

VISTAPHILIA, A SPRITUAL AESTHETIC LANDSCAPE MOTIVATIONS - THE RUSTIC AND WILD

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Quote from this manuscript:

The topic of spiritual motivations arising from rustic environments is directly pertinent to the condition of humans in this time of globalization, political unrest, reemerging tribalism, religious dogma, degradation of living conditions on our globe, plus scientific and Humanistic understanding of our place on this small unique planet.

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LANDSCAPE MOTIVATIONS - THE RUSTIC AND WILD

Vistaphilia definition:

A human emotional response to landscape views which inspire awe and perceptions akin to veneration, wonder, astonishment, evoking one's kinship with something extraordinary, mysterious, sacred and sublime.
GJG

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The Rural, the Wild, and the Spiritual in Art of Wisconsin

(How environmental experiences mold creative output)

1. INTRODUCTION, SHARED VISTAPHILIA AND PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT

After a long period of observation and unfocused thought, the motivation to organize emerging ideas about matters of significance in my life, which are obviously matters of significance shared in the lives of fellow artists for decades, manifested in a desire to express them. As with other gestation periods, a confluence of influences came together as I went about creating my own art objects, observing the work of others while actively interacting with various art professionals in my regional art culture. Eventually artistic preoccupations and thoughts required organization in order to reach a better understanding about what I and others around me were doing. A personal critical mass had been reached, with this manuscript being part of the result.

It might be curious that I am not personally a landscape painter, and only a bit of a landscape photographer, but I am a sculptor who has utilized human created objects set in natural environments to create site specific installations (*which I call outstallations*). Essentially I have created assemblages which incorporate outdoor environments as a very significant part of the whole sculpture, which then are documented in digital photographs that can be called landscapes.

I have witnessed for years the work of fellow Wisconsin artists, many who derived their independent visual language from the same sources that I have, and from whom I have gained insights and inspiration. It is those regional artists with whom I have shared the same air and impulse, even though their art work was very different than my personal output. The ubiquity of landscape as subject in one form or another has always been and remains an integral part of exhibitions today. Historically and contemporarily landscape imagery is a naturally accepted and expected part of the regional art culture of WI and the Midwest, as it may be worldwide.

And since my personal formative associations and firsthand experience with artists and art from my region were important in formative years (*at least as important to my personal growth as the more remote relationships I have had with artists from outside my region encountered in literature, art history, and exhibitions*) I must credit landscape art-making as playing an important role in my upbringing. It is fellow artists with whom I have had actual contact that stand philosophically with me shoulder to shoulder, despite any obvious visual differences in our work.

This geographic region, labeled as some sort of "Upper Midwest", delineated by those who historically gave it a name and who might today have but a foggy outsider's idea about it, is the environment in which I and many fellow artists were born and intellectually formed.. It is those around me who have observed and experienced

the more wild spaces of the upper Midwest who likely have the same “Vistaphilia”, with similar reactions to, involvement in, and love for our rustic environments.

This online Merriam-Webster dictionary provides this definition of *environment* that comfortably defines for me Humankind’s physical and cultural place on Earth at any time:

2 a: *the complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival* **b:** *the aggregate of social and cultural conditions that influence the life of an individual or community*

To put it simply, I postulate what may be all too obvious, that there has continued to be an important movement in contemporary fine art, grounded in human presence in wild places, that has remained “largely uninterpreted” by contemporary authors, which has been understudied, ignored and unreported by the mainstream media, by art critics, historians and scholarly students of contemporary art. This is the *spiritual effect* that environment has upon the attitudes and creativity of artists. The word, **Vistaphilia**, for this author, is a useful one word shorthand for a lengthier description just as Biophilia or bibliophilia have earned their places in other discourse.

This Vistaphilia is aroused by sensitivity to the environment, a response of feeling we call “numinous”, a sense of something “behind”, within, integral with the natural environment and wild scenes that we observe. This awareness would likely stimulate thoughts and discussions of the supernatural, the mysterious, a sense of something diaphanous existing behind the visible...perhaps involved in the “creation of” all that is physical. There can be creative expressions in the form of paint on canvas, photographic images, and sculpture aroused as a result of what might be called “higher emotions”.

Vistaphilia is a metaphysical response grown out of deeply felt experiences in rural and wild places from encounters that motivate artists to produce work which better enables them to feel they are an integral part of the natural environment. To better understand the workings of Nature they attempt consciously or unconsciously to become linked to Nature in what is a spiritual experience of “being there”, of having a form of intercourse, and then embracing inspiration to create art. They are part of an ancient shaping process, a nexus binding all of us to Nature.

2. SOME DEFINITIONS

Let me clarify the use of some terms in this discussion. First, *Vistaphilia* is a name not unlike other recently popularized words like Biophilia (see E. O. Wilson). It denotes what is at least affection for, and interest in, the physical spaces we observe and of which we are actually a part. I suggest it implies that if artists recognize kinship with the environs that surround us many or them, consciously or unconsciously, attempt to praise, learn about, become intimate with and learn about that landscape. We respond as lovers, bonding with

what we love. Transcendentalism and metaphysics are integral when we speak of Vistaphilia, and I suggest the art making process involving interpretations of landscape vistas is a form of spiritual communion...perhaps even some form of "worship".

I also propose that we focus on the word "Rustic" in this context, as very basic definitions for this word suggest it is of, or relating to, the countryside. The sources of inspiration for Vistaphilia are not urban nor suburban, for certainly they are from outside city limits where the rural and wild still survive. One definition of rustic that is *not relevant* to this discussion is a suggestion that the art arising from rustic surroundings is unsophisticated or unpolished. On the contrary, the artists and intellects behind it are clearly sophisticated, subtle and thoughtful, but geared to the harmonics of Nature rather than those of cities.

Use of "*Intuitive*" is fitting as part of the response people have to rustic places. There are the elements of Nature, its beauties and characteristics, which are not always easy to express in spoken words, but which somehow are communicated in poetry or visual art. Undoubtedly there were visceral reactions and intuitive responses of emotion caused by natural settings ever since humans began their journey on this planet.

One summary definition of "intuitive" is this offered by the current online dictionary, "yourdictionary.com":

1. **a.** *The act or faculty of knowing or sensing without the use of rational processes; immediate cognition.* **b.** *Knowledge gained by the use of this faculty; a perceptive insight.*
2. *A sense of something not evident or deducible; an impression.*

One more potentially confusing word in this discussion which might be problematic is "*Modern*". In art history

The Modern Period has become defined as a style or movement of the early to mid-20th century, with certain

appearances and motivations that are peculiar to that time and/or which come to be applied when describing

contemporary work that is somehow influenced by that modern period.

While many of us use "modern" to simply mean the stuff of our culture that is advanced and up to date, *current*

that is, there remains that lingering attachment to the defined 20th Century Modern Period. In its place as a substitution “*Contemporary*” works well, as it seems to have little or no connotations or implications to mislead us. The term allows us to simply accept that whatever is under discussion occurs in the more immediate time frame surrounding us, of which we are an integral part.

The men and women working in outdoor environments, creating landscape art, inspired by what they see and feel in nature, are of the same “contemporary” moment as painters of abstract and nonobjective work. These landscape creators have had broad opportunities and experiences to study all of art history as well as contemporaneous art and thought. They are advanced thinkers who have made their choices from among many philosophies and themes, having the advantage of worldwide views of art history, cultures and chronicles. They are very much part of the contemporary era, not passé nor outdated or irrelevant. They are of the “*now*”, and like other long enduring forms of expression, they seize upon both historic and modern inventions to express themselves.

So how to classify this this form of expression aroused by Vistaphilia...the intuitive response to the landscape, to the wild, the rustic, the environments outside our cities? Can it be called a movement, school, idiom, vernacular, aesthetic, or sensibility. Because the physical form or style of expression varies from artist to artist I suggest that perhaps the choice of “*Aesthetic*” is helpfully interpretive and useful as a descriptive word. The online Merriam – Webster dictionary offers this agreeable definition of aesthetic:

1 plural but singular or plural in construction: a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art, and taste and with the creation and appreciation of beauty

2: a particular theory or conception of beauty or art: a particular taste for or approach to what is pleasing to the senses and especially sight

Who and what is representative of the Vistaphilia Aesthetic under discussion? These criteria are my own:

1. *The works are inspired by the rural, the natural conditions usually outside our cities and towns...basically nature and its organic and cosmic processes.*
2. *The works suggest, at least, that there are some things going on behind the obviously visible scenes which are the underlying animating forces of nature that are sometimes orally hard to define and translate.*
3. *The artists successfully use a medium to represent that which is not immediately easy to understand, more diaphanous, less physically definable or even demonstrable. These painted vistas are attempts to represent less obvious elements that are more evanescent in the moment, but which ultimately represent some "thing" which is more permanent than our brief mortal human existence.*

Call it transcendent, call it metaphysical, call it a mythical God. When a receptive sensitive human body and psyche comes in proximity with difficult to define mysterious forces of Nature, sometimes there are attempts to respond out of awe, emotions or basic intellectual inquiry. One is "moved". For some artists, what follows the environmental encounter is the creation of art which attempts to capture the moment, the feelings aroused, and to blend...become part of the place and experience...maybe capturing some part of a mysterious force that might be behind it all. Are we attempting to define, or just better understand, the indefinable?

Due to training and experience, the actual physical form of expression and practical choice of medium varies from artist to artist, resulting in a dissimilar physical appearances, or "styles". What is shared by "*landscape artists*" is not the method and style of interpreting the natural world. Rather there is a shared motivation and response, a desire to express in some art form what has been instilled by encounters with a rustic environment.

3. A BROADER ENCOMPASSMENT, BEYOND THE FLY-OVER STATES

The nature of response to the rural and wild is not merely a "local" phenomenon, but one that naturally arises wherever creative, thoughtful and sensitive people are bound by common experiences and a shared motivating environment. In my case the environment I deal with is located in the Northern and Central United States – an area not currently recognized for its importance by art critics and in art history (*with a few exceptions*).

An example of how rustic materials and themes can touch the chords of widely separated persons is seen in this quote from the book, "Rustic Traditions", by Ralph Kylloe, which deals with the history of furnishings made from natural elements such as wooden branches, bark, animal horns and antlers. These are real objects plucked from wild places, and while not perhaps defined as fine art paintings or sculpture, they do cause resonant responses.

"Many people who see rustic for the first time find it to be trendy, while others view it in philosophical terms: It inspires them. Some rustic furniture makers...recently exhibited their work in Japan. Modern Japanese people, who had never been exposed to rustic furniture before, were immediately drawn to it. They touched it repeatedly and spent an inordinate amount of time sitting in the chairs and commenting on how beautiful everything was."

While I will address the subject of “regionalism” later in this composition in two supplemental articles, I will relate some thoughts immediately as they do have relevance to definitions and pertinent conditions experienced by artists who do not reside in established important media and art centers.

Generally speaking, in terms of our nation’s art culture, many of us are dependent upon major media market focal points and publishing strongholds on the East and West sea coasts to keep us abreast of what is “hot”, being discussed and exhibited, and what is ostensibly important in Art. Those centers would be New York and Los Angeles, and the satellites which orbit and imitate them. Current US art history tends to focus on what has happened in the East and West (*again with some exceptions, of course*).

Because a natural tendency in art history would be to continue a linear progression of study and commentary, thereby following an already established acceptable path in the evolutionary links of 20th Century Modern and Post Modern “expression”, some areas of study that have not achieved much notoriety will tend to be left out. Landscape art, with its long history and continual adherence to the same or similar outdoor subjects, can be overlooked...especially contemporary expressions not capturing the topical lime light.

Because major marketing centers tend to be outside of the so called “fly over” states, Midwest activities and developments can suffer from lack of attention by the national media and can be peripheral at best in popularizing media discussion. Consequently developments occurring mid-continent United States can remain marginal in their impact, largely unrecognized nationally, and not adopted as relevant outside our wrongfully perceived “unevolved” environment which lies within the fuzzy boundary lines of what is called the Midwest. Denigrating terms such as provincial can arise and hardly be objective. Other regional art forms besides landscape expressions can be thought of as not progressive, parochial and unimportant, when not spoken of in the “right” venues.

There are connotations and misperceptions of the word, “regional”, a term that some immediately interpret as provincial and which can also be used in a disparaging fashion. Maybe it is because to the disinterested, uninvolved or “differently evolved” observers of a Middle America there appears a link to already established conservative art histories not attuned to the cutting edge and avant-garde. Is landscape expression included among that which is avant-garde? I tend to believe that is a rare inclusion.

It seems we must raise the question as to how relevant landscape art is to modern life today? Is the art intellectually driven and progressive, or is it merely an attempt to revive tired expressions of which we are already too familiar? Time and open minded thought must be given to resolve such questions.

