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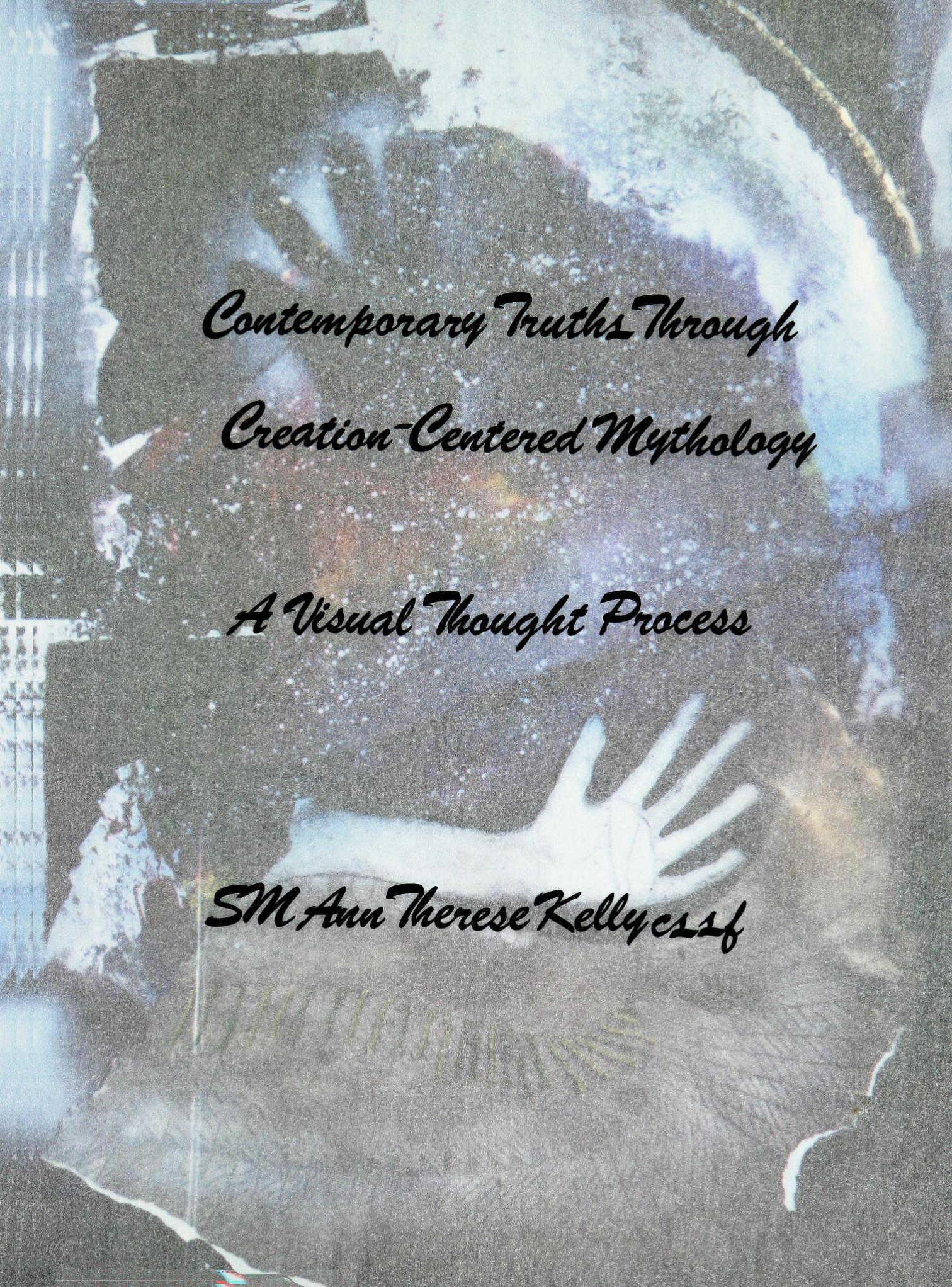
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The background is a complex, layered collage. It features a dark, textured surface with a prominent, bright, multi-colored sunburst or starburst pattern in the upper right quadrant. A large, white, stylized hand is visible in the lower right, reaching upwards. The overall color palette is dominated by dark blues, greys, and blacks, with vibrant highlights from the sunburst and the white hand.

