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ABSTRACT

THE HERO EPIC: research into the nature of the subconscious. The work explores the manner in which archetypes manifest in folktales, myths and legends and how they and their symbolic content are conveyed into consciousness through dreams. A study taking the form of an exhibition of tapestries and drawings exhibited at the Canberra School of Art Gallery from March 4 to 15, 1997 which comprises the outcome of the Studio Practice component, together with the Report which documents the nature of the course of study undertaken.

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Introduction

My work explores the manner in which archetypes manifest themselves in folktales, myths and legends and how they and their symbolic content are conveyed into consciousness through dreams. One archetype in particular has commanded my attention, the archetype known as a creator/destroyer.

The final work consists of three pieces, collectively called *The Hero Epic*. *The Hero Epic* is inspired by Carl Jung's theories regarding the collective unconscious and archetypes, and in particular analysis of a type of myth categorised as a hero cycle. A hero cycle describes an initiatory stage of the psyche's development. It is also about a quest. *The Hero Epic* documents my search for the creator/destroyer archetype and is also a vehicle for furthering my understanding of the workings of the subconscious. Through the making of *The Hero Epic* I hope to increase my ability to listen to my intuitive voice as this is informed directly by the subconscious.

The three pieces of *The Hero Epic* correspond to stages of the hero cycle. These pieces I call *Stagnation*, *The Compost Heap* and *Metamorphosis*. They also correspond to the three aspects of the creator/destroyer archetype: creation, preservation and destruction. A common manifestation of the creator/destroyer archetype is as a weaving deity such as the Greek Athena or Navajo Spider Woman. The creator/destroyer is often in charge of giving and taking life; this I see as directly analogous to the process of making art (particularly tapestry weaving) and is the ethic by which my work has been created.

It is significant that my work is woven, as tapestry is a symbol in itself. Many analogies of existence utilise tapestry and textile metaphor to describe the interrelatedness of human existence. As a personal symbol, tapestry is meaningful because of its ability to integrate disparate elements into a new whole unit without destroying their uniqueness.

The work is built up of fragments, simultaneously referring to the fragmentary nature of dreams and the fragments or components of which a tapestry is constructed. The overall body of work can be seen as a large tapestry; each piece built on the foundation of the

preceding piece. Individual fragments are like the thread or weft of the tapestry, woven around the warp of *The Hero Epic*. The work has been allowed to evolve and gather its own momentum. Decisions are made intuitively. The only predetermined plans are that the work will be based on a hero cycle and evolve intuitively.

The work is about my voice, telling the story of the relatedness of dreams, myths and the slippery, elusive workings of the subconscious. Voice is important because it is through voice that we enact the 'who-ness' that we are. Like symbols, the work can be read on a level beyond consciousness, containing meanings that bypass the logical interrogative part of the human brain and speak directly to the intuitive. It is a female voice, that is a 'matter of biology'.¹

The work documents my journey through time into the space of the unknowable, evolving interior. I am asking questions of myself: 'Who am I? Where am I going? What will I do when I get there?'. As I see the process of art-making as a journey, maps are a powerful personal symbol representative of that journey.

Introduction to a Fragment of a Dream

The Hero Cycle

Carl Jung had a theory that contained within the psyche, besides the conscious and unconscious, every person has a collective unconscious. The collective unconscious contains ideas, archetypes and instinctive behavioural patterns. This information is common to every person, but manifests differently through individual personality and perception. He developed this theory after study of myths from vastly different cultures. He noticed that similar figures manifested in unconnected cultures and also manifested in individual's dreams. These figures became known as archetypes. As similar patterns began to emerge in myths, he began to classify them according to their symbolic content. The hero cycle is one of these.

The hero cycle is a pertinent example of how the collective unconscious relates to myths and how they both relate to the human psyche. The hero cycle is about the evolution to maturity.

¹ Moi, Toril, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine' in Belsey, Catherine and Moore, Jane (eds.) The Feminist Reader Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, Basil Blackwell, New York

This is the symbolic content or subliminal message of a hero myth.

The protagonist will be set a quest such as "You may have your heart's desire on the condition that you bring back the Seven-Headed Ogre of the Soul-Destroying Abyss's prize-winning tulips". This is an impossible task because everybody knows that on entering The Soul-Destroying Abyss not only is your soul sucked out and left to disintegrate round, shiny soul atom by round, shiny soul atom over a period seven times longer than an eternity, but your body wanders the lonely wastelands of abandonment, forever searching for its lost soul. And all that is before you even greet the monster face to faces.

The protagonist will usually receive aid from a mysterious well-wisher in the form of a magical gift. This is what enables them to defeat the gruesome opponent. This aid comes from what Jung calls the anima (if the hero is male) or animus if female. This is a part of the psyche that knows more than you consciously know or has different strengths. In battling the monster the protagonist dies a symbolic death, and is resurrected into maturity or a higher level of being.

The Creator/Destroyer Archetype

The creator/destroyer archetype can also be described as a life/death/life goddess. This term reinforces the importance of the cyclical aspect of creation. The creator/destroyer archetype is often a three-fold deity embodied as one. The three parts relate to the three stages of womanhood spoken of in myth and psychology. These are the Virgin, the Mother and the Crone. Each of these fulfils a function within the cycle of the creative process. The virgin is the creator, the mother the preserver and the crone the destroyer.

The destroyer does not signify the end of creation, but is an essential part of the continuous cycle of creation. I received some good advice from Geoff Dupree while I was at Monash University. He said "if something is not working, don't be precious with your work. Be prepared to change it, rearrange it, take it apart and put it back together." This advice summarises

the usefulness of the destroyer within the creative process and the way in which I have applied this concept to my work.

From ancient cultures we have myths involving great goddesses of yarn. The cosmogonical significance of which involves variously: creation of the world; control over life and death; the ability to create or destroy; dealing out justice; inventing things; healing; looking after women, particularly during childbirth and menstruation; teaching of wisdom and giving the example for women to be strong and independent.

Although the most well known and influential myths are Greek and Roman, weaving myths are found globally. The Greeks, Romans, Scandinavians and the Anatolian all had versions of The Three Fates, three sister deities who were responsible for dealing out portions of good, evil and luck at birth. In Greece they were called the Moerae, daughters of Night. Clotho personified the thread of life. It was her job to spin it. Lachesis was the element of chance. Her role was to measure the cord. Atropos is called the inescapable fate - she was the one who severed the cord.

What intrigues me about weaving myths and the related archetype is that they conjure up aspects of weaving which still seem to be magical processes. A long line of string intertwined around other pieces of string creates an object; tapestry. This is like the Navajo belief that the first being of the world, Spider Woman wove the 'great blanket of the earth' and summoned all creatures into existence. Or that the weft is representational of human lives that live as they are being woven until severed by Atropos' hand. As a weaver you are connected to these powerful beings because it is you who decides what is to be included and what is left out.

The relationship between textile metaphor and tapestry is due to the specific nature of its construction: discontinuous weft and interconnectedness. Tapestry is inseparable from the image it depicts, unlike a painting or print which is superimposed onto an existing surface. The individual strands that make up the tapestry object simultaneously build the image. Tapestry weaving is ancient technology and as such a direct connection to the ancient goddesses of yarn.

