


Vision 12: Three Types of Sorcerers
Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 1989
Pablo Amaringo





Inner Visions: Sacred Plants, Art and Spirituality • An Exhibition of Art Presented by the Brauer Museum • Curated by Luis Eduardo Luna

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From the Director

In this Brauer Museum of Art exhibition and accompanying publication, expertly curated by the noted scholar Luis Eduardo Luna, we explore the complex and enigmatic topic of the ritual use of sacred plants to achieve visionary states of mind. Working as a team, Luna, Valparaiso University Associate Professor of Art Robert Sirko, Valparaiso University Professor Richard E. DeMaris and the Brauer Museum staff present our efforts of examining visual products arising from the ingestion of these sacred plants and brews such as *ayahuasca*. Consumed by indigenous people's of South America in order to attain heightened states of consciousness, the effects are said to include experiences with spirit worlds that form the basis of various belief systems and religions. Traditional and contemporary, ceremonial and artistically creative visual products, both indigenous and nonindigenous, comprise our exhibition, with common elements or traits among the objects speaking to objective aspects and cultural influences of the particular agents.

While the exhibition focuses in part on religions and cultures dependent on such agents for access to an alternate plane, one could say that religions in general have their individual concepts of divine realms attainable only through a departure from lived or objective reality. Thus, while some of the objects here may seem exotic or esoteric in nature, they actually relate significantly to sacred visual products of other faiths that may have used other means of access to achieve nonetheless similar results, in terms of their reference to a place

other than earthly existence. Additionally, while some objects may be culture specific in their references and nature, they are also broadly influential on many levels to, say, contemporary American and European subcultures, as well as to contemporary artistic practices in general.

We at the Brauer Museum of Art wish to thank the following individuals and agencies for making this exhibition possible: the Brauer Museum of Art's Brauer Endowment, the Brauer Museum of Art's Robert and Caroline Collings Endowment, Partners for the Brauer Museum of Art, Integrated Marketing and Communications, Valparaiso University President, Mark Heckler, Rudolf Adamczyk, Anderson Debernardi, Richard E. DeMaris, Edna Kurtz Emmet, Rick Harlow, Jon L. Hendricks, Dean Jon Kilpinen, Larry and Rachel Kolton, Luis Eduardo Luna, Dennis McKenna, William Richards, Gloria Ruff, Alex Sastoque, Laura Krepp, Robert Sirko, Craig and Judy Spiering, Rebecca Stone, Donna Torres, and Thomas Wilkenson. In addition, we are particularly grateful to Robert Sirko for his fine design of the exhibition catalog.

Gregg Hertzlieb

Director/Curator

Brauer Museum of Art, Valparaiso University



Vision 4: The Spirits or Mothers of the Plants
Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 1986
Pablo Amaringo



Vision 8: The Powers of the Mariris
Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 1987
Pablo Amaringo

Introduction

One evening nearly three years ago while surfing the Internet, I stumbled upon the work of Pablo Amaringo. Until that point I had never heard of nor seen his work, but I soon found myself overwhelmed by his genius. Here was a manner of painterly style combined with exotic visions of indigenous mythologies, of fantastic worlds with everything from serpents, to otherworldly creatures, places within the depths of the earth to the outer reaches of space, inhabited by spaceships and angels. I'd long been intrigued with the work of Hieronymous Bosch and of his autonomous worlds of man and creatures of all sorts, but this was something entirely different and bizarre. Amaringo's work had hugely populated the Internet, and I wondered why I had never seen it before. Resolved to learn more and to see more detailed images, I continued my research. I soon learned that a book had been published and was co-authored by an anthropologist specializing in the cultural practices of the mestizo shamanism and of a strange brew called *ayahuasca*. I ordered the book that night.

After observing the images of the *ayahuasca* visions and reading the accompanying text, I was compelled to reach out to the author, Luis Eduardo Luna, to acknowledge his wonderful work and simply remark how amazed I was by Amaringo's paintings. Two months passed, and then one evening I received a message from Luna. He began with an apology for his failure to respond more quickly as he had been flying all over the globe, participating in conferences and giving lectures. In my genuine naiveté of this subject and of the man, I was just beginning to

understand how highly he was sought for his unique insights and how valued was his knowledge. Nevertheless, within the exchange of those emails was the chrysalis of this exhibition.

After a few back and forth conversations, I proposed to Luna the idea of an exhibition of Amaringo's work. He responded with great interest and added that he knew several other artists who would make wonderful contributions to an exhibition of "visionary art." I was intrigued by the prospect but somewhat uneasy given the "hallucinogenic" nature of the work as influenced by *ayahuasca* or *yagé*. A chance conversation occurred between myself and Richard DeMaris, professor of Theology at Valparaiso University, when I happened to discuss my idea of an exhibition and the concern of contextualizing it within the discourse of the university. Rick was surprisingly enthusiastic, citing instances within the Christian tradition of "ecstatic revelation," and urged my continued pursuit of the project.

Soon thereafter came several other conversations via Skype among DeMaris, Gregg Hertzlieb, the Director of the Brauer Museum of Art, Luna and me, in which we laid out the initial logistics, culminating in this exhibit. It is appropriate for me to offer thanks to all those who have contributed to this event and especially those who urged and supported the effort, especially Rick who helped with my initial stumbling block, to Gregg for his undying enthusiasm for this exhibition and for the unique niche that the Brauer Museum supports in examining the religious in art. I would also like to thank the artists who have contributed their work and shared their comments with

me, especially Donna Torres and Rick Harlow. Rick's stories of encounters with cultural practices and tribal traditions of the peoples of the Amazon were most fascinating. I offer my special thanks to Luis Eduardo Luna who has become somewhat of a mentor to me throughout this journey. Through numerous personal conversations, articles and books he has written or recommended, and his willingness to share with me his vast knowledge, I feel so fortunate to have made his acquaintance. I felt something of a bond with Luis when he shared with me that the first book he ever read in English was Mircea Eliade's *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*. Reading that same book in high school launched my own personal journey towards a greater understanding of religious thinking. It is my sincere hope that your experience with this exhibition, through an exploration of the unique "unseen" realms presented and the words expressed in the following texts, will broaden your understanding of Amerindian religious traditions and cultural beliefs and the nature of art as well.

Robert Sirko

Associate Professor of Art

Valparaiso University



Vision 17: Vision of the Snakes
Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 1987
Pablo Amaringo

“The Spirits don’t
talk, but express
themselves
through images”

Pablo Amaringo



Pablo Amaringo's First Painting

Inner Visions: Sacred Plants, Art and Spirituality

by Luis Eduardo Luna

Since the advent of human consciousness, we have been drawn simultaneously towards the external and the internal world. Magnificent examples of figurative Paleolithic art have been preserved which depict many species of animals of economic or ritual importance. For example, the paintings depicting pig deer found on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, according to recent studies, are at least 35,400 years old, and the horses, rhinoceri and lions from the Chauvet cave in southern France date from 30,000-32,000 BCE. Representations of strange, non-naturalistic beings that are human-animal composites (therianthropes) also have been discovered from an equally distant past and probably possess a mythic-religious significance associated with ritual music and dance. In the cave at Fumane, near Verona (Italy), one of the oldest known depictions of a human being is a horned therianthrope. It is called “the shaman” and is at least 35,000 years old, with claims that it may be even 8,000 years older (Broglia). In the Chauvet cave (a World Heritage site), a mysterious figure is a composite of a female lower body and a feline head, with one of the legs growing into a second body that has a head of a bison. In the Hohlenstein-Stadel cave, located in the Valley of Lone, Baden-Württemberg (Germany), a magnificent, 32,000-year-old, wood sculpture with a lioness’s head was found.¹ Perhaps the most famous therianthrope is *The “Dancing Sorcerer”* of the Cave of the Trois-Frères in Ariège, France, with a figure that seems to be in the process of animal transformation (Figure 1). Numerous examples of therianthropes in rock art from various periods are found in Africa (see www.sarada.co.za) as well as in the Americas.



Figure 1. *The “Dancing Sorcerer” from the Cave of the Trois-Frères, Ariège, France.*

¹ Until recently, it was thought that the oldest rock art, from about forty thousand years ago, was found only in Europe. Now we know that rock painting from the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, is as old or even older. As current dating techniques are applied to other paintings, perhaps much of Australian rock painting will prove to be just as old. It is now clear that the so-called creative explosion occurred independently in more than one place, or perhaps was already occurring when our African ancestors left the continent some 70,000 years ago.

Therianthropes have been a part of our species' artistic endeavors ever since. They are found in the human-headed, winged bulls and lions guarding Assyrian palaces. In ancient Egypt, there is Anubis, the jackal-headed god associated with the afterlife; Sekhmet, the lion-headed goddess of war and battle; and, of course, the sphinx, silently gazing forever toward the eastern horizon. In India, there is Ganesha, the elephant god, and Hanuman, the monkey god. Fauns, centaurs, mermaids and angels are familiar images from antiquity, as well as Satan, a powerful archetype of Christianity and Islam, depicted as a therianthrope with horns, tail and wings. We find therianthropes in Picassos' Minotaur. They are also the main heroes of today's blockbuster films such as *Spiderman*, *The X-Men*, and the Na'vi of planet Pandora, in *Avatar*.

Clearly, our compulsion to create myths explaining our place in the natural world and the nature of existence itself dates from ancient times. What is the origin of all these enigmatic figures depicted in such diverse geographical areas since the very beginning? Do they come from dreams? Have they emerged from altered states of consciousness, as proposed by Lewis-Williams in *The Mind in the Cave*? Are they manifestations of beings that exist either in other dimensions or in the minds of particular individuals with enough power or charisma to imprint them in future generations? This remains a great mystery. In any case, they are certainly not beings from ordinary reality. Subjectively, at least, our ancestors were deeply affected by such apparitions, and, as far as we know, most

cultures through time and space have believed that human-animal figures play an important role in supernatural worlds.

Historians usually mark 4,000 BCE as the approximate advent of complex societies. As children, we learned that civilization originated in the "Old World," and only later in the "New World." This may be true if one takes into account the recent discoveries of Göbekli Tepe, in Turkey, where 11,000-year-old, sophisticated ritual architectural sites are being unearthed, and if one also accepts the existence of a much older Egypt, which is still a matter of dispute (Schoch). If, according to traditional interpretations, one views the origin of western civilization in Sumer, it is important to be aware that, at the same time, another civilizatory process was taking place on the other side of the Atlantic. One needs to consider Norte Chico, located some 100 miles north of Lima, where archeologists have uncovered more than 30 major sites with monumental communal architecture (though lacking ceramics), occupying from 25 to 500 acres in an area along four short river valleys running into the ocean on a 15-mile stretch of Pacific coast. These sites are dated 3200-1800 BCE. Archeologists consider Norte Chico the cradle of Andean civilization.

Asians crossed to America through the now submerged Beringia, which, at that time, bridged the two continents from at least 37,000 years ago. The two populations were separated at the end of the last glaciation (18,000-12,000 BCE), each following their own development and establishing advanced civilizations on both sides of the Atlantic. These were *two* old worlds that

would meet at a later point in time. And when they did cross paths, it was not the “discovery” of a new world, but rather the violent collision of two ancient worlds, one overpowering the other, which gave birth to the new world in which we live today. I’m referring, of course, to 1492, when a process began by which the Americas were nearly totally overtaken by peoples from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

At the end of the 15th century, Portugal and Spain, two competing kingdoms on the western tip of Eurasia, began an impetuous expansion of exploration and conquest, the purpose of which was to dominate the whole world. Two more kingdoms, France and England, would soon enter the race. These nations had advanced navigation technology, superior weaponry and combat experience, as well as a cultural commonality that included a shared fervent religion: Christianity in its diverse forms. There was no such cultural cohesion in the Americas. Apart from two large empires, the Incas in South America and the Aztecs in Mesoamerica, Amerindians were fragmented into hundreds of cultures with various degrees of technical development.

Over the course of millions of years of separation, Eurasia and the Americas also developed their own unique flora and fauna. One of the great differences between the two worlds was the larger emphasis given in Eurasia to the domestication of animals: cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, horses and chickens. This profoundly affected their way of life, their use of land and water, in addition to the development of their immune systems as they

gradually developed a resistance to several illnesses that jumped from animals to humans during the domestication process. When the Europeans arrived on the other side of the Atlantic, they not only took their plants and animals with them, but also, unknowingly, a formidable biological weapon: their germs. Within 150 years of contact, approximately 90-95% of the Amerindian population had disappeared. Concurrently, plants and animals from Eurasia invaded the Americas, initiating what Alfred Crosby calls “biological imperialism.”

Few animals were domesticated originally in the Americas, and all of these had a limited geographical impact: the llama, alpaca and guinea pig of the Andes, the turkey and the dog in Mesoamerica. Eurasian plants played, then as well as now, a crucial global role, as we still consume rye, wheat, rice, barley, rye and chickpeas. But Amerindians mastered different ecosystems with great skills, developing hydraulic technology and domesticating plants for food and a wide range of other uses: the many varieties of corn, potatoes, tomatoes, beans, squash, manioc, quinoa, amaranth, edible cacti, avocados, pineapples, and numerous other fruits; stimulants such as cacao, tobacco, coca and mate; medicines such as quinine (used in the treatment of malaria) and the active compounds from the various *curare* of Amazonians which now make open heart surgery possible. Rubber extracted from several species of *Hevea* was essential in the birth of modern transportation (bicycles and cars) as well as other industries.

