

***Mother Earth:
Revisoning the Sacred
A GUIDE***

Mary R. Hopkins

May be downloaded from www.motherearthvideo.com

Layout by Producciones de al Hammaca,
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Preface

Mother Earth: Revisioning the Sacred: A GUIDE is a guide to the Video of the same name sponsored by Unitarian Universalist Rowe Conference Center in Rowe, Massachusetts. The Guide provides identification of all the art shown in the video, the narrative script of the video and some comments and additional information for teachers and discussion leaders. The format of the *Guide* is as follows:

The Slides shown
in the video are
identified in boxes:

The relevant narrative from the video is shown next to each box describing each art.

Quotations, whether in the narrative or the additional comments, are in Italics.

Additional comments by the author are provided, not indented, in bold type, for the individual, teacher or discussion leader.

Mother Earth: Revisioning the Sacred

A GUIDE

Introduction

Intro 1
Mary R. Hopkins

A review of art history and the work of modern women artists can tell us how, in our human history, we once felt at one with the earth,

Intro 2
Gerard, Paula. *Vortex* (detail 1) silver and gold point on parchment

how we lost this connection and the effect this loss has had on our present day lives and environment. Somewhere in times gone by, the point of view of women was lost. In a male dominated society, art by men has prevailed.

Intro 3
Gerard, Paula. *Seedpod* . silver and gold point over watercolor.

Today women artists are once again beginning to contribute their point of view to our culture; re-emerging and re-visioning our relationship to our Mother Earth. Their work reveals a balanced vision upon which we may build a more equitable and nurturing culture.

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Remember: Those who control the image and the myth, control the society.

William James advised his students that “There is no greater fear than the fear of a new idea.” Much of what follows is a new look at our Western culture. It stems from the work women have been doing to identify the irrational contradictions imposed on them by a male centered society. These recognitions, or “AHA” moments can be formally identified as “Cognitive Dissonance”. Teachers and discussion group leaders as well as the individual viewer will want to be aware of the three modes of coping with cognitive dissonance, or, new ideas: a. reduce the importance of held beliefs which conflict with what is seen and heard, b. acquire new beliefs which change the balance of other beliefs, c. remove the conflicting attitude and behavior. When self-awareness of these three modes of coping come into use, viewers will be able to accept their responses in the context of their life experience, in place of beliefs. Then the person can go beyond their beliefs into personal experience and thence deeper into their personal reality. For a formal paper on this theory, see (*Appendix A*)

Part I

1 Font-du-Gaume Cave. *Ice Age Art: An exhibition of Ice Age Art and Symbol*. American Museum of Natural History and Alexander Marshack, curatorial consultant. 1979. p. 3. Photograph by H. Gardiner, Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge MA

We once lived IN the earth. For millennia, human beings lived in caves like these. We are looking across the valley at the mouth of a cave. Here we are in the cave looking out. To get an idea of scale, notice the van parked in the entrance. The oldest artifacts found in caves like these are 32 to 25 thousand years old. Not hundreds of years, but 32 to 25 thousands of years old. In those Paleolithic times, people looked around and knew that females create new life and, of course, they could see that Earth creates all life, and so, Earth became the sacred Great Mother.

This last sentence is a leap of faith, which may be borne for you out by what follows. The viewer is encouraged to keep this in mind.

2 Lorenz, *New Yorker*, 1980.

“Does it strike anyone else as weird that none of the great painters have been men?” This ironic *New Yorker* cartoon points to a blind spot regarding the role of women in art history. Until recently art historians, archeologists and anthropologists have built their disciplines on the male point of view. In the entire body of cave art the great majority of figures are of women. None of them are sexualized.

For a good discussion of the erotic, “..a reticence toward the explicitly erotic”, see Hadingham’s *Secrets of the Ice Age*.¹ With one possible exception—one bison perhaps about to mount another in a bas relief in the Le Tuc d’Audobert cave—I have been unable to find pictorial or written mention of depictions of animal or human copulation in Paleolithic art.

Animals are brilliantly drawn on the walls. Among elementary school teachers it is well known that girls obsessively draw horses and dogs, animals, in the margins of their workbooks. This is noted in textbooks used for the instruction of budding art teachers. I found several examples in the library at the Moore School of Art in Philadelphia.

It is in the ancient graves of women where the art pallets, brushes and paints are found. Yet the assumption has been that men did all of the cave painting and sculpture.

Try an exercise here. Ask yourself if you ever made an assumption about who painted the animals on the walls of the Paleolithic caves. Would it have occurred to you that women might have painted them? Did you feel you needed proof that women might have also painted these figures?

¹ Hadingham, Evan. *Secrets of the Ice Age*. Walker Publishing, 1979 Ch. 11

As museums are filled with fine art made by men, most would assume men painted these figures and they would not ask for proof that men were the artists.

