

Myth and Archetype in the Studio
An Artist's Encounter with a Goddess

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This is dedicated to Inanna, Ereshkigal, Conjur Woman, and Storyteller who reached across the ages to inhabit my studio and my life. Your presence has made this journey rich and rewarding.

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Abstract

This thesis is based upon my artistic interaction and response to the 5,000-year-old myth of the Sumerian deity, Inanna. Much has been written about Inanna's descent into the Underworld. The entire story is very compelling; I too was caught by the chthonic journey of this goddess of heaven and earth. This is not simply a journey below the surface of Gaia's living earth, but goes much deeper into the subterranean world of death, dissolution and rebirth. It is the psychological world of the grave.

The main element of my thesis consists of a body of artwork that evolved out of the interweaving of my textual, psychological, and artistic research. The artwork is my response to a particular juncture in the descent portion of Inanna's myth . . . the moment of her transformation. This amalgamation of artistic and textual artifacts documents the power of an ancient story, from a long-dead culture, to reach through time and touch an individual life.

The visual section of this document illustrates studio processes and the development of artistic ideas as I engaged with this myth. The artwork itself expresses my ever-changing relationship to Inanna's transformation. The written documentation draws from diverse areas of study such as alchemy, mythology, depth psychology, women's spirituality, and women's studies. Through readings, conferences, workshops, one-on-one conversations, active imagination, and art-making I have woven together a glimpse, perhaps a momentary perspective, of an encounter with a divine feminine archetype.

A more traditional academic paradigm would have me state that I began with a particular research question in mind, that I used a specific methodology to investigate the subject, and that these are the results of that inquiry. In other words, A led to B and B led to C. *Finé*. My program did not follow that paradigm. The path of this inquiry meandered quite a bit and consequently the

methodologies used – art-based research, autoethnography, and phenomenology – reflect an organic and personal approach to the work. This path reflects the feminine propensity to making connections between diverse areas of knowledge, and is congruent with my engagement of the subject matter. I am a visual artist and my lens is that of a 21st century woman and a maker-of-things. I gather, experience, and express my knowingness from this point of view and my thesis reflects my perspective.

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Phase I: Call to the Journey

This journey into the Underworld of Inanna and Ereshkigal began with the convergence of three seemingly unrelated areas of personal interest: the Dark Feminine, Carl Jung's *The Red Book*, and alchemy. Using my natural methodology that connects one book or experience to the next, these topics converged. My instinctive research process involves a series of vast interlinking spirals as reflected in this particular endeavor. My study of *The Red Book*, readings in alchemy, and the making of art confirmed the connection between imagery, mythology, archetypal figures, alchemy, and the process of psychological development: all are concerned with the fundamental idea of transformation. My studies of the Dark Feminine, specifically the Sumerian myth of the Descent of Inanna, also point to a transformation, a rebirth. Although the story of Inanna is a cultural myth and Jung's descent is a personal myth, they both involve individual journeys that result in profound psychological and spiritual transformations. I developed this master's program as a way to structure my own explorations of this transformational process on a more personal level.

Reading *The Red Book* validated my encounters with the figures appearing in my dreams. My intuitive process of making art also unearthed these images in my studio. *The Red Book* chronicles one man's journey in search of his soul through exploring the contents of his subconscious; it often reads as the rantings of a madman. However, viewed as a whole, the book illustrates how to engage the residents and visitors of one's own unconscious. Carl Jung treated the images that appeared to him as real. He listened to them, spoke with them, argued with them, and questioned them. He took walks in the garden with Philemon, an otherworldly entity he came to view as a guru or "superior insight" (Jung, *Memories* 183). Here they conversed as if Philemon were a corporeal being. Jung states that "Philemon and other figures of my fantasies

brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life” (Jung, *Memories* 183). Jung slowly realized that his self-experiment involved integrating these independent voices and images into himself, yet remaining separate and whole unto himself. Through these daily confrontations, and often conversations in exaggerated language, he experienced a changing sense of self and worldview. Jung’s visions compelled him to embrace the importance of the feminine and, although he was often at odds with the women of his imaginings as well as the women in his personal life, he had to acknowledge that his soul was unquestionably feminine.

Initially Jung wrote down his dreams and fantasies in detail, but before long he began painting them “in order to impress the images upon [his] memory” (Jung, *Memories* 183). Externalizing the images allowed him to work with them over a long period of time, thereby attaining a deeper understanding of their import. Throughout his lifetime, he continued to grapple with their meaning and integrate them into his psyche. The paintings of figures and mandalas show not only the hand of a skilled artist, but also a dedication to intensifying the psychic process. His renderings are forceful, just as one would expect of representations of the unconscious. The paintings are intricate, complex, and repetitive with an obsessive, even ritualistic feel to them. Highly saturated colors and hard-edged imagery liken many to mosaics. They are mysterious, fantastic, and beautiful images.

As an inspiration, *The Red Book* paves the way for freeing the psyche in a remarkable and constructive way. Jung often showed his patients *The Red Book*, encouraging them to create their own. One patient, Christiana Morgan recalls him saying: “I should advise you to put it all down as beautifully as you can—in some beautifully bound book” (Jung and Shamdasani 216). In spite of this, “it is not a book to instruct but rather a book to learn from” (Hillman lecture). At

the outset of *The Red Book*, Jung repeatedly exhorts that “My path is not your path . . . There is only one way and that is your way . . . You seek the path? I warn you away from my own. It can also be the wrong way for you” (Jung and Shamdasani 231). These statements encouraged me as I approached forays into my own unconscious.

Studying Jung’s *Red Book* along with alchemy and its relation to the Dark Feminine helped me become more aware of my own artistic process. Jung understood that the language of alchemy was uniquely suited to describe the process of transformation. Initially, the characters of Jung’s fantasies were mercurial shape-shifters, requiring him to become more adept at handling their elusive nature. Likewise, the medieval alchemist also had to be skilled at handling mercury, at fixing it in order to use it. The paradoxical nature of alchemical language reflects the beauty and the challenge of alchemy itself. In this way, it is particularly apt for expressing the vicissitudes of the psyche and its processes. The stages and operations are more than one specific thing. They are this and not this. They are that and not that. There are no strict recipes. The rules apply more to the alchemist’s attitude in approaching the work than the work itself. Consequently, each alchemist approaches the processes of alchemy in his/her individual way, just as the process of soul-making, or making soul matter, is unique to each individual.

Alchemy concerns itself with taking the *prima materia*, the ideas and experiences of everyday life, and transforming them into something of value: gold. It is about altering what is to make something new, something *more* than it was before, even if it is physically less. Through the alchemical process of creating art, the artist is also changed. The making of things newly informs the body and the psyche. In other words, art is about transformation.

Black is a predominate color in my artwork, and I have always associated this color with a void – not a void of emptiness but a *void of potentiality*, a space/place where ideas are born,

where life begins, where death lives and regenerates, where images are created. This is a chthonic world of seduction and repulsion. Although I am seduced by the images and the desire to manifest them in three-dimensional space, the resistance I often encounter as soon as I enter my studio also repulses me. This resistance comes from the depths of the void in the form of my fears, insecurities, old messages, and the unknown. They can be the death of me as an artist or they can be the compost that nurtures continuing growth, a fruitful darkness. Well-known photographer, Paul Caponigro, once told me that even after years of working, every day that he goes into his darkroom he has to battle the seven-headed hydra. What an appropriate image – and a notably feminine one – for encountering the Underworld.

Over the years, imagery of the Dark Feminine has permeated my artwork. At first, it appeared in the female forms I constructed out of reed, rags, and paper clay – figures invariably related to archetypal characters from mythology, fairytales, and cultural phenomenon. In spite of these forms being dark and related to the death part of the life-death-rebirth cycle, they possess healing, nurturing, and restorative qualities for me. Dying is only half of the death cycle; the other half is regeneration that leads to rebirth. Journaling, documenting my creative process, and producing the artwork itself have allowed me to tap into these archetypes and delve more deeply into my own personal mythology. From these explorations arise questions. Who are these dark women? Where do they come from? What is their purpose? How can I be more conscious in engaging them through my artwork?

My investigation into the forms that I create led to the discovery that the Dark Feminine appears in diverse cultures throughout the world, from ancient to contemporary times. In one of her oldest forms she is the Sumerian goddess, Ereshkigal. In more recent history, she is Queen of the Night from the Mozart opera *The Magic Flute*. Artist Romare Beardon based a series of

collages on Voudon's mysterious figure, *Conjur Woman*; contemporary author, Toni Morrison, often uses this same elusive figure as a character of mystery and magic. The Dark Feminine, Underworld goddesses, and chthonic women inhabit mythology, fairytales, cultural anthropology, archetypal and depth psychology, poetry, and fiction. Using references from all of these fields, as well as the field of art, provides insights into Her mysteries. Initially, I was intrigued by the reoccurrence of a particular female archetypal and mythological entity in a variety of



Fig. 1. Romare Beardon, *Conjur Woman*

forms, in a multitude of cultures, and throughout time. But, instead of studying many Underworld goddesses in diverse cultures, I was *called* to study one myth and one goddess: Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth. Her story is 5,000 years old and contains the oldest descent story currently known.

Until I embarked on the actual research for my master's program, I surmised that if I learned more of her nature, the Dark Feminine could be a guide down and through her realm. As an artist, this is my calling—bringing to consciousness that which hides in the shadow, actualizing the potential that springs forth from the dark void, making visible that which is hidden. But one must be willing to be surprised because, as I quickly discovered, one needs the light in order to see into the dark. For me, Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, Queen of the Upperworld and Light, has been the most appropriate guide down and through the Underworld.

Through Inanna I have been able to approach the quintessential Dark Feminine, Ereshkigal, the Queen of the Underworld.

Inanna's tale reaches across thousands of years to reaffirm the spirit of the Divine Feminine and tell us how we can re-engage this life-giving force. I feel this story in my "blood and bones," as Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes described it in a seminar I attended in 2013. I engaged Inanna in my studio with all the passion that the phrase implies. How could I not? It is a passionate story even today.

Phase II: Council of Advisors

I began the research that informs the textual and artistic components of this thesis almost 40 years ago with my first reading of M. Esther Harding's book, *Woman's Mysteries, Ancient and Modern: A Psychological Interpretation of the Feminine Principle as Portrayed in Myth, Story, and Dreams*. I do not fit into the patriarchal paradigm of what or who a woman should be, and this book gave me a way to articulate my way of seeing and thinking about my experience of being fiercely "one-in-herself" (103). From these writings, I realized that there were stories, both historical and mythological, that invoke a sense of the innate divine feminine energy, which defines being female. Harding inspired me to seek references to this strong feminine archetype in many sources, giving me tacit permission to broaden my own interests and studies. I began to encounter the Divine Feminine wherever I turned.

Consequently, mythology, women's spirituality, women's art, archetypal and depth psychology, anthropology, alchemy, fairytales, symbolism, and *The Red Book* inform this thesis as a whole. My research literature includes writings from these diverse fields of study. Also included is some brief background information regarding the archeological discovery of the clay tablets that introduced contemporary culture to Sumerian mythology and, more specifically, the goddess Inanna.

My initial plan was to study the Dark Feminine as she has appeared in myth and fairytales throughout the world and create artwork reflecting my discoveries. The chthonic part of the Divine Feminine deals with the deep, hidden, mysterious, powerful side of the soul. Often, the Divine Feminine holds what we are unwilling to see or acknowledge in ourselves. Her influence extends to the Sumerian goddess Ereshkigal, the Greek goddesses Hekate and Persephone, Hindu's Kali, the Aztec Tonantzin, and other goddesses who rule over the

Underworld and death. These feminine deities and the rites associated with them gave ancient peoples a way to deal with the cycles of nature as well as the phenomenon of death. Today, through archetypal and depth psychology, they give us a way to understand the deeper workings of the psyche.

This archetype of the Divine Feminine is, like all archetypes, complex and multidimensional. It is also not exclusive to the female form, but contains both masculine and feminine attributes. Given this caveat, the predominant qualities associated with many entities who move and reside in the Underworld appear to be primarily feminine in nature.

