

DREAMS, MIGRATION AND A SENSE OF PLACE

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Radford University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art

By

Lauri Lydy Reidmiller, B.F.A., M.A., Ph.D.

\*\*\*\*

April 2016



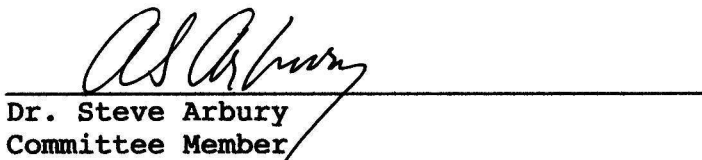
Dr. Halide Salam  
Thesis Advisor

April 5, 2016  
Date



Dr. Eloise Philpot  
Committee Member

April 5, 2016  
Date



Dr. Steve Arbury  
Committee Member

April 19, 2016  
Date

Copyright 2016, Lauri Lydy Reidmiller

## **Abstract**

“Creativity which comes from the subconscious can be more powerful  
and authentic than any product of a conscious mind.”<sup>1</sup>

– Sigmund Freud

The body of paintings discussed in this thesis focuses on physical manifestations of the subconscious mind. This was accomplished by creating a personal vocabulary of symbols, colors, and modified forms embedded in vast fields of richly painted layers. Particular attention is drawn to the utilization of nontraditional tools and paint applications that were employed to express the fluid and repetitious qualities of dream and childhood memories. It is through this investigation that a passage of visual narratives was created.

Lauri Lydy Reidmiller, M.F.A.  
Department of Art, 2016  
Radford University

---

<sup>1</sup> “Tapping the Subconscious: Automatism and Dreams,” 12 June 2015,  
[http://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/themes/surrealism/tapping-the-subconscious-automatism-and-dreams](http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/surrealism/tapping-the-subconscious-automatism-and-dreams)>

## **Dedication**

To Abby

Who never left my side

You will be forever loved

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to extend my thanks to the many individuals who have helped in the creation of this thesis. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Halide Salam for her academic support and guidance in creating this body of work. She is a gifted artist and mentor. I wish to thank Dr. Eloise Philpot, for serving on my committee and for her eternal words of wisdom, insightful comments, and encouragement. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Steve Arbury, for his unending knowledge and endless dedication.

Thanks are especially due to my loving husband, David, who has always supported me as an artist, scholar, and educator. Thank you for standing with me when I needed strength, behind me when I needed a push and in front of me when I needed someone to follow. You inspire and encourage me every moment of every day.

Thank you to my son, Nicholas, for the love he showed me everyday through his smiles, hugs, kind words, and unending humor. His compassion and talent kept me going and filled the silent moments with beautiful music.

Thank you to my daughter, my Bella, my junior editor, for always finding those things I missed and for her uplifting words. I hope you always see and know the beauty, creativity, and strength that I see in you.

Thank you to my Mom, Carlene, for always believing in me, encouraging me to do my best, and to try new things. I could not have made it without your continued love and support. Thank you for all of the late night talks!

A special thanks to Chloe, who shadowed my every move and gave me a nudge, to stay focused or to let me know it was time for a well-deserved break.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract .....	iii
Dedication .....	iv
Acknowledgments .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
Table of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: Dream Symbolism .....	2
Chapter 3: The Creative Process .....	16
Chapter 4: Process Connections .....	19
Chapter 5: Significance of the Study .....	26
Bibliography .....	27
Appendix .....	29

## Table of Figures

	Page
Figure 1. <i>Is Anyone Listening</i> (detail).....	3
Figure 2. <i>Is Anyone Listening</i> (detail).....	4
Figure 3. <i>Light of Day</i> (detail) .....	6
Figure 4. <i>Light of Day</i> (detail) .....	6
Figure 5. <i>Light of Day</i> (detail) .....	7
Figure 6. <i>Light of Day</i> (detail) .....	7
Figure 7 .....	8
Figure 8. <i>Facing Fears</i> (in progress) .....	9
Figure 9. <i>Facing Fears</i> (in progress) .....	10
Figure 10. <i>Catching My Breath</i> (detail).....	11
Figure 11. Detail of raised features.....	13
Figure 12. <i>Cutting Wound</i> (detail) .....	14

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Art has been a constant companion throughout my life, through the good times and bad. Over the past three years, I have faced some unbelievable challenges. My dreams became a record of the peace, joy, turmoil, and emotions I was experiencing. They also revealed hidden imagery and references to childhood memories. It is believed by many that dreams are meant to relay important messages or document our feelings, perhaps creating opportunities to better understand our motives and actions.

Three years ago I was diagnosed with a disease that everyone fears. After multiple surgeries and regular weekly treatments I lost my ability to dream. During this difficult time, I tried turning to my art for comfort, but was unable to create. Then one night my dreams returned, overwhelming me with colored visions reflecting my worries, sorrow, grief, and depression as I battled with the fears of the unknown. My sketchbook came alive with imagery of animals, moving effortlessly through layers of colors, pushing forward and drifting away.

