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Opening Doors: A Guide to Spontaneous Creation-Making

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OPENING DOORS

A Guide to Spontaneous Creation-Making



BARBARA BICKEL

ROBERT FISHER

OPENING DOORS: A Guide to Spontaneous Creation-Making.
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I won't be silent any longer
This may be the last chance for me
I won't pretend that I'm not feeling
All the feelings deep in me,

I won't pretend that I'm not hurting
When I'm hurting and afraid
I won't deny the things I long to tell you
I won't let fear get in the way,

I'm gonna open up and let the feelings soar
I'm going to fling wide the window
and open up the doors
I'm gonna take a risk,
I'm gonna take a chance,
I'm gonna open up and tell you who I am....

(words from a song by Anne Mortiffee)

ABOUT THIS BOOK...

"I like the art/life philosophy and your simple and direct approach to the image, giving it the primacy it deserves; you also honour the process."

— Dr. Shaun McNiff,
Expressive Arts Therapist, Professor and Dean,
Institute for the Arts and Human Development,
Lesley College, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

ACTIVITY FOR
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OPENING DOORS

A Guide To Spontaneous Creation-Making

"Soul-making is healing in this modern world of fear and isolation. Connecting with our 'true Self' and the reasons for those fears, brings a radical new aliveness to our experience of Life/Creation. We no longer need to suffer in our search for meaning and purpose. The need to question our separate existence disappears. In spontaneous creation-making we become one with Creation-in-the-making."

A unique, innovative approach to creating and sharing images is presented in this book. Within the safe context of a non-judgemental group, the method of spontaneous creation-making is described as a way to draw out the 'inner artist' and 'natural creator' within each person.

The authors share several years of their own experience facilitating groups using their method. Beginning with warm-up activities and giving permission to play spontaneously with art materials, the author's develop easy to use guidelines to facilitate sharing creations in the 'sacred circle'. The importance of creating spontaneously and expressing ourselves, returns 'art-making' to its original purpose as a social ritual for building a healthy community.

"Caught up in defining 'what is art?' and 'what is an artist?', we sacrifice the essence of creation-making as a natural ability in all people. The experience of creating awakens the senses and the primal instinct to connect with Life...."

PREFACE and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We began our journeys creating art that was primarily representational. Later, as individuals we explored the purely expressive mode of art as a process and healing experience. After many years of working in human services, Barbara heard of art therapy through a friend. Through art therapy she saw a way of connecting her artistic abilities to her interest in working with people. After taking some expressive arts therapy courses, she realized that the obstacles to becoming who she wanted to be, were within herself. Expressive art experiences continue to be the vehicle for opening doors to the world and her full potential.

Teaching and human liberation have always been two sides of the same coin for Robert. He sees education as therapeutic and therapy as educational. Robert worked as a professional artist for several years before he started teaching art. He avoided the formula "how to" approaches in teaching art. What evolved was a method which focused on removing the fear-based obstacles that blocked the natural ability of students to see accurately and express themselves. In discovering the field of art therapy and its principles, the approaches he was creating were validated. Teaching art was not the focus but rather a means to creating a relationship where he could facilitate a healing experience. His interest in the therapeutic aspect of creating has grown into a passion to return the creative-artistic process to human experience available to everyone.

The motivation for creating this book comes from the positive and powerful experiences over the past few years, of facilitating and sharing spontaneous art experiences with people. This approach has worked well for individuals who call themselves "artists" and those who don't. We have learned that in most cases using the word 'art' is

not useful in encouraging, spontaneity, creativity, and playfulness. The normal concept of 'art' cannot adequately explain what the actual experience is. In this book we have changed the word 'art' to 'creation-making' to reflect the experience of the process of creating itself, rather than the product. We also use 'creator' in place of 'artist' in the text.

The emphasis on creation-making and sharing the creations has evolved into an experience of social ritual for us. Shaun McNiff, an expressive art therapist, said; "Art is primarily a religious [communal] instinct." To return to the social ritual of creation-making, we provide a framework in this book for others to facilitate similar experiences. The format is a 'map' to guide you and others into the 'territory' of creation-making as social ritual.

We are continuously developing this framework and invite others to share their experiences with us. An ongoing drop-in group is held at the Centre every week, as well as day long workshops and inservice training programs.

To contact us write or phone: The In Search of Fearlessness Centre and Research Institute, 4814 -16 St. S.W., Calgary, AB. Canada T2T 4J5 (403) 287-9624.

We are particularly grateful to the late Dr. Martin Fischer, Founder of the Toronto Art Therapy Institute. His 12 day intensive course in 'spontaneous art' inspired Robert to bring this type of art experience to Calgary. The spiritually-based experience with Robert Rice, art therapist with the Creation-Centered Spirituality Institute in Oakland, California, provided Robert with a deep appreciation for non-clinical approaches to using creative art experiences.

Later workshops with expressive arts therapists; Carolyn Kenny, Bonnie Bultz, Roberta Nadeau and a course by Bernie Warren provided the practical techniques and skills essential for Robert to

develop his own theory and approach to art therapy. A special gratitude to Don and Carol Hale, Directors of Quest: A New Beginning, for supporting Robert's seven year journey developing and working with art therapeutic approaches with adolescents and families in crisis; and publishing his manual on *The Art Therapeutic Approach For Care Givers*. Barbara's in-service practicum with Bonnie Bultz provided the support, guidance and encouragement she needed to continue to pursue her interest in the expressive arts therapies. We appreciate the opportunity Barbara had to attend workshops with Dr. Martin Fischer, Bonnie Bultz, Carolyn Kenny, Anne Johnson, and Masquirks. The courses in art therapy with Dr. Bruce Tobin, Helene Burt, and dance therapy with Judith Koltai provided invaluable insights into her own healing journey.

A special thanks to Dr. Peter Gordon, Alan Briks, Bonnie Bultz, Larry Sannuto, Coralie Willis, Graeme Skinner and Dr. Shaun McNiff for reviewing the manuscript. We would like to acknowledge the inspiration we have received from the theoretical foundations of Dr. Shaun McNiff, Professor and Dean, Institute for the Arts and Human Development, Lesley College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, with his emphasis on the sacredness of the image and the social ritual of creation-making. We are especially grateful to the prophetic voice of Fr. Matthew Fox, founder of the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality, for assisting the re-birth of the ancient creation traditions in North America.

