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The Greatest Mystery

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“The greatest mystery is not that we have been flung at random among the profusion of the earth and the galaxy of the stars, but that in this prison we can fashion images of ourselves sufficiently powerful to deny our nothingness” Andre Malraux

The ‘body’ is and has from its earliest conception been the product of a form of social construction¹. The body and mind in pain enters into the realm of a community based identity. This body and mind is subjected to severe objectification.

The discourses constructing the body are explored in Foucault’s *The Birth of the Clinic*². In the late 18th century clinics were established as places where disease could be compared and classified from body to body in order to invent a system of ‘symptom logy’ (observation in terms of symptoms and signs). It constituted the localisation of disease to a specific place, a point of origin. It would be the place where disease could be made visible and be determined by the ‘specialists’. Power was thus vested in these ‘specialists’ to look for and name disease. The Birth of The Clinic, describes these power relationships as -- the power between physician [over] patient, visibility and control over disease because of the power to ‘name’ it. This shifts power over the medical body to the specialist. The majority of ‘us’ leave such diagnosis of ‘our’ bodies to ‘them’.

¹ Foucault’s Power relationship over bodies in being able to control social masses through its institutionalisation (schools, hospitals, prisons). John Pultz, ‘Photography and the body’. 1995

² The Birth of the Clinic - Michel Foucault.

It is the fear of death, of things leaking out, of not being in control, of red connoting 'bad', of blood being seen as worse than 'bad', it is of the mind being safely contained, the soul being centred, that the heart is beating; all of which we accept as being 'normal'. But what is normal? If we look throughout history and its discourses, we come to understand that this is normal. Why this fear? Why do we fear? Why do we fear the unknown and the unpredictable nature of existence? I believe that it is [wo]mans constant search for meaning that is not only central to our lives, but also possibly the cause of our instilled fears and feelings of emptiness.

I work at a drug clinic. I see individual clients who have been referred to me for art therapy. Each of the cases that I have come across so far, there is a continuation of a common theme. Fear. Fear of not being able to see anything other than the colour black. "I see nothing but black". With this, I feel it my duty to help re-ignite the sense of hope for foresight about the self. But also to give power back to the individuals to be able to keep their flame ignited to be able to further develop the sense of self as well as to obviate the preconditioning that we have all been circumscribed. My art work takes place within this space. This space where the client meets the self. Each session, I will create a piece using acrylic or inks on a small card. I make the image as the client creates and explores theirs. My images can be viewed by the client, most often, they are not subjected into the discussion. It is only when a client asks. It is difficult to understand what the act of my image making has on the clients process. For me, it is easier to understand this as what effect the client has on my process of image making. I have not yet come to a conclusion. I have on the other hand, come to understand that without the image making process of the art therapist in the session, would be false. "Practice what you Preach".

Through my images, I try to depict an exploration into my own psyche about what it is about a client, or what it is about my own presence or the situation as a whole that leads me to question the 'workings of' a session.

It is quite illusive.

Fear of death, fear of heights, fear of water, fear of being re-incarcerated, fear of not being able to pay bills, fear of children, fear of not seeing ones children again, fear of children abandoning the parent, fear of growing old, fear of a loved one dying, fear of abandonment, fear of not being loved, fear of not loving, fear of becoming what one knows they are not, fear of becoming what one knows they can never be, fear of not knowing who one is, fear of death, fear of death fear of death....

My time as an art therapy trainee has been quite an insightful experience into the nature of our 'humanness'. Being in the space while the art therapy process is executed by both client and therapist has also been an eye opener. I have seen peoples transform from a person who cannot see a future self, to ones that cannot stop the want for further exploration into the self and others. This I believe is where the magic happens. Where the instillation of hope and a confidence to embrace life and more importantly, to embrace the self in quite often harrowing circumstances, occurs. The magic of creating art, which some believe is closely related to our psyche, is somewhat freeing. To be able to live with less fear about ones existence is one of the remarkable outcomes that I have come to experience in the clients metamorphosing in becoming more aware.

My process of image making is part of my becoming. As is the clients own becoming through their process of image making. An investigation into this 'becoming' leads to an exploration which I believe is boundless. I cannot assume that the client also feels this way. I can on the other hand make the assumption via their images and their statements about them as well as their newfound insights into the selves, that they too are becoming. Like magic. Triggered by a medium which obviously has been enough to ignite the imagination. The imagination that once lay dormant, still, sleeping, possibly in fear of submerging. What does one do with an imagination if one fears their own existence? Their own self?

I feel that art therapy is a safe way of re-integrating imagination with existence. According to Bruce Moon, faith in imagination is reflected in the person who honours images and is able to consult them even in darkest hours. If there is no imagination, there is no soul, and if there is no soul there can be no meaning³. He believes that it is because of the inability to find meaning in the events of everyday life that is the underlying cause of our turmoils. It is the absence of meaning that is at the core to many of the dysfunctions that we experience and see around us in our family and friends, we are left with the problem of what can be done. How do we attend to this emptiness?

As art therapists, Bruce Moon believes that the art therapists primary task is the doing of creative work with the arts. By doing so, we call out the creative potential of our patients/clients.

³ "Art and Soul" - Bruce, L Moon 1997

I feel that it is precisely this that entices me to create images during or after sessions as either reactions or responses to the therapeutic situation. But also, it is a curiousness about our humanness, of our unconscious workings, of the magic that happens between individuals, and of our growth.

It is magic.