

ISSUE 33

CADUCEUS

HEALING INTO WHOLENESS



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£2.75 \$4.50

the healing power of mask-making



KATHERYN TRENSHAW

'Treat the mask with reverence, for it is alive. Putting on the mask, I enter sacred space. I walk past the boundaries of this daily world into a new land of movement and change. Wearing the mask, voice, vision, and body change as I meet and enter the mask's form, touching the sky with wings of spirit. Removing the mask, I am changed, I am new.'

Michael Babcock

Masks: embracing fear and creating protection

We all wear masks. Our masks conceal as well as reveal. Sometimes we create masks as disguises and decoys as well as for protection or to make a statement. They reveal the hidden and transform the ordinary. They have always been a medium for cultural expression, used in ceremonies to celebrate significant events of human life: birth, coming of age, marriage, death. And what has been revealed can heal. It is the power of the mask as a transformative symbol that underlies my work. The energy of Fear, Anger, Joy, Power can all be focused into a mask. Clay, cloth, feathers, symbols, textures all become expressions of these feelings. This process can liberate bits of us simply by giving it 'permission' to surface and be explored. The art of mask making becomes an alchemical vehicle of transformation and healing. My work as a therapist and workshop leader began in earnest out of my own process of healing. I have academic training in both psychology and fine art. But my real 'training,' and what I draw from the most profoundly, is my life and its ancient connection to Earth wisdom and magic of long ago.

In January of 1989 I was deeply involved in the process of healing, and dealing with my own experience of being sexually abused as a child. In a turning-point session with my therapist, she said, 'Katheryn, you are an artist, why don't you put some of these feelings into your work?' That was the beginning of *Breaking the*

Breaking the Silence

Katheryn Trenshaw is an artist and psychotherapist. While healing her own childhood history of abuse, she has discovered the power of the mask for healing and transformation.

Silence. What I thought would be a year-long series of art exhibits has become my life's work. The *Breaking the Silence* Project consists of an art exhibit along with slide lectures and workshops that have evolved from it. The exhibit is a 100 piece series of raku-fired ceramic masks and paintings that are touring internationally. This art depicts the devastating and insidious effects of child sexual abuse, as well as the struggle toward growth and wholeness that are possible with psychological healing. Some pieces within the exhibit express the fear, frustration, denial, secrecy, anger, rage and guilt of experiencing the sexual abuse. Other reflect a renewed sense of personal power and comfort within one's body. And still others are symbols of protection and wisdom and inner strength. The works invite the viewer to feel the full range of emotions, to be with them, befriend them, spiral with them and eventually move beyond the role of survivor and become a thriver.

Creative process/healing process

Art, when it is a spiritual expression evoked from the body's experience, is both high art and the most profound healing path I have discovered. When I began to make the masks, I would sit with a ball of clay. Instead of carefully creating sketches and studies, I would simply focus in my body, in my belly especially, on the emotion at hand or on the phase I was experiencing, and invite the image to come. The pieces that are the most powerful are the ones where this 'letting go' took place the most effectively. This process became incredibly healing and so contrary in some ways to the

notions of the healing process contained in my academic university studies in psychology. This body-based work is much more tangible and real to me. As each mask came into being, it seemed to take with it some of my pent up and stuck emotions. And with the birthing of each mask I felt a renewed sense of joy and lightness as a part of this surprising process.

When I lead others in similar exercises, everyone has a different reaction and resulting mask. The simplicity of breathing, and allowing the body to create, instead of the mind, has a profound and unique result for each individual. This sort of work gets right to the core of whatever is at the centre of each person. There are always shared themes, and in groups there is the wonder of teaching and 'medicine' shared among participants. There is no set pattern or predictable result. Only the non-visible 'spiral' patterns that result from change and growth.

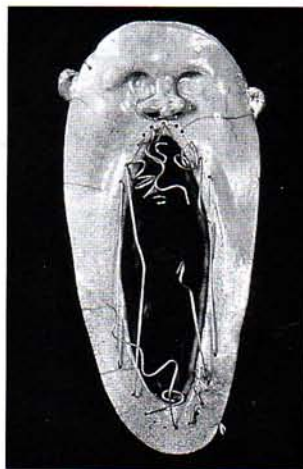
When I created *What Am I Good For?* (see photo A), for instance, I went into this particular chunk of clay with my experience of 'oral rape' as the focus. I honestly feel that the tears that I cried and mixed and blended into the clay contributed to an alchemical reaction which people feel and respond to when they view the piece at an exhibition, or even in photographs. It is as if the auric field of the work has the ability to transmit the energy encapsulated in the piece. This one is especially powerful and provocative, as I've witnessed time and time again. It is a very scary mask. Some people want to be right up close to it

and revel in its outrageously strong and clear statement; others are pleased it is there, but want to be on the other side of the room with a lot of space between them and the mask. Still others simply acknowledge that they are grateful that it is being said. At the very first exhibition, one woman saw this piece, and said that she was so glad I had made it. She said that she didn't have the skill to do it herself, and she thanked me for giving her feelings a face. Because so many women and men at those first few exhibitions came and shared similar relief, my initial shyness and fear of exhibiting *What am I Good For?* slowly dissolved. Further, I was gifted with the growing awareness of how archetypal these symbols were.

'I would simply focus in my body, in my belly especially ...and invite the image to come'



What Am I Good For



Breaking the Silence



Protectress Moon

In sharing these kinds of masks, I believe we are able to link into a shared consciousness that is direct and powerful beyond any words or cultural, socioeconomic, or other possible barriers. When I had my first exhibition in the Netherlands in late 1991 I was approached by an 80ish man I had never seen before who had a strange look on his face: that of delight mixed with teary eyes and a nose reddened by emotion. He came up to me at the opening, opened his arms and gave me a huge hug and thanked me in such a profound way. 'I know what it is to be silenced and have your voice taken away,' he said. 'I was in a Nazi concentration camp for 5 years and I feel in your pieces that you also express my experience. Thank you from the bottom of my heart!'

Breaking the Silence (photo B) embodies the point at which the voice is no longer controlled by someone else. Though scars and steel wire fragments remain, the voice is one's own again. Some pieces are protector gargoyles, modern renditions with a twist on the scary creatures atop Notre Dame Cathedral. My gargoyles are benevolent and are inspired by wise old women. They are not so much to scare away evil as to invoke safety and protection. They are 'Keepers of the Space'. *Protectress Moon* (photo C) is one example of this: she reminds us to pay attention to the cycles of the moon which endlessly rises again from its descent into darkness.

In the course of a workshop, people have the opportunity to meditate and participate in guided imagery. Movement plays a key role as well, exploring various emotions and feeling them in the body, mirroring them in someone else, or even 'directing' another to express a specific gesture/emotion so as to simply witness from the outside what it looks like. Movement 'in' or 'with' the mask creates yet another view of oneself to explore.

A guided exploration: relinquishing baggage

Guided imagery exercises allow special access to more hidden internal spaces and images. One such exercise which I use accesses (and eventually gives form to) a layer of the psyche that once was useful, but is now worn out and tattered and heavy and ready to be let go. Participants are led into their own personal sacred space, led through a series of gradually descending passages before arriving in a gallery of masks inside their own belly.

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