

Preface for Martina's book,

Since time immemorial, the deepest inspiration for art came from visions experienced in non-ordinary states of consciousness. Tens of thousands of years ago, at the dawn of humanity, the early shamans were accomplished artists portraying their visionary journeys on rock surfaces and the walls of cave temples. On the clay floor of one of these caves, Tuc d'Audoubert, the discoverers found footprints in circular arrangement around two clay bison effigies suggesting that its inhabitants conducted dances, similar to those that are still being performed by many aboriginal cultures for the induction of visionary states.

The walls of the famous caves in Southern France and northern Spain, such as Lascaux, Font de Gaume, Les Trois Frères, Altamira, and others, are decorated with beautiful images of animals. Not all of them are realistic representations of species that roamed the Stone Age landscape - bison, wild horses, stags, ibexes, mammoths, wolves, rhinos, and reindeers. Some of them, like the "Wizard Beast" in Lascaux, are mythical creatures that clearly have magical and ritual significance.

And in several of these caves are paintings and carvings of strange figures combining human and animal features - the "Beast Master" in Lascaux presiding over the Happy Hunting Grounds teeming with beautiful animals, the Dancer in La Gabillou, and the "Sorcerer of Les Trois Frères," a mysterious composite figure featuring the antlers of a stag, eyes of an owl, tail of a wild horse or wolf, human beard, and paws of a lion. All this indicates that the extraordinary paintings of the Cromagnon people found in

these cave temples were not done just for pragmatic purposes, using some form of hunting magic. The fantastic traits of some of these figures betray their origin in the imaginal realm of visionary states.

While it is not known what methods Paleolithic artists used to induce their creative visions, there exist many native cultures whose art portrays visionary states induced by various psychedelic plants, the “flesh of the gods.” Thus the fantastic paintings of South American Indians of the Amazon region depict visions induced by ayahuasca, a brew prepared from a jungle liana and other plant ingredients. They feature cascades of fractal images in incredibly radiant colors, various divine beings, and an impressive array of shamanic power animals – anacondas, jaguars, alligators, and exotic birds.

The yarn paintings of the Huichol Indians portray the figures of this tribe’s pantheon as the Huichols experience them in their peyote visions – Grandfather Fire Tatewari, Father Sun Taupa, Great Mother Werika, Deer Spirit Kauyumare, Sacred Serpent Ku Temai, as well as the Eye of God Tsikuri and the Peyote Portal Hikuri. The same motifs, rendered in intoxicating colors appear also on other artifacts of Huichol artists - carved wooden animals and gourds richly covered with colorful beads and on exquisitely embroidered sombreros and costumes.

But even the art of native cultures that do not use psychedelic plants clearly betrays its origin in visionary adventures in non-ordinary realities. It portrays denizens and abodes of the Beyond, archetypal figures of deities and demons, various fantastic power animals, and the world of the

ancestors. These cultures use in their ritual and spiritual life “technologies of the sacred” that do not involve psychoactive materials, but powerful non-drug means.

These methods combine in various ways drumming and other forms of percussion, music, chanting, rhythmic dancing, changes of breathing, and cultivation of special forms of awareness. Extended social and sensory isolation also play an important role as means of inducing non-ordinary states. Extreme physiological interventions used for this purpose include fasting, sleep deprivation, dehydration, and even massive bloodletting, use of powerful laxatives and purgatives, and infliction of severe pain.

The great works of art of the spiritual traditions of the East – Jainism, Hinduism, Taoism, various schools of Buddhism, and particularly Tantra - are so saturated with powerful archetypal figures and motifs that it is obvious that they are not products of everyday human fantasy and imagination. They have clearly been inspired by visions induced by powerful mind-altering procedures used by practitioners of these religions. Besides ritual use of psychedelic substances - the legendary soma, Ayurvedic herbal mixtures, bhang, and Datura - these included combinations of meditation, fasting, and breathing exercises.

