

## **RUNE MAKER**

### **BECOMING A NOVICE**

Lady Poetry's first public meeting with me was a disaster. At 14, an introverted, undiagnosed dyslexic raised in a technocratic oriented family, I had to recite from memory 100 lines of an 100 year or so old English poem written in a syntax making spaghetti for me of its meaning. If this was poetry, I wanted nothing of Her. And, I didn't until I had dropped out of the University of Utah as a mathematics major in late 1964 (father transferred to Salt Lake City in 1962 from Los Angeles), returned to Southern California, lived on the beach, and body surfed winter waves after a full day's work as a statistician on the Apollo Project. One day, a friend was playing Ken Nordine's WORD JAZZ. Somewhere within me Lady Poetry turned a key. I saw language dancing.

It was 1965 and being between colleges, I was drafted into the army. Fourteen months later, stationed in Stuttgart, Germany, I found works by Kerouac and Ginsberg in the base's library. I had begun writing poems. Also, I met Concrete Poetry in Club Voltaire. The walls of the descending stairwell to the basement club displayed works of scattered letters. And, my first poems were published by Will Inman in his New York City based mimeo magazine, KAURI.

In 1967, I returned to Salt Lake City and the U of U, changed my major to Economics to study the dominant religion of America, material wealth. Within a year I earned my B.S. with minors in mathematics and

history. I continued writing poetry.

In 1971, I returned to graduate school to study political economy with an emphasis in Middle Eastern Studies. In the library, I found the Emmett Williams' AN ANTHOLOGY OF CONCRETE POETRY, and concluded that the concrete poems I saw in Germany were composed by Hansjörg Mayer. Soon afterward, referring to the anthology as a whole, I commented to myself, "I can do better than that." That is, except for the work of Seiichi Niikuni; his work I found the most impressive and challenging to equal. I began experimenting with a manual typewriter. Three years later, I bought an electric model and found my way to compose.

Two friends made a lasting impression. John Hess was Utah's finest non-Indian weaver. Aside from learning about weaving as I watched his art quickly evolve, he taught me by example an artist's aesthetic and commitment.

Meeting Charlie Potts was another turning point. Until then, I had not known a poet, having consciously chosen to go my own way with as little poetic influence as possible; this I found later to be almost impossible. He quickly became a close friend and colleague who introduced me to contemporary poetry, the independent small press scene and a new way to look into language.

In graduate school, I was also taking classes in the Middle Eastern Studies Department. My dyslexia, though, made it too difficult and time consuming to learn Arabic. (My dyslexia is visual and auditory adding or subtracting a letter or entire

syllables and is motor impairing by impeding the translation of thought to speech. It is highly active in its creative aspect with which I can move with ease in and through 3 and 4 dimensional space and enables me to see and observe events and objects in non-ordinary ways, for example, hidden poems inside words. Other features and subtleties gave and continue to give many insightful moments.) I continued my research into Arabic calligraphy in the Middle Eastern library, and when time permitted read Olson.

Soon, I was dissatisfied with the graduate program. The academic Marxist faculty was unable to respond to criticism with artistic and literary accents. They demonstrated that Marxist anti-egalitarianism remained fixed in place from the moment of the abolition of the First International by Marx when the Anarchists were about to come to power. I was also amazed at the psychological brutality bordering sadism visited by some of the faculty upon the doctoral candidates. In late 1972, I left graduate school, went to work in a cabinet manufacturing plant and committed myself to poetry. I continued to earn a living with my body keeping mind and spirit free for another 18 years.

In November 1973, I composed on a new electric typewriter, one with a vertical half space, a square inch diamond mandala with the + sign. After 3 years of dissatisfaction with strike over and random typewriter work, I found my approach to the composition field: the weaver's grid, the mathematician's two dimensional x-y axis.

## HONING THE WORK

I moved with Sylvia, my first wife, to Sacramento in 1974 and began studying world art, symbols and patterns, Olson, Pound, Rexroth and who and what they pointed to. Robert Grave's THE WHITE GODDESS lead me to Keltic knots, the term rune, megalithic cultures, solstice sites, calendars, archaeoastronomy, symbols, patterns and the BOOK OF KELLS. I also met and became friends with D.r. Wagner. He later curated my first one man visual poetry exhibition. He also introduced me to the Sacramento poetry scene.

My work reached a form too complicated to just type out. Translating Keltic knots from curvilinear to the right angle x-y grid began at this time. I sketched the pattern, translated it to graph paper and then typed the poem (which took the least time).