3 Upper Paleolithic, after Muller-Karpe (1966). Battacharya. *Palaeolithic Europe*. Humanities Press, NJ. 1977. Fig. #34. Female figure from Grimaldi, Italy. Animal figures from Vogelherd, Germany.

4 Naturhistorisches Museum, Wien. From postal card, copyright: Luz L. Linder, 101 Wien. Printed Austria, 1984

Let's look more deeply into this canon of ancient art. Here we have archeological drawings of some of the artifacts found in two caves in Spain. These are tools chipped out of flint. And here, views of a more smooth, carved female figure. Below are sculptures of animals. These figures are sophisticated abstractions and aesthetically quite profound. What the artist has caught so brilliantly is not the specific animal or person, but the essence of the spirit of these beautiful creatures and the female of our species. ²

The Venus of Willendorf; with hair that looks cornrowed, and with a half-sneer, she was given the title "Venus" by today's archeologists. But notice how women's great life-giving powers are celebrated: the belly where new life is created, the huge breasts which provide perfect nourishment for new human life and the fat on the hips and thighs indicating not only bountiful food supplies, but a resource when food is scarce. In 1979 the, then male, editors of *Newsweek* described her as:

*"Squat and rotund, with attenuated limbs and an exaggerated coiffure, the so-called 'Venus of Willendorf' is anything but the epitome of female beauty."*³

This is a prime example of how the male gaze dominates our present day printed and pictorial media.

When I began this study, I went to the University of Pennsylvania department of archeology. A patient professor directed me to what was then the primary resource for information about Paleolithic art for the non-academic by Andre Leroi-Gourhan.⁴

Oversized, expensively laid out, with many pages of full color photos of the art in Paleolithic caves, it consistently referred to, "the hunters and their wives." I was able to find two pictures which were labeled "hunters", the assumption being that they were males. They both were stick figures; one had a bird's beak, both with a penis, lying flat on their backs. All other human figures were of large women.

² A good briefing on Paleolithic art is at the website <<http://www.bradshawfoundation.com>>. The essay is by Dr. Jean Clottes, Conservateur General du Patrimoine. French Ministry of Culture and includes many pictures.

³ *Sculpture*. Newsweek Books, NY, 1975. pg. 1 (Venus of Willendorf)

⁴ Leroi-Gourhan, Andre. *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*. H.N. Abrams, 1967

Amid the figurative art were many schematic drawings containing slashes, dashes and geometric figures. Some were described as “barbed shafts” and defined as signs for the phallus. When I considered what a barbed phallus would do to the delicate interior of a vagina during human intercourse I was curious as to who might have been making these hypotheses. Apparently it was a Catholic priest by the name of Abbe Henri Breuil. His interpretations seem to validate his choice of a celibate life.

The texts were consistent in the way they described the small figurines of weighty women. They had “mysterious bands” above their breasts. The first time I showed slides of these figures to a women’s workshop, I quoted the “bands” descriptions. One older woman cried out, “Well, that’s the only comfortable place to put your arms when you are really, really pregnant!” Clearly, at that time, a woman’s voice was needed in this field.

5 “Diagrams, frontal view, of figures (8) .. the stability of the design regardless of the variations in rendering the proportions.”
Lespugue/ Kostienki
V./Dolci Vestonice/
Laussel /Willendorf/
Gagarius (2)/ Grimaldi.
From *Treasures of Prehistoric Art*. Leroi-Gourhan, Andre. H.N. Abrams, 1967.

Do most women look like the *Newsweek* ideal or do most women look like this? This is a study of similarities in configuration of eight statuettes that were found in seven different caves scattered across Europe. Their dates span fifteen thousand years. If they were worshipped, then the religion they represent is the longest lived that we know of.

It is important to recognize that this Paleolithic canon of art is distinguished by the fact that all the figures are contained within the geometric rhomboid. A rhomboid is a geometric figure in which the angles are oblique and the adjacent sides are unequal.⁵ As we will see, later Neolithic figurines of females do not observe this rule.

6 *Ice Age Art*, Inside cover, #1,

Each dot on this map indicates a Paleolithic site where the figurines were found, from Spain and France in Western Europe, and, beyond, to the Eastern borders of Asia, China and Siberia.

⁵ LeRoy McDermott <<http://cmsu2.edu/~ldm4683/index.htm>>. McDermott, LeRoy. “Self-Representation in Upper Paleolithic Female Figurines”. *Current Anthropology*. Univ. Chicago Press. 1996.