The intent of my work is to capture the memories of these subconscious images. The challenge was documenting and modifying them into something that felt cohesive and complete. It took time to distill and shape the moving images of the dreams into context.



## **Chapter 2: Dream Symbolism**

Creativity is often accessible during dreams; it originates from combinations of ideas, memories, and impressions often overlapping the past, present, and future. When I dream, it is not just the separations in time that disappear, but also divisions between events, people and objects. My mind selects symbols from my life and arranges them into a narrative structure that best represents the emotions or events of that particular moment in time. The memories of my dreams dictate the initial appearance of symbols, but they were modified to some degree, and influenced by my emotions, childhood memories, and aesthetics as an artist. These became the vocabulary of symbols I captured in my paintings.

Symbols have no value until a meaning is attached to them. Every culture has its own set of symbols associated with different understandings and insights. People's perceptions of the same symbol depend on their individual or collective knowledge. Many symbols even communicate similar concepts for people from different cultures.

My first dreams haunted me; they came in the form of large predatory animals representing my illness. They were in profile, pitch black with sharp teeth and claws. Thrashing tails and open jaws accentuated the strength of these enormous reptiles. They were surrounded by crimson, with pools of light penetrating and reaching the surface. Small schools of circles moved in and out of my dreams, floating above and around the gators.

This dream brought back a memory of a boat trip through the Florida Everglades and my feelings of fear as we passed over the alligators' dark imposing bodies in the

water. Signs posted in red and black lining the shoreline contained frightening imagery, giving warnings about these dangerous animals.

The memory of this dream became my first paintings. I began by etching words of fear and anger into the first layers of acrylic paint that covered the wood panels. I've never done this before, but I found it to be very empowering. These inscriptions were later incorporated into my design or hidden by additional surface applications. Random mark making into the top layers represented the confusion and memory loss that I was struggling with on a daily basis (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Is Anyone Listening* (detail)

I created a large stencil of the gator to represent how my illness dominated both my dreams and my life. Using the same stencil supplied balance and the stark black against the background brought contrast to my composition. The central yellow areas represent those moments when I forget about being ill (Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Is Anyone Listening* (detail)

I identify the circles in my paintings as “Alvelo” marks, after alveoli, which are the small air clusters of cells in the lung that expand and contract as air is inhaled or exhaled.<sup>2</sup> They range from the smallest ones, “Restricted Alvelos,” which were the moments when I received bad news and felt I was submerged under water and unable to catch my breath, to large colorful “Free Alvelos,” rising to the surface teaching me how

---

<sup>2</sup> “Definition of Alveoli”, 2 January 2016,  
<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=2212>

to breathe again. They vary in size and are carried with the currents, some floating to the surface of the water as my symbol for survival, while others recede with my fears of the unknown.

Clusters of dots represent the joy my children and family give me. They are arranged into circles to represent our unending love and support for one another. I identify this symbol as “Tricotta” from the word *tricot*, meaning the process of forming tightly woven fabrics by interlocking loops.

As I was working on these paintings, I started to have nightmares about snakes; they appeared pure black without skin. I drew and sketched larger-than-life snakes intertwined. They had large heads and slender bodies. There was not enough space around them; with hardly any negative space, I felt that the composition was weak. I started the paintings over, stripping the skins and adding deep dark purples and rich reds. The bones were too stark, the background too dark and the reds too flat. I painted over them again, reducing the five snakes down to three with more robust bodies.

I could see the imagery from my dreams in my mind, but I was having a difficult time transposing them onto my painted surfaces. The snakes were too large and the composition wasn’t working. I seemed to be more fearful of the snakes than the gators. Have I accepted my disease but not the pain associated with it? After my third attempt I abandoned these paintings.

As I finished my medical treatments, claws and teeth were replaced with a solitary image of the gator seen from above, quietly resting. His pose might be considered a passive stance, but as with all predatory animals, it was waiting for the opportunity to

strike, without warning. Even though the deep water concealed most of his body, the head and tail of this reptile still dwarfed the large fish gliding nearby.

Schools of fish filled this painting, representing the doctors and nurses that floated in and out of my life. Some were just shadows or silhouettes that came in the middle of the night or drifted out of sight as the anesthesia took effect, while others were brightly lit under the florescent lights of doctors' offices and recovery rooms. I don't remember particular faces, but many brought peace and calmness to the situation I was facing. The fish closer to the surface of the water represent the individuals who were invested in my well-being (Figure 4). Others were stressful to work with; they didn't listen. Unfriendly and uncaring, they are the darker fish, hiding in the shadows and submerged deeper in the painting (Figure 3).



Figure 4. *Light of Day* (detail)



Figure 3. *Light of Day* (detail)

As I regained my strength, colors began to lighten into softer hues and imagery of regrowth began appearing in the panel below the resting gator. I cut new stencils for the rocks and foliage. I chose relaxing blues and greens and warm oranges to contrast with the deep hues of the water (Figure 5).



