

Meditative Vail Painting: A Finnish Creative Arts Therapist's Transpersonal Journey

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Abstract

Anthroposophy has made the spiritual a living experience by producing numerous practical applications, such as veil painting, initially created by Liane Collot d'Herbois (1988). Its theoretical framework has been substantially simplified by the author and crucial meditative and contemplative steps have been added. European and American transpersonal movements are briefly compared in order to introduce the author's Finnish background and other inspirations that led to the development of the meditative vail painting method. The meditative vail paintings created by this author are offered as visual manifestations of her spiritual journey. The meditative vail painting method is described here for those artists and art therapists who are interested in widening the scope of their projections, or their clients/patients' projections, in order to draw imagery from beyond their personal body/ego consciousness.

Introduction

"The very essence, the secret of modern initiation: To get beyond the words to a living experience of the spiritual."
(Steiner, 1924, ¶ 33)

In 1991, I painted *Healing Hand Opens the Heart Chakra*. For several years I wondered about its origin, meaning and message. Then in Brazil, five years later, I had an experience that seemed to have been illustrated in the painting. My experience reassured me of the transpersonal essence and origin of the painting as well as the value of what I would later call meditative vail painting method. *Vail* is the older version of the word *veil*, and is used here to distinguish the essential difference between the method of veil painting established by d'Herbois and my adaptation.

This article identifies the spiritual journey which led me to develop the method of meditative vail painting. Even though I have formally studied transpersonal psychology in the United States, my Finno-European background and my transpersonal experiences before moving to the United States provided an essential foundation for my world view. My upbringing in Finland exposed me to a variety of spiritual traditions that left a significant mark on my identity,

philosophy and spiritual beliefs. The initial inspiration for writing this article came from a need to communicate my transpersonal roots as a creative arts therapist, the transpersonal foundation of my work known as SohKiDo™, and especially the method of meditative vail painting which is a part of that method.

In order to understand the different European transpersonal traditions, a brief history of these traditions is given. Collot d'Herbois' (1988, 1993, 1995) veil painting method is outlined, as it was the initial inspiration for the development of meditative vail painting. Examples of my meditative vail paintings are not only direct reflections of my transpersonal journey, but also of my self-healing and self-development.

Personal Exposure to Spiritual European Affiliations, Experiences and Inspirations

I was born in Helsinki, Finland close to the end of World War II. My spiritual search actually began at five years of age preaching from an illustrated Bible to my playmates. When I was eight years old, I joined a spiritual sect that honored Christ as the Master, rather than a crucifix; His words, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life," embellished the altar. These words of Christ have followed me in a mystical way throughout my life.

The European transpersonal movement greatly influenced my own spiritual development. As a student, I was first introduced to parapsychology in Helsinki, Finland. I became aware that parapsychology, paradoxically, has strong roots in atheist Russia. Then I was introduced to and joined the Finnish Rosicrucian (Rosenkreutz) movement, a Christian lodge deriving its strength from the Finnish mythological epic of *Kalevala* (Ervast, 1951).

I had a brief encounter with Theosophy and, later on, Anthroposophical studies in Painting Therapy in Finland and Eurythmy in England, an artistic and curative practice based on the theories of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Steiner's philosophy and spiritual psychology influenced me personally and professionally. For example, in Lehenhof, Germany, I volunteered in a Camphill Community for adults with cognitive disabilities. Karl König founded the international Camphill movement, the education and training of persons with cognitive and other disabilities, on Steiner's theories. In May of 1972, after returning from travel in Japan, Thailand, Hong Kong and Indonesia, I arrived in Ringwood, England to study Eurythmy at the Sheiling Schools. The Sheiling Schools is a Camphill Board-

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ing School for children and youngsters with mental and other disabilities and severe behavioral challenges. There I met my business partner and discovered our mutual dedication to serving persons with differing abilities. In 1975, we opened one of the first group homes for such persons in Finland. Two years later, we moved to Washington, DC, where we both continued our academic studies. In 1985, I founded the Therapy Theater Company, Inc. (TTC) featuring persons with differing abilities and later, in May 1992, I opened the Art and Drama Therapy Institute, Inc. in Washington, DC.