It is within this larger context of plant knowledge that

one needs to consider the discovery and use in the Americas of numerous species of psychotropic plants, probably within a shamanic context. Once this important defining characteristic is understood, suddenly a great deal of previously enigmatic pre-Columbian art makes far more sense. Representations of the human-jaguar motif, for example, are found all over Central and South America, as Rebecca Stone has demonstrated in her book *The Jaguar Within*. Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff recognized the birdman motif in a large number of Colombian Amerindian works in gold (*Goldwork and Shamanism*). Many of these figures are probably expressions of subjective states: animal transformation, for instance, or depictions of meetings in non-ordinary states of consciousness with therianthropes. The use of psychotropic plants seems to coincide with the dawn of certain major Amerindian civilizations. From Caral (2600 BCE), one of the ceremonial sites of Norte Chico, we know of inhalators used to absorb a plant, though it has yet to be identified botanically. Coca was in use since at least 8,000 BCE and is still considered sacred among Andean communities of Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Colombia, as well as indigenous groups of the Sierra Nevada in northern Colombia.

In the circular plaza of the temple of Chavín de Huántar (1200-300 BCE), one of the figures in the gallery of the offerings (Figure 2) is a man-jaguar therianthrope with snakes as hair and a belt holding a piece of *Trichocereus pachanoi*, the well-known San Pedro cactus still used by healers in Andean and coastal Peru. Chavín ceramic representations of this cactus, either in



Figure 2. "The Cactusman", plaza of the temple of Chavín de Huántar (1200-300 BCE), Ancash, Peru. Photo by Constantino Manuel Torres.

association with a jaguar or a deer, confirm its importance in this advanced culture.

Several hundred Maya mushroom stones have been found in Kaminaljuyú, Guatemala, dating from 2500 BP. Mushrooms are still used ritually by Mazatec healers, as the meeting of Gordon Wasson and María Sabina revealed in the book, *The Wondrous Mushroom*. Peyote buttons that date from approximately 3000 BCE were found in a cave in Texas in a context suggesting ritual use (Schultes & Hofmann 132). There are ceramic representations of peyote from Monte Albán (300-



Figure 3. The “Ponce Monolith”,
In the Ponce Stela at the Kalasasaya Courtyard,
Bolivia, South America.
Photo by Constantino Manuel Torres.

100 AD) and Colima (100 AD) in Mexico. Although persecuted by the religious and civil authorities of Mexico since the 16th century, peyote is still the central sacrament of the Huichol, Cora and Taramara of that country. In the US, the American Indian sacramental use of peyote was threatened in 1990 by an ominous decision of the Supreme Court, in response to which the Native American Church (NAC), seeking protection of the ancient use of peyote, prevailed on Congress to enact in 1993 the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), and to amend in 1994 the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA), both signed into law by President Clinton, to ensure the continued religious use of peyote by thousands of members of the Native American Church.

The oldest date for the use of *Anadenanthera colubrina* (based on known archeological evidence) is from around 2100 BCE. A related species, *Anadenanthera peregrina*, was used by indigenous groups of northern South America and taken to the Antilles around 2000 BP. The first book written in the Americas in a European language was mostly about the ritual use of *cohoba* (the vernacular name of this plant) by the Taíno on the island of Hispaniola (known today as Haiti/Dominican Republic). This book was written by Ramón Pané, a Catalan friar, under the orders of Christopher Columbus during his second voyage of conquest and discovery (Pané). The seeds of these two species were roasted, ground to powder and inhaled by means of snuff trays and inhalators of various kinds.

Anadenanthera colubrina had obvious religious significance

in the remarkable Tiwanaku culture (0-1000 AD), which had its capital near the shores of Lake Titicaca. In the Ponce Stela at the Kalasasaya Courtyard, a figure holds in his hands strange objects that archeologists believe were ritual objects of some kind (Figure 3). Thanks to discoveries in San Pedro de Atacama in northern Chile, an area influenced by Tiwanaku, these objects are now identified as paraphernalia related to the inhalation of the seeds of *A. colubrina*. In San Pedro de Atacama, approximately 25% of the male funerary bundles contain perfectly preserved wool bags enclosing wooden snuff trays for depositing the seed powder, inhalators and tiny spoons to handle it, as well as leather pouches containing snuff powder with traces of bufotenine, its main psychoactive compound (Torres & Repke). In spite of persecution by religious authorities, as was the case with other sacred plants, *A. peregrina* and *A. colubrina* are still used by a limited number of indigenous groups.

Ayahuasca is the Quechua name of a brew consumed in the Amazonian areas of Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, and parts of Ecuador. It is prepared by cooking the stem of *Banisteriopsis caapi*, a vine in the Malpighiaceae family, and the leaves of *Psychotria viridis*, in the Rubiaceae family. In Colombia and adjacent areas of the Ecuadorian Amazon, a normally cold infusion known as *yajé* is prepared by macerating the stem of *Banisteriopsis caapi* and the leaves of *Diplopterys cabrerana*, another malpighiaceae vine. Both preparations are pharmacologically similar: *P. viridis* and *D. cabrerana*

contain dimethyltryptamine (DMT), an alkaloid present in many plants and in all mammals, including, of course, humans. This alkaloid is orally inactive, but in the presence of harmine from the *Banisteriopsis* vine, it crosses the blood-brain barrier, stimulates serotonin-2A receptors and blocks adjacent metabotropic glutamate receptors in the nervous system, and finally binds to sigma-1 receptors inside the neurons. In appropriate concentration it produces changes in mood and cognition, and often elicits extraordinary visions that are culturally interpreted. Recent studies show that DMT has anti-inflammatory properties at a cellular level and may play a role as an immune regulator (Frecska et al. 2013; Szabo et al. 2014). It is extraordinary that such a simple molecule on the cellular level has such healing properties, while at the same time opens up the visionary realm.

The names *ayahuasca* and *yajé* may be used to refer solely to the *Banisteriopsis* vine, but there are also numerous vernacular names among the dozens of indigenous groups that use these preparations in the Upper Amazon. In the Peruvian Amazon, other admixture plants (some of them psychoactive) may be added to the basic *ayahuasca* brew. In the Sibundoy Valley, in the Colombian Putumayo area, the Kamsá and Ingano—with a special expertise in *Brugmansia* species—add potential medicinal plants to *yajé* in order to study their properties and thus expand their pharmacopeia (Bristol). The oldest known archeological reference to *ayahuasca* is no more than 200 years old, but the use of at least *Banisteriopsis caapi*

is probably much older. Among contemporary Amazonians it is used to communicate with the spiritual side of nature, for divination (diagnosing illness, finding lost objects or learning about others), or as a tool “to learn” about this world and other worlds. It is also connected with ethical aspects: it is given to young people as an initiation to help them lead a good life. Among the Aguaruna (or Awajún, their endonym), it is not enough simply to know facts; one must learn to think well by bringing together the body, the emotions and the intellect in the epiphany of the visionary experience (Brown 49). It is also the source of inspiration for indigenous songs and ornamentation. Reichel-Dolmatoff was the first to realize that the decoration on the communal houses or *malocas*, ceramics, and painting in general, was associated with the visions that the Desana and Barasana of the Colombian Vaupés received under the effects of *caapi*, their vernacular name for the *Banisteriopsis* vine (*Amazonian Cosmos; Beyond the Milky Way*). Jean Langdon discovered that the body painting among the Siona of Southwest Colombia mimics other depictions of spirits encountered in visions (*Spirits, Shamans and Stars*). In Siona culture, most narrative is related to the adventures of shamans in parallel worlds. The Shipibo of the Ucayali believe they are covered and penetrated by normally invisible three-dimensional designs that are revealed in non-ordinary states of conscious and subsequently are represented by the woman through the textiles, ceramics and body painting. In earlier times, they also covered houses and objects of their material

world. These designs have a musical aspect: shamans see them when they ascend to the summit in their cosmology and listen to the songs of the spirits. These are the same songs they use to cure their patients, restoring their spiritual patterns to them in the healing process (Gebhart-Sayer). All designs are believed to be found on the skin of the cosmic serpent, a spiritual being that surrounds the world (which, curiously enough, is also the case in Germanic cosmology). Music is probably older than language itself. To a certain extent, the so-called power of the shaman resides in an ability to evoke powerful, non-linguistic, archetypal images through his chanting.²

From 1980-1986, I carried out research among *vegetalistas*, mestizo practitioners who use *ayahuasca*, tobacco and other powerful plants as a vehicle to diagnose and heal illness, which is thought to be caused in most cases by soul loss or by an animated agent that is either natural or supernatural. *Vegetalistas* are experts in the use of specific powerful plants they believe are *doctores* or plant-teachers from whom it is possible to learn medicine and acquire certain powers. A strict diet and isolation that may last for several months or even years is required in order to “learn from the plants.” Transmission of knowledge is most often mediated through *icaros*, powerful songs or melodies used in their shamanic practice. This tradition is at least 100 years old. During my research, I was worried this tradition was in danger of disappearing, since,

² For the shaman, I use here the masculine, but in some traditions, such as among the Mapuche, of Chile, it is a woman or *machi* who performs shamanic tasks.



Vision 21: The Sublimity of the Sumiruna
Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 1987
Pablo Amaringo



Vision 28: Spiritual Heart Operation
Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches, 1989
Pablo Amaringo

at that time, I did not meet any young people interested in undergoing the hardships of such training. This situation has radically changed since the beginning of the 1990s due to the interest in *ayahuasca* shown by a growing number of non-Amazonians. Today, there are dozens of practitioners, some Amazonians (indigenous or mestizo), some from a surprising variety of Western countries and even beyond, who are offering sessions or have created centers where it is possible to be in isolation and observe the required diet.

In the summer of 1985, ethnopharmacologist Dennis McKenna and I were collecting plants in Pucallpa, in the Peruvian Amazon. Dennis introduced me to Pablo Amaringo (1938-2009), then living in a very modest house with no electricity, running water or proper sanitation. I soon realized that Pablo Amaringo was very knowledgeable about the mestizo *ayahuasca* traditions I was then studying. He had been a *vegetalista* but had stopped practicing seven years before we met. Almost by chance, he showed us a few watercolors on cheap paper depicting jungle motifs. He claimed to have a photographic memory. I was inspired by Reichel-Dolmatoff, who had taken paper and pencils to the Barasana, a Tucanoan group of the Columbian Vaupés, and asked them to paint whatever they wanted. They painted their visions. I asked Pablo whether he could remember his visions under the effects of *ayahuasca*. He made two paintings, and gave each of us one of them. At home in Helsinki, Finland, where I was living at that time, I photocopied the painting I had received from Pablo and

requested an explanation with regard to several elements in his painting, which he did without delay. This initial painting and the letters we exchanged are displayed in the exhibit. I understood that Pablo could elucidate the inner world of mestizo Amazonians graphically, and, for years, I provided him with the best possible art materials, organized exhibitions, transformed his living conditions and those of his family, and finally published *Ayahuasca Visions: The Religious Iconography of a Peruvian Shaman* (Luna & Amaringo). The paintings displayed here are among those I acquired from Pablo during the first years that he began to produce his work.

Once copies of Pablo's paintings began to circulate, and even more so when the book was published, I witnessed a profound reaction among Peruvian Amazonians themselves, who immediately recognized that these paintings depicted worlds revealed by the *ayahuasca* experience. Except for a few illustrations by Peruvian artist Yando Ríos that appeared in the book *Visionary Vine: Hallucinogenic Healing in the Peruvian Amazon* on *ayahuasca* by his wife, anthropologist Marlene Dobkin de Rios, to the best of my knowledge, no artist had attempted to render these kinds of visions as works of art. Friends of mine who are anthropologists took the book to Amazonian indigenous communities and encountered similar reactions. The book also caused something of an international stir, with some people claiming this publication was partially responsible for the new global interest in *ayahuasca*.

In 1988, Pablo Amaringo and I created the *Usko-Ayar*

Amazonian School of Painting in Pucallpa, Peru, a project to which I dedicated several years of my life, buying high-quality materials, photographing the art, and organizing exhibits in various countries. At its apex, the school had 300 students, mostly between the ages of 10-20. Amazonians seem to have extraordinary eidetic memories, and Pablo, a remarkable pedagogue, was able to transmit his own technique of projecting on paper what the students had seen in the forest. Although it might be difficult to believe, not a single sheet of high quality paper was ever wasted. A few students attempted to paint their own *ayahuasca* visions, but Pablo, who had already abandoned his practice as a *vegetalista* many years before, did not encourage it.

One of these students (and certainly the most talented), Anderson Debernardi, entered the school at age 18, but left after a few years to follow his own path, specializing in highly realistic depictions of Amazonian birds, plants and forest landscapes. In 1994, due to an urgent need to continue my own research in other areas, I resigned from my responsibilities at the Usko-Ayar school. I was offered a visiting professorship in the department of anthropology of Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC) in Florianópolis in southern Brazil. Several years later, I saw Debernardi, who had just finished several huge murals at the Helsinki Zoo. I knew he had partaken of several *ayahuasca* sessions and that they had a great impact on his life. I proposed that he paint his visions. The result is clearly astounding. He gives the same kind of

fine detail to his visions that he does to his strictly naturalistic paintings.

Donna Torres, whose father is Canadian and mother is Colombian, is a painter, an art teacher and a botanical illustrator. She has collaborated with scientific drawings in publications by retired art historian and archeologist Professor Constantino Manuel Torres, her husband. Mr. Torres is an expert on Tiwanaku, the world authority on pre-Columbian snuff-trays. He has travelled extensively to visit important archeological sites, especially in Northern Chile, always accompanied by Donna, who is herself interested in shamanic traditions and sacred Amerindian plants. I met Donna and her husband in July 1985 at the *45th Congress of the Americanists*, which that year was held in Bogotá, Columbia. They were in the audience of the very first international and interdisciplinary symposium on *ayahuasca*, which I organized. The three of us became instant friends and have collaborated since then on various projects. I have followed Donna's artistic development with admiration and I am extremely thankful for her collaboration not only with paintings, but also with her exquisite botanical drawings of sacred plants.

