

# ***Ancestors***

**Art exhibit – performances - events  
September 21, 2012 – January 8, 2013**

**Life Force Arts Center, 1609 W Belmont, Chicago  
LifeForceArts.org 773-327-7224**

The mission of **Life Force Arts Foundation (LFA)** is to advance the field of spiritual art through artistically excellent exhibits, events and publications that explore the connection of art and spirituality. We define spiritual art as visual, literary or performing art that flows from spiritual practice, strives to connect the audience with Spirit, and creates spiritual awakening, healing, or evolution. We focus on the arts as a common ground of human expression, where artists and audiences of diverse spiritual traditions can honor each other, and share their personal and collective experiences of the spiritual aspect of life. LFA's goals are to develop spiritual artists, the spiritual arts audience, and the spiritual arts community. The Foundation operates Life Force Arts Center (LFAC), Chicago's spiritual art gallery and performance space, which presents visual art exhibits, dance, theater and music performances, author book signings and workshops with artists who are experts in spiritual art-making.

# ***Ancestors***

## **Art exhibit – performances - events**

**Opening Reception: September 21, 2012**

**Closing Reception: January 8, 2013**

**Free admission to exhibit & Opening & Closing Receptions**

**Gallery hours**

**Mon & Thurs 1:30 - 6:30 pm & by appointment**

**info@LifeForceArts.org or 773-327-7224**

Honor and commune with the ancestors and explore the many meanings of heritage, lineage, and identity at *Ancestors*. *Ancestors* is an art exhibit running September 21, 2012 - January 8, 2013 at Life Force Arts Center gallery, 1609 W Belmont, Chicago IL 60657. Opening Reception is Friday, September 21, 2012 from 6 - 10 PM. Closing Reception is Tuesday, January 8, 2013 from 7 - 9 PM. Gallery hours are Mondays and Thursdays 1:30 - 6:30 PM, and by appointment. Admission to the exhibit and Opening & Closing Receptions is free. Workshops, performances and other events related to the theme of ancestors will also be held as part of the show.

The exhibit celebrates ancestry of various kinds: biological, spiritual, geographical, cultural, ethnic. Contemplating one's ancestors is about belonging, acknowledging or discovering who you are, how you express yourself, and understanding the primal instincts of your beginnings. Cultural expressions including art, music, architecture and fashion are connected to ancestors and their creativity over the generations. There is also the aboriginal concept that all of nature is "the ancestors". However diluted our conscious knowledge or awareness of them may be, ancestors influence us.

Artists featured in the exhibit are:

- Steven Blaine Adams
- Sharon Bechtold
- J. Penney Burton
- Fred Casselman
- Judy Demchuk
- Kurt Fondriest
- Ladan Ghajar
- Phyllis Gordon
- Dorothy Graden
- Susan Joseph
- Lauren Macklin
- Jon Pickell
- Joan Riise
- Paul Rucker
- Donita Simpson
- Sujata Tibrewala
- Marilyn Zimmerwoman

### **Special Events for *Ancestors***

LFAC presents themed shows throughout the year, that include an art exhibit plus events such as workshops, performances, lectures and poetry readings. Some of the upcoming events for *Ancestors* include:

- 10/3 - "House by the Side of the Road" movie with Susan Abbott Gidel & Jan Abbott Landow
- 10/20 - Parting of the Veil - Shamanic Kirtan with Ananda Lila
- 10/23 - Sacred Cauldron, Holy Grail with Kiel Milner
- 10/27 - Native American Tales with storyteller Mark Kater
- 11/3 - Renaissance & Folk music with Courtly Consorte
- 11/4 - Faces of the Dark Goddess: mask making with Szmeralda Shanel
- 11/10 - Family Constellations Soul Work with Danuta Jirik
- 11/15 - Libation: Painting as an offering to the Ancestors with Sujata Tibrewala
- 12/1 - Remembering Artists on WORLD AIDS DAY
- 12/12 - "Ancestors": performance with Katherine Chronis

For more details on each event, please visit our website [LifeForceArts.org](http://LifeForceArts.org)

# Following the Lineage: Curating the Ancestors Show

## An interview with LFA's *Transcendent Journeys* ezine

### **Transcendent Journeys: What gave you the idea for the show?**

**Joan Forest Mage:** At LFAC, we do shows on themes. Steve Adams, one of the members of LFA's Art Committee along with Judy Demchuk and me, had the idea for the theme of ancestors. He was fascinated with cultures of old, and how we relate to ancestors.

