



# Art and the Artistic Process

By Calen Rayne

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Asheville has increasingly become a destination for art collectors. Our area has a number of world class artists creating unique creative works in a variety of disciplines, including over two hundred artists working in River Arts District studios. For some visitors, being immersed in works of art is a near religious experience. With heart and mind open, an artist can make use of works of art to enable his or her audience to enter a spiritual plane of consciousness and commune with whatever one's interpretation of God or Spirit or Wisdom is. Theologian Matthew Fox sees wisdom and creativity as inseparable. Wisdom and creativity go together according to our deepest spiritual traditions. Knowledge in and of itself produces neither creativity nor wisdom. Wisdom has to do with our relationship to the whole, to the cosmos, to nature, to both the feminine and masculine powers of nature. Fox believes "It is our creativity itself that lies at the essence of our humanity."

He continues, "Creativity may be the nearest one-word definition we possess for the essence of our humanity, for the true meaning of 'soul'."

As artists, we must possess a hopeful, persevering and energetic disposition. Every time we pray or meditate or find our spiritual center, we engage in a renaissance of the mystery of creativity, commanding us to join a global community of spiritually creative people. This community of artists endeavors to produce works of art that would leave a record that not only were they here, but they made a difference with the artistic works created. There is a spiritual energy flowing from the beginning of the beginning, and mystic artist Alex Grey, who has shared his creative genius with Asheville audiences, believes "we are expressions of this spiritual energy." We need to see ourselves as vehicles of compassion and relate to this great community of the universe in a way that is a reflection of that infinite compassion.



Artists need to unveil their true artistic nature, and there discover a wonderful source of wisdom, compassion, and power to bring their artistic vision to bear on our world.

Grey offers following advice to artists: “If one wishes to be an artist, and loves his or her work, an amazing reservoir of creativity will open its doors. Someone once asked rethink the way they see the world and open up to a more loving attitude toward the web of life.” George Washington Carver was once asked how he discovered so many different uses for the peanut. “Whatever you love opens its secrets to you,” the great inventor replied. Once the secrets are opened to us, Alex Grey tells us to “transcend our rational, conceptual minds and get ready to transcend the great mystery.” One needs to have confidence in one’s own spirituality and artistic ability to share that “great mystery” in a unique, meaningful way. One should not try to replicate the artistic vision or works of others, but rather trust their own inner wisdom for inspiration. The mind must be empty and open when approaching a blank canvas. Grey reminds us that in our creative process, “we are receiving information on a scale beyond our ability to process.”

There may be some “plan” as to what is about to unfold in the creative process, but there is no predicting what will happen once brush meets canvas. Grey says that for the artist, “the creative act must be in alignment with their soul’s mission,” and part of that mission is to “align your creativity with a spiritual source and receive creative energies from a higher source.” If one is passionate about their work, and is completely open to receiving “the secrets” from these higher realms, the ensuing process will be both fresh and spontaneous. Matthew Fox offers the following reflection of Aquinas on the creative process bringing forth the Holy Spirit, “The same Spirit who hovered over the waters at the beginning of creation hovers over the mind of an artist at work.”

To generate works of art, an artist must focus on his or her creative expectation for their work. This is often a meditative process. Artistic expression and meditation practice are similar in many respects. An artist stares at a canvas or a lump of clay and begins

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*Terton Perspective painting by Calen Rayne*

a journey into the unknown, hoping to create an original expression of their being, while risking that they may produce a work of art similar to works of others they have seen or studied. A person who sits in meditation, while trying to create mind space for original thoughts, could end up pondering the words of one of his teachers or someone he has studied.

The artist, like the person who meditates, must try to transcend their ordinary “regular reality” consciousness to explore the depths of creativity and compassion. One needs to remove oneself from the ordinary, mundane thinking process and enter a spiritual realm in which one communes with the creative visionary thinking process. Often this is only possible through a meditative practice, or an artistic endeavor. The process itself is not the end product, but rather a means by which the artist can change the mind’s ability to pursue their creative consciousness, and see a different reality, one that they can transfer to some form that can be shared with their audience, and a form that moves that audience toward a more compassionate vision.