*Contemporary Truths Through
Creation-Centered Mythology*

A Visual Thought Process

SM Ann Therese Kelly c2sf



ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Fine and Applied Arts
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Contemporary Truths Through Creation-Centered Mythology
A Visual Thought Process

by

SM Ann Therese Kelly CSSF

May 25, 1991

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III. INTRODUCTION

THE PROFOUND EXPERIENCE OF THE CAVE

The experience of this year of study is an important aspect in the development of this body of work because it is very much in the present. The pressure of time, limited studio space and intense sharing with other artists (which is a luxury for me) has helped my work to evolve and become strong. I also learned to rely heavily on an intuitive process of thinking and working rather than a left-brained approach to ideas.

As a religious person I have often come to crossroads in my career as an artist. I believe I have found a personal style which is both contemporary as well as spiritual in a way which coincides with my view of a wholistic spirituality; that is, depicting a kind of creation-centered view of spirituality.

My work has an autobiographical quality as well as a feel for the primal: the experience of the present using symbolism of the deep past and applying it to the present. Intuitive feelings about primal ideas as well as Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious are major factors in the thesis work. Therefore, I will refrain from making extensive references to historical facts when describing my work and concentrate on the spirit out of which the work emulates.

In this thesis report I will first discuss a body of work which led up to the thesis. I will examine the struggle for ideas which brought me to a contemporary connection in my work. Each thesis print will be discussed individually to examine their contents of symbol and meaning for me. Finally, in conclusion, I will discuss how they work together as a whole.

IV. *PRIMAL SYMBOLS AND PERSONAL APPLICATION*

Ancient symbols and their human spiritual implications are fascinating to me. There are two symbols in particular which I have been exploring for a long time. They are the hand and the spiral. I used the hand in teaching myself to draw realistically as a teenager and have continued for many years, often in a symbolic manner. The hand always seemed to find its place in much of my art work for about twenty years. I have always found the hand to be very expressive and most easily accessible to draw, being right in front of me.

The hand has powerful implications of human presence. One of the earliest examples can be found in caves at Lascaux, France which date as early as the Paleolithic Period in history. Remarkably, the human presence is still among us in this simple negative image of the hand which appears on one of the walls. There is wide speculation that the artist/shaman used the hand as a blockout, loaded powdered pigment in his mouth and blew the pigment onto the wall which was smeared with animal fat as a binder. This use of human breath is a powerful concept. It sends forth a message that our mark making, too, is powerful.

The spiral is much more recent and began as a circle in many of my images. The spiral evolved naturally from the circle because the flow was rhythmic and felt like it belonged in my art. I had also been reading many books which referred to the subject of the spiral as a symbol for god, eternity and even the idea of entropy (the measure of the unavailable energy of a system; an ultimate state of uniformity). I have even seen the eastern Yin and Yang symbol described as a spiral. Many other symbols, which will be discussed in the individual thesis

prints, were used in this body of work.

This use of primal symbols in my work began in the summer of 1990 when I did a large group of “painterly” serigraphs which I call *Icarus*. They were about the Greek myth of a boy, Icarus, the son of Daedalus who fashioned for his son a pair of wax wings so that he could fly. He loved the wings, felt the power of their build and perceived himself as infallible. He flew until he was too close to the sun which melted the wings, consequently causing him to fall swiftly to the earth and die. (Bulfinch, 1942, 160)

Icarus, in my series of three serigraphs, is about power and the possible consequences if it is misused. I have often seen how people can change when given a certain amount of power over other human beings. Power put into responsible, sensitive hands is respectful. Power misused is impetuous and misuses people. The use of the story of *Icarus* in my work serves as a warning and a message about power.

I have described a well known symbolic story, transferred it to symbolic images and assigned a contemporary meaning to it. The *Icarus* series, however, is more than a myth. The use of serigraph and the energies put into each piece are part of the works themselves, and the energy in them will eventually be an integral part of the work in the thesis group.

The next step in the process was the use of mixing media and finding other symbols to incorporate into the work. I went to old and familiar symbols that I could resurrect to make new and exciting.

