

Spirituality and Art

Conversations with Artists on Spirit

by Jean Macleod Le Cheminant

Shared Vision- Improving the Quality of Life

Every year artists in various media visit Hollyhock Centre, north of Vancouver, to practise their art in the company of others, while sharing some of its secrets and drawing inspiration from the beauty of the place. We met with several of these artists....

For Zuleikha, a storydancer and performance artist who's trained intensively in several spiritual and musical traditions, spirit and breath are inseparably interwoven in them all. "One great master," she says, "translated 'blessed are the poor in spirit' as 'blessed are the refined in breath.' You can create different states of awareness with the way you breathe. That's the secret of the mystics of all traditions."

Art as Meditation "Learning how to concentrate and bring my feelings into that concentration is how I work with dance," says Zuleikha. "I can't train my body without being aware of what's going on inside, my breath, my emotions, everything. Because if I have to do these intricate rhythms with my body for an hour and I'm not in the mood, what do I do? Well, I can allow the fact that I don't want to do it to be present at the same time as I'm doing it. If I can allow myself to be as I am, then something opens and miracles start to happen."

Zuleikha takes her art beyond the cultural limits in which she was trained. In her dance, she expresses something all traditions recognize no matter where she performs. "Having experienced a taste of the great reality, it's good to have a way to practise being present," she says.

"In India, music and dance are very intricate, melodically and rhythmically," says Zuleikha. "Your brain has to have a train wreck so something else can happen. The feeling of spirit is very spacious; it gives us permission to feel the cosmos, or the great mystery. In

Flamenco dance, there's something called 'La Duenna.' It's when the spirit overtakes you and it's in every tradition. You have to have a certain mastery of the form to allow it to percolate in you."