INTRO - What is the Sacred Feminine?

As I share my definition with you, know that mine is just one of infinite ways to experience and define her.

It is in our seeking the Sacred Feminine, in our naming her, and in speaking out to express our findings that we will come to know her and how she is already in our lives.

The way I discover her is to look beneath, below, and before any situation, location or circumstance. Then I uncover, unearth and revel in her stories. I look for the Sacred Feminine everywhere… and though well-hidden, she is always there – in nature, in family, in politics, in economics, in history, in the birth of consciousness, in the creation of culture.

The Sacred Feminine I speak of is an all-encompassing feminine essence and energetic principle. She is relational, cyclical and spiral in time and motion. She acknowledges and honors both sides of the same coin - the light of our lives as well as the darkness, the wax and the wane, the haves and the have-nots, the harmony and the disaster.

Exhibit on The Sacred Feminine Begins Feb. 17th and Goes Through April 28th, 2010 Here!

As a multidisciplinary artist, I create song, visual art, dance, and writing which embodies and explores the role of the Sacred Feminine in our global culture. I encourage and celebrate as well, others’ expressions and perspectives on the Sacred Feminine. It is said that ‘She Is Everywhere’… will you look for her with me?

Polly Wood
For Museum of Motherhood
Sacred Feminine Exhibit, 2010

Museum Of Motherhood/PO Box 164/Seneca Falls NY
13148/museumofmotherhood@gmail.com
Since this is the first of twelve exciting weeks exploring the Sacred Feminine, let’s begin with one of our basic human needs: food.

Whether mother’s milk or mom’s home cooking, we have all been mothered with food. Perhaps by our own mother or by another person showing motherly love, the essence of the Sacred Feminine is present in the universal experience of feeding and being fed.

Men can embody the essence of mothering when feeding others, and children, too when ‘feeding’ their dollies, as the Sacred Feminine can be embodied by anyone, regardless of gender or age.

Songwriter and percussionist Tara Greenblatt’s gorgeous song ‘Ground Beneath’ beautifully exemplifies a perspective on the Sacred Feminine as source of sustenance, and one woman’s need to acknowledge and give thanks to the feminine essence for her life-sustaining gifts.

Later this month, on the full moon of February 28th, hundreds of thousands of women from all over the world will gather to simultaneously cook for the Goddess in Thiruvananthapuram, the capitol city of Kerala, India, for an annual festival called Pongala.

Women of all ages, castes, and religion participate in Pongala, performing a cooking ritual for the health and prosperity of their families, each bringing their own firewood, cook pot, rice, sweetener and other flavorsome ingredients, as well as their own prayers to the Goddess.

Pongala takes place around Attukal Temple, the abode of the Divine Mother, which is at the center of the city. For seven kilometers radius in all directions from the temple, women line the streets and prepare for the ritual cooking. An ancient story about a woman seeking justice is read in the temple during which the sacred fires are lit, and the signal is sent for the women to begin.

“I stand in the sun, waiting with hundreds of thousands of other women for the moment to light my fire.” - Dianne Elkins Jenett
The next time you are cooking a meal, I invite you to give thanks to the motherly aspect of the Sacred Feminine - an energy that is available within everyone, and a nurturing essence that keeps us alive and well. Put a special prayer into your food, and remember, if the pot boils over, consider that it may be something other than a mess. It may be a blessing from the Goddess!

**Blessings While Cooking**
All that I have comes from my Mother!
I give myself over to this pot.
My thoughts are on the good,
the healing properties of this food.
My hands are balanced, I season well!

I give myself over to this pot,
Life is being given to me.
I commit to sharing, I feed others.
I feed She Who Feeds Me.

I give myself over to this gift.
I adorn this table with food.
I invite lovers and friends to come share.
I thank you for this gift.
All that I have comes from my Mother!

*Chief Luisah Teish*
Footnotes: Thanks and blessings to Tara Greenblatt, Dianne Elkins Jenett, and Chief Luisah Teish for their generosity of heart and for allowing me to republish their works in the Museum of Motherhood’s Sacred Feminine 2010 exhibit: Ground Beneath is from Tara Greenblatt’s album River Belly, www.taragreenblatt.com
Photos thanks to: Dianne E. Jenett, Ph.d.