I take the position that Vistaphilia, the “Intuitive Rustic Spritual Aesthetic” under discussion here, is largely the result of highly evolved progressive thought as well as high quality execution and techniques by intellectually evolved artists. The topic of spiritual motivations arising from rustic environments is directly pertinent to the condition of humans in this time of globalization, political unrest, reemerging tribalism, religious dogma, degradation of living conditions on our globe, plus scientific and Humanistic understanding of our place on this small unique planet.

4. MOTIVATIONS

For some time in American “popular culture” there has been interest in the rural and the rustic which has deeply permeated the fields that have come to be known as the decorative arts, interior design, artifacts, furniture, and architectural design of the 20th and 21st centuries. In these there has been a clearly defined movement to incorporate rustic elements drawn from Nature and its wild evolved processes outside of human interference. This movement has generally gained the name of “Rustic Modern” in the commercial marketplace.

In fact, even during Mid-Victorian times there was also a movement titled the “Rustic” seen in interior decoration and architectural design. Historically, there has been interest among the wealthy classes to go to the “country”, to their retreats and cottages, where they partook of a more rudimentary, albeit temporary and sometime shallow form of interaction with more natural environments.

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries there has been some sort of boom in the use of “Adirondack” and hickory furniture, weathered wood, distressed paint and finishes, and outdoor designs derived from studies of natural surroundings, wild things and evolved weathered materials. There is a “cabin culture” that has existed side by side the technical industrial machine age environments usually thought of as being citified and progressive. One can find these rustic objects on the pages of design magazines and in furniture stores as consumers attempt to bring into their homes some elements from the rural, the country and the so called primitive. A term used often is “shabby chic”. Some city dwellers feel the need to escape to rustic environs, or at least bring some part of those outdoor more wild environs home.

Of course the inspiration of Nature has always been seen in the fine arts, whether in prehistoric cave paintings, bucolic scenes of European art history, natural influences feeding the Art Nouveau style, 19th Century representations of the US frontier and its newly discovered places, or the abundance of generic landscape paintings all around us today.

And as I reiterate, Nature in its processes of growth, evolution and decay, its “vistas”, still serves some progressive contemporary artists as food for intellectual, intuitive and artistic action, resulting in visual

statements about what is beyond the apparently physical, what is not in plain sight, with implications and directions arising therefrom. We see current artists incorporating the processes of nature in their Vistaphilia driven creations. There are various Earth Art projects in natural places, especially witnessed in the newsworthy developments during the 60's and 70's. Today there are portions of natural environments, trees, plants and dirt brought into fine art museums, often serving as bold contrasts to the traditional content and appearance of white sterile galleries. *The processes of planting, nurturing and growth are part of contemporary art expression.*

Amidst the many expressions of contemporary fine art, including the growing myriad of technically inspired works that draw on use of computers and software or industrial subjects and methods, there remains Vistaphilia to inspire...a territory, a sphere, a domain, a school, a genre, influenced by natural settings and rustic environments. More than a few artists have settled into modes of expression that depend on their past or present connection with Nature. The work of these artists is allied thru subject and sources of inspiration which arise from similar experience, though not expressed by shared joined manifestos or planned group organization.

These artists are intimately sensitive to natural organic processes of growth, florescence, death and decay. They have felt motivational visceral experiences in natural rural settings, and despite their knowledge of other artistic developments going on around them in galleries, museums and publications, it is their intimate personal background in rural settings that serves as their wellspring. What they have seen and recalled provides some important "centering" in their personal lives, no matter what medium of expression they use. One might use the term "spiritual", though that does not necessarily imply the existence of a deity in the traditional sense.

They are college educated. They are attuned to developments in the fine arts, in technological advancements, and to what "fresh meat" is being touted as new, daring and advanced in fine arts museums and publications. These persons are aware of the contemporary art movements of past and current times, as well as recent technical methods and the art being shown and touted in major centers and cities. They have chosen to express their Vistaphilia by drawing from their own inspirational environmental histories...those including the rural, the woodlands, lakes, fields and farms.

5. NOSTALGIA? ROMANTICISM? TECHNOLOGY?

There may be some degree of nostalgia and romanticism as motivation for some persons seek to recreate or re-experience what once existed or was felt in their lives, or which may still exist in circumstances remote from their day to day living conditions. Some sense of elements transcendent, mysterious, and the invisible underlying forces which unite the Universe at all levels, course thru their visual expressions. There is the

unknown, the mystique of our natural evolution on this planet...and the fantastic possibilities just outside our conscious knowing. There is invisible gravity, unrecognized science, life giving electricity, unexpected realities and maybe things magical awaiting discovery. There is the abrupt undeniable end to the life of individuals, but there are also both physical and immaterial bridges which links all things, past, present and future. And staying within the realms of recently espoused scientific possibilities, there might be parallel universes and underlying synchronized patterns to all existence.

Artists' choice of subject matter is not necessarily a reaction to, or rejection of, technology, nor a refutation of popular and changing topical culture...though in some cases, it might be. They simply have found that their experiences and associations in natural rural settings are of enormous significance in their lives. Vistaphilia in the Midwest and Northern Lands, their response to woodlands, fields, lakes, rivers and farms, the elemental forces of Nature as experienced in rural areas, have infiltrated their souls and serve as animating forces. Some of the experiences in formative periods have bled deeply into their psyches, giving them identification with Life, with a capital L, and their place on this planet, which have proved to be manifestly important, perhaps superior, to other intellectual experiences, influences and subcultures.

"The extent to which we sever our connections with the land is the extent to which we disconnect ourselves from our souls." pg. 24, "Rural Wisdom, Time-Honored Values of the Midwest", by Jerry Apps, 1998, Amherst Press, Amherst, WI

Their inspirations and histories are expressed in their artmaking without attachment to what others are producing in important cultural urban centers. They are making their own art history outside the gravity pull of what is current in the major art markets. These artists may find philosophical links to the 19th Century Transcendentalists, with or without associated religious beliefs. They may be aligned with Midwest Naturalists like John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Joseph Wood Krutch and others who have processed thru higher education and still come out the other side as deeply moved appreciators of the rural and Natural, experiencing something spiritual in the rural and rustic.

A study of the artists' individual histories will reveal their evolution and experiments with subjects and materials akin to other contemporary artists and movements. Their choices of art medium, technique and format, may arrive in part due to their classic education in the fine arts. Whether the choice is paint, photography, digital manipulation or sculpture, each artist has worked thru explorations and settled upon a personal visual language. Each has evolved, made choices, and found a comfort level allowing personal satisfying expression.

To be clear, the artistic medium is not the message. Artists can and do utilize new technical developments and methods, plus a variety of traditional mediums, to explore their relationships with the rural and rustic. They may employ photography and its manipulation, and/or other modern mechanical and computer related

developments, and/or traditional paints or sculpture to probe Nature and their reactions to it.

Let us also recognize that these artists need not spend their entire lives in rural and wild places to work in this genre. As with writers such as Joseph Wood Krutch and Wisconsin's Aldo Leopold, artists may be inspired by visits of any length to the rural and wild, but for practical reasons they need to return to cities where they conduct the necessary business of their lives. However, despite the limits on time spent in more wild surroundings, it is even a brief presence there that reinforces and refreshes their insights and motivations. It need not be quantity, but rather the quality and stirred deep memory, that serves as the guiding spirit for such people.

To mention only a few WI acquaintances as examples of artists who do not live entirely in rustic places, Wisconsinite Tom Uttech, who does live in a rural farming area, usually spends weeks annually in remote wild northern country being joined with Nature as best possible, but due to the professional needs associated with his very successful painting career, he returns to his studio and deals with a demanding exhibition schedule. Rita Crooks, who lives and is active in the northern Wisconsin community of Wausau, also retreats to a cottage and is inspired as she drives in her automobile by the visual deterioration and loss of rural farm architecture. Chris Buth Furness and Colette Ody Smith spend most of their time in the city of Milwaukee dealing with business and personal matters, but the limited time they find in more natural surroundings reestablishes their links to Nature. Richard Quinney documents in photographs a rural life and objects that reveal experiences from his rural upbringing. For many more artists I do not mention, who cannot find much time to "merge" with the rural and wild, it is the powerful memory of those places and the nostalgic feelings that arise, which serve as the impetus to use visual arts materials to express deeply motivated inner lives linked to the rural, rustic environment.

A short list of other WI artists who are inspired by the wilds include people who were part of an exhibit held in 2006 at the Museum of Wisconsin Art, West Bend: Barry Roal Carlsen, John S. Miller, Charles Munch, David Peacock, Vicki Reed, Mai Wyn Schantz, and Jim Stewart. Tellingly, that exhibit was titled "Up North, Interpretations of North Woods Culture and Mythology". Their styles and interpretations may differ, but their inspiration remains embedded in rustic places and their own private Vistaphilia. There are hundreds of other Wisconsin and Midwest artists who are so motivated. Just visit any art fair, gallery or museum, and one will undoubtedly encounter some form of landscape expression, whether by one's standards successful or not.

Environment, experience and our Vistaphilia, can lead us to other forms of expression such as poetry, a medium that can sympathetically blend mood, intuitiveness, art and intellectual exploration. I quote this poem,

"Strata Formation" by Douglas Lockwood, from the periodical "Every Day Art", Volume 35, Spring, 1957.

"I paint a tree – I think of how the roots go deep, deep into the earth. How the tree grows year by year toward the sky. How it stands with the winds.

I paint a mountain – I think of its age – the strata formations or what grows on the mountain.

I paint the ocean – I think of its vastness – its power – its wetness.

I paint the fog – I think of its fresh moistness – its stillness – its mystery.

I am the thing that I am painting at the time of painting."

And this quote from Walt Whitman:

"There was a child went forth every day,

And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became,

And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,

Or for many years or stretching cycles of years."

Beyond the poetic, it is not my intention to expand upon theories concerning potential relevance of this Rustic Spiritual Genre, landscape Vistaphilia, within the broader context of environment studies, conservation and scientific theories. However I do suggest these areas are tempting for further theoretical exploration. The motivations, intentions, intuitive response and knowledge of some of these artists may have some relevance to current discussions about society's perception of the environment, and peripherally to scientific theories ranging thru string theory, multiple dimensions, gene memory and things abstract.

6. FOLK OF THE RURAL AND CITY, AND ART THAT GETS NOTICED

Concerning Vistaphilia experienced by "the folk", some caste of what are considered "common" people, it is thru shared basic human experiences in natural settings that persons of all ilk are linked in response. Artists who produce landscapes are united with one another and to "the folk". Awe arises out of what Earth's environment provides naturally and commonly, which can be shared by all feeling and sensitive humans, especially those close to Nature where many of the rural common folk reside. However, it is up to the artist to create something out of this love of views, this Vistaphilia. It is history, training, genius, promotion and publicity that establishes in culture what is acceptable, what is exceptional and what gets noticed.

Perhaps it is this core of shared commonality that has awakened us in the last century to the authentic qualities of work by those given the titles Outsiders and Naives, plus the broadening acceptance of art from other formerly called "primitive" cultures. This interest has brought their work into the mainstream of art history study,

drastically affecting the nature, appearance and philosophies of modern 20th and 21st Century art.

To be sure, there are common folk in urban areas as well. A recent statistic quoted on Public Radio and available elsewhere stated that about 80% of Americans live in city and urban environments. I propose it would be a very interesting study in a large urban setting to see how much of the contemporary fine art exhibited in cities relates to, and arises out of, experiences of the common city folk. What portion of art which is exhibited there is a product of the streets and the underlying city culture? Does that which is shown there represent the authentic heart and core of its local environment? And to tie such a study to the subject of this manuscript, how does authentic "city art" grown in an urban environment compare to that risen in what I describe as a rustic spiritual one? What vistas that motivate do city folk encounter?

Of course we can find examples of authentic inspiring models drawn from the day to day big city culture in artists of the Ash Can School, Social Realists, urban photography, guerilla and graffiti art, Basquiat, et al. There are those who brought basic deeply felt real experiences of city life into galleries. Art history was made thru the influence of these urban artists with their work being exposed and discussed in art critiques and historical texts. I won't pretend to have knowledge enough to plumb a major city's art culture beyond what are my own simple observations. Art raised out of city dwelling is, perhaps, a near opposite to the subject of the form of Vistaphilia fashioned in this composition.

The influence of the media, publicity and vocal support by experts lifts discussion of art to visible levels resulting in exposure and success. We should recognize that it is hardly the case that art which might be important, historically significant and aesthetically successful, always gets the attention deserved in its time. This is especially true when the means to broadcast the quality of art objects is not available in a community, largely due to a media that does not speak about it, or one which is biased against regional art. Hopefully there will always be scholars who mine the vast fields of neglected art which spread from time's horizon to horizon...and who give "coverage" to that which was otherwise neglected.