Steve also had the idea for LFAC's previous series of shows: *Ancient Voices of Stone*, *Bridge to Eden* and *Animal Wisdom, Animal Soul*. This series explored the theme of mineral, vegetable, animal. This is an ancient idea called the Great Chain of Being that goes back to at least Aristotle in ancient Greece. In some ways, by doing the *Ancestors* show, we are continuing with the Great Chain of Being: Ancestors would represent the next step after animal, which is human.

### **TJ: Please tell us more about how you prepare a theme.**

**JFM:** The first step is Steve, Judy and I meet to create the description. That description is used for the Call for Artists, which is posted on various visual artists lists. Artists who are interested in exhibiting in the show submit samples of their artwork by email to us, and we choose which artwork we will have in the show, artwork that we feel best represents the theme of the show.

It is always amazing to see how different artists depict the same theme. That's one thing that makes it exciting to do this type themed show: we see novel "angles" on the theme that the artists come up with.

### **TJ: How many variations of "ancestors" are in the show and how do they enrich the show?**

**JFM:** Many variations are present! Fred Casselman does beautiful digital photography of nature. He sent us wonderful artwork of a nautilus shell and of a huge boulder.

Fred explains, "As the Nautilus grows, it creates new, wider and larger chambers that are perfectly proportionate. A lifeline connects one chamber to the next, so previous rooms are left behind but not forgotten. The Nautilus is emblematic of continuity with our ancestors, interconnectedness, and change. The boulder is a glacial remnant. The surrounding land, now overgrown with forest, is very rocky and at one time was used for grazing sheep. The ancient megalith still serves as a silent sentinel and guardian."

Dorothy Graden has amazing artwork based on ancient rock art. She brings to the show the images that our early ancestors created as visual art.

### **TJ: How are mothers as ancestors shaping the idea of the show?**

**JFM:** Several of the artists had personal ancestral connections that they explore. For example, Marilyn Zimmerwoman's artwork is essentially a death mask: an enhanced photograph of her mother shortly after her mother died, set in a context of ancient Egypt. It is a powerful piece that shows how people throughout the ages have honored their loved ones.

Then there are two other artists in the show, Donita Simpson and Jon Pickell. Marilyn is an art teacher at Wayne State University. Jon and Donita were both Marilyn's students. That makes Marilyn an artistic "mother" to Jon and Donita. They follow in her artistic lineage. Marilyn posed for Jon in his photo "Djinn". Marilyn represents the Djinn, or ancestor spirit in the photo.

Marilyn also is the subject of one of the photos Donita has in *Ancestors*. It is a photo of a very pregnant Marilyn; in fact, it was taken the day before Marilyn's daughter was born! So we have Marilyn's photo of her own mother, and Marilyn's "professional daughter" Donita's photo of Marilyn pregnant with Marilyn's daughter. Sujata Tibrewala has a wonderful painting called *Mitochondrial Mother*, a representation of our earliest female ancestor. She also did a painting of herself and her own mother, showing her connection with her East Indian ancestry and culture. At the same time, it is a universal mother-daughter depiction.

Another interesting "mother ancestor" connection in the show is the art of Lauren Macklin and Phyllis Gordon. Lauren sent a submission, and in her artist's statement she mentioned that she was very inspired by her grandmother, Phyllis Gordon, who was an artist. Phyllis passed away before Lauren was born, but Lauren grew up in a house filled with Phyllis' artwork.

Reading this as part of Lauren's artist's statement, I asked Lauren if she would like to exhibit Phyllis' artwork as well as her own. So we are doing that! The art of both granddaughter and grandmother will be in *Ancestors*.