The mysteries of death and rebirth that were celebrated in Sumer, Egypt, Greece, and Asia minor in the name of Inanna and Dumuzi, Isis and Osiris, Dionysus, Attis, Adonis, Demeter and Persephone, and other gods, had a profound effect on art and cultural life of these countries. According to extensive research by Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann, and Carl Ruck,

the visionary experiences of the initiates in the famous Eleusinian mysteries conducted in Greece every five years for a period of almost 2,000 years were induced by kykeon, a sacred potion containing ergot alkaloids similar to LSD (Wasson, Hofmann, Ruck 1978).

John Allegro, member of an international team formed to decipher the Dead Sea Scrolls contended that Judaism and Christianity had their origins in fertility cults of the ancient Near East that used psychedelic mushrooms in their rituals (Allegro 1970). According to religious scholar Dan Merkur, manna, the miraculous bread that the Israelites ingested before they beheld the glory of Yahweh appearing in a cloud, contained ergot, a psychoactive fungus with active ingredients related to LSD. Merkur believes to have found indications of an unbroken tradition of Western psychedelic sacraments from Moses and manna to Jesus and the Eucharist. According to him, when this practice became unacceptable to religious orthodoxy, it was perpetuated in secret by the Gnostics, Masons, and Kabbalists (Merkur 2000).

Whatever role psychedelic substances might have played in the history of the “religions of the book,” mainstream forms of the Judeo-Christian religion and Islam do not generally encourage and support spiritual experiences of their members and self-experimentation with methods inducing visionary states. This has remained limited to monastic orders of these religions and to their mystical branches, as exemplified by the hesychasts, the Desert Fathers, the Kabbalists, or the Sufis. However, the most powerful motifs appearing in the scriptures and the art of these

religions, such as Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory, Ezekiel's vision of the chariot, temptation by the Devil experienced by Jesus, and Saint Anthony, the Miraculous Journey of Mohammed, the scenes of the Judgment of the Dead, the Last Judgment, and the Apocalypse, are clearly archetypal in nature and were very likely inspired by visionary states.

This became clear to the pioneers of consciousness research, when they discovered that these motifs frequently appear in psychedelic sessions, shamanic initiatory crises, near-death states, mystical experiences, and "spiritual emergencies." In his ground-breaking essay, *Heaven and Hell*, written after his self-experiments with mescaline and LSD, Aldous Huxley suggested that concepts such as Hell and Heaven represent subjective realities experienced in very concrete and convincing ways during non-ordinary states of mind induced by psychedelic substances or various powerful non-drug techniques (Huxley 1959).

In the course of European history of art, exceptional individuals have been able to reach deep into their unconscious and portray visionary states thanks to the extraordinary power of their mystical insight or emotional disorder – Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Brueghel, Matthias Gruenewald, Hans Baldung Grien, Francisco de Goya, Gustave Moreau, William Blake, Gustave Dore, and others. Some of the darkest visionary art of medieval Europe was inspired by experiences of the Witches' Sabbath or Walpurgis' Night induced by brews or ointments containing psychoactive ingredients – the deadly nightshade (*Atropa Belladonna*), mandrake (*Mandragora officinarum*), thorn-apple (*Datura stramonium*), henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger*), and toad skin.

The twentieth century saw emergence of vivid interest in the unconscious psyche as source of artistic inspiration and origination of new movements – surrealism and fantastic realism. After Freud's discovery of the unconscious and publication of *Interpretation of Dreams*, it became fashionable for the artistic avant-garde to look to their dreams for inspiration or imitate the dream work by juxtaposing in a most surprising fashion various objects in a manner that defied elementary logic. The selection of these objects often showed a preference for those that, according to Freud, had hidden sexual meaning.

Another important inspiration for Surrealism was medieval alchemy. André Breton happened to come across an illustration from one of the old alchemical texts. The picture was extremely complex and featured all the most important symbols used to portray various stages of the two works of the alchemical opus. Breton was fascinated by the fantastic array of seemingly incongruous images that this picture brought together and the shocking surprise it induced in the viewer. As C. G. Jung discovered in twenty years of his intense study of alchemy, the alchemical symbolism – like the symbolism of dreams - reflects deep dynamics of the unconscious and reveals important hidden truth about the human psyche.