Tapestry as Symbol

There is a profound connection between textile, analogies of existence and existence itself. This is evident in the significance attached to the textile deities of myth and the everyday use of textile metaphor in language.

A clue to it's (tapestry's) importance is that we have a sense of what it means even if we don't know what it means. The word is frequently used to sum up an array of things, events, or ideas, a picturesque extension of describing them as interwoven. Comparing something with tapestry evokes a large and detailed image or narrative, a grand sum of many parts.²

Every person has a relationship with textiles. From the moment the umbilical cord is severed, our red, raw body is wrapped in cloth. When our lungs have filled for the last time with air again we are wrapped in cloth. Clothing signifies civilisation, organisation. It is the most basic expression of who we are and what we do. Thread, the basic component of textiles is also the basic component of life - DNA.

Individual histories are wrapped around warp threads. It is a place where a million different things can meet and not lose their identity. If you mix colours in paint, they are assimilated, they become a new indivisible thing. In Tapestry also you may blend colours. The difference is that the colours do not change, it is the relationship to other colour that makes them appear changed.

² Harris, Peter, "Why Weave Tapestry" International Tapestry Journal Spring_Issue, Vol. 2 No, 1_

The Nature of Fragments

Fragments speak about a partial glimpse of a whole idea. They are intriguing because they are the residual elements of something lost, an idea that sticks around because it means something important. Fragments refer to absence. What is not shown is just as fascinating as what is. It is the arrangement of sounds and silences that make up music, the invisible warp threads that hold a tapestry together. If there are gaps in knowledge, then there is room for another's input.

Every substance known to humanity is made up of fragments; tapestries too. One of my favourite things about tapestry is the way disparate elements are integrated into one object. The broken strings from my guitar and the shiny new fabric from Lincrafts are suddenly so entangled you'd swear they had known each other for years. Weaving broken things gives them a new context and a new function.

The guitar strings and the fabric are each an element of a tapestry communicating different information. I have woven fragments as often fragments are all that remain of a dream upon waking. Over a period of time a whole picture may be built up from the information that permeates consciousness. The fragments are pieces of a puzzle fitting together to tell a story; they are woven differently to reinforce this notion.

In weaving fragmented pieces, I am departing from the traditional European rectilinear format of tapestry. Except for the Fibre Art movement of the seventies, this has remained unchanged for thousands of years. Tapestry is a textile, and as such has different behavioural patterns to other mediums. The selvages might meander, the surface might buckle slightly or the fabric might have a certain drape. These are characteristic of textiles and I celebrate them.

Diana Wood Conroy wove tapestry fragments mounted on drawings in her 'Archaeologies and Time' exhibition, but as a whole piece, like a collage. Tapestry is conducive to recreating the illusionistic qualities of a collage. If the eye can blend colours in a tapestry, will the eye not link pieces whose images are continued throughout a series of pieces? I thought of a patchwork

quilt, no matter how discordant the colours, an overall logic emerges.

Evolution and Process as Concept

'Only what is mortal bears life...Only in death is there rebirth. The balance is not stillness. It is a movement - an eternal becoming.'³

Amongst the very important aspects of my work is this: the process of evolution. It governs the realisation of thought to object and object to thought. It is a continual process, a cyclical event. My work cannot be separated from process - the process of sifting and refining ideas, the specific process of constructing a tapestry and the process of discarding what is no longer beneficial. Then it begins all over again.

Tapestry is a time consuming practice. Your mind moves much faster than your hands. I have built into my work the means for working with this aspect. I am celebrating temporary truths. There are no pre-set destinations in my work. I work on small pieces in order to move on to the next truth or question.

Marks made on paper have a graphic quality, what is woven has its unique quality. There is metamorphosis in translating the drawn image into woven vocabulary. I know of no way of predicting the outcome, nor do I want to. I like the surprise. There is metamorphosis in seeing an intuitive thought through to its fruition and even more of a surprise. Like identity, art making can never be a static thing. Static is another word for stagnation.

Tapestry is constructed like a house; it can only be built on a firm foundation. What is placed on top is informed by what lies below. This is the manner in which I have constructed my work. Individual fragments are the thread of which the overall body of work is constructed. Tapestries manifest on the loom, they grow and change and assert themselves. As more information is added, their personality is revealed.

Map as Symbol

I am fascinated by maps. I see them as a symbol suggesting several things. The intersections of lines on a map are like the connectedness of ideas. They can be thought paths representing mental journeys, tracing the routes through which an idea

³ Le Guin, Ursula, The Farthest Shore, Gollancz, London, 1973 px 423

develops. Maps are important because they locate us on the earth. They can show us where we have been and all the endless possibilities of where we might go. They show us things that are too vast for us to see. Maps direct us to the mystical objects of our quests. They are encoded with signs and symbols and speak of destinations; destiny.

In my proposal I spoke of making 'a macrocosm of my unconscious archetypal world', I was referring to the idea of mapping the uncharted territory of the subconscious, making visual notes of my journey.

Part 2 Working Processes

This section describes the processes I went through in the creation of The Hero Epic. Before I reached the point of departure for my Grad Dip work, three separate, yet subsequent ideas held my attention, and influenced the direction I took. The first came from a book called Sophie's World⁴ and is encapsulated in this quotation:

'We know of no culture which has not concerned itself with what man is and where the world is, how was the world created, is there meaning behind what happens? Is there life after death? How can we answer these questions, and most importantly, how shall we live our lives?'⁵

How shall I?

Further along in the book I came to Empedocles, a Greek philosopher (circa 490 - 430 BC) who believed there were two basic forces at work in the world - love and strife. While love bound things together, strife pulled them apart. This spoke in symbolic language to my psyche, it absolutely enchanted me. I looked for it everywhere I went. I saw it as something more complex than good versus evil and paradoxically more physical.

From these two ideas I made two drawings, their story went something like this: I am the boss of whatever I choose to show

⁴Gaarder, Jostien, Sophie's World, Phoenix House, London, 1985

⁵

on this paper. To emphasise this I played around with scale, I made myself enormous by comparison to my surroundings. These drawings, in the whole scheme of things were not important, but I used them as the basis for the first tapestry samples I made. The imagery was not important, rather the techniques I was exploring.

The third was a most accidental find. I came across a book while searching for Carl Jung's Man and His Symbols⁶. The title is The Sacred Prostitute,⁷ the author also a Jungian analyst. A lot of this book I found irrelevant, as it dealt with issues such as marriage. Other parts I considered goddess tripe; however, one very interesting fact came to light. This was that the original ancient Greek definition of the word virgin had absolutely nothing to do with a woman's chastity (or lack thereof). Rather it referred to the way she lived her life: a woman who does what she does because she is being true to herself.

This book also introduced me to basic principles of the feminine psyche - eros, meaning relatedness, and the emphasis on the cyclical aspect of existence. The masculine counterpart is logos or logic.

In retrospect it is easy to see where these ideas have led. In answering the question 'How shall I live my life?', my other questions, (Who am I? Where am I going? and What shall I do when I get there?) will be answered. Empedocles' love and strife have coalesced into the triple aspects of the creator/destroyer archetype. The Woman who is Virgin is the desired outcome of following the creator/destroyer archetype, and also an answer to the question, How shall I live my life?