However, author and depth psychologist James Hillman, while acknowledging the Dark Feminine as an Underworld presence, places males as rulers of the Underworld in the gods of Dionysus, Pluto, and Hades. He makes the distinction that the Upper world of light is of the Father, yet notes that “Hades is also Pluto; the ‘void-of-day’ with only two dimensions is also a richness and nourishment and vast receptivity . . . Hades is mild of manner and receptive” (Hillman, *The Dream* 53). These are characteristics usually associated with the feminine.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Sylvia Brinton Perera, a Jungian analyst, puts the rulership of the Underworld under the auspices of the Dark Feminine in the form of the goddess Ereshkigal. Perera states that Ereshkigal is “queen of the Netherworld and the dead. Her name means ‘Lady of the Great Place Below’ . . .” (Perera, 21).

Just as in ancient times, myths chronicling encounters with the Underworld retain the power to inform and transform modern people. Contemporary women have once again gained access to this powerful archetype, often in a psychological context, through the work of C. G. Jung and Jungian scholars. Jungian analysts such as Marie Louise Von Franz, M. Esther

Harding, Marion Woodman, Sylvia Brinton Perera, and Clarissa Pinkola Estes have written extensively about the chthonic aspect of the Divine Feminine.

Jung, Hillman, and Perera equate the psychologically transformative quality of the Underworld journey to the alchemical processes outlined in manuscripts from the Middle Ages. All three adopt the language of alchemy to bring abstract psychological processes into concrete concepts. In *Alchemical Psychology*, Hillman calls alchemy a “*materialized language*” (16). He describes its speech as using “thing-words, image-words, craft-words” (12). He goes on to clarify his assertion:

The five supposed sources of alchemy are each a technology. Each is a handwork physically grappling with sensate materials. (1) Metallurgy and Jewelry: mining, heating, smelting, forging, annealing; (2) Cloth and Fiber Dyeing: dipping, coloring, drying; (3) Embalming the Dead: dismembering, evacuating, infusing, preserving; (4) Perfumery and Cosmetics: grinding, mixing, distilling, diluting, evaporating; (5) Pharmacy: distinguishing, tincturing, measuring, dissolving, desiccating, pulverizing. To these traditional sources must be added food preparation and conservation, the daily acts of transforming raw materials into tasty and nourishing edibles. (13)

These words can also describe psychological or artistic processes. They resonate at a soulful level because they engage us through our bodily senses. In working with cloth, I understand what it is to be hung out to dry at a physical and an emotional level. As I tear pieces of fabric, I comprehend in my body and my psyche the feeling of being shredded. When I am regulating the temperature of a dye bath, I recognize that the temperature of my psychic life has its own variable temperatures. Does the change I seek, whether in the dye bath or in my psyche, require the gentle heat of a nesting bird or the heat necessary to smelt iron?

In her book, *Descent to the Goddess: A Way of Initiation for Women*, Perera presents a thorough psychological interpretation of the descent portion of Inanna’s myth and makes

perceptive use of alchemical terms in bringing Inanna's trials into a real-world sensibility.

Descent to the Goddess is a short but complex text, which produces a new and deeper understanding with each reading.

The Sumerian story of Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth, and her sister Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld, first appeared in the third millennium B.C. A powerful story, it has lost none of its potency over the last five thousand years. It moves beyond the concept of physical death into the work of soul. Much soul work happens in the hot, moist, messy, dark center of our psyches. The myth of Inanna and Ereshkigal is a story we also feel in our guts, for it grabs us and drags us under. Using quotes from Jacobson, Kramer, and Wolkstein and Kramer, Perrera relates the story this way:

In the Sumerian poem Inanna, decides to go into the underworld; she “set her heart from highest heaven on earth's deepest ground,” (Jacobson, 55) . . . “abandoned heaven, abandoned earth—to the Netherworld she descended” (Kramer, 108). As a precaution, she instructs Ninshubur, her trusted female executive, to appeal to the father gods for help in securing her release if she does not return within three days.

At the first gate to the Netherworld, Inanna is stopped and asked to declare herself. The gatekeeper informs Ereshkigal, queen of the Great Below, that Inanna, “Queen of Heaven, of the place where the sun rises” (Kramer, 112), asks for admission to the “land of no return” [sic] to witness the funeral of Gugalanna, husband of Ereshkigal. Ereshkigal becomes furious, and insists that the upper-world goddess be treated according to the laws and rites for anyone entering her kingdom—that she be brought “naked and bowed low” (Wolkstein and Kramer, 60).

The gatekeeper follows orders. He removes one piece of Inanna's magnificent regalia at each of the seven gates. “Crouched and stripped bare” [sic], as the Sumerians were laid in the grave, Inanna is judged by the seven judges. Ereshkigal kills her. Her corpse is hung on a peg where it turns into a side of green, rotting meat. After three days, when Inanna

fails to return, her assistant Ninshubur sets in motion her instructions to rouse the people and gods with dirge drum and lamenting.

Ninshubur goes to Enlil, the highest god of sky and earth, and to Nanna, the moon god and Inanna's father. Both refuse to meddle in the exacting ways of the underworld. Finally Enki, the god of waters and wisdom, hears Ninshubur's plea and rescues Inanna, using two little mourners he creates from the dirt under his fingernail. They slip unnoticed into the Netherworld, carrying the food and water of life with which Enki provides them, and they secure Inanna's release by commiserating with Ereshkigal, who is now groaning—over the dead, or with her own birth pangs. She is so grateful for the empathy that she finally hands over Inanna's corpse. Restored to life, Inanna is reminded that she will need to send a substitute to take her place. Demons to seize this scapegoat surround her as she returns through the seven gates and reclaims her vestments. (9-10)

Perera's telling is fairly straightforward and immediately moves into a rich dissection of the story and all of its psychological nuances. This is a very difficult book to reference since every sentence is relevant to the Underworld journey. In spite of this thorny issue, *Descent to the Goddess* deeply informed my perception of and relationship to both Inanna and Ereshkigal. Although this is not a thesis for a psychology degree, it does deal with psychological issues that refer to women's relationship to themselves as females in a patriarchal over-culture.

Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Stories and Hymns from Sumer is altogether a different approach to the myth of Inanna, as it concerns the entirety of the myth (as was translated at the time of publication). It is a collaboration between Diane Wolkstein, storyteller and folklorist, and cuneiformist Samuel Noah Kramer, who restored and translated the first tablets found dealing with Inanna's myth.

The story of Inanna's Descent to the Underworld comes from the land of Sumer located in an area in the southern half of modern Iraq, between Baghdad and the Persian Gulf. The

Sumerians created one of the earliest forms of writing, sophisticated enough to leave us songs, stories, hymns, and literature inscribed on tens of thousands of clay tablets now in museums scattered around the world. In *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth*, co-author Kramer states that “. . . some five to six thousand tablets and fragments are inscribed with Sumerian literary works current in the early second millennium B.C. These reveal the religious beliefs, ethical ideals, and spiritual aspirations of the Sumerians, and to some extent of the ancient world as a whole . . .” (Wolkstein and Kramer 125). Many stories and hymns to various gods and goddesses have been deciphered, translated, and interpreted over the last 130 years and Inanna’s story is among them.

The myth of Inanna, “Sumer’s most beloved and revered deity” (Wolkstein and Kramer xiii), is quite long, originally from tablets dated at approximately 1750 B.C; however, the narrative of her descent is a small portion consisting “of more than four hundred lines of text in almost perfect condition that were pieced together from thirty tablets and fragments . . . the process of scholarly cooperation that began more than a century ago” (Wolkstein and Kramer 127). It is the narrative of the development of an immature young deity into a self-empowered Queen of great wisdom and courage.

Wolkstein, under Kramer’s tutelage, “picked through, word by word, the different parts of Inanna’s story. I wove them into a cohesive whole . . .” (Wolkstein, *Parabola* 79). Wolkstein approached Inanna’s story from the perspective of a storyteller and dramatist, and her telling is lyrical, emotional, and at times lusty. This is very much in keeping with the original text. In spite of its fragmentation, the original versions – and there are several – were written as powerfully emotive praise in a poetic form. Wolkstein wanted to capture the feeling expressed in the text from the clay tablets while presenting “the goddess in *all* her aspects . . . [we have] long needed a ‘grand’ story of a woman—as inspiration, guide, and model . . .” (Wolkstein and Kramer xv).

She focuses on the full story rather than just the descent. Wolkstein also gives a psychological interpretation to the narrative but, because she was trying to present the story to a widespread audience, it is couched in the form of a good tale that could be dramatized. Perera's telling of Inanna's journey through the seven gates and meeting with Ereshkigal is adequately descriptive and is covered in a short paragraph. This section in the original text is quite long and Wolkstein's inspired interpretation leaves space for the imagination to fill out the scene. For example, when Neti, the chief gatekeeper of the *kur*, which is generally interpreted as netherworld, tells Ereshkigal of Inanna's desire to enter her realm, she reacts thusly:

When Ereshkigal heard this,
 She slapped her thigh and bit her lip.
 She took the matter into her heart and dwelt on it.
 Then she spoke:

“Come Neti, my chief gatekeeper of the *kur*,
 Heed my words:
 Bolt the seven gates of the underworld.
 Then, one by one, open each gate a crack.
 Let Inanna enter.
 As she enters, remove her royal garments.
 Let the holy priestess of heaven enter bowed low. (Wolkstein and Kramer 56-57)

For the sake of brevity, the next part is shortened, and the quote begins where Inanna has gone through five of the seven gates and is preparing to enter the sixth.

When she entered the sixth gate,
 From her hand the lapis measuring rod and line was removed.

Inanna asked:

“What is this?”

She was told:

“Quiet, Inanna, the ways of the underworld are perfect.
They may not be questioned.”

When she entered the seventh gate,
From her body the royal robe was removed.

Inanna asked:

“What is this?”

She was told:

“Quiet, Inanna, the ways of the underworld are perfect.
They may not be questioned.”

Naked and bowed low, Inanna entered the throne room.
Ereshkigal rose from her throne.
Inanna started toward the throne.
The Annuna, the judges of the underworld, surrounded her.
They passed judgment against her.

Then Ereshkigal fastened on Inanna the eye of death.
She spoke against her the word of wrath.
She uttered against her the cry of guilt.

She struck her.

Inanna was turned into a corpse,
A piece of rotting meat,
And was hung from a hook on the wall.

When, after three days and three nights, Inanna had not returned,
Ninshubar set up a lament for her by the ruins.
She beat the drum for her in the assembly places.
She circled the houses of the gods.
She tore at her eyes; she tore at her mouth; she tore at her thighs.

She dressed herself in a single garment like a beggar.

Alone, she set out for Nippur and the temple of Enlil. (Wolkstein and Kramer 59-61)

The poem continues at length about Inanna's rescue and what happens when she returns to the Upper World. When I first read the lines of this poem, my mind was immediately filled with images. I was sitting at the feet of a temple priestess from long ago, listening to the chronicle of a beloved goddess.

Many Sumerian scholars, the foremost of whom was Samuel Noah Kramer, deciphered the clay fragments pertaining to this story during the first part of the twentieth century. During that time Kramer and others wrote extensively about Sumer's history, culture, religion, and myths. Due to the sheer number of fragments discovered during the original dig and in later excavations, translation has been ongoing. This has required a massive coordination of numerous scholars, institutions, nations, and governments over many decades. Discoveries have included other versions or elements of Inanna's myth written at various periods in ancient times. The most recent translations of new texts are published by the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature from Oxford University and are available online. On a recent search of this site, I found a newer translation of Inanna's descent that is somewhat different than the one I have used for this paper, including an alternate spelling of Ereshkigal's name and a phrase in her praise, "Holy Ereckigala – sweet is your praise" (ETCSL t. 1.4.1 Inanna's descent to the netherworld 411-412). Other translations from the latter part of the twentieth century reveal Inanna as a ruthless warrior goddess. Inanna's story is a gold mine for psychological and artistic inquiry.