In the middle of the twentieth century, the serendipitous discovery of the extraordinary psychedelic effects of LSD-25, or diethylamid of lysergic acid, by the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann launched an unprecedented renaissance of visionary art. This substance caused a sensation in the scientific world by its incredible potency and promise for a variety of fields – as a

unique therapeutic agent, a key to the understanding of psychoses, an unconventional tool for training psychiatrists and psychologists, a sacrament capable of inducing mystical experiences, and even a chemical weapon.

For historians and critics of art, the LSD experiments provided extraordinary new insights into the psychology and psychopathology of art. They saw deep similarity between the paintings of “normal” subjects depicting their LSD visions and the Outsider Art (Art brut) and the art of psychiatric patients, as it has been documented in Hans Prinzhorn’s classic “Die Bildneri der Geisteskranken” (Artistry of the Mentally Ill) (Prinzhorn 1922). Other psychedelic paintings bore deep resemblance to artifacts of native cultures, such as bark paintings of Australian Aborigines, African masks and fetishes, or the sculptures of the New Guinea tribes living near the Sepik River.

There was also unmistakable similarity between the art of LSD subjects and that of representatives of various modern movements - abstractionism, impressionism, cubism, dadaism, surrealism, and fantastic realism (Roubíček 1961). For professional painters, who participated in LSD research, the psychedelic session often marked a radical change in their artistic expression. Their imagination became much richer, their colors more vivid, and their style considerably freer. On occasion, people who had never painted before were able to produce extraordinary pieces of art. The power of the deep unconscious material that has surfaced in their sessions somehow took over the process and used the subject as a channel to express itself.

However, the impact of LSD and other substances on art went much farther than influencing the style of artists who volunteered as experimental subjects. Psychedelic research opened access to vast domains of the human unconscious psyche unrecognized and uncharted by Freudian psychoanalysis and academic psychiatry. The content of these deep recesses of the psyche provided undreamed of richness of entirely new themes for artists and a new field of study for mental health professionals. While most LSD researchers came into this work equipped with the traditional map of the psyche, limited to postnatal biography and the Freudian individual unconscious, the experiences of their LSD subjects sooner or later transcended the narrow confines of this model.

Talking about his discovery of the unconscious, Freud once compared the psyche to an iceberg. He announced that what we thought was the totality of the psyche – the conscious ego – was just the tip of the iceberg. Psychoanalysis, according to him, discovered the hidden part of the iceberg of the psyche - the individual unconscious. Paraphrasing Freud's simile we can say that what classical psychoanalysis discovered about the human psyche was, at best, just the tip of the iceberg. The part revealed by psychedelic research remained concealed even for traditional psychoanalysts. Or, using mythologist Joseph Campbell's whimsical image, "Freud was fishing while sitting on a whale."

In the early 1960, after several years of frustrating attempts to explain psychedelic experiences of my clients and my own in Freudian terms, I was forced by my observations to vastly expand the cartography of the psyche by adding two new domains to the traditional biographical-recollective

model. The first of these new domains lies immediately beneath the postnatal biographical realm and seems to have close connections with the beginning of life and its end, with birth and death. Many people identify the experiences that originate on this level as reliving of their biological birth trauma. This is reflected in the name *perinatal* that I have suggested for this level of the psyche. It is a Greek-Latin composite word where the prefix *peri-*, means "near" or "around", and the root *natalis* "pertaining to childbirth."

The fact that in psychedelic sessions we can relive in a very authentic way the memories of our prenatal existence, biological birth, and early postnatal life is very surprising, because academic psychiatrists assert that our memory begins after we are born. Yet, these memories of the beginning of our life belong to the most common phenomena occurring in psychedelic sessions. They come in four distinct experiential patterns, related to the consecutive stages of biological birth; I refer to them as Basic Perinatal Matrices (BPMs). BPM I is related to prenatal existence immediately preceding the onset of birth, BPM II reflects the claustrophobic first stage of birth when the uterus is contracting and the cervix is not yet open. BPM III then portrays the struggle to be born after the cervix opens. And finally, BPM IV contains the memory of emerging into the world and the newborn's union with the mother.