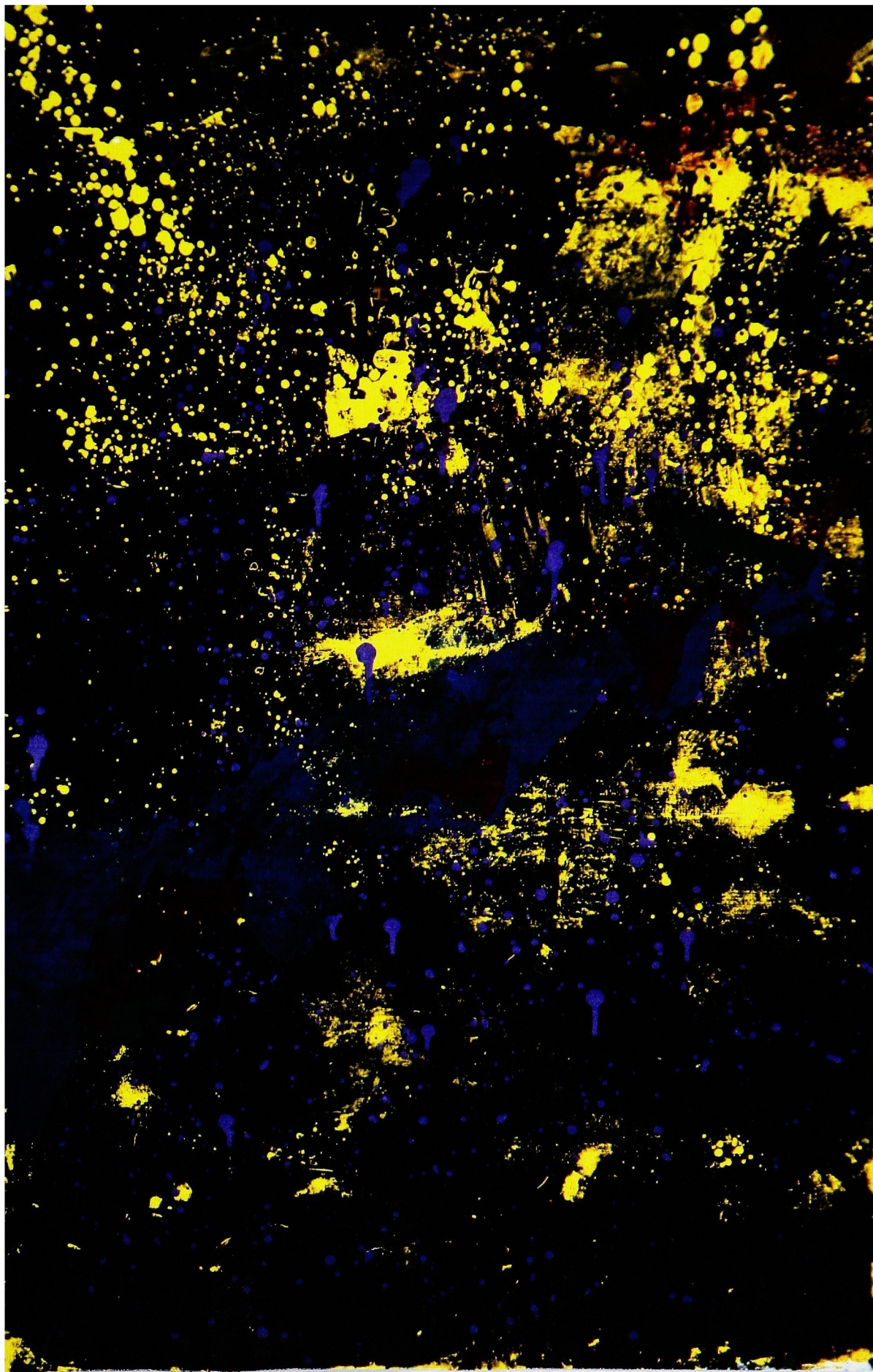
In the process of making six silkscreen paintings I began using processes which were new to me. These new choices were purely spontaneous. I was was experimenting with silkscreen on canvas



Icarus I, The Inferno 28" X 36"



Icarus II, The Fall 30" X 44"