Figure 5. *Light of Day* (detail)

In the panel above the gator, cool hues lighten and restricted rivers dance and rise to the surface of the water (Figure 6). The colors I used came from my memories of playing in the clear turquoise waters of the Gulf of Mexico while I listened to the sounds of the ocean waves on the beach. Floating in the warm gulf waters gave me a feeling of security and comfort. Removing the top layers of the wet paint created the gentle movement of the water, bending and curving in space. This panel represents coming up



for air and the completion of the medical treatments.

Eventually, the fish were replaced with larger sea creatures that took control, pushing my fears even farther away. They represented the unending support of my husband and my mom. Even though they were there from the moment I received my

Figure 6. *Light of Day* (detail)

until recently.

I intended for these new paintings to be bright and incorporate my newest stencils, but I got caught up trying to use hues of browns and gold (Figure 7). The more I



experimented and worked, the muddier it got. I over sanded it and actually brought it all the way back to the wood in some areas. These were the pieces I was looking forward to creating the most and there they sat, a big muddy mess. I repainted the turtles and began layering brighter colors on top hoping to show greater depth. I still wasn't happy with the direction this painting was headed. It didn't match what I remembered in my dreams.



Figure 7

Around this time I began creating a painting, representing the animals only by their movements and textures. I started creating abstract symbols of the turtle shell, textures of the gator skin and movements of the female turtles as they use their flippers to pull themselves across the beach. I've always been amazed that the females return to the same beaches where they were born to lay their eggs. I tried putting some of this imagery into this painting, but it didn't work. I sanded the boards down and started over. I liked the layout, the turtle, swirls, and plant stencils, but I struggled with the colors.

One afternoon I painted the entire piece with rich blues and violets. How liberating that felt! I made intentional marks in the paint as I layered my colors. The background became rich with printed patterns of fish scales, gator skin, and swirling water. Strong vertical stripes of deep reds cut the picture planes in half, resembling the large scars that now mark my body (Figure 8).



Figure 8. *Facing Fears* (in progress)

Red is an emotionally charged color and in many of my dreams it was overpowering and aggressive, representing pain, anger, and fear. On the other hand, the energy of red combined with yellow represented encouragement, happiness, and endurance. My color choices were intended to evoke emotions and highlight the most important elements of my designs.

New imagery surfaced as I worked and I realized at that moment that I wasn't ready to paint the safety the sea turtles represented. I still had pent up emotions and fears



about what this disease has taken away from me. I created more stencils and found ways of printing them to show movement.

Revising was done throughout the creative process; the strong upward curve in the left panel (Figure 8) was eventually removed so it wouldn't take away from the vertical movement I wanted to achieve. The turtle shell and gator texture stencils were repeated to show the directions and tracks made by these animals. Bright orange egg shapes multiplied across the painting, representing the generations of nurturing women being either directly or indirectly affected by this disease (Figure 9).



Figure 9. *Facing Fears* (in progress)

After I worked on the abstract painting it was time to return to the sea turtles, this time on new boards. They started the same way all of my paintings began, with layers of gesso, paint, and intentional mark making; this time the words I wrote were more

uplifting and hopeful. Spaces around the words were filled with swirls and spirals mimicking the movements of the water.

Rich patterns and surface designs dominate these paintings with colors undulating in intervals, rolling and moving with the current. Delicate pastel-colored aquatic plants grow and bloom, while sea turtles drift above (Figure 10). These agile swimmers glide effortlessly across the composition propelled by their flippers. They reminded me of joyful times with my family in the ocean and the endless support from my husband and my mom. Unlike land turtles that hide inside their shells, sea turtles face their challenges head on. They helped me accomplish everything that I couldn't do for myself.



Figure 10. *Catching My Breath* (detail)

I limited the plant life to my tallest, vertical stencil and used rays of light penetrating through the layers of paint to enhance the depth and translucent qualities of the water. Light guides me on my journey, just as the moonlight guides newly hatched turtles over the sand to the ocean. Swirls were hand-painted and stenciled into the layers of the paint sharing my feelings of hope and joy.

Since my first initial gator paintings, water has been a dominant presence in all my dreams and in my paintings. Natural flowing rhythms can be seen in the ocean waves, bringing me back to my childhood memories of better times.

It was time to try to tackle the snake paintings that I had started and painted over numerous times. These animals represent the operations, stitches and pain that I have faced. I thought those fears were beginning to fade, but they all surfaced again with abnormalities found on an x-ray. Walls immediately went up and my mind began to shut down, which is my defense mechanism. If I didn't think about it, and I didn't paint it, then I didn't have to face it.

Test results came back negative and my dreams exploded with layers of bright oranges and yellows. Blue shapes floated effortlessly above the background, evoking feelings of peace and relaxation. I found myself reaching for the snake scale stencils I had previously cut but never used. This time I saw them as patterns representing opportunities.

I began experimenting with acrylic gel mediums. Adding them to my paint enabled me to create raised elements that mimicked suspended Free Alvelos forms from my dreams (Figure 11). I enjoyed the freedom these paintings gave me; the imagery came

to me easily, and I looked forward to working on them. In this painting, the snake scale stencil lost all of its intended meaning.