Having chosen the direction, I am now walking to the station. The station (being the point of departure) is located in the suburb of Jung, on the street of the Collective Unconscious and Archetypes. As I board this train, I began to wonder which archetypes found their way into my dreams and what they signified. I have always been conscious of dreams, and I know from bitter experience what torturous fantasies lie in wait for a person whose left hand is unaware of what their right is doing.

⁶ Jung, Carl; von Franz, M.L.; Henderson, Joseph; Jacobi, Jolande; Jaffe, Aniela; Man and His Symbols, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc, New York 1968

⁷ Qualls-Corbet, Nancy, The Sacred Prostitute, Intercity Books, Toronto, 1988

I began a hunt for archetypes by reading as many different myths, legends and folktales that I could find and religiously wrote down my dreams to scrutinise every morning. Man and His Symbols was my primary source of information, but I began to find that it focussed on issues specifically related to men. This was inevitable as this book was written by men and their fundamental experience of a psyche is their own.

I encountered a similar problem in reading myths. The great heroes were always engaged in killing someone to prove how strong they were or not needing as much of a reason as that. Basically I became bored with the endless repetition of the 'boy bashes that' theme and wondered what the women who weren't evil child-devouring sorcerers or wicked stepmothers or passive fainting princesses were doing. In short: Where were the female heroes?

This was when I found quite by chance a collection of folktales and myths entirely about women edited by Angela Carter⁸ (whose fiction is often based on myth peculiarly twisted or inverted for a surprise ending). Also into my hands came a book I had been searching for - Women Who Run With the Wolves.⁹ This book in conjunction with Man and His Symbols led me to the hero cycle and my incarnation: *The Hero Epic*.

The feminine version of a hero cycle runs along the same lines but doesn't involve the same amount of blood and bravado. The version I found in Women Who Run With the Wolves, Vasalisa the Wise,¹⁰ is the hero cycle on which I have based *The Hero Epic*. I will give a brief synopsis (in my own words) of the story and it's symbolic content.

When Vasalisa was young, her mother was very ill. As she lay on her deathbed, she drew Vasalisa close and said: 'I want you to have this doll, and if you take care of it and feed it whenever it is hungry it will give you the help you need.' She drew her last breath and died.

⁸ Carter, Angela (ed), The Virago Book of Fairy Tales, Virago Press, 1991

⁹ Pinkola-Estes, Laura, Women Who Run With the Wolves, Ryder, Sydney, 1992

¹⁰ Pinkola-Estes, Laura, Women Who Run With the Wolves, Ryder, Sydney, 1992 px 74 - 114

Several years later Vasalisa's father married again, her new stepmother bringing her own daughter with her. The stepmother and her daughter were lazy and mean and made Vasalisa work from sun up to sun down while they worked from sun up to sundown scheming to do away with her.

One day, in the middle of winter, they let the fire go out. 'Vasalisa' they said, 'The fire has gone out and we will all perish unless you go to Baba Yaga's hut and fetch us some coals'. 'Ha ha ha" they thought, 'The Yaga is fond of little girl flesh, how convenient!' Vasalisa swallowed back her terror, and nodded her acquiescence.

So she set off, the little doll her mother had given her in her apron pocket. Although Baba Yaga lived not far away, her house lay in the midst of a huge, dark forest. Vasalisa bravely walked through the slowly darkening forest until she came to a fork in the path. Which way? She could not tell. She stopped. She noticed the little doll jumping up and down in her pocket. Remembering her mother's advice, she asked the little doll. As the doll knew, she followed the guidance offered by the little doll, not forgetting to feed it.

At last she arrived at the house of Baba Yaga, which as most people know stands on four enormous chicken legs that change direction according to the will of the Yaga. 'What do you want?' The Yaga demands. 'I want to ask for some coals for my family's fire, it has gone out.' Vasalisa answers, hoping the terror she feels is not so apparent. 'And why should I help you?' The Yaga asks through her menacing smile. 'Because I ask.' This seemed to satisfy the Yaga and Vasalisa is brought inside.

'You will do these things for me and maybe I will give you what you ask.' So Vasalisa is set tasks such as sorting poppy seeds from dirt. 'This must be done before the sun rises or you'll be a tasty treat with tobasco sauce.' So Vasalisa starts her mission impossible, but very soon she is falling asleep. 'Don't worry', the little doll says, 'You sleep and I will take care of this.' No sooner said and Vasalisa is snoring, but in the morning there are the two piles, one distinct from the other.

Two more days follow of washing, cooking and cleaning for the Yaga. At the end of the third day, the Yaga asks how Vasalisa can accomplish all these tasks. 'With the aid of my mother's blessing.' 'Blessing! We need no blessings around here! Take the coals and go. NOW!!!'

The coals, held in the base of a human skull, give off an eerie light as Vasalisa sets off through the forest. She is disturbed by the skull and goes to throw it away, but the skull speaks to her and reassures her. The skull helps her find her way back to her father's house in the same way the doll had helped her find her way there.

When she arrives, her stepmother berates her: 'Where have you been? We've been freezing, we thought we were going to die!' with no thought to Vasalisa's welfare. The skull observes this and in the morning all that can be found of the stepmother and her charming daughter is a pile of ashes. While happily ever after Vasalisa and her father reside.

As a hero cycle, Vasalisa the Wise follows the same basic pattern as other hero epics; however each of the symbols encrypted into the story are relevant to me personally. Laura Pinkola Estes has broken the story down into nine basic stages, I shall condense these into six.

1. *Vasalisa faces the loss of her mother as psychic protector:* Vasalisa's mother died before she was able to pass on her knowledge of what is beneficial to Vasalisa as a person, before Vasalisa was able to take responsibility for her own psychic welfare. This is why Vasalisa was given the doll and told to feed it. The doll is a symbol for intuition.

2. *The evil mother-substitutes plot her downfall:* The evil mother-substitutes are based on an unhealthy psyche, one that does what it does based on what it thinks other people think. Vasalisa submits to the will of the stepmother assuming that what this woman says is right because she is speaking from a position of power. By not questioning what is going on Vasalisa is being psychologically immature.

3. *Vasalisa journeys through the woods of the subconscious:* The journey to the house of Baba Yaga involves the penetration of a deep dark forest. The forest is a common symbol of the subconscious, as is any dark or wild place. During the journey, Vasalisa begins to rely on her doll (intuition).

4. *Facing the Baba Yaga :* The Baba Yaga is often described in stories as an evil hag. When you remove the influence of Christianity, the Yaga becomes a life/death/life Goddess, an archetype. The Baba Yaga is not confined by our values of good and

evil, she does what she deems best. She may devour Vasalisa (the devouring aspect of a goddess) or she may see merit in Vasalisa and reward her. Vasalisa succeeds by facing Baba Yaga and not quavering.

5. *Carrying out her tasks:* The tasks set by Baba Yaga have symbolic content. Sorting poppy seeds from dirt requires the finest discrimination. It is about sorting out what is useful from what is useless. Washing clothes is about purification and renewal, while cooking and cleaning relates to the ordering of the psyche. The house is a metaphor for the mind, cleaning the house ensures that it is free from unimportant clutter. Cooking is the process of preparing food for the mind to ensure it's stimulation. By doing these tasks. Vasalisa observes the way a powerful woman like the Yaga does these things. It was only possible to complete these tasks by using intuition.

