

Britney Rupley

Trance

The Great Underground master comes to you and tells you that you must travel the path of every illness. Deeper into the underworld you travel, when suddenly seven tents appear before you. In each tent you encounter a different worldly disease, absorbing knowledge passed on by the Masters of Confusion, Stupidity, and Madness. These Masters cut out your heart and boil it before you can leave. Continuing on your journey, an endless sea appears in the distance with seven flat cliffs off of its shore. These cliffs hold you for several days, teaching you the ways each one can be used for the betterment of humanity. This is where you learn the lessons of the shaman. On the eighth day, you emerge from the cliffs and continue on through a small opening in one of the rocks. Greeting you on the other side is a man sitting around a fire; he is known as the blacksmith. He slowly dismembers you, removing your head from your body, then cutting your flesh up into small pieces and throwing it all into a cauldron, where it must be boiled for three years. All your muscles are then separated from your bones, and your bones are submerged in the river. The blacksmith then reassembles your bones, and your body is reborn. Before you can finally return, your eyes are pulled out and you are given new ones (Vitebsky 60).

This is the initiation ritual of the Siberian shaman. Each must spiritually die and be dismembered and reborn, in order to fully embrace the shamanic power to navigate the underworld via the trance state.

Through the language of painting and abstraction, I investigate the intangible space that is the trance state. My project focuses on how the trance state bridges the gap between the physical world and the spiritual world. My intention is to create a window into the intangible world of trance in keeping with my own trance experience. Trance has completely informed the way I paint. When I put a brush in my hand and put on headphones, I am taken to a different level of consciousness. The surrounding world becomes quiet and my thoughts become clear, which allows me to paint intuitively and trust in myself to be able to manifest my own trance experience. I have been asked, "Why trance? What makes it so interesting to you?" I am searching for an authentic experience, looking deep within my subconscious to find something bigger than myself.

I discovered trance when I began practicing meditation to deal with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, an illness I share with incredible artists such as Vincent Van Gogh and Michaelangelo, who once stated "A man paints with his brains and not his hands." Meditation allowed me take control of my own thoughts and my mind when it was misbehaving. After meditating for a few years with positive results, I wanted to be able to go deeper into my subconscious, so I started looking into trance. I look to trance in order to seek that authentic experience, clarity, and to center myself. The quiet mind can bring me to a level of such peace and introspection, which I sometimes find hard to do in the world of distractions we live in, whether its technology distracting me or the worries of the day.

To fully realize my project, I created a series of paintings depicting this intangible landscape of my trance experience. I feel as though painting lends itself quite nicely to the subject matter of trance. When I paint, it becomes a meditative transformative trance experience in itself. I am the medium, my concept is the unknown spiritual entity, and my canvas is the meeting point that is the trance state. Through the process adding, removing, manipulating, then adding more paint I am able to manifest my desired imagery. Painting and representing the intangibility of the trance experience have a long history together. Francisco Goya painted *Witches in the Air* in 1798, which depicts three witches hovering in the air in a trance, with two veiled figures cowering underneath them. Goya is considered the father of modern art because he dared to step inside of the mind (“Francisco”), which is the basis of my own work. The ethereal subject matter of trance is still something fascinating to contemporary artists. In March 2015, there was a show in Calico Gallery in Brooklyn, NY titled “Mediums.” Each piece in the show was inspired by a visit the artist had with a medium (Meier). “Mediums” presents themes and imagery that I also want to convey in my work.

The act of entering into the trance state, which is defined by the Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology as an altered state of conscious either induced or spontaneous, predates the existence of Christ (Shepard). Many cultures and religious groups have adapted trance work into their ritualistic practices, each with a different goal. In American culture, the origins of trance date back to the early 1900’s, with the birth of American Spiritualism. Spiritualism was the first significant new independent religious movement established in the United States, and it

centers on the core belief that through trance mediumship, a connection can be made to the spiritual world, thus proving the spiritual survival of death (Ellwood 1217). Through the trance state, mediums were believed to be able to produce paranormal phenomena such as levitation, ectoplasm, and spirit materialization (Vishita). Also through trance mediumship, the medium was said to communicate with highly evolved spiritual beings, which offered wisdom and guidance, or assisted them in their search.

Contemporary spiritualism, however, has less to do with creating paranormal phenomena and more to do with the intimacy of individual's connection to the spiritual. In early September I met with a local psychic, Joan St. John, who I was able to interview about trance mediumship as well as work with her to develop my own trance capabilities to be able to influence in my work. Joan is able to go into trance almost instantaneously, which comes from many years of training. For myself, it takes almost thirty minutes. Joan taught me how to enter trance, by tricking my mind into going deeper into my subconscious. One enters the trance solo, in order to clear the mind and open oneself up creatively to the endless possibilities of trance ("The Trance State"). Spiritualists are not the only culture that utilizes trance: shaman from Siberia to the Amazon also utilize trance-inducing methods in order to contact and explore the spirit world, as well as voodoo priestesses, Native American healers, and many other spiritual groups.

Trance is an ancient practice that still captivates the modern mind. It is something you can't reach out and touch, it is something you can't see and describe, it is the unknown. Trance is this intangible space where you can reach new levels of

clarity, creativity, and knowledge if only you have the proper tools to reach it.

“Match the frequency of the reality you want and you cannot help but get that reality” – Darryl Anka.

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