What is particularly fascinating about the reliving of the memories of our early experiences surrounding birth is that they do not represent a simple replay of the physical and emotional aspects of biological birth. These memories of symbiotic fusion with the mother are associated with a

sense of profound numinosity. They show that pregnancy and birth are above all profoundly spiritual events and that the connection between the mother and the child is sacred. It becomes obvious that what in everyday life appears to be a biological event is informed and imbued by the archetype of the Divine Feminine. Reliving of birth is also deeply connected with another important archetypal pattern – with the experience of psychospiritual death and rebirth.

The second major domain that has to be added to mainstream psychiatry's cartography of the human psyche when we work with psychedelics, or with non-ordinary states of any provenience, is now known as *transpersonal*, meaning literally "reaching beyond the personal" or "transcending the personal." Transpersonal experiences can be divided into three large categories. The first of these involves primarily transcendence of the usual spatial barriers, or the limitations of Alan Watts' "skin-encapsulated ego. Here belong experiences of merging with another person into a state that can be called "dual unity", assuming the identity of another person, identifying with the consciousness of an entire group of people, or even experiencing an extension of consciousness that seems to encompass all of humanity. Experiences of this kind have been repeatedly described in the spiritual literature of the world.

In a similar way, one can transcend the limits of the specifically human experience and identify with the consciousness of various animals, plants, or even forms of consciousness that seem to be associated with inorganic objects and processes. Incredible and absurd as it might seem to a Westerner committed to Cartesian-Newtonian science, these experiences

suggest that everything we can perceive in our everyday state of consciousness as an object, has in the non-ordinary states of consciousness a corresponding subjective representation. It is as if everything in the universe has its objective and subjective aspect, the way it is described in the great spiritual philosophies of the East. For example, in Hinduism all that exists is seen as a manifestation of Brahma, or in Taoism as a transformation of the Tao.

The second category of transpersonal experiences is characterized primarily by overcoming of temporal rather than spatial boundaries, by transcendence of linear time. We have already talked about the possibility of vivid reliving of important memories of the trauma of birth and from prenatal life. This historical regression can continue farther and involve authentic identification with the sperm and the ovum at the time of conception. But the historical regression does not stop here and it is possible to have experiences from the lives of one's human or animal ancestors, or even those that seem to be coming from the racial and collective unconscious as described by C. G. Jung. Quite frequently, the experiences that seem to be happening in other cultures and historical periods are associated with a sense of personal remembering; people then talk about reliving of memories from past lives, from previous incarnations.

The third category of transpersonal experiences is even stranger than the two previous ones; here consciousness seems to extend into realms and dimensions that the Western industrial culture does not consider to be "real." Here belong visits to various mythological domains, visions of archetypal beings or even identification with deities and demons of various

cultures, encounters and communication with discarnate beings, spirit guides, suprahuman entities, extraterrestrials, and inhabitants of parallel universes.

In its farthest reaches, individual human consciousness can identify with Cosmic Consciousness or the Universal Mind known under many different names - Brahman, Buddha, the Cosmic Christ, Keter, Allah, the Tao, Great Spirit, and many others. The ultimate of all experiences appears to be identification with the Supracosmic and Metacosmic Void, the mysterious and primordial emptiness and nothingness that is conscious of itself and is the ultimate cradle of all existence. It has no concrete content, yet it contains all there is in a germinal and potential form.

Although transpersonal experiences occur in the process of deep individual self-exploration, it is not possible to interpret them simply as intrapsychic phenomena in the conventional sense. On the one hand, they appear on the same experiential continuum as the biographical and perinatal experiences and are thus coming from within the individual psyche. On the other hand, they seem to be tapping directly, without the mediation of the senses, into sources of information that are clearly far beyond the conventional reach of the individual.

These observations indicate that we can obtain information about the universe in two radically different ways: besides the conventional possibility of learning through sensory perception and analysis and synthesis of the data, we can also discover various aspects of the world by direct identification with them in a non-ordinary state of consciousness. Each of

us thus appears to be a microcosm containing in a holographic way the information about the macrocosm. In the mystical traditions, this was expressed by such phrases as: "as above so below" or "as without, so within."