By now, I called my works typoglyphs: the then modern writing machine wedded to rock art. I wove the ancient, the old and not so old to the contemporary. I limited my composition to no strike-overs working like a weaver with a loom: one line at a time. I desired clarity.

That summer of 74, I came across knot work other than those of Keltic origin: grass, string and wire. I spent hours walking Sacramento railroad track beds sketching and collecting the intriguing knotted and twisted wires.

Two series of knot work began their flow in November, RUNE and LOST ALFABET FOUND. This was the point in time between the previous efforts

that I came to call my lab work, my experiments, and the work. RUNE was based on words, accents and poetic gestures. LOST ALFABET FOUND was an abstract alphabet; each letter was composed by a single typewriter key. RUNE's primary form was the mandala. LOST ALFABET FOUND was an asymmetrical collection, each piece standing as both letter and sculpture. For both series and later series, the sum of the strokes on each page equaled the chant that materialized it, and so, these were also voice scores.

"OM" was the first "word" or recognizable syllable of RUNE. It is perhaps the oldest cosmological creation sound and perhaps globally the most widely recognizable cosmological syllable currently with us.

While learning about the complexity of the knot work, I also studied Vasarely and Escher from whom I learned invaluable lessons about optical and kinetic art, illusion and impossible geometry.

Literally and figuratively, knots held and hold human society and culture together. The age of knotting remains a guess, though without knots the levels of paleolithic culture were impossible. Perhaps "The Stone Age" itself should be renamed "The Knotting Age". Knots abound in nature from consciousness to energy, to energy's denser form, matter.

I learned in the early 80's that the oldest amulets were quite possibly magical knots; while being tied, they were chanted through. The words "knot" and "amulet" according to the source were related in

many language families. Through intuition, I found I was working with the origins of the first visual poems, or a distant relative depending upon one's nomenclature and sense of the tradition of visual poetry. One of the first types of visual poems appears to be amulets with patterned language arranged on the object seemingly to represent the vibration set in motion by chanting, the well known vehicle to create altered states of consciousness. If one is quiet enough, one can feel the waves of a chant move through one's body as well as lift one out of the body.

I have lived in the southern coastal portion of San Luis Obispo County since 1975. Upon moving here, I quickly found and was inspired by uncountable examples of nature's ocean knot work. I sketched knots, figures and patterns of kelp and sea grass and patterns of foam on local beaches and shorelines (where I continue to sketch) and north to Canada. LOST ALFABET FOUND exploded from 27 to 111 pages. It became my first published book, thanks to William Fox of West Coast Poetry Review Press. He also published a few of my experimental typoglyphs and the first RUNE poems in West Coast Poetry Review.

LOST ALFABET FOUND was the first of many books of individual series and collections to be composed and published. What began as an individual book, RUNE became a long series. The typewriter poems of RUNE 1 through RUNE 8 are "suspended" within a conceptual gallery. The viewer enters into the gallery in RUNE 3: SHIFT. From RUNE 10: ROSE WINDOW onward, the visual poems

(composed on computer) float in a conceptualized sacred precinct. Their more introverted focus is made clear within RUNE 12: INNER VIEWS. RUNE 9: TRANSITION (typewriter and computer) is the bridge between the exterior and the interior.

Bob Grumman has published some of the RUNE books; they remain in print. Karl Young selected 72 pages from the 328 typewriter pages for RUNE, A SURVEY. A few copies remain in print.

## **WORKING MATERIALS**

**1) Physical** – Before computer – bc – I worked with an electric typewriter with cloth ribbons. In the late 80's, I purchased an electronic typewriter with carbon ribbon. Since the early 90's I have worked with Macintosh computers and laser printers.

**2) The Page: finding the vision in visual poetry** – I have always worked on the surface of paper except for some pieces with alphabet noodles. Initially, the imagists and the concept of the ideogram informed my direction as I composed. Olson's essay, "Projective Verse", brought to my attention the use of the page as a field upon which to compose. I studied various geometries to energize the field. I added a third element from Graves: the poem sourced from non-urban, pre-Greek and Roman empires, tribal experience in Western European. The Keltic tradition and its use of the mystery poem, chant, song and prayer encouraged me to probe my Keltic roots.

For me, optical art's after-image suggested the sound vibration that formed each

poem. That is, the sound arrived before the viewer from chanting, song or mantra; from sound waves the image took shape. Sound generated the seemingly solid, physical form.

