

Awakenings

By

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Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us. ... We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone and as we let our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

- Nelson Mandela's 1994 Inaugural Speech, quoting Marianne Williamson

INTRODUCTION

Love, light, and radiance are some of my aspirations, and I notice those desires in others as well, yet, we soil our souls with negative beliefs and thoughts of fear, unworthiness, guilt, shame, anger, greed, and hate, which often lead to despair. These long lists of negative mental constructs keep us from accessing the beauty that is within and around us. My personal experience with healing my own traumatic life events and my observations of the experiences of others, have inspired a healing impulse in my work.

In my Thesis Exhibition, *Awakenings*, my goal is to capture our internal resistance to change that keep so many of us trapped in negative or harmful situations and the process of releasing destructive patterns and beliefs. These life-depleting patterns of behavior can prevent us from reaching or expressing our full potential for happiness. However, by consciously making a decision to transform and shift to more coherent life-patterns, we can be awakened to the full beauty of life, and of ourselves.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF AWAKENINGS

This large-scale installation incorporates 173 three-dimensional forms that are meant as visual interpretations of the soul. I view each form as the spirit of an individual person. Just as human beings have diverse life experiences, my work also represents an assortment of forms that may have varied history. The forms can be interpreted as cocoons, pods, chrysalises, eggs, seeds, ideas, perceptions, dreams, and relationships; whatever concept the viewers can relate to within the framework of their own lives.

The exhibition is composed of cocoons that vary in size, shape, and texture within the ascending, three-dimensional installation. The placement of the forms spans from the floor, climbing up across two walls, to a height of over 30 feet. Each cocoon begins as a wire armature with the exception of the top four armatures that are welded steel. Each one is carefully covered with a range of materials, including natural and synthetic fibers. The smaller ones are primarily covered with many layers of thin paper dipped in a mixture of water, glue, coffee, or other natural staining material that hardened once dry. Additional textual resources are applied in many layers, such as human hair, yarn, dryer lint, dirt, seeds, coffee grounds, saw dust, wire, cotton fabric, cheese cloth, silk, polyester, expandable foam, and various paints. The largest forms are mostly covered with cottons, silks, and polyester fabrics that were crinkled, cut, painted, and hand-dyed.

The process of creating these forms was personally liberating and adventurously satisfying. It was an opportunity to explore many materials that were new to me, as well as giving me the chance to apply my Metalsmithing background for the welding process. Overall, the creation of this large-scale exhibit entailed much planning and reliance on years of artistic knowledge and experience. As I reflect on the last eight months, I recognize that much of the process required that I acknowledge my inner guidance and intuition. Working intuitively ties in with my exhibition, because I believe that intuition is what protects us and guides us in the direction that is most beneficial for our lives. The lack of listening to this natural instinct is portrayed in the lower section of this exhibit. In contrast, the upper most forms are the ones that have ‘discovered’ that inner voice.



ARTISTIC ANALYTIC PERSPECTIVE

The forms are visual representations of soul forms. Those on the floor are my interpretation of many of the individuals that I see in society who are constricted by negative beliefs, thoughts, self-defeating behaviors, defense mechanisms, or harmful situations that do not allow them to move into a healthier mindset or life context. Many of these forms have a hard outer shell that is bound and/or cluttered with layers of various materials such as hair, dirt, string, or glue which serve as visual metaphors of constricted energy, past dysfunctional behavioral patterns, and memories that have kept them trapped, callused, or guarded.

There are a larger number of these floor pieces because I have noticed that numerous

people in today's society live in negativity, lack of enthusiasm, fear, self-disapproval, and isolation. The bottom forms are the smallest in the installation because they are like small seeds that never blossomed, forgotten souls, potential that never flourished, or perhaps love that was never nurtured and finally withered away. On the other hand, there are openings of hope in a few of the pieces on the floor, and my purpose is to capture the tension between the willingness and hesitance that can arise from change.



The emergence and unfolding of inner beauty and self-love has been a recurring theme in my past works, and this emerges in this exhibition as the soul forms that are climbing the wall in relation to the closed forms that are on the floor. As the forms begin to 'find' self-worth, they partially open, allowing their vulnerability to be seen, although there are still there are remnants

of pain inside. To capture that hurt, I chose to stain the softer and lighter colored materials in the interior, such as silk organza, tulle, and cotton, as a contrast to the hard outer shell.

Awakenings, represents my intrigue with the question: can we ever be cleaned or cleared of all the pain that has tainted the core of our souls? In this work, I convey the resistance to change that we all hold in some aspects of our lives through some of the darker colors and the partially open pods.



As the forms continue to rise up the wall of the gallery, the larger and more open cocoons symbolize personal awareness. As they grow in size, they have a lighter presence. The hardness of their shells has shed. However, other layers of fears, doubts, or past qualms are still present but show signs of peeling away and detaching. I want the viewer to see the development and growth of these soul shapes as transitions, personal evolutions, and metamorphosis. If we are able to release traumas and restrictive thoughts, we may be able to gain a greater sense of well being and peace, which can spiral upward into greater coherence and purpose in our lives and minds.



Sometimes, demonstrating our vulnerability takes great courage and, as I observe our society, I see less and less of that courage to show true feelings. To illustrate that lack of bravery, I intentionally placed fewer forms in the uppermost section of the installation. Perseverance is part of the transformation and that progression is not always an easy journey. Even though the forms in this installation are getting lighter in color and cleaner, there is always a presence of a tainted memory or perhaps of residual doubt and fear. I see the relationship of these forms to the human experience: from my perspective, an individual can gain momentum and focus and still have bits and pieces of the past clinging. Nonetheless, I believe, that we are capable of transcending to higher states of consciousness.

The final sculpture at the top is my representation of a soul that is most transcendent. It is a parallel to a soul that has been able to heal, and see the beauty within; a soul that has the ability

to allow their light to shine. Visually and artistically, this is supported by my choice to use silk and polyester organza, a material that is sheer and able to speak to the beauty and softness of an awakened and healed consciousness. The transcendence of the top piece signifies my view that we all have the potential to achieve a personal sense of freedom and personal empowerment.

A quote that inspires me and reminds me to keep moving no matter what the circumstances is one by Oliver Wendell Holmes: “To reach a port we must sail, sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it. But we must not drift or lie at anchor.”





CONCLUSION

In conceptualizing the installation, *Awakenings*, I felt it necessary to create a work of art that would touch the human soul. In this day and age, people are quickly moving from one moment to the next, overwhelmed by too many responsibilities, and struggling to survive: it is difficult to create a space or a period of silence to listen to forces moving inside of us. I wanted this work to be a reminder that no matter which cocoon one relates to among the many in the installation, there is beauty and potential within each, waiting to emerge. Whether beautiful or not, dark or light, dormant, or in the process of metamorphosis, each is a reminder of the potential that, if nurtured, can allow an individual's inner light to shine, and, the resulting path can be beautiful beyond belief.

