

Artist Statement

Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.

- *Carl Jung*

Only connect...

- *E. M. Forster*

I am a person with a big heart and a deep need to be connected, but I grew up insulated both from others and from myself. The arc of my life has been to reclaim what I now, writing this, think of as my birthright. Connection and compassion have manifested themselves mainly in my work in photography -- in particular, digitally manipulated images of flowers, and photographs of the sea and sky -- and as a psychotherapist, my current occupation.

My entry into the path that led me both to psychotherapy and to the photography I do now began with a near-fatal medical error in Albany, New York, in 1993, where I was a graduate student in a PhD program in English Literature. That event, which included a near-death experience, divided my life into two parts: who I was, and who I am becoming. To paraphrase the Grateful Dead's Jerry Garcia, the way back from the brink has been "a long, strange trip." On it, I have discovered what I was put on the planet to do; my calling.

Making both the flower mandalas and the other nature images feels like I am in wordless conversation with natural elements far more profound than anything I could create myself. The seascapes and skyscapes evoke a sense of connection with vastness and an appropriate resizing of worries and concerns, much like the perspective one gets from Chinese landscape scrolls, where the people are tiny figures on an apparently infinite terrain. The work with flowers and trees connects me deeply with their minute particulars, the building blocks from which all creation generates. There is something prayer-like about both shooting and post-processing. They are acts of devotion. When the process is at its best, I'm no more the creator of these images than someone who tunes the FM dial is the creator of whatever sweet music comes through the speakers.

Listening to what the flower mandalas were telling me led me out of a dark place and, indirectly, to my decision to become a psychotherapist.

Early in the process of my re-entry into photography, I met with a painter who had been making mandalas for years. She suggested that each of my mandalas was trying to tell me something. "Look at them. Listen to what they're saying." I hung prints around my house and made them the digital wallpaper of my computer. What I found was that the act of creating mandalas and then looking deeply at what I had done resulted in a spiritual feedback loop:

- 1) The original flower moved me enough to photograph it.
- 2) The mandala-making process distilled the initial feeling into something more precise and more deeply felt.
- 3) Looking at the mandalas I'd made brought that enhanced feeling back into me, distilled and amplified.

With each iteration of the creating/receiving cycle, some previously inaccessible facet of my divided self became more revealed, and with each re-experiencing of what I had captured, I became more whole. The net result of this strengthening of my soul is that I have been able to open my heart to what I now realize is my greatest gift, to be a healer.

Two years after my brush with death, I was in a support group for people who had survived near-death. I was still finding my way back into this world, and although I knew I had returned from the brink with something of great potential value, I was also profoundly disoriented, split between the me I had been and the me I was becoming. One of the group members, addressing my confusion, made a wide half-circle gesture with his arm and said, "David, I think you're one of those people who has to take the long way 'round." He paused, his arm fully outstretched. "But when you get there," he continued, closing his hand into a fist and pulling it to his chest, "it'll be important."

What I do now, a decade later, *does* seem important. As a psychotherapist, I see the light in people and help bring it into the world. I know I am saving lives. As an artist and writer, I know I am affecting people I may never meet. Through these gifts, I hope to convey what wisdom I have garnered from my journey, a kind of boon that, had I not taken that long, strange trip, I would never have been able to discover.