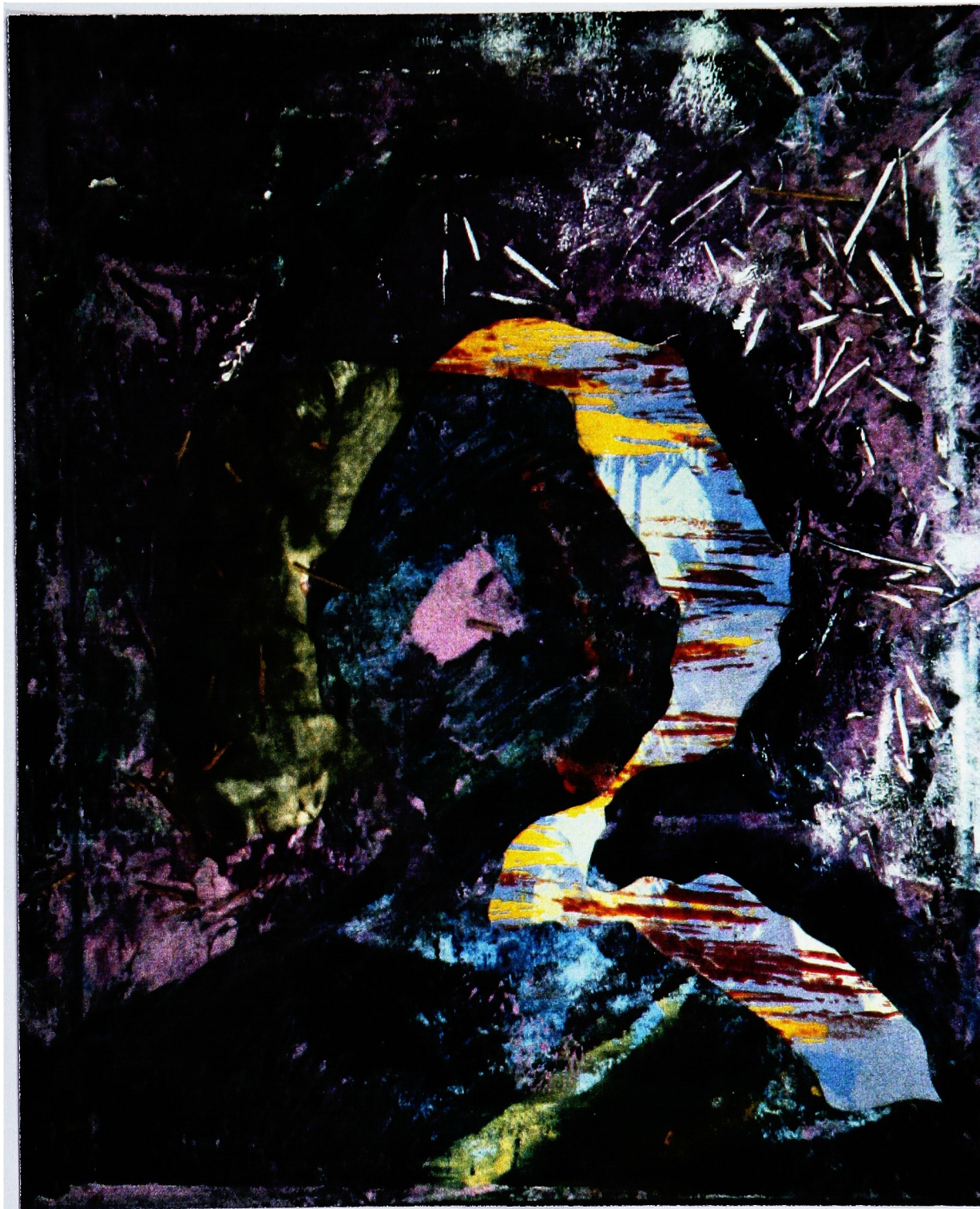


Icarus III, New Creation 28" X 36"

followed by painting into them with oil paint. My original intent was to make them similar but with different tonal values. The original outcome was not very exciting, so I began dealing with them in an extremely free manner. I found greater freedom of expression because the canvas panels already were filled with paint. I often feel intimidated by a white canvas or piece of paper.

I began gluing various objects that I had collected onto the canvas. Many objects in my “thing” collection seem precious to me for some unexamined reason. I tore up some of my silkscreen experiments and made use of their vibrant patterns and colors; even *Icarus* became part of the series. I assigned a theme to each of the six canvases such as death, wonder, awe, infinity--ideas which have rather primal beginnings in the human psyche.

I continued to paint them, stamp objects on them and silkscreen more overlapping shapes and textures. The outcome was exciting. I felt a different energy than *Icarus*. It was an energy that I could tap into over and over again and I knew it would always be there. Each work of this series ended up being treated in an individual manner rather than as an edition. I was striving for autonomy in each one, yet I wanted them to work as a group. Each one has different imagery which could easily be read as symbolic. They are torn-paper blackout in order to avoid too careful an image. I like the beauty of ancient images which have corroded with time, just like myths changing, breaking down or corroding as time passes by. I began working on a more intuitive level with that group. I had to stop “thinking” and planning out each step as I was so accustomed to. Working on an intuitive level helped develop strength in my images. They became

