

# LIFE ON EARTH

by Emilio Cruz

Knowing the present quandaries challenging our viability as a commanding species on this earth, and in respect to Hieronymous Bosch's ironic Garden of Earthly Delights about which I wrote so much in my novel, Luminous Journey, subtitled: Somewhere On The Outskirts Of Purgatory, and as a lover of Francisco Goya's Los Caprichos, I began to compose this series of drawings. What I learned from Goya is that when one is trying to create works that demand intrepid moral resolve, it is imperative that the space be composed in a manner that it invites suspension of judgment, unless it will fall victim to romanticism and sentimentality. Because we are either alone in the universe or exist as an element of the divine, the space must bring into focus the terrifying irrationality of that knowledge. For the enemy is never man, it is irrationality. As a result, paranoia, xenophobia, and fear of the unknown are dramatically portrayed in this series, entitled LIFE ON EARTH, to capture the consuming complexity of our contemporary dilemma, bridging time past and time present.

From the middle and late sixties I realized that in our Modern and Postmodern world all individuals, conscious or unconscious of the fact, have the opportunity to be not only exposed to but saturated in an array of magnificent world art representing a multitude of cultures, places and times. Being so saturated, in part the result of colonialism, gives one the miraculous opportunity to comprehend and envision the distinctions and similarities that motivate and galvanize our humanity. Ultimately one can reach an understanding that our needs and desires are the same regardless of plight. Furthermore, this encounter with great art has the tendency to reshape our ability to perceive, for hindsight can lead to foresight; as T.S. Eliot wrote: "Time past and time present are both perhaps present in time future." In this process we become "Everybody" as in James Joyce's Finnegan's Wake, HCE: "Here comes everybody".

Bearing witness to historical artifacts, unlike reading about history, places one in the throes of history, because the medium has been the message throughout historical time. This fact did not go unnoticed by the South American literary giant Jorge Luis Borges whose tales appear to emerge out of an ascetic wilderness of thought because he understood that life is lived cerebrally, more on the metaphysical plane than the physical. For him, the non-material world of ideas is

determined by inapprehensible imagining, as postulated by Kant, Schopenhauer, and such Logical Positivists as A.J. Ayer.

Borges, entrenched in sly irony, magnificently puts these ideas to task, as exemplified by his short story, The Aleph. In this tale a man, Carlos Argentino, discovers in his cellar an Aleph where all of art, philosophy and literature come together on a point of light reflected in a mirror. At first it astounds the author who finally brings the veracity of this Aleph into question, because: "I would like to know whether Carlos Argentino chose that name or he read it- applied to another point where all points collide... Incredible as it may seem, I believe the Aleph of Garay Street was a false Aleph"... He then lists a series of places and events where other such Alephs have been reported beginning with: "Around 1867, Captain Burton held the post of British Consul in Brazil. In July, 1942, Pedro Henriquez Urena came across a manuscript of Burton's, in a library at Santos, dealing with the mirror which the Oriental world attributes to Iskander Zu al-Karnayn, or Alexander Bicornis of Macedonia. In its crystal the whole world was reflected." Borges finally asked at the end of the story: "Does this Aleph exist in the heart of stone? Did I see it there in the cellar when I saw all things, and have I now forgotten"...

Amazingly as if by magic Borges introduces such complex ideas with such simple means, in this case to remind us that the compilation of conflicting temporalities may cause forgetfulness, producing a multitude of calamities. I too labor to suggest the potentiality of this dreaded outcome. So nullification of significance becomes an expressive tool, as if each state of being portrayed in these drawings threatens to erase one another.

In another story by Borges, The Garden Of Forking Paths: ... " is a picture, incomplete yet not false, of a universe such as Ts'ui Pen conceived it to be. Different from Newton and Schopenhauer, your ancestor did not think of time as absolute and uniform. He believed in an infinite series of times, in a dizzily growing, ever spreading network of diverging, converging and parallel times. The web of time-the strands of which approach one another, bifurcate, intersect or ignore each other through the centuries-embraces every possibility. We do not exist in most of them. In some you exist and I do not..."

Contrasting Borges while supporting his fictional thesis, in my Labyrinth, which is partially defined in these drawings, life does not exist in time and space, but space alone. Because space in my hypothesis is configured multifariously and simultaneously while capable of possessing the variables of potential experience. Thus I create interchangeable spatial events that can be

rearranged by discreet factors, as they often are in time. Under these existential spatial arrangements, we are not only ourselves but also others, making the consequences of thoughts and actions infinitely more complicated.