6. *The Gift of Fire:* Baba Yaga, unable to find fault with Vasalisa is forced to give her what she asks. The coals in the skull are a more powerful symbol of intuition which Vasalisa earned through her apprenticeship with the Yaga. The skull promptly dispatches the unnecessary elements in Vasalisa's life, which the doll was unable to do. The doll is a child's toy, while the skull came from the Yaga who acts as a role-model for the psychic development of Vasalisa. This signifies Vasalisa's maturity.

The story is about learning the ways of Baba Yaga, an independent spirit. It is also about learning to listen to the intuitive voice. The intuitive voice is not only gut reaction but also informed coming from a dream.

I believe that all experiences and emotions, even things a person may not be aware of feeling are stored in the unconscious. It takes in information on all kinds of levels, it remembers smell vividly and associates smells with a circumstance. Exposure to that smell will instantly recall that time into consciousness. Certain experiences may be stuck in your mind for no apparent reason, but perhaps on a psychic level something about that occasion spoke to your psyche.

Phenomena like dreams and the intuitive voice are not based on reason or logic. The Subconscious has its own rationale, an elusive and seemingly changing rationale.

The female hero archetype is one who completes tasks that culminate in the gaining of heightened intuition and finally the one-in-herself existence. My hero epic is about the search for my intuitive voice. I am the hero of my epic - my subconscious is the only one I can experience first hand.

According to Jung, a sense of completeness is only achieved in an adult through a union of the conscious and unconscious mind. Out of this union arises what Jung calls the 'transcendental function' of the psyche. By listening to the subconscious, you are enabling the psyche to function transcendently.

The Evolution of the Hero Epic

As part of my search for archetypes I began analysing my dreams: their content and the manner in which information is transported into dream consciousness. I wanted to convey the sense of a dream or subconscious activity in my hero epic. I became aware of things such as the ability to see myself from outside of myself and the ability to see things from a multiplicity of viewpoints, often simultaneously. I wondered about what it is that enables you to identify someone when they look nothing like they really do in waking life. What makes you wake up and remember a dream? Is it just coincidence or is it part of your subconscious' master plan?



I'm still not sure; what is important is that these things are peculiarities of dreamspace.

Figures emerged in my dreams, evil flatmates from my past who were crooked and deformed. These were people who told me I could never do anything worthwhile. Jung told me they were negative animus. Groups of young men explained mysteries to me using mysterious language. Once I saw a Warrior Woman striding through what I can only describe as a battle camp. While I was terrified of her I knew I wanted to be on her side because she was so powerful.

I also looked for symbols in my dreams. I found a couple. Horses were dying in earthquakes, horses were pulling my mother's amazing three-story Dr Seuss cart. Luminous footprints led around the edge of the ocean, and I found brilliant red and blue feathers like a Crimson Rosella's that I was too scared to pick up. For months my dreams were so vivid, I didn't need movies, I had my own internal cinema.

After consulting several symbol dictionaries, and applying their meanings to my dreams, I found horses to be symbols of the conscious and earthquakes to signify upheaval in the unconscious. The Warrior Woman and the footprints show there was a path to follow. The feathers signified transcendence and flight.

I started thinking about feathers and their uses. I drew a man growing wings. He wasn't transformed into an angel - it was quite a painful experience, (he was human after all) and once he learned to fly, he wasn't sure he enjoyed the sensation. I drew a girl who'd made a feathered shaman's cloak or perhaps she'd just found one. She wasn't entirely comfortable putting it on.

I wanted *The Hero Epic* to be based on the retrieval of intuition, as I felt I had lost some of my ability to draw upon it. This would be found by following in the footsteps of The Warrior Woman. Drawing further from my dreams, my hero epic had an enormous cast of characters - the negative animus, the wise animus (the boys who cryptically explained things in my dreams), and of course myself as seeker of intuition.

At this stage I was still referring to mythology and borrowing symbols that had existed for centuries. I was trying to cram all

this information into a piece of tapestry that was feasible for me to produce within the given time. Carl Jung speaks again:

Those who do not realise the special feeling tone of the archetype end with nothing more than a jumble of mythological concepts which can be strung together to show that everything means anything - or nothing at all... Archetypes come to life only when one patiently tries to discover why and in what fashion they are meaningful to a living individual.¹¹

I thought again of the internal cinema and how I was director, producer, actor, and prop supplier of my dreams. I decided that all the characters cast in my hero epic should wear my face. I thought of a two-headed monster and the arguments going on between each head as to who would control the body. The hero became a two-headed monster representing the conscious and unconscious.

I wrote these words in my journal:

I had a dream about a huge fire that would not ignite because the ash and cinders had not been cleared away.

I had a dream about sculpture outside my front door

I had a dream about not being willing to enter the cares of my subconscious where beautiful paintings were lurking and mysterious people were working.

I might have a problem with colour

I have an idea about mixing media

I have an idea that's not where I started

I want to abandon the caution that governs my potion

I want it not to be easier to write it in words

I had an idea...

Maybe that should be let go.

Let go, let go.

I remembered dreaming the previous year constantly about my favourite tea cup, every night its crack became more pronounced until one night it was in pieces. I thought about the cup as a symbol of creativity particularly women's creativity as it refers to the womb. So I started scribbling, arranging all my players and the epic in the vague shape of a uterus. By now the evil animus had turned into a hunchback-sphinx and the conscious resurrected the unconscious by breathing soul fire onto her.

I became confused, the composition was too complex so I started drawing all over again from the very basic, the self. I've always

¹¹ Jung, Carl; von Franz, M.L., Henderson, Joseph; Jacobi, Jolande; Jaffe, Aniela; Man and His Symbols, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc, New York 1968, px 87 - 88

drawn self portraits because I like to draw from life and I'm going to be there anyway. It is an on-going process, the internal trying to reconcile itself with the external whom everybody I encounter is reconciled.

I drew myself twice on the same page as two separate beings - Conscious and Unconscious and suddenly the whole epic became very simple indeed. I came up with a plan.

The plan could also be described as a list of the stages or elements that make the hero epic. The cast of seemingly thousands had been narrowed to two - me and my subconscious. This plan had three stages as I discussed previously. Although that narrative still exists, the stages have been broken down into conceptual form.

The first stage deals with a dysfunctional psyche - stagnation. Nothing can grow because there is no communication or recognition between the two figures. The second stage is where the subconscious dies its symbolic death - but it is also a stage of regeneration. Compost is the word that always came to mind. The old scraps are broken down and mushed around to form a dynamic base on which to grow new things. The third stage is of course metamorphosis.

Stagnation

The first stage of The Hero Epic deals with a dysfunctional relationship between conscious and unconscious. This is signified not only by the fragmentary nature of the piece, but also by the imagery and surface texture.

I have already talked about my plans for the actual construction of the hero epic - woven fragments placed together to construct the image - this is how I began the first stage.