**TJ: Do you think artists are more conscious of their ancestors than other people?**

**JFM:** Not necessarily, though artists are experts at expression, and they do express things about their ancestors in ways that others may not think of. In terms of professional lineage, rather than biological ancestry, people of all kinds of professions and communities are conscious of their ancestors within those communities. For example, schools often have a picture or sculpture of the founder of the school in the main lobby, and they regularly invoke the memory of the people who are in the lineage of the school.

Some people who are not artists are very involved with their ancestors, such as people who study genealogy. Also, there are many people who do care-giving for their older relatives; those people are very conscious of their ancestors.

Many people display photos of their ancestors. That's another way some people express their consciousness of their ancestors. Various cultures have there are ceremonies about the ancestors where all people, whether they are artists or not, regularly remember their ancestors. Some people have had bad experiences with their ancestors and may try to forget them or distance themselves from their ancestors. Whatever the relationship, good or bad, contemplating our ancestors and the heritage we received from them is a core human experience.

## **STEVEN BLAINE ADAMS**

### ***Antler Ancestors***

2012. Antler, Bone, Shell, Starfish, Agate, Carnelian, Amber, Red Jasper, Leather. 2' X 1 ½'. \$200

### ***Antler Healing Dish***

2012. Painted Feather, Abalone, Aquamarine crystal. 1' X 1'. \$100

### ***Solar Wheel (Shaman's Necklace)***

2012. Bone, Green Jasper, Turquoise. \$200

Antlers are symbols of regeneration because they keep growing back. In many cultures, the star represents the ancestors. My grandmother is American Indian which is why I chose Indian artifacts for the show. I chose the healing dish because incense is a way of communicating with our ancestors.

## **SHARON BECHTOLD**

### ***The Lord & Lady of the Greenwood***

2012. Pyrography on walnut. 10" X 81". NFS.

## **J. PENNEY BURTON**

### ***Doe A Deer***

2012, handmade and eco-dyed paper, deer jaw, branch, wire mesh, 9" x 12" x 6" \$750.00

## **FRED CASSELMAN**

earthecho.com

### ***Pyramids***

2009, 34 x 18.5, \$400

The pyramids represent the age-old quest for illumination, for the Divine. We are now rediscovering what many of our ancient ancestors knew, that the Divine lies within and always has.

### ***Chambered Nautilus***

2012, 26" X 21", \$325

As the Nautilus grows, it creates new, wider and larger chambers that are perfectly proportionate. A lifeline connects one chamber to the next, so previous rooms are left behind but not forgotten. The Nautilus is emblematic of continuity with our ancestors, interconnectedness, and change.

### ***Megalith***

2011-2012, 34" X 19", \$400

This huge rock near Widow Gage Road in Massachusetts is also a glacial remnant. The surrounding land, now overgrown with forest, is very rocky and at one time was used for grazing sheep. The ancient megalith still serves as a silent sentinel and guardian. There's a very interesting effect especially visible in the print version--it has the appearance of a light source coming from within and beneath the megalith.

## **JUDY DEMCHUK**

### ***Remembering Her True Self***

Textile paint on silk, 36" x 32", \$1,000

I explore the theme of ancestors from a broad perspective. My inspiration comes from the wise women who came before me. These women imparted their insights about realizing and appreciating their true self. Some of these wise women are my mom, grandmother, great aunts and friends. The book *Wise Women* by Joyce Tenneson is also a source of inspiration for this painting. I chose to paint on silk to reflect my Japanese heritage and my painting techniques reflect my American heritage.

## **KURT FONDRIEST**

### ***Night Watchers***

Paint & Pastels, 16" x 20",

The tree of my soul is one full of branches that grow into individual stories. I use the imagery of trees in my paintings to represent the ever changing experiences of the universal mind brought forth through "Individuality". The trees in my art are a reflection of my childhood spent in the Ohio valley. The trees I played in as a child are now part of the images in my paintings. They now make up the forest where my ancestors planted them. I find trees are symbolic of the past, present and future in the way they are resilient to the elements of nature. Like trees we all grow in many ways and our branches' "experiences" go many directions. Life is symbolized by the tree, an element of nature created out of a cause to keep life growing and reaching upward in becoming aware of our higher power.