However, I also recognize that this phenomenon of neglect is a universally historical given, no matter what culture and what time period one discusses. From Leonardo to Picasso to Pollack, the place to make a substantial impact and get into the record books is where the power of money, politics, prestige and media reside. While some art will always be made for market consumption no matter where you are, thereby modified to satisfy the tastes of existing popular markets, both the artists and viewers should consider to what extent the "underlying motivations", the inspiration for making the art, remains in the actual final work. That goes for either environment, urban or rural, with their differing sources of inspiration.

Still, I am inclined to ask the reader, do subjects derived from the experience of city dwelling have any innate superiority to subjects derived from rural and rustic settings? I think not. I am of the opinion that is a good thing to have art grow in all settings. But as I have pointed out earlier, when it comes to publicity, prestige and public commentary, it is a matter of who has access to the influential press, the politics, and the power that determines what gets into the media, locked into art history texts, and what garners the fleeting attention of both aesthetic appreciators and cash investors seeking safe use for both their intellectual and monetary capital. Is landscape art inferior? Superior? Is the long tradition of creating landscapes inspired by outdoor environments static? The answers are both no. There are always new ways of expressing ones motivations with media and fresh techniques. Vistaphilia may be the starting point, but new means and methods as well as old ones need not be exhausted.

For good or bad, as the viewer may argue, the theme I discuss here, this Rustic Intuitive Aesthetic, motivated by Vistaphilia, exists with or without a lot of national publicity or media notice. It arises out of deeply felt experiences and beliefs that can originate in our own connected midcontinent Environs and minimally some of it is authentic and valuable. I submit that despite the Midwest regional art promotional systems which have evolved in place, scattered and frail in power compared to those in large influential cities having more media to hawk their wares, the landscape art under discussion here is as important a part of this nation's art history as urban subjects. Its roots are in natural surroundings with first hand experiences that may be numinous, at least authentic and deeply felt. This is not a small feature of any art.

In 2006 a photograph of a moonlit pond by Wisconsin native, Edward Steichen, sold for over three million dollars, setting a new auction record for a photograph. This view was simply a moonlit landscape view caught at a certain time with a photographic device and technique. Edward was born and lived his first two decades in Milwaukee but moved on to New York where he tied in with Steiglitz and where he gained a national reputation. Had he made that photograph while remaining in Wisconsin, would it have achieved the same price, and would his genius have been recognized? Georgia O'Keefe left Wisconsin before she turned 20, and also made her way to New York where she and her work also caught the eye of Steiglitz. It is possible to find many artists who began working in the state of Wisconsin, and more broadly the Midwest, who had to leave in order to gain their recognition and reputations. Regional marketplaces are often too limited in numbers and influence of collectors and patrons to provide financial and critical success at levels desired by many artists. This is and has been the nature of national art markets and art cultures historically. Elements such as concentrations of population, education, history, traditions, and media all come into play...to include prestige, power and politics. The "center" of the art world has changed from place to place, time to time.

It seems to me that it is difficult, if not impossible, foolish if not fantasy, to attempt to change the mindset and conditions of established dominating markets. And it is silly to expect national reputations will emerge outside of one's familiar realm unless artists exhibit their art elsewhere, or unless those from commanding centers focus on art from outside their immediate environment. However, I also do think it is possible to at least raise the level of discourse about regional art at both the local and national levels, thereby gaining some greater purchase in fields of art criticism and history. One is assured of 100% failure if one does not try.

That task must include: (a) begin locally with an increasing chorus of supporters, museums, institutions and media championing work from the region without unconsciously having self-fulfilling low expectations. (b) Some national figure or institution must recognize the possibilities inherent in a search thru the art of regions where searches are rarely done. (c) What is considered regional art must be carried to the centers that would otherwise ignore it. (d) Associated with the previous points, there must be media attention, publicity, promotion, promotion, promotion. With the decline in influence of hard copy newspapers and paper publications, the Internet has emerged and must be used to the best possible advantage, as well as ever present TV and radio.

While I speak to a particular genre of some art in this region, this stuff motivated by Vistaphilia, let us also acknowledge that the art rooted in the rustic and wild is but one part of Midwestern art. There are artists producing work of all sorts, some not distinguishable from the art produced in other regions and cities. One might not be able to determine the geographic source by the look of these things. There is plenty of variety and quality in Wisconsin and contiguous states to satisfy a variety of tastes.

The subject at hand, this Rustic Aesthetic, on which I concentrate here, is an ongoing quiet agitation in the hinterlands shared by those who still recognize their organic roots, those who do not focus their art on their city fortresses and who do not fear nor find embarrassment in their natural histories on this planet. Here are people who would rather explore and celebrate those links. Maybe to these artists it is ultimately important to pay attention to our origins, our environmental histories, and the dependence we have on the natural sometimes mysterious places and processes outside our protected urban homes.

7. SOME BASICS

I submit that there are very elemental human experiences in the work and subjects of these Intuitive Rustic Artists, and any category of artist that is motivated by the looks of nature. Like others they respond to the natural environment around them on planet Earth. They experience the vistas, they mingle with natural elements and forces. It is a response shared by all human beings around the globe, although the art produced

in various places may appear visually different due to the physical environment and cultural traditions already in place. The urge to make art inspired by Nature is as vital and important to some persons as any other human urge. There will be those differences caused by variations in the environments, but the inspirations, the processes and underlying natural forces, are what conjoin the art makers.

I suspect this contemporary "Rustic Aesthetic" has the same roots that in prehistory prompted peoples to draw, to decorate cave walls...to express something of the numinous and elemental. The reaction to natural things may remain the same to those artists who are sensitive to it, although their mediums, methods and styles may be different.

Let me offer this brief quote from E. David Peat. Peat is the author of "The Looking Glass Universe", and "Science, Order and Creativity". He received his Ph.D. at Liverpool University, conducted research at the National Research Council of Canada, studied quantum mechanics, the work of Psychologist, Carl Jung, the subtleties of consciousness, and has worked as a fine art painter and Sculptor in stone and bronze.

"At the origin of civilization the desires to wonder, worship, and understand may well have been all of a piece". pg. 239 "Synchronicity, The Bridge Between Matter and Mind".

Such a notion of an earlier cultural condition having a blended rather than departmentalized life may lead us to using the term "spiritual" with a greater appreciation and broader definition. One need not be in church nor wear sackcloth to experience the spiritual. It might be said that early and aboriginal peoples had a spiritual life which melded all aspects of their experiences. For us, the living, the creative process can provide breakthroughs and tie us to our distant ancestors, to others living today (or tomorrow), and to the mechanisms operating in the Universe. Unspoiled natural places, if one can find them, embody the Earth's essential processes.

In the work of artists who are part of this "Rustic Sensibility" there might be a conscious or unconscious recognition that natural forces will always remain just out of complete understanding. Contemporary quantum physics doesn't offer a final resolution settling on a satisfying end to what underlies physical space and life itself. Scientific theory and real existing dimensions surrounding us, like mysterious processes of growth and decay, are never in our complete understanding and control...no matter how advanced we think humans might be.

In fact, considering the frailty and tenuousness of human cultures and emerging technology, we are really never far from returning to a Stone Age due to a total breakdown in our seemingly stable "advanced" technological systems. In the past couple of decades there has also been recognition of the potential for world wide catastrophes casting us back to pretechnological states, due to an asteroid impact, super volcanoes or other

cosmic phenomena, or just good old Human stupidity.

It might be better said that this Rustic Aesthetic arrives thru a state of mind, thru common or similar experiences that occur in various places but which have corresponding or analogous roots. Being outdoors in a woods or farm in the United States is not that different from equivalent environments around the globe. Having experiences that bathe one in sensations like rains in woodlands, the odor of fields and farms, lapping of water on some shore, movement of sands in an expansive desert, the sunlight and winds of wild places, sounds and appearances of living things in their natural environments, all these things and more imprint minds and are recognized for what they are -- elemental, life sustaining or life threatening. We are of the same stuff.

Here is a quote from an artist living in Wisconsin who, as a youngster, experienced the outdoors, the rural, and who has been capturing images which relate to his feelings, his intellectual growth and his observations after decades spent teaching and traveling. Richard Quinney has used the camera to capture his rural surroundings, the beauties and the gradual decline of physical things. In another professional life, Richard was a sociologist, and retired as professor emeritus from DeKalb University. In his book, "Once Again the Wonder", Borderland Books, 2006, he writes on page 69,

"How are we to make ourselves ready for the experience of the sublime? The meditative act of photographing is now my daily spiritual practice...The disjunction between the subject and object is overcome. Earth and sky are joined. I become one with nature...Experiencing the sublime in everyday life – with elevated consciousness – is the long tradition of romantic poets, transcendental writers, landscape painters, and all who would be close to the truth of existence. The act of creating expands the spirit of the artist."

It can even be questioned if there is something inbred in us that causes us to respond to the natural environment in predictable ways, responses which our bodies are programmed to experience. Are many of us, if not all of us, programmed to be Vistaphiliacs...to respond in some degree of wonder and awe? Are there subtle purposes creating such response? Are we wired that way? What will gene study reveal to coming generations? Will we find that there is a gene that relates to the horizon, to qualities of the sun and moon, to directions of up and down, to color, to gravity and other unseen forces? Those of us who hold to theories of evolution must believe that we retain elements of what in our lineages existed before. Where did the impulse to create aesthetically pleasing objects begin? What ancestors do we credit that to? Those humans who painted in caves, or some more distant relative in an animal evolutionary chain?

Of course I am hardly alone in conjoining theories of our long physical evolution on this planet with our current mental states and thought processes. The artist and author, Frank Avray Wilson, in the book, "Art As Revelation", states this:

"My approach to the arts...depends on a view of reality that I have adopted from very recent concepts in physics. Human

art could not have arisen without a long evolutionary antecedent; indeed human sensitivity to music, and colour (sic), as well as to the beauty of the human form and face, suggest a prolonged and elaborate evolutionary expertise which, in biological terms indicates their importance in the process of humanization. Nature does not waste such effort for inconsequential activities. Aesthetic sensitivity is therefore likely to be as much a human characteristic as our upright gait.” Pg. 2

And he includes these several statements, all inspiring and relevant in this discussion:

“Thus the irreducible characteristics of life, although apparently made entirely of matter, and the qualities of mind – product of the material brain – are explained as the accumulation of vital neural and cerebral experiences in a transcendental level of nature; the source of inspiration in the arts and the hyper-reality, the unutterable joy and reassurance of the peak experience, can be understood as a participation in the universal pooling of mind activity”. Pg.8

“Does this mean that the aspects of mind involved in the arts share a common experience with the basic events of nature? I believe that it does, and the relevance of this belief is that it makes it possible for the central core and dynamic of such a theory to be caught and comprehended intuitively without recourse to the processes of mathematical thought.” Pg. 10

“The main features of the visible world – the shapes of trees and hills and animals and the general structure of natural phenomena, serve as a support for purely symbolic abstract qualities, such as the integrative harmony of the components, the musical play of colour, light and shade, the frolic of lines and the diversities of texture. It is these which are the essential triggers of release to high aesthetic emotion, for a response to the harmonious in nature, the appeal of beauty and the sense of sanctity and purity” Pg. 59

“Communion with the more aesthetically endowed aspects of nature is the most direct means of obtaining a peak experience, provided a sufficiently pristine and pure aspect of nature can be found, and provided that the individual is sufficiently attuned to nature itself.” Pg. 68

“It should be evident that the sensitivity of the mind to such wonders implies a fundamental accord between mind and nature or the forces in nature responsible for these aesthetically relevant expressions. Clearly at some profound level, the aesthetic expressiveness of mind and nature meet, so that nature offers the aesthetically tuned the perfect subject for gaining the peak experience.” Pg. 68

“Art As Revelation, The Role of Art in Human Existence”, Centaur Press LTD, Fontwell, Sussex, 1981

And to go along with that here is another quote from E. David Peat's book, “Synchronicity, The Bridge Between Matter and Mind”:

“...‘peak experiences,’ sudden ecstatic moments of great happiness, awe, and of a feeling of unity that gives way to serenity and contemplation. Synchronicities, epiphanies, peak, and mystical experiences are all cases in which creativity breaks through the barriers of the self and allows awareness to flood through the whole domain of consciousness.” pg. 235

Some of the experiences of Rustic Aesthetic artists are primal, associated with and representative of a more Natural Earth, less disturbed by urbanization, pregnant with possibilities that move one into considering our evolved histories, our associations and partnerships with living things, our fragile existence on this planet, and the wonders of what Nature presents without the altering interfering hands of Humankind.