Phase III: Tools for the Dig

My degree program is primarily visual arts with interdisciplinary studies in mythology, archetypal psychology, and women's spirituality as it pertains to the Sumerian myth of Inanna. Consequently, my research required several different methodologies. The questions that interested me were historical, phenomenological, autoethnographical, and artistic in nature and lend themselves best to qualitative methods of research. My learning style and worldview also influence the research methods I chose. Specifically, I used heuristic, phenomenological, textual, art-based, hermeneutic, and autoethnographic methods. Over the course of this program, I gained more clarity about what was relevant to my research but repeatedly returned to O'Leary's statement that "... you need to be able to articulate to yourself and to your audience that your desire to 'explore' and 'discover' is indeed part of your design or plan. Additionally, knowing what you want to know does not mean your questions must be set in stone from their first articulation" (89).

Mythology and fairytales are, at heart, tales about the subtle complexities of being human, which includes the dark energies of the feminine. In my opinion, quantitative research methods do not allow us to get close enough to the vagaries of this phenomenon; we have to experience it. We have to climb down into the darkness ourselves. As Patricia Leavy asserts, "Visual art can jar people into seeing something differently. This kind of consciousness-raising, unleashed by images, may not be possible in textual form" (220). The studio is where the Dark Feminine first appeared to me. I seek a deeper understanding of the *raw* psychic/soulful material that continues working with and through me.

Following Jung's exhortation that "There is only one way and that is your way" (Jung and Shamdasani 231), I found my way into my unconscious through active imagination, self-

reflection, and art-making, which I equate to soul-making. In the studio, I am down to the dirt beneath my fingernails knowing that the emerging work will once again herald a return from a transformative process. During this master's program I have felt dried out, dissolved, dissipated, stuck, and dismembered. Nevertheless, in the end, it all coalesced in way that was beyond what I could have planned by reason alone.

I have primarily used art-based and autoethnographic research methodologies, but found the basic concepts and designs of heuristic research to be compatible with my particular program. In *Heuristic Research*, Clark Moustakas described the way I approach research in this way:

Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one's self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social—and perhaps universal—significance.

Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences. The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one's senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments. This requires a passionate, disciplined commitment to remain with a question intensely and continuously until it is illuminated or answered (15).

The phases of heuristic research outlined by Moustakas, in essence, describe the creative process: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication/understanding, and creative synthesis.

Phenomenology contributed to my research process by its focus on understanding the internal, emotional, and psychological responses to a particular experience of the researcher(s). It

was a specific phenomenon—the appearance of a certain form in my artwork—that prompted the question that is at the core of my master’s program: Who or what do these feminine forms represent and what do they mean to me? Why am I being called to work with these images?

Questions about the history and function of the Divine Feminine in psychology, mythology, and fairytales were pursued through textual research. Students or scholars of C. G. Jung, many of them women, have written much of the available literature regarding both the ‘Light’ and the ‘Dark’ Feminine in myth and folklore.

My writing, therefore, has a distinctly Jungian as well as a feminist slant; this means looking beyond Jung’s androcentric and sexist perspective to reframe his ideas from an evolved and synthesized female point of view. In spite of his efforts to rise above what he called “the-spirit-of-this-time” (*Red Book*, 229), Jung could not escape the prevailing paradigms about women. One example of this bias is Jung’s assumption that his concept of ego and ego annihilation applied to both men and women. Many feminist scholars, theologians, and Jungian analysts question the very idea that women have an ego that is in any way similar to a male ego. Although I am keenly aware of the myriad issues alluded to here, it was not my goal to engage in the particulars of this schism. My goal was to explore and document a particular phenomenon that I personally experienced and has relevance to a larger audience. I was interested in learning how other women writers, particularly women working with depth and archetypal psychology, talked about the Divine Feminine, whether it is light or dark.

When I began my query into other methods of academically recognized research, I was unclear about the differences between terms such as heuristic, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. Though they all have something of value to offer to a research project based on art and art-making, ultimately they fall short in organizing, creating, understanding, and

presenting a project that results in and informs an artistic body of work. That is exactly as it should be. When we are endeavoring to better understand the process of creativity, art-making, and art, we reside in the fluid realm of the imagination and human consciousness. It is mercurial in nature and difficult to put into a linear sequence of events or experiences.

In his book, *Art-Based Research*, author Shaun McNiff clearly outlines the issue when he says,

When ‘phenomenological, ‘heuristic’, and ‘hermeneutic’ methods are designated as qualitative research methodologies, they are presented as aspects of behavioral science. These procedures are larger in scope. The effort to include them into an expanded scientific paradigm is a reflection of scientism which assumes that science is the only tool for understanding human experience” (Loc. 83-85).

Art-based research is not quantifiable or even, in some cases, qualifiable; because of its basis in human creativity, it challenges the objective, linear way of gathering information. McNiff defines the basic core of this unorthodox mode of investigation thusly: “Art-based research is simply defined by its use of the arts as objects of inquiry as well as modes of investigation” (Loc 92). The objects themselves are varied and often illusive, and the modes of investigation are just as slippery when attempting to corner the hows and whys of the phenomenon. Yet the making of art, the impetus to continually create, and the art itself engender a whole new set of questions with each expressive manifestation.

In many creative endeavors information is taken in and processed through the body. In writing it is through the hands, by putting pen to paper or typing on a computer. Performance involves the whole body as it moves through space. The visual arts can incorporate the whole body as well. When a painter picks up a paintbrush and applies color to the canvas, the hands, the extension of the arms, and eyes become the means of expressing an internal vision. Artists

such as Andy Goldsworthy, whose artwork is innately and, one might say, intimately connected to the environment, are responding to the information collected from their personal perception and artistic response to the natural world.

Working in collage, assemblage, and sculpture, I continually select, compose, and assemble as I go. I seek to express an internal vision as I constantly take in information, play with it, ply it, bend and twist it, making internal and external adjustments along the way. When I read books, papers, or articles on fairytales, mythology, and archetypal psychology topics, I gather data that will be visually translated into something I can hold in my hand, a physical manifestation that began as words and images in my mind with no corporeality. When I journal, I also gather and examine the data that influence the transformations that occur in my studio.

One educationally grounded approach to art as research, called A/r/tography, has been developed at the University of British Columbia and interrelates the role of the artist, researcher, and educator. It is unique in recognizing the natural flow between art-making and research. Art is often a quest to answer a question not yet asked or even known. In his book, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in Visual Arts*, Graeme Sullivan describes the a/r/tographers' approach as a fluid "in-between" place of knowing and discovery, where "new relationships among theories, ideas, forms, and contexts as assumptions . . . that tend to fix meanings are brought into question" (58). He goes on to say that:

Procedurally, a/r/tography seeks to integrate theory and practice by embedding art-making processes at the heart of inquiry . . . There is a rich and messy ontological and epistemological landscape [much like an artist's studio] being uncovered by a/r/tographers, and the resistant stance [by traditional researchers?] sharpens the creative and critical path being opened up. This gives a good sense of the power of art to make a difference in communities and cultures . . . (59).

Although not an art educator, I found that autoethnography's philosophy applies to artists just as much as other research methods.

Initially, I could not clearly explain that I would be researching myself and my personal encounters with the Dark Feminine in an effort to understand this archetype as she appears in our culture and in women's lives. The understanding I sought came through experiencing the research itself, but I did not know what to call it. Over time it became evident that autoethnography would be one of my primary research methodologies, but it took several forays into other methodologies to come to that conclusion.

In *Autoethnography as Method*, Heewon Chang explained this approach, “. . . autoethnography is not about focusing on self-alone, but about searching for understanding of others (culture/society) through self . . . Autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary data” (49).

My autoethnographic research consisted of personal journal entries, shamanic journeying, active imagination, dreams, and conversations with other artists and individuals interested in similar subject matters, as well as notes from workshops I have attended since the inception of my master's program. The artwork and these writings form the backbone of my thesis and represent the artifacts generated from my inquiry into the world of the Dark Feminine. It became apparent that I was not going to be studying the Dark Feminine as an abstract concept in my art or in theory. I experienced her presence on a very personal level, which included everything from conversations with my *doll* figures to my struggles to express my unique feminine voice in academia.

Using autoethnography as a research lens requires attentiveness to honest communication. It requires being present to one's genuine self. Finding my own authentic voice

required time . . . long stretches of uninterrupted time. I needed to hear not only my voice but to know what my voice had to say. What do I think when allowed the time to contemplate one, long continuous thought? Journaling helped me track the lengthy meandering thoughts that often lead nowhere in the moment, but on reflection added to a growing self-awareness.

These reflections became data for my research into a topic that morphed from a generalized query regarding the nature of the Dark Feminine into a very personal encounter with the myth of Inanna. I collected disparate events, insights, and experiences and translated them into a form that I could study, interpret, and understand in relationship to a broader canvas. Mine was a process of artistic synthesis, or perhaps more apropos of my journey, of alchemy.

In working with personal writings and workshop notes, I found it difficult to make a clear distinction between autoethnographic and hermeneutic methodologies. I have differentiated them in this way. I consider the journaling and note-taking as autoethnographical, and the interpretation of those documents as hermeneutic in spirit, if not in practice.

This personal data-gathering made me aware of the ways I engage with myself and with the world outside my studio. I was intimately involved with and changed by the research. I recognized myself as unique in the world and as a member of a community or tribe of others who experience the world in a similar way. I am unique in my expression of the workings of my mind, but not singular nor isolated. My research and my interpretation of that research, contributes to the ever-evolving conversation of what it means to be human, female, an artist, and a researcher.

Autoethnography provides a framework in which to capture the elusive nature of personal experience and gives us methods with which to validate and communicate the significance of that experience in language accessible to others. Autoethnography is less susceptible to jargon

that can obfuscate the knowledge gained from exploring an individual journey to knowing. When we step outside the box in our research, we must find ways to hear our own voice, trust our creativity and experience, and recognize our validity as researchers.

In speaking with and reading about other women artists, I find that I am not alone in these concerns. The knowing we gather is not understood through graphs, algorithms, statistics, or neatly designed and documented through experiments conducted within a controlled environment. Even in the strictest of quantitative research methods, the researcher is still a factor in the final interpretation of the data. Years later, experiments and the resulting data can be interpreted in an entirely different light than was originally determined as “the truth.” So how does one go about validating and proving “rigorous” investigation of one’s own experience – especially if that experience as a woman and a visual artist is at odds with the over-arching paradigm of patriarchy?

In a patriarchal structure, women struggle with finding a voice. I have struggled to find my voice in an academic environment that, for all of its progressive efforts, relies on an accreditation system based on a hierarchy of proven data and linear knowledge. In that sense, it is also elitist. Only in relatively recent history have the halls of academia been open to women in equal numbers; the requirements for scholarship are still primarily structured on a masculine worldview. This worldview is restrictive in its approach to knowledge, i.e., knowledge is acquired as if it were in limited supply and only a few persons proven worthy may possess this treasure. To introduce new knowledge, one must *defend* it as though knowledge were something that threatens an established truth. Fortunately it often does. However, it does that only if all voices are allowed to speak, not just a few elite that are of the right race, ethnicity, sex and/or

economic strata. This is especially true in view of the many problems facing today's world. We need all the knowing we can find.

The enculturation of the patriarchal paradigm is insidious; it creates the illusion that the predominant accepted mode of experiencing the world is the only way. In Adrienne Rich's essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" from her book, *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*, Rich tells us "Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves" (35). Language and images are paramount in offering us another way of seeing, of knowing ourselves as women. Although Rich's comments are directed to women writers, her comments resonate for any woman who is trying to communicate her unique way of experiencing the world. She goes on to say, ". . . there is the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography to be explored. But there is also a difficult and dangerous walking on the ice, as we try to find language and images for a consciousness we are just coming into, and with little in the past to support us" (35).

When women are constantly defined through a masculine lens using masculine language, their voices and singular language of the heart, soul, spirit, visions, and dreams are difficult to hear and lessened in value. Women may imitate men's ways of seeing, evaluating, and describing women, thinking that because they are saying it as women, it is the feminine voice. Just because there are women in the boardroom does not mean that the institution is not patriarchal.