Clarity of presentation, after-image, chant, song, mystery poem, charm, prayer and mantra underpinned my poem as I typed. At first glance, the work looked like a specific pattern woven either as a mandala or an abstract form ranging from pattern to sculptural figure. With a deeper reading/viewing, the image rose off the page lifted by the voice pattern of its making. It was surrounded by its energy or consciousness field alive in the fourth dimension. Staring longer at the poem brought forth color. This became and remains the basic foundation for my visual poetry. Later, the white fielded page represented the closest "objectified" symbol for unmanifested pure consciousness. The black stroke or font represented manifested consciousness. The white field suggested the static; the black font or image suggested the active born out of the static.

### **3) Consciousness:**

**Informing Resonators** – Over the years I was drawn to specific interests. I followed my intuition. Here is a partial list: found objects such as wire, string, grass, kelp and sea grass, sidewalk and rock cracks; American Indian (mainly southwest) and Chumash (upon whose ground I live) weaving, pottery, basketry, contemporary painters, and rock art; the calligraphy and illuminated, religious and mystical manuscripts of Japan, China (over 150 specified types, many sourced from nature), Islam,

India, Ireland, England and continental Europe; Mesoamerican symbols and patterns; Inca weaving, megalithic and paleolithic patterns and symbols; Australian aboriginal art; impossible and illusionary geometries following the lead of Escher; science and its patterns, symbols and technical art renderings, contemporary and ancient including optical physics, electronic circuit patterns, astrophysics, human anatomy drawings; linguistics of Worf and Sapir; Jungian symbology work; music and song; the 20th century avant garde art movements (learned the positive additions and declined the negative aspects); meditation; and India – a short pilgrimage and stay at two ashrams and India's saint poets and sacred arts.

**PROMOTER: EDITOR, PUBLISHER & CURATOR**

I founded KALDRON in 1976 as tabloid magazine for lyrical and visual poetry. Spelled with a K noted the actual sound to my ears. The title came from the I CHING's hexagram 50, cauldron, nourishment. It happened also to be a symbol for poetic inspiration across Eurasia.

With the help of David and Patty Arnold in 1978 and 1979, I curated VISUALOG, the first of 5 international visual poetry exhibitions under that heading. The last, number four, part two, was co-curated with William Keith and displayed in the Hudson Valley. Because there was no magazine, nor had here been one, in the U.S. specifically devoted to visual poetry, I changed KALDRON to an international journal of visual

poetry and language art in the 1978-79 winter issue, #8. I also curated other international exhibitions of visual poetry and correspondence art locally at THE EXCELLENT CENTER and Arternatives during the 90's.

I tried to be inclusive by publishing and exhibiting a wide variety of approaches to the visual poem including concrete poems. I exhibited (and promoted through reviews in KALDRON) a wider spectrum than I published. Even if the content was contrary to my views, I published works until more outlets for visual poetry in this country appeared. Except in its last printed issue, addresses of all contributors were published for direct communication between contributors, audience and other editors and publishers. If an issue was full or work did not fit, I suggested other publications to poets. This helped strengthen the friendly and open network in the 80's of magazines publishing visual poetry of the established and new generations. Each issue had a run of 1000 copies. Contributors received 10 copies as payment. An example of free enterprise, copies were mailed free of charge to 100's of individuals.

From my observations of concrete and visual poems, I developed an understanding that Dick Higgins, booster of concrete, accepted during a joint guest editorship of a Canadian magazine's special issue on visual poetry. Concrete poetry is a fission process. It explodes apart the stuff of language to create texture and density. Visual poetry is a fusion process. It weds word, text, note, code,

petroglyph, font, phonic character, rock graphic, type, cipher, symbol, pictograph, sentence, number, hieroglyph, rhythm, iconograph, grammar, cluster, stroke, ideogram, density, pattern, diagram, logogram, poetic terminology's visual possibilities and implications (accent, line, color, measure, . . .), either singularly or in a multiple array of possibilities with other visual arts. I later concluded that the term visual poetry is the umbrella term to cover all the various types of poetic works composed for the eye. Concrete poetry, then, was a specific movement, form, type or style.