I met artist Rick Harlow in 1993 through legendary Professor Richard Evans Schultes (1915-2001), the father of modern ethnobotany. Harlow was our guide when Pablo Amaringo, two of his students and I visited Washington D.C. in 1994 in connection with an exhibition at the Capital Children's Museum. Over time, I learned of not only of his work as an

artist, but also his admirable commitment to various projects with Colombian indigenous groups, such as teaching the Amazonian Makuna and Tanimuka to make paper with the pulp of *Cecropia* species and helping the Arahucos and Kogi of the Sierra Nevada, in northern Colombia, to record and publish tales of the elders in their native language for free distribution among the young. In his paintings, Harlow juxtaposes the visionary realm with nearly photographically realistic landscapes. “*Ayahuasca* taught me to read the book of nature,” he says. Harlow was one of the artists I invited to participate in the exhibition *Visions That the Plants Gave Us*, which took place in 1999 at the Richard F. Brush Art Gallery at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, and I am grateful he agreed to exhibit some of his truly exemplary, intriguing paintings here in Valparaiso.

Alex Sastoque is a Colombian artist, who, in my opinion, is a rising star. He is the youngest of the artists in this exhibition, but already has compiled an impressive artistic résumé. We have not yet met in person, but Skype is a good substitute. Donna suggested that I consider his work while I was in the process of planning this exhibition. Sastoque’s art is obviously influenced by Amerindian shamanic themes—for instance the therianthrope motif—since he has taken the sacred plants in ceremonies with several indigenous groups. At the same time, he has collaborated with the great visionary artist Ernst Fuchs. This is a powerful artistic confluence that is perfectly visible in Sastoque’s work.

What might the current interest in sacred Amerindian plants mean for the religious and spiritual life of today’s globalized world? It isn’t entirely clear. New religions that adopted *ayahuasca* as a sacrament under the names *Santo Daime* and *Vegetal* emerged in Acre and Rondônia (in the Brazilian Amazon) beginning in the 1930s and continuing through the 1960s. These syncretic religious institutions incorporate Christianity, Afro-Brazilian religious elements, European esoteric traditions and Amazonian ideas. Undoubtedly, institutions of many kinds are now being developed that will have a future impact. Experiences with sacred plants (in the proper setting) are not incompatible with these world views or symbolic systems. Previously held cosmological ideas may even be reaffirmed: encounters with Jesus or Mary, Lord Shiva, Odin, Ogun, the Cosmic Serpent, the World Tree, or Mother Earth (Gaia) are common. Strassman finds powerful explanatory models in the mystic Jewish tradition for the DMT experience (*DMT and the Soul of Prophecy*). And, certainly, as presented by Professor Richard DeMaris in this catalogue, visionary experiences abound in the Christian tradition.

Remarkably, regardless of their cultural background, many persons participating in ceremonies with the sacred plants discover a renewed interest in nature and environmental issues. This represents extremely important common ground. In this time of ecological calamity, caused in part by the desacralization of nature, all world religions and spiritual

traditions (regardless of ideological differences) urgently need to reconsider our relationship with the natural world. The worship of nature may unite us more than anything else and allow us to overcome doctrinal discrepancies that are relatively unimportant if considered from the perspective of human culture as a whole.

Our Western contemporary world is perhaps an historical exception in that our attention is constantly being drawn (in keeping with the devastating logic of unbridled consumerism) solely towards controlling and profiting from the external world. We have forgotten our own traditions that facilitate entering inner worlds during our waking hours, even though we have learned the benefits of meditation from the East. Too often, we pay no attention to our dreams, arranging our lives so that we are violently disconnected every morning from our inner world by all sorts of clocks and artifacts. Art saves us, which perhaps explains why it fascinates us. Art reminds us (sometimes explicitly, as in the case of the artists in this exhibition) of other realities, hidden in the inner recesses of our minds.

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Vision 30: Kapukiri
Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches, 1988
Pablo Amaringo



Vision 33: Campana Ayahuasca
Gouache on paper, 12 x 18 inches. 1989
Pablo Amaringo

Encountering Other Worlds, Amazonian and Biblical

by Richard E. DeMaris

Among the many ways Europeans oppressed the indigenous peoples of the Americas in the sixteenth and subsequent centuries, Christian missionaries and priests sought to eliminate their native beliefs and practices and replace them with Christianity. In the case of the Peruvian and Colombian Amazon and elsewhere, this meant the suppression of shamanic traditions and practices. These and other traditions were vilified as superstitious, perverse and satanic. Europeans saw their religion as altogether different—as superior, divinely inspired, reasonable and moral.

What they were unwillingly to acknowledge, or perhaps could not even recognize, were the striking resemblances between the indigenous religious traditions they attacked and their own piety. Such is the irony of imperialism, that the polarity of conqueror and conquered hid the many things they had in common.

The artwork in this exhibition comes from or takes its inspiration from the Colombian and Peruvian Amazon, where shamanism, once pervasive, barely survived the onslaught of European and, later, Euro-American domination. But it did survive, and has in recent decades come to intrigue and attract Western intellectuals and artists. What is shamanism? There is no universally accepted definition, because shamanism varies greatly across cultures. Yet there is a family of features

that attend the many expressions of it. The distinguished historian of religion Mircea Eliade concluded that the hallmark of shamanism was ecstatic experience, especially the spirit journey, the aim of which was to bring some benefit to the shaman's community ("Recent Works" 153). Benefits could come in many forms: special insight into ongoing or future events, neutralizing a malevolent power or healing an illness. More recent scholarship prefers the term altered or alternate state of consciousness (or ASC) to ecstasy, but characterizes shamanism in much the same way, explaining that it "consists of a specific configuration of certain characteristics (ASC experiences such as visions, possession or journeys) and certain social functions (such as healing, divination, exorcism and control of spirits) that flow from these experiences" (Craffert 135). Simply put, a shaman's entry into an altered state of consciousness gives him or her access to another world, a spirit world. In this transformed state, the shaman enjoys an enriched understanding of reality that can be used to improve the lot of his or her people and to guide them. What is worth noting is that this life profile is not alien to Christianity, even though advocates of Christianity invariably present it as the opposite of shamanism.

Early Christian writings are filled with reports of dreams, visions and revelations that an anthropologist would identify

as experiences had in an alternate state of consciousness. For instance, when the apostle Paul's authority is challenged, he is quick to claim to have had a revelation (Gal. 1.12; 2.1-2), and at one point narrates (in third person) the spirit journey he made: "I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven . . ." (2 Cor. 12.2). Likewise, the Acts of the Apostles narrates a trance event in the life of the apostle Peter, during which he has a vision authorizing the end of dietary restrictions on him and his fellow believers, and the establishment of table fellowship with people of all ethnic backgrounds (Acts 10.9-29). Jesus evidently had such experiences, too. The Gospel of Mark begins with a vision he has at his baptism: "he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him" (1.10). In this Spirit-possessed state he heals the sick and exorcises demons and unclean spirits (1.23-26; 1.31; 1.34; 1.41-42; etc.). So Christianity actually shares many features with shamanism. Visionary experience lies at its foundation and remains fundamental in some strands of the tradition to this day.

Does this mean that Jesus, his disciples and the apostles were taking hashish, belladonna, or some other hallucinogenic plant to get a visionary high? Sensationalist would have it so. John Allegro's *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* and other texts like it have attracted considerable attention (Allegro). But such efforts miss the actual correspondences between Christianity and shamanism. Denizens of both the Peruvian and Colombian Amazon and the ancient biblical world reside

in cultures that value alternate states of consciousness and sanction entry into the spirit world. They have a vivid sense of that world, considering it as real as the mundane world—perhaps even more real.

What is different is how one enters that other world. The means of entry vary across cultures. In the Amazon, ritually-induced sensory overload or deprivation—drumming, chanting, hyperventilation, fasting, meditation, isolation—along with ingesting psychotropic plants like *ayahuasca* mediate entry into, or interaction with, the spirit world (Luna, "Indigenous and Mestizo"). As for the biblical world, the Hebrew Bible book of Ezekiel narrates the eating of an inscribed scroll (2.8-3:3), as does the New Testament book of Revelation (10.9), which in both cases triggers revelation. But both books are rich in symbols; the inscribed scrolls could simply be the very words that are revealed, placed in the prophet's or seer's mouth. The common means for entering an ASC in the biblical world were fasting and solitude or isolation (DeMaris 17). In Acts chapter 10, Peter's hunger was enough to trigger his trance (10.10). Jesus' encounter with the spirit world—his temptation by the Devil—occurred when he had fasted in the wilderness for forty days and nights (Luke 4.1-13). Ingestion of a psychotropic drug appears absent from the repertoire of ways to induce an ASC in the biblical world. In other words, Jesus did not pop mescal buttons.

While the means of inducing an ASC vary across cultures, all cultures that value ASC's identify and sanction legitimate

ways for entering them. Shamanic initiation in the Amazon involves self-discipline—fasting, sexual abstinence—and elaborate ritual (Luna, *Vegetalismo* 43-55). The ingestion of *ayahuasca* or other psychotropic substance—an *ayahuasca* session—is preceded by socially-prescribed preparation and follows a scripted pattern. It is, in short, ritually controlled. Ritual control also marks legitimate ASCs in the biblical world (DeMaris 14-18). Jesus' vision of the divided heavens happens at his baptism, according to a well-established cultural pattern, such as Saul's anointing followed by his entry into a prophetic frenzy (1 Samuel 10.1-13). It is true that the Bible does not always identify the ritual inducing the trance. The visionary who authored Revelation reports simply being in the spirit (1.10; 4.1-2). But in such instances the means of triggering trance and the ritual that attends it may have been so well known that there was no need to report them; they were assumed.

If ASC's and visionary experiences were common features of both shamanism and early Christianity, they also had a common purpose. Access to the spirit world provided a deeper, richer understanding of reality. Such insight was thought to come from a god, spirit or ancestor who was assumed to know more than human beings. Interaction with this higher reality could provide insight or wisdom that would allow the visionary's community to thrive. In the biblical world, such information was identified as prophecy or revelation.

There are many examples of this phenomenon in early Christianity. The apostle Peter's trance in Acts 10 allowed

him to see in new ways. His religious heritage prevented him from eating certain types of animals and other living things; he kept kosher. But in trance, he saw a range of creatures and was instructed to eat them. He came to realize that dietary restrictions were no longer in force, which allowed him to have table fellowship with those outside his religious tradition. Justification of, and motivation for, the early Christian missionizing of the whole Roman Empire was thereby born, which proved crucial to Christianity's survival and success.

Mission, the hallmark of the Christian tradition, was prompted by another vision, this one received by the apostle Paul. Acts chapters 13 through 16 narrate Paul's great success as a missionary in Syria, Asia Minor (present day Turkey), and on the island of Cyprus. Then one night Paul had the vision of a Macedonian, who summoned him to his land (16.9-10). Paul departed for Macedonia immediately, and in so doing brought Christianity to Europe.

The Book of Revelation concludes the New Testament, and it presents in symbolic language a timeline for the consummation of human history and the cosmos. The book provides a colorful and often cryptic account of the events that will transpire in the immediate future, as the end of time approaches. We learn the purpose of the book as it ends: "I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. . . . And he [the angel] said to me, 'Do not seal up the words of prophecy of this book, for the time is near.' . . . Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of

life...” (22.8, 11, 14). The book amounts to a survival manual of visionary insights as to what will be, made available to the seer’s community, so that they may escape the impending cataclysm. Those who know what will happen will presumably know how to act and save themselves.

Special insight into impending events or into how the community should engage its environment was information that a shaman might gather on a spirit journey, but knowledge for purposes of healing seems to be especially prized. This was important in the biblical world, too, but to a lesser extent, though it should be noted that Jesus was known in his time primarily for his exorcisms and healings. Luis Eduardo Luna’s study of shamanism in the Amazon reveals the central importance of diagnosing and treating illness (*Vegetalismo* 119-139). *Ayahuasca* in some cases might be taken by the shaman to aid in the determining the source of, and cure for, a disease. In other cases, patients themselves might ingest *ayahuasca* for therapeutic and purificatory purposes (148-152). Illness and cure are so integral to the profile of the shaman that grave sickness and recovery in childhood marks a young person as a potential shaman (Eliade, *Shamanism* 23-32; Halifax 10-21).

In addition to differences in why and how religious leaders enter an ASC, shamanism and Christianity differ in the content and medium of the vision. These matters, again, are culturally specific, so differences are inevitable. Pablo Amaringo’s paintings point to the intensely visual nature of the ASC experience, and visual images dominate this exhibition

of visionary artwork. Though not immediately evident, aural experience is also important. Icaros, power songs or melodies, are associated with the spirits of the other world, and learning and using them allows the shaman to summon spirits, to prompt or enhance visions, and to bring about healing (Luna and Amaringo 37-41). These melodies are visually transcribed as multicolored spirals and waves on Amaringo’s canvases. Such is also the case with the Shipibo pottery in the exhibition. Their geometrical patterns represent the icaros sung by shamans of the Shipibo tribe (Luna, “Indigenous and Mestizo” 13).

Visions in the biblical world largely came to oral or spoken expression and are recorded in the literature of the Bible. The so-called literary prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah, recorded their visions and prophecies, though it is more likely that scribes did the actual writing and that the books went through many editions and took centuries to reach their final form. Formulaic introductions like “thus says the Lord” or “the word of the Lord came to . . .” appear frequently in these texts, pointing to the verbal nature of the revelation. Writing had great prestige in the ancient Mediterranean world, so it is not surprising that ASC experiences in the biblical world eventually took written form.

Yet ASC experiences in the biblical world could also be visual. As John, the visionary behind the book of Revelation, notes at the start of his text, “I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, ‘Write in a book what you see’ . . .” (Rev. 1.10-11). John saw a

great deal! While there is a verbal aspect to his visions, such as the messages to the seven churches that occupy the opening chapters of the book (2.1-3:22), Revelation's content is primarily visual. Chapter four marks the beginning of a series of revelations that are dominated by imagery: "After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this'" (4.1). The end-time scenario that follows is played out in a series of images, not a verbal timeline.

