and you try to hold on to them a while in your mind's eye, or you try to get them to come out and stay still without losing that quick-moving, subtle, fleeting sense that you can't quite seize... There are incredible creatures 'out there' living with us on this planet and just because they aren't immediately in our face doesn't mean they don't hold an important position.⁴⁰

The book *Dream Animals* that she co-wrote with James Hillman led to my research on the endangerment of the elephant.

When I look at this piece now, I feel it is successful when it stands alone, but next to my other drawings it appears washed out. As can be seen, I tend to use strong contrasts in my work and yet this quality is absent from this piece. I did reinforce some of the blacks in the elephants but did so minimally as the concept behind this drawing is the disappearing elephant.

Hindu scripture describes an ancient yearly festival celebrating Laksmi, the Lotus goddess. In preparation for a parade in her honor, an elephant is painted white with

sandalwood paste and decorated with flowers. This divine elephant is addressed in prayer as Shri-Gaja, Laksmi's elephant. It is believed that when Shri-Gaja is invoked he can conjure the winged elephants that bring rainfall. Hindus believe the first elephants had wings and flew about the sky in the guise of clouds showering the earth with rain. From my research, I found marvelous photos of elephants painted in this manner. I was captivated and enjoyed the idea of elephants being placed in a position of such high regard. *Shri-Gaja* (Fig. 9) came into being as a result of these images. One book describes the preparations for the ceremonies in this way:

They would be bathed in pure water and then liberally doused with eastern perfumes. Once their hides were dry and smelling sweet, artists would set to work, carefully painting their heads and ears with brilliant colors in shapes following the solid contours of their bones beneath. The tusks were scrubbed clean and adorned with gold. When the paint was dry, a splendid cloak of royal scarlet, gold, purple, and yellow was spread across the back. When the final trimmings of necklaces and pendants were all in place, the full splendor of the animal and its proud mahout were paraded in public for the gathered throngs.⁴¹



Fig. 9. *Shri-Gaja*, 2008, mixed media, 30" x 40"

Aside from the elephant's connection with gods and goddesses such as Ganesha and Lakshmi, the decorated elephant is also associated with royalty.

Kings in ancient India kept stables of elephants, which formed their heavy artillery in military campaigns. Kings often traveled on elephants in ceremonial processions and in general elephants were considered an important indication of royal authority.⁴²

Today, elephants are still dressed and prepared for ceremonies and festivals throughout India but the care one assumes is taken with these pets is not what it seems. I was initially attracted to these images because I assumed these elephants were treated with great respect and admiration. But I found upon further research that this is rarely the case. Temples in India commonly house elephants for money raising capability.

However, temple elephants are not by any means well cared for and some are permanently chained to the same spot for their entire existence . . . November-May is festival season in India and many towns and villages hold religious events at which it is desirable to have one or more elephants present . . . The elephants often have to work every day of the week standing in the hot sun while noise and movement occurs all around them. It is exceptionally difficult work . . . India has some of the strictest elephant legislation in Asia which should provide adequate protection for the country's 3,600 domesticated elephants. However the laws are rarely adhered to or enforced and many of India's captive elephants suffer as a result.⁴³

As I embarked upon drawing *Shri-Gaja*, I was concerned that the painted decorations on the elephant would appear flat. I had to take special care to draw the ornamentation in such a way that it followed the contours of the elephant's head. I chose a close-up view of the elephant's face and ears. His eye seems to express dismay or confusion. As in my previous drawings, I used gold leaf to suggest royalty. I applied it to the bells around his neck and tiny gold sequins to the star shapes. I drew with charcoal pencils and graphite. I wanted to do this drawing in a more refined manner than my previous work in hopes of achieving a more delicate style. The process was very slow

and meticulous, but I enjoyed it immensely. For the drawing surface, I again used a decorative paper. This paper is very fragile with small circular shapes imprinted upon it. It is somewhat transparent and has a quality similar to lace. When I first saw it, I was instantly reminded of the skin of some elephants in which they have a spotted look similar to polka dots. Because the paper was so thin, I knew it would not be durable enough to draw on so I prepared a piece of heavy drawing paper with grey paint and glued it on top. I knew the grey would show through the decorative paper, giving it the same hue as an elephant's skin.