We would like to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of all those who have shared their creations and journey with us over the past few years.

PROLOGUE

The following is a sampling of comments from Spontaneous Creation-making participants.

"I was attending a weekend workshop given by Robert almost two years ago: Living and Loving Beyond Fear. We were given 40 minutes and free rein with the art materials supplied. Surprisingly, I had no hesitation. I found paints and paper and began re-creating an image that had come into my mind the previous night—a five-pointed black outline containing a core of red, graduating outward to blue. At the end of the 40 minutes, we shared our work one at a time in a 'sacred circle'. I felt my creation totally accepted and respected. The group was right there with me at a fundamental level. Their reflections and reactions touched me to the core. The experience of creation-making and sharing this expression of my soul was a turning point in my life. It was the start of a conscious journey.

Since that time I have highly valued the role of creation-making in my life. From the start, art has been an integral part of this process—a process in which I have great trust. I never cease to be amazed at the great wealth and wisdom of the unconscious mind, which is continually tapped through my art work. My rational conscious mind may run in tormented circles, but put a paint brush, crayon, or pastel in my hand, supply me with scissors and materials, give me the time and space to create spontaneously and my inner wisdom takes over. My rational mind is baffled and I let it remain so, trusting the process.

It begins with a color that appeals, then a line, a shape. Forms create forms. Colors lead to other colors. I always know when the piece is done. It is only then that I can sit back and begin to understand.

Sometimes there is no understanding—just a sense of completion, a sense of unburdening. Often there is an opportunity to share the piece with someone, and the gift of attention to my creation is a gift of attending to my innermost self. Frequently, there is a key that opens the next door in my journey, or a theme that unwittingly repeats and refuses to be repressed.

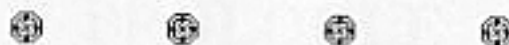
Creation-making has been a powerful tool in my emotional and spiritual growth. Through my experiences with it, I am learning to respect the part of me that is the artist, the creator, the intuitive female and the spontaneous child. I am reconnecting with long lost parts of myself."



"I was born to a dysfunctional family— secrets, criticism, judgement, blaming, resentment, no expression of feelings, no healthy problem solving, little information, little touch or affection, one whipping, many expectations and corrections. I felt oppressed. I suppressed feelings. I repressed feelings. I knew nothing of healthy relationships. I experienced depression which was treated with electroshock therapy, tranquilizers, anti-depressants, psychiatric wards, and chronic stages of alcoholism. I have been sober and healing for 14 years.

When I create spontaneous art:

I am 'with myself', rather than being involved and dependent on being 'out there'. I find out about me and my unique beingness. I express my unconscious and subconscious and make it conscious. I allow non-verbal expression and healing of past hurts. I can non-verbally express my feelings that come from deep inside of me—they are true, unique expressions of me, by me — 'art restoreth my soul'. It takes me away from my logical mind and into an inner place of non-verbal expression. I am 'with myself.'"



"In the spontaneous art group last night I was able to create an image which allowed a lot of expression of the anger I felt at growing up with all the abuse and irrationality. I was a bit afraid to bring my creation into the circle. But the whole night had seemed quite magical. All the sharings were quite divine. We had really captured some healthy soulful spirit in each of us and the connection was deep. What had seemed like heavy stuff coming out, turned into something beautiful and playful. The evening ended with wonderful joyful smiles on all our faces. I think we were all waiting to burst into a cosmic gut-splitting laughter. We knew we had been connected in a non-rational way and 'it' had fooled us—caught us by surprise—totally delightful and a bit scary. The wisdom of this experience seemed to be at least three steps ahead of us understanding it. That is what I call magic."



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INTRODUCTION

Opening the Door to Creation-Making

"...awakening ordinary people to their own creativity, they are going to become better citizens, better parents, better educators, more imaginative solvers of human problems and conditions.... The best thing the artist creates is the artist."

— Matthew Fox

From Making Art To The Essence of Creation-making

What makes humans unique is the desire to create. At any moment we can take the opportunity to express ourselves in the world. In creating we are re-expressing and making ourselves. In this book we have changed the word 'art' to 'creation-making' to reflect the experience of the process of creating, rather than the product. We also use 'creator' in place of 'artist' in the text.

Caught up in defining 'what is art?' and 'what is an artist?', we sacrifice the essence of creation-making as a natural ability in all people. The experience of creating awakens the senses and the primal instinct to connect with Life and the world around us. Creation-making is a natural way of growing and becoming just what we are—creators. Most importantly, as creators we are of unquestionable value.

Any form of self-expression is an act of creation-making. Creating pictures, hanging a poster on the wall, dressing, walking, all reflect how we feel about ourselves and the world. These acts of self-expression are too often overlooked as insignificant. Significance is the key to healthy self-esteem. When value and unconditional



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attention are given to our forms of self-expression, we experience a feeling of undeniable self-worth.

Creation-making As Social Ritual



"Artistic expression has always been one of the cornerstones of all known human communities....Unfortunately, the communal, expressive, healing and spiritual aspects of the arts have been all but lost in technological societies."

— Bernie Warren and Roberta Nadeau

The basis for this book comes from the knowledge that humans first marked their way in the world painting in caves and scratching in sand. Their images and creations were intimately linked to the social rituals which gave meaning to the life of the individual and community. The connection of the individual and the social group provided a context which facilitated natural healing.

Creation-making is an intrinsic part of an individual's spiritual development. In sharing our self-expressions we connect with the communal aspect of spirituality. The true value of creation-making as a social ritual has been lost in modern western culture. In place of this loss we have made healing a private affair not readily shared. The approach in this book focuses on recovering the ancient form of healing in social ritual through the spontaneous creation-making experience.

Caring Is Facilitating Creative Expression

"To care for another person, in the most significant sense, is to help them grow and actualize themselves.... Man [woman] as growing and creating is always unfinished and in the making."

