

PROJECT STATEMENT

Tanya Pixie Johnson

The title of the body of work that I am proposing to exhibit is "Lines in Blood and Milk".

The paintings are a tracing of bloodlines and a personal unraveling of ancestry and "raison d'etre". This is a deeply spiritual exploration on many levels: through intention, dream, ceremony and paint, of my journey towards source.

The work portrays a quest from my earliest memories. A quest that has taken me from South African sangoma (traditional spiritual healer) ceremonies, to living in Krishna temples and yoga ashrams, to the shores of North and South America, and a discovery and immersion in certain medicine ceremonial ways.

I propose to exhibit 49 paintings. I work in both acrylic and oil. Some of the paintings are resolved with additional materials: wax, crayon, glazes, chalk, and elements of collage.

Some of the pieces include text. Words that, I feel, do not explain the layers of meaning, but potentially allow the viewer another doorway of perception. Sometimes the words are broken down and re-arranged to provide a deeper understanding of how and why they might apply to, and support the subject matter of the work. For instance "Potent (ial) ". This word exists in a painting, with its layering of meaning and paint, with its symbology and seemingly disparate images. It makes reference to the black panther (which in turn makes reference to the high sangomas in Africa, the blue panthers). The black panther appeared to me in a vision, in a vast white space. The painting evolved in the spring and in a time of great and palpable potency-both in the awakening of the landscape, and within myself.

I am excited by language(s), by symbols that represent meaning, and by the formal aspects of letters and words: the shapes, how they exist in the composition, the spaces created by their rendering. Sometimes I will borrow and use words from other languages if appropriate to an individual piece.

I propose, also, to display certain writings and drawings that are intrinsic to the theme. These would be framed alongside paintings, or sketchbooks mounted open by their covers with copper wire, allowing the viewer to peruse the pages. These books are filled with writing, much of it in the form of streams of consciousness, and drawings. These books could also be displayed on plinths. I feel that, presented thoughtfully, these would be pieces of art in themselves. I am intrigued by the interaction of word and image.

The body of paintings will be supported by a soundscape. There will be a continual stream of sound (some of it very subtle as to be almost silent) that I have "envisioned", or heard with a "3rd ear". This will be created in collaboration with a sound artist (as yet not chosen). The sounds might include bird calls, ceremonial song, chanting, mantras, rattles, drumming, heartbeats, footfalls, the sounds of water, wind, waves, my

mother's voice, my grandmother praying, women weeping, African voices, and my children singing. I concede that these are points of departure that will grow into a stream of sound in the hands of the sound artist. I intend to record sound on my return to South Africa this winter.

I am interested in displaying this work in Gallery A.

I grew up in South Africa, pre-revolution, in a segregated and violent society, but found my way to experience certain traditional sacred ceremonies. I have participated in sangoma ceremonies and witnessed initiation, ritual animal sacrifice and ecstatic trance. I have had the bones read for me by sangomas, and have friends who have twaza (been initiated into sangoma). My perception of ancestry and caretaking ancestral spirits has been shaped by being a white African.

This is juxtaposed in my life and work with my discovery of North and South American medicine ways. Although each ceremony has its own protocol and cultural history, similar aspects are apparent: devotional song, instruments and music making, endurance, visionary states and transformation. In terms of my experience (and I am no more than a baby, metaphorically speaking), each prayer, each ceremony is a step towards understanding the sacred.

The paintings and drawings are not an illustration of these experiences; they are an attempt, rather, at getting out of my own way enough to allow the teachings, visions and information received, to find form through the medium of paint.

I employ a personal symbolic language. The symbols are hooks on which meaning is hung. The process of executing these pieces is as much a part of the journey as any of the afore-mentioned (or unmentioned) experiences; as is the intention to embark upon the series.

The paintings offer signposts along a road that is continuous. I am particularly aware of questions of appropriation, and as such, this is not a didactic portrayal of traditional ceremonies, but a truthful exploration of ceremonial ways, creation, and the song for its continuation, through a human perception, in the form of paint and image.