Surely this is not new, for in the West it began with printing which allowed the mind of a single author to enter and alter the minds of many. To absorb the thoughts of an author one must temporarily become the author, as if one were performing a rite that engages transference, as in psychoanalysis. Literature then becomes not only an arrangement of words spinning tales but states of being. The word as in logos becomes life. This is what Foucault was postulating in his famous essay The Death Of The Author, for in this rite of transference originality is sacrificed upon the altar of collective knowledge. Therefore it can be said that literature engages substitution similar to sympathetic magic, akin to animistic ancestor worship.

The same can be said of pictures; one no longer needs to visit Florence Italy to see Michelangelo's David in order to have perception shaped by it. In this manner all who have seen Michelangelo become Michelangelo. To be otherwise one would have to undergo and endure an exorcism ritual so harsh as to risk sanity.

C.G. Jung wrote in his foreword to Symbols of Transformation: "The psyche is not something unalterably given, but a product of its own continuous development. Hence, altered glandular secretions or aggravated personal relationships are not the sole causes of neurotic conflicts: these can equally well be caused by historically conditioned attitudes..." To this, in this hemisphere, all other forms of identity are but romantic pretence. Europe was no longer Europe once it colonized America, Asia, and Africa. Surely no one today can deny that they are everybody, from the powerful to the powerless.

Concerning culture, our brains do not discriminate, our minds do. As a primary survival strategy the brain must absorb and record everything we encounter. Therefore involuntarily, everything that we experience and interact with becomes our self, independent of cognitive awareness or fancy. Culture is the expressed crystallization of this composition.

This too I suspected in the late sixties when I began experimenting with discursive spatial arrangements allowing for the existence of simultaneity. Besieged by information, often conflicting and contradictory, I became starkly aware that unlike primal humans who spent their lives dwelling in a geographical zone that did not exceed more than sixty miles, who knew little

about the surrounding world unless they were forced to migrate, we are exposed to disparate places, people and events far beyond our reach. The constant presence of such disparate information ultimately shapes not only our perceptions, but also who we are.

So it is not simply physical travel through space that radically changed the phenomenon of being but the easy availability of information and concepts, capable of directing us by existing in the mind everywhere and into everyone simultaneously, willfully and opposed to our will.

In respect to this awareness and the constant flood of horror I witness daily from innovative electronic media, one can see world hunger and genocidal wars transpire while helplessly, passively, growing increasingly detached, snacking on some edible delight inside personal spaces, miles and miles removed.

To establish, encapsulate, and express similar states of being in this series, like others I have created, it is comprised of two vital elements both discursively realized.

While viewing these works it is important to consider that the creative act of making art is in essence liturgical, for it engages a rite of passage. Through it, by the act of substitution, we exorcise and conjure human concerns: anxieties, bewilderment and consolation of the human spirit while seeking to satisfy our need to communicate, to define our "will to overcome" as Nietzsche put it. This rite of visual communication, exorcism, conjuring, exalting, examining, searching, and praising has been performed through art for over 40,000 years. Rather than beseeching the gods or impressing their neighbors, the origin of art lies in religion. Unlike Nietzsche, but more like Dostoyevsky and Teilhard de Chardin, I search for a transcending moral resolution and this I hope is expressed in my art.

Discursively there are other masters whose erstwhile spirits contribute to the creation of these images largely dependent upon disconnected relationships in order to formulate a metaphor that leaves the mind suspended in the humbling state of not-knowing, or as Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno state in their collaborative work written in 1944 *Dialectic Of Enlightenment*, "when god was murdered so was knowledge", because knowledge is rooted in not knowing and introduces new states of not knowing, as in Gnosticism. Some of these hallowed masters of drawing and printmaking are: Albrecht Durer, Pieter Brueghel, Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, William Blake, Francisco Goya, Honore' Daumier, Otto Dix, George Grosz, and Winslow Homer.

By no means have I attempted to sycophantically imitate this diverse group of magnificent artists whose expressive powers owe much to our Paleolithic masters, but I am deeply inspired by them. For each were not only masters of their craft but also masters of metaphor, similitude and analogy.

My wish and mission remains, as always, to create unique works of art, to become a worthy contributor to this noble history. And this cannot be achieved without bringing together a synthesis of time past and time present. In this way I choose to be more like Picasso who was so entrenched in the history of art that he could not help but to be original. Or the great compassionate poet Pablo Neruda who said that he was never alone because he was the multitude. Chief Seattle wrote: "No where on this earth is there a place called solitude, for the dead do not die."