— Milton Mayeroff

"If you bring forth what is within, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

— Gospel of Thomas

Caring has two components. One is providing and maintaining basic physical needs and companionship, enabling an individual to cope in the world. The other is providing unconditional attention to the creative expressive desires, encouraging the individual to heal through their woundedness and develop self-worth. Woundedness is the 'baggage' we carry in memory from past hurtful experiences. In denying these wounds we deny a part of ourselves, which if left unattended, will cause further hurting. Our experience indicates that emotional healing occurs when creative expression is received non-judgementally in a caring environment.

Most of us are taught to bury and deny so much of our 'true self' from a very early age. We become afraid to express our 'true feelings'. The spontaneous art format in this book is designed to create a safe space for creative self expression in the presence of unconditional attention.

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Creation-Making and Community

"Community-building first, problem-solving second."

— Scott Peck

There are many ways to effectively facilitate creation-making. This book is based on our experience with many people creating, sharing and healing within the context of spontaneous art groups. Although, we have utilized many of the principles of expressive arts therapy, and counselling in our approach, we differ from these traditional models in that there is no "expert" and "client" relationship involved. We see our approach as a social ritual where no one is expected to solve anyone else's problems.

We encourage community-building rather than problem-solving as the focus of creation-making. The approach in the following chapters details how to facilitate effective creation-making with all individuals. Past hurts and problems may arise in this experience. There are simple ways to handle these without needing training as a therapist or group facilitator.

When an individual is given unconditional attention hurts may arise as unhealed painful memories, this is not a 'problem'. It is an opportunity for them to move through the painful past experience. Feelings and fearful thoughts may accompany the memories. The facilitator will be most effective when they remember that these feelings, felt in the present moment, originate from past hurtful events.

The individual is already coping with their wounds. Creation-making provides the opportunity to express the feelings and heal through the hurt in the safety of the group. The expression of feelings or pain has never harmed anyone... they are not 'bad'. It is the holding of painful feelings inside, or being judged by another person for having these feelings, that causes damage.

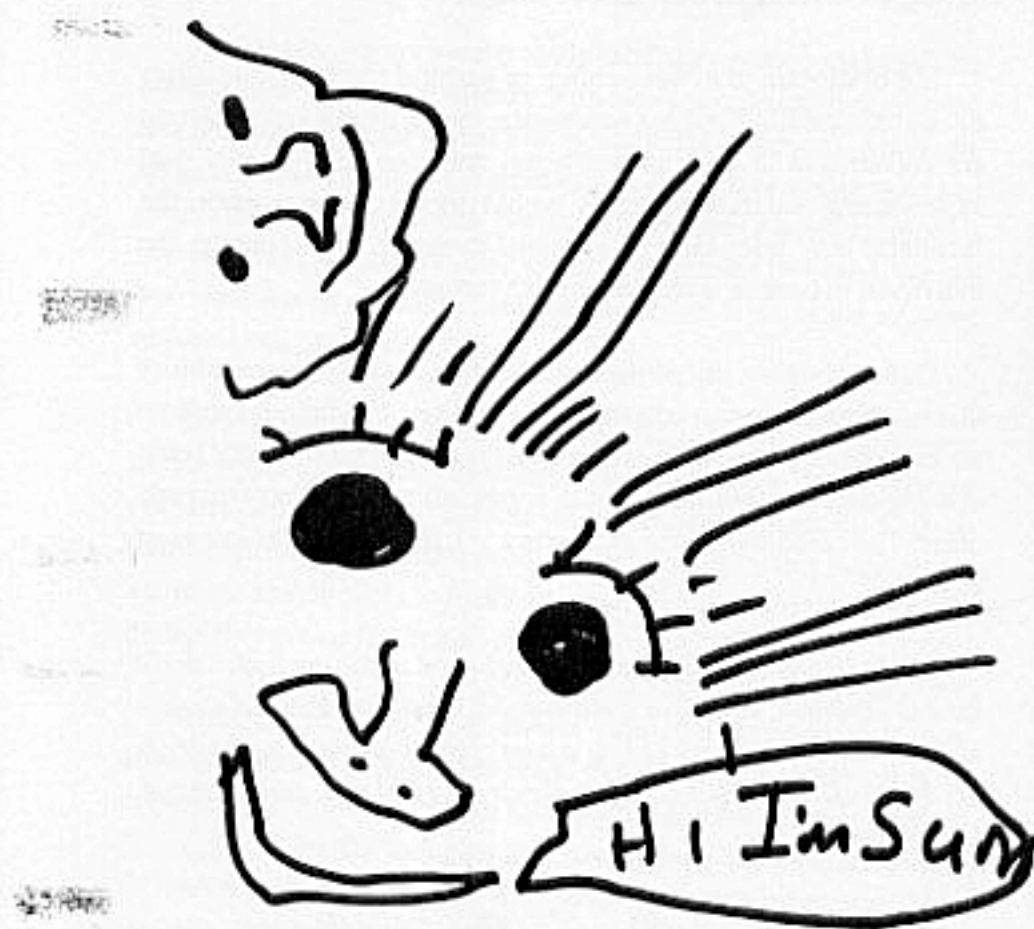
If a disclosure of a 'threatening' or harmful circumstance arises through the creation-making experience, the facilitator and the group are encouraged to give unconditional attention. If the individual experiencing painful memories would like extra assistance the facilitator may refer them to a trained therapist, or encourage the individual to consult with a supportive resource.

Our experience in spontaneous creation-making groups shows that much excitement, enthusiasm, joy and self-validation dominate the experience people have. This energy is very contagious and leads to the spontaneous building of trust, appreciation and support for each other. The creation-making experience is often freeing, as one man shared:

"I do it ultimately for my Self. I feel good about my Self. I don't have to explain it, judge it or feel ashamed. When I create I feel a sense of relief that I don't have to hide a part of me. I am working towards accepting all of myself. Sharing in the circle, I feel safe, and accepted. I feel Love."



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Spontaneous Creation-making

"To do something active and creative in this world of increasing mechanization and passivity is in itself therapeutic."