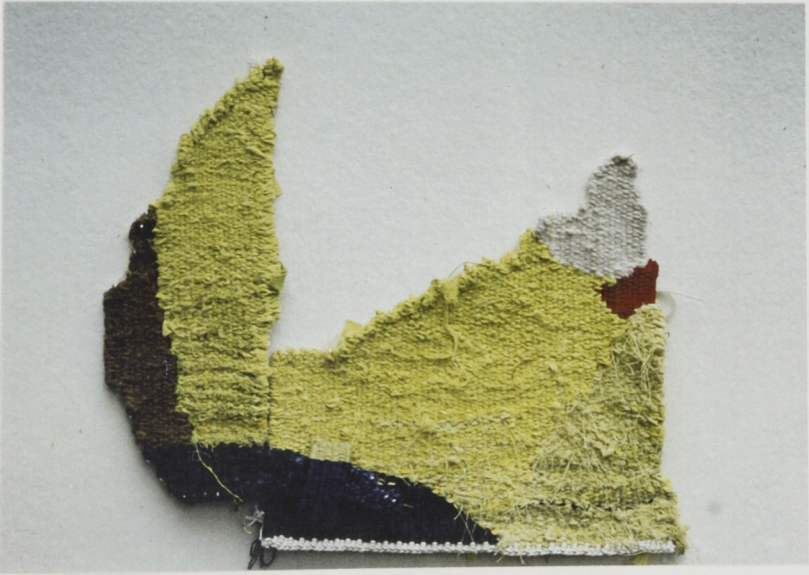
Another good piece of advice I received at Monash was: 'Just start. Make a mark'. This is the impetus behind the first piece: make a mark and react against it. I arbitrarily mapped out sections to weave. I chose first of all a section that could have been a badly taken photograph - a chopped off head. This was composed to fracture the composition. The first piece was rectangular and woven roughly.

To create a contrast to the previous piece, I wove the second piece very flatly using wool and developed a brocaded technique to emboss feathers and the shirt front. This piece was shaped by the outline of the figure of the conscious, including the face. I wove the face as simply as possible after the style of Hannah Ryggen¹² using minimal tonal differentiation to create form. I thought of fragmenting within a piece. In the hair and background, I allowed the weft ends to float onto the front of the piece. I thought this might link to pieces that would surround it. Although this piece was shaped, it had one very straight edge that was finished with Swedish plait. This makes use of the white warp which emphasised the straightness of the edge.

The final piece in this batch of tapestries was woven so that the image was on an angle to see what would happen when the bead of the weave was askew and the picture righted. To vary the shapes and sizes of the pieces I wove it as a long narrow strip. I also interrupted the surface by using a twill weave whilst still following the image as it appeared in the drawing. Instead of using straight colours I blended orange and maroon so that from a distance the eye would read it as red. I also repeated the face of the subconscious slightly subliminally just to see what would happen. As these were my first pieces of the hero epic just about everything I did was to see what happened.

As I was finishing the first three fragments of my hero epic I had a review. It was commented that the pieces looked like tapestry 'slabs'. I could see the point, so I spent a couple of days thinking about how to remedy the situation and finally it came to me. I have a theory that when you studiously avoid thinking about things the

¹²Seen, Albert, Hannah Ryggen, Kunstindustrimuseet, Oslo, 1896



answer suddenly penetrates the barrier between conscious and unconscious.

I decided to tear up the first stage of my drawing and weave the shapes made by the torn fragments. In order to break up the regularity of the long thin piece, I cut it in half. This was a delicious and delightful experience. I realised I was enacting the role of creator/destroyer - destroying in order to create. My archetype was claimed. I also realised I was making the manifestation of the path on which I had chosen to travel.

I began the next batch of tapestries experimenting with interlocking pieces. I also used fabric again, fabric that frayed and created stringy bits. The third piece of this batch I began with a huge 'I wonder what ...' I wonder what would happen if I didn't tie those half hitches along the base and the edges of the piece. The knots that all throughout my tapestry career I had been told were mandatory for a structurally sound weaving. A good analogy would be building a house without digging the foundations.

I also experimented with new weaving techniques - a soumak stitch. This involves bringing the weft around the front of the warp, encircling it and repeating this with the next warp. This creates a raised texture, resembling a knitting stitch.

On my noticeboard I had pinned up my first three samples and filled in the gaps with the torn drawing pieces. I liked the way the smooth- flat, muted (by contrast with the tapestry) drawing pieces created a back and forth tension. Even though I had the tapestries with different materials and created different textures, I felt the pieces were still unified because they were all woven on the same warp setting.

The last piece in this batch was woven using pinks for the red and blues to replicate faded colours. I also used linen which to me always has a very magical quality. This piece was made to sit over the top of the original pieces to create an extra layer, but also because it broke up the squareness of these aforementioned slabs.

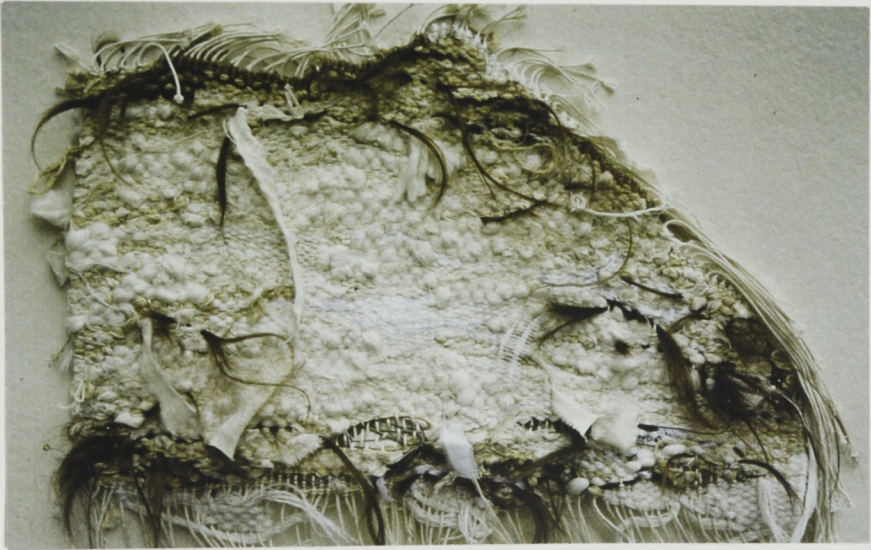
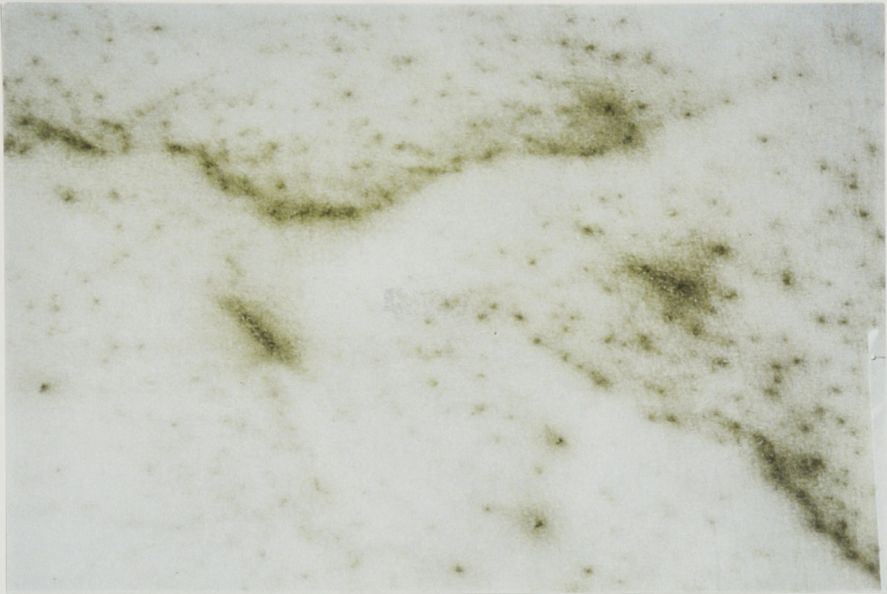
Having thought some more on this problem of overly unified fragments - part of the purpose of weaving fragments and having them vibrate against each other was to emphasise information gathered on different occasions - I used a 12 warp and wove a small fragment of the conscious' face. This warp setting was a lot finer so it allowed more detail. I also wove the piece tonally. I wasn't sure whether it should be used or discarded, it was an experiment.