Between 1979 and 1990, KALDRON was the first U.S. journal of visual poetry to publish and showcase contemporary Islamic illumination and calligraphy, French Letterism and a host of individuals composing in Europe, Japan, Australia, and Latin America. KALDRON gained a new life on the internet in 1998 thanks to Karl Young, who has been serving visual poetry with his heavy lifting of the visual poems from their physical format into electronic space and writing the accompanying insightful and unsurpassed essays and introductory statements. It can be viewed at <http://www.thing.net/~grist/1&d/kaldron.htm>

## **WATERSHED**

When I first moved to San Luis Obispo County, half way between Los Angeles and San Francisco, I studied the existing archaeological and historical literature on the Chumash, the first people to

inhabit this area. I came to look at rock art as an ancestor of visual poetry with each symbol being a cultural signifier most probably associated with the cosmology or one of its stories. Solstice sites associated with rock art are not unique, but the addition of solstice markings moved the symbol from a static ("our" way of seeing and reading) to kinetic dimension and a more direct link to the cosmology. My friend, Normand Hammond, has recently recovered several new solstice sites proving the Chumash were using light and shadow in ways new to our understanding of their methods.

The prodigious memories in non literate cultures are well documented. Quite possibly many surviving visual symbols are doorways into stories or songs that unraveled from a teller's, poet's or singer's recall for days, maybe even weeks, on end. A Chumash scanning a landscape from a distance would have had a detailed memory of its parts far greater than most of us can even imagine, a landscape literacy. It was walked for uncountable generations and stocked full of lore. The oldest scientifically accurate and accepted date of Chumash habitation of the area is now around 13,000 BC. Other dates suggest a much longer residency. Horizon to horizon line of site was the longest straight line for the Chumash; memory extended it beyond site. Pin points of fire extended site lines further at night. Even more distant were the solar, lunar, planetary and stellar points of light reaching to the rock art. I found that many of the inner and outer planets' reflected

and refracted light lay down lines of light on local calm waters.

In late 1977, I began 20 years of environmental direct action politics, in part based on Gary Snyder's call for each of us to protect our local watershed. Thus began my political work: anti-nuclear power; 20 year involvement with local Chumash for site protection (My studies of their rock art and solstice sites that lead to discoveries/recoveries of 2 solstice sites and a possible solstice grid overlaying all the Chumash lands and maybe further. From this came ALIGNMENT, published by Harry Polkinhorn's Atticus Review Press in 1986); and in the 1990's, ocean protection against offshore oil. The latter evolved out of a back injury forcing me into physical rehabilitation and job retraining where I learned to use the computer. I was hired for once "because of", not "in spite of" my politics as an energy planner for the county to write a marine sanctuary proposal and monitor and resist federal attempts to permit offshore drilling. The information learned during the research of the near and offshore waters, I turned into an attack of an unprecedented level by a county against the federal program. My contract was not renewed; I gave my expertise to the local environmental center. I have worked as a wheatgrass and sprout grower with Ruth in our family business since 1993; she founded it in 1984.

I married Ruth on the summer solstice of 1983. I have lived in Oceano since. Ruth's openness and spontaneity

continues to be an inspiration. We collaborated on a book based in part on her sketches: FIRE + WATER BALANCE THE BOOK published by Karl Young. Her daughter, Amy Franceschini, 12 at the time of our marriage, is now a formative creative force on the internet (founder of future farmers and co-founder of atlas magazine) and in environmental instillation art in San Francisco.

### **CURRENT**

Early on, I rejected the Romantic notion of the suffering, nihilistic artist, writer and poet. By 1978, I stopped the occasional use of herbal smoke. By 1982, I dropped the failed materialistic Marxian political economy analysis. By 1983, I stopped the occasional consumption of wine or beer. By the late 80's, I dropped the adrenalin addiction promoted by the moment of poetic inspiration. In 1993, I dropped the adrenalin addiction promoted by environmental political confrontation. By late 1994, I concluded that the low place of poetry in our culture rested directly in the hands of its dysfunctional visionaries caught in the grips of their unconscious, that tar baby articulate with the language and forms of the unconscious, and inarticulate with language and forms of consciousness expansion, of enlightenment. This conclusion was not solidified until I was able to release some of my own charged baggage carried 40 years in an unconscious bag of post traumatic stress syndrome.