By limiting access to other ways of gathering knowledge, to other ways of knowing, both men and women are seduced into this mindset. They question ways of knowing and expression that have not gone through the rigorous hazing of the traditional scholarly obstacle course. Many people – women and indigenous people, for example – do not garner knowledge by stacking

facts one on top of another or lining them up to reach a set conclusion. They do not think linearly. The act of analyzing – of dismembering and isolating everything—is not reflective of how nature actually works. The natural world functions holistically, is interdependent and self-referential. There is a constant feedback loop in nature. And there is mystery. Everything cannot be explained. It cannot be pinned down and in this way, as in quantum physics, there is a constant interplay or interaction between the participants.

Traditional academia and research criteria encourage a separation of self from research. To an artist, such archaic standards of validation are stifling and restrictive. I experience the world through relationship, not only interpersonal relationships but also relationships with everything I encounter. I have relationships with my environment, my art-making, and my research. Articulating the way I grow into knowing, how I take information in through my body, my fingertips, my dreams, my artistic wanderings and wonderings has not been easy. Imagination and so-called flights of fancy are downplayed in scholarly research and writing, but they are the very wings on which new ideas and ways of perceiving the world soar. Intuitive meanderings allow us to access knowledge that is outside the box of a currently accepted truth constrained by outdated rules and systems.

The main focus of my program has been my artistic response to Inanna's transformation, but describing the process of studio research has been challenging. One reason is the subject matter, the dark and light aspects of the Divine Feminine; the other reason is using language of the light to convey the essence of experiences that happen in the dark.

A very late addition to my research methodology library was Robert Romanyshyn's book, *The Wounded Researcher: Research with Soul in Mind*. Although written as a research manual for doctoral candidates in psychology, it validates the way I approach my studio work.

Romanyshyn clarified the concepts I needed to articulate my experiences as an artist and a researcher, and also expanded on techniques I was already using to engage the images that appear in my studio. For every time he used the term “psychology” or “researcher,” I could have replaced it with the term “art” or “artist.” There is a strong correlation between my investigations into the Underworld and Romanyshyn’s use of myth—Orpheus and Euripides—as a metaphor to explain “research with soul in mind.” He uses similar phrases and concepts, i.e., “. . . the secrets of the Underworld have to do with love and loss, with mourning and dismemberment, and with the transformations that this dismemberment brings” (52). This is a statement that could easily refer to events in and around Inanna’s descent into the Underworld. He captures the spirit of doing deep soul work when he speaks of what the researcher “brings to and wants from the work, from the soul of the work, and what the work asks of the researcher.” (xi). He means being in dialogue with the work [artwork] and listening to what it has to say. He speaks of loitering around the work, falling in love with the work, being disillusioned by the work, and of being worked on and worked over by the work. I have firsthand knowledge of the experiences exemplified by these phrases.

Romanyshyn writes from a decidedly Jungian perspective. He is another author who uses alchemical language to identify psychological processes and research methodology, using a research approach he calls alchemical hermeneutics. He describes alchemical hermeneutics as a method that “attends to the margins of consciousness in research. It keeps open a space for the researcher’s dreams, symptoms, synchronicities, feelings, and intuitions to come in from the margins throughout the research process” (275). The method has ten characteristics that define its uniqueness: complex, creative, imaginative, aesthetic, hieratic, spiritual, ethical, an-amnesic, re-creative of unfinished events, and erotic. Many of these attributes are characteristic of my own

research; had I found this concept earlier in my program, I would have used it as my primary research method.

Phase IV: Digging up the Bones

Most of my life has been spent walking on the edge of an abyss, never knowing when I would be pushed, pulled, or simply lose my balance and fall into a bottomless pit. Although I could not articulate this experience in mythological or archetypal terms, it did feel as though I was being sacrificed to a ritual of a higher order. Through art, psychotherapy, life wisdom, and the elixir of modern medicine, these terrifying descents are mostly a thing of the past and that pit now has a bottom. Using the structure of a master's program, I consciously chose to make the descent. I sought a better understanding of the realm of the Underworld and the many archetypes - both masculine and feminine - that walk there, specifically the archetype of the Dark Feminine.

Mythology provides some of the most insightful clues about the Underworld and those who travel there. Over time, these myths have morphed to reflect specific times and places but the core story remains the same. There are many archetypes that embody the Dark Feminine. But what is the Dark Feminine? In *Descent to the Goddess*, Sylvia Perera describes her as “the goddess in her primal reality” (7). The Dark Goddess moves down below the level of earth, dirt, Gaia, much deeper. She is primitive and ancient. Thinking in terms of a physical place, the molten cauldron of the Earth's center comes to mind - the boiling cauldron of the Celtic goddess Babd. However, this is not the Hell of Christianity overflowing with eternally screaming souls in a fiery inferno. The non-Judeo-Christian underworld is a sacred place, yet utterly terrifying nonetheless. This is psychic territory below the dirt of our familiar Mother Earth. Mythologically, it is viewed as a place of desolation: barren, cold, and lifeless – there is no fire in this subterranean realm of the dark night of the soul, the bottomless pit of depression, and the fecund depths of regeneration.

Western culture values that which is associated with the external Upper World of light, consciousness, and reason. The feminine qualities, which have less to do with what is visible and known than that which is invisible, internal, and mysterious, have been pushed into the shadows. Perera expands on this idea when she says, "For what has been valued in the West in women has too often been defined only in relation to the masculine: the good nurturant mother and wife; the sweet, docile, agreeable daughter; the gently supportive or bright, achieving partner [wife]" (12). It is what is acceptable in the light; but with light there is shadow, a shadow that is counterpart to the light. In *The Moonlit Path*, Fred Gustafson describes it as "the side of the feminine archetype that cannot, nor does it even necessarily desire to, fit into the existing cultural structures" (xv). The shadow contains all that cannot be brought into the light. The Underworld is the repository of what has been lost to the feminine - all her fierceness, power, courage and clarity. Yet, it is within the dark of the feminine body of earth and animal alike, that life is created, nourished, and birthed. So it is in the psyche as well.

Most of us have experience in the Underworld. We may be abducted through no will of our own by illness, death of a loved one, natural disaster, life changes, loss, and depression. Sorrow, suffering, grief, and disconnection are all experiences of the Underworld. Small, subtle deaths occur in everyday life such as the breaking of a favorite dish or the hurt from a difficult exchange with a valued friend. Dreams are also a way into the Netherworld for they belong to the night, to the dark. Dreams take us down through sleep, forgetting, into a death-like darkness. We may also choose to make the descent for a deepening of soul, for a deeper understanding of our life and ourselves. Deliberate modes of journeying to the Underworld are varied and numerous. It has been accessed through ritual, shamanic trance, myth, psychotherapy, and art, to name but a few. Often these methods overlap into a dance of symbolic death, descent,

transformation, and ascent - for this is not a realm of physical, literal death so much as the realm of psychic or soul death and rebirth. Any death, whether psychic or physical, is an unknown; its essence is dark, and the image of the grave is but a step down into the depths of the mysterious chthonic realms.

My first encounter with the feminine descent into Hades was through the myth of Persephone and Demeter. The most well-known version of the story is based on the Homeric “Hymn to Demeter” in which the god Hades abducts Persephone to the Underworld. This myth was an important touchstone in helping me understand, in mythological terms, my own descents for I often felt as though I was being abducted. However, on some level this story had always bothered me. Perhaps it was the lack of volition on the part of Persephone. Why, as the daughter of the most powerful god, Zeus, and the equally powerful goddess, Demeter, does she have no power of her own? What was expected of her as Queen of the Underworld? Did she have decisions to make? How did she feel? Was all that time spent mourning her mother? I can relate to the abduction, but what happened after that? This horrific event must have changed her but in what way? Overall, she is a helpless female at the mercy of more powerful masculine forces, which indicates a firmly established patriarchy.

An earlier, pre-Hellenic version does have Persephone voluntarily making the descent after hearing the cries of the lost souls caught in the Underworld. Out of compassion for her mother’s grief and the suffering of those left below, she agrees to spend half the year above and half the year below, in the Underworld. This version portrays a woman with some will and decision-making ability. The Demeter-Persephone myth is an important myth, but I found it inadequate for myself and the times I live in. It is a rather bleak story to use as a guide to

understanding a descent and time spent in the Underworld. I needed a fuller story and I found it in the myth of “The Descent of Inanna.”

Inanna’s Descent is the most well-known section of her narrative, but there is an entire life that precedes her descent. Unlike the Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter, Inanna is not a young innocent maiden still attached to her mother when she is abducted (or voluntarily descends) into the Underworld. Inanna is a successful and honored Queen in her own right with a husband and grown sons. As Inanna’s story unfolded, I wondered if her story represented a more complete cycle of continuing feminine maturation in the lives of both women and men, with relevance to the feminine/masculine issues in today’s world.

Diane Wolkstein’s introduction to *Inanna: Queen of Heaven and Earth* clearly identifies where the power of this story lies. It is in the fullness of Inanna’s life and in her experiences as a woman—both in her physical life as well as her psychological life.

In Sumerian, Inanna’s name means literally ‘Queen of Heaven’, and she was called both the First Daughter of the Moon and the Morning and Evening Star (the planet Venus). In addition, in Sumerian mythology, she was known as the Queen of Heaven and Earth and was responsible for the growth of plants and animals and fertility in humankind. Then, because of her journey to the underworld, she took on the powers and mysteries of death and rebirth, emerging not only as a sky or moon goddess, but as the goddess who rules over the sky, the earth, and the underworld. Here is the goddess in *all* her aspects . . . the texts formed one story: the life story of the goddess, from her adolescence to her completed womanhood and ‘godship’ (Wolkstein and Kramer xvi-xvii).

Perera further elucidates the importance of the myth when she states:

Inanna’s path and its stages may thus present a paradigm for the life-enhancing descent into the abyss of the dark goddess and out again. Inanna shows us the way, and she is the first to sacrifice herself for deep feminine wisdom and atonement. She descends, submits, and dies . . . It is not based upon passivity, but upon an active willingness to

receive” (13).

Women have been sacrificing and submitting for a long time, but it has been to the wrong thing. This story asks that we allow ourselves to be acted upon by the Goddess in order to reclaim the power and passion of the feminine. Inanna points the way to what is required in our own sacrifice. Not only must we sacrifice what we most cherish, but also that which no longer serves us. We are called upon to die to an old way of being. Dying to the attitudes and beliefs held most precious, we surrender to the work of powerful psychic elements. Renewed, regenerated, and steeped in the cauldron of life, we emerge lightened of the burden carried below and with a clarity gleaned from an encounter with our worst nightmare – ourselves stripped bare. It is a harrowing experience, but necessary as it becomes the fertilizer for the rebirth that must follow. As Perera says, “the Underworld is a place of transformation – not Death – to which the goddess willingly surrenders” (22).

The ritual and shamanistic nature of Inanna’s descent is clear. The initiation occurs as she descends through the seven gates, divesting herself of garments/attributes of daily life at each gate. Stripped of all outer trappings, she dies to her old self. Magical beings heal her and make her whole again. She then ascends, retrieving long repressed values as she passes, once again, through each of the seven gates. The final state is uniting her life Above with the wisdom gained from Below thereby creating a new pattern for her life. Inanna is transformed. Transformation is at the core of both the Demeter/Persephone and Inanna/Ereshkigal myths and the rituals that surrounded them. Transformation is also at the heart of the Dark Feminine. Demetra George writes, “. . . [the] Goddess embraced constant and periodic renewal of life in which death is not separate from life [but is necessary to life]” (30). She “. . . receives the dead and prepares them for rebirth” (*Mysteries of the Dark Moon* 33).

