



Welcoming the wild women within

by Tamara Thiebaux

The current ethno-centric patriarchal system has a long history of condemning everything pertaining to women - menstruation, natural birth, mid-wifery, wise-women, lesbians, crones, witches, etc. As a woman and an artist learning what it means in our society to be born female (that it's considered less than desirable is putting it mildly), I am drawn to the perception, as suggested by the concept of a Goddess-centered culture, that women are integral beings of the Universe, and have always been vital contributors to human progress.

Goddess-worship/Woman-spirituality is a topic bearing significant personal, political and social meaning, and for an artist like myself, it is a fascinating wealth of resource worth



A wild woman

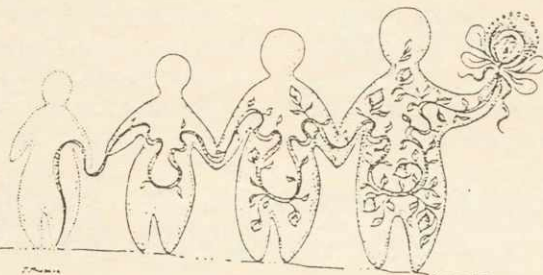
exploring. Aside from being an artist, if it can be separated, the ideas of woman-spirituality provide an angle from which to approach a reclaiming of my womanhood, feeling socially-bereft. And, conveniently, looking at beliefs and practices that tie women and spirituality to Earth, is the closest I feel comfortable to religious ideas.

When something touches me as profoundly as does what I am learning about past social systems, I am motivated to translate the information into visual creations. Through drawings, watercolor paintings and mixed media soft sculpture, I strive to create a reality for women other than that which we are subject to in our present culture, as well as providing an opportunity for us to re-view our self-images, as it relates to our society.

I see my role as Artist functioning as a means to speak to and of society; my purpose is to challenge what I have come to understand as injuri-

ous attitudes about women that are fatally hazardous to human existence; I seek to encourage awareness of the impact and destructiveness of cultur-

in a light of reverence challenges and contradict internalized dissatisfaction and disgust, and has the potential to re-educate society.



ally-ingrained subordination of women, and I urge a questioning of everything we have been taught to believe.

This culture we live in is de-humanizing; it denies us the knowledge of a complete history of evolution, and the greater human potential realizable through having such knowledge. I don't think returning to an exclusively patriarchal culture is an answer to social over-haul, but a re-integration of a female-honouring perspective, and re-education, contributes a measure of balance, and can lend itself to ending violence and oppressions.

A pro-female culture holds forth that the value of women should never be questioned or neglected. The history we have been taught to believe, being distorted, selective, male-oriented and exclusive of women, has left out that women, at different times in various cultures, unquestionably held positions of honour and leadership in societies that were not defined by sexism.

One's self-estimation develops out of what society has determined is acceptable and valuable (and so far it's been limiting and negative). Culturally-ingrained perceptions of "physical beauty", as a topic with immense impact (particularly for women because the pressure of body-image is so pronounced for us), involves re-acustoming ourselves with the concepts and visions that project women in a significantly brighter and more reverential light than what we are familiar with. Images projecting positive messages, i.e.. vulvas as flowers and sacred centers of life, the menstrual realm as imperative and powerful, different body shapes as unique and beautiful, and presenting Woman as central, vital and integral to the Universe, are healthy and liberating.

Women have an obvious harmonious and rhythmic connection to Earth and Universe. We are the owners of the chamber and orifice of life. Acknowledging this erotic center of individual power, strengthens and re-habilitates our self-identities. Our vulvas and cyclic fluids belong to us and are an intrinsic part of our existence. The notion that vulvas and menstrual fluids are shameful and dirty forms a basis to the attitude that women are inferior. Presenting and displaying nature and natural forces

Even as far as it is possible, within the confines of our society to be entirely comfortable with these ideas, they can elicit a sense of threat because they expose a woman's most vulnerable areas - a vulnerability that exists as a result of systematic violation and suppression. The conditioning from early childhood to not question authority, the fear of rejection for being born female, the fear and confusion instilled about sexuality, menstruation, reproduction and aging, and the traditions of socially-recognized faiths are challenged.

The habits we establish to help us function under these conditions are very tightly enforced by society. Deciding to reconsider the merits and worth of these habits opens oneself up to internal upheaval, as well as to attack by that part of society still locked into the "norm" of conventional existence, particularly those who "benefit" from indoctrinated perception; if we freely accepted and enjoyed our bodies and all of our differences, the media-advertising industry that thrives on all of our dissatisfaction, is challenged. However, out of upheaval comes change.



PHOTO: JUDY REID

Tamara Thiebaux in her studio

I propose that as the earth is sacred, so must we see our bodies and our existence, and expand and cultivate such an affirmative vision. Menstruation is a channel for reformation, whether we are menstruating now, or retaining our wiseblood after menopause. It is a power-source, inherent in the meaning of being female, to draw upon to effect change and return to a balance of natural earthly energy.

I believe it is important for people to be aware that I still retain much of the conditions that every woman experiences in our society. I continually battle against internalized warped perceptions of women that breed dis-

comfort in those very things that continue life. In addition, my background is of surviving emotional and physical abuse as a child, largely perpetuated by my mother, and early sexual abuse inside and outside my family. It is a challenge to feel and maintain a connection with the imagery I explore, such as attempting to portray the gentle and benign power inherent in all of us, tying us to Earth. During my formative years, I did not receive enough positive messages to counter-act the negative; I have to uproot myself out of that, work diligently to replace it, and re-cultivate an internal balance. The vehicle of art assists in transforming negative experiences into something useful to contribute to society.

While I am dedicated to creating woman-affirmative art, referring to research and literature of patriarchal theology, viewpoints of writers, other artists and visionaries on the same quest of Re-presenting Woman, I also draw upon personal intuition; I suspect we have an inherent collective knowledge that we can tap into, which connects us to our ancestors and the earth.

Sometimes, when what I create feels particularly profound, I have this sense that I am an intermediary for a greater Universal Being, the Goddess perhaps. She is conveying images and visions for us to learn from to help us grow and see over the limitations enforced by our society.

Forums of publicity for my work are presentations to interested groups of women, and displays during events focusing on women's issues. I also facilitate workshops in which women can share, creatively explore and reclaim our bodies. As well, I welcome commissions to create pieces that are specific to a recipient, given details of strengths and visions of that person.