This drawing was most definitely influenced by artist Laura Orchard. Done solely in graphite, it depicts a woman from the waist down kneeling on a prayer rug. The patterns of her skirt and the rug are exquisitely rendered. The woman's feet jut out into the picture plane creating a strong three-dimensional effect.

In the end, I was very pleased with this drawing. It is perhaps my favorite work done while in graduate school. This is in part due to the subject matter, the process of drawing, and the delicate style achieved. I also enjoy this image because for me it reflects the beauty of an elephant.

Avarice (Fig.10) is the last drawing I completed before my thesis exhibition in May of 2008. I returned to the subject of endangerment with a focus on the ivory trade in Africa.

Poaching has taken a great toll on the African elephant. There are few males left more than 40 years old - most have been slaughtered for their ivory. Since tusk size is an inherited characteristic, taking the animals with the largest tusks out of the breeding pool reduces the average tusk size in later generations. It is now rare to find a tusk weighing over a hundred pounds.

As older, larger and healthier elephants are killed, poachers turn their weapons on younger elephants; they must kill many more of these to get the desired amount of ivory. These hunters are ridding populations of their healthiest

genetic material. By killing off matriarchs, poachers are also wiping out the herd's 'memory,' without which it is more difficult for them to find traditional sources of food and water, raise their calves and defend themselves.⁴⁴

As I read about the ivory trade, I found images of dead elephants completely intact with the exception of their trunks. I could not fathom the waste and brutality. I found other images depicting mountainous piles of tusks stacked carelessly. The images were terribly disturbing as I could not help but think of the slaughter behind each of the tusks. They spoke to me of greed and indifference. At times, it seems there are no bounds to which humans will go for the sake of money.

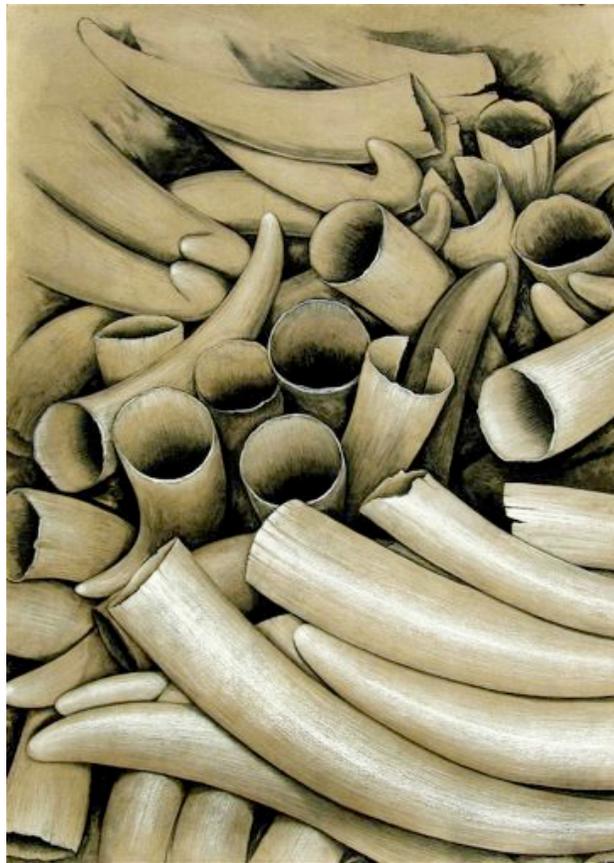


Fig.10 *Avarice*, 2008, mixed media, 40" x 30"

Aside from their statement on the ivory trade, I was attracted to the images of the tusks for their capacity to produce a pleasing composition. The repetitive forms piled one on top of the other consisted of arcs and circles. The space between the tusks provided appealing positive and negative shapes. I found it interesting that I could switch from revulsion to fascination when viewing these images. I have learned that to observe the world from an artist's eye, I must at times learn to see objectively.