In corresponding alchemy with the myth of The Descent of Inanna, the termination of Inanna's Descent is also the beginning. When she is in the presence of Ereshkigal, Queen of the Underworld and Dark Goddess, she is in *nigredo*, the blackening. From an interview in 1952, Jung conveys the drama and import of this stage when he says, "Right at the beginning you meet the 'dragon,' the chthonic spirit, the 'devil' or, as the alchemists called it, the 'blackness,' the *nigredo*, and this encounter produces suffering" (Jung, *Speaking* 228). Ereshkigal is the embodiment of the chthonic spirit, and when she turns her killing eye on Inanna, Inanna is caught in the alchemical operation of *mortificatio*. She is dead. Ereshkigal hangs Inanna's body on a peg like a piece of meat leaving it to rot, to undergo *putrefactio*. Thus, Ereshkigal becomes an agent of change, of transformation. As Inanna waits to be rescued, she is decaying, dying to an old way of being, passing from one state to another, her ego self dissolving. She is in *olutio* and being returned to *prima materia*, an original state. She is then rescued by homunculi created from dirt beneath her grandfather's fingernails. These androgynous earthy creatures claim the *prima materia* and usher Inanna into the *albedo* state, a state of being newly born, whitened yet not resurrected. That requires *rubedo*, a reddening, blood. She sacrifices, she bleeds, she is reddened, and she is fully alive.

One could say that before Inanna's Descent she is in a condition of *coagulatio*, fixed in her ego as a powerful woman and Queen of Heaven and Earth. In a state of prideful naivety, she decides to go to the Underworld and puts safeguards in place to assure her return. She does not seem to understand that she will be reduced to her basic elements. One of the personal items she surrenders as she goes through the gates into the Underworld is a necklace of lapis beads. In some accounts it is a lapis pendant. In alchemy, lapis was the stone of paradox and was associated with the Philosopher's Stone, which had many attributes; the most important was as

an agent of transmutation. Medieval alchemists declared that it could change base metals into gold. Symbolically, the Philosopher's Stone represents the transformation of one's consciousness into a higher state of being. The appearance of lapis at the beginning of Inanna's Descent announces that a process of change is underway. Inanna descends as though still a maiden psychologically. She has taken on the trappings of the outer world but she has not engaged the contents of her psyche. Ereshkigal tempers her and mediates her transformation. She returns with clearer vision, finally attaining maturity and wisdom. Having integrated psyche and soul, Inanna reaches the final phase of her transformation.

Inanna's transformation has required her to turn the eye of discernment—the killing eye, the eye of death—upon herself. This is the core issue of Inanna traveling to the Underworld to visit her sister Ereshkigal, who is her mirror self, her shadow. She cannot hide anything from her shadow sister, so all the accoutrements, trappings, and paraphernalia of Inanna's Upper World life—in other words, her persona, her mask—must be left behind hence, the relinquishing of an Upper World item at each of the seven gates. She can only come before her Shadow Self stripped of any artifice. Being seen by her Shadow Self means being naked and vulnerable. The Dark Sister strips Inanna even further by removing her skin, that thin layer of protection, leaving her remains to rot—to further dissolve, decay, and die. Inanna has become intimate with Death, with her Dark Self, and she can never go back to who she was before. She agreed to this transformation the moment she accepted the rules of the Underworld journey and stepped through the first gate. It is the point of no return.

With so much rich material, it is difficult to break away from its unrelenting depth; in fact, I could not. I delved deeper into the myth. As I was doing my artwork, my art was working me, and I found myself focused on one specific moment in the myth. It is the moment where

Inanna's remains are hanging on the peg, her corpse is removed, re-enlivened, and she ascends. It is the movement from *nigredo* to *albedo* to *rubedo*. The main body of my thesis artwork is based on the movement between these states and the colors associated with them—black, white, and red.

These color themes have long been a part of my artwork. I am strongly attracted to black and red, but especially to black. To paraphrase James Hillman, I am *seduced by black*. Black feels nurturing, rich, mysterious and full of potential. I have often referred to black as *the void of potentiality*—after all, black is the confluence of all colors and therefore open to all possibilities. Red, on the other hand, feels decadent, luscious, and full of life. Both can be as wicked as the devil. These associations feel deeply intuitive in spite of my awareness that there is a cultural overlay of childhood stories and fairytales. One only has to think of the ritual of storytelling and Snow White, Little Red Riding Hood, or the Wicked Witch of the West, to realize how early these cultural images are imbedded into our nascent psychological development.

Along with the color white, red and black are colors often associated with the Divine Feminine. Individually, these colors are connected with death in various cultures around the world. In feminine spirituality they signify the trinity of the Goddess as maiden, mother, and crone, indicating the journey of a woman's life from innocence and purity through sexual awareness, fertility, suffering, and sacrifice to wisdom, transformation, and death. I feel an intense connection with this symbolism as it literally embodies the Goddess as Nature as Life. This association is certainly not unique to me but is found in many cultures around the world. In *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*, Barbara Walker writes:

In India these colors [white, red, black] were known as the *gunas* or “strands,” the interweaving threads of living nature, representing the Goddess Prakriti, a title of Kali as

the totality of natural forces. The strands of *sattva* (white), *rajas* (red), and *tamas* (black) ran through every life as ordained by Fate (*karma*), or the Three Fates, which were yet another manifestation of the same female trinity (89).

As symbols of the cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth, these colors move continuously from white to red to black and back to white. In alchemy, this differs. Used to describe the main processes that make up alchemy's *magnum opus*, the stages begin with *nigredo* (blackening) then move to *albedo* (whitening) and culminate in *rubedo* (reddening). However, the stages of *nigredo* and *albedo* can alternate and sometimes include a fourth stage called *citrinitas* (yellowing). The only thing agreed upon by the alchemists of old is that the *opus* ends with *rubedo*. This one agreement is significant because alchemy is a mercurial subject. Alchemists considered the three most important elements in alchemical work to be the condition of the materials, the work itself, and the nature of the worker. These three elements could present endless variables to be considered and, in that sense, is analogous to the variables present in creating art.

Phase V: Archetypes, Ritual, and Relics

The language of alchemy appeals to me for its use of words that describe activities carried out by the hands (grinding, mixing, coloring) and physical transformations processed through the senses (dissolving, decaying, heating, evaporating), which is exactly right for talking about “nature, life, death, and the soul” (Hillman, *Alchemy* 14). They are physical words that describe the various means used to transform *prima materia* into metaphorical gold. That certainly describes my work as I cut, tear, dissect, mix, twist, knot, color, and infuse my chosen raw materials into something that reflects the parallel journey of my soul.

My studio is a cauldron, the crucible in which my ideas and mental images are made manifest. Here I bring forth my unconscious processes and transform them into something I can see and hold; in this way, I better understand what my psyche/soul is trying to expose. I literally make visible what my deepest self wants me to know. So often what I want to know is hidden; I am in the dark trying to peer into the shadows for some clue as to what is attempting to come forth. I do best when I simply surrender to the unfolding phenomena and trust that the mystery will be revealed in its own time. Thinking about my artistic process in terms of *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo* helps me to relax into the magic of making art. It also helps me to understand and accept the psychological cycles that accompany creating and living as an artist in this particular time and place.

With all of the images flooding my mind, I was tempted to spend too much time working with collage, painting, and drawing. It was easy to get off track. But was I really off track? Early in my program I was described as a bricoleur. Never having heard the word, I consulted dictionaries and Wikipedia. Here is Wikipedia’s definition:

Bricoleur (pronounced brĕkō'lər) is a term used in several disciplines, among them the visual arts, to refer to the construction or creation of a work from a diverse range of

things that happen to be available, or a work created by such a process. The term is borrowed from the French word *bricolage*, from the verb *bricoler*, the core meaning in French being, "fiddle, tinker" and, by extension, "to make creative and resourceful use of whatever materials are at hand (regardless of their original purpose)". In contemporary French the word is the equivalent of the English "do it yourself," and is seen on large shed retail outlets throughout France. A person who engages in bricolage is a *bricoleur*.

This definition fits the way I work as well as the way I think about my work. I now understood that collage was not just a medium but also a style of working. This allowed me to achieve two goals: 1) getting myself into the studio and making things, 2) developing an understanding of my artistic methods. What gets me into the studio and, once I am there, what keeps me going? What compels me to make things, play with objects, put things together—engage in bricolage?

I, like many artists I know and read about, struggle with overcoming huge resistance to doing the very thing we want to do—make art. I am very hard on myself about resistance and not doing the work I claim I want to do. But as I focused on the way I work and my attraction to the studio, I made progress. I discarded habits that were no longer useful, fine-tuned practices that worked, and incorporated new ones. I became more compassionate with myself as I learned new ways of living with resistance. I say living with it because many artists fight resistance every time they go into the studio, no matter how famous or prolific they are. They just find a way to get in there and do the work.

Staying with the creative process is important for me no matter what I am doing in the studio. I may not be working on the piece at the moment, but if I cut out some pictures, make a collage, pick up some knitting, do a little beadwork, play with some clay, eventually it will lead me back to the primary work at hand. By showing up, even when I am not in the mood, and *mousing* around, I make room for the muse to appear. This is hard for me. I want to be linear and I am just not. I suspect this will be an on-going challenge.

Art-making takes a concrete amount of body time meaning that one can only work as fast as the body allows. The unfolding significance of a piece may take years, but the moment before the actual creating begins is the alchemical *prima materia*. In his book, *What Painting Is*, James Elkins describes that moment as it applies to painters; but, it is true for many artists as well. He says:

“When painters think this way [alchemically], they are experiencing the *materia prima* [sic] as a moment of silence before the work begins: . . . ‘without form and void.’ Before creation the waters are still, colorless, odorless, lightless, motionless: they are pure potential, waiting for [movement] . . .” (77).

The core expressions of my recurrent crossings into the unconscious, are sculptural female forms created from rags, reed, and PaperClay®. These are the *prima materia* of the art I make, but they are also the primary structural material of these specific forms. When my hands embrace these materials and begin to work with them—weaving, knotting, tearing, shaping, molding—my mind releases the chaos of information and imagery and settles into an intuitive sense of what needs to take form. I vacillate between trusting the elusive ways of this innate knowing and the desire for certainty of what I am creating. I know that I am creating a sculptural form, and I have a general idea of what it will look like, but the details only make themselves known at the eleventh hour of creation. And even then I may not understand the full import of what is being revealed through the completed form until much later.

The female form has called to me throughout my life, beginning with the dolls and paper dolls I played with as a young child; this interest transformed into later work in ceramic and collages and now in sculptural forms. However, I hesitate to call these particular forms dolls, as the term seems too insubstantial for the qualities they carry. They are more like effigies of feminine ancestors. All of the figures embody qualities of the female characters I create.

Symbols of their stories, as well as my understanding of various aspects of their personalities, are included as amulets, charms, talismans, or fetishes. These terms are often used interchangeably; however, I try to use them according to their function. I also attach odds and ends, trinkets, and whatnots simply because the pieces are beautiful or add something to the overall form.

There is an alchemical process in all art-making and these archetypal forms come up and take me down into the unknown depths of my soul. They are physical manifestations of a tiny corner of my psyche that I have been able to capture and make visible. Through my hands, I get to know them, hate them, love them, and finally release their energy.

Inanna's story has become symbolic of my own journey of both descent and ascent in the studio. I was carried away by the ramifications of this story and its effect on my understanding of the Dark Feminine and her place in a woman's psyche. I realized that this story was more about Inanna rather than Ereshkigal. Where was the Dark Feminine? Ereshkigal was my main interest in this story; however, Inanna kept pushing her out of the way. Inanna's dominance was made emphatically clear to me when I awoke in the middle of the night from a dream of one of my doll forms who, with white face and hair, was dressed in white rags with red beads for eyes. It was such a powerful image that I immediately made a quick sketch and jotted down some notes. It was very clear that this was an image of Inanna and that she would be my next art piece. I had not left the myth of Ereshkigal and Inanna, but was being drawn deeper into it. I resisted pursuing this direction because it seemed to pull me away from working with the Dark Feminine. It also meant working in white. I am most comfortable working in dark colors and especially black.

An internal argument began to rage about making this u-turn both artistically and academically. Focusing on Inanna meant working with uncomfortable concepts and colors. Inanna

was Queen of Heaven and Earth and as Queen she was powerful – she ruled her world and all things in it. She was surrounded by light; she was worshipped as the goddess of love and sensuality. In today’s vernacular, she was seen in a big way.

I had collected material for the dark goddess forms—pieces I really wanted to create. Using the Dark Feminine as the primary theme of my studies meant I could continue to work with the dark. The dark is a safe place to hide. Although I no longer experience the deep depressions of years ago, I know its territory and its darkness can become a comfortable cage. I was being called to move out of my comfort zone.