In the context of my transpersonal studies I have spent some time studying Steiner's (1972, 1990, 1994) complex spiritual theories. Steiner was the founder of Waldorf education, which seemed to naturally spring from his years of experience as an educator, journalist, and lecturer. Biodynamic gardening, curative education, spiritual psychology, and Anthroposophical Medicine can be added to the list of applied Anthroposophy (McDermont, 1984). Lois Schroff, a student of Collot d'Herbois, introduced me to veil painting in 1990. In my view, the development of veil painting is one of the most important applications of Steiner's educational and artistic ideas.

As for transpersonal art therapy, I was first introduced to its spiritual dimensions in the 1960s in Finland, while studying Anthroposophical Painting Therapy. In addition to my study of veil painting, my transpersonal approach has been influenced by my foundational beliefs in the Mystic Christ, my exposure to Eastern spirituality early on via Theosophy and Anthroposophy, and later through my experience of Zen Buddhism, which transpired in the context of Noh Theater in Japan. The latter was particularly inspirational, initiated by a 1972 visit to Kyoto, Japan, where I watched five consecutive plays at a Noh Theater without understanding one word of Japanese. Yet I was mesmerized by what I witnessed, and experienced Noh Theater at a level difficult to put in words. Haunted by my transpersonal experiences in the Noh Theater, especially by the use of masks, I began to pursue the development of my own methods in the art and drama therapies, with a focus on the transpersonal creative arts therapy method I have named SohKiDo™.

Meditative veil painting is just one of the methods of SohKiDo™, which utilizes "action meditation" methods of haiku meditation therapy (Hiltunen, 2003c), masked meditation, Zen Dance, Tai Chi, Chi Kung, laughing meditation, walking meditation, eating meditation, the meditative sacred dance of Therapeutic Noh Theater® and the Prism of Consciousness tool (Hiltunen, 2001, 2003a, 2003b). Linked collage, mask collage and mask making are some of the visual arts modalities used. The use of masks in Therapeutic Noh Theater® also demonstrates the significance of masks in my creative arts therapy approach (Hiltunen, 2004). SohKiDo™ includes the therapeutic use of lamenting (Hiltunen, 2003a), which was inspired by the Finnish mythological epic of Kalevala and no doubt also by my early transpersonal exposure to it via the Rosicrucian lodge. The Seven Stages of Womanhood ritual (Hiltunen, 2001) was inspired by Kalevala and is identified with each

meditative veil painting introduced in this article. The seven stages of womanhood are: virgin/maiden, wife/lover, mother/nurturer/creator, crone/wise woman/elder, sage/spiritual teacher, warrior and healer/servant.

Oriental and Occidental Roots of Transpersonal Psychology

My personal European experiences clearly distinguish two distinct roots in the transpersonal movement, namely Buddhist/Shintoist/Taoist and Mystic Christian roots. Generally speaking, the same can be found to be evident in the United States. In its theories and practices, North American literature on transpersonal psychology references studies in consciousness based on Zen Buddhism (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987; Grof & Grof, 1990; Kornfield, 1993; Murphy, 1992; Roland, 1988; Sheikh & Sheikh, 1989; Tart, 1992; Walsh & Vaughan, 1989, 1993; Washburn, 1995; Watts, 1961; Wilber, 1977, 1979, 1982; 1995; 1996; 1997; Wilber, Engler & Brown, 1986; Wolman & Ullman, 1986); Taoism (Dass, 1990; Katchmer, 1993; Kornfield, 1993; Murphy, 1992; Sheikh & Sheikh, 1989; Tart, 1992; Walsh & Vaughan, 1989, 1993; Watts, 1961); and Hinduism, Tantrism or Yoga (Dass, 1990; Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987; Grof, 1988; Grof & Grof, 1990; Kornfield, 1993; Murphy, 1992; Roland, 1988; Sheikh & Sheikh, 1989; Tart, 1992; Vaughan, 1995; Walsh & Vaughan, 1989, 1993; Washburn, 1995; Watts, 1961).

