

ART=YOGA, YOGA=ART

By Michele Ogilvie

In *Tree of Yoga*, BKS Iyengar writes, “Through yoga—the human being comes into contact with the soul; thus yoga is a spiritual art. Each asana has an exact geometrical and architectural shape; thus it is also fine art.”

Throughout the past 15 years I have explored the correlations between the art making experience with meditation, and yoga. I have created and exhibited numerous bodies of work with the philosophical intention of addressing Existentialism or the study of being. I have experimented with all types of art-making processes including observational and imaginative drawing, painting, sculpture, wheel thrown forms, metal-smithing, and photography. I have observed and experienced the various tactile and symbolic qualities of matter through art. Each material has offered insight into the ephemeral and transient nature of life. Each art endeavor has revealed glimpses into the psyche and the collective unconscious. The more I delve into the world of Yoga and experiment with creative expression, the more I realize that each of these journeys have undeniable philosophical and practical correlations. Both offer the potential of personal and collective realization. Both are transcendent gateways to understanding the awesome interconnection between all things.

Iyengar writes, “If you are an artist you also practice yoga—if you are also in touch with the internal levels of your being—you will develop a vast range of expression and your art will become what is known as “*satyam, sivam, sundaram*—true, auspicious and beautiful.”

When the sensuality of expression is coupled with the divine in yoga the consciousness becomes illuminated. “Then there is a vibrancy which enables each of us to live in the field of the soul, so that this mortal body may drink the nectar of the immortal soul and the art [journey] may become divine.”

TRUTH IS IN THE TREE

Drawing from nature has a long tradition. It extends back to the 25,000 year old paintings discovered in the caves of Lascaux, France and continues to the present. Although during the past 100 or so years, the definition of Art has expanded to include Postmodern ideas and approaches there are still some artists today that are revisiting the traditions and discipline of drawing from nature. At different stages throughout art history observational drawing has been compared to a quest for *Truth*. In *Lectures on Aesthetics*, Hegel explained, "There is a symmetry between the mind of the artist and the *Absolute* or what one considers to be the essence or meaning of the

world. He asserted that art does not only reveal God [*Truth*] it is one of the ways in which God reveals [itself.]" While looking at the grand scale of the role of art through the ages, and across the globe, it is clear that most often it expresses the spirit of individual artists, and particular cultures, as well as the collective spirit of humankind.

With the intention of simplifying my work, and exploring the framework of seeking an interconnection with something higher, I have committed myself to sitting with, and drawing trees. The experience has presented many profound and beautiful things.

THE SEER AND THE SEEN

The first time, I brought my chair, sketchpad and charcoals to Temescal Canyon, a Santa Monica Mountain hiking spot within walking distance from Pacific Coast Will Roger's Beach, I was, I admit in awe of the expanse that surrounded me. I walked a bit, taking in the sounds, smells, and sensations, and decided to set up in front of a magnificent Oak tree. I immediately felt I was in the presence of a beautiful mystery that I was about to unfurl. This is also where I began to realize that Art is Yoga and Yoga is Art.

Before the pencil touched the paper, I took in the essence of the tree and gradually traced with my mind's eye the negative and positive spaces. The negative spaces are the shapes around an object. They are the pieces of sky and horizon. The positive spaces are the tangible: the trunk, the branches, and the leaves. I began to translate my observations onto the sketchpad. My gaze alternating between and about the negative and positive defining spaces, it became clear that this methodology was becoming a symbolic gesture of unifying opposites. And equally important this experience was manifesting as a meditation, the gaze became so concentrated, linear time ceased to exist and I felt as though I was entering into a synergy with the tree. It became a poetic dance between the majesty of nature and seeing beyond the physical. As this was sustained, there was a transference of energy, a receiving, a giving—a merging with something higher—a Oneness as in "*Tat Tvam Asi*" or "I am That, That I am". Ultimately, the final drawing became a record of devotion and gratitude.

Dharana + Dhyana + Samadhi = SAMAYAMA

In Patanjali's *8-fold Yoga Sutras*, the stages of concentration, meditation and merging are collectively referred to as *samayama*. These are the stages toward the liberation of the self and include *dharana* (concentration or complete attention), *dhyana* (meditation) and *samadhi*—"A state in which the aspirant is one with the object of his meditation, the Supreme Spirit pervading the universe, where there is a feeling of unutterable joy and peace."