Figure 11. Detail of raised features

Once I completed the paintings, my dreams changed. They became filled with large menacing snakes haunting me again. These serpents represented the surgeries I faced, and the pain I had endured. This time the serpents had massive heads and larger bodies covered in diamond and cross-band designs (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Since they were intertwined, it was difficult to determine how many there were. As they slowly constricted, some of their scales caught the light, reflecting iridescent patterns. Their movements revealed large sections of their massive bodies stripped away, exposing their vertebrae and ribs. They were surrounded by pieces of their shedding skins and torn flesh. Did they represent my scars?

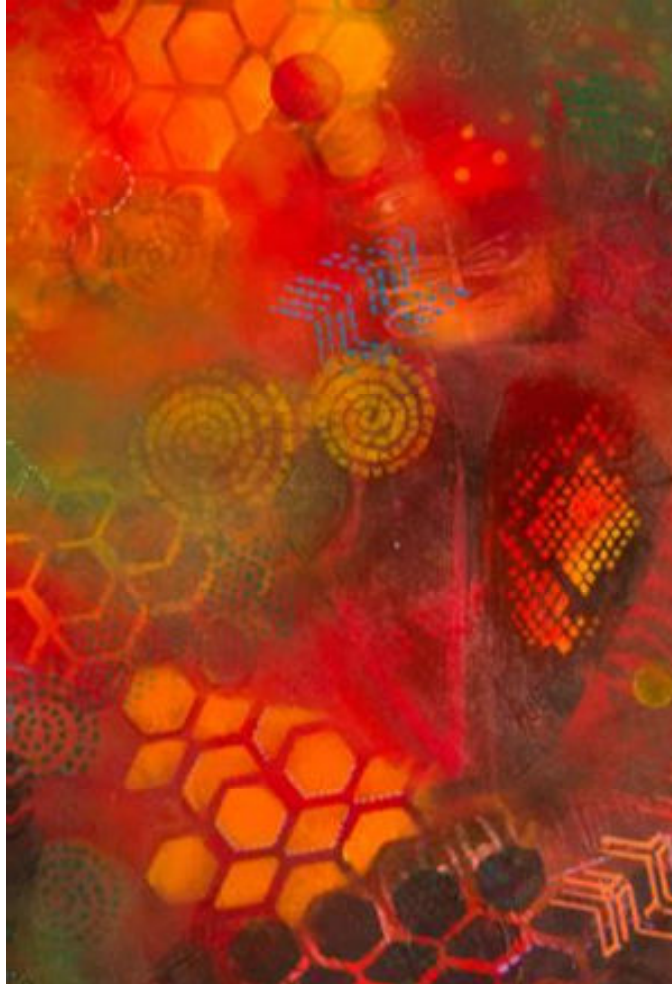


Figure 12. *Cutting Wound* (detail)

I created numerous stencils to recreate the scales, flesh, and bones of the snakes. I found that a brayer was a useful tool to create a consistent width of the serpents' bodies. The dominant rich reds were toned down and balanced with the introduction of greens and blues. I again struggled with these paintings, but felt relieved and content when I completed them.

All of the raw images from my dreams are deeply reflective and informative. Each of them holds the purity and intention of a moment in time captured by a dream. After documenting the memories of these symbols in my sketchbook, I worked diligently until I was satisfied with the form and shape of each, making sure they conveyed my

intent. Understanding the meaning behind the symbols in my paintings will allow viewers a greater insight into my personal journey.

### **Chapter 3: The Creative Process**

The images conjured during this period of my life combined incongruent visual images and specific color palettes to express my emotions, fears and dreams. Mark making and symbols from my dreams are embedded in the layers of my paintings and required extensive experimentation with traditional and non-traditional tools to achieve the desirable outcomes. Additive and subtractive techniques were also employed because these best reflected how my dreams moved through space, building and then receding, revealing my unconscious and indirect associations with my present and past memories.

I used wooden skewers to etch words into the first layer of paint; these were often hidden by additional surface applications. This type of mark making is known as sgraffito, which comes from the Italian word sgraffire, which means, “to scratch”. By layering a dark hue on top of a dried lighter or complementary base coat and dragging a tool across a surface I was able to remove the top layer of paint revealing the color below. The random marks represent the confusion and memory loss that I struggle with on a daily basis.

The movements of the waves were scraped into the surface of the paint using combs that I created. Cutting slits into the edges of cardboard enabled me to experiment with tooth placement and vary my mark making. I felt they captured the fluid movements of the water and allowed me to make multiple waves and curves with a single stroke.

The eraser end of a new pencil, both ends of a paintbrush, wooden skewers, and Q-tips were used to create my Alvelo marks. Using these various tools and applying varying pressure, increased or decreased the diameter of the circles. Rings resulted when

too much pressure was applied. Another way I varied the dots was to let the initial paint dry and print smaller circles on top.

I created stencils because of their ability to produce the same image, which enabled me to reconstruct the repetitive imagery documented in my dreams. Printing the images allowed me the opportunity to plan out different compositions and to select the most interesting one to use. I found this to be a very productive system because it allowed me to evaluate different compositions in a short period of time. If the placement didn't work, I am able to scrub the image off the surface before it dries.