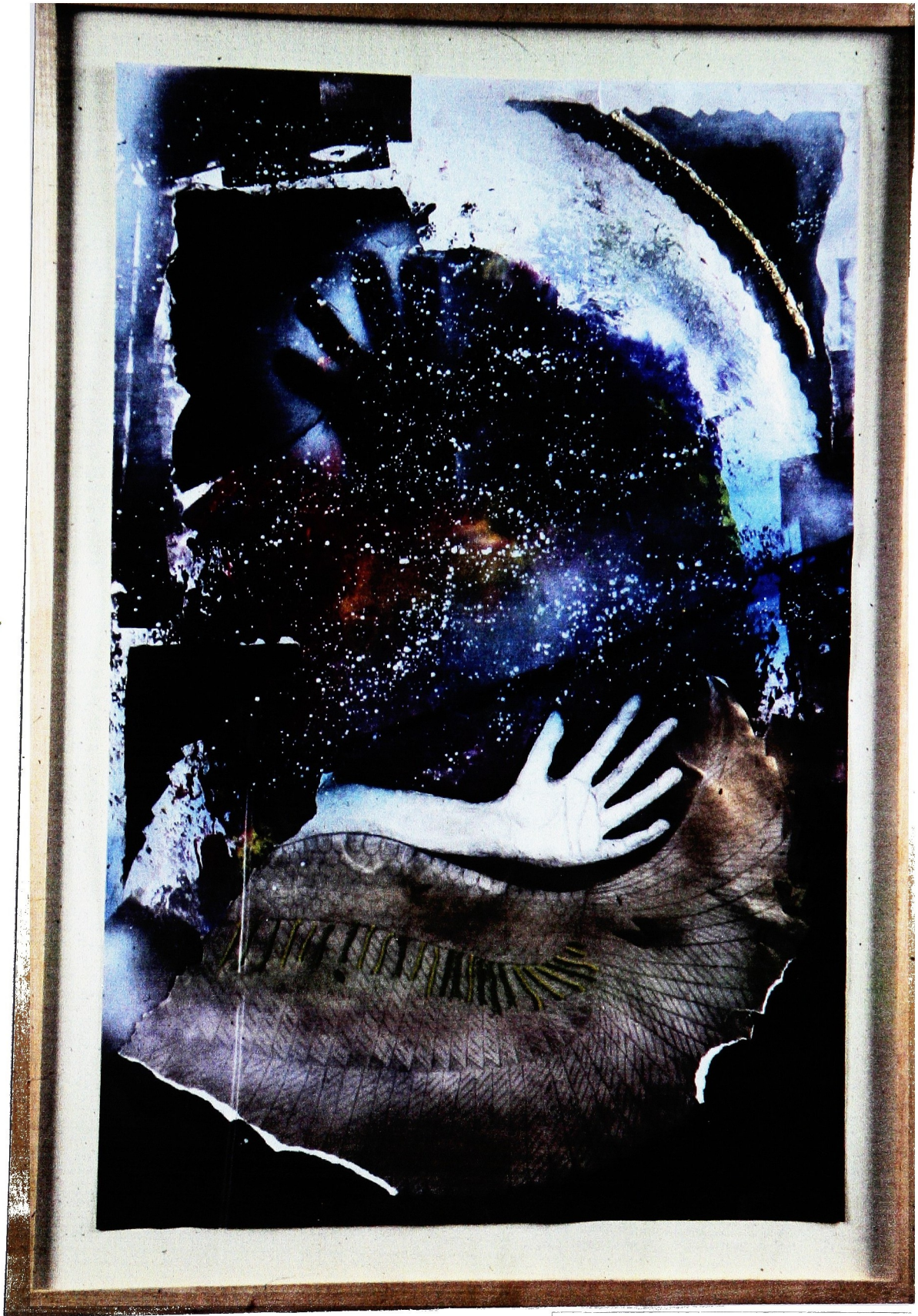


Shaman 16" X 20"

more interesting through layering and masking. The symbolism is vague and ominous which creates interest and wonder. In my world as a religious person I am overwhelmed by symbols. Creating a new language, a new slang, breathes new life into the world of myth.

The finishing touch came when they were hung in a show called "January Thaw." The students who hung them, for the sake of space, placed them in two rows vertically stacked three tall in each row. It was a great idea that I would use again in the Thesis show. It visually completed the group.