In actuality, many forms of Transpersonal Psychology practiced today originate from ancient India. From India these ancient wisdom traditions and practices found their way to China, Japan and Korea, evolving into other disciplines. According to Yokoi (1976), the two main points of Japanese Zen Buddhist teaching are that there is no gap between practice and enlightenment, and that one's right daily behavior is Buddhism itself (p. 12). Steiner (1990) also expressed this call for applied spirituality in everyday life. Theosophy is deeply rooted in the oriental, whereas Anthroposophy is founded on Mystic Christian traditions.

Other Christian-based transpersonal approaches are mostly founded on Mystic Christian faith. Happold (1979); Harvey (1998); Paulsen (2002); Peers (1990); Roberts (1982, 1985), Thompson (2003); and Underhill (1995) offer both theoretical and practical outlines of Mystic Christian paths.

Fundamentally speaking, transpersonal psychology in the United States provides redefined practices and new variations for ancient spiritual practices. Thus it can be noted that before the actual term "transpersonal psychology" came into being, many forms of spiritual practices, of what we now call transpersonal psychology, blossomed in the East on fertile soil (Deikman, 1982). They were not then called by the name "transpersonal," the forerunners of which they nevertheless were.

Transpersonal Art Therapy

Psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral and existential-humanistic models have been established as the founda-

tions for psychotherapy, with transpersonal psychology emerging as the fourth force. When psychotherapy not only addresses neurosis or character problems, but adds concerns for “existential human suffering,” (Deikman, 1982, p. 1) it includes spiritual needs.

Western science is characterized by a split between the sacred and the rational, which has left modern psychotherapy less well equipped than the superseded ancient... to handle certain problems... Freud’s view of reality and that of most contemporary theorists of psychotherapy is based on a nineteenth-century physical and biological scientific model that is too narrow to encompass human consciousness. Consequently, certain sources of suffering cannot be dealt with from within a Western framework. We are faced with major problems that call for broadening our perspective and extending our science. (Deikman, 1982, p. 2)

Deikman discusses an essential transpersonal human need to find a purpose and meaning to one’s life. The ancient existential questions of: “Who am I?” and “Why am I here on earth?” can only be addressed by a psychotherapist who acknowledges the transpersonal or the spiritual dimensions of human existence. Transpersonal psychology as a field has expanded the concept of psychotherapy and has recognized and included spiritual human needs in its scope of treatment.

Franklin, Farrelly-Hansen, Marek, Swan-Foster & Wallington (2000) discuss the inclusion of transpersonal psychology and contemplative education in art therapy. They discuss the need for transpersonal art therapy education, with fundamental and critical concern for how to change the “knowing” into “not knowing” and being willing to open one’s mind to accept new and expanded vistas in the field of art therapy. The difference between transpersonal disciplines and other subjects taught in academic settings is the premise that actual spirituality should not remain as theory but be internalized; thus, spiritual gifts or applied spirituality in one’s life are subjects that cannot be tested only theoretically. The challenge of spiritual knowing is to live one’s life accordingly.

Art therapists have addressed spirituality in theory and practice (Allen, 1995, 2000; Horovitz-Darby, 1994; Farrelly-Hansen, 2001), including Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Yogic, Celtic, Shamanic and Jungian influences, as well as native, multicultural, and aboriginal sources of spiritually-based practices (Farrelly-Hansen, 2001). But the first representation of the spiritual in art therapy in the United States was introduced by Florence Cane (1989). It seems that because of her early death and her sister Margaret Naumburg’s rise as one of the founders of dynamically oriented art therapy, Cane has not been widely recognized as a pioneer of transpersonal art therapy. Her holistic approach to art making focused on the integration of emotional, mental, and physical experiences, including deep breathing. Her aim was not only to bring the unconscious into conscious awareness, but also called for “spiritual awakening” (p. 35) via art making.