## **LADAN GHAJAR**

### ***Waiting***

2009, Acrylic & Oil on Canvas, 54"x54", \$4500.00

In absolute summary, my paintings speak of my perception of life, its unknowns, and a new dialogue. "Waiting" is a story of the human's past whose messengers carry the message through a winding staircase from generation to generation until they reach the last person who is standing in the middle of painting between the sea and the land. That last person's being is waiting, looking to the future, and the line between the sea and the land depicts future and past. The girl in the middle of the sea is going towards an unknown with bright future with someone in the sky waiting for her. The girl's red color is an indication of today's humans who live within the

rays of pain, indignation, war, and inequality, but still with hope and brightness heading towards the future. This is evident in the choice of colors and the manner of the brush strokes, which make the sky and the sea always bright and hopeful. The existence of another woman in the space blow is the symbol of our Ancestors who is given message to some others with someone still carrying it. Historical junctions are also depicted in this painting.

**Ladan Ghajar** was born In Tehran Iran into the family of artistic backgrounds. Her father was caricaturist with talent for poetry and writing as well. Her mother use to paint as a self taught painter. After 16 years of growing in a rich cultural and historical era of Middle East (Persian) she came to U.S.A

About 20 years ago, Ladan was enlightened with strange dreams which changed her entire life. Science that erratic and unbelievable phenomena she find herself .She could imagined the meaning of life, by stepping into the world of art as a surrealist painter and writer. And she reveals her existence and her need of creating art. Art is not just beautiful piece of work to her. Is another way of life and dimension which is the only way that she can interpret her life with the world around her.

Her work has been shown In Chicago, Iran and Canada as a solo and group exhibitions. Her expressive perspective, reveal a mutual grand for duality of western and eastern cultures on her work. What make her art interesting and eternal are her inspirations of emerging cultural and historical intuitive thoughts and emotions into the work of art with no borders.

## **PHYLLIS GORDON**

### ***Portrait of Man***

Oil on canvas. 19.5" X 23". NFS.

### ***Indian Portrait***

Oil on canvas. 19" X 23". NFS.

Lauren Macklin says, "Phyllis Gordon was my maternal grandmother. Based on the paintings we have and what my mom has told me, she liked to paint from nature and painting people, and used mostly watercolors and oils. I never had the chance to meet her, but I often wonder how we would have gotten along. According to my mother she was very warm with a contagious upbeat personality and an adventurous spirit. My grandmother started painting as an adult, taking many art classes at the village art gallery in Skokie, IL. She evolved to become a teacher there where she became close friends with several other instructors. They would travel together all over the country to paint outdoors. She displayed her work in many shows around the Chicago area. She died young, at age 47 in 1983. There was a show at the Skokie Public Library to honor her and her artwork.

## **DOROTHY GRADEN**

[www.dorothygraden.com](http://www.dorothygraden.com)

### ***Dancing Shaman***

2011 /dimensions: Framed, giclee print (original - india ink and watercolor). 34" X 42". \$600.00.

### **Sacred Birth**

2012. Framed giclee print (original – india ink), 34" X 42", \$600.00

Twenty five years ago my sister, daughter and I set out for an adventure in the American Southwest. We traveled through New Mexico, Utah, Arizona and Colorado hunting for ancient Anasazi ruins. We climbed mesas, hiked nearly vertical cliffs, boulder "hopped", waded through canyon rivers, explored caves and rock ledges. We found many ruins as well as the markings on walls and floors that the Ancients left. These markings are defined as "Rock Art".

Now, every summer for the past 25 years, we plan a new pilgrimage to visit the ancient ancestors. I have viewed and photographed Rock Art in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Hawaii, Bonaire, Hawaii, and Ireland. There are so many sacred sites to see and each one brings cultural and artistic as well as spiritual vision. The styles vary by century, cultures and clans. Many are mystical and inspiring. Some are 10,000 years old.

I was invited to present my field findings and lecture at Cork University in Ireland as well as the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow. My photographs have been published in the Theosophical Society's journal, *Quest*.

