

A Journey of Healing - the Works of Gunilla Maria Åkesson

By Ulla Munck Jørgensen

It keeps drifting in and out of my thoughts. As I ponder the issues of human relations, of attachment and self-reliance, it pops up, pokes and provokes. Its twisted body grows from two roots up in one entwining embrace, stirring thoughts of stifling closeness and unbreakable ties. Its two separate heads press against each other in an all-encompassing kiss confirming the unity of opposites and the harmony of love. It is green and vibrant like grass and spring – and like hope.

For your inner Eye is supposed to provoke. It is one of several manifestations in clay of a human journey of healing, growth and self-actualization. It represents one section of Gunilla Maria Åkesson long travels through an inner landscape of thoughts and emotions, discovering her own as well as general human limitations and potentials in a psychotherapeutic process of creativity.

“My works reflect a therapy process lasting 5 years. I have always worked, though. And I have always searched for answers and for a deeper meaning. I am guided by my intuition. I see the shape and colors for my inner eye in the process. I let come whatever may come. The works represent mental states or psychological processes that I want to bring into my life.”

Gunilla Maria Åkesson's works are organic abstractions based on geometric shapes. A devotee of meditation, she creates objects reminiscent of the elements of a mandala.

Mandala is Sanskrit for circle, polygon, community and connection and it is frequently used ritualistically in meditation. The psychologist, Carl Jung referred to the mandala as "the psychological expression of the totality of the self." Jung held that the symbols of the mandala express primordial images, so-called archetypes that form an integral part of the collective unconscious that is shared by every person that has ever lived. ", (Jung, C.G. Mandala Symbolism. Princeton University Press, 1972).

As such, Gunilla Maria Åkesson's works can be viewed as archetypal symbols. Objects that facilitate the release of drives and wishes from the unconscious into the conscious bringing about a state of wholeness certainly in the artist herself and arguably also in the viewer.

My work can really provoke people. They tend to pick out one or two of my works that they really like – the rest they don't seem to care about. I think they recognize their own feelings and desires for life in my work. I leave my process – mental and emotional- in my work and people like the final result, not the process. People like what they are longing for.”

She herself was once only interested in the final result. “Years ago, I tried to construct the forms, maybe to please other people. At art school, I used to make lists of what to do and I was making boxes. And then suddenly, one Sunday I just knew – I could not do boxes anymore! I was preparing for a solo exhibition in Stockholm at Blås & Knåda in 1994. Instead of the constructed works that I tried to put meaning into, I just started some other projects. The shapes just came to me, I didn't think much of them at first, but they actually turned out to be the most important ones.”

The artistic approach to the applied arts in Norway has probably been influential in the development of her oeuvre. Born in Sweden, she moved to Norway to study at the National College of Art and Design, Bergen Norway, 1987-1992. “I was longing to work more freely. In Norway there is an emphasis on uniqueness and bringing forth “the golden egg” in every student. This puts great demands on both pupils and teachers. You have to know who you really are.”

However, it was meditation that really helped turn her gaze inward to bring her in touch with herself and find the symbols for her work.

The work process itself is meditative. There is a resistance in the clay. It needs time and Gunilla Maria Åkesson works very slowly. “Time brings forth the energy in my work. When creating the works from the therapeutic period, I grated or peeled thin flakes of clay about 1-2 mm. in thickness and 1 cm. in width. I then built them up, weaved them like a piece of cloth.”

She needed a goal in life. “I needed to get stronger and if you want to become stronger you need a goal in your life. Mine was to become the queen of my own life. To bring love into my life. To learn to communicate clearly, to be able to have close relationships. To gain acceptance.”

The powerful red piece, Pomegranate, symbolizes her decision to become a queen in her life – to rule her own world. “I had to make myself visible. I was ready – frustrated and angry. It was like kicking my self. I had decided what I had to do.”

Her work is about honest communication based on her feelings and some processes are harder than others. “Portal took two to three months to do. I usually do a short sketch to remember the feel of an idea and then try to turn this feeling into a physical object. I start to build, sometimes it feels wrong, sometimes right and I actually feel sick if I cannot realize it.”

Works like Grail, Crown of the Princess and Core of the Sun have taken her through the process of becoming the queen in her own life dealing with issues like communication, defense mechanisms, love relationships and childhood influences. Woven into the gnarled surfaces of each twisted curve, brimming from the unexpected juxtaposition of every strange form is knowledge - not easily gained, yet present all along.

Her most recent works such as For You I is softer and more sensual – and it is figurative: in this case a large lotus flower with a stalk. The smooth glossy surface, the rounded form and the clear expression testify to the power of transformation.

Gunilla Maria Åkesson now works with Norwegian healer and therapist, Audhild Karlsen, helping people with their own psychological processes through art therapy and courses in creative processes.

Pomegranate

Red as a ruby

Red as an apple

There it stands

I stand

at the door of a new life.

In my room

it stands

and catches the light

of its own beauty.

Let me open the door

and

let the light shine

also on me.

Grail

In a holy pattern

you change your steps

the contours fade

and

a new bright world appears.

Are you afraid?

*Take it all in
the big
and the small*

*understand
the greatness*

of your experience

*when the Grail
opens up
and draws you
inside its noise.*

The Core of the Sun

*The sun shines brightly
through your glittering halo*

No one can resist the light

It embraces you

*Lifts you up
just as you are
In your own safe haven
of love
for yourself*

of hope and faith

in your deepest

deepest

feeling

of

trust.