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# THE PROCESS OF BECOMING... ALEXANDRA ELDRIDGE

THE SANTA FE-BASED ARTIST SHARES HER JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY THROUGH MIXED-MEDIA ARTWORK. BY JOHN O'HERN

Alexandra Eldridge's kindergarten teacher wrote on her report card, "Alexandra lives very much in her imagination." Intending, perhaps, to suggest that Eldridge might learn to be more...practical, the teacher actually had an insight into the young girl who would become an artist of the imagination, trusting in what she explains is the "richness of the inner world, of the unconscious, of the imagination."

Attending an honors program at Ohio University, Eldridge recognized in her art professor the voice of a poet and a mystic. She later married him, and together they formed a community based on the teachings of the English poet, painter and mystic William Blake (1757-1827), who wrote, "The Imagination is not a State, it is the Human Existence itself".

She eventually left the community with her two children "to become my own teacher." She reads and experiences widely and sees the world, as Blake

admonished, "through" the eye, not "with" the eye.

One of her recent paintings, *An Immense World of Delight*, embodies her idea that "art is prophetic. It goes out ahead of you. I'm not sure where it's coming from." It began, as all her paintings do, as a panel she laid on the floor. She began to apply paint and reveled in "pushing it around." Ordinarily, the paintings are Venetian plaster, which is less easy to push but is capable of forming and accepting richer textures. "The Venetian plaster doesn't move as fast as my thoughts," she observes.

The large, expressionistic swaths of white paint have not appeared so boldly before but can be seen in subsequent works in progress. "I had a great time with the white. It's so unlike what I've done in the past," she says. Eldridge allows the paint to drip, a "dissolution" that "breaks up a fixed way of being. They're like tears, a release."

On the coffee table in her Santa Fe studio are books

1  
*The Divine Breath*, mixed media on panel, 60 x 48".  
Courtesy Nüart Gallery,  
Santa Fe, New Mexico.













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**2**  
*How to Teach A Soul to Fly*, mixed media on panel, 72 x 48".  
 Courtesy the artist.

**3**  
*My Daimon or Guardian Spirit*, mixed media on panel, 48 x 60". Private collection, courtesy Nüart Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

**4**  
 Alexandra Eldridge in her Santa Fe, New Mexico, studio.





I skipped over water,  
I dived over me,  
And all the birds in the  
Air couldn't catch me.





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such as *Visions of the Cosmos* and *Alchemy & Mysticism*, as well as a copy of *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* that contains a lengthy interview with her. There are books in which her paintings are used as illustrations, and next to it all is a page of engravings of birds from an ancient, dismantled dictionary.

Some of the birds appear photocopied, enlarged and colored in *An Immense World of Delight*. One of them holds in his beak a phrase clipped from the page of a book: “for the time is come.” As she was working on the painting, she picked up an old, literally mouse-eaten book of children’s poems and came across the stanza: “I skipped over water/I danced over sea/And all the birds in the/Air couldn’t catch me.” It is now collaged on the painting.

There are physical references throughout her studio, from a portrait of her by her mother to copies of the 27 children’s books her parents wrote and illustrated. There are

ideas in her head from her vast reading and experience. There are archetypal references common to all of mankind and there are images from dreams.

Imagery and symbols come out as her paintings progress, but they aren’t static in their meaning. “Symbols need to change,” she explains. “I deconstruct them. They’re forever expansive and have no limitation. Both the conscious and the unconscious are at work. The unconscious shows itself to me, and then my conscious mind takes it. The process of painting is a revelation that brings me in here every day. ‘What am I going to learn today?’”

Eldridge’s evolving symbols, her archetypal references and the poetic assembly of her paintings resonate in the viewer. Academy Award-winning actor William Hurt wrote, “If I ever can, I will be lining up with the crowd to ask for more pieces of her beautiful soul to come live in my house, among my children—to urge

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*An Immense World of Delight*, mixed media on panel, 60 x 48". Courtesy Nüart Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico.

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*Hold Infinity*, mixed media on panel, 20 x 16". Courtesy The San Francisco Gallery, San Francisco, California.

them in some way to become more like the being that crafts them, to be inspired...in the center of the eye or in its corner. There are two tides, one of light and another of muffling, suffocating...absence. Alexandra is clearly in the light.”

Eldridge herself speaks of the mundane but exciting process of pushing the surface of her paintings around allowing “the soul to fly out of it.” She describes the process of painting as a way to “realize the soul...to make it real. I’m rupturing time and space to get to a deeper reality.” She refers to her paintings as “insights, acknowledgements or, if you will, a soul map of my journey through life.”

During an Ayurvedic oil treatment, she had a vision of a stone face. Back in the studio, she began painting a stag and realized its face was the face she had seen in her vision. *My Daimon or Guardian Spirit* is one of many paintings in which the stag appears. *The Divine Breath* is another. “I don’t know why I gave it that title,” she muses. Nevertheless, it recalls the Hebrew word *ruach*, meaning wind, breath, mind or spirit. Job proclaimed, for instance, “The *ruach* of God (from God) is in my nostrils”.

The painting is about “becoming,” Eldridge states. The birds are not yet fully colored and the stag is still transparent except for his eye...and nostrils.

She states, “My paintings emerge from a place where contradictions are allowed, paradox reigns and reason is abandoned. My search is for the inherent radiance in all things...the extraordinary in the ordinary.”

Her kindergarten teacher admonished, “Alexandra lives very much in her imagination.” Blake declared “Imagination [is] the real and eternal world...” ●

John O’Hern, who has retired after 30 years in the museum business, specifically as the Executive Director and Curator of the Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, N.Y., is the originator of the internationally acclaimed Re-presenting Representation exhibitions which promote realism in its many guises. John was chair of the Artists Panel of the New York State Council on the Arts. He writes for gallery publications around the world, including regular monthly features on *Art Market Insights* and on *Sculpture in Western Art Collector* magazine.