These stages can also be achieved in the creative experience. Drawing from nature first requires intense observation and focus (*dharana*). As the drawing progresses, and the gaze intensifies, the state of meditation (*dhyana*) is achieved. If the seer can delve beyond the consciousness, lose the self and merge with the object, there is an interconnection with something higher, an absorption, (*samadhi*).

The experience is not only in seeing, it becomes an expression of *prana* (energetics) and a journey into the layers of the subconscious, imagination, vibration of color, light, and shadow. It becomes a heart to hand manifestation containing the qualities of a higher, universal, visceral language. It becomes an altogether inspired expression of *samayama*.

YOGA OFF THE MAT

When I draw trees, when I spin earth between my hands on a potter's wheel, when I solder interconnected chain links together, when I forge flat metal into tiny vessels that symbolically contain the essence of all things, when I doodle little “meaningless” lines, when I dream of the possibility of peace—Yoga mind and intention weaves it all together. It is the string that connects spirit to absolute intelligence, nature, creativity, love, and potential.

When we are in a yoga state of mind, metaphorically unifying opposites, and attempting to still the fluctuations of the mind—all things creatively and magically manifest with the energetics of spirit and there are no more lines that divide the “concept” of yoga—or the union of opposites with anything else.

I have learned that the process of making art is a way to investigate and expand our perceptions and meaning of the world and our relationship to it. If approached honestly, and intuitively—the work becomes an inspiration, a breath taken in, like we experience on our mats. A painting or an art object that moves us, and reveals evidence of a personal and/or universal journey contains the essence of all of these things.

TEACHING AS DHARMA

It is my hope that as we learn to experience the transformative qualities of yoga, we also open our journey to the potential of creative expression through the art-making experience. I have taught art at secondary schools and University with subjects ranging from drawing, painting, photography, ceramics, color theory, 3-D design and studio problems in teaching. Through these experiences I have consistently witnessed the discovery of art as an opportunity towards healing and realization regardless of age, aptitude or personality. I believe that the disciplines of yoga and art compliment each other as personal and collective gateways towards a greater understanding of

the self, the world and the responsibility to these things. As a teacher and practitioner of art and yoga I aspire to help guide students on this awesome journey.

SIDEBAR: Patanjali's 8 fold path

According to Swami Satchidananda, Patanjali compiled the *Yoga Sutras* somewhere between 5,000 B.C. and 300 A.D. The path of yoga lays out a logical series of restraints and observances (*yamas and niyamas*) that guide the practitioner to a path towards *yoking* or yoga—which in layman's terms means the union of opposites. It is metaphorically represented by the sun and the moon, and is translated into all conditions and states of being—male/female, presence/absence, past/future, night/day, etc. The practice of transcending opposites yields a metaphysical interconnection between all things and all places. The ultimate realization is that everything folds into Oneness. I am you, you are me.

1. **Yama** = Restraints
2. **Niyama** = Observances
3. **Asana** – Postures
4. **Pranayama** - Expansion and extension of energy or life force.
5. **Pratyahara** – Withdrawing the mind from the senses.
6. **Dharana** – Concentration, fixing the attention on a single object.
7. **Dhyana** - Meditation
8. **Samadhi** - Super-conscious state

In order to prepare the practitioner for *samayama*, the stages, *yama*, *niyama*, *asana*, *pranayama* and *pratyahara* should first be mastered.

In addition, according to Iyengar, *samayama*, or the “integration of the body, breath, mind, intellect, and self cannot be understood as separate entities. The controlled mind gained in *pratyahara* is made to intensify its attention on a single thought in *dhyana*. In *dhyana*, release, expansion, quietness, and peace are experienced. The state of *samadhi* is achieved when the knower, the knowable, and the known become one. *Samadhi* is the condition of total absorption.” Iyengar asserts that even though *samsadhi* can be explained at the intellectual level, it can only be experienced at the level of the heart.

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali.: Sri Swami Satchindananda

The Tree of Yoga: BKS Iyengar

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Michele Ogilvie was born in Nakuru, East Africa, and has lived in Southern California since she was six years old. She earned her Masters of Fine Art, and CA Single Subject Teaching Credential in Art from Cal State University, Northridge. Her teaching methodology is informed by over 15 years of experience as an exhibiting fine artist, as well as 7 years as an Art Director. Her work can be viewed at www.standingonmarbles.com. Ms Ogilvie has been studying and practicing meditation and yoga for over 10 years. She earned her *Yoga Teaching Certification* from *Yoga Works, Los Angeles*. She is presently working on workshop possibilities to help expand on the interconnections between Art and Yoga. She can be reached at mimogilvie@yahoo.com

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