On the other end of the scale, I warped up a fabric warp - each bead of weaving is approximately 2 cm (compared to the 5 mm of the 18 warp that I had used previously). It was fun weaving on that warp - but also kind of silly. I felt I was in Primary School again, using big chunky crayons so my clumsy hands could become used to holding a pen.

Not even half of the first drawing had been woven at this stage, but I felt as if the first piece had enough information to communicate notions of disconnectedness. The drawing was only a starting point and I knew what I left out would speak as strongly to the viewer as what I included. Absence is as intriguing as presence, but also too much information denies the viewer space to create their own interpretations.

Stage 2 - The Compost Heap

One day walking through the ANU Campus I discovered the most beautiful stretch of cracked pavement. The shapes formed by the fractures reminded me of my tapestry fragments. I decided to make rubbings of the path with charcoal and weave the fragments. I began to feel that my Hero Epic should come down off the wall and onto the floor. Apart from wanting to disrupt the gallery process, particularly the idea that objects are art when hung on the wall (does tapestry become rug when it's placed on the floor?) I was transfixed by the idea of the path as a concept. To some extent, I was influenced by Merryn Jones' red carpet. I also wanted the Hero Epic to come towards and confront the viewer saying: 'This could easily refer to something in your life.' The path would become an obstacle, preventing the close examination that seems mandatory when looking at textiles.



I started making the rubbings using charcoal, but it left a black smudgy mess, totally failing to capture the subtleties of the cracked concrete. So I grabbed the nearest thing at hand, which happened to be a handful of dirt. As it had been raining the earth was damp but not muddy. After experimentation, I perfected the technique. What I produced was the most astounding thing; the rubbings looked like aerial-view sepia photographs of mountain ranges or river systems, or perhaps even marks that had been burnt in like a scorch mark. Even weirder than that was their resemblance to a series of works I had done in my final year at Monash, which I called *The Cartography Series*. I thought they were (and still think) extraordinarily beautiful things. I felt doubtful of my authorship over their creation, I felt I had to contribute a deliberate mark to call them my own.

With the onslaught of the maps, I wholeheartedly and enthusiastically abandoned my previous plan for *The Hero Epic* and formulated a new one. The new plan involved weaving tapestries based on the rubbings. In my mind's eye they were to be woven using a similar approach to that of the cartography series; integrated into the tapestries would be my deliberate mark - more self portraits. I played around with drawing onto an already rubbed paper and also rubbing over a previously drawn image, but neither of these approaches jelled.

At this time I came into contact with an answering machine message that said: 'Hi, you've called Mark, tell me who you are and I'll call you back'. This floored me - 'tell me who you are...' *'Who am I?'* I had an existentialist crisis everytime I heard these words. I posed myself more questions: 'What constitutes my identity and how can I communicate it, as everyone is responsible for their own perceptions, and perceives and relates through their own experience?' So I thought about it long and hard and answered myself with more questions:

I can tell you what I am called - a name given to me before I knew who I was - I am not singular in having that name. I can talk about my physical characteristics, but even those are handed down (I am told I have my mother's nose). There are the clothes I wear, the music I listen to, the things that I do - I AM A WEAVER, so is my neighbour and we are very different. Even the sum of all these things leaves so much unanswered; what I feel like, how do I smell, even what I taste or sound like, but they are judgments to

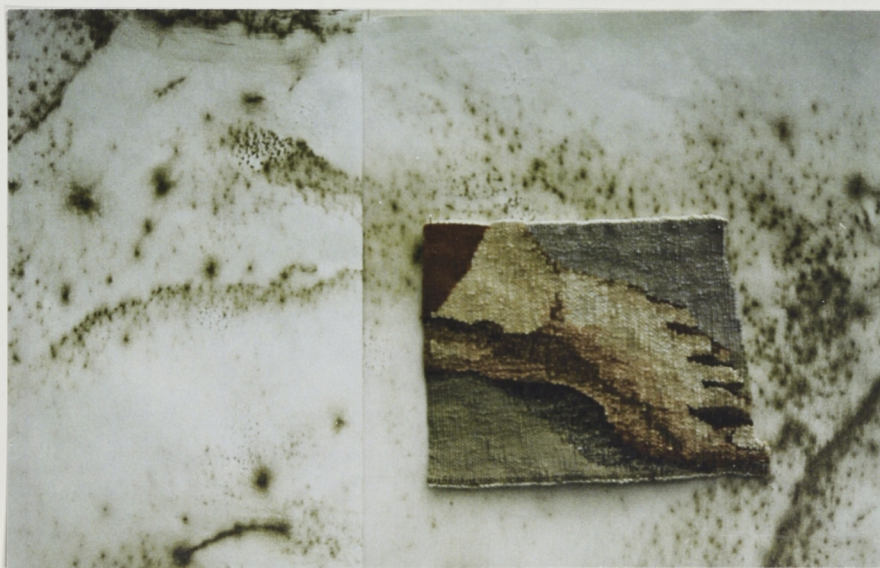
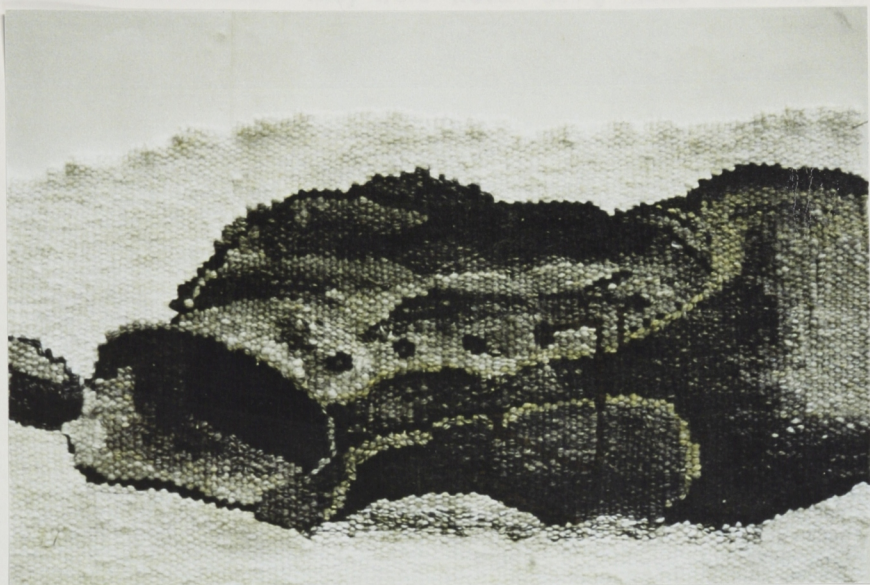
be measured against other judgments about other things. If I tell you who I am, I am offering a construct built on censorship; what do I want you to know about me and what pre-conceptions might I have about you that may colour my response? If I tell you who I am, am I just offering my opinion of myself?

