

FEATURE ARTICLE

The Creative Impulse by Karen Lehrer, MFT

I suppose I was born with a creative impulse. As a child I had always been a creative individual, which meant I suffered sometimes because I just saw things differently. While I was a high school student in the Los Angeles area, a few fellow art friends and I were enrolled in Saturday morning classes at Art Center College of Design. This was a real eye opener for us, getting a glimpse of the “real art world”. My interest in art and design continued into college. During my first year of college I was seriously injured in an automobile accident. After several months of mending, as the casts were removed and I was able to return to my normal activities, I realized something had happened to me which I could not describe and had no reference to articulate. After my physical recovery I had awareness that I was somehow different than I was before the accident. Having come from a secular family I was not acquainted with much beyond the concrete world. I was on my own to figure this out.

My early career background was as a designer, stylist, and buyer in the textile industry. I worked for a Fortune 500 company, which opened up my world when I was in my twenties. I had the opportunity to travel to New York frequently. Being in a position of power (but too naïve to realize it) my co-workers and I were wined and dined, I was interviewed by the major fashion publications, invited to amazing events, and was in on very high level negotiations worth millions and millions of dollars. It was a wonderful opportunity for a young person. After leaving that company, I remained in the fashion business for several years, and taught at the Fashion Institute in Los Angeles. I did learn that working in the business world is not

a good outlet for ones personal self-expression.

Throughout this period I was continually interested in psychology and read extensively. I was in a relationship with a psychologist who happened to be addicted to expanding his library, which covered nearly every wall in our home. I also was in long-term psychotherapy with a clinical psychologist. Despite all the healing which occurred, the “accident” never seemed to be to be healed in all those



years of talk therapy. The memory of the auto accident followed me everywhere; always just beneath the surface of my awareness. Knowing what I do now, I am quite sure I had a very extended case of PTSD, which was not on the books in those days.

Eventually I left the fashion business, in order to pursue my own creative endeavors, but real life got in the way and making a living was a real necessity. I worked in the fine art business for a while, but the painful reality was that this was too close to my dream, which I was not yet following.

Pushing the fast forward button... several pieces of my personal life came into place. It should have been a happy and exciting time for me, but I had a sinking feeling and was becoming depressed. I had this compelling feeling that I needed to paint, as if my life depended on it. I knew I wanted to paint on large canvas, getting my entire arm involved. I also knew that I had no idea how to do this. I searched for a program or course, none appealed to me at the time. I asked everyone I met if they knew of an artist who could teach me what I wanted to learn.

In one particular week, two people mentioned the name of one teacher, and I knew I was onto something. This instructor offered private tutorials and had an ongoing group of students, most of whom were mature adults, older than myself at the time. I was thrilled when he said I could be a part of the group. I was taught painting techniques which helped me with a visual language to translate the images in my head to canvas.

Eventually, I became comfortable with the paint and techniques and I was off and running. My instructor would come by my easel, where I painted with a brush in one hand and a silent hair dryer in the other, he would say I was painting “like a bat out of hell.” I was just compelled to paint. What I didn’t know at the time, I was painting what happened to me when I was unconscious in that car accident about twenty years earlier. I was engaging in my own unconsciously driven art therapy, with no guidance but my own innate need to heal the trauma I experienced. The paintings just kept coming and coming. I thought the well would never run dry, but eventually it did. This led me to the return to school and the journey to my work as a marriage and family therapist.

During graduate school, as I reflected on the process of painting, I realized the charge I had on the “accident” had just disappeared. Something had lifted for me as I painted on canvas. I understood that the impact of the accident was of a non-verbal nature and it seemed that it needed to be healed in a non-verbal nature as well. This is when I decided to devote my career to helping other people in a similar way.

My professional goal was to work with people using both art and psychological processes as a healing modality. I knew I needed the education to learn to deal with psychological is-

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sues for potential clients, and I had already taken countless art workshops over the years. Along this journey I discovered much to my surprise that I absolutely love working as a therapist.

Four years ago Mapping the Inner Journey, a workshop, was developed in which participants create a series of maps such as mind maps, dream maps, body maps, and so on, in a non-judgmental atmosphere, and no art experience is needed. It has been offered here in Santa Barbara and in Santa Fe, NM, to glowing accolades from participants. My long held goal to teach at Esalen Institute is about to become a reality. I've just been invited to teach Mapping the Inner Journey at Esalen, in December of 2007.

In addition, I have a painting studio in downtown Santa Barbara for painting your inner journey, which is process oriented, not product oriented, no previous art experience is

required. I facilitate this journey of self-discovery which is also a wonderful adjunct to therapy or a fun stand-alone experience. Therapists can refer their clients to me for painting. The client then returns to their own therapist to process and explore the work in context. Painting for process is an excellent modality to get clients out of their heads, deal with creative blocks, and access the non-dominant side of the brain. The unconscious is awakened and it is something like working with a dream, or sand play.

In my private practice I work with individuals and couples. I have expertise with dream work, and offer sand play to my clients. Mapping the Inner Journey will be offered at Esalen Institute, December 9-14, 2007.

www.esalen.org Everyone is invited. Another workshop will be offered in the late spring in Santa Barbara. Please visit my website:

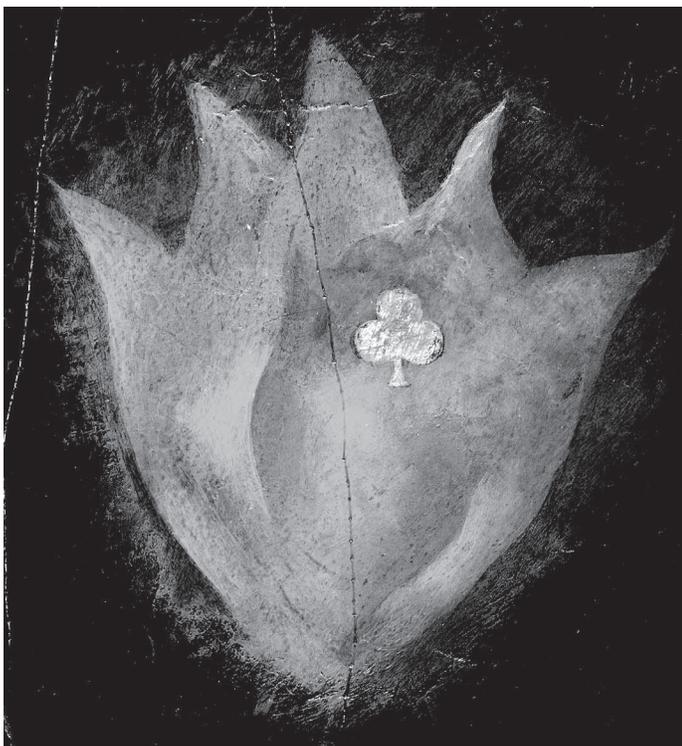
www.karenlehrer.com for more information or feel free to contact me at karen@karenlehrer.com

COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Has your muse lost her a-musement and been making noises that you pick up your pen to write what's in your heart without judgment or fear? Perie Longo, who specializes in poetry "therapy", is re-starting a group for those in service to others who would like to serve their own muse, exploring their creativity, and inner emotional and spiritual lives through reading and writing poetry. No experience is necessary. We will meet bi-weekly on Monday or Thursday eves from 7:00-9:00 pm, depending on response. Call Perie at 687-1619 or email her at perie@west.net.

Individual and Group work available. Encourage others to learn how relationships with food and their body impact self confidence, interpersonal relationships and mental health. For more information contact Shannon Miles, MFT 805-455-9344.

Group sessions: \$45 for 12 weeks.



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