Siberian figures are described as follows:

*“Some of the most distinctive Old Bering Sea I objects are the ivory figures in human, usually female, form. They appear in many different sizes from miniatures three centimeters high to “monumental” sculptures of twenty centimeters. Their thin, pointed oval heads; beetling eyebrows; straight, ridge like noses; and rudimentary details give them a powerful, brooding quality that suggests unknown connections with the spirit world. Anatomical elements such as eyes, mouths, breasts, and genitals, are often extremely stylized. Arms and legs, if they are indicated at all, are simply carved stumps or elongated and bent at the joints.”*⁶

It would seem that we can put these carved figures of the female principle in the same category as the Christian Cross, Jewish Star of David and other such symbols of a theology.

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Let’s explore present human needs to tease out what these figures probably meant to our foremothers and fathers. At about four and a half inches long we are told that,

*“The delicate modeling fits sweetly in to the contours of the hand.”*⁷

8 Mary R. Hopkins and Nina Bryans, Hand holding statuette of female principle, made of fired clay

This piece was made by myself and sculptor, Nena Bryans, to give you a sense of how these statuettes were possibly held in the hand to give comfort to the bearer. An object held in the hand, like a baby blanket, is well known in psychiatric circles as a “transitional object”.⁸

Transitional Objects by Kathi Stringer

Security

Usually in the first 5 to 18 months of age, the child may grow attached to a primary transitional object. Supplied and offered by mother, the object could be a blanket, diaper, teddy bear, bottle or other such similar article. The attachment is direct and not passive. The child’s feelings for mother or primary caretaker spill over into the object which is used for self soothing and to reduce anxiety. Transitional objects acts as a substitutes, and bridge the representation of mother. For example - A child my curl up in mother’s rocking chair when mother is not in the room for self comfort. This is also an indication of a growing awareness that the child is separate from external objects and is an individual.

Blissful State

It is interesting that in tribal villages, the need for transitional objects are absent. This is because mother is always available to the toddlers. In western culture

⁶ Wardwell, Allen. *Ancient Eskimo Ivories of the Bering Strait*. Hudson Hills Press, 1986, pg. 36.

⁷ Giedon, S.. *The Beginnings of Art*. Bollengen Series, XXV. 6.1. Pantheon, 1962.

⁸ D.W. Winnicott. *Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena*. 1951

where the child sleeps in a different room, the transitional object helps ease the stress of separation. These objects provide security as they try to recapture the oneness of mother. At times a child may rock while holding the article, projecting themselves into the blissful state of being held in mother's arms.⁹

9 *Ice Age Art*, p. 13.
Restoration of the Venus of Lespugue, early period; now in the Musee de l'Homme, Paris. (Marshack). See #1.

Holding the little figure of the Great Mother in their hands may have comforted our ancestors just as a "baby blanket" comforts a youngster. Today a major function of religion is to comfort us in a strange and alien world, another reason to interpret these artifacts as religious symbols.

My hand is six inches long. This majestic idol is four inches long. She was carved in mammoth ivory about 20 thousand years ago and was found in fragmented condition in a cave in Lespeuge, France.

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When the godhead is female, She is the mother so we have all had the experience of being at one with Her when we came into being in her womb. The Divine mother loves unconditionally and intuits what is needed. In her wisdom, She also provides what is best for us. This can result in feelings of confidence and joy in the protection of the Goddess, where we were all once innocent, totally dependent and perfectly nurtured into the world.

During the 1950, when I had my children, I was unaware of these qualities of mother and motherhood. Gynecological and obstetric practices removed any agency from the mother; and child-raising practices stressed that the parents not "spoil" the child by conceding to its wishes, and, sometimes its need for affection.¹⁰

11 *Thetis Begging Jupiter for the Life of Her Son*. Ingres. Granet Museum, Aix-en-Provence. P. H6, *Metropolitan Seminars in Art*. Ed. John Canaday, Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC, 1958 –1959

The lone male god who exemplifies law and order came into existence only recently.¹¹ In turning to monotheism, we have lost the blending of divine male law and order with divine female unconditional love and nurture. Some day we may balance them evenly across the spectrum of gender in order that we may have all aspects of divinity flourish in our hearts and minds. Patriarchal religious myths and legends often glorify the rape and murder of females. One Greek myth after another glorifies Zeus and his brothers as they rape lowly nymphs as well as the Great Goddesses. The only ones they missed were Artemis, and the one He gave birth to, Athena.

⁹ *Kathi's Mental Health Review* © Kathi Stringer & Respective Author

¹⁰ Also, for attitude towards mothers, Philip Wylie, "Common Women" in *Generation of Vipers*, Pocket Books, 1942 – 1955. pp 184-196.