The material from my unconscious could not be approached directly; I had to sidle up to it. I drew a series of cloaked figures, which were carry-overs from the work I did as an undergraduate. At that time, I used black Conté crayon to draw life-size cloaked hooded figures. The new figures were no longer hooded and I worked with white chalk. These white-cloaked drawings were an initial approach to Inanna, while I found a way through my resistance to changing the direction of my work.

Then came a literal call. At one point in my ongoing internal argument, I clearly heard a somewhat gravelly voice in my left ear saying, “First you deal with Inanna, then you deal with me.” I am not prone to hearing voices, but I felt that Ereshkigal had spoken. I was amused when I realized that I had envisioned myself as a journalist who was just going to take a little trip to the Underworld, interview Ereshkigal, and make my report. But that was not to be the case. I could not just appear in front of Ereshkigal; Inanna was to be my guide down. What did I need to learn from Inanna? The first step was to become even more familiar with her story, both before and after the descent. Once I started working with her artistically, the deeper lessons would begin to emerge.

If I was *seduced* by black and red - and I was - then I would have to say that white left me cold. Nothing excited me about white, and yet it was the color that appeared when I envisioned Inanna. I associate Inanna's *albedo*, her whitening, with her being taken off the peg by the little dirt figures sent to rescue her. She has been reduced to her bare essence, to pure ash, ready to be born anew, not as an innocent maiden or even an honored Queen, but as one who has been stripped of artifice. She can no longer live her life in the old way; she will return with a dubious gift from the Underworld. She returns with the "eye of death" or as I interpret it, the eye of discernment. Illusion is gone. She sees things as they are and must act accordingly. But all that is in the *rubedo*. The white of the Inanna doll and dress form represent that moment between the blissful unawareness of ash and Inanna's return to consciousness. It is a moment where she is pure, untainted by the past or the future that awaits her.

Intrigued with the red eyes, the artist in me was already at work. What would be the benefit of red eyes? One benefit could be the ability to see in the dark. Inanna needed red eyes so she could see in the dark, and it was through her red eyes that I would develop night vision. Here was one piece of information I could use in creating the Inanna piece. But I needed more.

Following Jung's example of talking with the images of his unconscious as though they were real, I dialogued with one of the doll-like forms I had created earlier. I sat down Conjure Woman and we had a talk. All of my forms have strong personalities, so she did not disappoint me. The following is that conversation as I recorded it in my journal on April 16, 2011.

ME. You seem to be trying to get my attention today. What would you like to tell me?

CW. You spend too much time in the dark. Inanna is one you should get to know better if you want to reach Ereshkigal. Otherwise, you will not be able to face Ereshkigal. This is not a tea party.

ME. Who are you in this?

CW. Be clear that *I Am Not Ereshkigal!* She is fierce! Although, I do have my moments. I am a messenger of sorts – a medial character, as you would call me as I can travel between both the upper and lower worlds.

ME. Why is it important for me to get to know Inanna?

CW. Because her life in the light of the Upper World will give you the inner light that will allow you to make the descent, and, more importantly, ascend. She will introduce you to the allies you will need on this journey. Who will be your handmaid? Who will mourn your descent? Who will find the one willing to intercede with Ereshkigal on your behalf? Who will create the little creatures from the dirt of their fingernails to bargain for your life? Follow the images of Inanna that are coming forth. Leave the dark for a little while and learn to see in the light before you try to see in the dark.

Alternating between the Inanna doll form and the *albedo* dress form, I committed to working with white. At times Inanna was relegated to the peg while I focused on the obsessive, meditative knot-tying that made the dress form. When I finished the dress piece, I turned it over to fill in some spots with reverse knotting. This turning-over pleasantly surprised me. The back of the piece was just as interesting as the front, maybe even more so. I decided to present that



Fig. 2. *Conjur Woman*

side to the world. This unexpected change made me think about what goes on behind the scenes. What is going on in the shadows? What is working below/behind the surface?

This frame of mind continued for days, until the power of light and shadow was graphically demonstrated to me while I prepared an armature for the next two dress forms. I cut the hardware cloth used for the armature into a simple dress shape and placed it outside on a piece of cardboard.

As I spray-painted the armature, I walked around the cardboard and I noticed that something peculiar was happening. Beyond the wire form, a shadow danced to a tune of its very own. In fact, the shadow joyously flaunted the movement that appeared to be trapped within the static grid form. Skirts swayed and sleeves



Fig. 4. Shadow Dancer Appears

that morning.



Fig. 3. Albedo Dress

reached outward as invisible bodies twirled to unheard rhythms. They were lyrical, beautiful, undulating, and moving in ways the physical objects casting the shadows could not. My imagination danced with possibilities born of these shadow dancers. This is an excerpt from my journal entry for

Sunday – June 23, 2013 9:52 am

I can clearly see these fleeting shadows captured in wire and cloth. I love that this is all coming to me through shadows. In a way that's what my work has been about – shadow. Ereshkigal has given me the eyes to see the shadows in the light. I'm thinking about the feminine shadow and its need to be free and imagine that part of her shadow is moving and swaying in response to the light whether it is sun or moonlight.

How often have I stood right next to my own shadow and missed what it had to offer? These shadows exquisitely express the beauty in a simple image. My perception has been shifted for now I only see the shadows of these forms. Can the shadows be captured/contained? The impressions of the two forms dancing together remind me of sisters interacting (Inanna & Ereshkigal) – sisters of the heart as well as heredity.

In my studio practice I find myself drawn back to the grid. There is something so soothing about the grid. It is not the first time I've used it . . . I am thinking of the tapestry work I have done in the past. The armature for the dolls is also based on the grid. I ponder these associations . . .

- What is the symbolism of the grid?
 - Crossroads but could also be construed as confining structure.
 - A seemingly ordered, clean form in contrast to the raw, untidy edges of the rags that are components of my artistic lexicon. What is a grid but little squares stacked on top and aside one another? A square is four-sided, which could reference the four directions but it is also solidly 'grounded' no matter what side it rests on.
- In what other ways is a grid used?
 - Plain weave (weaving, gauze, *cloth* – I like this reference!)
 - lattice work (screens – conceal, hide, harems, burkas)
 - net/netting
 - mesh
 - aqueous; permeable

The concept of permeability makes me think of doorways or windows. . . or portals, even eyes. Or transition places, which works with the whole idea of the crossroads/intersections.

In the meantime, I was ready to complete the *albedo* doll form of Inanna. She had waited patiently, hanging from a nail on my studio wall, calmly taking in all the imaginative dances that



Fig. 5. Inanna Waiting

had gone into crafting the *albedo* dress form. As I began to work with her again, I realized that I was engaged with something/one beyond the piece I had begun a year earlier. I was working with Inanna in her essence, and her fundamental nature was that of the Goddess in her manifestation as Queen of Heaven. I was smitten. Each time I approached her, I was drawn to her whiteness, to her purity, to her spirit. Working on her became a sacrament. As the last bits and pieces

of her ancient presence fell about this fabricated form, a hymn, of sorts, came to mind.

In Search of the Dark Feminine

She calls,

Yet she eludes me.

Filling my ears with gravelly commands,

She sends her sister in her stead.

This one I have no desire to meet,

This one that blinds me to what is,

all the while illuminating heaven and earth with her brilliance.

Why is *she* the gatekeeper?

Why must I learn *her* ways

when I have more important matters to pursue?

But there is no escape.

To see in the dark I must become skilled in the ways of the light.

How can I become a crosser of thresholds

when I refuse to acknowledge the threshold?

How indeed?

Always the questions, never listening for the deep knowing.

And then one day, not any special day or any special moment,

I do stop.

No questions. Just a wondering, An opening.

And Inanna enters . . . in silence.

No fanfare befitting the Queen of Heaven and Earth.

My hands begin their work and a form emerges claiming her identity.

I reach for black yet white appears in my hands.

I surrender and while I am busy creating her, she is quietly creating me.

This is the way of making. One is made as one makes.

This work is nearing completion

. . . I feel sadness at the loss of our intimate connection.

Of weaving reed into body,

of layering lengths of rags into a skirt,

of shaping face and hands from clay.

Oh yes, I have caressed your beautiful form and

marveled at the love of so much whiteness.

And love you I do . . .

for the eyes you have given me to see in the shadows, if not in the dark.

for opening my heart in compassion.

For me, there is a finishing point and

I am almost done with this particular Inanna form.

However, Inanna's work continues for hers is the work of the opening heart.

I have much to learn.

So where is the Dark Feminine I was so earnestly searching for?

She rests.

Awaiting my approach.

Preparing the way.

After working with white for almost two years, I was relieved to be moving on. I was overdue for some time in the dark. I had become giddy and *light-headed* working with all that white and was indeed *longing for darkness* as China Gallaland so aptly titled her book by the same phrase. I was still too close to this whitening to see clearly what was unfolding. Yet I knew that one needs light in order to see what is hidden, what is waiting to emerge from the dark.

The creative potential contained in the meeting of dark and light lured me as I began working with the black dress form. I had already



Fig. 6. Inanna in Albedo

dipped into the dark where there was little light, but the work continued; it was the only way through to the next stage of *rubedo*. The work of soul-making is physical as well as psychological. An artist has to be willing to be *worked on* in order to make art.

I pinned the photographs of those dancing shadows next to the piece I was preparing to start. This was the *nigredo* piece, and I welcomed the respite from all that purity. I wrapped and hung the frame. I tore and cut the fabric, putting it in small piles ready to be knotted into the little squares created by all those crossroads.

There was a certain comfort as I felt the dark fertile ground beneath my psychic feet, knowing that the compost created from my darkest moments was exactly the right fertilizer needed to nourish and birth a new approach, a different perception, a deeper knowing. Working with white revealed the shadows and the dark forms that were ready to be made manifest through

my hands. I had planned a summer of concentrated studio time; however, just as I was approaching the work, a triptych of events showed me that the opportunity to experience the *nigredo* is always close at hand.

My youngest sister, who is the primary caregiver for my mother and stepfather, required surgery; so I took her place, spending a month away from home. It was a grueling month, as my mother required 24/7 care. Every facet of her care necessitated constant attendance. She had to be moved every few hours so pressure sores could heal. These wounds also had to be dressed several times throughout the day and night. As mother began to improve, she became less cooperative in her care and my stepfather needed attention as well. While I dealt with the physical realities that continually presented themselves, I was conscious of the attitudes, fears, and judgments I was bringing to the situation.

I definitely felt I was being worked on. I brought some of this consciousness to my sleep-



Fig. 7. *Nigredo* Dress Form

deprived stupor, but was usually caught up in the demands of the moment. It was only when I returned home to my studio and began tearing and cutting up the black fabric for the *nigredo* pieces that I let the fear, deep sadness and grief at the loss of vibrancy in my mother wash over me. I also grieved my own aging process. I sensed the presence of Ereshkigal.

As I let the work come through my hands I often thought of James Hillman's comment in the beginning pages of

Alchemical Psychology, "The work of soulmaking requires corrosive acids, heavy earths, ascending birds; there are sweating kings, dogs and bitches, stenches, urine, and blood" (13). Elements often found in the *nigredo* phase, which Hillman says

“... is not the beginning, but an accomplished stage. Black is, in fact, an achievement! It is a condition of something having been worked upon, . . .” (87).

Again a hymn came to mind as I contemplated being “worked upon” and how I experienced that “achievement” in my body.

Ereshkigal’s Embrace

Finally, dark sister/lover

I am in your cold embrace

I feel the caress of sharpened claws tearing away

the veil of my illusions

No sweet sisterly welcome here.

I have accepted your rules

Shed my precious garments on the way down

Now I lie before you

my belly hugging the cold stone floor

I have been here before trembling in anticipation

The pain will not be less.

Sight is gone.

All that remains are blackened shreds of skin

I am rotted to the core.

How many times do I/we have to be here?

Isolated, bereft of hope. The stillness becomes a balm.

Essence remains.

Aaahh. A glimmer of light . . . a glimmer of white

But not yet.

There is time yet to serve,

grinding minutes left hanging on the peg

All detritus surrendered to decay.