Then I began making the Thesis pictures. They were easily formed; I felt very comfortable with the subjects and symbols, yet they were very complex. I had no problems with the complexity because they were so spontaneous. I also added some new dimensions to the work. I began appropriating woodcut prints from the trash in the studio, even if they were torn up. I began by gluing them to the paper and continuing to work over them. I also made use of spray paint to create shadowed areas and vague shapes. The use of spray paint was quick and right at hand as opposed to my usual use of airbrush which is a slower process. I did not need a careful application of paint spray in these pictures. I glued on straw, feathers and other objects from my "thing" collection and made new sense out of old personal symbols such as the hand and the spiral. I brought together many pieces that I had worked on separately throughout the year such as etchings, lithographs, silkscreens and linoleum blocks. I even used candy wrappers and disposable plastic gloves. Phenomenally they fell into place to create more powerful images. I even wondered where they came from at some points. but it was all very exciting.



Rise Upward 30" X 44"

V. *The Thesis Group of Ten:*

1. *Rise Upward*

Visually, this picture began with the wing of Isis. My April, 1990 trip to Egypt was powerful and flooded by mind with ancient images. Isis is an important Mother-Goddess who is seen as the epitome of virtue in her time. The hand juxtaposes the wing, the two being similar in function. The negative hand image rises above; evoking a living presence of someone. I feel that this image is more powerful than the etched hand although it is really only in negative form, giving the impression that the hand *was* there but is now gone.

There is a cosmic atmosphere about the picture especially because of the background. This ground is an appropriated monoprint which I have altered by spattering ink on it in a spontaneous manner. These spatters create a cosmic universal feel that I have used many times in the past including the third piece of the *Icarus* series, *New Creation*. In appropriating the monoprint from the trash can, I inherited a profound crease in the middle of the picture which provides an interesting depth in the middle ground.

Providentially, I was provided with many new gold colored Hershey's Kisses wrappers (because they are the ones with the almond inside and gold is more precious than silver) which I rolled up and glued strategically in the upper right corner of the picture. This is to lead the eye from the gold wing on the bottom up and around the top in a curve, creating a visual balance to the wing.

The shadow behind the wing creates a strong contrast and depth in the composition. Ancient voices speak through this symbolic representation. It is meant to evoke wonder and awe that perhaps

primal people felt when faced with juxtaposing their god-like images and views of the stars in the mysterious and unknown night sky.



Then I Looked Ahead 29.5" X 42"

2. *Then I Looked Ahead*

The central images in this picture, the dancing or walking figures, are ones that I have repeated several times in early lithographs. I had cut a blockout from heavy paper and used both the positive and negative portions to create the figure. Having saved these paper stencils, I used them with spray paint on the composition. The image is an obscure human moving in a kind of dance from right to left across the picture, one in positive form, the other represents a shadow.

My thoughts return to the reason for this image and its importance, because I have come back to it several times. I had been making a few lithographs dealing with the concept of darkness and light; not only in an artistic value sense from the elements of design, but also in a more important context, in a spiritual sense. I think of darkness and light in the realm of blindness and sight, wrong and right, good and bad, although I don't mean darkness to always be in the negative. The darkness can be friendly; even flowers grow out of the darkness of the soil.

The image of the two figures has a mysterious aura about it, like in a primeval cave where the aura of past spirits still swell in human-made images. We die, but our images remain as a testimony to our existence. The dancer is moving out of the darkness and into the light. A shadow figure gives the impression that there is a light, perhaps from a fire, piercing the darkness.

This image was produced on an appropriated surface which is a scrapped woodcut print. I was attracted to the highly optical textural surface that it could offer to my composition. I also glued on bits and pieces from five other serigraphs and etchings that I had previously

experimented with, bringing it all together with spray paint to continue the feel of a mystical aura and shadow.



Your Cries Will Be Like The Wind 29.5" X 42"

3. *Your Cries Will Be Like the Wind*

This picture began as a full page one-piece image in painterly serigraph superimposed by a human figure produced with a photo stencil. I wanted to make a big cosmic picture with low key hues of blue and purple. These colors represent spiritual and mystical qualities. I used an open screen and applied these colors using a transparent base to mix and mottle them together. After they dried I spattered white paint to represent stars as well as a spontaneous feeling. Then I screened on the obscure figure in a posture of receiving, hands in an open position. This reminded me of pictures I have seen of star studies in books with lines connecting the stars (represented by dots) to form a figure.

