



EnSights

Resources for Tapping into Our Inner Wisdom

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HARNESSING THE POWER OF YOUR ART

As artists, we strive to create work from a deep place in ourselves. Although we don't always get there, our desire to do so allows us access to what Carl Jung would call the collective unconscious. When we create at this mythic level, our work can be truly transformational both to ourselves as creators and to those who experience our art. Joseph Campbell would equate artmaking with dreaming. When we dream, we are reaching into the "deep dark ground that is the support of our conscious life." For the artist, creating is *our dreaming*. Granted, many of our art works are ordinary associations of our lived questions and concerns, but from time to time we tap into that "deep dark ground" creating work that is truly mythic, what I call, *Archetypal Art*.

The creative process is about bringing our inner world into the outer world. When we create in time and space, we project our dreams and visions as well as our fears and unresolved issues onto the screen of our work. Jung calls this a necessary, unconscious, and involuntary process by which we become our true self. As artists, then, we are in a unique position to use our creations to understand our own story and simultaneously tap into the universal story.

A STORY



I became aware of my own archetypal artwork in a most dramatic way. I was in the process of scripting a one-woman show based on the life of a twelfth century mystic, *Hildegard of Bingen*. One morning, I woke up from a powerful dream in which I had been told to paint. Although my training was in the arts—*theater and dance*—I had never really painted. Believing that there are no accidents, I took the morning off to buy art supplies. What evolved from that first step into the unknown were a series of five large (6'x4' Mixed Media on Paper) paintings that changed my life.

I didn't know how to even start a painting at the time. I knew how to use drawing media, so most of this work and the others that followed were created first with pencil colors, later sealed with acrylic medium. Each portion of this one and each of the successive paintings came in its own time, often with weeks of waiting in between.

When **Wisdom Woman** was complete, I sensed that this one painting was part of a series of paintings, the last of five. The paintings along with the script and character of Hildegard that I had been writing, gives form to my own journey toward wholeness, toward balance. Together they are both sign posts marking the way I have come and indicators pointing the way I need yet to go.

I have made a lot of art since 1989. Very few of these works carry that kind of transformative power; however, because they appear at pivotal times in my life, these paintings, or plays or sculptures are thresholds for amazing self-discoveries that often hold the key to new directions in both my life and my work. Over the years I have used a variety of processes to identify my archetypal artworks and deconstruct the richness of their symbolic meaning. If you are interested in harnessing the life changing power of your art, here are a few steps to get you started.

Finding Your Archetypal Artworks

First, you will need to identify your archetypal artworks. Set aside quiet time for yourself, armed with a journal and a source of images of your work. Archetypal art doesn't have to be your best work or even recent work. In fact, some of my most transformative pieces aren't even finished. The work can be current or sold, available to you in image or memory. I no longer had a slide of a work that I remembered as emotionally significant. The image, though, was clear in my mind, so I reconstructed it. Although the image changed some in the reconstruction, it still had an ability to provide insight.

Begin a slow shuffle through your work in no particular order. When you find a work that has an interior pull, set it to one side. If your head gets involved in the selection process, you will probably choose work that has more to do with your career than your life. Instead, stay with your intuition. Don't make this either an exhaustive or a definitive process. You will find that artworks, like puzzle pieces, will continue to be discovered over time as you fit them into your story. If you select five images of work that has "soul energy" you have enough material for a year of inner work.



Secondly, place the images in a format that is easy and portable.

I like to glue images of my archetypal art onto cards, some artists arrange their images in a special journal, others work with images digitally from an online library.

Unlocking the Power in Your Work

The next step is to unlock the power of your work. When approaching a new image, I often use a simple TTAQ form used in dream interpretation. After I quiet my spirit so that I can listen, I first look

“with fresh eyes” at the image and then give it a new title with the first words that come to my head. Write the new title in your journal. (Note: The key to working this way is to honor whatever comes to your mind without needing to make “it right” or “make sense.”)

I next “remember” the experience of making the work and/or any life circumstances that I associate with its creation. I am not concerned with accuracy; I am looking for the themes that might have been playing out in my life and work at the time. Again, I write the first words that come to my mind whether they make sense in this moment or not.

Returning to the image, I attempt to name the emotions that come to me...how I am affected, touched or moved by the image. Don't be surprised if you discover several feelings that arise as you re-experience your work in this way.

The last, Q, stands for Question. I always find something puzzling, mysterious, concerning or intriguing about the image or a section of the painting that inspires a question. It is the question that often becomes my path forward. If several questions come to mind, write them all. Usually, one question will become more significant than all the others. Answer the question in writing from the perspective of your work. Sometimes, the question needs to percolate. I often place my image in a prominent place in my studio so that I will see it at odd moments during the day. When I feel on the verge of an answer, I imagine myself a scribe, capturing the painting's response.

You can follow up any of the TTAQ insights with journaling to tease out additional information. Don't be surprised if this process feels awkward or foreign at first. When you consistently take time to allow your art to speak to you, I suspect you will discover, like I have, that there is an amazing source of wisdom just the other side of your brush.

Wisdom Woman, the final painting in the series, is the image of what I understand as feminine spirituality. As the Grandmother among us, she incarnates true wisdom and authentic spirituality. Hildegard of Bingen is the embodiment of someone who has been true to herself as woman, to herself as artist, to herself as both human and divine.

“Ah,” says Hildegard in the play, “we so often fret because we must make our way through life by walking where there is no path. Yet, God with such humor, carves the image of each step onto our face. My face with its hills and valleys is the path. Here on my face is the proof that I have lived. Here is the proof that I have loved.”

Resources for Hildegard of Bingen

The Journal of Hildegard of Bingen, Inspired by a year in the life of the twelfth-century mystic. A Novel. Barbara Lachman 1993. Crown Publishing Group, New York.

Hildegard of Bingen, A Visionary Life. Sabina Flanagan. 1989 Routledge, London.

Illuminations of Hildegard of Bingen. Commentary by Matthew Fox, O.P. 1985 Bear and Company, Santa Fe, NM.