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# Wild: Paintings Intertwining Body and Mind

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Jenny Montenegro

## Artist Statement (Long Version)

The first moment I walked on ancient grounds, the warmth of dust and dirt greeted my toes; I immediately felt a profound connection with the classical spirit of Greece. The monumental entrance of the Acropolis felt like a dream state of mind, as though my subconscious was illuminating from the inside out. Ancient Athens holds the finest sanctuary, dedicated to the goddess Athena who embodies reason and intelligence. She is the goddess of art and literature and the daughter of Zeus, and I had the opportunity to be there for a brief moment in time and to soak it all in. This particular experience sparked an interest that I now explore in my current body of work with threads, paintings, and performances.

I am interested in exploring the holistic dualities of art through meditation, architecture, spirituality, and materiality. My current work is meditated on the gallery space as sacred grounds. A gallery holds history; it has been filled with countless exhibitions, of all walks of life, yet the gallery remains timeless to be rebuilt into something new.

A gallery symbolizes a sanctuary for our contemporary culture and communities where we gather to intelligently create, observed, and meditate on art to shifting our perspective and share an experience. The gallery also is known as the 'white cube' as Brian O'Doherty describes it in his book titled "Inside the White Cube" in which he writes about the white cube as an aesthetic object in and of itself. Therefore, the white cube is inseparable from the artwork exhibited inside it, which

conditions the artwork and creates a space for the work to appear in a timeless environment. Therefore, walking into the gallery, is as walking into sacred grounds, allowing one to experience the artwork, completely separate from our current reality.

The idea of a particular space considered sacred has been a common theme throughout my lifetime. As a child I was hospitalized for a couple a weeks, contained in a bubble, no human access unless they too were protected in order to interact with me. This plastic container become my sanctuary. I made it my home for weeks to come. I began my first creative exploration within that space; coloring books after coloring books with the color brown becoming my healing crayon. I couldn't get enough of the color brown. I colored every single thing brown. I recall the nurse exclaiming that I shouldn't color the sky brown or the flowers brown, but I disregarded her intentions and continued to cover the entire page in this beautiful color brown. Nowadays, I understand the healing powers of color and the color brown was my earthy connection back to soil, roots, and the richness of life. Brown embodied all that was natural and organic for me, the complete opposite in which I was surrounded by in the hospital at that moment.

Color and emotions go hand in hand in my current work; choosing to play with the color blue as the beacon of my process. I am painting canvas after canvas with many shades of blue, adding several layers and textures complimenting the colors. This obsession and repetition leaks into many other segments of my past artworks; for example, I've had a brief intimate relationship with the color yellow; yellow in all shades, objects, and materiality. My obsession started with wearing

gold jewelry and mustard yellow dresses and this influenced my figurative paintings, *Mi Famalia*, 2014 and a series of self-portraits titled, *Reclined Subtleties*, 2014. In each work the yellow light shined through with the oil paint in interesting ways. This color became more prominent when I traveled to Peru, seeking once again, ancient grounds but of the Incas this time and to connect with the Peruvian shamans. Little did I know that in Cusco they celebrate New Year Eve's in yellow, and Peruvian's are very connected with the spiritual, the mystical and they believe in miracles. The markets were filled with an abundance of yellow treasures such as flowers, petals, candles, undergarments, and fruits. I felt the powerful essence of yellow as I participated in their customs, for the color yellow symbolizes happiness, enlightenment, creativity, sunshine and new beginnings.

I returned back to the States in search of a new home, when I found her and to my surprise, the house was the color of a sunflower. Therefore, when I am working on certain art projects, the color has to have a strong connection or I move on until I find another connection with color to work with. The mystical and the magical are always present in spirit while I create.

I am highly influenced by artists that use color and performance that explore the physical and/or psychological emotions, and for the most part use art as their own healing process. Frida Kahlo, Willem De Kooning, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, James Turrell, Yayoi Kusama, and Marina Abramovic, all embody in one way or another such a practice of using their body, life, or design to evoke emotions and shift perspectives. Frida Khalo, a Mexican painter was a highly influential artist that I considered to be a mentor in my early stages of development as an artist. Khalo

highly inspired me to be vulnerable in the process of making art. She exuded courageousness in her artwork and lifestyle and characteristics of integrity.

Many of my paintings are self-portraits. They begin representational and finish distorted, layer over layer, signs of scratching and scraping by large bodily movements with the tool of a pallet knife. This was leading me into a high interest of the spiritual in art, the process of making felt highly meditative, almost as if I were renewed every time I would complete a new art piece.

My artwork is a hybrid practice; a branching into many mediums, fusing art and spirit in all I create. Exploring the many facets of the spiritual in my artwork through video art performances and fiber art with threads. For instance, *Tumble Weed*, 2015, a video art performance where my intention was to create a storyboard about rebirth, and the tumbleweed was a symbol for consciousness. Also, tumbleweeds resemble emotions of emptiness, boredom, and wandering that thread throughout the video performance.

The performance was influenced by my trip to India; a soul-seeking journey to find myself in the motherland. I traveled alone and had moments of paranoia and loneliness, but I also felt awakened and connected to a higher source. I made friends with two traveling Himalayan brothers who read my aura and saw a parrot green color surround me, advising me to use my words more often and take flight into liberation. I was in complete bliss upon their presence - I can feel them vibrating with the cosmos, simply by being.

My artwork became a space of exploration and liberation. The *Tumbleweed* video takes one on a journey of beauty through open landscapes, with birds echoing

in the sky as I laid in the grass, soaking the sunlight, as to insinuate that I have stopped looking and started being. Spirituality and art are the highest human expressions, which allows the potential to connect on a higher level. The more I open dialogue with different cultures around the world, the more the conversation sways into art and faith. Art is a portal for profound transformation and connection and that is my objective for making.

My method for creating is highly intuitive and spontaneous, I have a practice that revolves around rituals before I touch the brush or write my next idea. Meditation and yoga come first, in order to empty myself to clear space and allow new ideas to flow in. These rituals are sometimes mirrored in my artwork and at other times there are no signs of simplicity or meditation but rather chaos and high emotions; capturing and embodying the full awareness. I never know the outcome of my work, but nonetheless trusting the process completely and into the unknown.

My artwork is my primary teacher - it humbles me every time. I sometimes feel my ego overly ambitious or sometimes at a low self-esteem, yet when the work is complete it always reveals the truth. My journey with my art is to continue to seek the spiritual, to keep listening to my inner child, and interact with her daily. In a contemporary world I find it challenging to find silence, rawness, and honesty, and art is the vessel that feeds my soul. Art is community and connection, it heals and opens wounds; it causes a shift inside, to be human for a moment. I dedicate my time to explore, practice, and seek the spiritual in art through a multidisciplinary practice, to paint the egoless woman, and meditate within the chaos of our world.