I quickly discovered that working on canvas and canvas boards would not produce clean, crisp prints. After some experimentation, I began working on wood surfaces that were sanded and primed numerous times. I discovered that I could create smoother primed surfaces by applying the gesso with a rubber brayer instead of a traditional brush. A brayer is usually used to mix and apply inks for printing, but I found it made a wonderful painting tool. It allowed me to distribute and overlap large areas of colors quickly and evenly.

Since this was the first time I had created my own stencils, I experienced a lot of trial and error. Cutting stencils with an X-acto blade was labor intensive and time consuming; eventually the blade was replaced with an electric stencil cutter, and cardboard was replaced with plastic stencil film. This decreased the time it took to create each stencil, and allowed me to create more precise and detailed designs.

Common uses for stencils are for home decorating, creating signs, and making crafts. Prefabricated stencil templates are available at most crafts stores. They are usually applied onto objects or walls of a home to add visual interest. Stencil brushes were used



to apply the pigment through the holes in the stencil. A stencil brush is a specialist brush with short, firmly packed bristles that are all the same length. The advantage over a normal paintbrush is that the bristles are designed to reduce the chances of getting paint under the edge of the stencil.

I tried using stencil brushes to apply the paint but didn't like the stippled effect they created. Using a dabber sponge gave me the ability to apply even layers of paint and create clearer prints. Mixing only a drop or two of water with my paint kept my sponges moist and reduced the chance of getting pigment under the edges of the stencils. After the painted areas dried, I used fine sandpaper to smooth down sharp and raised areas.

Concurrently, I experimented with different techniques to create the illusion of depth in my paintings. Along with overlapping my images, I also experimented with layering paint to build up areas and sandpaper and wet sponges to remove or reduce the pigments in others. I also adjusted the paint's transparency to lighten and tone down areas.

While creating and exploring, many feelings and emotions surfaced organically from the artistic process. This sometimes influenced my color choices; other times my dreams and childhood memories dictated these decisions.

## Chapter 4: Process Connections

“When I pick up my brush, I think of my dreams, about the dream of the sun, moon, and morning star.”<sup>3</sup>

– Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri

Since the earliest markings, artists have grappled with the realm between reality and dreams. Some of the earliest evidence of human art suggests that people communicated with painted and stenciled images. These earliest examples are found in Paleolithic caves dating from as early as 30,000 BCE to 9,000 BCE. They were mostly hand stencils, created by blowing pigment over a hand held against a wall. Early humans used various natural materials, found in diverse environments around the world, to share their stories. These early artists also extended the range of raw materials that could be used for making tools for the application of pigments. Many of these images, stories, and techniques have been handed down and are still evident in artwork today.

Artists who translate their dreams, visions, and stories into symbols have informed this study. Inspiration also came from individual artists using traditional cultural tools and contemporary artists using nontraditional tools to create their paintings. These include Surrealist artists Giorgio de Chirico and Yves Tanguy; Australian Aboriginal painters Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Charlie Matjuwi, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, and Tim Leura Tjapaltjarri; and Banksy, a graffiti artist.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, movements such as Symbolism, Expressionism, and Modernism introduced dream imagery into the visual arts. Around that time, through his book, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, psychologist Sigmund Freud

---

<sup>3</sup> Bernice Geoffroy-Schneiter, *Primal Art: Native American, Eskimo and Aborigines*. (New York: Assouline Publishing, 2006), 372-373.

introduced the notion of the subconscious mind as a field of scientific inquiry.<sup>4</sup> It was Freud's theory that dreams were a product of wish fulfillment and were a reflection of our deepest desires, often traced to our childhood. A key feature in Freud's dream theory was his claim that dreams are visual and come from the primitive parts of the brain.<sup>5</sup>

Freud greatly influenced the 20th-century artists with a focus on the unconscious as a creative tool. Surrealists became deeply interested in interpreting dreams as conduits for hidden feelings and desires. They created compelling imagery and embraced Freud's theories that creativity born from the subconscious mind was more genuine and powerful than the conscious.<sup>6</sup>

Carl Jung was a student of Freud's who later disagreed with many of his teacher's theories. Where Freud thought that dreams represented those unfulfilled wishes, Jung believed that dreams were messages to help one deal with past and present dilemmas to resolve the most inner conflicts.<sup>7</sup>

Surrealists rebelled against the constraints of nature and the rules of reality. They preferred figurative and occasionally absurd subject matter to the imitations of reality. Many created art that combined exaggeration and distortion of different elements in their work. Some embodied sensual and disturbing images to express extreme emotions conceived from their dreams and imagination.

---

<sup>4</sup> "Tapping the Subconscious: Automatism and Dreams," 14 June 2015, [http://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/themes/surrealism/tapping-the-subconscious-automatism-and-dreams](http://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/themes/surrealism/tapping-the-subconscious-automatism-and-dreams)>

<sup>5</sup> Lynn Gamwell, ed. *Dreams 1900-2000: Science, Art and the Unconscious Mind*. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000, 20.

<sup>6</sup> Lucien Morgan, *Dreams and Symbols*. (New York: Todtri Productions Limited, 1996), 22-29.