— Edith Kramer



This book focuses on visual art forms of expression (drawing, painting, collage, sculpture etc.), although the other expressive arts are dealt with briefly. This approach is applicable in any caring relationship where growth and change are encouraged.

Spontaneous creation-making focuses on:

- creating a "safe", non-judgemental environment to allow spontaneous expression of feelings and ideas
- providing opportunity and encouragement to explore various art materials, creative process, and social interactions with others
- freedom and permission to make a mess,

Spontaneous creation-making *does not* focus on:

- interpreting symbols in art work and making diagnoses on the basis of those interpretations
- psychotherapeutic intervention techniques based on any kind of psychological diagnosis
- teaching art techniques

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- problem-solving

This format works most effectively when the content or subject matter of creation-making is seen as only part of the experience of creative expression. We feel it is not essential to have pre-set goals to make a "nice", "attractive" or "useful" end product. Creation-making itself and the sharing of that experience with others, opens the doors to healing and community-building.

For example, young children often produce vast quantities of spontaneous "art" that they give freely to anyone near them who shows even the slightest interest. What is important for these children is not so much the subject of the picture, but the act of creating as an expression of their world. Giving the picture away is an acknowledgement of their own value. Accepting that creation non-judgementally is a validation of their worthiness as a creator in the world.

What is therapeutic?

In this format we define 'therapeutic' in the original use of the term which is derived from the Greek 'therapon', which means "companion". In this model people are companions for each other on the journey of growth and change. There is no one who is a "therapist" or "expert" and no one who is a "patient" or "client". 'Therapeutic' is defined as the experience "which connects people".

Our experience in sharing creation-making with others, shows that UNCONDITIONAL ATTENTION is 'therapeutic' and the key to developing a trusting relationship which encourages healing and community-building. This in effect is a major contradiction to isolation, aloneness and despair that is often brought on by fear of judgement.

The 3-R's of Creation-making: Reverence, Rhythm and Ritual

3

*"Our human movement is really a magical effect,
because in it something is set in motion by the spirit."*

— Rudolf Steiner

Wherever spontaneous creation-making is occurring it is essential to develop the qualities of reverence, rhythm and ritual. When these qualities are present a sense of sacredness is formed in the group as the creations are shared. To facilitate the sharing of spontaneous creations we suggest forming a 'sacred circle'.

1. REVERENCE - (Creating A 'Sacred Circle')

- this is the quality of attention in which the creation-making experience, the creation, the persons, and the relationships are treated as entirely new and always significant. For example, during creation-making we bring each creation into the centre of the 'sacred circle' of participants. We ask that each creation be viewed as if it were a 'new baby' just born and presented to us. During creation-making we ask participants to see themselves and others in the experience of 'birthing'.



2. RHYTHM - ('Letting Go With The Flow')

- the creation-making rhythm is a direct expression of the inner world of the creator. There is no "right" or "wrong" rhythm when creating. Our goal as companions on the healing journey is not to

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impose our own rhythms of comfort on each other or the creative experience itself. Being able to "let go" of preconceived notions of what 'should be' happening and how it 'should be' is essential to opening the doors to healing.

3. RITUAL - ('Creating A Social Experience')

- along with creating a 'sacred circle' for creation-making, it is important to create a 'sacred time' or 'ritual time.' This ritualizing of the time builds trust in the creators. Their experience expands each time they come together, bringing different moods and parts of themselves to be shared. By repeating this experience (daily, weekly, or monthly) we create a ritual that provides multiple opportunities to explore ourselves and connect with others.

'Take A Moment'...

When you create something, even if you were just scribbling, or doodling, stop, and appreciate that you created it. You may even say to yourself "this is amazing how this appeared." Take a moment to acknowledge that it appeared out of endless possibilities in just that moment. Your creation is significant as it is a live "being". You may not see its significance at first glance. Watch to see that you are not dismissing it because of 'old tapes' such as, "this is not art" or "beautiful" and "it is stupid and a waste of time". Watch to see if you are overly critical and judgemental of your creations.

Now just imagine if you gave that kind of attention to someone else's creations. Take that moment. This is the essence of creation-making.

Suggestions for a 'magical' way of seeing:

1. *Change any habitual ways of responding to a creation,*
e.g. "That's nice!"...(the creator is very aware of the quality of attention you give to them and their work)

2. *Practice reflective seeing...* i.e., look at the creation as if you were looking into a mirror, or your reflection in a pool of water. You don't need to analyze or say anything about it...you need only to engage fully in the viewing of it...that is the attention the creator desires...you may tell them what you see and how it affects you... e.g. "I see a deep ocean and it feels cold and dark." You may ask; "what do you see in your creation?"

3. *It is useful to look at the creation from all angles* and even to get up on a chair to see it from a distance. This often reveals other qualities and provides a fresh experience of the piece.

4. *Listening non-judgementally to the creator is all that is required.* Often the creator will try to 'lure' you into saying something "nice" about their creation. Our experience is, they would rather have you listen to them talk about it, or have you talk about how their creation affects you. One way to interact with the piece non-judgementally is to say: "If I were the creator of this piece I would be feeling....". The creator is not obliged to agree or disagree.

5. *Handle the creation as if it were a new baby...* there is nothing as supportive as delightful curiosity and sensitive touching.

6. *Put the creation in better light, or at a distance where you can sit down and really look at it....* the creator loves having such an effect

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on you ... you may ask them if you can put it up on display (if that is what you really want).

7. *Provide a folder, or room where their creations can be stored* ...occasionally you may pull them out and compare them with new pieces being created. You may encourage them to combine the past creations, or if the creation is not available you may refer to them and compare them as you recall their qualities.

EXPERIENCE FROM THE SACRED CIRCLE

One man brought a box of toothpicks to his first group, only because he felt he should bring something. Although, he admitted he had no idea of what he wanted to create, the ideas soon came out of him spontaneously. Within 20 minutes he had interwoven with toothpicks several mini-sculptures of varying complexity without using glue. They reminded people of "planes with beautiful architecture". They were at once humorous, playful and brilliant. Many of us in the circle suggested he had a real talent as an architect. During the next few weeks he moved away from these abstract, highly controlled creations and explored using various media. One night he brought a burlap sack and cut it up into a shape which he delicately and sensitively folded and wove together with several toothpicks. When this creation was placed in the centre of the sacred circle it evoked deep emotions. Spontaneously, someone picked it up and wanted to hold it like a baby creature. It was greeted and admired with delight as it was then passed around the room. We had all come to a birth.