I chose to tone my paper with a mixture of coffee and India ink. I applied a wash with the intention of keeping the tone even. I didn't want the paper to compete with the image. The resulting color was a sepia tone that set off the black and white of the charcoal and pastel beautifully. I chose to use strong contrasts to depict the tusks closest to the viewer. I drew the tusks at the top of the page with less definition to suggest distance. I provided texture by rendering the striations of the tusks and employing the use of linear mark making in the negative spaces.

In the process of making this drawing, I found myself bouncing back and forth between a highly rendered style and one of a more spontaneous nature. This was in most part due to the last drawing I worked on. I was still in a mode of working in which I drew slowly and meticulously and I wanted to continue that way of working and yet the piece seemed to call for a more graphic approach. This tendency to bounce back and forth between the two styles of drawing happens to me quite often. I find myself feeling conflicted about what approach to take. I think the two actually work well with one another and I need to just allow it.

Midway through this drawing I realized it was highly influenced by D. Jeffrey Mims' *Study for Allegory*, 2006. His is a charcoal and white chalk drawing of a nude

figure on toned canvas. I originally used this image to inform my students about the appealing effects obtained from working on toned paper. The artist's use of contrast, texture, foreshortening, and depth are reminiscent of old master drawings. I realized this drawing had influenced my own by my similar use of all these elements. It is fascinating to me that another artist's work can stay tucked away in my mind and reveal itself months down the road in my own work.

CHAPTER 6

CLOSING

John Hillman writes of how in many cultures animals are the divinities that bless us.

We are each an open book to the animal eye. Especially to our household pets, who can call you on your state of soul before you have a notion of it. Household pets were called ‘familiaris’ in the Roman world. Not only are pets part of the larger family, but they are intimately familiar observers of your unconscious presentation in everyday household life. They were the first psychoanalysts. Is that the psychological reason for the domestication of dogs and cats, of birds, pigs, cows, elephants, goats? The animals could make us aware of ourselves.⁴⁵

I find personal relevance in this statement because throughout the past two years, the elephant has led me down a path of self-discovery. In many ways, the elephant has been my teacher. I began this work in hopes of helping people understand the plight of the elephant. But now as I look back, I see I have benefited as much from this relationship as the elephant has. For this reason, I chose to name my thesis exhibition *Symbiosis*.

It seems as though I have barely scratched the surface of all there is to know about the elephant. I intend to continue my drawings on this fascinating creature. I will most likely revisit the concept of the elephant as circus performer. I will learn more about the significance of the elephant in other cultures as well.

My graduate work has been an invaluable gift to me. Not only have my technical skills improved but I have also come to better understand what makes a successful work of art. Artistic principles such as the elements of composition introduced to me in

undergraduate school are now more clearly understood. I have learned to combine my skill for tightly rendered drawing with more free gestural approaches. I have come to understand how to make a drawing that is visually intriguing and leaves room for interpretation. I mentioned earlier that my advisor, Anita DeAngelis, stressed the importance of mystery in a drawing. I had a persistent need to visually represent every detail in my drawings. Anita helped me to understand that this was not necessary. She stressed the importance of simplification. My mantra became “simplify”. Artist Hans Hoffman famously stated “the ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak.” I believe this may be the most important lesson I have learned while in graduate school. Another important lesson I am learning is to trust my instincts. I have a tendency to second-guess myself. Anita has brought this to my attention several times. I usually know intuitively what a drawing needs to make it work, but I sometimes doubt myself. After consulting Anita or John Hilton, they will usually confirm my thoughts. It is time for me to trust myself and let go of my need for outside validation.

In the past three years, I have developed not only as an artist but also as a person. Through this process I have come to understand the artistic process as one of exploration and revelation. It is much like a treasure hunt in that we as artists are invited to probe concepts that intrigue us and analyze how they influence us. In turn we are asked to visually describe that experience. I believe I have grown an immeasurable amount during this time not only artistically speaking but intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. It has been a journey I have benefited from many times over.

Let a person walk alone with few wishes, committing no wrong,
like an elephant in the forest.