Week II
Sacred Trees Within & Without
Trees are beautiful and diverse, gifting the world each day with their presence, providing oxygen, habitat, shade, soil integrity, and food. Trees are symbolic, metaphoric and metaformic providing relationship, meaning and inspiration. Cross-culturally, trees are associated with the feminine principle, as well as with knowledge, life, cycles, time, and the connecting matrix between earth, water and sky.

Trees are deeply embedded in human consciousness and, physiologically, embodied within the womb of pregnant mothers... The amazing placenta! With its tree-like morphology it's the only organ a human grows when needed - in order to support, nourish and sustain a human life - then releases after it has met that need. One side of the placenta attaches to the inside wall of the mother’s womb. The side facing the baby contains an image of a tree, with the umbilical cord representing the trunk, and the exposed blood vessels acting as branches.

It has been said that the human placenta "looks like" a tree... Artist and women's spirituality scholar Nane Ariadne Jordan takes this concept further into the development of what she calls ‘Placental Cosmology’.
"I use the red thread specifically to honour women's blood mysteries."
She says, "Extending the direct morphological connection between trees and placentas, I want to push beyond the idea of 'connection' to how we *embody* trees, to how the human baby is nourished from this tree within the mother. A placental cosmology extends consciousness towards a body parable rooted within the placenta (which brings oxygen and nutrients to the baby from mother) and trees (who oxygenate the atmosphere from the earth) as life."

Once an apprentice midwife, Nane's research and teaching explore women-centered birth and education, women's spirituality and mothering. She works Placental Cosmology into scholarship, art and performance ritual... using red wool cord, Nane weaves through both cloth and forests alike:

"The impetus for creating the ritual with the mantle was to enact relationship to the forest itself within and through my own body, to feel myself next to, as kin to, the trees, ferns and life of this place."
Songwriter & Percussionist Tara Greenblatt graces us again in this exhibit with another beautiful song, this time a song about a tree called Ms. Hand.

CLICK HERE TO LISTEN.

"Her gray skin draped loosely over wooden bones / thin, spindly finger bones two hundred years old / She is touching the ever-moving ribbon, the liquid in the vein, snaking through the moss / as if there is a woman standing in the sky, invisible to my eye whose sleeve has fallen shy, to reveal her ancient hand extended / She touches down to Earth."

-Tara Greenblatt, from the song *Ms.Hand*

More on Trees and the Sacred Feminine!

Another artist/scholar/author whose work gifts us with beauty and education of the Sacred Feminine is Lydia Ruyle, 70 year-old mother & grandmother who has been pursuing Goddess research with body, mind and spirit for several decades. Since 1995 Lydia has been creating representations of Sacred Feminine icons from many cultures. Her "Spirit Banners of the Divine Feminine" have hung at sacred sites, in museums, at conferences and gatherings around the world! Here are two of the 150+ Goddess banners Lydia has created that are associated with the Tree of Life...

Morphology is the study of shapes and forms of things. In biology it is the study of how living things grow and are structured. Jordan, Nane Ariadne, excerpt, *A Poetics of the Placenta: Placental Cosmology as Gift and Sacred Economy presented at A (M)otherworld is Possible: Gift Economy and Matriarchal Studies* The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) embedded conference, Oct 2009, York University, Toronto, CANADA.

References:
Placental Cosmology quotes from Nane Ariadne Jordan, conversations & notes 2010
Ms. Hand song from Tara Greenblatt, [www.taragreenblatt.com](http://www.taragreenblatt.com)
Goddess Icon banners from Lydia Ruyle, [www.lydiaruyle.com](http://www.lydiaruyle.com)
Girls are the Future of the Sacred Feminine

One way or another, girls journey towards the experience of being time-keepers, as they come to embody the lunar cycle as a cyclically menstruating and ovulating being.

The linguistic origins of the word 'time' comes from *di-ma*, meaning "to cut the moon". Women have been menstruating since the beginning of time, and, the beginning of time-consciousness was menstruation.