Such inspirations cannot be exclusive to this Midwest Vistaphilia, this inspired Intuitive Rustic Group on which I concentrate. I refer the reader to two deliberately established artist organizations begun in the late 20th

Century. One of these is the “Brotherhood of Ruralists”, a relatively small English aggregation that chose to leave cities, to derive and spend their energies in more pastoral settings. Their official informational website is

<http://ruralists.com/general/background.html>. Members exhibit together and otherwise communicate

among themselves, therefrom gaining publicity, a semblance of unity, and some public recognition.

The second such organization is the "Society of Layerists in Multi Media", a group in North America, also found to have gained some public interest and exhibition success. It appears there is more than one book published dealing with their efforts. Their website located at <http://www.slmm.org/index.html> includes this quote on the homepage:

Mary Carroll Nelson, founder of SLMM, observes that "Layerists have developed a perspective related to the time/space continuum. In layered art, many events connect at a single point in space; and many points in space are linked at a single moment in time." Alexander Nepote, SLMM's late mentor, expressed an idea that is relevant to Layering: "Energy that connects everything is a cosmic web—this includes information from the collective unconscious, the metaphysical as well as the physical."

Both of these websites, extant at the time of this writing, provide bibliographies and at least basic information about these groups, histories and goals. The fact that these artists found one another and a common cause to create joint organized exhibitions sets them apart from most artists involved in the Intuitive Rustic Aesthetic subject of this manuscript. Many, if not most, artists are not consciously united to form a "club", an organization, and perhaps have not even been wholly conscious that their siblinghood arises from the same natural experiences and deep wells of evolutionary time.

By a chance emergence, as mentioned previously, the Museum of Wisconsin Art in August of 2006 united some like-minded artists in an exhibit titled: "UP NORTH": Imaging of North Woods Culture and Mythology". In fact, discussion and planning of that exhibit in part inspired my further personal investigation, resulting in this manuscript.

What is more, unexpectedly and surprisingly, in early 2006, I also had communication with a representative of the Center for the Visual Arts in Wausau, WI, and learned that independently they also began considering an exhibit dealing with this "Up North" theme. Following that revelation in the same year there appeared three other exhibits concentrating on artist responses to the rural and agrarian elements of this state, one each in non-commercial venues in the Wisconsin cities of Plymouth, Franklin and Marshfield.

6. RELATED AREAS OF COMPARISON AND DISCUSSION

A. WILDLIFE ART

Wildlife art is usually a celebration of feral animals which are presented in more or less realistic poses and in the natural environments to which they are linked. The technical skills of wildlife artists are used to present naturalistic representations that can satisfy the artist and enrich a public which absorbs and appreciates the

physical beauties of those feral realities. Sometimes there is also an attraction to this art due to a sort of “lust” to capture, to hunt and kill wild creatures. I submit that this desire is a means of gaining knowledge, blending and being intimate with wild conditions. Gradually photography has been used to satisfy the drive to capture.

Landscape art that is inspired by Vistaphilia can and does sometimes include wild creatures...as well as domesticated animals set in rural environments. Both expressions may be linked to drives born out of natural settings. But unlike wildlife art which appears on the covers of “Field and Stream” and on wildfowl stamps, the work of “Vistaphiliacs” is just not merely a technically proficient rendering of realistic looking beasts as artists and viewers attempt to satisfy an appetite to gather trophies. This is not to say that landscape art is more obscure, remote or terribly cerebral. But then some landscape expressions might elevate philosophical art discussions into hyper-natural and less accessible realms which are not easily digested by all viewers.

Artists of a more spiritual Rustic Inspired Genre approach their work less head-on, at different angles, with at least slightly different motivations than rendering an animal in life-like fashion. Wildlife art links stalker and prey. Landscape art, that motivated by Vistaphilia and a spiritual element, has results which may sometimes appear oddly unreal, magical and mysterious...or they may at least present elements of reality that are subtly out of the ordinary and too often overlooked in our current hurried urban environments.

B. MERELY LANDSCAPES?

The creation of various forms of landscape art include those which are mere attempts to capture or recreate the view. They might be common attempts to imitate nature. But some landscape art is offered to engage a viewer in seeing something more than reality. Perhaps the scenes are edited to provide just the essential or elemental, or the real is modified or embellished to create an atmosphere or mood suggesting some underlying unseen mystery. This may be done by presenting some objects or living things in an uncommon way, or it might be accomplished by editing and/or a technique resulting in what “might” be there...just beyond our consciousness.

It seems necessary to discuss a commonly used word that sometimes describes nature scenes and one that in the 18th to late 19th centuries emerged in discussions about real land scapes and the paintings that represented them. That word is “*picturesque*”. It was meant to apply to scenes that were interesting and aesthetically appealing, which might be worthy of capturing in a painting.

Because of potential misapplication of the term, let me emphasize, that what is picturesque is not a painting.

Rather it is the scene deemed worthy to “be pictured” or captured in a painting. If one seeks out the emergence

and evolution of the term, one will find that there were energized discussions in intellectual circles when the word was “new”, freshly minted, of just what it meant and how it related or did not relate to such words as the sublime and the beautiful.

To further emphasize that the type of art objects I focus on in this manuscript are meant to impart more than a lovely representative scene, let me offer four definitions from a variety of sources. First, from the online

Wikipedia:

*“Though the [concept](#) of the [sublime](#) had roots in the [connoisseurship](#) of [Antiquity](#), the “**picturesque**” was a new category in the incipient [Romantic](#) sensibility of the 18th century. “Picturesque,” meaning literally “in the manner of a picture; fit to be made into a picture” was a word used as early as 1703 (Oxford English Dictionary), and derived from an Italian term *pittresco*, meaning, “in the manner of a painter,” but the [idea](#) of ‘the picturesque’ as an aesthetic category was first developed by the connoisseur and teacher Rev. [William Gilpin](#).”*

From an online art glossary by the magazine, *Art in America*:

Picturesque...“Describes paintings, usually landscapes, that emphasize the interesting or unusual elements in a scene. Common subjects include ruins, river valleys, and natural phenomena.”

From the Albany Institute of History and Art online art dictionary:

“Picturesque - *Representing the charm in scenes or ideas, without attaining beauty or sublimity.*”

From the online Glossary of an English class titled, *American Nature Writing*, Spring semester, 2001, by Dr. John E. Becker, Emeritus Professor of English, College at Florham Fairleigh Dickinson University, Carlisle, Pennsylvania:

“A way of describing nature which emphasizes its prettiness and its charm, as opposed to the Sublime, which emphasizes its force and overwhelming power. More literally it inverts the idea that a picture imitates nature, by looking at nature as though it were a picture.”

The tradition of painting American landscapes can be traced thru the romantic traditions of the 19th Century as one studies the Hudson River School that produced wonderful paintings of rural and rustic scenes by such luminaries as Thomas Cole. As the Western frontier expanded, artists were among the first to venture there and then capture in paint what they saw as early witnesses to such natural wonders as Niagara Falls, the Rocky Mountains and the Grand Canyon. Frederic Church and Thomas Moran were high among those who rendered simply gorgeous paintings of spectacular places. The 20th Century photographer, Ansel Adams, though removed in time and by technology, was among those in this category that presented the grandeur of natural settings, as did some of his 19th C. photographer predecessors.

Toward the end of the 19th Century American George Inness emerged and remains in our eyes today as an artist who further molded landscape painting into a spiritual metaphysical realm by means of his blurry atmospherics. His mature paintings may represent mysterious models from which later artists responded in their own landscapes. Before him, the Englishman, Turner, appears stylistically well in advance of other 19th Century landscape artists in his vaporous, ethereal and spiritual renderings. In the work of some artists there is suggested something behind the beautiful façade, just out of reach and beyond full comprehension. Such artists seem to have sought to interpret more than the picturesque.

Albert Pinkham Ryder's work should not be overlooked if one is to pursue this line of study. We also must look to others such as the 20th Century's Charles Burchfield, John Marin, and more, who provided stimulus for today's artists attempting to represent something that is beyond the obviously visible and into what is more mysterious and even extrasensory. For a revelation of "Tonalism", I invite readers to look at the book, "Like Breath on Glass", by Marc Simpson, written for an exhibition at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute,

There was a time in the 19th Century when Wisconsin was part of the Western frontier. There were artists associated with Wisconsin who produced images of natural wonders, including John Ferry who did work for the Great Northern Railroad. That company tried to drum up business thru his paintings which represented untouched rustic scenery. The German immigrant, Henry Vianden, sometimes called the Father of Wisconsin Painting, brought his German academy traditions and love of the landscape plus his personal metaphorical noble trees as he influenced more than one generation of Wisconsin art students. The photographer, H.H. Bennett, introduced the natural beauties of the Wisconsin River and its Dells to a broad American public. Other photographers captured beauties of the Northwoods and lakes, as well as the conditions of Woodland Native Americans.

Today the 21st Century artists need not necessarily know any landscape history in order to paint their personal versions. All they need is to experience first-hand the wilder places, to sense the natural settings and to embed their psychological roots into the soil. The contrasts between urban and rural are obvious, and these artists have made their choices from rustic themes that have been motivations.

For those artists under discussion here it is not enough to merely represent the beautiful land and its living things in a realistic fashion. In today's technical world with spreading globalization and great cultural diversity and influences, they have chosen to create art that steps beyond representation, to reveal in their own unique ways that which is on the edges of our knowledge...that which might be mystical and sublime, and that which speaks of their recognition of, or search for, our place on Earth...limited by our human lifespan...but also

coupled to something eternal.

C. MAGIC REALISM

It must be acknowledged that there usually are no distinct edges when it comes to pigeonholing individual artists because the creative mind is disinclined to hold to hard and fast rules. For example, a surrealist movement called Magic Realism seen in Wisconsin's own art history in the work of John Wilde and others in the mid 20th century, might be said to be joined to this Rustic Contemporary Movement, because there are mysterious images that surface in both genres.

So it is with categorizing this Contemporary Intuitive Rustic. There will be some images of real things such as fauna and flora. There may be elements of fantasy and Science Fiction with a dream like quality. What will hold these works together is the choice of subjects derived from rural settings that are, or have been, acted upon by Nature, or which are seemingly feral, but which by their presentation are distinguished as peculiar and out of the ordinary

There are mysteries presented by both the Magic Realists and those included in the Intuitive Rustic Aesthetic. The environments from where both emanate may occasionally also blend, but an overriding characteristic distinguishing the latter from the former will be the emphasis on the rural. The workings of the natural world are all powerful in this Rustic Movement inspired by natural environments and Vistaphilia.

Also in the Intuitive Rustic humans tend to be the observers rather than the subjects. While not always the case, the works are often presented as if the painter, the subject of the painting, and the viewer of the painting are melded together in a shared experience, observing the same scene, and perhaps exhibiting a sense of awe or even puzzlement.

"All aesthetic response must contain an element of magic; one is confronted by something out of the ordinary, miraculously right, 'more real than real'." pg. 30, "Passing Strange and Wonderful", Yi-Fu Tuan, 1995, Kodansha America and Island Press.

D. FARMLANDS AND WILDS

I suggest that farms are a midway environment in which humankind has taken root where it can manipulate and use natural processes to benefit itself. Having educated themselves to the growth patterns of living things, humans have harnessed some of these natural forces to the benefit of their families and cultures. But these farmers are not in control of rainfall and drought, winds and sunshine. While they have a sort of a partnership with Nature, in the end it is Nature that dictates the terms and provides the ultimate success and sustenance, or failure.

Of course farmsteads have certainly remolded wild spaces, extending human effects and subduing a wilder Nature. But the farms themselves, especially after generations have lived upon them, tend to degenerate as fields and buildings gradually age, with Nature and the organic processes making a return. Humans move on, die off, and/or retrench in more urban areas. The farms become metaphors for life, and represent what natural forces will eventually do to each of us. We will all break down and go back into the earth. These farms are neither city nor feral places, but they are living emblematic habitats that serve as slow moving symbols of our own existence.

Cities, on the other hand, can renew their deteriorating streets and anatomy when required given the infrastructure and finances to do so. While this process might be compared to the workings of other healthy environments which self-sustain and renew, cities do so largely, if not exclusively, by the decisions of humankind. cities generally will fight off Nature, not letting it express itself without human restraints, confining it to controlled districts such as parks.

It is in the environment more remote from farmlands where Nature thrives without human influence, notwithstanding the pollution that we send there. Some of the artists included in this Intuitive Rustic are sensitive to the systems of growth and decay that act on every part of Earth. They recognize that much of what affects humans happens without human control. While we can momentarily usurp and affect some part of nature, eventually nature acts upon all of us by natural processes. We grow. We wither. We die...and the organic and mineral are transformed from one state to others. Who better to recognize the terminal points to a life than the farmer who grows on the land, who harvests the plants and husbands the animals? The cycle of life and death is intrinsic in the farming everyday life style.