The images described in the book of Revelation have little in common with the images in this exhibition, which are inspired by the Peruvian and Colombian Amazon and its shamanic tradition. Visionary content always reflects local influences, and the Amazon and the ancient Mediterranean have very different environments. Still, there is commonality. Animals figure prominently in shamanic artwork, and Amaringo's paintings depict snakes with some frequency. In other related artwork the jaguar dominates (Luna and Amaringo 41-42). These are "power animals" connected with certain principal spirits and ancestors, and the shaman can tap their strengths and abilities for various purposes.

The book of Revelation is also replete with animals, all of which represent some power or force in the events that lead up to the end of the world. Horses; a dragon; and a beast like a leopard, bear and lion—these are the power animals that populate the seer's visions in Revelation. Foremost among them

is the lamb, which is paradoxically the most powerful animal of them all because it represents Jesus Christ in the text. The function or significance of these animals differs from those in shamanic visions, but it is remarkable how animals dominate the content of the visions from two very different worlds.

As different as the Amazonian and biblical worlds are, the visionary images that come from them depict a reality that is rich, complex and vibrant. Nothing survives from the ancient world that shows how the book of Revelation was rendered visually, but medieval and modern artwork inspired by Revelation is vivid, unrestrained, and fantastic, very much like the work of Amaringo and others in this exhibition. Biblical scholar Felix Just has assembled examples of such artwork online, and the website is worth visiting (catholic-resources.org/Art/Revelation-Art.htm).

The artwork in this exhibition may initially strike viewers as exotic and foreign. But there are familiar points of departure for engaging and understanding it. As this essay suggests, for all the differences between the biblical and Amazonian worlds and between Christianity and shamanism, they have much in common.

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The Artist and the Shaman: Seen and Unseen Worlds

by Robert Sirko

Anthropologist and writer Jeremy Narby states that “DNA in particular and nature in general are minded, implying both have a sense of purpose” (145). In his book, *The Cosmic Serpent: DNA and the Origins of Knowledge*, he presents a hypothesis that DNA mediates the communication between cells and that this means of communication could possibly be the same whereby shamans, while in a trance state, commune with nature and spirits—spirits which the shamans claim are all around us. Supporting this theory is neuroscientist Ede Frecska MD, who suggests nonmainstream theories that DNA is “not an originator but rather a receiver of morphogenetic (structure forming) information ‘lying out there’ in a ‘nonlocal’ domain” (qtd. in Strassman 204). Particular to this shamanic trance experience are certain visual and perceptual phenomenon that “contain brilliant colors and geometric shapes; spinning, spiraling, and undulating movement; confrontations with predatory animals and transformation of the self into other beings; sensations of flying; communication with spirit-beings; and revelations concerning a universally shared life force” (Stone 3). In Narby’s view, DNA is the agent that conveys this information to those trained in the shamanic arts. These shamanic arts include the use of various plant agents as well as meditation techniques such as sensory deprivation, drumming, chanting, fasting, isolation and hyperventilation.

If Narby’s assertion is true, and we account for what little we know about how DNA functions (there are approximately 125 billion miles of DNA strands in a human body), then consider the role it may play in forming and facilitating not just shamanic trance but the nature of artistic vision. Moreover, if we consider historical accounts of the artist/shaman symbiosis and further compare characteristics and behaviors of the shaman to that of an artist, consider then how closely the two are connected, or are perhaps in some ways one and the same.

Before Navajo sandpainting became an artistic commodity sold to tourists, it was central to shamanic healing. In healing ceremonies similar to those of other indigenous peoples, a shaman or hataaʼii (medicine man) would create an image using the sacred colors of white, blue, yellow, black and red. “Sandpainting images require the careful attention of the hataaʼii, as a slight error could result in harm rather than a cure” (Bahti 13). When finished, the patient would be instructed to sit atop the completed sandpainting. These ceremonies lasted an entire day, from dawn to sunset, and would include family members of the afflicted, all participating in dance and chants led by the medicine man. At the conclusion of the ceremony the sandpainting is carefully “erased” using a wooden stick with prayer feathers attached. The remains of the image are then carefully removed and deposited in a place far from any

instance of disturbance to “discharm” the sands. For the Navajo, the sands are the embodiment of the earth’s spirits that intercede with others and guide the medicine man towards a cure. In this instance, if not art per se, it is the image created by a skillful medicine man that affects the cure. Author Graham Hancock expresses the artist/shaman connection in this way: “I soon discovered that the best archaeological work on prehistoric cave and rock art all around the world, from all periods of history and prehistory, had concluded that those ancient artists had been shamans also, and that their art also was an art of altered states of consciousness” (qtd. in Charing 11).

Although being in or having experienced a trance state is not a prerequisite for artistic expression, the words used to describe the nature of shamanic trance offer similar comparisons for all sorts of historical and contemporary artistic output which includes visual, musical and dance performance. The language of art and the formal outcome, i.e colors, forms, visions and messages, may be thought of in similar ways to what is reported to be experienced in shamanic trance. Both are often described as “visions” or to be of a “visionary” nature. As for their places within the respective societies, both artist and shaman are servants to a community and their respective value is often based upon reputation and the scale and scope of their reach. They are at their best when presenting visions or conveying messages that lead their communities towards “enlightenment” (in the case of the artist) or “healing” (in the case of the shaman). However, these two

qualities can be transposed or claimed by both. Ede Frecska explains the shaman’s mission is that of a “psychointegrator,” or a person that is a traditional healer “who encounters divine entities and spirits in order to fulfill his therapeutic obligation.” His definition of the shaman’s mission is “to act as a messenger of divine information in the service of the community” (qtd. in Strassman 175). Professor and curator of the Art of the Ancient Americas Rebecca Stone suggests that the shaman is “first and foremost an intermediary, an anomalous experiential knowledge seeker, and authoritative ritualist restoring dynamic balance to the system by going outside the norm” (7). By comparing the shaman with the artist, we might come to understand common functions and behaviors and perhaps gain a greater insight to both.

A great deal of what we know and think of Western art is premised upon the Newtonian rationalist approach whose form is rendered as a direct result of empirical observation, as in the case of much of the work from the Renaissance to the late 19th century. We often judge art upon the idea of verifiable representation. Throughout this time, students of art relied on plaster casts and other assorted objects as the subjects of artistic formal training to teach the artist how to “observe.” Even a great deal of 20th century work, albeit less attached to the formal observation of objects, places considerable emphasis on a measurable outcome. Art whose premise is based upon “a formal problem” whose resolution is found in its essential balance of “mass and space” which is

“concrete and measurable” as the sculptor Naum Gabo states, makes up a great deal of the modernist aesthetic (qtd. in Chipp 332). Granted, acknowledgment of the soul and the spirit is embraced within the rubric of the modern era, as referred to by Peter Selz when he suggests that, “form itself is meaningless unless it is the expression of an artist’s inner necessity and everything is permitted to serve this end” (qtd. in Chipp 127). Indeed, without argument the Modern movement became much more concerned about the role of the subconscious and the aboriginal archetype as introduced to us through Picasso with his 1907 creation of *Les Femmes d’Alger*. Quite often though, explanations of art of this sort may still default to empiricism as form itself is said to have a language of its own; when the language is misunderstood or unknown, it remains as mere formal observation. The default analysis of Cubism often presents a case for geometric forms inspired by those found in African tribal masks. “Indeed, it was in the abrupt dislocations of African and Iberian sculpture, as well as in the art of Cézanne, that Picasso found a hint of how to dissect natural forms into their essential planes and volumes” (Gardner 728). There may be other sources that led Picasso to this understanding, as alluded to later in this essay.

In efforts to understand works of art, we often begin with a description. However, we often describe art from a point of view tainted by our own cultural perspective. Problems occur in historical understandings of ancient objects as well. What might be mistaken as mere decorative motif by some

casual observers may in fact be part of a far more complex language of form related to the visionary core experience in shamanic trance, as in the case of most ancient Central and South American art, including the examples of Shipibo-Conibo pottery displayed in this exhibition. In her book, *The Jaguar Within*, Rebecca Stone offers compelling arguments to suggest that our true understanding of the art of the ancient Amerindian period has everything to do with interpreting the shamanic trance state and that any analysis of these works should proceed from that point. She examines accounts of contemporary trance perceptions as relevant in the analysis of ancient artworks and suggests that these experiences, ancient and contemporary, have certain commonalities and are “linked across space and time” (Stone 3), and thus we are more likely to perceive the intent of the ancient artist by understanding the trance state. These common trance qualities can be considered as “the distinctive, sometimes indescribable, yet veracious character of the visionary world; dual consciousness; multiplicity and flux; and brilliant lights and color effects” (Stone 13).

When form is understood as another language, it may lead us more easily to the realm of the unseen and the unconscious. Indeed, modern art and artists embraced intuition and the subconscious. Modernist art seemed to present a collective consciousness or understanding that there must be a way to transform mere optical experience of the temporal world to reveal the hidden realm of the mind or the “spirit.” Joan Miró

created a world of pictorial signs, Mark Tobey preferred surfaces covered in gestural mark making, and Mark Rothko simplified painting to matters of color. Many may find these sorts of subconscious languages and the required interpretation difficult to accept or understand. For them, artistic expression and bliss are found in mere depiction of what is more commonly understood as the “observed” environment.

A search for “the real” has long been the quest of the visual arts. Before the advent of Pop Art and Hyperrealism, there was Realism itself with artists such as Gustave Courbet and Jean-Francois Millet, whose engagement of social-political subjects viewed reality in a much more grim light. This movement didn’t seem to last long, perhaps because it was “too real” for comfort as denial is a frequent reaction to art. It seems though that art, regardless of its philosophy or aesthetic, has the ineffable ability to hold a mirror to our world (and ourselves) and reflect our condition. Art, if viewed as a collective consciousness, reflects what it “sees.” Given this assertion, as we are in fact sentient beings, art must “see” and reflect that which is non-observable and part of an unseen or subconscious world, if it in fact tells the complete story. Hans Hoffman writes that “painting at its greatest is a synthesis arrived at by mastering its multi-problems. Only painters of the stature of Rembrandt and El Greco have been artist and painter in one, not only because they have understood how to compose with color, but at the same time, how to express with it the profoundness of man” (48). What then is this profoundness? Can it be anything less than

those questions of our eternity? Hoffman further suggests, “The Real in art never dies, because its nature is predominantly spiritual” (48). For Hoffman, spirituality consists of “the emotional and intellectual synthesis of relationships perceived in nature, rationally or intuitively” (72). Hoffman writes that there are two kinds of reality, “physical reality, apprehended by the senses, and spiritual reality created emotionally and intellectually by the conscious or subconscious powers of the mind” (72). It seems plausible then to question: If art never dies, where does it live? What or where is the realm of the spirit? For Hoffman, “nature was the source of all inspiration” (70); if so, then perhaps nature is the realm of the spirit. This begs the question as to what is nature and all that is considered as such? Is it limited to our own planet or is it a universal force? What is the empirical and theoretical answer to this question? If Jeremy Narby is correct and nature does have a consciousness, then it is surely vast.

Our present world shows many signs of deterioration and is seemingly on the verge of economic, political and ecological collapse. History demonstrates that often times it is the artist, as the first responder, who alerts us to atrocity and crisis, hence leading us to a different way of thinking or motivation. In this exhibition, nature’s voice, as conveyed through its “plant-teachers,” as Luis Eduardo Luna would describe them, and interpreted by these artists, may be speaking directly to us. “These plants are trying to teach our species about nature, and about how we fit into that,” suggests noted ethnopharmacologist

Dennis McKenna. A close colleague with Luna's, he further suggests the concept of Gaia where "all of the species on the planet are organized into something like a conscious being" (36). Pablo Amaringo would have agreed and said, "A plant may not talk, but there is a spirit in it that is conscious, that sees everything, which is the soul of the plant, its essence, what makes it alive. The channels through which water and sap move are the veins of the spirits" (qtd. in Luna 33). If plants are in fact teaching us something, or trying to, what is the lesson?

For many, the notion of plant teachers may be new; however, the names associated with them may be more familiar. Chief among these plant teachers are: tobacco, coca, opium, *ayahuasca* (a brew of *Banisteriopsis Caapi* and *Psychotria Viridis*), yopo (*Anadenanthera Peregrina*), *Salvia Divinorum*, *Amanita Muscaria*, San Pedro cactus and peyote. Historically, several of these plants have been recruited as aids to everything from spiritual enlightenment to death and destruction, suggests David Cohen in his book, *The Secret Language of the Mind*. He writes, "Sumerian tablets dating from c. 4000 BC refer to opium; the effects of cannabis were known to the Chinese around 2700 BC; and in Central America, species of mushrooms and cacti have been eaten for their hallucinogenic properties since at least 1000 BC." He further suggests, "the battle-fury of the Vikings was partly due to their habit of consuming fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)" (128).

Today, those who see the use of these plants as spiritual aids or as healing agents prefer the term "entheogens."

Derived from two words from the ancient Greek for $\epsilon\nu\theta\epsilon\omicron\varsigma$ (entheos) and $\gamma\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ (genesthai), this term first was used as a replacement for the words "hallucinogens" or "psychedelics." The use of this term, since being introduced in 1979, has become synonymous with spiritual questing aided by the aforementioned plants (Ruck). Whether directly or indirectly, all of the participating artists will speak of, or have spoken to, a personal relationship that was gained through the use of these plants to reach a place of greater understanding where their visions, the earth and cosmos all meet. For them, art lives and comes from that place.

We are fortunate to view these wonderful works and should remain open minded to a larger understanding of their message and of the current trends in our world towards these "plant-teachers." To dismiss the connections between these plants and other "sacred plants" of the planet, in particular of the Amazon, is a failing to recognize their long historical presence and the influence they have had from ancient times until present. For the moment, let us set the backdrop to this art which has its roots reaching back thousands of years ago.