Not only were the first calendars created by women, painting blood on bone to mark days of the menstrual cycle, but the first words in dozens of languages all boil down to menstruation. If one were to open a dictionary of word origins, they would find over and over that the words *moon, month, measure, mind,* and *menstruation* are interchangeable.
Two women who gift the world with menstrual-lunar wisdom and its connection to the Sacred Feminine are Judy Grahn and Vicki Noble. Judy's development of Metaformic Theory brings to light the infinite ways that human culture and human consciousness are rooted in menstrual rites. Vicki's scholarship and shamanism have woven tapestries of connections between archeology, astrology and women's embodiment of the lunar cycle. We will be visiting some of their works more closely later in this exhibit, but know now, that their influences are like sacred springs throughout.

Cross-culturally, and throughout time, the transition from girlhood to womanhood has been honored as a sacred event that affects the entire community and is ritually celebrated. Can you imagine living in a world where each time a young girl comes-of-age, the entire community celebrates?! Judy Grahn and Dianne Jenett with Serpentina Films grace us with another beautiful documentary of a modern menarche ritual in Kerala, India... (FILM CLIP)

While this way of honoring a young girl's rite-of-passage may seem foreign, menstrual activism abounds in the U.S., as women and girls are reclaiming menarche and, reclaiming the inherent power of their blood.
De'Anna L'am is one such activist who is enriching the lives of mothers, grandmothers, aunts, step-mothers, and "any woman with a special girl in her life". As an author, speaker, coach and consultant, she guides women "to become an inspiring role model; to deepen trust with her girl; and to develop ease and confidence about her girl's puberty and coming of age". She also works to cultivate Red Tents in every neighborhood and trains women to hold Red Tents in their communities, so women to have a space to gather and share menstrual wisdom.
Stories of the Sacred Feminine are being unearthed, rediscovered and remembered. These ancient, multi-cultural stories of inspiring women are being shared with young girls and offer encouragement to explore their full potential.

After many years of sharing Goddess stories with women, authors Tina Proctor and Donna DeNomme co-created the book Ophelia's Oracle. Women they met expressed how they wished they had been handed down these stories of divine feminine wisdom when they were younger, and that is just what *Ophelia's Oracle* does.

It is a delightful story about a 12-year-old girl who explores her emerging sense of self. From caring and supportive women, she hears ancient divine feminine stories and through her own experiences, learns how important these stories are today. Ophelia discovers her deep connection to the natural world, finds love and appreciation for her mixed cultural heritage, and for all people.

*Ophelia's Oracle* - which can be used by girls alone or with their friends, mothers or other female relatives or mentors - also features fun activities, interviews with girls who embody goddess qualities, and engaging art and poetry by girls.

**Congratulations Tina and Donna, on the birth of this beautiful book!**

As a closing to exhibit #3, I'd like to offer up a song. Its called 'Bledsung'. If you're comfortable reading and
talking about menstrual consciousness, perhaps you'd like to listen to a song about it!

Listen to 'Bledsung' by Polly Wood

02_Bledsung_Live_at_Kuumbwa.mp3
LIVE with Cellojoe @ Kuumbwa Jazz Center, Santa Cruz, CA June 08

References:
Online Etymology Dictionary http://www.etymonline.com
Judy Grahn http://judygrahn.org/
For more on Metaformic Theory visit Metaformia: A Journal of Menstruation & Culture
Vicki Noble http://www.motherpeace.com
De'Anna L'am http://www.deannalam.com
Check out De'Anna's book: Becoming Peers - Mentoring Girls Into Womanhood, which offers practical guidelines, creative ceremonies and activities designed to honor a girl's transition and call her to new levels of maturity.
Ophelia's Oracle http://www.opheliasoracle.com
Ophelia's Oracle co-author contacts: Tina Proctor tinaproctor@4edisp.net / Donna DeNomme donna@enlightenedsource.com

Week IV
Belly Bowls & Sacred Containers
Witness the Sacred Feminine as divine 'container', as she holds our stories, our choices, and our infinite possibilities...
Our Reproductive Rights!