The new image of the psyche that has emerged from the study of non-ordinary states of consciousness reaches far beyond the narrow confines of Freudian psychoanalysis. It includes the perinatal domain – memories of the intrauterine existence, biological birth, and early mothering - and the vast territory of the historical and archetypal unconscious first explored and described by C.G.Jung and his followers. It also corrects the gender bias of the Freudian model by emphasizing the enormous importance of the Feminine.

Freud's male-oriented psychology was often criticized for describing women essentially as castrated males and for not recognizing the psychological importance of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. Freud also missed the psychological implications of the fact that women have a special role in the universal scheme of things by participating directly in the act of creation. Modern consciousness research revealed the paramount role that the archetype of the Great Mother Goddess plays in the human psyche and its deep connection with psychospiritual death and rebirth and with healing and positive personality transformation.

While experimental psychiatrists, psychologists, religious scholars, art critics, and art historians found psychedelics fascinating from a theoretical point of view, an entire generation of avant-garde young artists embraced

them as tools for finding deep inspiration in visionary states and in the perinatal domain and in the archetypal realm of the collective unconscious. They portrayed with extraordinary artistic power a rich array of experiences originating in deep and ordinarily hidden recesses of the human psyche. Their self-experimentation also led to serious interest in areas closely related to their psychedelic experiences – study of the great Eastern spiritual philosophies, intense meditation practice, participation in shamanic rituals, worship of the Goddess and of the Sacred Feminine, nature mysticism, and various esoteric teachings. Many of them documented in their art their own spiritual and philosophical quest.

The remarkable German-born visionary painter and sculptor Martina Hoffmann is an outstanding representative of this group of avant-guard visionary artists. What makes Martina's art unique is her intimate relationship with the Divine Feminine and her capacity to portray the numinosity of female reproductive functions – menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing – that she has discovered in her visionary journey, as well as by her passionate historical research. Much of her art is an apotheosis of the feminine force which engenders male and female forms and of the way in which women participate with their bodies in the cosmic process of creation.

Martina found it fascinating that people of this earth recognized the generative power of the feminine since time immemorial and worshipped it in the form of the Great Mother Goddess. She has found deep inspiration in the “Venus” carvings and figurines - Paleolithic images of the Feminine created by the Cromagnon people 18.000 to 29.000 years ago. The

emphasis that these primordial representations of naked female body put on areas involved in reproduction seem to attest to the fact they are meant to represent the quintessential Feminine.

Already the oldest of these, Venus of Dolní Věstonice in Moravia, featuring an unusually broad pelvis and full pending breasts, can easily be seen as a symbol of fertility. Venus of Laussel, a carving in a limestone rock shelter in the Dordogne Valley, depicts a naked woman with a horn of a bison with thirteen marks, very likely related to the annual and monthly lunar cycles. The most famous of the Venus figurines, Venus of Willendorf, with her very pronounced vulva, breasts, and belly, seems to be an idealization of the female form with strong connection to fertility, rather than a realistic portrait. The lack of facial expression has prompted some archeologists to view her as “Universal Mother.”

Martina was also profoundly influenced by later images of the Goddess created during the Neolithic Age, where this deity represented not only fertility and protection of the family and harvest, but also the Goddess of Death, such as the female figure sitting on a throne in the settlement of Catal Huyuk in Anatolia, Turkey (dated 6,500 BC), or the Minoan snake goddess from Crete (dated about 2,200 BC). The sculptures from the Indus Valley civilization found in Harappa and Mohenjo Daro are additional exquisite examples of the Goddess art.

The work of the Lithuanian archeologist/anthropologist Marija Gimbutas was another profound influence on Martina’s world view and her art. Gimbutas demonstrated through her research not only that the European

Bronze Age cultures were matriarchal societies that worshipped the Goddess, but also that these societies lived peaceful lives. Archeological excavations have shown that many of their settlements did not have any protective walls. Many aspects of these prehistoric Goddess religions stayed alive throughout the times of ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome all the way into the Christian era where the Goddess is still present in the form of Mary Magdalene, The Black Madonna, the virgin of Guadalupe and the Virgin Mary herself.