Indeed they do not because all who are alive are filled by the many. As for example when I visited Haiti, dominated by animists, I heard in my body the cries of tortured-to-death slaves whose souls could not rest unless they told their tales. By transporting these restless souls in my flesh I have become a witness. At present as in the past, art must place the beholder in a place of being. Not one that signifies localized geographical place of origin, but one that embodies a conceptual and omnipresent metaphysical state of being, codifying the existence of the mind, as postulated most firmly by Schopenhauer. The limitations of our physical or material bodies, prevents the experience of life from being apprehended or perceived through the faculties without the aid of the imagination.

It is not being that determines our state of being, because by no satisfying means can existence be proven other than by existence. Scientists may be able to replicate a cell, but none can prove that this replication is more than an illusion. This I fear represents the eternal quandary. Hinduism recognizes this truth.

So I walk each day amongst the living and the dead. I do so as one called human who embodies all of those that belong to the development of an evolutionary chain leading to consciousness. Therefore I am a fish, antelope, bear, lion, goat, predator and prey, the one who sacrifices and the one who is sacrificed, and according to many modern geneticists and micro-biologists, much to my embarrassment, a fruit fly.

Often I transform the human anatomy by displacement or scale. Other times I place one body or a number of bodies into another, turning the human torso into a vessel as if these merged beings are in a state of collective metamorphosis, being genetically altered, mutilated by paradox or the exigencies of war and environmental pollution.

Through art one can communicate with ghosts. To this effect in my 1979 play Homeostasis: Once More The Scorpion I begin by writing a letter to Francisco Goya dropped off at the mail box of the land of the dead, post marked for spirits, because I state certain discouraging events have led me to write to him against sound advise. "Do not write him they say, after all he is dead and only a fool would write a dead man. But every now and then blood is splattered against the clock as I watch the frozen hands of death stand still in the belly of time."

All artists, who adore art as visual scribes are writing letters to the living, and the dead. Therefore no artists are alone, for the ghosts that inhabit their minds and spirits circulate through their studios and therefore embody their souls. These blithe spirits, whose origin are rooted in Paleolithic times, are the ancestors, known and unknown, and periodically they are given to whisper secrets.

As for Winslow Homer, ironically most of my life I had little interest in this artist, beyond respectful curiosity, but because of an essay written by my friend Paul Staiti, an historian of 19th Century American art, I have developed a recent interest, especially since Homer like Melville used the sea as a metaphor, signifying the second law of thermodynamics.

The discursive means I utilize to fashion my images are brought about because I realize that the irrational is a form of violence that can culminate in tyranny. Only reason stands against violence. For the development of all organic life is dependent upon survival strategies, catalyzing evolution. All disconnected developments coming about suddenly disarm the brain, but reason allows the organism to record and adapt, through reflection.

My works are not symbolic, since symbols are by and large culturally specific and therefore subject to change and misinterpretation. But they are metaphors invented by the individualized mind, yet they share universal qualities that transcend place and time because they rely upon, in many cases, sensing but not knowing. And these sensory impulses have the tendency to galvanize states of consciousness while serving as a springboard for ideas because they must be felt.

Therefore I, as an artist in the tradition of shaman, must unnerve and disrupt to give one pause to ponder through association.

To do such discursive work one must bring to bear a multitude of intellectual and conceptual ideas seasoned by historical knowledge. So in these works I comment on art through line, edge, light and dark, form and mass and the absence of rationalism, literalism and empiricism. They must be considered non-codified events that exist on their own terms, unless I intend to manipulate being by imposing my will like a god. By using substitution, I attempt to achieve what Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno edify: " The magician never interprets himself as the image of the invisible power... The sacrificial animal is massacred instead of the god. Substitution in the course of sacrifice marks a step towards discursive logic."