Right to decide to bear a child or not: to contraception, abortion, self-protection and sex education

Right to perinatal medical care, with full information, and no forced sterilization, no unnecessary Caesarians or hysterectomies

Right to protect children from sexual violation

Right of mothers to justice in custody and family law, including poor, working, lesbian, disabled, battered, and imprisoned mothers

Right of a people to preserve its bloodlines and families, and to survive as a culture

Right of all people to live free of chemical and nuclear poisons that harm our genetic integrity and disrespect Mother Earth

It is a woman’s decision whether she will bear a child from her breath, blood, and bone.

www.maxdashu.net
www.suppressedhistories.net

Our Reproductive Rights! © 2000 Max Dashu
Our Reproductive Rights

Right to decide to bear a child or not:
to contraception, abortion, self-protection and sex education
Right to perinatal medical care, with full information, and no forced sterilizations, no unnecessary Caesarians or hysterectomies
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Right of a people to preserve its bloodlines and families, and to survive as a culture
Right of all people to live free of chemical and nuclear poisons that harm our genetic integrity and disrespect Mother Earth.

It is a woman's decision whether she will bear a child from her breath, blood and bone.

Our Reproductive Rights by the legendary women's cultural historian, Max Dashu.

As founder of the Suppressed Histories Archives, now in its 40th year, Max built a collection of over 15,000 slides and 100 presentations on global women's history. The magnitude of her contributions to women's studies is immense and covers topics such as women's power; neolithic female figurines; gender-egalitarian, mother-right cultures; goddess veneration; indigenous philosophies; and female shamans, to name just a few.

Re-weaving knowledge from divided fields of history, archaeology, linguistics and folk-traditions, Max Dashu is an international scholar and artist who's wealth of knowledge on the Sacred Feminine is sure to inspire anyone seeking Her.

"She supports me with my body pressed against Her / Stars in my belly as she cradles my face / She receives me / I spill my waves inside her / She holds me open in her infinite space"
- from the song Open, by Megan McElroy

(SONG) Click here to listen to her song 01_Open.mp3
I Am the Childless Mother
by Caryl Malone, Shamanic Healer

I am the childless mother
I am the barren womb
I am the tough decision
I am the waning moon

I am your disillusion
I am sweet Brigid's flame
I am the gentle breeze
I am the pouring rain

I am hunger for knowledge
I am the seeking soul
I am Hecate's crossroad
I am fierce Pele's bowl
I am my mother's heartache
I am his broken toy
I am the raging river
I am my sister's joy

I am the Dark Mother
I am Rhiannon's doubt
I am the dancing children
I am the defiant shout

I am Inanna on her peg
I am lament's sad song
I am the heart of compassion
I am dreams forgone

I am Cailleach's cauldron
I am the healing drum
I am the burst of laughter
I AM, since time begun

(This poem is written in the form of a tuirgin, Gaelic for transmigration; based on the tradition of Taliesin, the last known Celtic Shaman/Bard.)
© 2010 Caryl Malone

References:
Max Dashu - http://www.maxdashu.net
    and... http://www.suppressedhistories.net
Judy Grahn - http://www.judygrahn.org
    and... http://www.metaformia.org
    and... http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/grahncarol
Megan McElroy - http://www.meganmcelroy.com
Caryl Malone - carylmalone@yahoo.com
Week V

Love and Rage

Sometimes we need a deity to match the heights of our rage, a deity to embrace our fires as we burn the energies of injustice.

Kali Quilt © 2003 Annemarie Zwack

Sometimes we need a Goddess who embraces our whole self... one who laughs at us, who adds fuel to our fire and who wastes no time in slicing away our illusions.
"This is one of the key reasons why I, as Native, African, black, indigenous, First Nations, KhoeSan, embodied a particular consciousness and respect, as well as humility, when engaging in this research with my Native people, and when writing about our people. My task is made somewhat easier as I position myself as an indigenous woman tracing my First People’s roots through my mother line. At the same time my task is also made harder, because I cannot distance myself from the lives of my ancestors and my contemporaries, from colonial genocide, from the depredations of Apartheid, from the invisibility and poverty of communities deliberately ignored by a government I spent my childhood devoted to bringing to power."

In her essay *Egalitarianism and Nonviolence: Gifts of the Khoe-San*, she goes directly to the source, talking with women elders across the Northern Cape especially, of the !Xun, the Khwe and the Khomani San. "Each ouma (grandmother) recounted stories of women’s strength and power, of goddesses (feminine deities), of sacred femininity that is so powerful it moves mountains".