Shamanism is likely one of the oldest forms of religious and healing practices, dating back thousands of years with its origins in Siberia and central Asia. Mircea Eliade, in his classic publication *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, refers to shamans as "technicians of ecstasy" who state that while in a trance state, "the soul is believed to leave the body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld" (5). Despite

its lengthy presence, shamanism and the accompanying “tools of the trade” are for the most part misunderstood by the nonindigenous cultures. Reasons for this lack of understanding are perhaps best explained by first examining the cultural perspective and historical accounts of the western prerogative towards economics, society and religion. During the early portion of the 16th century, Spanish conquistadors were the first to assert a western influence and later to dominate the regions of Central and South America. In the European view, indigenous shamanism was considered contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ and of the Catholic Church—and thus were suppressed. Luna cites several historical accounts of this oppression:

The sacred books of the Maya were burned in 1562. The quipus of the Andes—a work of the Devil according to sixteenth century friars—were destroyed by a decree in 1583. The sacred groves, temples and places of worship of the Amerindians were desecrated. Revered works of art were melted down for the price of their gold. The repository of Amerindian traditions, the bearers of wisdom who “remembered” and knew “how to speak”, were hunted and killed. Their knowledge was treated as the work of Satan, still today a powerful archetypal figure in both the Christian and Islamic worlds.

A few hundred years later, an intellectual perspective,

tainted by an ethnocentric prerogative, helped to perpetrate the notion of western superiority to that of “primitive” systems. The first impressions of shamans and shamanism began with observations made in the middle of the 19th century when anthropology as a “science” was conceived. Its purpose was to study “primitive” cultures. However, the lens through which primitive societies were viewed was that of a “modern” and advanced civilization looking backward to a “less” advanced form. Anthropologist Adam Kuper describes the popular 19th century viewpoint in this way: “Primitive man was illogical and given to magic. In time he had developed more sophisticated religious ideas. Modern man, however, had invented science. Like their most reflective contemporaries, in short, the pioneer anthropologists believed that their own was an age of massive transition. They looked back in order to understand the nature of the present, on the assumption that modern society had evolved from its antithesis” (5). As it was in the early 16th century, the 20th century western perspective towards “primitive” cultures seemed unchanged, choosing to disregard the significance of cultures foreign to its own. However, this way of thinking seems to be giving ground in today’s contemporary view, which invites a more integrated perspective that blends modern thought reflective of ancient wisdom.

The term *shaman* and its precise etymology are not entirely certain. In the Tungus language, spoken in Eastern Siberia and Manchuria, “a shaman is a person who beats a drum, enters a trance, and cures people” (Narby 14). Another interpretation

suggests the word implies movement. The Tungus root word *sam* signifies body movement related to the gestural activity associated with the shaman. The Hungarian ethnologist Vilmos Diószegi (1923-1972) suggests that the term *shamanism* comes from the word *šaman*. The noun is formed from the verb *ša-* “to know”; thus, a shaman is literally “one who knows” (qtd. in Narby 167). Narby also cites Julian Silverman in his comparison between shamans and acute schizophrenia, and notes of his observations that both “exhibit grossly non-reality-oriented ideation, abnormal perceptual experiences, profound emotional upheavals, and bizarre mannerisms” (qtd. in Narby 167). Of noteworthy mention is that Silverman’s comments are extracted from a 1967 paper entitled *Shamans and Acute Schizophrenia*, published by the National Institute of Mental Health. In this document he outlines the necessary sequence of events that leads to psychotic or a shamanic resolution in five stages:

1. The Precondition: Fear; Feelings of Impotence and Failure; Guilt;
2. Preoccupation; Isolation; Estrangement;
3. Narrowing of attention; Self-initiated sensory deprivation;
4. The fusing of higher and lower referential processes; and
5. Cognitive Reorganization: “a reorganized set of perceptions and conceptions in which the structure of reality is “something else” (Silverman).

Narby goes on to suggest that our notions of the shaman

as portrayed by the mid to late 20th century anthropologists range in opinion as a “creator of order, a master of chaos, or an avoider of disorder” (15).

Reread the above descriptions replacing the word “shaman” with “artist,” and they may seem in some cases to apply equally to the ways artists are often considered. Several names may come to mind whose temperament, work habits and vision might be described in similar fashion, whether justly or unjustly deserved. Names like Van Gogh, Dali and Pollack seem the most immediate as tortured, misunderstood eccentrics. However, paradoxically, the artist—much like the shaman—is prized for his or her “vision” and because of this vision we tend to pay more attention to what the work and the artist “says.” Art is often thought of in terms of order, whose expression can be found in such 20th century works as that of Piet Mondrian. Or it might reflect a degree of chaos like that found in the work of Willem de Kooning. Finally, what artist is worth his or her salt without a good dose of “non-reality-oriented ideation” or “abnormal perceptual experiences”? The works of contemporary artists such as Peter Saul and Erik Parker seem to suggest these states of mind.

All these comparisons, and there are plenty more, may help in describing the similarities between the artist and the shaman but they may also lead one to wonder, then, what makes “Visionary Art” unique? If an argument may be made that connects art that is consciously disassociated with the shamanistic perspective as hitherto mentioned, then what is the

significance of what we refer to as “visionary”? After all, to an extent, isn’t all art “visionary”? Moreover, what sets this body of work apart from others ostensibly similar?

The term visionary art is often times used to describe works that depict a surreal fantasy world, which is most commonly understood as in the works of the Surrealist movement. One offshoot of Surrealism formed shortly after WWII by a group of artists that included Ernst Fuchs, Arik Brauer, Rudolf Hausner, Wolfgang Hutter, Anton Lehmden and Fritz Janschka. Their affiliation became known as the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism. Grounded in the techniques of the Old Masters and a narrative construct informed by religious and esoteric symbolism, the collective oeuvre compares to that of Hieronymus Bosch, William Blake, Salvador Dali, Max Ernst and Gustave Moreau—artists who perhaps hold more notoriety. Common to these works are scenes that depict supernatural occurrences and mythological events. Much like the Surrealist works, the settings are understood yet unfamiliar, as if from another world. Moreover, the collective imagery of the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism is decidedly western in its setting, and mankind often occupies a visual prominence. A more general comparison to the contemporary Amazonian counterpart reveals that man, if not less important, is more integrated within his surroundings. One might stop at the visual comparisons between the various iterations of visionary art and draw certain conclusions, but these comparisons would yield only a portion of the story. What is more compelling is the

fact that the art in this exhibition is either directly or indirectly influenced by altered states of consciousness as permitted through the use of entheogens.

We might never know what led artists of former or current generations to “see” what they saw and be so inclined to create the images they did, as few artists are given to writing about their work and sharing this sort of insight. Prevailing legalities discourage open and free conversation regarding the use of entheogens or hallucinogenic substances and, until recently, art historians seem to have avoided the topic. Of notable exception to this avoidance is art critic Ken Johnson, who takes a bold look at Modern Art as seen through a psychedelic lens. In his book, *Are You Experienced?: How Psychedelic Consciousness Transformed Modern Art*, Johnson looks at the connections between art created during the later half of the 20th century and psychedelics. He presents several works of art and film in connection to this thesis. His view is less about individual artists and their own experiences, but rather suggests that we are part of a culture influenced by an altered consciousness that had its precise beginnings in 1965 with Ken Kensy and the Grateful Dead Acid Tests (11).

Let’s assume that at least some artists have experienced some form of an altered state of consciousness, whether induced by substances or not. Perhaps they achieved this state by meditating, by observing nature for prolonged periods of time, or simply by the act of making art. Many forms of altered states of consciousness are recognized by Western culture, such

as the ones observed by Ede Frecska: “hypnotic trance, deep sleep, dreaming, REM sleep, meditation, use of hallucinogenic substances, and periods of peak athletic performance” (qtd. in Strassman 180). Perhaps the “artistic temperament” is naturally common in some human beings, resulting from a unique set of chemical activities in the brain, such as higher concentrations of serotonin or DMT (*Dimethyltryptamine*,—an alkaloid that triggers the hallucinogenic response and is naturally common in human beings and all mammals). In the book *Inner Paths to Outer Space*, Luna cites research studies that observe the brain during meditative states, and offers a notion of “gamma synchronization” where several sensory inputs are combined into one as a possible explanation to the altered state of consciousness (qtd. in Strassman 110). Further support for this notion is found in a recent publication by Rick Strassman, as he suggests a theory supporting the role that DMT played in ancient Hebrew prophecy. He contends that the prophetic experience is influenced by biological (physical) forces, through an invisible metaphysical (spiritual) process. “I propose that the common biological denominator is the presence of elevated levels of DMT in the brains of individuals in both states. I hypothesize that DMT levels rise endogenously, and this mediates certain features of the experience.” (Strassman, “DMT and the Soul of Prophecy” 11) For now, these are speculations, but similar questions are being raised within psychopharmacology and adjacent fields. Wasiwaska, founded by Luna in 1996, is one such place where one is likely

to find these sorts of conversations. The concept that drives the institution is creating synergies among a broad constituent of scholars, researchers, pharmacologists, writers, artists and those interested in the mysteries of the mind. Perhaps as time and research continue we may learn much more.

Artist Rick Harlow suggests that maybe some artists have innate sensibilities to create while others “just needed a kick in the head” through the use of hallucinogens of various sorts to achieve altered states. Several artists of the Modernist movement may have agreed with Harlow. Picasso biographer John Richardson explained that it was an innate curiosity that led Picasso to opium. “Opium flavours the themes and mood of many late Blue and early Rose period works,” he states, while noting the sleepy, almost trancelike expressions of the faces in several Picasso paintings of 1905 (qtd. in Gilman and Zhou 116).

There is further intrigue in this observation of Picasso and some of his counterparts in connection to the aforementioned hallucinogenic effects. As anthropologist and art historian Rebecca Stone relates, the colors blue and red are often reported during the early onset of several entheogenic effects (32). As the experience continues, the participant sees entirely new colors or familiar colors becoming unrecognizably intense, which are anomalous to our conscious “normal” perception. These observations are consistent with numerous accounts of the hallucinogenic condition. The book *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking* edited by Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun, suggests several names of people who frequented local smoking dens

near Le Bateau-Lavoir, an artist house in Montmartre, France, during the early years of the past century: “The Fauve painter André Derain visited the local fumeries with his neighbor, Apollinaire, keeping each other informed about the latest developments in modern poetry and painting” (116). The list of names associated with Le Bateau-Lavoir reads like an all-star lineup for modern art as well as contemporary literature. Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, Alfred Jarry, Jean Cocteau, André Derain and Raoul Dufy all lived there during this time. Matisse, Derain and Dufy formed the nucleus of what became known as Fauvism, a style typified by its highly saturated color palette. It may be plausible to suggest that our collective consciousness of modern art has already been informed by plant-teachers.

At his own website, Ernst Fuchs provides his own account of an altered state experience:

Not seldom I get into trance while painting, my state of consciousness fades giving way to a feeling of being afloat (like a medium) and being led and moved by a safe hand, doing things I do not know much about consciously. This condition lasts for hours. Afterwards, everything I did in this time seems to me, as if someone else would have done it. I am aware of insights, which I would have never thought to find. In this spiritual condition, I comprehend what the great insights of other great artists I admired, where an understanding of art and the insight it conveys ascertains me as if my mind would get into discussion with all artists of all epochs. It is like floating, opening wings, I believe, that it is what was called inspiration.

Fuchs does not offer an exogenous source, and we might assume that his trance is attributed to his unique vision or some other artistic muse.

Perhaps within the artist exists some sort of latent “artistic” gene that has resisted atrophy over time and naturally connects with the spirits of nature or some other force. Clues suggest that artists have striven towards certain phenomenon that reportedly are part of the altered consciousness experience. One such example is that of synesthesia, a neurological phenomenon in which the stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway leads to an automatic, involuntary experience in a second sensory or cognitive pathway. An example would be to “see” sound. Sam Hunter cites an entry in Charles Burchfield’s journal which describes a series of watercolors created in the midst of a “curious depression.” Burchfield writes: “I went further back into childhood memories and it became such an obsession that a decadence set in. I tried to re-create such moods as fear of the dark, the feelings of flowers before a storm, and even to visualize the songs of insects and other sounds” (qtd. in Hunter 125). Virtually all of the implications suggested by Burchfield’s efforts are similar in description, especially that of synesthesia, to experiences reported by those under the effects of *ayahuasca* or other hallucinogens. Stone provides accounts of more contemporary versions of the synesthesia experience, citing the statement of artist Macia Smilack that she hears “specific instruments play when she witnesses rippling waves of water” (23).

Terence McKenna, famed psychedelic philosopher, speculates that protohominids used psychedelic mushrooms for their unique visual effects to aid hunting. This notion, suggests Rick Strassman, “could have become an unexpected side effect to language development aided by the unique property of psychedelics to blend and merge the senses of sight and sound” (11). He further states: “Our ancestors may have seen the sounds they were making, which provided them with an unprecedented additional level of abstraction with which they could manipulate communication” (12). In other words, they might have seen what was unseen.

The Art of This Exhibition

A name that has become synonymous with “Visionary Art” is that of Pablo Amaringo. Surely without the support of Luis Eduardo Luna and his co-authored book entitled, *Ayahuasca Visions; The Religious Iconography of a Peruvian Shaman*, the world at large may have never known of Amaringo’s work. Luna met Amaringo through his acquaintance with Dennis McKenna. Upon meeting Amaringo in 1985, Luna saw some landscape paintings done in tempera. He states: “Pablo clearly possessed a photographic sense of observation, and at the same time his work was full of poetry” (17). Amaringo had no formal training in art and is largely self-taught. However, he believed that his acquired ability to visualize so clearly and his

knowledge of colors came to him through the *ayahuasca* brew.