OVERCOMING FEAR OBSTACLES



"Trust begets trust; fear escalates fear....When I trust my own inner processes I am able to become what I am meant to become. When I trust you I am able to allow you in. And when I trust the process of living I am able to join others..."

— Jack R. Gibb

A Woman's Experience

"When I came in I was so afraid—the devil images inside me—and seeing the devil images come out was spooky—and that helped me get in touch. I think this was my anger about my mother not supporting me. I didn't feel like an artist. I kept thinking I had to produce something people would say was art—to be important and be noticed, so I am worth something. So I felt like I was a failure to be something. The artist is down there—and what was important was to stop going outside myself to be validated. The art is still painful for me. I was constantly criticized when I was a child. I am learning to be less critical with my art and myself now. Spontaneous creation-making is a way of validating my art for what it is."

It is not necessary to be an "artist" to appreciate and delight in creations. You don't have to be well educated in art, aesthetics, therapy or psychology to connect with someone in the creation-making experience. What is essential is to trust the process of what is going on at any time.

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We have found common fears in creation-making groups both as facilitators and as participants:

Common Fears as Facilitators

1. How am I going to make someone create?

You are there to offer the opportunity to create or not. We have rarely experienced anyone who has not contributed a creation in the sacred circle. All are welcome in the circle if they chose to participate.

2. What if the participants are feeling uncomfortable and anxious about creating?

For individuals who have never expressed themselves spontaneously, it can be scary at times. It is not useful to allow their fears to become your fear that they are not enjoying the process. Their uncomfortable feelings may need to be listened to and validated as O.K. We have found that the specific interactions during spontaneous creation-making groups are unique and unpredictable.

3. What if a painful and fearful experience comes up for a participant?

In situations where the creation expressed by an individual reflects painful experiences it is important to listen unconditionally, without giving advice or attempting to solve anything. Revealing painful memories in this safe environment is a healing process.

If an individual experiences pain and fear that feels overwhelming to them and you do not feel able to give them all the attention they require, we suggest that you recommend they consult a qualified therapist.

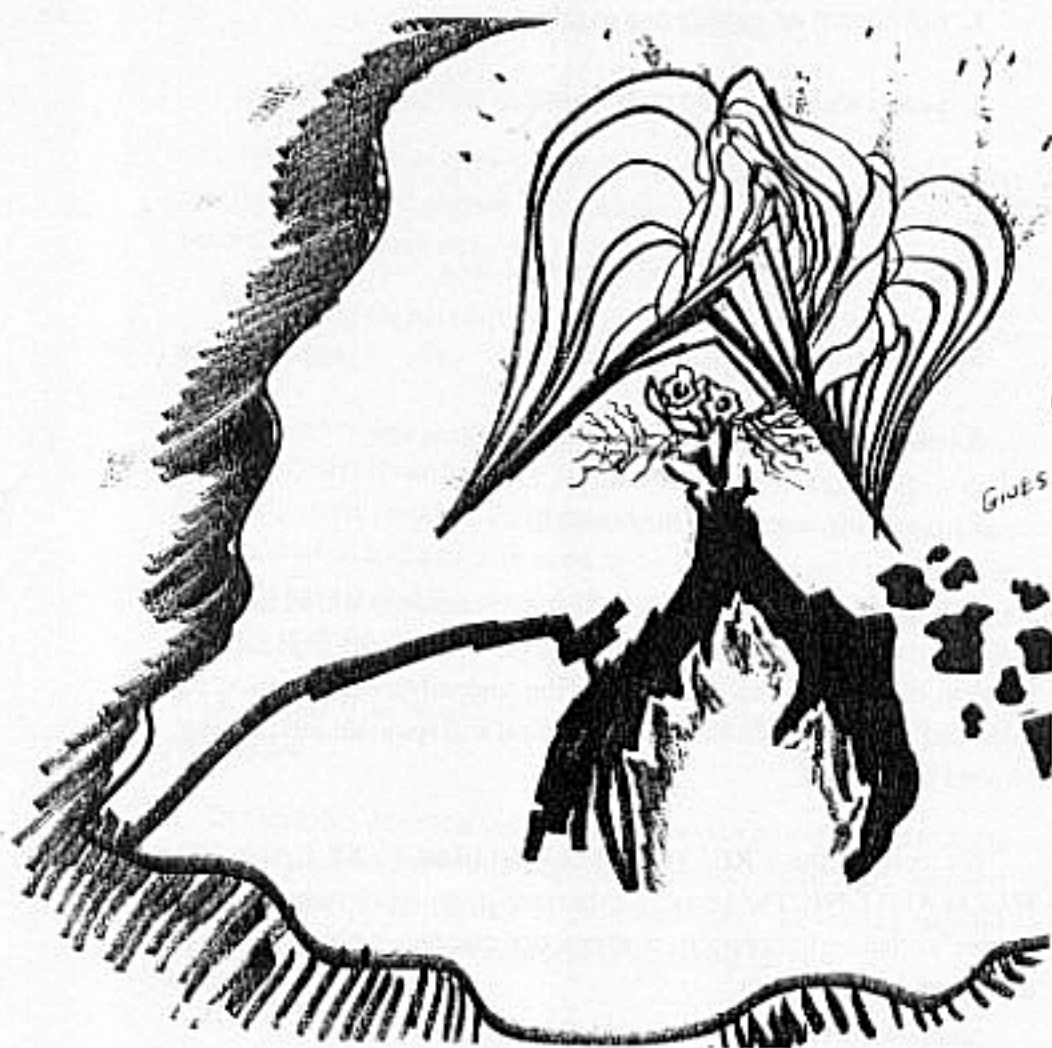
Common Fears as Participants

1. not having art experience or talent
2. past criticism around their creations and ability
3. being seen as childish
4. this is not important and a waste of time
5. judging and comparing with others
6. not being able to come up with a brilliant idea
7. revealing more than they want to

Staying delighted in the creator and their creations allows them to open doors to new parts of themselves, parts that were kept hidden because of these common fears. Giving unconditional attention to them and their creations facilitates a natural and spontaneous healing beyond these fears.