The picture itself seemed rather trite so, in light of treating my pictures in an individual manner rather than an edition, I tore it apart and reassembled the pieces on a larger format of paper and glued it down. The negative spaces became important and created sudden depth. I juxtaposed the fire from *Icarus* on the bottom and glued cheesecloth to the top to create a translucent veil, putting the viewer at more distance from the composition. I glued on a hand torn from an earlier lithograph and, lastly, spray painted shapes using paper blockouts, using the spray as a device to make shadows and connections.

Your Cries Will Be Like The Wind is meant simply to evoke a feeling of wonder and creative thought.



Do Not Weep Yet 29.5" X 42"

4. *Do Not Weep Yet*

One of the serigraph/painting experiments I did was to create a series of four canvases and several prints on paper of angels. I proceeded to title them from Dante's *Paradisio* from the section on Beatrice who represents revelation. In the process of making the thesis work I used one of these angel prints on paper as a background for this undividually-treated composition.

I had started a different picture that had turned out badly although I liked part of it. I tore off the part I liked and glued it onto the angel print in a strategically juxtaposed position. This piece contained two hands; one drawn with pencil and the other a sterile hospital glove onto which I spray painted a negative image of my hand and tore a hole in one of the fingers. I was struck by the immediate recognition of a very serious image that came of this structure.

At the time I was making this picture, my aunt was seriously ill in the hospital and had subsequently ended up in a quarantined room where we had to wear masks and gloves in order to visit her. I was taken aback by the fact that I could no longer touch her, being very much aware of the human need to be touched in order to grow in a healthy way, and, in my aunt's case, to be healed. Thus, the hole I put in the glove is a symbolic gesture of the human being let out of the glove barrier in order to have real contact with the person in need. Of course, the angels are present, a symbolic presence of God.

I also glued on an etching in the left corner, which I had done earlier, of two figures dancing. Again, I used the original paper blockout as in *Rise Upward* to spray paint a negative image of the dancer in the lower right corner to balance the composition. I added

more silkscreen pieces in a random manner. Lastly, I spray painted various shapes to create mystery, shadow and visual connection.



Home 23" X 32"



Take Flight 23" X 32"

5. *Home*

Take Flight

This pair of images came out of a larger group of experiments using a newspaper blackout with the silkscreen and transparent base. As each picture was screened the newspaper would break down causing some very interesting variations on the paper. I also threw in small pieces of straw which stuck to the ink. I purposely made vertical, male oriented images which represent trees or tall buildings. As the image progressed they represented trees and undergrowth in a woods. I began gluing on different objects I could find around the studio, mostly flat pieces of paper and cloth. Then I became spontaneous and glued on straw and feathers that I had collected. Using white, blue and silver hues, I spray painted the pictures to create an atmospheric aura.

Home is actually the representation of a bird's nest. This is so primal to me because a bird's nest is actually a very well built and planned out architectural structure. What makes it a home is the pride that the mother bird takes in the nest. A friend recently related a story about a bird's nest in her back yard. She was observing this Robin's nest in which the eggs had hatched. Often the baby birds would naturally defecate which would be in a small, thin-skinned sack after which the mother would eat the sack in order to keep the nest clean. One time the mother didn't catch the sack and the nest became soiled. The mother thoroughly cleaned the nest out by pushing out the straw or eating it. This is a remarkable observation.

The nest was not only a habitat, but a home in which the bird cared thoroughly for her young. The obscure oval shape which is female balances the up and down male oriented vertical shapes of its background creating a wholistic atmosphere. The silver sprayed underneath the nest emphasizes the preciousness of home.

Take Flight has a similar balance with the curved swoop of paper and strip of canvas which connects the feathers. The vertical images are pushed to the background creating a depth through overlapping. This image is much more active than *Home* because of the movement of the curve and the direction of the feathers. The white spray paint over the feathers continues up and off the top of the picture which leads the eye upward into flight.

Feathers have been an important symbol/object to me since I was a very young child. I used to carry one around often and even take one to bed. Later, on occasion, I would wonder what the feather really means to me. I have never really been able to verbally come up with that answer although visually, this composition speaks to me of freedom, spontaneity and spirituality.



Moon Brother 23" X 32"



Sun Sister 23" X 32"

6. *Moon Brother* *Sun Sister*

Moon Brother began as a serigraph experiment using low key hues of gray and purple. Then I took the photo screen of the human figure which was central to *Your Cries Will Be Like The Wind*, masked off parts of it, and used it to create optical textures on each of the ten prints. I appropriated some printed black paper which I found torn in its present shape and glued it on to the print. These reminded me of tree stumps. I took a spray paint can lid and moved it around the tree stump, spraying gold negative circles to make mini-auras. I stamped on white paint around the two stump shapes to form contrast. Rolling a large metal cog in white ink and rolling it onto the picture, I created more optical texture, pattern and rhythm. I saw what felt like the iridescence of moon-glow in a landscape, therefore, naming it *Moon Brother*.