From the *Dhammapada*, Author unknown

NOTES

¹ Marcia Tucker and Donald Kuspit, *Horses: The Art of Deborah Butterfield* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992) , 33.

² Rachel Youens, *Marching in Synch*, 2004, [online], available from <http://www.offoffoff.com/art/2004/suecoe.php>, 09, October 2005.

³ Mark Rosenthal, *Franz Marc* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1989) , 13.

⁴ Gabi La Cava, *The Expressionist Painter Franz Marc*, 2004, [online], available from <http://www.csa.com/discoveryguides/marc/overview.php> , 09, November 2005.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Frank Noelker, *Like Beauty, Loneliness is in the Eye of the Beholder*, 2004, [online], available from <http://www.satyamag.com/jul04/noelker.html>, 28, January 2008.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Tucker, 14.

¹⁰ Jerome S. Bernstein, *Living in the Borderland: the Evolution of Consciousness and the Challenge of Healing Trama* (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2005), 17.

¹¹ Ibid., 9.

¹² James Hillman and Margot McLean, *Dream Animals* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1997), 22.

¹³ Ibid, 9.

¹⁴ Tucker, 37-38.

¹⁵ Bernstein, xv.

¹⁶ Hillman, 11.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jody Morgan, *Elephant Rescue: Changing the Future for Endangered Wildlife* (Buffalo, New York: Firefly Books Inc., 2004), 8.

¹⁹ William Mullen, *Where the Elephants Roam*, 2005, [online], available from http://www.elephants.com/media/chicago_tribune_5_29_05.htm, 08, March 2008.

²⁰ Charles Siebert, *An Elephant Crackup?*, 2006, [online], available from http://www.elephants.com/ptsd/NewYorkTimes_10_7_06.htm, 03, February 2008.

²¹ Hillman, 19.

²² J.Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep: the Emotional Lives of Animals* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1995), 52.

²³ Carl G. Jung and others, eds., *Man and His Symbols* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), 266.

²⁴ Kate Corbin, *The Law of Attraction and Quantum Physics*, 2008, [online], available from <http://www.ezinearticles.com/?The-Law-of-Attraction-and-QuantumPhysics&id=223148>, 08, March 2008.

²⁵ Hillman, 25.

²⁶ Anodea Judith, *Wheels of Life: A User's Guide to the Chakra System*, 2nd ed. (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2006), 4.

²⁷ Ibid, 60.

²⁸ Ibid, 62.

²⁹ Arnold Bittlinger, *Archetypal Chakras: Meditations and Exercises for Opening Your Chakras*, trans. Christine M.Grimm, English ed. (York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 2001), 75.

³⁰ Martin Saller and Karl Greoning, *Elephants: A Cultural and Natural History*, trans. Patricia Cooke, Elaine Richards, Janet Richmond, and J.A. Underwood, English ed., (Cologne: Konemann, 1999), 122.

³¹ Ibid, 134.

³² Dan Freeman, *Elephants: The Vanishing Giants*, 2nd ed. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1981), 119.

³³ Anodea Judith, *Eastern Body, Western Mind: Psychology and the Chakra System as a Path to the Self*, (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2006), 4.

³⁴ Claudia Betti and Teel Sale, *Drawing: A Contemporary Approach*, 2nd ed. (New York: CBS College Publishing, 1986), 58-59.

³⁵ Matthew Fox, *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh: Lessons for Transforming Evil in Soul and Society*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999), 108.

³⁶ Elizabeth Gilbert, *Eat, Pray, Love*, (Waterville, ME: Thorndike Press, 2006), 203-204.

³⁷ Charles Welch, *Elephants*, [online], available from <http://www.solcomhouse.com/elephants.htm>, 01, April 2008.

³⁸ Saller, 327.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Hillman, 1-2.

⁴¹ Freeman, 120.

⁴² David R. Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986), 22.

⁴³ Eleaid, *Elephants and Elephant Conservation in India*, [online], available from <http://www.eleaid.com/index.php?page=elephantsinindia>, 30, March 2008.

⁴⁴ Hillman, 16.

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