We believe the CREATION-MAKING PROCESS CANNOT HARM ANYONE. The best way to become more comfortable around people's creative expressions is to practice creation-making yourself and share it with others.





CROSSING THE THRESHOLD: ENTERING THE EXPERIENCE OF CREATION-MAKING

5

"As we restore art to its place in the healing process, we should be guided by those most qualified to speak on the personal effects of the art experience [the creators]."

— Shaun McNiff

"We have to realize that a creative being lives within ourselves, whether we like it or not, and that we must get out of its way, for it will give us no peace until we do."

— Mary Richards



In this chapter we provide a structure and process for directed ways of interacting with creation-making. This does not include providing the reader with 1001 activities, rather to provide you with a format in which you can facilitate a spontaneous creation-making group.

Structuring Creation-Making

What is required?

1. A space where people are allowed to create freely without being interrupted, without worrying about making a mess or being judged

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2. A designated time that will not be interrupted where attention can be devoted to creation-making and sharing
3. Person(s) willing to participate
4. Permission to use (and waste) art materials (see Appendix for a recommended list of basic supplies)

SPONTANEOUS CREATION-MAKING consists of FOUR PHASES:

The phases are analogous to a physical 'work out': first is a gentle warm-up (UNLOCKING), leading into increased intensity (CREATION-MAKING & OPENING DOORS), and completing with a "cool down" (CLOSING).

A. UNLOCKING (Getting Started)

This phase includes a time of introduction to the process about to take place. (You may want to set a rough time frame.) We commonly tell the group something like this:

"This is a time to play and nurture yourself. This is not about creating a work of art. You don't need to be an artist, gifted or talented. It is about making creations. We are all creators and making creations is natural to us."

It is a good idea to let people know what you are going to be doing during this time (are you going to watch, go away, or participate in making something yourself?). Then let them know how you are going

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to share the creations later. For example, prepare them by saying:

"After(a given time frame) we will gather around in a sacred circle to share the creations one at a time. We will tell you when it is time to bring your creations to the sacred circle."

You may modify this introduction to suit your particular situation. Our work with individuals and groups involves letting them create spontaneously for 30-45 minutes and then sharing the creation(s).

Suggested Warm-up activities

If you feel your particular group needs more guidance to get started:

- create an exercise where the creator is "blind" (have them close their eyes or not look at what they are creating).
- have them make a mess, crinkle the paper they are working on, rip old magazines, use old pieces of junk etc.
- have them move with music to express feelings
- use the opposite of the dominant hand
- use unconventional tools to paint or draw with
- join with a partner to create something



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Suggestions For Those Still Reluctant To Create

1. No one is forced to create or share. Acknowledge their resistance (eg. *"Oh, you don't seem to be interested in making any creation today"*). You may offer suggestions and make the art materials more accessible. Encourage them to go at their own pace.
2. Model participation in creation-making yourself.
3. Encourage play without needing to create a product.

B. CREATION-MAKING (Giving Permission)

This is the phase where the individual is allowed to play and explore with the media provided. In our work we allow total permission to create whatever they want. For some facilitators this total permission may be difficult. We encourage non-censorship of images created. The imagery is an expression of feelings and thoughts, it is not a reflection of who the person is who creates it.

Most individuals will be ready to create without any further direction. For those who are still looking for guidance we recommend in the following order:

1. Ask them if they have anything they would like to create and encourage them to pursue that.
2. If they do not know what to make, suggest they express what has been on their mind or express their feelings.

3. If they need more direction, encourage them to express a memory of a significant event.

4. If they have not engaged by this point give them some individual attention by connecting with them either physically or through conversation, this may have nothing to do with art or creating.

5. While giving them good attention, ask them if they have ever made anything, such as; cooked a meal, sewn an outfit, made a sand castle etc. Validate any activity that is making a creation.

6. Go back to step 1, and work through the encouraging process again.

7. If there is still resistance you may suggest themes:

...such as, "a picnic", "work", "my best friend", "things that make me angry or happy", "myself", "my family", "what I want", "what I hope for", "what I regret", etc. Let them choose their own theme. Always provide more than one option.

In our groups we often make encouraging comments while they are creating such as:

"Try not to think too much about making any kind of picture, or recognizable thing...just respond to the art materials, feelings and intuitions."

"It is O.K. to make several creations. If you don't like the piece you are working on... move on to another... create as many as you like."

"Feel free to try different materials and explore..."

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"Feel free to move around and work in different places."

Spontaneous expressions grow best when no one is looking over anyone's shoulder while creating. The facilitator or a participant may feel drawn to interact and to work with another person in what they are creating. If the urge to interact is strong, ask permission.

It is useful to give a 10 and 5 minute call before the time for creation-making ends.

C. OPENING DOORS (Sharing)



In this phase each person gathers in the sacred circle. The facilitator's role is to create a safe and caring atmosphere. Each person's creation is brought into the centre of the circle by the creator. One at a time, the group attends to the creations until each participant is offered this opportunity.

This is the most important phase to pursue consciously, without letting habitual patterns of responding to creations and creators invade the experience. (see guidelines below). The facilitator acts as a key role model in encouraging sharing without judgement or analysis.

We have all been hurt in exposing our creations. Too often in the past we have been criticized and judged around our art and our artistic skills. Our creations have been compared to what society has labeled "real art", "useful art" or "fine art". What we expressed in our creations was often missed, ignored, denied, or made fun of. These experiences were invalidating and resulted in various ways of 'closing

doors' to our inner self. Over time we may have given up trying to express our feelings. Often we gave up on using art as a medium to communicate and heal our wounds.

Spontaneous creation-making goes beyond normal definitions of "art" and "artist". It focuses attention on the person and the experience of creation-making, NOT the "product". We can consciously 'open doors' once again as we return to creation-making as a healing experience available to all people.