I draw with great admiration, respect and humility for the ancients who inspire my work. Some images represent world views, spiritual rituals, hunting magic, time keeping, vision quests, and more.

### **SUSAN JOSEPH**

[www.divinelyfired.com](http://www.divinelyfired.com)

Susan is a Intuitive Healer and Creative Spiritual Entrepreneur. She has an Associate of Arts and has been self employed for 19 years.

### **Foundations**

Mixed media, 16"x20" framed

Based on a photograph taken at Sinnissippi Park in Rockford, Illinois of a sculpture on display by the Rockford Art Museum called *Rockford Rock Guardians* by sculptor Teresa Agnew, 1988

### **LAUREN MACKLIN**

#### **Rose & Polly**

Pen and ink. 17.5" X 15". \$400.

#### **Holiday**

Pen and ink and watercolor. 20.5" X 16.5". \$400.

The images I have submitted resurrect people and moments from my ancestry. I often wonder about that lines that connect us to those who came before us. I believe that my interest in the stories of my family's past stems from a desire to have gotten the chance to meet my maternal grandmother, Phyllis Gordon, who passed away before I was born. She is the only artist I know of in my family, and growing up, the closest I could get to know her was by hearing family stories and by studying her drawings, sketches, and paintings that filled my home.

In my own work, I render the stories of my past back to life. I think that drawing from these images helps me to honor and remember where I came from. Through studying the details and feelings emoted in old family photographs, I attempt to connect myself to the past be recreating it in my artwork.

## **JON PICKELL**

**Djinn.** Framed archival pigment print on rag paper, 12.5" x 10.5", \$200.

Arab traditions hold that the Djinn were a race of superhuman beings which existed before the creation of humankind. According to legend, the djinn were the first inhabitants of this world, where they lived for thousands of years before humanity arrived. Angels took the djinn out of this world and placed them in a dimension that parallels our own, In order to make room for humans. They have the ability to see and interact with us, but we have difficulty seeing them. They are cloaked in mystery, and it suits their purpose...

### ***Jon on Marilyn Zimmerman***

In "Djinn", Marilyn Zimmerman appears as a Djinn in the background of a portrait of my sister, Lorene.

I first met Marilyn Zimmerman when I was an art student at Wayne State University in Detroit, and was taking a photography class with her; it was her first semester teaching at the university. Marilyn's teaching encourages students to discover their own unique vision and voice, to express themselves in a way that is true to them. This is one of her greatest gifts; it is the culture of teaching and learning she has established.

Over the 30-plus years Marilyn and I have known each other, our roles have shifted and morphed many times, with each of us playing, variously, parent to child, mother to son, father to daughter, student to teacher, and peer to peer, among others. One day I may be the grounding element in her life, and the next day, she may provide insight and clarity in issues I am facing.

One thing has remained constant through the years however: we are family through choice, if not through birth. It is very apt that she portrays the Djinn observing my sister in this image. Although I was once her student, we are now peers. I feel I am totally in command of my gifts of an artist – I know, now, who I am. And Marilyn played a huge role in that journey.

..."Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one. ~Jane Howard

## **JOAN RIISE**

[www.loonsmoonart.com](http://www.loonsmoonart.com)

**Bone Mother (Changing Woman)** Snake skin is interwoven among the bones deer, sheep, racoon. All bones found in woods. 16" round and 3" deep. \$300.

In a society that puts youthfulness and superficial beauty on a pedestal, honoring our inevitable transition to elder is often fraught with disappointment. Akin to snake who changes her skin monthly, woman is perhaps more easily positioned to find truth and meaning while moving through the aging process. The monthly flow of blood, birth, menopause and avoiding the potential ravages of osteoporoses compel us urgently to go within, coming to terms with the reward and contentment of surrendering to the flow of life, finding appreciation for such transformation with its development of wisdom. Like Spider, Changing Woman weaves eternally drawing us deeply into the web of life itself where we can celebrate our strengths, share our stories and support the daughters of our lives through the beauty and lessons of our own experience.