We take from Nature, use it to our temporary advantage, and the natural forces eventually reclaim it from us. We will always lose not only what we have borrowed, but we are reclaimed in our entirety...bodies, abodes...and cultures. In this reality there are implied mysteries that serve as intellectual nourishment and motivate artistic responses.

It is undoubtedly true in contemporary art that there are factions of intellectuals which not only disregard nostalgia and sentimentality, but who believe those emotions and/or feelings are not appropriate stimuli for making good art. Not being a psychologist or psychiatrist, I cannot comment with authority about why that is so. However, as a layman, I know nostalgia and sentimentality abound in this contemporary society, as all of them. Those emotions are but one element in the fabric of our lives forming the layers that make us truly feeling and more complete human beings.

Two artists already spoken about who illustrate art which is related to the sense of nostalgia are Richard Quinney and Rita Crooks. Richard lived the formative part of his early life on a Wisconsin farm and afterward productive years as a professor and cultured world traveler, inherited that farm which became the inspiration for both a verbal and visual artistic production. Rita Crooks recognized the deteriorating farmland structures of barns, silos and homes, and rearranged their curious architectural shapes in her watercolor collages. Both these people have sensed the changes in their environmental landscapes, and that loss has motivated them to make new art.

The art they make can be interpreted in mere intellectual visual terms without ascribing nostalgia or sentimentality to them, or the viewer may look deeper and see the intuitions that motivated their creation. In the end, the work expresses something the artists feel is behind a subject's existence. But the viewer will use his personal experiences and sensitivities, as well as purely intellectual considerations, to state how successful the work of art speaks. To quote again from "Once Again the Wonder" by Richard Quinney:

"We are of the landscape, and we too change and pass on to something else. Others will record the artifacts that remain from our time on this land." Pg. 116

E. NOSTALGIA AND SENTIMENT

Each of us will likely have an understanding of and definitions for nostalgia and sentiment. In discussion of these related subjects we can include such words as longing, remembrances, pining, bittersweet, homesickness, and in particular emotion. This discussion would have to include thoughts and intuitions arisen out of feelings that are not much based upon pure intellectual analysis and reason.

In this Rustic Sensibility it may be assumed that what art is created, and that which lies behind the creation, has at least some subtle relationships to what is nostalgic and sentimental in the lives of the artists. If one has experiences in one's youth that were psychologically significant, resonant and which imprinted deeply, and which may have settled into one's subconscious, it should not be unexpected that some sense of nostalgia and sentimentality would serve as motivation for creation of visual art.

It seems to me that there is some percentage of intellectuals involved in the visual arts that eschew emotion, that criticize and look down on art that has elements of sentiment, nostalgia and feelings. Still, there are others that do have an appreciation for emotions serving as legitimate and highly significant reasons for art making, understanding that art is often an attempt to express and/or balance a life of the intellect vs. emotion.

Landscapes and natural subjects, personal experiences and mythologies, the mysterious forces of Nature, all Entwine to produce motivations and animate some of us to make art objects. It is impossible to entirely excise emotion from the process and difficult to determine at what point our remembrances influence what we create.

The varieties of art are many, as are the experiences of a lifetime. To be critical of art just because it stems from emotions, from the past, out of nostalgia and sentiment, is to cut away something deeply meaningful and visceral from our lives. The art under discussion in this manuscript, it seems to me, utilizes both the intellectual and the visceral as motivations for its becoming. The physical experiences of being in rural places are real, and they serve to inspire the additional realities of both thought and emotion. From the wild environments come stimuli leading to thought, learning, action and creativity.

We cannot criticize blindly the motivations found in rural, wild and rustic places as not having intellectual value, of not being worthy sources for art making. In fact, natural environments may be the places for the most vigorous and important experiences in our lives, whether experienced as children or adults. Let us not shun emotion, bypass nostalgia or dodge sentiment. They do provide impetus to create personally important expressions, and lead us to new discoveries.

Some of the most potent art of all time arose out of the gut reactions of humans in the most powerful of situations. We do not bypass Picasso's Guernica or German Expressionism because they may have come into being due to deeply felt emotions, personal histories and remembrances of things past. Hiding under cover of pure intellectualism is a form of avoidance in the first place, and a coward's refuge as well.

F. ABOUT REGIONALISM

Regionalism as an "art definition", and as a reality having implications on the perception of landscape art, must come into this Rustic Sensibility discussion. It seems an elementary basic reaction for any historically trained commentator to consider landscape artists as being from a particular environment, as in the Midwest or North Woods. Yes! Everyone is from "and of" certain geography, within some defined latitude and longitude. Persons have worked out their lives experienced in certain places where they have come to know their environments intimately well. The higher latitudes of the United States are part of some artists' sphere, providing relatively easy access to more untouched places when compared to cities...though dwindling these places may be.

In Wisconsin, if not elsewhere, the phrase "Up North" has come to mean more than a physical place. It also connotes a state of mind implying an escape from cities and demanding responsibility incurred thru jobs and family. It suggests leaving some troubles behind, departing crowded cities and communing with Nature. One might be in the southern Wisconsin city of Milwaukee or upstate central Stevens Point and still refer to points of higher latitude as "Up North". That northern dimension means more than a circumscribed geographic area.

In an event mentioned earlier, the Museum of Wisconsin Art, West Bend, WI, had organized an exhibit titled "Up North: Imaging Northwoods Culture & Mythology", held August 6th thru Sept. 24, 2006. Here is a descriptive phrase drawn from publicity for this exhibit: *"The Wisconsin Northwoods has long fascinated and inspired artists with its mythology and culture"*. (From the WBAM "Schedule of Exhibitions" released December, 2005.) The focus on a "better" place somewhere in higher latitudes of the state, an integral part of the region's popular culture for generations, emphasizes real and imagined characteristics of a special place. This seems like a creation of a region within a region, physically present but partly illusory...like the fables of Paul Bunyan, Hodags and other folk heroes, perhaps rooted in fact but elaborated upon and fantasized about for a century or more.

The title of Regionalism can be accepted with an amount of pride, for uniqueness and independence are often desirable attributes, especially in a growing monochromatic world culture too often dependent upon a limited number of influential taste makers. There are subtleties and depths of thought regarding what "regional" means, with deeper implications than the common shallow usage suggests.

I propose that the easy supposition that Vistaphilia and this Rustic Movement being only a regional one is a bit too myopic and limited. For example, why must a deer, fish, lake, tree, hills and vegetation be restricted to the Northwoods of Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota or Canada? There are plenty of these or analogous animals and plants in eastern, southern and western states as well. Are the images of what is organic and feral only restricted to certain higher regions or a limited part of the globe?

These living things are the outward signs of the actions of Nature, the products of processes that always underlie the physical. The processes of Nature are often apparent only steps away from most major cities, except where urbanization has created Megapolis that unite city after city until they finally run out. But eventually in time and space natural forces will quietly work again to reclaim environment and superiority over human action.

The same motivations and similar forms of expression may be part of art created in different geographic areas which have alternate or analogous life forms. For example, whitetail deer are relatively ubiquitous and are not greatly different from Mule Deer, Elk, Moose, Fallow Deer and Western Antelope. Cannot Oak or Kudzu, or even "invented plants" like those of the French Naïve, Henri Rousseau, serve as subjects in any art dealing with rustic themes? Are the elemental processes of Life and its mysteries really radically different from Canada to the Florida Everglades to rural California? It is the underlying processes of Nature to which artists are responding to, no matter what the geographic region.

It just seems more useful to think of the subjects found in the work of these “landscape” artists as having a *similar source*...but not a limiting geography. The source is the often verdant, rural, wild and undomesticated space which can be found in many regions across the United States and around the world. The source is the place where organic processes are allowed free of human alteration and affect, or where humankind has infiltrated but found an environment in which it can blend without drastically altering it...where rises a more mutually symbiotic relationship between the human and non-human.

G. NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNION

In the process of writing this manuscript the relationship of Vistaphilia, and an Intrinsic Rustic movement, to the beliefs and practices of Native Americans became apparent. In fact, the term “Native Religion” as applied to a broad range of beliefs from around the globe comes to mind. Those would be religious faiths and practices found amidst humans living in close association with untrammelled nature – those that existed before there was the infiltration, influence and acculturation caused by “advanced cultural” attempts to convert and “modernize” the so named pagans by proselytizing religions.

I suspect that we humans have a tendency to fantasize admired role models, whether persons or entire cultures, with an esteem that might color the truth about them. Upon first glance, and due to the haze of time, it can appear that indigenous persons and societies were without flaws, perhaps having near superhuman qualities. However, in reality with study, blemishes are bound to be uncovered. Upon objective scrutiny no one is perfect or living in idyllic conditions, including indigenous peoples who, like all humans, fail to live faultless lives.

However it does appear in good part that Native Americans have lived in their environment with great respect for Nature and appreciation for their place in it, unscientific as that may be. There are many sources of research and commentary about Native Americans, their belief systems, material and philosophical cultures, to reinforce that point of view. (Some of these are undoubtedly skewed by some amount of idealism or, alternatively, prejudice.) There are also Indian men and women today who can speak for themselves about their heritage and beliefs.

For the limited purposes of this discussion, I assume a degree of accuracy and authenticity in the viewpoints espoused by scholars and Natives. I also assume that what I write about contemporary artists working in this Intuitive Rustic Genre is colored by my own prejudices and inclinations. Little would be written or expressed if we always sought perfection before we placed a word on paper. Creation of theories, philosophies and the interpretation of histories require thoughtful study, contemplation and rumination...which do not guarantee perfection.

I will choose one quote from a Native American author from New Mexico. She is Carol Lee Sanchez, part Laguna Pueblo Native and Lebanese American, an educator, on the Faculty of San Francisco State University, where she taught courses in the American Studies, Ethnic Studies & Women's Studies Programs (1976-1985). She was Acting Chairperson of American Indian Studies (1979-1980) and served in other professional positions. She has taught courses in American Indian Studies at the San Francisco Art Institute (1978-80), Mills College in Oakland, CA (1981), and courses in Women Studies at CSU Northridge in Northridge, CA (1989) and the University of Missouri at Columbia, MO (1993). She served as Writer in Residence at Stephens College for Women in Columbia, Missouri during the Fall Semester of 1998. She is a poet, painter and lecturer. 1

1. Source:

Osnabruck Bilingual Editions of Marginalised Authors, Volume 16, available online at <http://www.lili.uni-osnabrueck.de/forschung/obema/sanchez.html>.

Sanchez writes:

THE PRINCIPLE OF RELATIONSHIP

Most Euro-American or Euro-Western peoples tend to separate themselves from 'nature' and to rank humans above animals, plants, and minerals in hierarchical fashion, and so it is not easy for them to perceive or accept a personal relationship with what they describe as the 'natural world.' Native Americans believe themselves to be an integral part of the natural world.' When we speak of 'nature,' we are also including ourselves. Our thoughts about nature don't assume humans to be more important and powerful than the rest of our environment, nor do we regard nature as something beneath us to be exploited beyond what we actually need to survive as individuals or as a group. Today, many tribal elders from Tribes throughout the Americas are telling us to be mindful of our relationship to our environment; to remember our relatives; to reclaim and re-establish our sense of connectedness to everything and to acknowledge the sacredness of everything in our universe. More and more contemporary Native American scholars and writers are speaking to non-Indians about Native American ways and spirituality-stressing the need for all of us to respect the land as our Mother Earth, respect the creatures, the waters, the air, and all the elements of our global environment.

2. From "Native Visions of the Natural World", section "Animal, Vegetable and Mineral: The Sacred Connection", Reprinted from: Carol J Adams. *Ecofeminism and the Sacred* (Continuum, 1999), pp. 207 - 228. The Continuum Publishing Company, 370 Lexington Avenue, New York. This quote drawn from the Internet at <http://www.greenspirit.org.uk/resources/NatAmerSpirit.htm>

Though the depth of experience and emersion in the natural environment might be quite different from artist to artist and culture to culture, those who are part of this Intrinsic Rustic Aesthetic, who are linked to Vistaphilia in some form or another, are also allied to Native American belief by inspirational sources and an unintended spiritual connection. Elements of association are due to either a religious or Humanist view producing an environmental appreciation in which humans may be recognized as but one participant, albeit one whose actions can dramatically affect the globe. The experiences, sensibilities, sentiments and responses of the Aborigines and these artists arise from the same roots embedded in natural places.

H. DREAMTIME

Along with discussions of Native American spirituality and associations with the physical environment, it is

appropriate to bring in thoughts about other aboriginal native peoples. The Australian Aborigines are a good case in point and relative to our thoughts about artist experiences in the wild and rustic environs on Earth.

