

ARTIST STATEMENT

Tanya Pixie Johnson

I am a painter, working in both oil and acrylic, and sometimes mixed media. My choice of surface varies: canvas, wood panels, steel, old doors and windows, road signs, walls.

There is much that informs my work in terms of intention, process and subject matter. My paintings are story tellers; they are a didactic narrative of perception, of how I relate to the world. I explore through colour, form and abstract form, representations of the dream, the vision, the thought, and the physicalness of being human.

The inspiration found in living rurally and close to the land, and forging bridges with indigenous people and ways, is juxtaposed (within myself and my work) with my perception of myself as a "scatterling". The identity I formed growing up as a white girl in a segregated and revolutionary society weaves with my identity as a South African artist and mother living on the opposite side of the planet.

The body of work with which I am currently engaged is entitled: "Lines in Blood and Milk". It is a deep exploration of my experiences, perceptions, visions, and teachings received while participating in traditional ceremonies of certain indigenous people of the Americas and of South Africa. The ceremonial experiences I have had on this soil overlay others, within me, of experiences of traditional ceremonies I have had in South Africa.

The concept of this series has gestated within me for a few years. The project has grown out of a previous body of paintings entitled: "Voices from the Rain Barrel", which was a personal, social, political, and spiritual exploration of the vital place held by water in the continuation of life on the planet.

I grew up in South Africa with my nanny, Nomobongo, of the Xhosa tribe, who is in the line of sangoma. My grandmother was a Christian Science practitioner (prayer and faith healer). She was exiled from Nazi Germany because of her Jewish blood, and found her home in Kenya, East Africa. I have experienced sangoma ceremonies in the hills, mountains, beaches and huts in South Africa. I have stayed in the sangoma cave and witnessed initiation, ritual animal sacrifice, ecstatic trance. I have partaken in medicine and muti (medicine) ways and had the bones read for me. My perception of ancestry and caretaking ancestral spirits has been shaped by these experiences and my 6 generations of South African blood.

This is juxtaposed with my discovery of North and South American medicine ways. The ceremonies in which I have participated on this continent involve similar aspects such as devotional song, prayer, instruments and music making, endurance, sacrament, surrender, intent, struggle, sacrifice, and moments of bliss and gleaning. As would be expected, however, each ceremony has its own protocol, its own intention, and its own cultural history. From fasting and looking for a vision, to all night dance and

prayer ceremonies. From the sweatlodge to the sacred yuwipi. From the sundance to ceremonies held by entheogenic practitioners. Each time I put myself in line with any of these teachings, I am brought closer to the spirit within, to an understanding of creation and my place in it.

Furthermore, my look to Eastern ways, an 18 year yoga practice, being with a guru in her ashram, and a full circle journey to study the teachings of Jesus and other mystics, has shaped my growth and spiritual understandings.

The paintings in this series are not an illustration of the experiences. They are a response to them, an attempt to understand the information and images received on the journey.

The layering of perception is evoked by the multiple layering of paint used in resolving each piece. The paintings are characterized by a vibrant and instinctive employment of colour and a very personal alphabet of symbols.

The work explores light and shadow, how light illuminates the subject, be it figurative, abstract, land or dreamscape. I seek to portray light through colour, while allowing the paint to hold its integrity and maintain an element of self-consciousness of itself as paint (as seen in the brushwork, paint drips etc.). Metaphorically, the representation of light and dark is an important aspect of my work.

A thread that runs through the work is an awareness of the superimpositions of the dream, the visionary and the waking consciousnesses on each other.

My research takes me around the globe, and sometimes beyond the borders of my body. I find pertinent information in my childhood memories, dreams, the landscape and in my relationship with humans, plants, animals and birds.

It is my intention as an artist to maintain an authenticity in my work. The most successful paintings are created when my faith in my process of art, and my role as artist, is most clear. I am intrigued by the unseen and seek to render that which is invisible through paint and brushwork.