Is there anything to salvage?

Soul survives.

Now the white is brilliant – my vision cleared

Spirit revived.

Praise Holy Ereshkigal!

I had been home less than two weeks when the next event happened. My studio flooded. Water engulfed my studio, half of my library/office, and half of the garage. Everything had to be moved out, water removed, room dried, carpet and pad replaced, furniture reinstalled. Once again my attention shifted to the immediate task at hand. However, at some point I felt this experience with the water was significant. The flood was not the result of weather but was due, according to the plumber, to “a failure of an inline nipple.” If this was the Goddess at play, my humor had deserted me. A friend directed me to an interview by David Van Nuys with Monika Wikman, a Jungian analyst, who spoke about the alchemical stage of *dissolutio/solutio*.

Grief is a real carrier of the alchemical process of *dissolutio*, and in *dissolutio* the sadness, loss, grief, deep feeling often hits one and you can't attach to and hold and embody life in the same old ways. . . It also dissolves old constellations in the psyche, it dissolves old identities . . . The grief is an agent of change, it's telling us the energy is not in the old and that there's a releasing to go through in order to find the next source of energy, so . . . what you'll see in the dreams that start to appear too and experiences, you see water—literally water—there'll be sometimes the dangerous side of water—tidal waves, floods, a dam breaking, a sense of drowning, there could be an ordeal by water, but there also can be other images that start to appear, like a baptism in water, something that has a salvific, revivifying quality that's showing up in the water scenes . . . It is ultimately, it can turn into . . . the redeeming waters of the unconscious, where there's a baptism and a new self that's getting born, a cleansing and a nakedness too that can come out of it, bliss, and a sense of moisture too, something feels humid that once was dry, your life energy is supple again. (Transcript #235)

The total disruption of this “ordeal by water” did dissolve much of the grief I carried from my time in Phoenix with my family. Although the effects of the flood were barely visible three weeks later, I continued to feel my way through releasing old identities and old ways of being while trying to access more soul-full-ness in my day-to-day interactions with the world around me. At the same time, I was trying to complete my visual and written thesis.

The third *nigredo* event was a direct result of the previous two events. As soon as the studio was reassembled, I was felled with a severe bout of sciatica. For several weeks, I could only stand or lie down and then only on my right side. I endured constant pain.

Yet again, I was thwarted in my desire to move forward with my art-making. Three times I had been held in abeyance. I was becoming increasingly frustrated. I thought about the flood. I thought about how my creative fire had been diverted to my body in the form of the burning sensation that raced down my leg. At a point of surrender, I reviewed the interview with Monika Wikman where she talks about *calcinatio*.

In *calcinatio* what is dying wants to be thrown on the fire of transformation, you have to find out what are the old patterns and throw ‘em on there and literally make the sacrifice—without conscious sacrifice this kind of work cannot happen. . . . [Jung] makes the conscious sacrifice of his outer identity—he makes many conscious sacrifices so that he can get a different relationship with the creative fire. And the creative fire goes all the way down into the soul—this is *calcinatio*—conscious sacrifice helps us get a different relationship with the creativity within us and the creative fire . . . get a better relationship with [. . .] the fire that’s within you and dedicate yourself, devote yourself, to what the most fruitful life is, with the creative fire that you live with . . . So, rage, anger, desire, frustration, are all part of this process too. Ash is another image that comes up in dreams and experiences of *calcinatio*—that’s usually when it’s burned all the way through—it shows you’re coming all the way through what wanted to die off.
(Transcript #235)

This made perfect sense in relation to both the psychological and artistic work that was coming out of my engagement with Inanna's moment of transformation. I was also struck by the synchronistic discussion on the creative fire with an upcoming five-day intensive I would be attending entitled "Igniting the Creative Fire."

Mimicking the convoluted processes found in the alchemical works of medieval times, both the *dissolutio* and the *calcinatio* were contained within the overall work of the *nigredo*. There was no neat demarcation from one process to the next, but I felt that events had followed a



Fig. 8. Luscious Red

certain order and, in doing so, had prepared me for the next stage of the work. My hands were in the black fabric of the *nigredo*, but the final work of the *opus* beckoned; my heart was yearning for red, the *rubedo*.

I felt uplifted to finally be working in red, my favorite color as evidenced by all the red cabinets in my studio. The many varieties of textures, hues, and intensities of red fabrics awaken the senses, demanding a response. Red is difficult to dismiss. Yet, when I researched the alchemical and psychological significance of the *rubedo*/reddening stage of the *magnum opus*, I was surprised to discover that there was little discussion in the prevailing literature. The last paragraph of Perera's telling of Inanna's descent into the Underworld sheds some light on what might be called the resolution of the *rubedo* phase.

The last part of the myth involves the search for her substitute. Inanna does not hand over anyone who mourned for her. But finally she comes upon her primary consort, Dumuzi (later called Tammuz), who sits enjoying himself on his throne. Inanna looks on him with same eyes of death Ereshkigal had set on her, and the demons seize him . . . He goes to his sister, Geshtinanna, who helps him . . . and urges him to flee. When flight proves useless, she shelters him and finally offers to sacrifice herself in his stead. Inanna decrees

that they shall divide the fate and spend half a year each in the Underworld. The final poem ends with the words:

Inanna placed Dumuzi in the hands of the eternal.
 Holy Ereshkigal! Great is your renown!
 Holy Ereshkigal! Sweet is your praise! (10)

Perera then states that Inanna “returns demonic” (78) and that “Inanna comes up loathsome and claiming her right to survive.” (78) I disagree with the portrayal of Inanna as demonic and loathsome. This sounds more like patriarchal assessment of a woman who is being assertive about, not only her right to survive, but also about how she wants to survive. She returns surrounded by demons who must escort her replacement to the Underworld; however, I don’t interpret this as her being a demon herself. This distinction is important. She does come back with the “eye of death,” which, as I have previously mentioned, I see as more of an eye of discernment. Inanna is changed and can no longer live her old life. The structures that supported her previous life in the Upper World must be dismantled and rebuilt to reflect her new state of integration. By sending Dumuzi to the Underworld, she is asking that Dumuzi meet her at the same level. She seeks parity in their relationship. When Inanna turns her newly acquired “eye of death” upon her husband Dumuzi, she discovers that he needs his own journey to the Underworld. He does not take responsibility for his actions and attitudes. In her absence, he has feasted and frolicked, and thoroughly enjoyed taking her position on the throne. It is Inanna’s capacity for compassion that she metes out an equitable solution allowing Dumuzi’s sister, Geshtinanna, her own sacrifice while still requiring Dumuzi to undergo his own transformation. Clarissa Pinkola Estes says, “that when one force of the psyche changes, the others must shift as well” (*Women Who Run With The Wolves* 451), which succinctly summarizes the issue.

While I immersed myself in bringing the red *doll* and dress form to life, these ideas floated around my mind. They were going through their own reddening. My hands were enlivening these forms. I felt intimately attached to each of the forms created during this process but the red is, appropriately, a more visceral connection. Associations with the color red were palpable in my workspace. As the materials slid through my hands, I felt red in all its permutations of anger, passion, fury, love, sensuality, and blood lust. The obvious association is with women's menstrual blood, but the blood of the *rubedo* is androgynous in its ability to redden one's psychic life.



Fig. 9. Draped in *Rubedo*

This phase of the artwork signaled the end of my program. Release was imminent. But all did not go as planned. In my excitement to complete the *rubedo*, I neglected to think through a different construction method I wanted to try with this doll form. I had finished dressing the form with a large amount of red fabric when the form began to deconstruct. Reed warp and weft began to snap until I had a tangle of ruby hued fabric rags escaping the confines of the doll form and falling at my feet. Ultimately, I returned to the old method of construction and made a new armature. The fabric then had to be untangled and the new form dressed. This was time consuming and humbling.

When I hurried the *rubedo* process I learned, to my chagrin, that there is a price to pay for rushing any phase of the work. The alchemical paradox of *hastening slowly* applies here. One cannot apply too much heat too quickly. I tried to fit the *rubedo* process into an externally

imposed schedule and, unfortunately, the psyche does not respond to artificial deadlines. Apparently neither does art-making.

One cannot engage with this subject matter at this depth without experiencing a transformation. I experienced the *nigredo*—several times, *albedo*, and the *rubedo* but did not get caught in any of them. This was something new, reflecting a successful embodiment of the phases through and beyond the burning fires of the *rubedo*. In a 1952 interview of Jung by Mircea Eliade, Jung comments on the importance of integration in the *rubedo* phase.

In the language of the alchemists, matter suffers until *nigredo* disappears, . . . a new day will break, the *leukosis* or *albedo*. But in this state of “whiteness” one does not *live* in the true sense of the word, it is a sort of abstract, ideal state. In order to make it come alive it must have “blood,” it must have what the alchemists call the *rubedo*, the “redness” of life. Only the total experience of being can transform this ideal state of *albedo* into a fully human mode of existence. Blood alone can reanimate a glorious state of consciousness in which the last trace of blackness is dissolved, in which the devil no longer has an autonomous existence but rejoins the profound unity of the psyche. Then the *opus magnum* is finished: the human soul is completed integrated [sic]. (*Jung Speaking*, 229)

This master’s program has been my own *opus magnum* and I can claim integration of stages as I experienced them, being ever mindful that I am still in the *rubedo*. The *rubedo* reflects a transformation not *the* end. Consequently, this master’s thesis is but an ending to a particular alchemical journey, which is a significant element in a larger cycle of psychological, spiritual, and artistic growth. So, for the moment, I will revel in the remaining scarlet fabric that puddles at my feet. Red is a celebratory color, and I feel a gladdening of spirit as this work approaches completion. Only a hymn to red remains.

It’s Bloody Time

What can one say about red?

I feel one step removed from its visceral energy when I call it *rubedo*.

Maybe it's why little is written about this alchemical stage . . .

what can one say about the fire, blood, anger, love
that this color invokes?

I'm not grounded in the *rubedo*,

I want to take flight

a Phoenix rising from the ashes
of an empty husk.

No wonder. I am poured out.

Blood flows in and through my fingers christening the work before me.

I've said, made, given all in pursuit of the dark

. . . then the light.

There is no place to turn—no either/or—simply red.

Luscious red.

Red with longing. For what?

I know not.

There is fear . . . a wrenching panic.

What now?

Once again I am scaring myself,

futuring with no basis in reality.

Unveil those eyes of discernment

Back to the ascent . . . back to rising from the ashes.

Allow a moment to feel my blood surging forth,

giving lift to wings of new life.

Phase VI: Bringing Home the Gold and the Legacy

This thesis has been a process of making soul matter as I engaged with an archetype at a psychological, intellectual, spiritual, and artistic level. As I strove to meet myself with integrity through my artwork, I became much more conscious of my internal processes. When I embarked on this program, my internal critic ran amok at the self-indulgence of turning a light on myself. But I have learned a lot, not only about myself but about others as well. Through this unflinching attention to self, I had to acknowledge fears, prejudices, resistances, and entrenched beliefs and behaviors that prevent me from connecting at a more authentic level with others and myself. I am now vulnerable to myself, and I am humbled by the encounter, opened up in ways that persist in surprising me. This is a living experience that continues to morph and expand through my artwork, my relationships, and my experience as a mature woman in this ever-changing world. I have become more comfortable in my own wrinkling skin and, by honoring *my* processes, I am better able to honor the processes and experience of others. As I acknowledge my own wisdom, I am more willing to share, and through that sharing I become part of a larger circle of humanity.

Many do not know the story of Inanna. It is a relevant myth for a time when women - and men - are struggling to free themselves from an outdated patriarchal paradigm that seeks to silence and discount more than half of the planet's inhabitants. Through personal conversations, attending workshops, and life-long observation, I know that many are searching for ways to create a model of knowing, being, and expressing that includes the compassionate, nurturing, and holistic view of the Divine Feminine in all her guises. I live in a place that is particularly sympathetic to other modes of viewing life and therefore my personal biases toward a reverence and interest in the qualities of the Divine Feminine are likely to be encouraged and supported by that community. I am fortunate to dwell in such a place, yet there is a large populace that remains

blind to the significance of incorporating the feminine perspective into the ways we solve the problems that are inherent in being conscious participants in earth's ecosystem. Certainly one of the feminine sensibilities relates to the connection between how we treat women and how we treat nature. By and large, neither is respected, and this willful neglect is a contributing factor to the problems we currently face as a species.