Veil Painting

“The basis of all that I have to say consists of two things: the cosmic threefoldness of light, colour and darkness and the human being as the microcosmic threefoldness of spirit, soul and body, of thinking, feeling and will” (Collot d’Herbois, 1988, p. 17). Veil painting as a method was inspired by the Anthroposophical ideas of Rudolph Steiner and the reach for the transpersonal is inherent in its method. It emphasizes the principle of threefoldness by using only three colors, each representing spirit, soul, and body as well as thinking, feeling, and willing.

Liane Collot d’Herbois was born in Cornwall, England, in 1907. When she was a 21-year-old artist, she met Anthroposophical doctor Ita Wegman, who encouraged her to begin developing her own application of painting therapy based on Steiner’s theories. Under Wegman’s supervision, she first worked with children with cognitive disabilities and later on with many other populations. Haushka, a physician, developed and established the formal Anthroposophical “artistic therapy.” After working over a half century with her ideas and methods, Collot d’Herbois finally published two books, one on color and the other on painting therapy (Collot d’Herbois, 1988, 1993 & 1995).

The fundamental preparation for the veil painting consists of twelve light and darkness charcoal exercises. These develop an ability to differentiate distances from the light source required in veil painting. When the light is faint and far away, it will resemble moonlight; when it is strong and close it resembles sunlight. The creation of an atmosphere is the very first step in veil painting. Watercolor paper is stretched like a canvas and specified watercolors are used in groups of three: one cool color, one warm color, and a color representing the light. The cool colors (derivations of blue) naturally have a withdrawing movement; hence they represent what is behind the light. The warm colors (derivations of red) have an essential quality of coming towards the viewer; hence they are used to express what is in front of the light. The light itself is represented by Viridian Green, Turquoise, Cobalt Blue, Pale Vermilion, Charcoal Grey, or Cobalt Blue.

In Steiner’s use of a 12-color wheel, there are seven rainbow-colors that correspond with the soul in its waking day-consciousness and five shades of purple, ranging from reddish-blue to bluish-red, that belong to the dream-consciousness. The remaining three belong to the consciousness of deep sleep (Collot d’Herbois, 1988).

Collot d’Herbois (1988) emphasizes the importance of simplicity in the veil painting, along with observation and visual memory. Schroff (1985) recommends using a cold-pressed, 30" x 22," 90 lb sheet of d’Arches paper which is submerged in water to make it wet on both sides and then stretched the same way any canvas is stretched. The strength of the stretched paper makes it possible to “wash” off colors if it seems that one is progressing too fast, using a wrong color, or applying layers of paint too thickly. The washing technique is especially useful when one begins to create a form by painting the veils with edges too soon. The veils are extremely thin and transparent and made with soft edges.

With the cools, we are looking through the light-reflecting particles which obscure the darkness beyond to a lesser and lesser degree the further from the light we proceed. Colors grow ever darker the further they are from the light, and one might also say that they fall, and thus we have a fan-type gesture behind and away from the light.... With regard to the warm colors, there is a general upward movement as the darkness in front of the light rushes to fill the void made by the light. (Schroff, 1985, p. 42)

While there only are three colors used for each painting, some additional hues may be added by using Magenta or Rose Madder. The three colors are chosen, as previously indicated, to represent light, darkness in front and behind the light, as well as spirit, body and soul. The veils cannot be too thick or the color applied too fast or else the painting will lose its essential translucent quality, its transparency.

Meditative Vail Painting

The consciously differentiated terms of “veil painting” and “meditative vail painting” mediate, in the latter, the message of the ancient, meditative roots of the method. *Vail* is an archaic spelling that precedes the modern spelling of *veil*.