I draw these quotes from a book by Karen Armstrong, a very well-known English author and historian, who deals primarily in the areas of myth, religion and spirituality. These statements concerning “Dreamtime”, as experienced and believed by Australian Aborigines, strike a distinct chord sending out reverberations from numinous peak experiences of artists and all of us who reaffirm our place in a more “precivilized” world. These are from her book, “A Short History of Myth”, Canongate Publishers, 2005.

“It is natural for these indigenous peoples to think in terms of myth and symbol because, ethnologists and anthropologists tell us, they are highly conscious of a spiritual dimension in their daily lives”
Pg. 13

“The spiritual world is such an immediate and compelling reality that, the indigenous peoples believe, it must once have been more accessible to human beings. In every culture, we find the myth of a lost paradise, in which humans lived in close and daily contact with the divine. They were immortal, and lived in harmony with one another, with animals and with nature.” Pg. 14

“The story of the Golden Age, a very early and almost universal myth, was never intended to be historical. It springs from a strong experience of the sacred that is natural to human beings, and expresses their tantalizing sense of a reality that is almost tangible and only just out of reach. Most of the religions and mythologies of archaic societies are imbued with longing for the lost paradise.” Pg. 15

“Today we separate the religious from the secular. This would have been incomprehensible to the Paleolithic hunters, for whom nothing was profane. Everything they saw or experienced was transparent to its counterpart in the divine world. Anything, however lowly, could embody the sacred. Everything they did was a sacrament that put them in touch with the gods. The most ordinary actions were ceremonies that enabled mortal beings to participate in the timeless world of ‘everywhen’...the purpose of myth was to make people more fully conscious of the spiritual dimension that surrounded them on all sides and was a natural part of life...The earliest mythologies taught people to see through the tangible world to a reality that seemed to embody ‘something else’” Pg. 16

And so it seems that some artists, when in the places that inspire reactions to the tangible multifaceted realms of natural vistas, sense that there are important realms “just out of reach”. In these current 21st Century days, those moments are now more rare and special. We sense the wonder, experience a numinous or hypersensitive moment, and for that time become one with the precivilized aborigine. The results include feelings that one is more an integral part of something enduring. This results in the need to express creatively, in some way, perhaps in poetry or visual art, and thereby link one’s inner life to the physical scenes around them. In their attempts to do so they create art objects by whatever methods of expression, the experiential and motor skills, that they have in their personal repertoire.

Karen Armstrong’s book, “A Short History of Myth”, quoted above, has offered direction and supportive background for the notions that at first inspired this paper. One fresh word which she uses and defines is “hierophany – revelation of the sacred” pg. 17. She goes on to say that in the ancient world “...When they watched the waning and waxing of the moon, people saw yet another instance of sacred powers of regeneration...” and “...a tree, which had the power effortlessly to renew itself, incarnated and made visible a

miraculous vitality denied to mortal men and women.” Pg 17

And when speaking of myths that informed, inspired, soothed and consoled the human mind, spirit and soul,

Armstrong states:

“Mythology speaks of another plane that exists alongside our own world...” and *“The myths gave explicit shape and form to a reality sensed intuitively”*. Pg. 4 & 5.

She uses the phrase “perennial philosophy” and comments that it is a belief in an invisible all pervasive and more powerful reality that stands as a basic theme of mythology around the world. *“The perennial philosophy expresses our innate sense that there is more to human beings and to the material world than meets the eye”*.

Pg. 7

Artists use their skills and feelings and then attempt to meld as much as possible with the inspirational rustic and wild that is largely outside our cities and towns. I suggest that artists do what persons of precivilized cultures did and still do today. They seek the sublime, the transcendent, the peak experiences and then attempt to make sense by linking with it in their art works. Perhaps it might be said that they create their own conscious or unconscious mythologies as they sense what to them are personal hierophantic spiritual experiences.

8. THE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

Wassily Kandinsky's famous book, “Concerning the Spiritual in Art”, may not directly equate to the subject at hand, but a few quotes are useful to share.

“The spiritual life, to which art belongs and of which she is one of the mightiest elements, is a complicated but definite and easily definable movement forwards and upwards. This movement is the movement of experience. It may take different forms, but it holds at bottom to the same inner thought and purpose.” Pg.4, translation by M.T.H. Sadler, Dover Publications, 1977, paperbound edition.

And this: *“...art is not a vague production, transitory and isolated, but a power which must be directed to the improvement and refinement of the human soul – to, in fact, the raising of the spiritual...”* *“Then is the bond between art and soul...”* pg. 54, *ibid*.

The spiritual life that Kandinsky speaks of in his theoretical manuscript is not scientifically defined, but seems to have been for that author a known and understood quantity intended to be understood by others who may have had similar elevated experiences. Below I utilize a dictionary in an attempt to better define what spiritual means. From the online dictionary, “yourdictionary.com”, comes this definition for “Spiritual”:

1. *Of, relating to, consisting of, or having the nature of spirit; not tangible or material.*
2. *Of, concerned with, or affecting the soul.*

And from the same source, a definition for "Soul":

"1. The animating and vital principle in humans, credited with the faculties of thought, action, and emotion and often conceived as an immaterial entity."

The ongoing definition also includes:

"5. The central or integral part; the vital core:..."

And this about the definition of "Mind":

- 1. The human consciousness that originates in the brain and is manifested especially in thought, perception, emotion, will, memory, and imagination*
- 2. The collective conscious and unconscious processes in a sentient organism that direct and influence mental and physical behavior.*
- 3. The principle of intelligence; the spirit of consciousness regarded as an aspect of reality.*
- 4. The faculty of thinking, reasoning, and applying knowledge:*

It seems to me that analyzing the differences of Spirit, Soul and Mind finds overlapping of their properties, and if

not identical, they are certainly conjoined triplets with shared characteristics. For purposes of this composition,

I will assume that each reader will have a definition of and spiritual framework for that is useful for them. If that

is not the case, then perhaps this will serve each as a guideline.

I consciously with intent ignore discussion about the various and many religious dogmas that assume to tell humans what sort of God might exist. I believe that a spiritual experience need not be defined as having a direct link to a Creator or Mythical Figure which assists or directs humankind. *The spiritual experience is interpreted as a sense of belonging to a greater process in the whole of existence*, and I cannot define it better than that. Importantly, what comes with that acceptance still provides moments of awe and means to access something sublime.

To respond to the surrounding environment, one must be open, willing, vulnerable...allowing natural phenomena to stimulate, and to be accepting of the sensations derived. Being in such a welcoming state is necessary to experience the physical realities of natural places thereby more fully recognizing and appreciating the magnitude and fullness of what resides there.

And to be sure, what exists in natural places does so without our presence... We are not needed there. We are just the beneficiaries of forces and phenomena that are present without our intervention. Just like the proverbial "tree falling in a forest", all the phenomena exist, activated and physically present, with or without the sense organs of humans to experience them. However...to whom or what are those forces and phenomena of use if not interpreted by the humans? There are important implications arising from that question...who indeed, and how far back along the evolutionary track did a sense of "wonder" and "numinous" begin?

When we are around environmental stimuli, such as the forces of the sun, wind and water we can be compelled to recognize them and act or react to their actions. We can cover ourselves and hide or ignore them, but to the sensitive partaker, accepting and opening up to them begins to unite us with these forces...as we interface, bond and meld with them. We also come to recognize that our time on this planet is limited. We are transitory. One person alone can feel it all, can interpret it exclusive of anybody else, and can attempt to react and thereafter express some sense of what is absorbed thru the body's organs. If we are accepting and open, we can be awed by what we see and feel. We wonder how it all came about...and we wonder what else there is that remains unseen, unrecognized. We feel the need to learn and understand, to adjust to and unite with that other stuff outside our bodies. Art making is a means to do this.

9. THE HUMAN ORGANISM RESPONDS

Artist responses to the verdant Earth, the organic processes, weather phenomena and the visual panoramas, go at least one step beyond appreciation and acceptance. The ability and need to create some physical evidence of what these artists internalize is a response similar to, consistent with, and completely a part of Nature's processes. The difference between actions of humans compared to less evolved forms of life is due to the "complications" of greater human intellect, its emotional responses, as well as supposed superior evolved human analytic abilities. Artists are moved to engage in some output...creating some product of thought.

With natural forces acting upon the physical bodies and mental states of living organisms, the senses respond in ways that evolution has built them. In order to survive there are shifts, sometimes very subtle, in the way organisms live. Following scientifically, the individuals of any classification that have the ability to adapt by changing something which is part of their bodies, minds, behaviors and/or genes, have a better chance of surviving the climatic and environmental changes that occur over the course of time.

For example, the darker colored individuals of a moth population may be able to absorb the required heat of minimal sunlight, or be disguised in darker surroundings, thereby enhancing their chances of surviving during colder periods and/or at times when predators are afoot. They pass on their characteristics to offspring and the

lineage continues, while any lighter colored strain disappears.

Human behaviors that result from witnessing and measuring the properties of natural places include artistic responses. The persons called artists are motivated to react to what is seen and experienced. Obviously not all members of a human population sharing the same experiences will create art, and are therefore not producing artists. It is the responsive sensitive individuals with the desire and need to create who provide “imaginative adaptations” that are corollaries to what happens when non-thinking organisms survive by means of their form of useful physical adaptation. Artists are individually adapting mentally, emotionally and creatively, and might even be passing their tendencies on to their own offspring...or with observers by example, if not actually thru their “art genes”.

Reacting by painting or sculpting, or otherwise making art objects, is a form of adaptation that can provide emotional stabilization and opportunities for better survival in emotional and stressful environments. This action of making art may provide release of pressures building upon a mind and body, and/or it may be a means of gaining better understanding about what is going on in the environment, thereby reducing stress, fear and negative reactions.

Making art objects is the result of witness, experience and thought processes, as one attempts to better understand, to absorb, and to be one with what one observes. One can better analyze and understand by the healthy process of creating art in response to the stimuli, thereby interpreting and empathizing to one's advantage. We can better determine our place and relationships in Life's web thru art-making.

10. THE VIEWER'S INTERPRETIVE ROLE

While the act of creating a work of art is in itself sufficient justification for action, for many artists the art is usually meant to communicate a message or point of view to a viewer other than the maker. Of course there are some art works which are highly personal, perhaps created out of some underlying mental condition, which come into existence without a goal of being shown to anyone else. However, it must be accepted that under most circumstances some interaction with a separate viewer is almost always expected or the “creative loop” is not completed. Art is inspired by an individual's ideas, and those ideas, no matter how cryptic, are usually meant to be shared with another human being.

Viewers arrive, standing before an art work, possessing varying stages and degrees of sensitivity. Naturally, there will always be different experiences and expectations fluctuating between all individuals. Any one person may, at any given moment, be more or less open or closed to the viewing experience. Perhaps there are

personal problems, distractions preventing the viewer from fully appreciating and comprehending meaning in a work. Maybe a "bad day" means that the eyes and mind are calloused and unable to fathom the message that is intended in the art work.

All people arrive before an art object with some common life experiences, but also with some that are very different from one another. There are people that have been taught and programmed in certain hard wired ways which means they will not understand, or even attempt to understand, what was meant by the artist. There are those with preconceptions that result in potentially easy rejection or acceptance. There are those who are open to the experience and are therefore in a better mental state to "read" the possibilities and messages that an art work presents.

Depending on the style, technique or content of the art, landscape or not, a viewer might recognize that something deeper than mere visual duplication or representation was intended. But it is up to each viewer to interpret what is seen, and to appreciate or reject what one sees depending on personal conditions, those mental, emotional and physical states one experiences at any given moment.

11. VISTAPHILIA, ONGOING AND FOREVER?

Historically we can trace threads of landscape art back thru the centuries, recognizing that Vistaphilia has always been a strong motivating force leading to creative efforts. In America in the 19th Century we see that artists were awed by the natural environments they visited and which they interpreted in paint or photographs...sometimes tied to the Transcendentalism movement exemplified in the literature of Emerson and Thoreau. But whether rightly linked to Transcendentalism or not, landscape artists such as those of The Hudson River School and others who ventured further into the Western continent, were moved and responded to what they witnessed.

Responses to natural environments by artists will continue as long as humans have the ability to feel wonder and awe. We will find ourselves in wild settings and sense that there are forces at work that we have little or no control over, and which are beyond simple ability to define and understand. The Intuitive Rustic Aesthetic will be with us as long as humans leave their cities and venture into the more remote and wild.

The technical evolution of machines and evolving artistic media allows for more and varied means to express what artists feel when immersed in Nature. With the introduction of the camera, computer, varieties of software and techniques, there have been rapid advancements in artmaking. There is no reason to believe that the evolution and experimentation will stop, and rather than these new developments depleting interest in creation of landscapes, they will give means and methods to expand the genre. Cameras in the 19th Century enhanced

the abundance of landscape art being produced. and advanced the expression.