Guidelines To Opening Doors

Common patterns that can become habitual and are to be avoided:

1. Critiquing and Analyzing

Creation-making is not about making an end product. The creator is still in the experience of creating when they enter the sacred circle. There is no finished product, hence nothing to judge. At all times use 'I...' statements. If you feel you want to say something about the creation, you may say:

"I feel a lot of emotions in this piece."

If you want to know what the color, shapes or symbols represent, ask the creator what they mean to them?

2. Trying To Make People Feel Good

Creation-making is about acknowledging and validating that people are good but don't always feel good. It is totally acceptable to not feel good. Our experience tells us that it is more important to be with people in what they are feeling, rather than trying to change their feelings.

3. Discussion

It is more important to give unconditional attention to the creation rather than talk about it. Discussion about the creation/content often leads away from the centre of focus... which is the creation and what it expresses. While there is a creation in the centre of the circle, it is essential that all talking be directed to the creation and/or the creator. Everyone will get a turn for attention.

Fundamentals To Sharing The Creation In The Sacred Circle

The key to connecting is to give undivided non-judgemental **ATTENTION**. Most of us find it very difficult and uncomfortable to receive such attention and give it. The creation acts as a safe bridge or vehicle in connecting with another person. Conversing and connecting through the creation is often less threatening than face to face encounters.

We **RECOMMEND** any or all of the following approaches:

Basic Assumptions:

1. The forming of the sacred circle is an extension of the creation-making experience. Each individual's turn is sacred and is not to be limited in how the creator wants to express their creation.

2. The creation is not the person. The creation is produced from a large number of factors and motivations including, and beyond what is personal. In our experience the dynamics going on in the room affect the outcome of what is created.

3. A time frame of how long each creation is shared is up to the group and the facilitator. We have found it may vary from 30 seconds to 15 minutes for each turn.
4. Invite each creator to bring all the creations made in that session and place them in consecutive order. This is not mandatory, nor do they have to show any of their creations.
5. Invite the creator, whose turn it is, to speak about their creation before others and/or after everyone is finished responding. It is optional for the creator to respond or not.
6. The quality of sharing in a group is influenced dramatically by the facilitator modelling openness and vulnerability first.

Techniques For Sharing Creations

1. Attending A Birth ("Invoking Magic")

In our groups we remind the participants that each creation can be received as a new baby. *"How would you respond to a new baby?"* ...with delight and expectation of something magical.

2. Silence

When the creation(s) are placed in the centre of the sacred circle, allow a time of silence for all participants to calm and be with the creation(s), accepting its presence (1-2 minutes).

3. Spontaneous Response

Because these are spontaneous creations it is appropriate that we

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respond spontaneously (not habitually or planned). We tell people:

"...let the creation(s) speak to you...and see what it encourages you to do. Feel free to respond however you feel so moved. You may move around, touch it... whatever."

Sharing can take the form of words, feelings, and intuitions. For example, share fragments and non-sensical expressions like: *"Singing a song for blue-birds"* and the creation may not look anything like blue-birds... that is not important... your intuitive response is.

4. Spotlighting

As a viewer you may find the creation(s) very complex, powerful or difficult to focus on in its entirety. Focus on one part that attracts your attention (positively or negatively) and respond spontaneously to it. You may ask the creator to talk about one part of the creation you are curious about.

5. Process Questioning

Ask the creator to explain how the creation(s) developed. Ask for details like: *"Where did you begin?"*, *"When did you add this color?"* etc. This is the least threatening way for the creator to talk about their creation. If there is more than one creation, it is valuable to talk with them about how the pieces changed and developed in the sequence in which they were made.

6. Finding A Story

One of the best methods to encourage sharing of a creation is to ask the creator to make up a story or give a title to what is going on in the piece.

7. Inviting - "Anything Else?"

To ensure all responses are heard, it is best to invite the participants several times during each turn: *"Is there anything else?"* or *"Does anyone have more to add?"*

D. CLOSING ("Wrapping Up")

In this last phase we recommend that each participant gives feedback to the group on how the experience was for them...positive or negative. *"What have you learned that is new or different?"* is a useful question for closing. No discussion is encouraged between participants during the sharing time. It is a time for personal statements. However, those who want to talk after the session are free to do so.

The creator may wish to wait and absorb the responses given. Sometimes this takes a few days to assimilate.

At times there is a group closeness that builds and a ritual closing is desired. Depending on the desire of the group, this ritual may take different forms, some examples are:

- joining hands, group hugs,
- sharing appreciations of the person next to them and around the circle
- jumping up together at the count of three and shouting out a chosen word...

eg. **"YES!"**

ENHANCING THE EXPERIENCE OF CREATION-MAKING

6

Spontaneous creation-making as a social ritual has traditionally involved more than the visual art forms described in the preceding chapters. In this chapter we extend the experience to include the other expressive arts such as story, music, movement, dance, drama and writing.

Story

In our spontaneous creation-making groups we often read inspirational quotes or excerpts from stories at the beginning. In today's fast paced world we all come from diverse experiences. It often takes only the sharing of a quote or story excerpt to connect our lives to universal human experiences.

The facilitator can take the responsibility for bringing a quote or excerpt to the group. If the group meets regularly others may share in this responsibility. The story theme is often a trigger in influencing what participants create.

Music

Music is a great evoker of emotions. In our spontaneous creation-making groups we play music tapes in the background while the group is creating. We prefer instrumental or sound music to music with vocals. You and your group may decide what type of music enhances the creation-making experience best for you.



Movement and Dance

It is important in these groups not to limit the way people move in the spontaneous creation-making experience. The body and its rhythms are integral in connecting with our emotions and other people non-verbally. As a facilitator you may encourage movement or dance as a warm up activity before creation-making. We find this helpful when there is a lot of high energy in the group that needs to be expressed. When the energy of the group is low, movement or dance can raise the energy. We encourage exploration of the room and the various art materials available. We then suggest the participants find a place in the room where they feel comfortable to create. During the sharing of the creations in the sacred circle, the participants are encouraged to interact with the creations. If someone wants to physically touch or move the creation it is best to ask for permission from the creator. These interactions can include getting out of the circle and moving around the creation, picking up the creation and turning it in various positions, and laying with the creation in the centre of the circle etc.