Images of man-made vehicles, such as boats, emerge phantom-like out of the sullen darkness, mist, and fog following a storm at sea. Appearing ghostly and threatening, they are accompanied by other apparition-like beings caught adrift in the doldrums of a windless sea. Then there are those who are shipwrecked and destitute, no longer capable of determining their destiny. Another sea vessel is caught spinning and swirling, being whipped around and swallowed into a vortex or a whirlpool of thermodynamic waves. A few aberrant boats are captained by anachronistic beasts, such as pigs that unknown to themselves sail themselves to market. Another uses decapitated heads as oars illuminated by moonlight. And there are carriages pulled by a domesticated horse that is actually enslaved as a beast of burden dynamically affecting human history by being used to increase the speed of travel, conquest and colonization and pulling the plow that gives birth to an agricultural revolution. Ironically clever, disinterested rabbits snidely observe human folly, although they are dispassionately trapped and mutilated in scientific experiments and locked in cages. All of these forms themselves repeated or mutated from other forms are made present through concave and convex shapes, suggesting sacrificial orifices as well as biological/ anatomical organism. The ships suggest the crossing of the River Styx as well as the ocean canoes of certain Pacific people, such as those brilliant master artists and craftsmen of the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea. These culturally fluid analogies clearly demonstrate the collective unconscious of Carl Jung and the viability of Mircea Eliade's comparative religion.

Boats ironically have managed, through transporting goods and slaves, to fuse together disparate people from distinct continents. They meet first as master and slave and ultimately become one by mere social and economic erosion and the magnificent human spirit that makes one and all yearn to define their own path. The idea is inspired by Robert Shaw's play Man In A Glass Booth.

wherein the bullet proof, protective, pristine transparent glass booth encasing these prisoners possesses ironic beauty. The very transparency of these sadistic façades has a tendency to incriminate those who are judged and those who judge, because, when they are used to interrogate political prisoners or war criminals they merge the innocent with the guilty. Ultimately this results in the incrimination of society at large. My indicted prisoners, placed on trial like Camus' Stranger, are forced to spill out their biographies and thereby incriminate themselves. So in their hands they hold interchangeable alternating heads because their will to survive forces them to create masks so the lie cannot be separated from the truth.

Trees cut down to make accommodating domestic objects aiding human comfort while destroying nature by compromising the very air we breath, are compared to the tree of life marking our DNA. According to the Hebrew Bible god gave Cherubim flaming swords to guard against man lest he gain eternal life. Once god discovered that: "Man is evil". Desirable women languishing in the throes of luxury as sex objects as portrayed in Western high art give these drawings an erotic charge, and they are contrasted with agony and death to demonstrate the brain's dependence upon the apprehension of pleasure as a catalyst to further enhance evolution of the species. Oblong shapes are manipulated as organic properties exemplifying the connection between all living things, by bringing together a female nude, a pear and a rabbit in a stasis organized like a still life in order to emphasize their metaphysical and physical connection and say all are one. Those who humble and those who are humbled are present. They huddle submissively and they rebel, both noble and ignoble. Nature puts forth an organized rebellion turning the table, topsy-turvy, to prevent further domination by man of this thermodynamic phenomenon called life. The persecuted and the persecutor are brought together in various unusual compromising exchanges. Out of the tree of life grow bodies and heads severed from the rest of their anatomies but are connected to the roots of trees in an act of metamorphosis to address what is sacred and what defines sacrilege in the throes of perplexed minds disemboweled from reflection. The spinal chord expresses the role of the nervous system as the messenger of god who uses a simple configuration to create an array of creatures from hulking giant dinosaurs to fish and fowl. They are dislodged mythic beings, such as a mysterious snake covered by scales that vacated the Garden of Eden, to integrate and migrate to become the human spine attached to our cerebellums leading to cerebral consciousness. People grow from trees like fruit rooted to the subterranean earth while reaching for sky and sun.

I celebrate the total biosphere's fauna and flora, blooming plants and creatures that walk, crawl, slither and swim, sometimes zoomorphic, or anthropomorphic but all in the act of deceptive

metamorphosis emphasizing their living potential. The crowd and the isolated individual abandoned by reason while struggling to merge sex, birth and death to fashion free will are played out in these discursive drawings honed through both planned and spontaneous improvisation that is sometimes savage, tragic, macabre, humorous, erotic, and bizarre, simultaneously.

Like all humans these fashioned beings are often, pompous, arrogant, proud, bedazzled, amazed, afraid, discerning, capricious, frivolous, promiscuous, stubborn, determined, foolish, humiliated, anxious, scrutinizing, condemning, approving, selfish and unconscious, full of cunning and bent on deceit. While others stand by passive and bewildered, some even recognize divine cause, reason and logic and therefore mourn our folly.

These drawings are not provocative, Surreal, illustrations of dreams. They represent discursive essences of critical events compounded when we are awake, defined by somnambulists, and signifying our LIFE ON EARTH.

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