### *CHANGING WOMAN*

*Bone Woman*

*Crone Woman*

*Weaver of Dreams.*

*Beauty and youth*

*aren't all that they seem.*

*"Structure lends balance"*

*sings Crone Woman's voice,*

*"the wisdom of aging*

*is all conscious choice."*

### ***Maiden, Mother, Crone - Honoring Herstory and Wisdom***

Mixed Media: Paper masks adorn natural grape vine wreaths; embellished with peacock wing feathers and dried sweetgrass & wheat; hung with talismans for guidance, protection, wisdom dreams and inspiration on life's journey  
28"x22"x5", \$480

## **PAUL RUCKER**

PaulRuckerart.com

### **Eyes of the Ancestors**

2002. Print. 8" X 16"

This image is all about touching, earthing, connecting with the love, wisdom and strength we receive from our Ancestors – both those of our bloodlines and those who are Ancestors to our spirit. The energy of vision and the fire of love emanate back and forth between the spirit world and this one, enriching both in the circle of life. Through the eyes of the Ancestors, we may see our own life purpose and soul identity as a unique offering and service to the Creation.

## **DONITA SIMPSON**

### **Stace**

2010, Framed, 16" X 20", \$500

### **Vinnie**

2010, Framed, 16" X 20", \$500

### **Waiting: Portrait of Marilyn Zimmerwoman**

2010, Framed, 16" X 20", \$500

All three images connect to Ancestry/Ancestors each in their own way. The portrait of "Stace" is connected to his ancestry via the cultural imagery of the poster and the masks in the background. "Vinnie" is connected to her roots by way of the antique weather vane that once embellished the home of her grandparents. "Waiting; Portrait of Marilyn Zimmerwoman" is the not-too-remote ancestor to the baby girl that was born on the next morning. (Marilyn Zimmerwoman was my teacher in the art program at Wayne State University.) The only connection between the subjects in the photographs, as far as I know, is me as the photographer.

## **SUJATA TIBREWALA**

[www.pratibimba.in](http://www.pratibimba.in)

### **Mitochondrial Mother**

2011, Acrylic on Canvas, 24" x 36", \$1300

I am your mother, your earliest known ancestor. I lived 200,000 years ago. You found me through the Mitochondrial genes which I gave to you, and not by a myth. Hope after finding me you will not lose me... Scientists could trace our ancestry through Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) in every living person, which directly descends from Mothers without recombination from fathers.

## **Hope**

2011, Acrylic on Canvas, 20" x 16", \$600

Being a bright girl I was my mother's hope since she thought I could become independent and something she would be proud of, like a few other girls we knew. Her words gave me a purpose in life, and I became what she could not. And since I was one of the first girls to do so, I made it easier for the girls who followed me. But I could do what I could because there were many other such girls in our country who were doing what I was doing silently, proving their worth to the world, and asserting their right to live.

## **MARILYN ZIMMERWOMAN**

### ***Sarcophagus for My Mother***

2007, Digital Photograph, 6' wide and 2' high

We not only remember our ancestors, we become them.

I took care of my mother during the last five years of her life. It was joyous and challenging. We were primary companions and best friends. As I bathed her, it was my future body I was bathing. When I laughed, it was her laugh. My hand reached out and I recognized her hand. When she was failing and fighting for her life I slept by her side at the hospital. I was by her side even as she was ultimately and finally entered into the crematorium. I arranged her memorial service. I have three siblings yet they could not handle her caretaking, and one sibling did not attend her memorial service. After her passing I would hear her voice calling my name. She was for me the exemplary unconditional love one yearns for. In the Jewish tradition it is said that the name of the deceased becomes a blessing. Maxine! Maxine! May you join the ancestors and be my guardian angel. I feel your presence everyday, in my very being now that you are everywhere.

**Marilyn Zimmerwoman** is the Artist in Residence at the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies and Associate Professor in the Department of Art and Art History at Wayne State University in Detroit. She continues to confluence the teaching of art with peace education. Her work addresses the re-envisioning of the Urban Environs, honoring the aging of women, anti-censorship, and the joyous reframing of gender identity in the internationally traveling exhibition *Marilyn: Artist as Icon*, which debuted at ARC gallery on her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday this year. Her work is collected in the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Detroit Institute of the Arts, etc.