A few days later I answered thus: All the ideas discussed regarding my identity are just signifiers that identify myself as distinct from other things. There is no absolute or definitive answer to the question, 'Who am I?', as my identity and all things that indicate or describe it are not stationary.

Now that I knew my identity wasn't solely tied up with my face, I began to draw sections of my body - fragments. Anything I do or see or more importantly what other people see describes something about myself. The position my body occupied spoke about my person even if you couldn't see a face. I drew my bare foot, my shoulder with the elbow turned in, a defensive gesture. Out of these fragments of body and the rubbings, I made a work for display in the cabinet downstairs in Textiles. At the time I saw it as a work entirely separate from my Hero Epic, but out of that work two things stood out. Instead of the maps and images being integrated, they were placed beside each other, the edges as abrupt as an A4 page. The second thing was my foot was placed firmly on the path.

This was around the time of my second seminar, I took slides of my previous tapestries placed on top of the rubbings, showing a slide of the Cartography Series to give an idea of what I envisaged happening. I was quite disgruntled when someone asked whether I had to weave from the rubbings at all? Of course I have to weave! I am a weaver!

I was thinking about the relationship between the first stage of my Hero Epic and the next stage - the path and thought that visually there was none. So I set about making some small fragments somewhere in between the style of the first section and how I thought the rubbings would be translated into tapestry, I came up with the 'Snow White Tapestries'. So called because of their



gleaming whiteness. They were woven using fabric and lots of different weaving techniques. I experimented with finishing them off and let the warp ends fly free - they look like protozoa or amoebas.

I then embarked on the first of what I call the 'Hairy Scary Monsters'. These were tapestries based on the rubbings. As this piece was all about the breaking down of ideas - the symbolic death of old pre-conceptions, I wanted to weave the hair I had cut off my head because it was symbolic of that change. I also wove in my guitar strings because they had broken and were of no further use in their current state. I asked Veronica for her warp ends which she gave me and more - Sarah's unused warp that she had thrown out, which was perfect.

These potential wefts all had their own histories. They speak not only about the extending of a things life by recycling but also about the all-manner of things which have influence on a person, however mundane or grand. Nothing escapes the psyche's attention; inspiration is found anywhere you look.

I wanted to experiment with making the marks of the map lines. I knew it would be a waste of effort trying to replicate their subtlety. Besides, why make a copy of something so beautiful when you can reinvent and create a whole new idea? I used my hair to suggest these marks and in another piece I painted the warps brown and left gaps in the weft for the brown to show through. These pieces were based on the shapes of the fragments of the pavement. I realised, given the time I had left, that it wouldn't be possible to weave the whole path. I opted to use a layer of the maps and place some woven fragments over the top.

These rubbings were ambiguous (part of the criticism, I received about the original plan was that it was didactic and left no room for interpretation) every person who saw them read them differently. I was delighted and intrigued, I realised that these maps spoke about the unconscious, and also about the journey between the first and third stages of my Epic. To discuss the conscious I returned to the fragments of my body.



I wove the foot on the finest warp setting I have ever worked on, a 12. I also wove with the most detail I ever have, just to see what would happen. I decided to weave the foot bare because it spoke about removing a layer, a discarded shoe to emphasise the point and a hand grasping something to signify the activity of reaching for something. The manner in which I approached these pieces was deliberate and considered; this is how I see the conscious functioning.

I had already discovered that the 'Snow White Tapestries' would not unite with the first stage of my epic. They sat next to each other like the most incongruous and ridiculous things you can imagine. So I left them; I finished the foot in time for my final review and I set up all my work to discuss presentation. I was trying really hard to link the first stage with the second. I experimented with intermingling them, rearranging *Stagnation*, but the two pieces would not connect.

I set up the floor with a layer of maps, interspersed were the drawings and the foot tapestry. I fiddled around with the 'Hairy Scary Monsters' and moulded them over books. I still had no clear idea of what the third and final stage would consist. It was a very distressing experience, it seemed like one confusing jumble. Ruth and Sharon calmed me down and helped me sort this from that; somehow the review managed to put everything back into perspective. The removal of the 'Hairy Scary Monsters' from the floor and onto the wall sparked the beginning of the third piece. It was great! I had not one but three separate but sequential pieces (I couldn't see it at the time).

It was important that there were three pieces. Three stages of the Hero Epic-Stagnation, Compost and Metamorphosis, beginning, middle and end corresponding to The Three Fates - Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. Or perhaps in the order of my epic - Preserver, Destroyer and Creator.

So now the first and third stages are linked by the path, an umbilical cord. Along the path are scattered like a trail of clues, the mostly regular symbolic representations of the conscious. First the drawings, then the tapestries to repeat and emphasise the cycle, and draw attention to their significance as symbols. I imagine them as punctuation, a rhythm that builds in intensity and then leaps up onto the wall. This is the configuration listed

in my original plan - vertical figures, horizontal figures and vertical figures again, still suggestive of a womb.

Metamorphosis

The final piece of *The Hero Epic* is the culmination of all I have learned during my year at the Canberra School of Art. In it the reunion of the conscious and unconscious takes place. This is signified by several things. Firstly it is woven as a whole piece, combining representations of conscious and unconscious. It is displayed on the wall, completing the uterine shape symbolic of women's creativity. The piece is shaped to reflect the outline of the first piece and provide a link with it; but reversed to suggest a reversal of ideals.

The final piece, *Metamorphosis*, was woven without a cartoon or any precise idea about its outcome. This was an important stage in the development of the body of work as I approached the piece relying entirely on my intuition. The piece was woven automatically, in the sense that the Surrealists used automatic writing and drawing to empty their subconscious's. This was possible because it was something I had been working towards all year; but not until I had worked through all the processes of developing and refining the other pieces and focussing on my ideas.

As I wanted to combine the chunkiness of *The Hairy Scary Monsters* and the fineness of the conscious pieces of the second piece, I used a twelve warp. This enabled me to utilise the fine setting to weave the conscious representations and weave three warps as one to produce the chunky unconscious texture. The interaction of the two sides of the psyche is suggested by areas where the fine weaving blends into the chunky. The warp threads are left dangling as they are just as important to the tapestry as the weft.