Drama

All creative expressions; walking, talking, dressing or making creations, involve dramatic re-enactments of our experiences in life. Creation-making is a dramatic re-enactment of how we feel, think, and respond to the joy and pain of life. The participants in the sacred circle are the audience and stage. The creators are the performers. We often experience the entire group of participants engaging in unpredictable dramas that unfold with and around the spontaneous creation.

Writing

The nature of visual art is pre-verbal. It is the language of the soul, complete in itself. However, in adding poetry, words, narrative and spontaneous written dialogue with the creation, the depth of communication and understanding of the creation is enriched.

Some participants have adopted the ritual of journaling before and after these experiences to elaborate and record reactions and insights in this learning experience.

Conclusion

Each of these expressive art forms may be used in the UNLOCKING Phase of spontaneous creation-making. They facilitate an elaboration and enrichment of the experience. We've also used objects such as colored sheers, string, puppets, and photographs to connect with participants and lead them into a playful and permissive mood.

You and your group are encouraged to find your own ways of combining any of the expressive arts forms into the spontaneous creation-making experience.



FROM CREATION-MAKING TO SOUL-MAKING



The modern vision of ourselves and the world has stultified our imaginations. What is needed is a revisioning, a fundamental shift of perspective out of that soul-less predicament we call modern consciousness.

— James Hillman

Spontaneous creation-making brings a revisioning of the art experience. Modern conceptions of 'art' and the 'artist' have generally not captured the meaning of creation-making as the soul-making process we have experienced in our groups. Sharing our creations in the sacred circle expands the individual experience of creating into a social ritual. The deepening connection of the participants opens doors to discovering our uniqueness as creators in the common ground of soul.

What do we mean by 'soul'? We use 'soul' to describe our experience of connecting deeply with our inner nature as creative beings. When we invoke our 'inner artist' to venture out we can no longer hide our vulnerable true human beauty. As a group of human beings allow themselves to communicate and be vulnerable in creation-making, the art experience fosters a communal bond.

Soul-making is healing in this modern world of fear and isolation. Connecting with our 'true Self' and the reasons for those fears, brings a radical new aliveness to our experience of Life/Creation. We no

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longer need to suffer in our search for meaning and purpose. The need to question our separate existence disappears. In spontaneous creation-making we become one with Creation-in-the-making.

Returning to creation-making as a valid social ritual begins a powerful healing journey for ourselves and the planet. The recovery of our soul is critical to the recovery of everything humane in our world.



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* Note: These reference materials and more, are available for reading and loan at The In Search of Fearlessness Centre and Research Institute.

Appendix III

Basic Art Supplies For Spontaneous Creation-making

[Note: you don't need all of the below to start.]

- exacto knives
- glue; sticks, bottles, and glue gun
- scissors; small and big, sharp pointed and round pointed
- hole punch
- paper clips, stapler, pins, nails, screws, wire etc.

- stones, shells, etc.
- pencils, pens, crayons, pencil crayons,
- chalk and oil pastels
- non-toxic felt pens of different sizes
- bottle of india ink

- erasers
- clay and/or plasticine
- paints: water color, tempera, acrylic,
- paint brushes, big and small
- sponges

- various plastic containers, holders for paints and water
- old magazines
- newsprint rolls, and sheets of any kind of paper
- old cardboard

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- old cardboard containers, scraps
- colored paper
- colored tissue paper
- foil paper, etc.

Note: all kinds of non-spoiling garbage type materials and packaging materials can be collected and recycled into creations.

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Barbara has completed a BA in Sociology and Art History from the University of Alberta, and a BFA in painting from the University of Calgary. Her art work has been exhibited and sold in Calgary and region. She has worked in human services for over 10 years with the long-living, physically and mentally disabled adults and children. Barbara has taught art classes for children and runs courses in music and spontaneous art. She facilitates a drop-in spontaneous art group and co-leads workshops with her husband Robert Fisher on personal development at the In Search of Fearlessness Centre. She currently serves as Vice-chairperson for the Alberta Arts Therapy Association.

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Robert has completed a Biological Sciences Diploma in Ecological Studies, from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology; a BSc in Environmental Biology from the University of Calgary; a BEd (after) Certificate in Secondary Science Education, University of Calgary, and a Graduate Diploma in Educational Psychology and Rehabilitation Studies, University of Calgary. He has been a semi-professional musician and professional artist for over 10 years. He has had several one-man shows and group shows throughout Alberta. His work has sold in galleries across Canada.

He has written many articles for journals, magazines and newsletters. Robert has been using art therapeutic methods with children, adults families, and teens labelled 'behaviorally disabled' for seven years. He is currently involved in personal, professional and organizational development work through the Institute. He maintains a private practice in healing work as an artist-educator. Robert lectures and runs courses and workshops in personal growth and worldwide change through the In Search of Fearlessness Centre and Research Institute and Department of Continuing Education, University of Calgary. He has facilitated workshops using his art therapeutic approach for The Canadian Art Therapy Conference and Alberta Arts Therapy Association and served one year as Vice-chairperson for the Alberta Arts Therapy Association.

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A Guide to Spontaneous Creation-Making

Barbara Bickel and Robert Fisher present a unique, innovative approach to creating and sharing images. Within the safe context of a non-judgemental group, spontaneous creation-making is described as a way to draw out the 'inner artist' and 'natural creator' within each of us.

The authors share several years of their own experience facilitating groups using their method. They develop easy to use guidelines to show how to share creations in a 'sacred circle'. The importance of creating spontaneously and expressing ourselves, returns 'art-making' to its original purpose as a social ritual for building a healthy community.

"Soul-making is healing in this modern world of fear and isolation. Connecting with our 'true Self' and the reasons for those fears, brings a radical new aliveness to our experience of Life/Creation. We no longer need to suffer in our search for meaning and purpose. The need to question our separate existence disappears."



**"In Spontaneous Creation-Making
we become one with
Creation-in-the-making."**