"Each ouma acknowledged that women have the potential to create life, that life creation is sacred, and hence women are sacred (creators).

Each ouma asserted that women and men are equal, and each must respect the other; that no one should rule over the other. Each ouma spoke of inter-generational respect, beyond nuclear families, especially of youth for elders (the idea that all children are governed by all elders in the community). Each ouma referred to the KhoeSan's ancient principles of nonviolence as norm.

Each ouma spoke of Khoe!na, of interconnectedness, of interdependence, of sharing and caring and gifting".
egg head
i am khoe (human)
san (a person)
khoe san (a person thru other people)
i come from
my mother's egg
nestled in her womb
the earth is not round
its shape is of
an egg
in our constellation
planets do not circle the sun
their orbits are
the shape of an ostrich shell
like a sacred full moon
i am fat with wonder
at how we powerful women
have all the eggs
that really matter
i laugh at how we unscramble
all male violences
and make us whole again
to start life's cycles
anew
like the egg
where beginning end inbetween
are all one
© 2009 Bernadette Muthien

"now you have left, you can wander / will you tell whoever could listen / tell all the voices who speak to younger women / tell all the voices who speak to us when we need it / that the love between women is a circle / and it is not finished"

Funeral Plainsong
Music and vocals by Anne Carol Mitchell
Lyrics from Judy Grahn's poem
Listen to MediaMom Radio Podcast to hear this gorgeous music-(SONG) Show #33
Curator Polly Wood, dressed as all-encompassing, fierce and loving, Divine Mother Kali. photo by Amber Alpizar 2008

References:
Michele Arista http://sites.google.com/site/danceofthedarkmother
Annemarie Zwack http://zwackart.com/
Lydia Ruyle http://lydiaruyle.com/
Bernadette Muthien http://www.engender.org.za
Anne Carol Mitchell http://www.annecarol.com/
Judy Grahn http://judygrahn.org/
Mary Saracino http://www.marysaracino.com/
Week VI

Curator's Note: I am the one who tires of needle and thread after sewing just three sides of a square patch. And yet, the word I use repeatedly to describe the creation of this exhibit is "weaving"...

Sacred Stitches

Lying On My Back at Stonehenge, Deann Tyler
Vicki Noble writes in her thesis, *Women's Textiles: Code for Sustaining Culture and Keeping Time*, "By examining "common threads" and looking at practices and approaches that seem to indicate traditions "cut from the same cloth," I will "piece together" images and illustrations from places as far apart as Peru and India, or Africa and Mexico. And by following all the different clues, and pulling the threads together, I will create a loosely woven whole new cloth that demonstrates the consistency of women's culture". More

In Week III of this exhibit we explored the idea of modern and ancestral women as time-keepers, through their ability to embody the lunar cycle and to mark time with menstrual-lunar synchrony.

The creation of these fabrics arts and quilts are what cultural theorist Judy Grahn would call "metaforms" meaning, physical embodiments of a metaphor, and specifically, as defined in her book, *Blood, Bread & Roses: How Menstruation Created the World*, "an act or form of instruction that makes a connection between menstruation and a mental principle".

While we can see moons, measurements of time and astrology in some of Deann Tyler's pieces, this collage created by Vicki Noble is also a time-keeper, marking a rite-of-passage for her son Aaron Eagle as he moved away from home for the first time.
Birthday Girl, © Annemarie Zwack
As we come to the end of this week's exhibit, I offer you another song of mine called
When the Women Reigned
© Polly Wood 2010

Click HERE to Listen. (SONG)

References:
Deann Tyler  http://deanntyler.webplus.net/
Vicki Noble  http://www.motherpeace.com
Judy Grahn   http://www.judygrahn.org
Annemarie Zwack  http://www.zwackart.com
Polly Wood  http://www.radwoman.com &
http://www.pollywood.ws

PARTIAL TEXT, IMAGE and PHOTO (no music) FROM THE ORIGINAL ONLINE EXHIBIT AT M.O.M. Feb-April 2010

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Exhibit Curator: Polly Wood
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