



Monkey Bike Illumination, 1994 © Caterina Verde

Dead Skins Talking

By Caterina Verde

Somewhere in the summer of 1973, my best friend Barb and I decided that we would go up to Maine to see my uncle Jim and his wife Mary and their two kids. They lived up in Franklin in a remote spot on 18 acres. Last I'd heard, their chickens were laying frozen eggs, and the goats were living in the house. I liked that.

Jim was a painter, and, having followed Adele Davis in the early sixties (maybe even the fifties), he was an early proponent of healthy living and a well-considered diet. Jim left his sixty-dollar-a-month studio on Avenue D to get to the land. Everyone tends to forget that NYC is on the land, but, ok, that's another story. He married his student Mary from The Cooper Union in a loft in Chelsea, where I sighted my first wearer of a paper dress. My very Victorian great aunt, Linda, asked a woman if she had forgotten her dress thinking she'd arrived in just her slip. With all that settled in NYC, off they went, first to North Guilford, CT and then on to Roast Meat Hill Road in Killingworth, CT (they were vegetarians), and then northward to Maine — the final destination. Jim was of a quiet mind, student of the I-Ching, teacher and practitioner of Tai Chi, a tall gentle spirit with a kind and loving smile. His paintings reflected his nature. He studied Chinese and because of his expertise, he was taken on as a code breaker during the Korean War. Mary was Chinese but didn't speak it.



Mushroom Act on a Hill, 2021 © Caterina Verde

Jim and Mary's kitchen shelves were always lined with mason jars full of beans and other dried food goods. Tea was served.

The Trip

Maine is where Barb and I are headed. Mom passed away last year, and Dad is all too eager for a break from an argumentative adolescent me. He drops us off at the New Haven Greyhound bus station. Our hiphuggers held up by wide-leather-big-buckle-belts, feet punctuated by water-buffalo sandals and our Mexican tops, fully inform our traveling neighbours as to who we are. Of course we don't know.

"Yeah, hey, bye, Dad, thanks for the ride," I shout in a muted voice and casually wave as we get on the bus.

Flopping into our seats, we sigh, and settle in. Within minutes I'm looking around. I don't want to be on that bus. I look at Barb — "This is bullshit, Barb. Let's get off. Let's hitch." She agrees. We're in Hartford, and hurrying off the bus, aiming our internal GPS towards the highway. Do we even have a map? I have no idea. But we get a ride from some guy for a big chunk of the way. We've even gone straight to Portland in one shot. There's still a long way to go. A young farmer picks us up and we ride much of the way in the bed of his pickup. Miraculously, we make it to Bar Harbor without incident.

Entre-acte: I guess we contact Jim and Mary phone-booth style, right? How quickly we forget. No one can even get properly lost anymore.

Before continuing on to Franklin, we decide to drop some Orange Sunshine in Bar Harbor and spend the day there. The town square is it. Exploring every section of it and its minutiae. It is opening itself up to us, opening us up to the Universe and all the natural world has to offer us in its great benevolence. We have a blanket (acting as carpet) that moves along with us from



Still So Full of Hope, 2015-2021 © Caterina Verde

area to area. Lying on our backs, our eyes relaxing, allowing information to enter us, watching clouds take formation, giving us enigmatic messages, all the while becoming fantastical shapes of creatures from yester-yore or never-before. The bark on the trees, undulating and moving, we are tuning into them and they are listening. We know it.

I think, "If it can be perceived, then it exists. Even a hallucination is real."

Taking a break from our four corners world we head to the local trading store. It's a once upon a time kind of place where trappers get trapped. A mix of hippie meets old Maine; stacks of wooden salad bowls, pipes, clunky ceramic coffee cups and some purple stuff thrown in for good measure. Turning a corner at the back of the store, I meet a standing pile of furs. Must be fifty high. I stand back and stare. Something's odd. I keep looking. The furs are expanding and contracting. Wait, the furs are breathing. "Hey, Barb, quick, come over here, the furs are breathing." She arrives and sees it too. We stay for a while, just watching. Breathing but not speaking.

Arc of Life

Back in NYC after several trajectories, one in Paris, a child now grown, extreme health issues, legal stuff, loss of life, an inheritance lost to a grifter, oh well, you know, gamblers, exhibitions, back to Connecticut, teaching, video editing, then out to the East End of Long Island (a whole meshgunnah there too) close friends die, some old friends drift away, as we're all looking for the freedom to create a new reality unfettered by other opinions, happy times in between and now exploring the land of NYC. Back to the place where my great grandmother, Zadie, who ran a Tea and Coffee Emporium on Chambers Street was killed by a cab while stepping off a curb. Didn't expect to be back, but, yes, and now here for some time.

Initially, I land back at Root's house in Ridgewood. I know Root from the early Williamsburgh – no, not Virginia. She's a stalwart friend; intrepid. Root believes in house-mating as a lifestyle. Now after having raised a daughter, I'm in a housemate situation. But hey, co-habitation as they say, is all the rage. It's ECO: eco-nomic; eco-logic and probably eco-comic. As it turns out, eco-cosmic. Still, it's good move, though I know it's another temporary lateral move.

It's been decades since I tried ye old lysergic acid or any other hallucinogenics for that matter. But now seems to be the time for micro-dosing as my old low-grade depression had been clinging onto me like a fine dust for decades. I need a bit of a re-fresh. A friend has access and I partake. Back and forth between precision blade-cut triangles of jelly, with names like Dragon Scale and yes, even Orange Sunshine. It's still around. Then, I move on to mushrooms.

I realize mushrooms have a profound healing capacity. Sending underground messages to trees informing them how to adapt, fertilize and repair, they are the networking masters. Neither flora nor fauna, fungi is probably the UFO that we've all been looking for but in the wrong place. We are part fungi too – and we're looking out when we should be looking down and in. As humans, we're only 43 percent human, the rest is a festival of bacteria and other freeloaders.

I read Donald Hoffman's, "The Case Against Reality." He posits evolutionary game theory as an initial foundation furthered by the concept that we're living in an interface and creating "reality" constantly. Of course, this can be taken many ways. Back to my thought from Bar Harbor...

My drawings are getting back to the beginning. Tired of the preciousness of art. There's no sense in this whole shebang that we are repurposing into some kind of grid pattern. Essentially, you have that first part of life, where you look around, bewildered. Initial joy and optimism with brightly opened eyes are gradually replaced by a cautious analysis. Yes, children have analytical prowess. Even as a child you are aware. As you are introduced to concepts and other people's thoughts, you think, "well, that's screwed up" or "that doesn't make sense" but over time people convince you that somehow you should swallow that pill. No wonder we're depressed.

We've swallowed a whole package and we can't pass it. So by the time we've swallowed it, indigestion sets in... and you wonder why it is this way or maybe you don't wonder, you're just wondering what the hell is wrong with you. But there's nothing wrong. You simply have indigestion from that package of crap you ate some time before and everybody's telling you to sing a happy tune. So by the time I'm rolling around to the micro-dosing, I'm realizing, we're all constantly creating our perceptions, our reality - undulating. Stop trying to manipulate the ocean.

The mushrooms tell me that I can simply move in space and that's good enough. This summer, mushrooms are everywhere. I'm photographing them. So many varieties. They pop up out of nowhere and suddenly disappear, just like us.

"If it can be perceived, then it exists. Even a hallucination is real."

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