Martina's interest in the Feminine started already in her childhood, which she spent in Cameroon, in equatorial West Africa. She grew up surrounded by rich indigenous African culture saturated by art and creativity – carvings and sculptures, fantastic ceremonial masks, colorful fabrics and costumes, musical instruments, and ritual dances, often with a strong emphasis on the feminine. But it was the women of Africa that left the strongest impression on Martina, with their natural beauty, graceful movements, strong sensuality, and earthiness. As she says herself, it was here where she encountered for the first time the Great Mother, Earth Goddess, in the human form. And the colors and sensuality of Africa had a profound influence on her work.

In later years, when Martina studied sculpting at the JohannWolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany, the female form as well as masks became her first inspiration and showed earlier African influences. In 19 , when she met in the Spanish fishing village of Cadaques, home of Salvador Dali, her future husband, visionary painter Robert Venosa, and inspired by his work took up painting, her first works were portraits of her women friends. Jennifer, Naomi, Agnes de Sacy, and others.

In later years, Martina's interest shifted from women's facial expressions to their creative and procreative nature. This resulted in a series of life-size paintings and sculptures of pregnant nudes entitled Birthscapes. Having experienced in her inner journeys the numinous quality of the female reproductive functions, she was able to capture not only the physical, but also the spiritual realities of pregnancy. Martina's special combination of the magical and the realistic shines through with particular clarity in her masterpiece, The Goddess Triangle. It was created as a tribute to all women who have chosen the demanding and challenging path of motherhood to ensure continued existence of our species.

The Goddess Triangle is an impressive 20'x10' composition consisting of nine painted panels and sculpted elements forming a triangle – an ancient symbol of the life-giving and regenerative womb of the Goddess. This monumental work, Martina's altar to the female principle celebrating the unique ability of women to bring forth life and the spiritual forces involved in this awesome process, took seven years to complete. Martina conceived it at a time when several of her friends were pregnant, which provided for her the extraordinary opportunity of free models, as well as inspiring conversations about the experience of motherhood.

The central pieces of the Triangle tell the story of Martina's friends and their very personal journey into first-time motherhood. Birthscape I depicts creation from pure energy, Birthscape II captures the pure joy of carrying life, Conception reflects the strength, dignity and selflessness needed to become a perfect vessel for the new life, and Mother Earth and Her Luna celebrates the deep connection between mother and child as miraculous and

sacred. The numinosity of the realistically portrayed pregnant and lactating female bodies is further augmented by the archetypal figures of goddesses in the outer panels.

As Martina was working on the Goddess Triangle, she observed the profound transformation of her friends' bodies, which reminded her of the physical features of the Earth Goddesses of the Paleolithic and Neolithic ages. She realized that these women were the modern-day-goddesses and decided to explore these similarities by placing into the outer panels of the triangle archetypal images of ancient goddesses - the Snake Goddess, the Goddess of the Life Force, the Goddess of Grace, and the figures of Minoa and Sphinx.

While the overall theme of the Goddess Triangle is apotheosis of Divine Femininity in its positive aspects, as evidenced by the inclusion into the composition of the transcendent image of Mother Earth, allusions to the darker side of the Feminine are also present. This is especially true for two figures in the Goddess Triangle that Martina also independently created in the form of sculptures. The first of these is the Sphinx (literally "Strangler"), one of the archetypes underlying biological birth and its vicissitudes, and Minoa, flanked by snakes and an egg, symbols of death and birth, and carrying a name alluding to Theseus' ordeal in the underground labyrinth.

The Snake Goddess at the top of triangle also suggests death and rebirth by combining two powerful symbols of transformation - a snake and a butterfly. Two of the deities in the triangle, Grace and Minoa, seem to

portray the Divine Feminine in its archaic form by resembling the Paleolithic Venus figurines. The Cosmic Egg, as well as the spirals and snakes representing the powers of the life force, link this remarkable composition to the creation cycle. The numinosity and the spiritual message of the Goddess Triangle is further emphasized by the fact that this work is a multimedia installation piece, featuring a sound track combining intrauterine heartbeats, female voices reciting the many names of the Goddess, as well as soft soothing music.