After my 1994 trip to India, I spent 6 weeks in a small cabin on the Big Sur

south coast overlooking the Pacific meditating and reading or rereading various masters of various traditions, including my first full reading of SAVITRI by Sri Aurobindo. From my previous mining through the years of the Zen poets of Japan; the Ch'an, Taoist and Buddhist poets of China; Milarepa of Tibet, Sufi poets of Islam, mystic poets and writers of Christianity, mystic poets of the Traditional Ways (original peoples of Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Pacifica), as well as the findings on the frontiers of the scientific exploration, I had learned much and found many common threads. Though these rich and deeply meaningful ways have guided countless individuals, I, however, felt no complete resonance until I found in the traditions of India, Sanaantana Dharma, a kindred resonating force.

The Sanaantana Dharma, the Eternal Way, refers to India's spiritual tradition. It is an inclusive tradition accepting all beliefs, even the belief of non belief. This wide open inclusiveness, this all encompassing spectrum, ranges from the absolute denial of the Divine by the atheist and hedonist to believers in any and all forms of the Divine and the various approaches to It from the religious to the mystic, to the Advahut who sees and experiences everything as Divine and moves beyond the Divine's form to the undefinability of the Divine, that all forms are manifestations of the Unmanifested. One can draw a circle beginning with absolute denial of the Divine to Its denial because of undefinability, Its

unspeakableness. Included within the circle are all the world's spiritual traditions. While the Sanaantana Dharma was born in India, it is for all humanity.

For me, Robert Graves failed by not sublimating the ego; except for being inspired by the muse, he worked in its service like most of us are taught. Snyder's watershed protection should have been extended to the inner environmental clean up: the mess we see around us is the collective total of all our inner polluted environments. Most of the Beats, whose name in part was sourced from beatitude, while introducing Buddhism to America in a wild Johnny Appleseed like populist thrust, failed as living examples of Buddhism's transcendental potential. Many sank under the weight of the act of the suffering, nihilistic or hedonistic artist and became unwitting models for others.

The poetic traditions within these various ways, in their ideal, call for the poet to raise his or her consciousness, ascend to the Divine Consciousness or the Unmanifested and then descend back to the culture with words and vision full of wisdom carried on a wave of enlightened consciousness. For me, this is the ideal that poets should embrace if they are to reassert a meaningful poetic vision in order to aid our culture to weave a peaceful and harmonious Way into our unraveling social fabric.

While the separation process began earlier, making the poem an objective poem in the early 20th century detached the poet from the poem. The

poet no longer answered for his or her lived life nor was demanded to answer for it. The objective poem was then reduced to an object. And now in too many instances, the poem has become an object of manipulated material; matter of little consequence becoming a deadened noun reflecting a shrinking, dying inner world as the exterior paradise handed our species dies at the touch of countless King Midas clones.

As I see it now, each work of art, literary or visual, is an autobiographical artifact. Each work is the materialization of the initial creative pulse and consciousness of its maker. Each work forever resonates with the consciousness that vibrates outward from its innermost core which its maker arrived with at the moment of completion. Each work is a measure of its maker's immersion in either reaching back in time to harvest an ideal and adding a contemporary thrust for new vitality; reaching backward for misunderstood manifestations that lessens, that generates a decadence; reaching around and embracing the present moment thereby becoming a reflector of her or his time; reaching forward over the horizon into the forthcoming and returning as a visionary prophet; or swimming or moving towards or establishing the self in the big Self or Eternal Moment. The poet consciously chooses to be a maker within the context of the poet, or bard, shaman, seer, or the self-realized mystic, zen and sufi master sage, yogi, saint, and teacher/master (yogi, guru, saint or transmitter). The realized poet has gained the

truth of self knowledge by merging with the Ultimate or Divine – That Which Is.

These and ongoing evolving insights frame and will frame the visual poems composed by computer for the ongoing RUNE series of books. The completed computer RUNE books are RUNE 10: ROSE WINDOWS, and RUNE 11: YANTRAS. RUNE series in progress are RUNE 12: INNER VIEWS, RUNE 13: PRAISES – Prayers, Scripture, Slokas and Sutras and RUNE 14: WHEELS OF THE VEHICLE. Composed before and in parallel to RUNES 10 and 11 are the various series in AMBER SANDS, and PORTRAIT OF TEXTURE.

What shape or form my future work will take I can not say. While I have specific projections and images in mind that I am currently working on and composing, inspiration and intuition power the waves I ride. The journey these waves provided and will provide depended and depends upon my shedding the heavier elements of my mind, those chunks of unconscious tar clouding and blocking my resonance with those I live with and around and environment I live in. I am not only what I eat – food and thought – but what I do not eliminate; I have much to let go of. To live one's ideal is a process of constant integrated awareness.

Karl Kempton