Meditative vail painting may also begin with charcoal exercises. These exercises enhance the painter's ability to differentiate the directionality and the formation of light, which is the very first element in a meditative vail painting. They also enhance the ability to see the interplay of light and darkness in creating an atmosphere. According to Collot d'Herbois (1988), medium light “falls down like a perpendicular shaft, illuminating its surroundings” (p. 36). She cautions against symmetrical representation of the medium light, which is soft and almost transparent. The weak light forms a wedge, because it diminishes at the bottom. It is misty like moonlight. Strong light, according to Collot d'Herbois, fans out because the source is closer. Strong light is more intense on the top and weakens when fanning out. The central light is in the middle of the picture, radiating through some kind of opening, for example. It is not a sun per se. The observation of light in nature is essential for its representation on the watercolor canvas.

The creation of the atmosphere begins with the decisions of the directionality, distance and source of light. First, the color representing light is used alone. Each wash or vail is extremely faint. It is important that the veils are not too strong and the application does not create substance too fast. It is essential to still one's mind before beginning to apply the extremely thin washes or veils. This form of painting can not be made in a hurry, in noisy surroundings, or with a noisy group of people. Chatter must cease externally as well as internally. The ability to settle in the moment and place, and to slow down and then aim to stop mental or emotional activities is essential.

Next, the color representing darkness behind the light is introduced with soft veils. Only after the atmosphere has gained enough substance is the darkness in front of the light introduced. But here, too, only soft edges of veils or washes are applied. Once the canvas has begun to carry enough



Figure 1
Meditative Vail Painting *Conquered Dragon*, 1990

substance, then the meditation begins. This is the most crucial step of the process. In looking at the veils, it is essential to realize that the most obvious images need not be accepted. By turning the canvas and meditating on it, and by observing it from four different angles, one must make sure that there is enough time to allow one's imagination to see the imagery projected, from the unconscious, conscious, or beyond the body/ego consciousness, onto the canvas.

In the beginning, no form is created, even when the color representing matter is introduced last. The edges are still applied without any form until the thin layers of color begin to substantiate themselves. Once the image has been discovered and identified during the meditation or contemplation, then it is time to introduce the edges, which will create the form. This process must be approached with caution, because over-painting as well as overly heavy vail applications, will ruin the image. This final step in the meditative vail painting is the slowest and the most deliberate one. The name for the image may come up while the image is being discovered or the naming may be done after the completion of the painting. A similar meditative and contemplative process is also applicable for verbal associations or naming the painting. The entire process is slow and requires silence and focus. It continues throughout the painting process without any conscious projection of ideas.

My Transpersonal Journey Reflected in Meditative Vail Painting

My first veil painting was created during private studies with Lois Schroff in 1990. It was entitled *Conquered Dragon* (Figure 1). As I studied the rules of light, darkness and matter, and the use of only three colors to represent them, I was expected to paint a mountain or flowers. But I



Figure 2
Meditative Vail Painting *Noh Dancer*, 1991



Figure 3 Meditative Vail Painting *Healing Hand Opens the Heart Chakra*, 1991

could not relate to the specific directive. I was compelled instead to do the painting via meditation and with the most unexpected results. This became my very first meditative vail painting as I intuitively and immediately applied meditative steps and contemplation in the process. The image clearly appeared after my meditative stillness and emerged from the watercolor vails on the stretched watercolor canvas.

The *Conquered Dragon* painting is transpersonal, intuitive, metaphorical, and purgative. The self-identity of the image refers to a warrior, which so well represented my own life's demands at the time. Due to budget cuts, I struggled to maintain the Therapy Theater Company for one year without financial support. The stress was enormous and taxed me not only financially and emotionally but also mentally. I was in the process of "conquering the dragon" of my own fears. The dragon's three heads seemed to represent fears of financial failure, loss, and the unknown future. It was reassuring to see that the dragon was conquered with the aid of an angel.