The artist who is successful in opening to the mystery inherent in each moment will manifest a transformation of understanding that will then free the energy of compassion within. Compassion will be the natural product of an artistic expression born of the depths of the soul of the artist, where the artist is in touch not only with his own, innate spirituality, but the spirituality inherent in other people, and the rest of the Universe.

Hildegard of Bingen reminds us, “There is wisdom in all creative works.” How to create artistic expressions that are an embodiment of this wisdom is the greatest challenge faced by an artist. Matthew Fox believes this blend is essential to commune with one another through our artistic endeavors. Wisdom and compassion; compassion and wisdom: wouldn’t such energy revitalize civilization, forge new links with world cultural traditions, create gentler and more dialectical relationships to earth, to body, to pleasure, to work, to the artist within and among us?

An artist cannot rush the process of creating meaningful works. An artistic work may be years in the making, but length of time to create an artistic expression drawn from the inner depths of the soul that enables others to experience a deepening of their own spirituality, as well as a sense of the love and compassion needed to produce such a work, is unimportant. Many search for the path to mental and emotional equilibrium, a balance of wisdom and compassion. Our goal should be clear, to create and maintain a constant relationship with the “mystery of the now,” where one





might experience a communion with compassion. If an artist wishes to be in communion with the mystery, or Spirit, one of the best ways to do so is through a meditation practice.

From the core of mystery, the artist realizes, in the words of Alex Grey, that “art is a reflection of universal consciousness” and that we are “the same ocean of pranic energy.” Grey speaks of the “one layer of sacred interconnectedness” that births a “void clear light from which everything emerges.” This is the clear light from which our artistic vision is translated to creative works in our medium of choice. We simply need to unveil that which has been birthed in our creative consciousness.

A wonderful painting, as with any artistic work, is the result of the feeling in your fingers. If you have the feeling of the thickness of the paint in your brush, the painting is already there before you paint. When you dip your brush into the paint you already know the results, or else you cannot paint. So before you do something, “being” is there, the result is there. It is important that the artist arrive at a balance with their

creative expressions, a blend of wisdom and compassion, one might say. For regardless of the intent of the artist, the purpose must be for an artistic expression to move his or her audience, and our world, toward compassion. This, too, is a precursor to a spiritual transformation for



both artist and audience.

The artist whose purpose is to produce an expression born of compassion and wisdom that will lead others on toward that same realization is truly enlightened. Their work becomes a teaching tool, like any good meditation



teaching. Think of works of art as a visual representation of energy. A painting may serve as a conduit for life-force energy. It is most important that the artist is to bring to his audience an awareness of the interconnectedness of everything in our cosmos, and to bring them to an awareness of the compassion that fills our universe.

If an artist can realize this goal, he or she has the ability to rediscover religious mysticism, discover great wonder, and unveil incredible mystery on a moment by moment basis. Artists must move toward a sense of wholeness where their work incorporates energies that support and sustain our spiritual journeys. When an artist approaches a blank canvas, he or she draws from imagination, mystery, Spirit, or a myriad of other inspirations to “speak to the soul of humanity” as Alex Grey says. Grey believes that “art we view and make can transform us.” He says the artist must draw from the “eye of the intellect and the “eye of the spirit,” and that

“the artist needs to open as many eyes as possible when working.”

And from what boundless source is the artist to draw his or her inspiration? Grey offers the following observation from Kandinsky in his book, *Sacred Mirrors*:

“The artist must not only train his eye but also his soul, so that it can weigh colors in its own scale and thus become a determinant in artistic creation.” Master Seppo was one of the great masters of Zen Buddhism who lived around 850 c.e. in China. Seppo had this observation about the boundless source, which describes eloquently the creative vision of the artist... “All this

universe is in this eye of mine.” Plan a visit to one of the many art galleries and studios nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains in and around Asheville and see how local artists use their innate creative vision to engage our eco-field in a myriad of mediums and styles.

For more from Calen visit [www.raynemaker.com](http://www.raynemaker.com)

