

Natalie Newman

How can one claim that human consciousness is evolving and going in a transpersonal direction when the twentieth century has witnessed such distressing carnage? Let us also remember that the twentieth century has been the time of great liberation movements, recognition of racial and sexual discrimination, and awakening ecological awareness....Can enough individuals personally awaken to a reverence for life, and then, through their creative actions and interventions, redirect the tendency of society away from self-destruction?

—Alex Grey, *The Mission of Art*

Between the Dawn and Dark of Night

I believe in the potential of art and other transcendent experiences to inspire growth in the way we treat each other, and the way we treat the earth. By “transcendent experience,” I mean anything that induces heightened states of awareness, such as making art, meditation, dreams, ecstatic dance, shamanic ritual, entheogenic plants, making Love, and encountering Visionary Art of all mediums. Thus, my intention for my senior thesis is not only to depict these states and encourage others to explore them as well, but to illustrate and inspire the huge potential for growth that we humans, artists and art-observers alike, possess.

I have noticed a correlation between this new movement of Visionary Art, spearheaded by painters like Alex and Allyson Grey, Amanda Sage, and Noa Knafo, and twentieth-century Surrealist painters, such as Dali, Ernst, and even Kahlo. Their Surrealist scenes, from Dali’s “Landscape with Butterflies” to Kahlo’s self-portraits, are hauntingly real, though stylized, and yet they depict landscapes and beings that cannot possibly exist on this plane of reality. They seek to find truth, to put value, in the imagination. Works like Ernst’s “Attirement of the Bride” achieve a characteristic eerie quality through biting social commentary. Where these Surrealists use fantastical metaphor as a vehicle to expose the absurd, I wish to emulate the Visionary Artists, like Grey and Sage, by using vivid colors and fantastical figures to portray the possibility of transformation at a time when transformation on a global scale is utterly necessary.

As a teenager, I undertook an art project exploring meditation in various aspects of life, from the religious to the mundane. I used oil and acrylic paints to depict people performing activities that can be “meditative.” Yet in that process, I realized that meditation can be found in almost all action. This is simultaneously the practice and the goal. Now, for my undergraduate thesis, I want to develop a visual language in oil paints to express what meditative or visionary states feel like. I play with bright colors and organic shapes to create my own worlds—a sort of magical realism inspired by physical experience as much as imagination. When I include figures in my work, I aim to portray them in an empowering way, rather than objectifying. I paint bodies in poses that show strength and focus and transformation, with a bold use of light and color to bolster these qualities. Ultimately, I am learning to unite the creative process itself with my meditative practice, and my paintings are the result of that experience.