The images used in the fine weaving were arbitrarily chosen from drawings I included in the second stage; new drawings and the drawing 'Tell Me Who You Are'. It was not important that they were an accurate representation of the image, only that they existed as a representation of the conscious and to contrast the unconscious. The pattern of the shirt from the drawing 'Tell Me

'Who You Are' is repeated, becoming a mantra-like motif and may even be a symbol that emerges later in my work.

Once again I used hair to replicate the map lines. It was important that the map lines continued onto the third piece, not only because of their symbolic content, but also because they show that the journey has not finished. True to the ethic of the creator/destroyer, the concluding piece of the epic is also the beginning of whatever work I undertake next.

Conclusion

The weaving of the tapestries is the mirror through which events in my conscious and unconscious life are manifested. It is the interrelationship of the duality of conscious and unconscious that I am looking at. The first stage of my Hero Epic dealt with a dysfunctional relationship between conscious and unconscious. This is signified not only by the fragmentary nature of the piece, but also by the imagery and surface texture. The presence of images speaks about the conscious, while the textured surface is a reference to the unconscious. These are the ways in which each interprets and receives information. Combining both of these aspects within the same pieces blurs the distinction between conscious and unconscious and suggests that neither are able to function to their full capacity.

The second stage shows both forms co-existing but entirely self contained. As such each is a purer form. They function together by providing definition in each other as opposites. The third stage will intermingle the two forms again, but with a much more decisive and effective outcome.

The final piece is the culmination of all I have experienced, learnt and done during the last year. The piece is no longer physically fragmented. It is a unified piece. The conscious realism bleeds into the Unconscious Fibre Art Extravaganza. The piece is shaped to echo that of the first piece but reversed. It is about the opposite state of mind. The unconscious element will follow the

lines of the weft, (horizontal) and the conscious will follow the vertical lines of the warp.¹³

It is interesting that these roles will change when the piece is righted (it is woven on the side), and all it means is that the whole object cannot exist without either part. They are of equal importance. These pieces are all representations of the whole psyche.

Tracing their relationship to the unconscious, the artist can gain an understanding of the personal and social meanings of interesting body of work.

According to Jung, archetypes of the psyche are found in the myths and legends of every culture, and individual persons, each with their own set of archetypes. They are the patterns, symbols, and configurations of the unconscious which are the basis of the conscious mind. The unconscious is made up of various elements, including instincts and archetypes, which are the basic patterns of the psyche.

The areas in which Jung's theory is most applicable are:

- the human mind as a dynamic system
- the shadow (opposite of the ego)
- dual realities and interrelationships
- development of a personal approach

Research and Working Methods

The construction of the piece is a process of self and working archetypes of substance. The primary goal is to create an experience for the viewer that is meaningful and transformative. The artist's role is to create a work that is both a reflection of the unconscious and a statement of the conscious mind. The work is a dynamic system that is constantly evolving and changing. The artist's role is to create a work that is both a reflection of the unconscious and a statement of the conscious mind. The work is a dynamic system that is constantly evolving and changing. The artist's role is to create a work that is both a reflection of the unconscious and a statement of the conscious mind.

13

Original proposal

Overview

The essence of my proposal lies in the questions: **Who am I? Where am I going? And What will I do when I get there?** I am seeking answers to these questions amongst Carl Jung's theories regarding the collective unconscious and archetypes, and tracing their relationship to my identity. Through this I hope to gain an understanding of my personal unconscious and develop an interesting body of work.

According to Jung, archetypal truths are to be found in the myths and legends of every culture, and individual versions inside every person's head. Acting on the feminine principle, eros (relatedness), I propose to construct a macrocosm of my unconscious archetypal world. This will be embodied as a piece or pieces that is made up of several smaller tapestries, interwoven and cross-references using similar weaving techniques or warp settings.

The areas on which I intend to focus are as follows:

- the hero (as a feminine archetype)
- the shadow (representing an unseen or cosmic force)
- dual realities and interconnectedness
- development of a personal symbolism

Research and Working Process

The construction of the pieces is a reference to cloth and weaving analogies of existence ('the tapestry of life', what a tangled web we weave" etc.). The smaller pieces can be seen as metaphors for the elements that make up this life, in my case, the life or world of my unconscious. These small pieces will act as the thread or yarn that makes up a tapestry - they will retain their own identity, yet function as an integral part of a bigger whole. Aesthetically, the work will rely on the conventions of a patchwork quilt, ideas crossing over, and linking up with the aid of supplementary warp and weft, and woven extensions that will be woven into corresponding sections.

The starting point for my research is reading Jung, (books such as Man and his Symbols¹⁴ provide an overview of his work, allowing me to focus on the areas that appeal to me most) and myths and fairytales from a wide variety of sources and cultures. The second stage of research will be reading interpretations of Jung from a feminist perspective, and fairytales such as those collected and interpreted by Angela Carter. I will also record images from my dreams through drawing and writing.

I have been looking at Scandinavian tapestry weavers such as Gerhard Munthe and Frida Hansen, but I am interested in the work of Hannah Ryggen particularly. Although she had formal training as a painter, she was a self taught weaver, the strong naive quality of her works reminds me of the Flemish tapestries of the Middle Ages, such as "Wild Woman and the Unicorn". The rawness of her work and the ambiguously constructed spaces of her tapestries appeal to me as they offer possibilities in approaching my work.

These ideas will be further developed through drawing and the weaving of samples, as both are suited to working through ideas rapidly. Drawing will be used as a focus for meditation and introspection, a key for accessing my unconscious. It will examine the 'what'; weaving samples will examine the 'how'.

Methods and Resources

Texture is an important component of my work, I intend to use a variety of materials such as ink, collage, acrylic paint and pastels in the making of mixed media drawings. In weaving I will continue using fabric and textured yarns, but also explore the use of different weaves (such as twill, soumak knots) to achieve surface texture. I will also experiment with shaped tapestries, these will have woven extensions which will be woven into other tapestries as a means of attaching them. Supplementary warp and weft will also be experimented with as surface design and as a means of attaching pieces. As I find cotton and linen preferable to wool for weaving, I will learn and experiment with the techniques necessary for dyeing them.

¹⁴ Jung, Carl; von Franz, M.L.; Henderson, Joseph; Jacobi, Jolande; Jaffe, Aniela: Man and His Symbols, Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group Inc, New York, 1968

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Education

1996 - 97 Candidate for Graduate Diploma of Art
Canberra School of Art , Institute of the Arts, ANU

1993 - 95 Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art)
Monash University

Group Exhibitions

1996 Look Me In the Eye, Photospace, Canberra School of Art

1995 Graduating Students Exhibition, Monash Gallery Space, Monash
University

Lucato Peace Prize, Monash Gallery Space, Monash University

Monash Open Day Exhibition, Monash Gallery Space, Monash
University

Proxima Proxima, Monash Gallery Space, Monash University

CD Exhibition, Monash Gallery Space, Monash University

1994 Girls own, Linden Gallery, St Kilda Arts Centre

Lucato Peace Prize, Monash Gallery Space, Monash University

Monash Open Day Exhibition, Monash Gallery Space, Monash
University

Proxima, Monash Gallery Space, Monash University

Awards

1994 Wondoflex Tapestry Award for Innovation

Professional Activities

1994 Work Experience, Victorian Tapestry Workshop