At an earlier stage in his life, Amaringo had been a practicing shaman, otherwise known as a *vegetalista*, one who practices the art of healing through plants and healing metaphors to cure the patient. Luna writes: “*vegetalistas*, like their counterparts the Indian shamans of many indigenous groups of the Upper Amazon, claim to derive healing skills and powers from certain plant-teachers—often psychoactive—believed to have a *madre* (mother). Among the plant-teachers large trees are considered particularly powerful” (Luna 12-13). He further states, “Illness is generally conceived as the product of an animated source, either human or spiritual—including the spirits of plants, animals, and natural phenomena—and is produced by intrusion of pathogenic objects, soul-loss, contamination, or breaching of taboo” (Luna 13). From 1970 to 1976, Amaringo had traveled all over the Peruvian Amazon using “various therapeutic techniques—suctions, restoration of the soul, use of medicinal plants, hydrotherapy, incorporations, massage, etc” (Luna 27). Several of his family members and ancestors practiced as healers. In fact, his first experience with *ayahuasca* was at the age of ten when his father gave it to him. He recalls a rather frightening episode while observing his mother washing clothes at the water’s edge seeing only half of her body, then running back into his house and standing in front of a large mirror. Pablo recalls, “I only saw half of my body” (Luna 22).

Amaringo relates that both his grandparents and his parents

were very religious people. They raised him as Catholic, but later his parents switched their faiths among Seventh-Day Adventism, Evangelicalism and the Jehovah's Witnesses. "Pablo himself had great sensibility towards religious matters," Luna writes. "He often prayed, and was very curious about spiritual subjects" (23).

These religious inclinations are quite evident in his paintings. Upon seeing early tempera paintings, Luna, intrigued by the notion that much could be learned of the mestizo Amazonian shamanism, asked if Amaringo could paint some of his visions. Luna provided the paper and paints for these visions, then, in turn found audiences for the paintings Amaringo created. Luna, interested whether Amaringo's representations of his visions were more of an exception rather than the rule, decided to show them to several locals familiar with *ayahuasca*. There was an instantaneous reaction among them, as they recognized *ayahuasca* as the source of these images. In 1987, Luna approached Amaringo with an idea of co-authoring a book, and Amaringo was eager to pursue the project. In addition to the paintings, he wrote accounts of what these images were about. Out of nearly 100 images, 49 were printed in the book. "Moreover, once the book was published, fellow anthropologists took it to various indigenous Amazonian communities, causing a certain commotion" (qtd. in Strassman 100).

Vision 21: The Sublimity of the Sumiruna

Through this hole the great characters of that world send a sumiruna [a very powerful shaman having dominion over land, air and water] to space with the help of the ancash silfos [blue sylphs] who transport him in a glass tube, which is the lupuna colorada [red lupuna, Cavallinesia]. There we see him now, the sumiruna, standing on a ball of high-pressure gas, ready for levitation. He wears skins of the boa, trouser of ray-fish with feet of yangunturo [giant armadillo], and his hat is a macaw called yura-guacamayo (Luna 88).

Vision 44, Fighting Through Tingunas, details the struggle between shamans and sorcerers, a conflict that may often arise within the shamanic trance experience. The following is an excerpt from Amaringo's own description:

But the *hada* (fairy) *Sinchinitimushca* (the one who presses hard), who works with the master healer, has seen the peril and thus throws a white thread into the middle of this spell, making it reach the vegetalista, who notices that he is being covered with harmful elements. The healer then starts to raise his defensive powers, such as the electric chain that binds together all the sorcerers. The fairy is waiting above and then ties the thread up with the laser thread the he carries in his lap (Luna 134).



Vision 39: Recovering a Young Man Kidnapped by a Yaruruna
Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 1986
Pablo Amaringo



Vision 42: *Lucero Ayahuasca*
Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 1987
Pablo Amaringo



Vision 43: Fight Between a Shipibo and a Shetebo Shaman
Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 1987
Pablo Amaringo



Vision 44: Fighting Through Tingunas
Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 1987
Pablo Amaringo

It is worth noting that Amaringo's paintings are based upon recollections of his visions that were conceived during his *ayahuasca* journeys. Amaringo had long since ceased his practice with *ayahuasca* by the time Luna and he met but was still able to render these images with precise detail. "The Spirits don't talk," he says, "but express themselves through images" (qtd. in Luna 30). The fantastic recall of these images, he claims, is enabled by reciting the songs called icaros that Luna states constitutes the "quintessence of shamanic power" (13). Icaros are "magical chants that are sung or whistled by shamans during *ayahuasca* ceremonies" (Charing 172). Amaringo regarded the icaro as "the sound of the universe" which constitutes all celestial entities. "Everything is created by music," he says, "by vibration, by sound. Icaros are the music of creation" (qtd. in Charing 173). When Amaringo would paint, he would sing or chant the icaro(s) he had learned were associated with the particular vision.

Amaringo's formal visual language, at first glance, reads quite similarly to what critics commonly refer to as outsider art. The manner in which the figures are drawn expresses a sense of naiveté. Artist Robert Venosa, was among those influenced by Amaringo's work. He writes:

Although Pablo's technique and color scale can be considered somewhat primitive or naïve by fine-art standards, his depictions of the *yagé* realms in their manifested power of emotions and otherworldly magic transcend all academic critique. Pablo was also a deeply

versed master translator of the *ayahuasca* mythologies, in which snakes, leopards, celestial palaces, and aliens and their spacecraft all converge on his canvas, presenting an indigenous encyclopedia of the inner, outer, and transcendent worlds of *yagé*. Celestial architecture, as well as and in contrast to his underworld iconography, never fails to captivate the viewers and take them on a vicarious journey that offers a view into the dynamic consciousness-altering experience magically exteriorized through Pablo's brush and palette (qtd. in Charing 12).

Another distinguishing aspect of Amaringo's artistic oeuvre is the pronounced use of vivid and highly saturated colors, a palette most typical of art of Central and South America. To simply refer to Amaringo's work as outsider in large measure does it a disservice and is further an example of the ethnocentrism relied upon in dealing with art divergent with that of all western traditions—an observation often times triggered by the presence of extravagant color. Michael Taussig observes in the book *What Color is the Sacred?* a colonialism to color, the new world vs. the old world, and claims that the West has viewed color with some aversion. He cites Goethe's Theory of Colours, "that savage nations, uneducated people, and children have a great predilection for vivid colors; that animals are excited to rage by certain colours; that people of refinement avoid vivid colours in their dress and the objects that are about them, and seem inclined to banish them altogether from their presence" (qtd. in Taussig 259). Remarkably

though, testimonials submitted by many who have partaken in psychedelics report a higher degree of sensory awareness, especially in visual experiences dominated by vivid colors and patterns. According to Rick Strassman, M.D., patients who participated in DMT (dimethyltryptamine) research frequently reported an extremely heightened visual sense: “Visual effects were profound and nearly always began with the kaleidoscopic display of patterns, which took on ‘Mayan,’ ‘Aztec,’ or ‘Islamic’ qualities and sometimes qualities of pixilation, ‘like being an inch from a TV screen.’” He further reports that volunteers would view objects within the room appearing to “undulate or shine with an intrinsic brightness and a living, breathing quality” (Strassman et. al. 53). It may be plausible therefore, to connect the presence of such a vivid color palette, particular to that of much of Central and South American indigenous art and other cultural artifacts, to the trance experience related to entheogens.

To view Amaringo’s work, and for that matter all of the work in this exhibition, as simply that which is “drug-induced” is dismissive and fatal to a much larger understanding of what this art truly represents. The indigenous use of entheogenic substances aligns with a cultural infrastructure of ritual sacredness. In the West there is no such corollary. Rather, with the exception of tobacco, all other entheogens are considered illegal, and medical research that explores the possible benefits to these substances has been detained by their legal status. However, much has, can and should be learned through

proper research and education. Given that much has been accomplished in the field of ethnopharmacology towards the potential cures and treatments of addictions and diseases such as Alzhiemers as carried out by researchers such as Richard Evans Schultes, William Richards, Dennis McKenna and several others, we ought to be mindful that the Amazon, albeit under siege, still holds vast resources of plant species that have yet to be discovered. We should also acknowledge that the indigenous peoples of the Amazon, who may hold knowledge critical to our own understanding of cures, are also under siege and face extinction due to policies of deforestation.

Several views of Amaringo’s work in particular have helped to raise a global consciousness of a world in dire need of ecological salvation, in particular the Amazon. In 1992, Amaringo, together with the likes of Jacques Cousteau, Chico Mendez and Jimmy Carter, was chosen to receive the Global 500 Award of the United Nations environmental program. In 1988, Amaringo, along with Luna, established the Usko-Ayar Amazonian School of Painting. Usko-Ayar is a Quechua term for “Spiritual Prince.” The school reached its peak in 1994 enrolling nearly 300 students, but unfortunately no longer exists. Amaringo’s vision is extended through his students as he taught them to “visualize internally” what they wish to paint in the same way that he did. Once the internal image is secured in the mind, they then “project” the image onto the paper or canvas. Amaringo once remarked, “The best thing you can leave is a seed for others to work with. I am not just a person; I am a

spiritual person. I always communicate with the great universal force, which is the rock of perfection—Dios—that I have seen in my *ayahuasca* visions, and which has always spoken to me” (qtd. in Charing 1).

One of the original students, Anderson Debernardi, studied under Amaringo and remained with the school as its administrator. The collective mission was devoted to the rescue and preservation of the knowledge and traditions of the indigenous people of the Peruvian Amazon. Debernardi showed a great deal of promise as a young student working under the supervision of Amaringo. Of his work, Dennis McKenna writes: “Anderson Debernardi is a gifted visionary artist who learned his craft under the instruction of the Master, Don Pablo Amaringo. Debernardi is clearly Pablo’s heir apparent; and as sometimes happens, Andy’s work is if anything superior to that of his teacher. He uses his training under Pablo as the platform to depict cosmic dimensions of incredible beauty” (Debernardi).

It is true that Debernardi is highly influenced by the work of Amaringo. He presents the visionary aspect found in Amaringo’s paintings in more refined detail. However, when comparing the two it is important to note that the medium perhaps plays a role in the outcome and the overall aesthetic. For the most part, Amaringo relies on gouache whereas Debernardi works in oils. To its advantage, gouache permits an immediacy of application and is faster drying than its oil counterpart. There is a kind of directness to the imagery of Amaringo that feels fresh and vibrant, akin to a

more contemporary abstract expressionist mode that is on some level informed by the medium. Where Amaringo’s work is more painterly, Debernardi’s is more tightly detailed and “illustrated.” His color palette is amazingly brilliant. Both artists present beautifully lavish scenes that appear to evolve and morph continuously. This is achieved through various means such as the use of contour rivalry where one object shares space with another. Illusionistic space or the idea of mimesis, where the viewer perceives a shared space, thus feeling an invitation inward, finds counterpoint with intricately patterned surfaces that helps to create a continual sense of movement between objects far and close, here and there. This distortion and continual shifting of space and time mimics the effects of entheogenic trance. Stone writes: “Unusual, multiple, or shifting scale or perceptual phenomena is typical in visions” (24). Strassman adds of the mystical state, “Time no longer passes in its normal manner, but instead seems suspended or subsumed in an eternity containing past, present, and future. Space is no longer limited, but at the same time, all existence rests in the smallest possible unit of space” (Strassman et al. 58).

A second publication of Amaringo’s paintings, *The Ayahuasca Visions of Pablo Amaringo*, features works done after the first book was published in 1991. An examination of these paintings reveals an aesthetic tendency closer to that of Debernardi’s.

Debernardi’s work features two essential directions; one is of visions and the other is of the rainforest. In the rainforest





Magic Serpents
Oil on Canvas, 31 ½ x 39 ¼ inches. 2011
Anderson Debernardi

Opposite
Adan Visionario
Oil on Canvas, 39 ¾ x 35 ½ inches. 2010
Anderson Debernardi



Sinfonía Chamánica
Oil on Canvas, 35 ½ x 28 inches. 2010
Anderson Debernardi



Visionary Inca
Oil on Canvas, 17 ¾ x 19 ¾ inches. 2012
Anderson Debernardi



Power Healing Plants
Oil on Canvas, 39 x 51.5 inches. 01/01/2009
Anderson Debernardi

series Debernardi presents an ethereal view of the forest where, not unlike in the visionary paintings, the viewer is permitted a glimpse of a mysterious world beyond imagination. There is sort of magical quality present, yet we are consciously reminded that we are witness to a “real” world. In contrast to the visionary works, his rainforest imagery draws a parallel between that which is seen and unseen in perhaps a more literal sense. Even though the rainforest is a temporal entity, it is unlikely that most will ever have the opportunity to see it first hand. The dichotomy of these two directions highlights the indigenous beliefs of symbiosis between the interior world (visions), and exterior world (rainforest), realms in which the indigenous peoples of the Amazon live. In this revelation, we see perhaps a more enlightened view of that which exists in the temporal realm yet filtered through a lens of spiritual grace. Much like the portrayal of the *ayahuasca* visions, few are permitted to know of such realms. Likewise, those outside looking in may never have known either if not through the vision of the artist.