Sun Sister is an experiment with handmade paper. I poured paper pulp onto a sheet of paper, laid torn pieces of serigraphs and ran it through the etching press with a felt over it, squeezing most of the water out. After making about five of these I let them air dry. I glued appropriated block print pieces over that, stamped a few images onto it with black ink and spray painted negative hand images moving upward with blue paint. I left the deckled edges there. The result was an inner glow through the hands, like the sun through leaves in a forest, a visual image which always gives me pleasure.



Emergence 23" X 32"



Ghost Dance 23" X 32"

7. *Emergence* *Ghost Dance*

This last pair of images is crisp and fresh. In *Emergence* I once again made use of the cosmic serigraph with the photo stenciled figure.

I stamped on a nautilus spiral image from a linoleum block cut I had done over a year ago. It was rolled with a gradated magenta and white ink which created an interesting contrast to the low key background. I stamped black on two of the corners with the rounded corner of a broken lithographic stone. There is a small amount of white spray paint over the large cog which made a negative curved image in the upper right corner. The feel of this image is one of cosmic and primal energy. The colors are very pleasing to the eye and it is restful even if it is complex.

Ghost Dance was mainly a blackout technique with spray paint on a background of the same serigraph ground as *Moon Brother*. I saved the glove insert from the *Isotoner* gloves I had received for Christmas. The print which resulted from it gave me the feeling of things mechanical, static and sterile. They are lifeless and unimaginative. So I spray painted my live hand in the middle to show the energy of life and enthusiasm. One live hand image is much more exciting than all seven mechanical hands combined. It could also connote the stifling of an enthusiastic life by uncreative authority and power. Such enthusiasm and youth is sometimes threatening to authority.

Conclusion: Influences and Integration

Although each thesis composition was treated in an individual manner there is a definite congruity here. The pictures have a complex quality yet they form a harmony and are pleasant and colorful to look at. Throughout my development as an artist I was intrigued by the work of the late Corita Kent, a contemporary serigraph artist. Her silkscreen style is often non-objective and the style so free. The fact that she belonged to a religious community also drew me to her work and I fully understood her images. There is a definite influence in my work from Corita Kent. When I was leaving Egypt in April of 1990 and was sitting in the Cairo airport, a woman heard me speaking to someone about my artwork. She asked me if I knew who Corita Kent was and of course I said that I was extremely familiar with her work. This woman told me that she is a teacher at Duke University and had Corita as a teacher when she was a child after which they became friends. She relayed some very interesting information about her in the course of the conversation. I later was amazed that I should meet this woman at a time when I was seriously considering where I would be going with my thesis. I think the spirit of Corita truly found me.

There have been a few other major influences in this project. One I have to credit is Saint Francis of Assisi for his tremendous thrust toward nature and a spontaneous free spirit of expression. He truly was an artist in the deepest spiritual sense.

Another influence was the writing of Matthew Fox, a creation centered theologian whose ideas are contemporary yet basic to human yearnings, in particular, Mother Earth, prophetic voices and cosmic unity. His books, *Original Blessing*, and *The Coming of the Cosmic*

Christ have had great impact on the spiritual thrust of these compositions.

More recently, the work of the late Joseph Campbell has provided me with a grounding in world mythology and the ideas of the collective unconscious of Carl Jung. I have tried to express the spirit of world unity which Campbell so eloquently conveys in many books films and videos.

My work and interests in other areas of the arts, I'm sure, have also added to the complex ideas which I have had the pleasure of expressing in this thesis. The contemporary new age music of Paul Winter, for example, has contributed to my mood during peak creative moments. I tend to work in spurts of energy and can aid that process by what I feed my brain at the time. I have learned to tap that energy by self discipline and perseverance.

My work in stained glass since 1980 has enhanced my sense of color and design. Although the process is quite different, there is an interesting interplay in the disciplined and careful planning out of a stained glass window and the freedom to be spontaneous in a painterly silkscreen design. The creative force in my silkscreening also influences the harmonious flow of my window designs.

There are many, many more integrated and personal aspects to this process which I could reflect on here, but I only care to mention the most prominent ones. The study of how a person is creative is a complex one and calls for in depth searching for a lifetime.

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