

John Bartlett; *The Artist's Journey*

Since the eighties the foundation of my paintings has been the *Spiral*. Following the *Still Point* series, the *Lasseter/Earth* series and a few *Journey to Horseshoe Bend* paintings the *Spiral* became less discrete and surfaced as the *Trinity* and *Korean Spiral* series.

The linear spiral developed during January 2007 and led to the image of the I-Ching hexagram due to the simplicity of its structure; 11 horizontal bars, 6 black bars broken. As the series developed I simplified the hexagram to trigrams and quadgrams. Through this investigation I also began to reverse some black bars to white, and during November 2007 I decided to further develop the image by rearranging the trigram, rotating some white bars to vertical, thus creating the image that appeared to me to relate to ceremonial facial body painting and, as a consequence, I commenced the *Ceremonial* series.

The *Ceremonial* and *I-Ching* paintings relate ancient Chinese Oracle I-Ching hexagrams, ceremonial body painting and the Japanese aesthetic of *wabi sabi*.

During December 2007 I made the first painting of the *Portal Wanderer* series. The image being just 2 short vertical bars in a dark field, is the final simplification of the hexagram. Based on a Goethe ballad and Schubert's 3rd Symphony in D flat Major, the 'wanderer' leaves the place he loves to find the place where happiness is and a voice asks,

"Where are you going?" to which the wanderer replies:

"To the place where happiness is". The voice again asks:

"And where is that?"

The 'wanderer' doesn't know, but as he has left the place he loves, he must find it. The 'portal' is the gateway into the dark mysterious landscape that must be traversed by the 'wanderer', or viewer, in search of the place where happiness is. Those far-off lights must be a big city, surely the place where happiness is - doubts must be overcome for he knows there IS a place where happiness is and he MUST find it for he has left the place he loves.

On the 10th of June 2009 I rearranged the *Ceremonial* image to become the basis for the *Variations on a Theme* series. The theme is the life cycle of birth, death and transfiguration with reference to the spirit of the universe; the spirit that sustains life in all its forms and relationships, the spirit that suffuses all creation.

The theme celebrates place, land as a ceremonial site, it celebrates courage, the human spirit surviving adversity making a way through boulders and all the other obstacles of life. And so it goes, always has and always will, "*Per Ardua ad Astra*" "Through Adversity to the Stars"; the human grows in stature as a 'Being' by not only surviving adversity but also by being transfigured through adversity.

For me there is in a driving passage in Tchaikovski's 4th Symphony, Mahler's Song of the Earth, Hendryk Gorecki's Symphony of Sorrowful Songs, Max Bruche's Adagio on Hebrew Melodies opus 47 and Schubert's 3rd Symphony in D flat Major that have something of the Spirit of the Universe, of the 'Grand March'; the passing parade of humans marching shoulder to shoulder through time and space toward that distant place where happiness is.

The Ceremonial, Portal Wanderer and Variations on a Theme series are on-going.

John Bartlett. August, 2009.

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