This story is rich with messages for this moment in time. There are gems to glean from each stage of Inanna's growth, from adolescence to goddess-ship. We live in a time when people of all ages need stories that view the feminine as strong, confident, and secure in her ability to discern what is right and best for her. We need examples of the feminine wisdom that can be gained through attending to each stage of our development, by making hard decisions that allow us to care for ourselves in the same way that we care for others, by valuing our own dreams, and learning that we can be wise leaders in our families, communities, and the world.

There are other aspects of Inanna's myth that require more study. As further translations become available, it is tempting to move Inanna forward in time in terms of her own life. I am intrigued with the implications of Inanna as a warrior goddess. How would that fit into an analogy of women's history echoing Inanna's myth? How does her warrior aspect fit in with her role as a goddess of fertility and love? Does she take on the role of warrior *after* her time in the Underworld? This may be another example of Inanna's wholeness—all parts existing simultaneously in one deity, which is in contrast to the women in Greek mythology who usually exhibit one attribute. For example, we have Artemis, goddess of the hunt, Aphrodite, goddess of love, or Hecate, goddess of the hearth and crossroads: all are goddesses limited in their rule and expression. Whereas Inanna embodies a pantheon of powers as seen in her many titles: Queen of

Heaven and Earth, Goddess of Fertility and Love, Lady of the Morning Star (Venus), to name but a few.

The presence of shadows, that play between light and dark, in Inanna's story as well as in the poetry of her priestess, Enheduanna, which has only been translated during the last half of the twentieth century, are areas that would be intriguing to explore.

The significance of the seven gates Inanna must pass through in order to enter the netherworld is another area ripe for exploration. The number seven appears in many systems, e.g., the seven sacraments in Christian theology, seven chakras, fairytales (the seven dwarves), and mythology (the seven daughters of Titan); it would be fascinating to learn more about the symbolism of this number in the Sumerian culture—a culture that was inscribing its stories in cuneiform on clay tablets over 5,000 years ago.

The *kurgurra* and *galatur*, those little homunculi made of dirt, are agents of change for both Ereshkigal and Inanna, yet they barely register as significant in the story. They are wonderful embodiments of a basic element that is often thought of as the lowliest of substances—dirt. Bringing gifts of the earth . . . the food and water of life . . . the *kurgurra* and *galatur* alert us to the idea that Inanna is part of Nature's cycle of birth, death, and regeneration; thus, she must ingest what the dirt figures offer her in order to be re-enlivened. Not so long ago most people understood the value of good dirt, because they depended on it to sustain and nourish their bodies. That dependence remains today despite our general disconnection from the land—from dirt, which is still the source of our food. Dirt has taken on negative connotations as something to fear and avoid. Consequently, many ignore the stewardship required to preserve the interconnectedness of soil, plants, and water needed for our survival. It would be enlightening to further explore the significance of dirt as a change-agent and our day-to-day relationship to its

presence in our growing ecological sensibilities. As symbols of transformation, the little dirt figures provide the sustenance that allows Ereshkigal and Inanna to undergo the changes required for further growth. This is also true of the soil that not only provides food for our bodies and therefore our psyches, but also the means of transforming our bodies back into the soil of Mother Earth.

In Inanna's myth, I see a deep connection to the physicality of our bodies as well as that of the earth. Inanna's first undertaking is that of nurturing a tree to its maturity. This required patience with an attention to the cycles of nature, and coincided with Inanna's own development into a mature woman. On a larger scale, this portion of the myth speaks to the idea that we must cooperate with nature to secure our dreams of the future. This is particularly relevant when we look at the catastrophic effects of centuries of abusing and working against our life-source, the environment. Inanna's story emphasizes respect for nature; she takes on the mantle of a fertility goddess by enacting the rites and rituals necessary to ensure the wellbeing of her people. Through her commitment and stewardship, Inanna becomes Queen of Heaven and Earth. And finally, in order for Inanna to gain wisdom she journeys into the depths of the earth, into the Underworld. This Underworld has no mercy and Ereshkigal can only do what she must do. Until the *kurgurra* and *galatur* demonstrate compassion toward Ereshkigal, she remains one-dimensional. As a result of our arrogance, perhaps we, as a species and a planet, are experiencing the impersonal consequence of the Underworld Goddess's attention.

In many ways this has been a solitary journey, and I remain an advocate for the time and space to know and honor one's own thoughts and feelings. This is especially important for women. However, I have not totally separated myself from exchanges with others about the Dark Feminine. In recent conversations about the topic of my master's program, I was surprised to

learn that one of the first associations made with the Dark Feminine is with today's women politicians – and this is from a Jungian analyst. I would argue that these women are not of the Underworld, home of the Dark Feminine. As author Perera states in her book *Descent to the Goddess*:

We women who have succeeded in the world are usually 'daughters of the father' — that is, well adapted to a masculine-oriented society — and have repudiated our own full feminine instincts and energy patterns . . . The patriarchal ego of both men and women, to earn its instinct-disciplining, striving, progressive, and heroic stance, has fled from the full-scale awe of the goddess . . . But it is towards her — and especially towards her culturally repressed aspects, those chthonic and chaotic, ineluctable depths — that the new individuating, yin-yang balanced ego must return to find its matrix and the embodied and flexible strength to be active and vulnerable, to stand its own ground and still to be empathetically related to others (7).

Unfortunately, the truth is, we are all children of “the father” in that we are citizens of a world currently living in a patriarchal paradigm.

This takes on added importance as we look at the events going on in the world around us. We have lost soul, and the Dark Feminine is all about the soul. She is about deep soul work, which is dirty, messy, and scary because it is about the grittiness of being human—the chaos, the destruction, the death, the vulnerability, and the loss—while remaining connected to our humanity. Not surprising, the way to that connection is through the dark. James Hillman talks about this dimension of soul-work when he says; “Here we gain contact with the soul of all that is lost in life and with the souls of the lost” (*Dreams*, 53). It is to this part of the *death* cycle that my work speaks. Through dying to an old way of being, as though shedding an old skin and emerging with a renewed commitment to life, to ourselves, each other and the planet we live on, we might survive as a species.

I thought about the depth of Inanna's story and what this 5,000-year-old myth had to offer today's women. Could it possibly be a metaphor for the history of women? Specifically, I saw the increasing subjugation of the feminine—and consequently women in particular—as the descent from a time of at least equality, if not worship, into a period of intense persecution during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I correlate the witch-hunts and burnings during that time to the killing or, in my imagination, the shredding that occurs when Ereshkigal fixes Inanna with the eye of death. It would appear that women have spent the last 450 years hanging on the peg and are just now beginning to come down and partake of the water and food of life. We have a ways to go before women totally ascend to the Upper World ready to make use of the Underworld gift of a discerning eye, wielding it judiciously and compassionately. This is an analogy worthy of further exploration.

It would be enlightening to explore the presence of the Dark Feminine in the work of twentieth century women artists, especially women associated with the Surrealist art movement. All of these further studies would contribute to an expanded understanding of the importance of addressing the shadow side of the Divine Feminine. There is enough imagery here to inspire a lifetime of work, and it will probably feed my work for years to come.

This has been a powerful voyage into uncharted territories within my own psyche. My artwork has moved to a new level of intensity and significance as I draw inspiration and imagery from the bottomless well of my being—a resource I never realized was there. I have found an acceptance and a way to *handle* the raw psychic/soulful material that is working with and through me. I delighted in being drawn forth by the mysterious and paradoxical signs to a meandering path that I have followed over the last few years. Most importantly, I have a more grounded confidence in being, creating, and expressing my unique ways of knowing in the

world. This personal empowerment has led to embracing the wisdom I have to share through my artwork and telling the story of an ancient goddess who offers us an archetype for finding our way through the spirit of our times.

In a recent workshop, Clarissa Pinkola Estés said that in order to deeply understand or know a dream, vision, imagining, or tale, “you have to lay your life down along side the story”. With this master’s program I have, indeed, laid my life down beside a particular moment in the myth of Inanna’s descent. From this I gained the ability to keep one foot in the light while leaving only one foot in the dark, which makes the light much richer. I learned to see the light in a different way. Not better or worse, just different.

As I come to the end of this most recent expedition, I once again call on James Hillman to emphasize the relevance of myth in our lives.

The power of myth, its reality, resides precisely in its power to seize and influence psychic life. The Greeks [and more ancient cultures] knew this so well, and so they had no depth psychology and psychopathology such as we have. They had myths. And we have no myths – instead, depth psychology and psychopathology. Therefore . . . psychology shows myths in modern dress and myths show our depth psychology in ancient dress (*Oedipus*, 90).

Even now, I am imagining how those modern and ancient dresses might invite in another body of work.

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Appendix I – Inanna Doll Form Triptych



Details

Materials: Reed, rags, paper clay, and armature wire.

Dimensions:

Nigredo Doll Form – 7” x 41”

Albedo Doll Form – 14” x 42”

Rubedo Doll Form – 24 x 56”

Each doll form carries tablets of Sumerian cuneiform glyphs for water and food symbolizing the nourishment administered to Inanna by the little dirt beings, the kurgurra and galatura. It was these vital gifts of life that enlivened Inanna bringing her out of the *albedo* stage into the final phase, the *rubedo*.

Inanna in *albedo* carries a staff symbolizing a gatepost that is thought to represent the entrance to her temple hence an entrance into the presence of the Goddess. The *albedo* form also wears a crown of flowers symbolizing her role as a goddess of vegetation, fertility, and beauty.



Nigredo Doll Form – 7” x 41”
Daniel Quat Photography



Albedo Doll Form – 14” x 42”
Daniel Quat Photography



Details of *Nigredo* Doll Form
Daniel Quat Photography

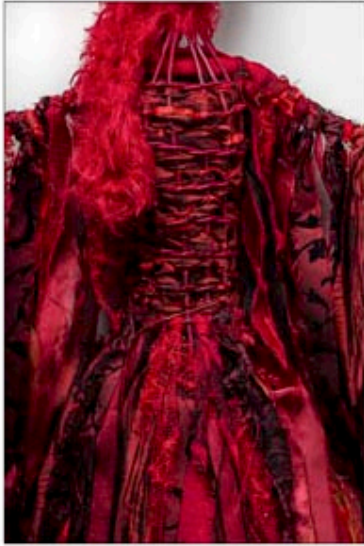


Details of *Albedo* Doll Form
Daniel Quat Photography





Rubedo Doll Form – 24 x 56”
Photography by Daniel Quat



daniel quat photography

Rubedo details
Daniel Quat Photography

Appendix II – Alchemical Dress Triptych



Details

Materials: Hardware cloth, rags, paper clay, waxed linen.

Dimensions:

Nigredo Dress Form – 18.5” x 33.5”

Albedo Dress Form – 20” x 33.5”

Rubedo Dress Form – 18.5” x 47”

Each dress form carries tablets of Sumerian cuneiform glyphs that relate to Inanna’s life from her adolescence through to her ascent from the Underworld as a fully realized Goddess

As a commonly understood symbol of women, these dress forms represent a more public interpretation of Inanna’s myth. Correlating the myth with an alchemical overlay, I thought of the history of women in general beginning with the time of the witch-hunts and active persecution of women, which reached its height some 200-400 years ago. I equate those times to the *nigredo*, Inanna rotting on the peg and women literally being hung on the cross. I feel that we are just now beginning to come off the peg into the *albedo*, ready to receive the bread and water of life . . . ready to be enlivened. The *rubedo* dress form is my hope for the future when women can once again fully inhabit their fundamental feminine nature while escaping the confines of the traditional demands that the dress shape can represent.



Nigredo Dress Form
Daniel Quat Photography



Albedo Dress Form
Daniel Quat Photography



Rubedo Dress Form
Daniel Quat Photography

Appendix III – Shadow Dancers’ Photographs

Photography by Dawn Hamilton