Figure 4
Meditative Vail Painting *Phoenix*, 1992

Noh Dancer (Figure 2) was created in 1991 with my further veil painting studies. I was in the midst of starting the Art and Drama Therapy Institute which was rising from the ashes of its earlier incarnation. During the veil painting course, I was directed to painting a mountain. However, I realized from my first painting that meditating was essential for me, and after meditation I discovered the Noh Dancer instead. This is a very significant and personal painting, partially realistic/naturalistic and partially metaphorical, and represents the identity of creator. The painting reassured me that my Therapeutic Noh Theater® work was valid and gave me confidence that I would be able to continue my work.

Healing Hand Opens the Heart Chakra (Figure 3), created in 1991, is a mystical painting that came to me through meditation five years before I experienced it physically and spiritually. Only after the meditative process did I discover what was hidden within the colors. I wondered what it meant and why I had painted it. Then in 1996, while attending an International Transpersonal Conference in Brazil, I received my answers. I physically had the experience illustrated by my painting during a massage in which the masseur invited me to rest and then left the room. Suddenly, I experienced a hand over my heart radiating tremendous warmth and energy, a sensation not easy to describe in words. My first thought was that it was the hand of the masseur. Yet when I opened my eyes, there was no one in the room. When the same sensation happened to me again the next day, I realized its meaning. I had just concluded a healing process about my relationship to my mother, motivated by a decision to engage in some form of self-healing process for transpersonal growth in my personal life. The painting, identified as that of a maiden, powerfully represents for me the opening of the heart via transcendence



Figure 5
Meditative Vail Painting *Ilmatar*, 1993

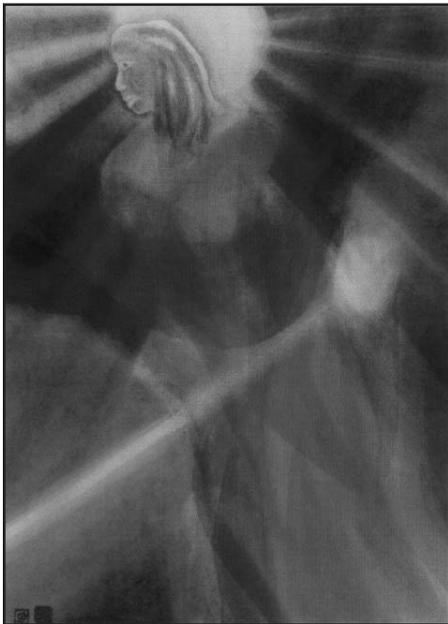


Figure 6
Meditative Vail Painting *Fighting with Light*, 1993

and transformation, and focuses on a newly acquired ability to accept, understand, forgive, and love. Profoundly true in reference to the healing of my mother relationship, it is the most mysterious of all the meditative vail paintings I have created. It offers evidence of the spiritual roots of the initial veil painting method as it has been transferred and manifested in the meditative vail painting method.

Phoenix (Figure 4), created in 1992, is a metaphor of my work as my first company was reborn into the Art and Drama Therapy Institute. The phoenix is the metaphor for life's transformations. This painting expresses for me the trauma of loss, yet at the same time a new hope for the materialization of a dream as suggested in its symbolic meaning. It is intuitive, organized, metaphoric, reaffirming and healing. The self-identity is that of a crone.