Alex Sastoque, one of the younger members of this show, has worked directly under the aforementioned Ernst Fuchs, now 84, and has recently collaborated with the master on works of art. Sastoque’s narrative is directly influenced by shamanism and, much like the supernatural found in the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism, Sastoque focuses squarely on supernatural entities. His latest compositions are often symmetrical with an ethereal lighting and setting. It is in the lighting and overall color palette where the Old Master’s and Fuchs’s influence



Transformacion chamanica "Hombre Jaguar"
Oil on Canvas, 48 x 48 inches. 2012
Alex Sastoque

is most felt. Unlike Amaringo and DeBernardi, Sastoque presently relies upon a less intense color saturation, giving more attention to modeling. His work overall is still quite luminous but is achieved more on the basis of contrasting color against a darker background. Sastoque spent three years living with and



Dawn - Amanecer
Oil on Canvas, 27 x 39 inches. 2012
Alex Sastoque



Jaibana Curandera
Oil on Canvas, 39 x 39 inches. 2013
Alex Sastoque

participating in various *ayahuasca* rituals and considers the relationship between art and shamanism as well. An underlying premise to his work is the notion that like the shaman, the artist is capable of providing healing through his vision. He presents us with this question: “Can the sensitive creative states reached with the experience of art also bring about healing?” (75). He states: “*Happiness in Trance* shows a fantastic vision and the spiritual journey of *ayahuasca*. We can visually observe children who become light and become part of a large mandala that integrates the entire universe. The eye of God is present in every corner of the painting. Complementary colors of their outfits and nature generate a vibration very strong, which in turn balances the space. For this reason I consider this painting



Happiness in a Trance
Oil on Canvas, 71 x 59 inches. 2013
Alex Sastoque

as a sacred image as it is a healing picture, visual medicine is a plane parallel to this painting” (53).

Sastoque’s connection to the divine expressed in nature is perhaps best understood in his description of an event which happened while sitting along a river bank in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. “We were under the effect of the coca leaf when we sat down to rest and meditate. I felt that the river began to talk and I clearly understood her language. I was informed that every drop of water that aurally exists in this world is like applause. Rivers, waterfalls and seas of the world are a constant and eternal praise to its creator” (Sastoque 30).

Sastoque is unique amongst the exhibiting artists insofar as his body of work extends beyond oil on canvas. In 2007,



Ayahuasca + Chagro
Oil on Canvas and 3D Animation, 71 x 59 inches. 2013
Alex Sastoque

his work was largely informed by computer imagery. What follows, in some instances, are works that combine video with canvas. In his 2009 painting, *Ayahuasca + Chagro*, we see a large butterfly whose wings serve as a gateway to another world. Amidst the conventional butterfly pattern is mixed imagery obtained while in a trance state. In the center of the butterfly is a small video screen that plays a looped animation of continuous motion, radiating spheres, forms that constantly alter and shift in kaleidoscopic manner—imagery consistent with entheogenic trance. *Ayahuasca + Chagro*, a mixed media construction, was inspired by a butterfly he had encountered during an *ayahuasca* session. He writes, “That vibration was coming through my eyes reaching to the depths of my heart,

and I managed to connect spiritually with the butterfly for a moment. When I walked in (to the butterfly), I realized that it was a huge ship that was traveling from universe to universe that showed pictures through the windows of other worlds and to share their ideas” (65).

The American painter Rick Harlow provides us not only with his remarkable vision but offers perhaps one of the most interesting personal journeys. In 1983, the *Boston Globe* recognized Harlow for having the “Year’s Best One-Man Show.” Following this award came much success and sales of his work. After an initial visit to Mexico that followed, Harlow was taken by the grandeur of the rainforest. Although initially drawn to the Mayan ruins, it was the rainforest that had subsumed the ruins and was reclaiming the land that captivated his greater interest. Three years later, after having been encouraged by the famous ethnobotanist Richard Evans Schultes, Harlow embarked upon a project that would change his work and life forever.

He explains he was initially concerned with learning more about the rainforest and sought opportunities and resources that would enable a lengthy stay. In 1987, he was able to move to the Columbian Amazon for a period of 20 months. “My idea,” he states, “was to try to get to know and feel at ease in the rainforest. It seemed to me the best way to do this was to make connections with the tribal cultures that lived there.” Upon arrival, he met a local leader of the community that helped him to build a boat that he would later use to travel up and down the river. He states: “In getting to know and live with these native

cultures I was taken in like a child that didn’t know anything and was shown how hunt, fish, look for and gather food and also participate in different dances and rituals.” This experience lead to a higher sensitivity to the surrounding environment and the experience of *ayahuasca* certainly helped. “*Ayahuasca* or *yagé*,” he explains, “opened up nature to me in a way that I had never seen before. When I experienced the rainforest under the effects of *ayahuasca* it would talk to me. It would say ‘look this is how I am’ and it would tell me how to paint it.” These experiences in the jungle would carry over into the studio. He never painted while under the influence of *ayahuasca*, but might more often chew coca leaves as was the common practice among the indigenous seeking an alert awareness. Through his conversations with *ayahuasca*, Harlow believes that he was led to a deeper understanding of creation that permitted a more “visceral and spiritual” connection to his work.

As for the process of painting, he claims that there is no clear idea at the outset of each piece. Rather, he begins by “muddying up the canvas” and next sees where it leads him. In this way, the act of painting mimics the journey of *ayahuasca*. Harlow relies on several painterly techniques and cites everything from methods of the Old Masters, applications of layers and glazing, to spattering and dripping as did Pollack, one of his artistic influences. Much like Pollack, he prefers working on a large scale and cites Pollack’s desire to “be in the painting”, and adds to “be the painting” itself.

Like Pollack’s work there is a force that seems to pull the

viewer into an entirely different space, where time and reality as we know it no longer exist, as if in suspended animation. Recognizable forms as we know them from the temporal world—for example, faces, landscapes, animals—are obfuscated as if either coming into or out of view. If this is nature speaking, then it must be truly melodious and magical. Colors swirl and spiral as if they were dancing, lines undulate in rhythmic harmony and seem to pulsate, some existing as pure lines while others converge and come together to suggest patterns and symbols derived from some primordial realm. Observe each painting of his collective oeuvre individually, and you will find variance within this description to greater or lesser degrees, but the variance seems to depend upon stages of what might be considered the *ayahuasca* experience. Some works such as *Yucuna Maloca*, painted in 1990, portray a simple interior of a hut (*maloca*), a space where the ritual ceremony will take place. Nightfall is yet to happen, and the space is empty, suggesting anticipation of the event.

In other paintings, such as *Falls Near Jirajirimo*, one senses the transformation of space from the temporal to the metaphysical. Here the viewer is suspended between two worlds, “seen and unseen,” and is perhaps coming or going in either direction. Like those images of Amaringo, space is often juxtaposed and simultaneously shared. However, unlike the master’s conception, fewer identifiable clues are permitted. With Harlow’s paintings a theme of opposites allows us to ponder a world of dualities: of the here and now, of the corporeal



Yucuna Maloca
Oil on Canvas, 22 x 28 inches. 1990
Rick Harlow

to the spirit, this side or “the other,” inside to out. These sorts of considerations are more abstract and suggest places that defy description, unlike the portrayals of cities, deities, animals and creatures found in the works of Amaringo and Debernardi. Harlow seems to suggest to us the essence of existence, a world that perhaps exists on a more microscopic level.

Dennis McKenna relates an experience that happened while attending a scientific conference organized by the União do Vegetal (UDV) in Brazil. The UDV is a Brazilian religious organization that uses *ayahuasca* as a sacrament, to which they give the name of *vegetal*. To the UDV, the brew has two basic



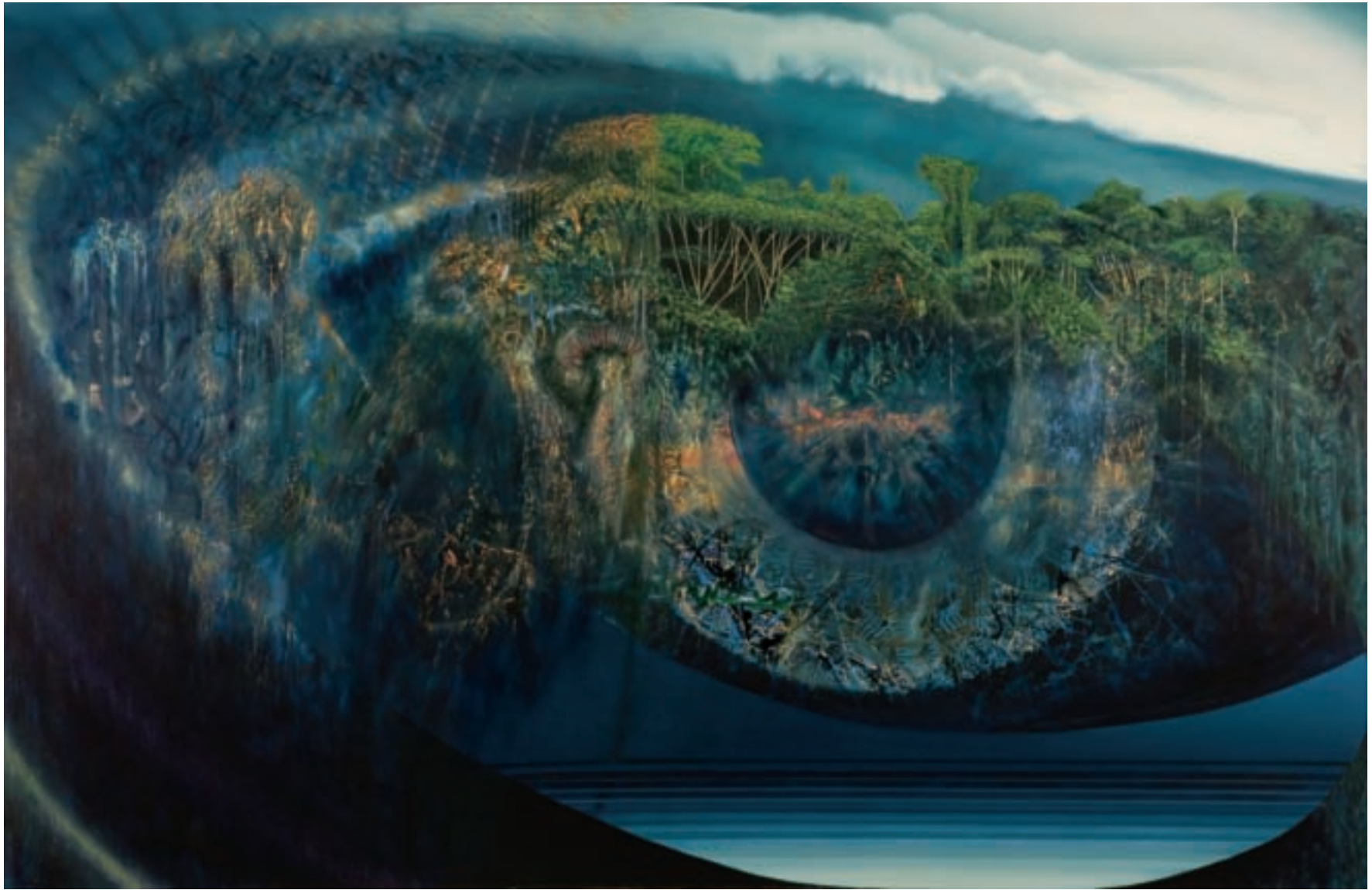
Falls Near Jirijirimo
Oil on Canvas, 72 x 96 inches. 1998
Rick Harlow

components: “força” (force) and “luz” (light). At the conclusion of the conference, McKenna participated in a ritual ceremony and partook of the vegetal sacrament. He describes a sensation of being suspended in space, high above the Amazon basin, seeing a World Tree in the form of an enormous *Banisteriopsis* vine, “the embodiment of the plant intelligence that embraced and covered the earth, that together the community of the plant species that existed on the earth provided the nurturing energy that made life on earth possible” (qtd. in Luna). He states, “I found myself instantly transported from my bodiless perch in space to the lightless depths beneath the surface of the earth. I had somehow become a sentient water molecule, percolating randomly through the soil, lost amid the tangle of the enormous root fibers of the Banisteriopsis World Tree” (Luna). As his account continues, he encounters the life of the molecule, as if he were the molecule itself, traveling through the vascular system of the vine, participating in the process of photosynthesis.

Rebecca Stone cites several examples of the *ayahuasca* experience as reported by several researchers. These descriptions help to corroborate Harlow’s vision: “Percepts may be felt as passing through oneself, the swirling, swaying mass of kaleidoscopic, geometric shapes flowed around and through me, softly exploding and imploding... (Brilliant light) that seems to pass through the viewer and touch the very essence of one’s Self...I was able to see through (the human technological world) to the pulsating energies of the world of

all-encompassing nature” (qtd. in Stone 27). Stone comments that in Ancient American art we see a concern for the interior often featuring “X-ray” views. She states further observations on reverse or interior perspectives, seeing upside down or looking from the inside out. She cites further *ayahuasca* experiences, saying, “The earth spins and the ground rises to the head... I felt like I was in areas of my body I had never consciously been in before, this lifetime. At one point I felt I was turned inside out—some force reached into my mouth and throat and pulled my insides out, until my inner organs were all on the outside, hanging out, so to speak, and limbs and muscles had become packed on the inside” (qtd. in Stone 27-28).

Harlow’s painting, *From the Inside Out*, permits the viewer a glimpse of all of the aforementioned *ayahuasca* experiences. Like McKenna, we experience a view high above the forest, yet we are looking through another eye, perhaps human, animal or even mineral; it appears to see a more microscopic vision as well, with tiny filament that seems to be in the midst of transformation between the micro to the macro. His portrayals, to most, may ostensibly seem like fanciful, highly-abstracted imagery done by a very talented artist and appear like a lot of other abstract paintings. However, even more compelling features surrounding his work are the comments made by other shamans. To them he is known as “the Shaman of Colors” and as Harlow states, from them he has learned much of what his paintings mean. As he explains, each has identified with aspects and imagery depicted; each has identified specific spirits and



From the Inside Out
Oil on Canvas, 92 x 62 inches. 2005
Rick Harlow



The Travelers
Oil on Canvas, 54 x 54 inches. 2006
Donna Torres

elements that they too have encountered.