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, 30-32.

Giorgio de Chirico painted scenes of classical architecture with exaggerated perspectives and empty spaces. He depicted cities as empty backdrops, creating eerily empty scenes similar to those encountered in dreams. In paintings such as *The Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* (1914), he continued to paint scenes of classical architecture and town squares, inhabited only by one or two figures, a statue, and distorted perspective. I am drawn to his creative process of combining childhood memories of Greece in his paintings, which are evident in paintings such as *Enigma of an Autumn Afternoon* (1910). I fuse my own nostalgic memories from family vacations, recalling the brilliant colors of the water and the repetitive markings on the sand with symbolism from my dreams as a retreat from my reality.<sup>8</sup>

Yves Tanguy's paintings have a unique, immediately recognizable style of nonfigurative surrealism. Their limited palettes stretching from the foreground to the far horizon reminds me of my memories of the endless ocean and vast beaches of Florida. His work inspired some of the initial backgrounds of my paintings, including the occasional layering of contrasting colors where my dream images and memories float on deserted seascapes.<sup>9</sup>

When I started looking at aboriginal artists, I was instantly attracted to the paintings created by Emily Kame Kngwarreye, an Australian Aboriginal artist from the Utopia community in the Northern Territory of Australia. I felt connected to her bright, playful mark making used in *Earth's Creation* (1994), a massive painting created during her Colorist phase. It reflects her childhood memories of new life in the bush after the

---

<sup>8</sup> "Giorgio de Chirico Biography: Painter, Writer (1888–1978)," 29 January 2016, <http://www.biography.com/people/giorgio-de-chirico-9246949>

<sup>9</sup> "Yves Tanguy 1900–1955," 30 January 2016, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/yves-tanguy-2023>

first spring rains.<sup>10</sup> Her palette influenced some of the colors of rebirth in my turtle painting.

There are many similarities in our art, and as I researched I was not surprised that we both had backgrounds in textile arts, which might explain the rich layers of patterns that our works share. Another resemblance was the motif of repeated circles that fill large areas of the painted surfaces.

*Earth's Creation* demonstrates her powerful color compositions derived from pushing paint-loaded shaving brushes into the canvas. This technique produces characteristically large smudged dots, which became known as Dub Dub.<sup>11</sup> Whereas some of her dots fuse together and overlap into linear strokes and represent rivers and terrain, mine remain isolated or grouped to represent my breath.

Charlie Matjuwi's painting *Burarrwanga's Baru – Crocodile Dreaming* (1990) demonstrates the fine parallel lines of the rarrk patterning, which is traditionally used for ceremonial painting. Rarrk is a painting style that features intricate designs created through the use of crosshatching. The patterns of line are believed to possess the power associated with the story or subject conveyed in the painting.<sup>12</sup>

These paintings were usually created on dried bark or paper using brushes made by binding twigs, bundles of human hair, or grasses together to form the bristles.<sup>13</sup> Matjuwi creates these fine lines with amazing accuracy, using a paintbrush made from

---

<sup>10</sup> "The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, 2003-2015," 14 July 2015, [http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/utopia\\_the\\_genius\\_of\\_emily\\_kame\\_kngwarreye/colourism](http://www.nma.gov.au/exhibitions/utopia_the_genius_of_emily_kame_kngwarreye/colourism)

<sup>11</sup> "Traditional Aboriginal Painting Methods," 14 July 2015, <https://www.aboriginalartonline.com/methods/methods.php>

<sup>12</sup> "Traditional Aboriginal Painting Methods," 12 July 2015, <https://www.aboriginalartonline.com/methods/methods.php>

<sup>13</sup> Wally Caruana, *Aboriginal Art*. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 24-25.

the stem of a reed with hair-like bristles to apply acrylic with natural pigment on canvas. The rarrk designs found in Matjuwi's paintings influenced the more structured and stylized appearance rendered in my paintings of alligators.

Another type of painting style created on bark is x-ray. *Kundaagi—Red Plains Kangaroo* (1962), created by Kuninjku Yirawala, features a spirit standing next to a large kangaroo. The figures are painted in profile with the intricate geometric rarrk patterning and sacred clan designs of the Kuninjku to indicate the religious nature of the subject. The internal organs of the kangaroo and spirit are visible and denote the aboriginals' ongoing relationships with natural and the supernatural worlds.<sup>14</sup>

The "X-ray" tradition in Aboriginal art is thought to have developed around 2000 B.C. and continues to the present day. This style depicts animals or human figures with some visible internal organs and bone structures. X-ray art includes sacred images of ancestral supernatural beings and secular works.<sup>15</sup> Even though I was aware of this type of imagery, it didn't occur to me that my dreams of the snakes, with their skins stripped back revealing bones, had a striking resemblance to these paintings.

The Tjapaltjarri brothers are two of the most famous Western Desert artists. Clifford Possum and Tim Leura produce Dreamtime paintings of muted colors on huge canvases that symbolize dreaming tracks, humans and animals alike. The striking earth tones used in *Dingo Dreaming* (1990) by Clifford Possum resonated with me and influenced some of my first color choices.<sup>16</sup> Tjapaltjarri paintings are not only created as

---

<sup>14</sup> Anne Wallace Sharp, *Australia*. (San Diego, Lucent Books, Inc., 2003), 45.