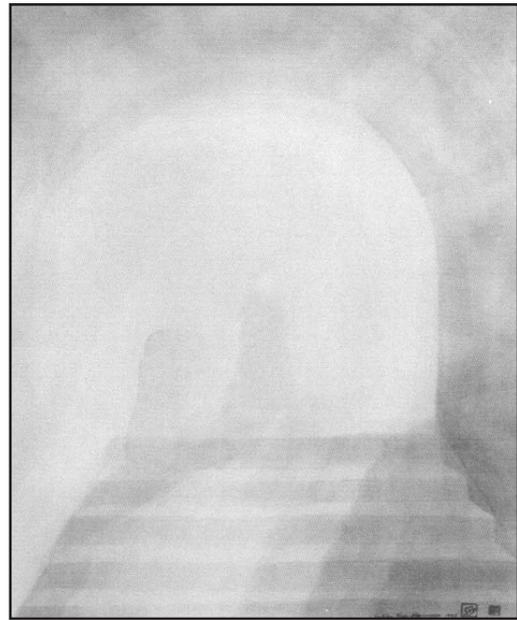


Figure 7
Meditative Vail Painting *Entering the Light*, 1995



Figure 8
Meditative Vail Painting *Initiation*, 1995

The *Ilmatar* painting (Figure 5), from 1993, illustrates a character from the Finnish Mythology of *Kalevala*. Ilmatar is a metaphor for creativity, wisdom and endurance. This painting is transpersonal, intuitive and harmonious, yet dynamic. The self-identity is that of a creator.

Fighting with Light (Figure 6) was created in 1993, during further studies of veil painting. My teacher insisted that I darken it and create a dark veil over the entire top of the painting. I was very surprised by her request and at first did not want to do it. After I had created the darker washes over the top, I realized I had made a mistake; it was not what I wanted to do at all. I proceeded to wash off as much darkness as I could, but without very good results. I almost threw the painting in the trash, so displeasing was the state of it. I then decided to meditate on it in order to decide

what to do. During my meditation, the title came to me and I discovered a strong beam of light in it. That discovery confirmed the name *Fighting with Light*. It is deeply metaphoric, transpersonal, and contemplative. Its traumatic content is directly expressed in its darker colors, which came from the teacher's projections. Its content, the transcendence of darkness with light or the victory over darkness with light, represents the spiritual warrior self-image.

Entering the Light (Figure 7) was painted in 1995 during the early morning hours in my "kitchen studio." It is extremely faint. I was not able to paint it stronger. I made some attempts to do so and immediately realized that it started to take away from the painting's initial essential, ethereal quality. It features two figures. The self-identity is that of a healer/servant. *Initiation* (Figure 8), created in 1995, is the last painting example offered here, also painted in my kitchen studio during early morning hours. It is personal, intuitive, dynamic, metaphoric, imaginative and reaffirming. The self-identity is that of a sage. These paintings suggest future events to me; I am waiting to see what is to come.

Conclusion

Transpersonal psychology, with its roots in ancient India, is now a well-established fourth force, which evolved directly from the third force, namely humanistic psychology. The pioneer of transpersonal art therapy in the United States was Florence Cane. In Europe, Anthroposophical painting therapy was created as one of the many applications based on Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical philosophy and spiritual theories, one of which is veil painting created by Collot d'Herbois. This spiritual method relies on the observations of nature in light, darkness, and matter. It has a clear and simple color scheme, always chosen in threes, with one representing light, the second representing darkness behind the light, and the third representing the darkness in front of the light. More importantly, the threefoldness of the colors represent spirit, soul, and body, as well as thinking, feeling, and willing.

The meditative veil painting method presented here by the author not only simplified the method inspired by Collot d'Herbois' veil painting but also its spiritual foundation, which in my case draws from academic training and my Finno-European spiritual roots and experiences. The fundamental prerequisite of the method is the painter's ability to quiet down and become "present," as in any meditative sitting practice. Due to its specific action meditation practice, meditative veil painting as a method produces transpersonally-oriented art to a greater degree than some other visual arts methods. The slow process, the presence in the moment, and the emptying and quieting of one's mind allows material to be unearthed, either from unconscious, conscious, or beyond body/ego consciousness. This method is offered here to artists and art therapists who are interested in expanding their painting vocabulary, transcending their personal body/ego needs, and opening up to the connection to their transpersonal consciousness.

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