Martina's artistry in portraying the archetypal aspect of the feminine is truly astonishing. The Goddess appears in her work in many forms and guises – as the cosmic creative principle, as a life-giving and birthing deity, as a destructive force, as agent of transformation, and as spiritual warrior. Martina's spectrum of powerful deities ranges from the dynamic Firekeeper, the volcanic Motherangel, and the Blue Madonna, surrounded by all the elements and glowing in psychedelic colors, through the triune horned goddess in the Cusp and the Muse of Awakening graced with a tiara decorated by the eyes of Argos, to the Leonardesque angelic goddess in the Vitrous Ovum.

Additional salient examples are the two powerful archetypal deities in Initiation, who flank the realistically rendered beauty holding the First Egg, and the majestic goddess in The One in All, who seems to contain in hierarchical arrangement several other subsidiary feminine deities. Female Crucifixion and Jeanne d'Arc, radiating gentle transcendent beauty, seem to belong to a category of their own. Martina also seems to have intimate knowledge of the process of psychospiritual death and rebirth and the role

that the Goddess plays in it.

In addition to many symbols associated with this process, which are dispersed throughout her work, there are some paintings where the connection to the motif of death and rebirth is particularly striking. It is above all her spectacular Phoenix, a rebirth symbol par excellence. Phoenix was a legendary bird which, according to the Arabic lore, lived five hundred years. At the end of this period, she/he built a nest and laid an egg. The sun then set the nest ablaze; the fire burnt the old Phoenix and cracked the egg. The new Phoenix flew out of the burning nest, aiming for the sun, to live for another five hundred years. The DNA/staff of Hermes motif in Martina's painting seems to intimate a connection of this archetype to biological existence and to healing.

In Trinity, another of Martina's paintings in which the theme of resurrection is particularly explicit, live Christa with her heart's fire burning is standing on top of a blade, symbol of male aggression and domination. From her hands radiates healing energy and emerge healing symbols. The live fish above her head, a Neolithic symbol of the uterus, regeneration, and epiphany, represents Christ energy. In a related painting, entitled Female Crucifixion, the menstrual blood becomes the stigmata.

The single most powerful principle driving Martina's creativity is, without any doubt, her determined spiritual pursuit and passion for self-exploration, which takes her to the depth of her psyche, the seat of universal archetypes. Her means to reach these ordinarily hidden recesses of the unconscious range from analysis of her dreams and her meditation

practice to shamanic technologies of the sacred, which Mircea Eliade called “archaic techniques of ecstasy.” Martina’s fascination with the movement of universal energy in the outer and inner world took her, among others, to the study of Reiki, in which she attained a master degree.

Martina’s unrelenting interest in the inner world of the psyche led her to the most powerful of all “technologies of the sacred” - psychedelic plants and substances. She was very excited when she discovered that she could follow this path without violating any laws. In Brazil, ayahuasca, a brew concocted from the liana *Banisteropsis caapi* and other plant additives, is used with the permission of the official authorities by three spiritual groups – the native shamans (ayahuasqueros), the Santo Daime people, and the members of the Uniao de Vegetal. Both Martina and her husband Robert Venosa decided to avail themselves of this unique opportunity and have used this powerful ancient sacrament as a vehicle for their inner journeys.

The visionary world of ayahuasca has had profound influence on Martina’s art. The rich array of fractal geometrical patterns in iridescent colors of almost painful intensity, giant reptiles, heads and bodies of jaguars, divine beings, and archetypal spirit guides portrayed in many of her paintings represent an unmistakable signature of the ayahuasca visions. The magic jungle potion found its strongest expression in Martina’s paintings *Caught in the Web* and *La Chakruna*. The first of these depicts the spirit of the powerful Amazonian plant teacher, *Psychotria viridis*, an important ingredient of the ayahuasca brew, and depicts it as part of the cardiovascular system of the Rainforest. The second explores the importance of absolute surrender in the process of transformational work. This piece was

inspired by shamanic work in the Amazon Rainforest.

