

Jan. 21, 2012 Barbara Bickel interviewed by R. Michael Fisher

[Lunar Imbolc and the Chinese New Year, Year of the Dragon]

M: So as I saw you with your load today and was riding beside you out to the Cemetary site, I noticed you were like an outdoor hiker, with back pack (video pack around your waist) and with tripod stuck into the pack's strap, and you were well dressed for the cold-- off to? And I thought to myself she is going to her art/spiritual practice for the day. How do you respond to that?

B: Yeah, it is definitely a commitment. To do something I made an agreement to do with other women artists who I practice with. Doing it at the same time frame, even if they are in another country in another time zone. I prepared a few days before, deciding where I was going to go, getting my equipment ready. Very loosely what I'll do when I get there. I envisioned it because I know that landscape. I would sit on the tree stump and put my great grandmother's crocheted fabric on it to sit on. It's all setting the stage.

M: For a place-based installation.

B: Of sorts, I think it is beyond that. It is creating a ritual space, an altar space to open to that liminal matrixial borderspace. To create a crack or window into it and go into that borderspace for awhile.

M: What is that particular borderspace in this instance?

B: All of this series is about doing ancestral journeys, doing whatever practices each collective member wants to do so there is an intention to do some communicating across time and space.

M: I see the prep as an artist and spiritual practitioner would do, kind of like some people prepare to visit a site or symbolic encounter to meet the divine.

B: Right, it is even like a mini-pilgrimage. I've noticed that I've chosen sites near where I live that are nurturing places where I have been before and have been nurtured and restored by being there.

M: Again, what specific borderspace did you enter and what was it like this time?

B: This artworking is also linked to the Gestare Art Collective and the Nap and restorative work last summer. A big part of our early work was sounding, and last year naps and restoring. Both of these are being incorporated into this series co-event. I'm just now thinking about listening to Ettinger on the co-event. In the co-event you can spend as long as you want there. I'm setting the space for the co-event and can be in that event for a longer amount of time than I would normally. I document it as well, so that I can share it with others. It is a big part of this work to

share the process of slowing down, as an artist and spiritual practitioner and share that. I don't want these as "canned" or "romantic" video interludes to just take a break. There is a unknown, quality in these. You don't always know what is going to come out. It may not be pretty and it could even be troubling.

M: So, it's restorative work but not necessarily a "break" from life, it's more going into a different kind of work that is somewhat demanding.

B: This particular ancestral journey I went with the crocheted piece from great grandmother Walters on my mom's side (my mom's dad's mother). She gave this piece to my mom for her wedding. I have never had any object/artifact/art from her, and I have now been gifted. The only story I know about her, is in the early 1900s, they lived on a farm in the prairies (Regina) my grandfather who was 8 years old burned down the family barn, and his dad, who was an alcoholic, was so mad at the son he banished the son from the home, and he thus lived at other places and would sneak home now and then to see his mother when the dad was absent. I hadn't thought about it when I chose this location. I knew there was a field by the cemetery but I didn't know it was a farm field, and I realized that it was today. I set up the camera to record looking at me from the back, and over this farm field, much like my great grandmother might have done, and listening to the birds, the sky and the wind, and with that it is a troubling story, I opened to the sounds that connected with the environment and the story I was told and moved into a kind of grieving wailing. I was making the sounds, but I wasn't particularly feeling them as grief but they did emerge as a grief. Yeah, they were given that voice. And the words that came afterwards were that she had been separated from her son. And my grandfather (her son) roaming the land and my great grandmother's way of communicating with him was to follow the lines of the land.

M: It sounds like fascination, when you were experiencing or relaying the 'message' or 'communication' of a feeling or trauma, but you weren't traumatized yourself or feeling it as an individual. It is like you were wit(h)nessing in a fragilized state enough to pick-up the strings of resonance, like an antenna, but you are still the antennae and that's what the artist is so capable to do in those modalities of registering information.

M: And the lines?

B: Just the lines that you see when you look at farmland, there is very long connected lines, to the horizon, you can see at a distance, see animals or humans on those lines, at a far distance, walking those lines, as paths.

M: So what is the matrixial method you use?

B: Ritual is the base and then sounding has become a big part of it and recording the sound. I've made, after last year's womb walks, I've chosen with this series to video record consistently as well. Creating a frame and "painting" that I can then step into,

literally. Recording the event and then recording things around the co-event of the "painting" e.g. lines of the place, close ups and I like to put the camera in the same place as I was sitting to record that view as well as the still view, different perspectives and directions, so that footage is all available to put into one piece in the studio. Which I never know how the collage will work, it is timeless when I am out there and so I extend it by documenting the other visual happenings around me and then in the studio I condense the time and sounds and images into a shorter piece.

M: Now would you chose to write about or into or analyze a finished condensed piece?

B: I haven't done that a whole lot, I'll introduce it on the website, and I am resistant to that, I prefer to talk it through. Eventually, the Gestare Art Collective will talk about and write about the whole experience. I have resistance to analyzing at whole lot at this point. The 8 sabbats are the guiding rhythm and I feel like we are still in it. Part of it is time constraints, as I'd rather do the practice of the co-event and the art making than the writing. It's a treat to practice. Writing is work work.