<sup>15</sup> A.P. Elkin, *The Australia Aboriginals*. (New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1964), 247.

<sup>16</sup> "Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri: Dingo Dreaming," 2 October 2015, <http://gallery.aboriginalartdirectory.com/aboriginal-art/clifford-possum-tjapaltjarri/dingo-dreaming.php>

art forms, they are also used to teach the stories of their ancestors. Each conveys symbols of the principles from Dreamtime.<sup>17</sup>

Aboriginal art has evolved from cave paintings to sacred ground art to commercially produced acrylic paintings. Artists soon realized the risk of revealing these images to the world and began covering and abstracting their designs with dots.<sup>18</sup> Sticks were used to apply the paint in neatly executed patterns and rows that covered the entire canvas. Their paintings are icons of place, identity and origin, and archives of ancestral stories.

This research enhanced my understanding of the purpose and tools used to create the dots and rarrk marks. I also learned about the aesthetic qualities and reasons associated with concealing and revealing some of the imagery. The significance of these hidden and visible elements spoke to me and is aligned with the value I place on my symbols and inscriptions.

I felt it was also important that I researched artists who used stencils. I discovered that the people of the Fiji Islands, who cut holes into leaves, created some of the first stencils and forced vegetable dyes through the openings onto their bark cloth.<sup>19</sup> Today, stencils are very popular with graffiti artists around the world. The most recognized contemporary street artist is Banksy. He meticulously cuts out the desired designs from cardboard with great detail and transfers them onto surfaces using spray paint. Unlike

---

<sup>17</sup> “Aboriginal Dot Paintings,” 21 June 2015, <http://www.aboriginalartstore.com.au/aboriginal-art-culture/aboriginal-art/aboriginal-dot-paintings/>

<sup>18</sup> “Are Dot Paintings Traditional Aboriginal Art?” 15 July 2015, <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/arts/are-dot-paintings-traditional-aboriginal-art#axzz3iwgw4b00>

<sup>19</sup> “History of Stenciling,” 10 February 2015, <http://www.royaldesignstudio.com/blogs/stenciling-tips/3763542-history-of-stenciling>

tagging, Banksy's art is seen as genuine artwork with its emphasis on color and composition. Many of his pieces are executed using only black or a second color, such as *Swinger* (2008), depicting a child swinging on a buoy.<sup>20</sup> I follow Banksy's aesthetic for creating clean stenciled images and rendering them for easy readability, which can be seen in my stencils of the alligators and turtles.

The art that appeals to me has never been just a pretty picture. It needs to engage me by supplying a new perspective, an interesting story, or an unusual technique. My paintings come from internal impulses, such as my memories and dreams, and are rendered for public display. It is my intent that my paintings communicate, challenge, and invite further exploration.

---

<sup>20</sup> "Banksy: The Artist," 3 February 2015, <http://the-artists.org/artist/Banksy>



## **Chapter 5: Significance of the Study**

This study presents how images documented from dreams can be used to inspire and transmit meaning to others in a public venue. The intent of my paintings is to transport viewers into another realm that transcends the normal human experiences. I fuse nontraditional methods of paint application utilized by early artists with contemporary mediums and thought processes. My finished paintings can be viewed in the Appendix section of this paper. It is my hope that the creation of my paintings inspire other artists to move beyond paintbrushes and explore other tools to apply pigments.

Sharing my story of survival through my symbols adds meaning to the wider context of visual literacy. I hope this study encourages others to document their journeys and find comfort in telling their own stories through art.

I plan on further developing my skills as an artist by continuing to explore different artists and cultures. One of the ways to grow as a painter is to be diverse in subject matter and techniques. In order to achieve this, I will try to take advantage of every opportunity to view, create, discuss and learn about painting. My inspirations may come again through my dreams or I may move on to other subjects that inspire me. I don't know what the future may hold for me, but I can't wait to find out.

## Bibliography

- Aboriginal Dot Paintings*. 2016. Central Art. Web. 21 June 2015.
- Alley, Ronald, Yves Tanguy 1900–1955. *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art Other than Works by British Artists, Tate Gallery and Sotheby Parke-Bernet, London 1981*, pp.712-3. Web. 30 January 2016.
- Are Dot Paintings Traditional Aboriginal Art?* 2015. Creative Spirits, Jens Korff. Web. 15 July 2015.
- Banksy: The Artist*. 2014. The-artists-org. Web. 3 February 2015.
- Caruana, Wally. *Aboriginal Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012. Print.
- Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri: Dingo Dreaming*. 2016. Central Art. Web. 2 October 2015.
- Definition of Alveoli*. 2016. MedicineNet, Inc. Web. 2 January 2016.
- Elkin, A.P. *The Australia Aborigines*. New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1964. Print.
- Gamwell, Lynn (ed). *Dreams 1900-2000: Science, Art and the Unconscious Mind*. New York: Cornell University Press, 2000. Print.
- Geoffroy-Schneiter, Bernice. *Primal Art: Native American, Eskimo and Aborigines*. New York: Assouline Publishing, 2006. Print.
- Giorgio de Chirico Biography: Painter, Writer (1888–1978)*. 2016. Bio. Web. 29 January 2016.
- History of Stenciling*. 2016. Royal Design Studio Stencils, Royal Design Studio. Web. 15 July 2015.
- Morgan, Lucien. *Dreams and Symbols: How to Understand the Meaning of Your Dreams*. New York: Todtri Productions Limited. 1996. Print.
- Sharp, Anne Wallace. *Australia*. San Diego: Lucent Books, Inc., 2003. Print.
- Tapping the Subconscious: Automatism and Dreams*. 2016. Museum of Modern Art. Web. 12 June 2015.