Upon initial comparison, the works of Donna Torres may seem to suggest less relationship to the others of this exhibition. When one considers all of the previous descriptions and accounts related to the aforementioned artists, Torres's work seems to bring us back to a more everyday reality, yet we don't remain there for long. She quickly reminds us of a more inviting space beyond our familiar settings, one where nature is calling to a magical realm. In the painting *The Travelers* she leads us

from the comfort of what appears to be a bedroom, as suggested by the partially made bed, to an exterior realm where we sense a gradual ascent. Like the sensation of flying while in a dream, we are at liftoff.

Throughout much of her work she uses forced perspective in a way that seems to create an imbalance for the viewer, as if we feel ourselves sliding off of the canvas. However, she offers a way out. As she suggests in her artist statement, there is something naturally alluring to a path. "What is it that draws us in?" she asks. In this room she seems to suggest that it is time to wake up and get going, following our path. Our path begins in this room, but we are certainly not comfortable for long. Shared spaces, the juxtaposition of interior and exterior, and the dissolution of these spaces are common themes we've seen in the other works and are particular to the entheogenic trance as previously described. What sets her versions of these themes as different from the others is the juxtaposition of the familiar interior, common ordinary rooms with the somewhat less familiar space of nature, and those specifically inhabited by teacher plants.

A former instructor once told her that "painting is magic," a place of hopes and dreams. Torres states of her recent work her desire to break away from the "habituated viewing of what is around us," looking rather at the small details enriching our lives. "People have used the natural world as shelter, as food, as a connection to the spirit," she explains. "I use this subject matter in my paintings as a place that allows me to



Unpacking History
Oil on Linen, 40 x 40 inches. 2005
Donna Torres

explore the differences between my experience, intuition, wishes and concerns.” Torres refers to her paintings as projects of exploration: “Where some might write an essay, I make a painting.” Her work recalls a Surrealist idiom; however, she feels little attachment to artists such as Magritte. Where Magritte seems to present an object to be viewed in denial, twisting our linguistic interpretation of it, Torres presents objects such as various plants as they exist in the real world, and seems to ask us if we have considered them. *The Travelers* features many of the plants particular to the entheogenic family as we see *Nicotiana tabacum* in the lower left, *Banisteriopsis caapi* vines within the diagonal path and an imaginary tree with flowers of the *Brugmansia sanguinea*, *Brugmansia aurea*, and *Brugmansia suaveolens* growing from it. On the bedspread are the flowers of the peyote cactus. As a passionate artist dedicated to her work, she professes an obligation to be botanically correct in her representation—hence the series of prints that she has assembled entitled *Ancient Conversations* that features detailed drawings of *Anadenanthera colubrine*, *Banisteriopsis caapi*, *Brugmansia sanguinea*, *Erthroxylum coca*, *Lophophora williamsii*, *Nicotiana tabacum*, *Psilocybe cubensis*, *Psychotria viridis* and *Trichocereus pachanoi*. However, a larger portion of her work partakes of a more constructivist idiom, juxtaposing interiors with exteriors, nights with days, past with present.

Unpacking History takes us to the site of an archeological dig in Tiahunaco, Bolivia. Torres’s husband, Constantino Manuel Torres, is an archaeologist and ethnobotanist



Ancient Conversations-Banisteriopsis Caapi
Litho Print from original watercolor
Archival pigment based ink on paper, 19 x 13 inches. 2012
Donna Torres

Ancient Conversations-Psychotria Viridis
Litho Print from original watercolor
Archival pigment based ink on paper, 19 x 13 inches. 2012
Donna Torres

specializing in the ethnobotany of pre-columbian South America and the Caribbean and has done extensive work at this site. Donna Torres is interested in the ancient Andean use of *Anadenanthera snuff Cohoba*, its paraphernalia and associated archaeology. In this painting we see depictions of ruins, a monolith, a garment with a series of bird heads arrayed in a serpentine fashion, and a curious set of patterns placed somewhat subliminally to the rest of the image. In the center of the painting, embedded into the landscape is an image of the ground plans for the archaeological site. On the upper right, is the current day town of Tiahuanaco. Beneath it appears an



Shipibo Pot
Early twentieth century
Clay and pigments, 12 x 18 x 18 inches
Collection of Craig and Judy Spiering



Shipibo Pot
Mid-twentieth century
Clay and pigments, 17 x 25 x 25 inches
Collection of Lawrence and Rachel Kolton

older sculpture from the archaeological site that thrived from 300 – 900 AD surrounded by coca leaves. The leaves, flowers and seeds are those belonging to the *Anadenanthera* plant. The seeds of this plant are ground to a fine powder to form a mixture known as yopo or cohoba. Yopo contains a high concentration of bufotenine, DMT and 5-MeO-DMT.

Much like the patterns that exist subliminally in *Unpacking History*, we see similar incidence in the artwork of the Shipibo-Conibo, an indigenous group inhabiting the Amazon rainforest along the Ucayali River in Peru. The Shipibo-Conibo are well known for the elaborate designs that adorn their ceramic pots and textiles. These designs are known as “kené” in their language. More than 200 years ago, the Shipibo-Conibo left little unaffected by these sorts of designs as they covered everything from homes, utensils, garments, boats, paddles, hunting equipment and even their bodies. Over time this tradition has faded. According to Angelika Gebhart-Sayer, the intricate design of the Shipibo-Conibo may have been “a codified system of meanings, a vehicle of communication.” She provides a most interesting analysis of these patterns in her 1985 essay, “The Geometric Designs of the Shipibo-Conibo in Ritual Context.” Therapy and healing are for the Shipibo-Conibo a matter of “visionary design application in connection with aura restoration.”

The role these designs play in relation to traditional healing ceremonies makes for a compelling argument, supporting the close proximity of art in relation to shamanism. Unfortunately,

less is now known as to the semantic content of the designs, and little knowledge remains with respect to the therapeutic applicability and spiritual origin of patterns, but Gebhart-Sayer’s research offers us some fascinating clues. On a formal level, there are two basic components to the style: a linear composition either curved or angular called the *quene*, and the *canoas*, a blocklike, angular composition in bold lattices presented in a figure/ground relationship. Spacing is uniformly arrayed and the symmetrical repetitions could be continued endlessly if not for the borders.

Angelika Gebhart-Sayer, Professor of Ethnology at the University of Margurg suggests that the intricate design of the Shipibo-Conibo may have been a “codified system of meanings, a vehicle of communication.” Consistent with Gebhart-Sayer’s reference, we see a head reference as the top graphic indicates. The second reference is of hands and the third, at the bottom, is of eyes.

To the Shipibo-Conibo, the designs are said to be of the earliest mythological past whose intricate pattern was revealed by Ronin, a “food controlling entity coiling around the edge of the world,” who is the “mother of all fish” where in its belly it has imprisoned its abducted souls (Gebhart-Sayer). Some shaman were believed to commune with the spirits of the dead, the “veroyushin.” Often they would own a “leporello” book that consisted of these designs carefully drawn on each of the pages. A leporello is similar to an accordion fold booklet. The shaman would claim to have received the designs directly from the “eye spirits.”

At certain times in what amounted to a sort of pilgrimage,

women would come from miles bringing artist's materials upon which to create designs and to learn about their designs from a master shaman. Sessions could last for days during which time the shamans explained the meanings of the designs: "When the master took his book out of the box, the women (women, not men, purportedly made the art) would gather around in order to have a lesson in design art" (Gebhart-Sayer 159). As their *shina* (intellect, creativity, vitality) grew, they would also fast, abstain from sexual activity and spend time in contemplation of the designs and the enhancement of the *tena* (image of the inner eye, imagination and reflection). These efforts were often aided by medicinal plants. If worthy, the shamans would offer to the artists an invisible design crown called the *quene maiti*. Much like contemporary practices, award recognition of this sort enhanced the artist's social status. The shaman's role was akin to interpreter of these signs created, relating the messages between the temporal and spiritual world. Like a modern day art director, he would select the themes to be reproduced for public consumption expressed within a variety of contexts such as pottery, textiles and other media.

Healing sessions involve several elements, including the assistance of plant and animal spirits, while the shaman operates within three sensory realms—visual, auditory and olfactory. The master spirit of the *ayahuasca* vine, Nishi Ibo, projects the luminescent geometric configurations before the shaman's eyes, covers everything within his sight, and, with the aid of the helper spirits, he begins his interpretations as quiquin design

medicine. Sight merges with sound as the shaman then proceeds to translate the received visual to an auditory expression, a song, which is a direct result of the design image. The song, therefore, is a kind of code to the image. This may lead one to consider the relationship of the sound and the image and perhaps find some correlation. Theodore Lucas writes, "Symmetry prevails in the formal, melodic, and rhythmic characteristics of the songs. An example of a more complex consonance is the lateral symmetry of the melodic inversion" (qtd. in Gebhart-Sayer 170). Gebhart-Sayer imagines a code exists and is understood through the song. Singing the song unifies the efforts of two potters working together in what is referred to as "the meeting of the souls." She writes, "In older times, the two halves of a very large vessel (more than one meter in height) were painted by two women simultaneously but independently. They sat opposite each other, with the vessel between them, unable to see the other woman's half. By singing, they managed to tune in to each other's mood to such an extent that they could paint two harmonizing and interrelated design halves."

Several examples have been discussed that suggest the affinity between the artist and the shaman in the past as well as the present. Considering the prospect that at one time in the ancient past they were perhaps one and the same, one wonders then what led to their unique, distinctive professions, while also considering how they are still alike. Much has been discussed of the visible and invisible worlds. Religion has long enjoyed the service of art, yet when art broke away from religion it

sought a new master in search of truths and absolutes, and thus various “isms” were the result. Many artists turned to nature for a source of inspiration. If nature is minded, perhaps then it speaks to both the artist and the shaman in ways beyond our current understanding. Artists seem to have intuitively known nature’s message throughout history and have presented humankind with numerous visual impressions and interpretations, and in some instances even presented us with views from “the Other Side.” The shamans say that the spirits speak in images and have learned ways to codify these visuals through songs that permit a vision or geometric patterns, as in the case of the Shipibo-Conibo, to reappear in the temporal realm. This notion ought to excite many contemporary artists, especially those who work with mediums such as animation and video where sights and sounds merge. Perhaps nature and the wider universe work in several other idioms that we are just now beginning to comprehend. They speak not only to artists and shamans, but mathematicians, scientists, writers and to all of those who have found a way to listen.

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Exhibition Listing

Pablo Cesar Amaringo (1938-2009)

First Visionary Painting

Gouache on paper, 9 3/4 x 12 3/4 inches. No date
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 4: The Spirits or Mothers of the Plants

Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 25/08/86
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 8: The Powers of the Mariris

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 28/05/87
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 12: Three Types of Sorcerers

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 12/11/89
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 17: Vision of the Snake

Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 16/03/87
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 21: The Sublimity of the Sumiruna

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 02/09/87
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 26: The Tiahuanaco Realm

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 04/08/87
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 28: Spiritual Heart Operation

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 15/11/89
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 30: Kapukuri

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 26/10/88
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 33: Campana Ayahuasca

Gouache on paper, 12 x 18 inches. 15/08/89
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 39: Recovering a Young Man

Kidnapped by a Yakuruma
Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 8/12/86
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 42: Lucero Ayahuasca

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 04/05/87
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 43: Fight Between a Shipibo and a Shetebo Shaman

Gouache on paper, 12 x 16 inches. 6/03/87
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Vision 44: Fighting Through Tingunas,

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 14/05/87
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Untitled

Gouache on paper, 18 x 24 inches. 28/05/87
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Alexander Debernardi (b. 1968)

Adan Visionario

Oil on canvas, 101 x 88 centimeters, 39 ¾ x 35 ½ inches. 2014
Collection of the Artist

Healing Plants

Oil on canvas, 131 x 100 centimeters, 51 ½ x 39 ¼ inches. 2008
Collection of Thomas Wilkenson

Iniciación Chamánica

Oil on canvas, 130 x 105 centimeters, 51 x 41 ¼ inches. 2014
Collection of the Artist

Magic Serpents

Oil on canvas, 80 x 100 centimeters, 31 ½ x 39 ¼ inches. 2011
Collection of Thomas Wilkenson

Sinfonía Chamánica

Oil on canvas, 90 x 71 centimeters, 35 ½ x 28 inches. 2010
Collection of Luis Eduardo Luna

Visionary Inca

Oil on canvas, 45 x 50 centimeters, 17 ¾ x 19 ¾ inches. 2011
Collection of the artist

Rick Harlow (b. 1951)

Falls Near Jirijirimo

Oil on canvas, 72 x 96 inches. 2000
Collection of the artist

From the Inside Out

Oil on canvas, 60 x 92 inches. 2005
Collection of the artist

Alex Sastoque (b. 1983)

Dawn - Amanecer

Oil on Canvas, 27 x 39 inches. 2012
Collection of the artist

Transformacion chamanica "Hombre Jaguar"

Oil on Canvas, 48 x 48 inches. 2012
Collection of the artist

Jaibana Curandera

Oil on Canvas, 39 x 39 inches. 2013
Collection of the artist

Donna Torres (b. 1954)

Ancient Conversations

Portfolio of nine inkjet prints on paper, 19 x 13 inches. 2012
Collection of the artist

The Travelers

Oil on canvas, 54 x 54 inches. 2006
Collection of the artist

Unpacking History

Oil on linen, 40 x 40 inches. 2009
Collection of the artist

Shipibo Pots

Shipibo Pot, early twentieth century
Clay and pigments, 12 x 18 x 18 inches
Collection of Craig and Judy Spiering

Shipibo Pot, mid-twentieth century
Clay and pigments, 17 x 25 x 25 inches
Collection of Lawrence and Rachel Kolton

Brauer Museum of Art

Valparaiso University Center for the Arts
1709 Chapel Drive
Valparaiso, Indiana 46383-6493
valpo.edu/artmuseum

Hours

Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 am - 5 pm
Wednesday, 10 am - 8:30 pm
Saturday and Sunday, noon - 5 pm
Closed Monday