They characteristic elements of the ayahuasca experience also feature prominently in many other of Martina's paintings, such as Milagro, DMT Oracle, DNA Spirit, Transmission, Sueno, and others. However, Martina's experience with psychedelic substances is not limited to ayahuasca. One of her most beautiful psychedelic paintings is her recent Lysergic Summer Dream, celebrating the hundredth birthday of the Swiss chemist Albert Hofmann, the discoverer of LSD.

In the early years of her artistic career, Martina was interested in the way in which the human personality is reflected in the face. As a result of it, she was attracted to portraiture, particularly of women. Later the rich array of visions that she encountered in her inner quest directed her artistic development from everyday reality to the realms of the unconscious and superconscious. Since she continued to use in her art realistic elements, she calls herself a "magical realist." This name is certainly very appropriate; most of her seemingly realistic paintings radiate an aura of numinosity that clearly has its origin in her deep visionary experiences.

Martina's magical realism manifests not only in paintings with explicitly mythological and archetypal motifs, but also in her later portraits. The space in which the portrayed persons appear is often permeated with dynamic whirls of cosmic energy reminiscent of Tantric art. The background features astronomical vistas, celestial bodies, oceanic scenery alive with dolphins, or archetypal figures and landscapes. But Martina does not seem to need these exotic elements to give the persons she portrays an

air of numinosity and otherworldliness. In many of her seemingly realistic paintings, she was able to achieve this effect with much less conspicuous, yet very effective means.

Martina's fascination with energy and its movement has brought into some of her paintings elements reminiscent of Tantric art. Tantra, an extraordinary Eastern esoteric discipline that combined advanced scientific knowledge with a remarkable psychospiritual system, involved profound understanding of energy and vibration. Like modern physicists, Tantric scholars saw the universe as a dynamic system, created and sustained by vibrations of different frequencies. In some Tantric diagrams, paintings, and sculptures, this cosmic energy found a very concrete and tangible expression. Martina's paintings, in which the vibratory nature of the universe is particularly distinctly expressed, are Messenger, Spirit Large, Guardian of the Veil, La Petite Mort, and the second portrait of Roberto Venosa.

Another famous and powerful motif of Tantric painting and sculpture is hiranya garbha, the Golden Womb or Cosmic Egg, the source of all of existence. The image of the original egg also appears in many world mythologies in connection with the creation of the world. The inclusion of various forms of this primordial egg seems to have taken Martina's spiritual and philosophical quest from human origins in conception and birth to the origin of the Cosmos. This motif appears in Martina's paintings entitled Initiation: The First Egg, the Vitreous Ovum, Spirit Large, The Coning Large, Don't Be Afraid, Fireball, and in the part of the Goddess Triangle depicting Minoa.

Martina's interest in and fascination by the egg motif that she keeps expressing in her paintings and sculptures reflects her unique insights concerning the relationship between female reproductive functions and creativity. She points out that of the four to five hundred eggs that a woman brings to ovulation during her lifetime only a few develop into human beings. According to her, it is possible that the immense generative potential that remains unused in this process can be transmuted into a creative force that can be used for the good of all humanity.

Emphasis on the positive side of creation and unswerving optimism seems to permeate Martina's life and work. She has not allowed the traumatic experiences in her childhood and in later life to discourage her and break her spirit. Instead she has used them as a source of deep learning and inspiration for her art. If we look for the most powerful force in Martina's life and work, it is her passionate spiritual quest and search for the deep mysteries of her own psyche and the human psyche in general. Her art is fueled by what she has discovered in her dreams, meditations, energy work, shamanic journeys, and experiences with sacred medicines. And she expresses it with great mastery in the universal language of form and color that all living beings have in common.

However, the importance of Martina's art with its unique emphasis on the Feminine and the Goddess transcends her personal spiritual quest and has much wider implications. The imbalance between the Feminine and the Masculine, with the overbearing preponderance of the latter, has long been recognized as the main cause of the current global crisis endangering the

future of humanity and of life on our planet. Influx of the nurturing maternal energy is thus a sorely needed remedy for the dangerous situation we are all facing. And Martina's art speaks with extraordinary eloquence and power to modern humanity's deep craving for the return of the Sacred Feminine to our troubled world.

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