Alongside expanding new means of expression, we will see ongoing use of the traditional mediums as well. The tactile quality of hands-on painting and sculpting will not be supplanted by the new media, but might become more important as part of the need for intimate human involvement in Nature and artistic response to it.

Previously I mentioned two artist organizations from different parts of the world that have links to this Intuitive Rustic sensibility. One English group, the Ruralists, seeks communion with Nature by living in rural areas with members deriving their subject matter from it. An American organization, the Layerists, has members linked philosophically thru attempts to understand human connections in the time-space continuum. Generally, at least, the members of these contemporary organizations are studying the human place in Nature and seeking to understand what lies just out of plain sight. Individuals, if not such organizations, will surely continue to work in this field.

I submit that there is an artistic tapestry woven across Earth, over its geographic and political boundaries, that is created by artists who sense their links to the forces of Nature, the Rustic and Rural, and who express their intellectual and emotional lives attempting to understand and report about their experiences by art making. In the art making, they participate in a shared Spiritual Life. They look at landscapes, parts of the Earth not created by human actions, and they respond by artistically duplicating them, altering them, interpreting them...becoming integrated, blended, morphed with them.

Artists serve as living and evolving integral threads in the warp and weft of the complex woven fabric, intellectually and emotionally experiencing their place in the Cosmos. It is the nature of the creative mind to test boundaries, extend sensibilities, wonder at the mysterious, and to probe surroundings for authenticity and meaning. As long as there are some artists who confront and attempt to meld with an essentially unaffected Nature, who are Vistaphiliacs that inhale thru their gathering bodily senses, then personal creative, thoughtful, intuitive responses will continue to produce an art aesthetic derived from landscape, from the rural and rustic.

SUPPLEMENT 1

SEEING MORE THAN THE VISIBLE; VISUAL ARTIST AS SHAMAN?

Painter, sculptor, printmaker...Shaman? Magician? Outsider? In need of psychological counseling? Are we the supersensitive antennae of humanity and on the cutting edge of culture, or are we throwbacks to more natural animal states? Perhaps we are the astute observers of society and the crafty coyote of literature? And what must be said about our everyday lives of being parents, business people, educators, employees, and otherwise

good citizens?

The oft quoted important contributor to the understanding of myths, Joseph Campbell, had intriguing, indeed wonderful things to say about the role of artists in the world's communities. He was author and teacher made especially prominent in the public mind thru television interviews with Bill Moyers, and thru his own well received books on the subject of myths in history and in the world's contemporary societies. (See *The Power of Myth*, with Moyers, 1988.) He spoke of artists as having an important essential place in communities, sometimes almost a mystical function, necessary as we explore and express what others do not sense, or express what others may sense but fail to explore. Moyers asks Campbell (pg. 99): *"Who interprets the divinity inherent in nature for us today? Who are the shamans? Who interprets unseen things for us?"*

Campbell responds: *"It is the function of the artist to do this. The artist is the one who communicates myth for today. But he has to be an artist who understands mythology and humanity and isn't simply a sociologist with a program for you".* And on pg. 217: *"There is a cauldron of plenty in the mansion of the god of the sea, down in the depths of the unconscious. It is out of the depths of the unconscious that energies of life come to us. This cauldron is the inexhaustible source, the center, the bubbling spring from which all life proceeds."*

It is likely that artists relish the idea that we might play such a provocative and important role, for if generally recognized it could elevate us to some more positive visible level in our culture. Of course, there are other opinions to be heard.

"... {these} artists do not claim they experience the world more deeply than others. They are not equipped with special antennae which permit them to feel what others do not feel. What these artists do possess, however, and what all artists - poets, dancers and musicians - possess, is the ability to take experience and make it concrete so that feelings may be shared...Always it is the sudden revelation in a familiar place, the moment of memorable clarity when what has been seen often is seen as if for the first time."

(From *The Artist as Native: Reinventing Regionalism*, Alan Gussow, p.13)

The following statement seems to be a practical expression of the role of the visual artist in most cultures today.

It is the nature of the artist to observe the universe, its external material and internal thoughtful realms, and to

use senses, intellectual analysis and intuition to create responses to it. The artist must be open and sensitive to the dramas that abound externally and internally in order to communicate in a visual way. Perhaps remaining open and sensitive to the processes that abound around us, and to the to discerning processes within us, is what sets shamans and artists apart from others.

SUPPLEMENT 2

REGIONALISM, GROW WHERE YOU ARE PLANTED

"Regions of the Mind"

Perhaps we wish too much to be artists that are part of a national movement, erring by attempting to fit in to the current popular style. Perhaps we have learned a wrong art history. Perhaps we have overlooked our roots and environment...that which has nurtured us and that which still sustains us.

Those artists of the Midwest who we easily recall as being Regionalists, John Stuart Curry, Grant Wood, Gerrit Sinclair, Thomas Hart Benton, were men with a broader knowledge of world reality and art than a superficial reading of their paintings suggests. They chose their subject matter from what they knew, understood, appreciated and experienced, but they did not fail to see bigger pictures of how life was lived elsewhere. They knew the depths of art and thought and culture, but they selected their subject matter to suit themselves.

There are other regions in the United States that have seen florescence in artmaking in which there was apparent kinship in style and/or intent among various artists. Among them were the California Regionalists, Southern Regionalists, and more broadly American Scene Painters. They were authentic, serious and inspired by shared experiences and environments. Perhaps it is again time to give attention to “regions” outside the current art gravity centers. This author has come to a late recognition that what we have in our reach, that stuff which has helped form us and which we still live and breathe, is good enough. It is good enough to provide us with inspiration, beauty or horror, love or loss, simplicity or complexity.

The intrigue and beauty of the accomplished bodies of work of those Regionalists mentioned above, the charm, the sometimes seeming simplicity...those were chosen by sophisticated minds for a reason. Their choices had as much to do with living and intellect as did the nonobjective and abstract work of Parisians and New Yorkers. Their choice of subject matter and technique was highly personal, and an outgrowth of their life experiences, choices and intellectual evolution. And, what is more, they were independent and not creating to suit a snobbish class that included willing slaves to certain art critics and a select art culture.

It is obvious that our world view and our ability to access information, current and past, is nowadays much greater than that of our forbearers, and even much better than the days of our own youth. Quantum leaps have recently occurred.

At least by the early 20th Century magazines and periodicals were available to anyone who desired and could

afford them, with specialty magazines dealing with fine art appearing at anyone's reach by mid-20th century. Popular magazines like "Life" and "Look" carried at least occasional stories about the most prominent artists of the century. Especially after WWII our schools of higher education increasingly provided scholarly classes on the history and practice of art, and there have been plenty of books dealing with the art of today and yesterday.

Now we can type a name into a search engine such as Google or Lycos and find hundreds of references and potential sources of information about almost any subject. While it is still possible to be reclusive and remain unaware of what is going on in the so called art world, avoiding contact and influence from major art centers and art movements takes a nearly conscious effort.

Despite knowing so much about the Universe, it still is important to recognize that where we live, what we experience...the life within our reach...this is our place to grow. Here we witness our fellow creatures. Here we learn to interact. In this place we become adults, we learn to love, we experience sex and nature and sunlight and death. In our region we grow and transform. Our childhoods become our memories...and the past is locked into our brains. We chose from what we see in the broadest sense, as well as selecting ideas and places and moods from our local experience.

As far as we are complete as persons and artists, we express what is important in our lives. Sometimes that is

drawn from the local, and sometimes from the remote and exotic. If we are considered Regionalists, then let us be so by our own free will. Let others categorize us as they want, but let us be as unique as we chose to be. We are not robots, nor slaves...nor dupes. We grow here. We make our choices here. Part of the beauty of the current scheme is the fact that we are free to reach for other things, to see what ideas abound outside our Region.

But...this is our place. If we awake each morning and find our roots are well planted, perhaps we can show in our art making the indebtedness to our physical and cultural environments. If some of us select subject, theme, imagery or method which might be construed as Regional, than simply let it be. Relax about it. We are part of the fabric of culture...of visual art in which all geographic and intellectual regions weave together.

SUPPLEMENT 3

A PROVINCIAL MANIFESTO

And what province is this, in which I and my fellow artists exist? It is the province undelineated by geographical borders. It is the province of our private idiosyncrasies. It is the province providing us with raw materials that arrive in our hands from sources close by as well as from distant time and space. It is the Province of our view.

We have a world-view unlike any previous period and in an art historical sense, and as an inspirational source, our perspective on the array that abounds is marvelous. From our high point of observation we see the blend of

sophisticated and primitive thought, advanced technologies and ancient religions; we are exposed to knowledge by the network of worldwide communication and the ubiquitous printed word. We make choices between increasingly complicated experiences and that which is simple and basic. We blend the sophisticated and naive, advanced and retarded, conscious and unconscious, the spontaneous and the thoughtful.

Despite our ability and interest in a more comprehensive world view, it still does appear by expressions and attitudes of some persons in the various fields of art, whether they are in museum work, galleries, art criticism, or art production, that the only clear geographical region that is NOT a province, is New York City.

I, and hopefully some others, will differ with that opinion. It seems to me that New York is also in a provincial condition. It is small geographically. It is focused on what is acceptable within its own borders. It consists of the inbred, those locals seeking acknowledgment from other locals, with their own regional promoters of all ilk seeking to stand out in their own nest. The Great and Small Province of New York City stands alone on its island...metaphorically and geographically. Who is land locked? Who is limited?

With the exposure and information to which we all have access today," we are the World". We are the history of many peoples. We are scientists, farmers, clergy and aboriginals. We are prehistoric and futuristic. Gone are the days of provincialism and regionalism defined as a limited point of view. Oh! Yes! It may be the case that some of us are more inspired by the Northern Lights which are not seen nightly by artists at the equator. It may

be that some of us are intimates of woods and wheat fields as well as the concrete of cities. And always, the lusts and fears of human men and women are no less in small towns than they are in a megalopolis. The human condition links us all, and our condition resides in an age of information.

Let us recognize that New York City is a limited region in itself and does not direct our brushes and techniques and themes. We are of a world that no longer resembles periods of the 1940's or 60's. Our roots nowadays naturally spread more widely than that. The sources of our art, and the resultant products of our thought, are comprehensive, deserving recognition as part of an expansive current world wide view.

Indeed, let us study the bones and fiber of those preceding us, and the still living tissue of those abounding on Earth...but let us not continue to be intimidated and insulted by persons who are dependent upon a New York or Chicago or LA for their sense of worth. Let us rejoice in our personal visions of the world as we draw on a broader stream of information, producing what our thoughts and hearts tell us is most important in the larger place we inhabit. Let us provincials with a world view each be a unique product of our age, leaving behind our own peculiar flesh and bone for future study.

SUPPLEMENT 4

BLOOD OF FLORA AND FAUNA

"...my feeling for the organic rhythm of all things...with the trembling and the movement of blood in nature, in the trees, in the animals, in the air..." Attributed to Franz Marc by Reinhold Heller, pg. 58, "Hildegard Auer, A Yearning for Art"

A. THE WELLSPRING OF ART MAKING

Recent personal experiences, observations and discussions have prompted this essay about a very basic

B. matter of some considerable complexity, intrigue and subtlety...or, at least it seems so to this

C. author. That matter is the topic of whether works of art are the product of mind or emotion, the brain

D. or the gut, the highly intellectual or basic deep "feelings".

Obviously we have motivations for making art objects or they would not emerge at all. Somewhere in our brains and bodies we are inspired and then engaged, expressing the motivations in outward action and material form. Call this process a "need", call it an "illness", call it what you will...but it must be clear to all that it is a creative act, and I suggest it is an extension of the evolutionary process which pervades the Universe. So I believe...without the need to bring a supreme being into the discussion.

We are using our brains and bodies to create art. Somewhere there is a personal balance struck that melds our mind's thoughts and bodily "feelings" in order to produce work. By feelings I mean the viscera, the gut, the subconscious, the primordial, the instinctive and/or intuitive...perhaps that manifested in and thru the enteric nervous system...and the yet unclear link between it and the physical brain in our skulls. Visit this Internet site for more professional information:<http://www.hosprract.com/issues/1999/07/gershon.htm>.

Stimuli which arouse sensations and thoughts in the body unite in what we know as the "mind". That is not a physical thing with bodily presence, but the diaphanous floating thinking and feeling entity that is the result of

some still mysterious and chemical processes acting within the actual body. It is my belief that the mind disintegrates when the body dies, for it cannot exist without the supply of energy provided by the organized body.