*Traditional Aboriginal Painting Methods*. 2008. Aboriginal Art Online.  
Web. 14 July 2015.

*Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, 2003-2015*. 2016. National  
Museum Australia. Web. 14 July 2015.

## Appendix



*Is Anyone Listening*



*Light of Day*





*Cutting Wounds*



*Catching My Breath*

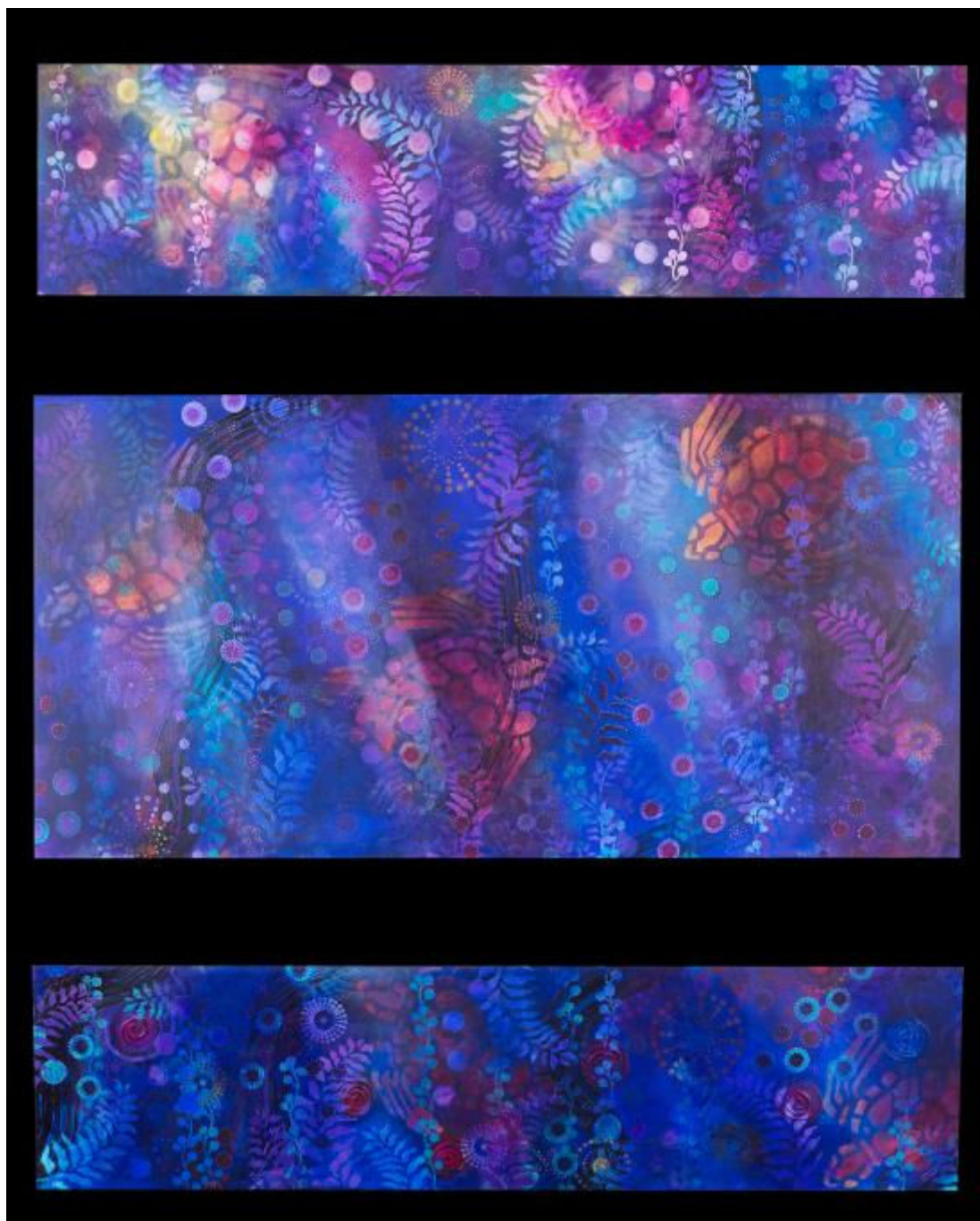


*More to Life*





*Facing Fears*



*Watching Over*