To speak of a "soul" is another related matter that I will not get into here, though I will suggest that the soul may be another name for mind and/or feelings. Again, I will not enter into the subject of a deity here...though the word "spiritual" as it unites with mind and motivation might be an operative one...as is the word "numinous".

Suffice it to say at this juncture, the creation of art objects, however defined, is an extension of our thoughts and feelings, an organization of matter...and an expression of energy.

B. THE PRACTICAL MATTER OF POPULAR ACCEPTANCE

To relate this subject to the production of art, its creation, exhibition, selection and "success", I propose that we discuss visual art as it is presented to the interested public. Of course, most of the public will unfortunately not have much interest in this subject, just as most of the crowd will not be particularly interested in the workings of a car motor, the processes that go on in the plumbing of our houses...or the techniques of brain surgery. The percentage of persons attuned to such specialties is small, while the public largely shows interest in popular culture, including sports, income providing work, mass media and other forms of entertainment.

A lack of appreciation and understanding of visual art has to do with a sometimes unspoken opinion, in much of the public, that art and artists are aloof, irrelevant to their lives, and at the fringe of acceptable everyday

existence. This undoubtedly has something to do with a lack in the educational system plus the everyday demanding practical needs of people. But it also has something to do with artists and art theoreticians who sometimes speak in terms difficult for the general public to grasp with any immediacy. Art talk can be off-putting to those not attuned or particularly interested.

It is often the highly intellectual and conceptual art that arouses distaste for visual art, but art that arises from and arouses emotions can also be alienating depending on how it is interpreted. Visual art is a form of communication, an expression of the artist, and the interpretation of the statement cannot be controlled by the person expressing.

C. ART WITHOUT EMOTION

Simply, there are some art objects made and appreciated that appear on the surface to be highly intellectual. Call them esoteric, sophisticated, theoretical, abstract and/or conceptual. Their creation and appearance are derived from intellectual consideration more so than following an instinctual or intuitive motivation to some conclusion. The physical growth/process and final product are the result of a creative act, but the final appearance may be less aesthetically appealing to some observers than an art object that relies upon a manipulation/technique that is more instinctual and spontaneous.

The final product may reveal that it was produced with little motivation to be physically pleasing in terms of color, shape, light, shadow, line and form...the more traditional described elements of art derived from basic text books teaching techniques of art making. Rather the object exists due to an intellectual response and need

to explore an idea or ideas, to produce something more “of the brain”, without concentrating on making that object physically “pleasing” to the eye...or motivating an emotional response. These intellectual objects may be intriguing...interesting...inspiring...but they do not usually motivate an observer to laughter, tears, and a variety of moods. They are “of the head” and in that they at least appear to be removed from the visceral and mood provoking.

Such examples might be products from the Dada Movement, the “Fountain” of Duchamp, his “In Advance of the Broken Arm”, the Minimalist work of the 60’s such as Judd’s sculptures, and subsequent work that explores use of technology, seemingly simple “straight line” themes without emotion or sentiment, and 2D or 3D work that relies on an austere imagery that is perhaps sober and entirely temperate.

Dictionary definitions of “austere” come to mind as useful in describing the highly intellectual: severe, astringent, ascetic, cold, earnest, exacting, forbidding, formal, grave, grim, hard, harsh, inexorable, inflexible, obdurate, rigid, rigorous, serious, sober, solemn, somber, stern, stiff, strict, stringent, unfeeling, and unrelenting.

D. ON THE OTHER HAND

It must be acknowledged that intellectual activity as experienced by individuals can be exciting, giving pleasure and arousing emotions. Who is to say that the form and content of a conceptual piece will not strike all people differently, either arousing quiet contemplation or deep emotion? Experience and associations are different due to differing personal evolutions...and a mental “hunch” giving a direction may be very intuitive.

It is an indisputable fact that the observer, the person looking at an art object, brings a unique set of experiences and knowledge. The observer interfaces with the object, considers, reacts...consciously or unconsciously applies knowledge and learning, and responds with thoughts and/or feelings.

The observer also responds to seeing art in a greater or lesser degree depending upon the sensitivity level at the moment. If the observer is intent, aware, open minded without troubles of the day weighing thought processes down...without being calloused or distracted, then the response might be intense and deeply felt. Ideas and associations might surface easily without restrictions or obstacles...no matter what the nature of the object being viewed.

“Art is not a matter of slavery to the emotion – or even a matter of slavery to nature – or to the aesthetic principles. It is a tempered and happy union of them all.” Marsden Hartley as quoted in “Theories of Modern Art” by Herschel B. Chipp

E. OUR ROOTS, OUR NATURE

I began this composition with a quote from Franz Marc concerning animals and flora. I did so because of my total belief that we human beings have arisen with and alongside of fellow living creatures on Earth, and that we...the animal kingdom...often share characteristics. Those characteristics are not just physical ones...they are internal, unconscious...intuitive and invisible. They manifest themselves and are recognized by our expressions and actions, our responses to what we see and experience...and they figure into our health and

illnesses. Those ailments may be of physical or mental nature, or both.

If the reader here recognizes that he is of a mindset believing that humans and all of nature were created by some overseeing intelligent creature...a god...and if such a reader is not willing to explore in an open minded fashion the subject of Evolution as developed by Darwin and subsequent scientists...then the reader should just stop here. That reader is a stone, a lump of hardened concretion...unable to see truth beyond the mythology to which he subscribes

However, no matter what one believes is the truth regarding our existence on this planet, one can find reasons to accept the idea that animals have at least developed in some parallel ways to Humankind. Living with animals should suggest to us that animals have feelings...emotions. There is clearly the emotion of fear. In many we see affection...love for their offspring or mates. We can see rage and even joy...happiness. These are basic shared feelings that humans have...either derived thru the steps of evolution or because some creator saw fit to give similar characteristics to creatures other than humans.

For god believers, one might think that god set down a "pattern", "model", "template", on which to create living things, and there are only varieties based on the basic model that was created. After all, perhaps even gods do not have unlimited ways to design living things.

Beyond that, while some may see it as a poetic expression alone, all living things depend on the “pulse” of electricity that energizes them and which therefore is shared by all. Scientifically, our hearts beat because there is indeed an electrical impulse. The hearts of deer and dogs experience this too. Stop the energy supply, and all things die.

F. THE PLANT KINGDOM

Plants and other flora, while not in the same evolved phylum as animals, draw from Earth their sustenance...and respond to the environment in a variety of ways. It is obvious that plants have developed in very different ways than mammals and other species of animals...and they do not seem to have ability to think as we do. However, plants do learn and modify to changing environments, especially over the course of years and decades. We know we can manipulate their genes and pass on or delete characteristics thru our intelligent selection and breeding programs.

But as living things, Flora depends on the same underlying current of energy that animals depend on. In that, we are siblings on this whirling ball of space dust. Scientists also can look back thru the millennia and postulate that all of us, human, animals...plants, were derived from events in the galaxies that dispersed the stuff of life...the energy and matter...the elixir of life. As some have said, including the science popularizer, Carl Sagan, “We are star stuff”. While we cannot link ourselves in a time line very closely with vegetation, which has

different sources early in evolutionary history, we also cannot be blind to our roots in an animal past.

There can be an exciting energized discussion arising from the fact that we, humans...carnivores and vegetarians...trace the source of our food back to plants. We either consume plants directly, or we find the origins of our own energy traced to and rooted in plant life. While plants may not exhibit the abilities, motivations and emotions that animals, us included, do...we are intimately linked to them.

“They tell us that plants are perishable, soulless creatures that only man is immortal, but this, I think, is something that we know very nearly nothing about.” John Muir, from “A Northwoods Companion” by John Bates

G. A CONTINUUM OF BRAIN AND MIND

Our physical human brain has been studied, and there is a nomenclature regarding it. Its parts have been named, and the history from whence each part emanated has been calculated...often by comparing those parts to the physical parts of animals on a lower scale of evolution. For instance, the “brain stem” can be seen as a part derived from or parallel to the brains of reptiles.

We have devised means to measure the intelligence of animals, dolphins, other primates, parrots, octopi, etc...and we have been surprised as we gradually relinquish our position as the only intelligent creatures on Earth. The evolution of the brain and body after conception and while in the womb, maintains some elements of

the phases it has gone thru over the millennia. The growing embryo reprises the physical make up and fetus takes the forms of fish, reptile, bird...until it ultimately arrives full term with over 99% of the same DNA as our relatives, the Chimpanzees. (Macroevolutionists at Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit announced key genetic material (DNA) of people and chimp that is 99.4% the same, according to The Washington Times (May 20, 2003). The paper quotes Dr. Morris Goodman who says "*We humans appear as only slightly remodeled chimpanzee-like apes.*"

Both categories of visual art, the conceptual arising from ascetic motivations, and the visceral imagery coming from intuitive sources, are evolved from our animal ancestry. They are from the same source but are different branches of the same evolutionary tree. Our brains and intellects, and our intuitions and instincts, come directly out of preceding creatures from which we have evolved. There is a chain linking what we are to what came before.

We have learned that animals use materials to build nests, dams, bowers, and shelters, arranging objects to attract the opposite sex, and the select objects with which to gather and prepare their food. A bird drops a shellfish so it is broken on stones, a sea otter cracks a shell on the rock balanced on its chest, a Japanese monkey washes its food in a nearby stream and others follow. We have learned that animals feel emotion, whether the fear of pain caused by physical harm or a more complex evolved structure of primates, elephants, dolphins, and so on. The skill of humans in utilizing tools, in building shelters, and in creating workable societies and cultures, did not emerge full blown in the minds of human creatures. Rather there is a continuum of

development arising from the gradual successful establishment of those characteristics as our ancestors wound their way thru the evolutionary sequence. We keep being surprised as we learn about various animals utilizing tools, to include Chimps, birds, elephants and otters. We discover that there are some animals that have their own cultures, as simple and humble as they may be in comparison to our more evolved examples.

Art can be defined as having a horizontal linear gradation from end to end, with art objects that are mere concepts on one side to the art on the other end that arises from and is meant to evoke emotional responses. Then, of course, there is all the expression lying between the two extremes that blend the intellectual with the visceral.

H. THE GODS AND SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

For humans who believe that some intelligent super intelligence was involved in the creation of the Universe, and an intelligence that still is engaged in its operation, it is important to consider the emotional life these gods might have.

In the many ancient religions gods have revealed their love and anger in stories that are handed down to us orally and in written form. There are instances in various holy books with gods expressing emotions in various ways. The bible informs us of a god that can be angry, loving, and even doubtful and insecure. Those societies that we call primitive provide a panoply of gods with characteristics that arise from emotional lives.

The ancient Greeks and Romans had gods with very obvious human characteristics, including a human bodily form, human desires and failings. Christian religions tell of a god who "felt" and acted on those

feelings. Societies of Africa and South America, for example, have animistic gods exhibiting all kinds of emotion. When we as individuals deny our emotions, when we repress them and fail to acknowledge and express them, we can become mentally ill. It doesn't take much psychological analysis and education to figure that out. Most of us have had experiences of our own, either personally or as witnessed in friends and family, of persons exhibiting behaviors that arise from emotions...while all of us try to find balance thru intellectual processes, sorting out ideas, motivations, "feelings", and establishing a reasoned balance for understanding our needs and responsible action.

Our mythical gods, it seems to me, despite having great powers, have either created humans in their own image...or have been manufactured by humans who project human characteristics unto them.

I have my own conclusion about that, just as I have my own formed ideas about the links between us and the rest of the Universe. I am comfortable with the shared pasts, the parallel evolution, the sources of our intellect and emotions... I feel blessed that I have siblings that help me understand more about myself and my fellow humans. I know, deeply, that at the very least, I feel what is felt in creatures other than me. I am fortunate to share the electric impulses that energize living things...and in having the "star stuff" that molds my body.

Whatever thoughts and emotions that motivate us to "make" art, the art making is the act of expressing, a glorious opportunity to release and to contact other humans who may potentially respond, understand, share

and communicate.

Save for the mores of individual cultures and the popular trends of any moment, there really are no rules to what can be expressed in visual art. In fact, evolution and progress in art making arises when individuals move beyond the mores and expectations of cultures. The following list of topics, among others, is fair game to speak about, to contemplate...to share and explore with others...and utilize in art making:

The intellectual, the intuitive, reason, nostalgia, sentiment, the split brain, fear of emotions and expression of the same, our animal roots, memories, evolutionary threads, our gods and feelings... Finding our Muse, that which is Spiritual, in rustic natural places.

*"You feel this God in your blood, do you not? She asked...
The God that requires only our remembrance in extremis,
The gentle, the mature, the ever-young,
That demands nothing but our participation and growth,
The composer of the song of earth and all worlds."*

From the novel, "The Serpent Mage" by Greg Bear