¹¹ 5,000 – 7,000 years ago

Demeter was raped, first by Poseidon who changed himself into a stallion to fool her, and then Zeus, before he raped her, deceived her by turning himself into a bull. She had a daughter by that rape named Persephone. Zeus later awarded this daughter to his brother, Hades who then raped his niece.¹²

12 Michelangelo.
"Creation of Adam".
Detail, ceiling Sistine
Chapel, Vatican
City. A Sandak slide.

Not just ancient Greek myths but our modern religions give birthing power to males. Taking the power to give birth, gods, Zeus, Dionysus, Apollo and Yahweh used their foreheads, thighs, ribs, or other parts of their anatomy as wombs. I know from personal experience that men do not give birth. Why did I spend half my life thinking that those myths are important and valuable? I chalk it up to the remarkable power of myth and image to control our society.

The above comment is a personal experience of coping with cognitive dissonance.

13 Mary R.
Hopkins, *Returning
to nature and our
Great Mother Earth*.
Photograph, 1986.

One day at the beach, I looked down and snapped this picture. I might have been standing on the Omphalos, or Her navel. The Motherpeace book says,

"The day we stopped loving the Earth as our Mother, and the woman as her holy representative, was the day we left the Garden (of Eden). The Mother beckons us to return to Her before we destroy ourselves. She asks to be reawakened in us so that we might once more know the joy and purpose of life on the planet."¹³

14 Judith
Anderson, *Bone
Woman*. Sepia ink,
January, 1994.

Now let's turn to some of our Western customs which block our awareness of our deep connection with all of creation. Here is "Bone Woman". by Judith Anderson. Until the last few thousand years people were buried in fetal position—Back to the womb. The red ocher strewn around these graves probably represented uterine blood. The wise knew with certainty that bodies are re-absorbed back in to Mother Earth. She is the great Creatrix who recycles you into a different form of vibrant life. With this understanding and practice you can more easily live in harmony with all existence. When we lost the experience of the comfort of the Goddess in life, we also lost her comfort in death. The

¹² *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*. Prometheus Press, 1960. pp 174 – 175. For graphic response to these changes in the myths of that culture, see "Gorgon" section of Part II of this video tape.

¹³ (Noble, Vicki. *Motherpeace: A Way to the Goddess Through Myth, Art and Tarot*. Harper, 1983. (slide #19, cat. #405)

present practice is to use non-biodegradable, lead-lined caskets in tombs, not wombs, in order to prevent what our culture calls, "corruption". Why are so many convinced that it is better to spend eternity alone in a sealed casket than to become another vital manifestation of life?

Artist's Statement: BONE WOMAN
by Judith Anderson, January 1994

Within us is the old one who collects bones.

Within us there are the soul-bones of Wild Woman.

*Within us is the potential to be fleshed out again
as the creature we once were.*

Within us are the bones to change ourselves and our world

You wish psychoanalytic advice? Go gather bones.¹⁴

*Reading **Women Who Run With the Wolves** profoundly affected me, the way those books do that make **the back of your neck** tingle with electric tremors, and you know you are being spoken to directly. In the year since I read the book, I have been living in a time of inward reflection and descent, and *Bone Woman* has been at the heart of it. In the care of the soul, we are digging for clues and solutions all of the time, in dreams, if not consciously.*

*I've always been intrigued by bones, marveling at their beautiful, intricate structure. They are inside and hidden. The great paradox is that we cannot see and appreciate bones and their functional underpinning of life except in a confrontation with dissolution and death. In this etching, *Bone Woman* is not preoccupied with death. This is rather a meditation on life, on the debris and compost and the past from which life arises continually, a celebration of the hidden structure and the turning cycle at the heart of life. Bones are like puzzle pieces we think how did these fragments go together to make the whole picture? What would that picture look like when the mysterious pieces are reassembled? Can we find all of them? What of the broken ones? Will there be a healing of memory? Can these bones live?*

Bone Woman is crouching in this debris, blending with her surroundings, a part of the earth she meditates on. It is as if she is in an old cave, a place apart. Her own bones are revealed. Her body is. at once very old and yet vigorous and supple. It is a fragment of a hand that she holds gently in her hand, as she reflects on hands as instruments of our searching, creating, loving and blessing. Whose broken hand is this?

¹⁴ Clarissa Pinkola Est *Women Who Run With the Wolves: The Wild Woman Archetype*. New York: Ballantine Books 1992 pp. 35 – 38.

Bone Woman is an archetype, and yet she is of course myself, as is the child beside her blessing the image of the mother and three children in the swirling of her head. The image is from a photograph in 1967 when Sam was three years and two months, Jessica was fifteen months, and Laura was two months old, a time for me of great preoccupation with mothering. Life was then full of interruptions and busy moments, leaving little possibility of time for reflection and meditation. It is curious to be still holding that memory now when the children are away from me, grown and thriving.

The leaves, the human and animal bones are all mixed together. The lilies bloom continually from this rich earth, several arising from the skull of the dog. The snake, intact in its skeleton, is poised and watchful, as in life. Bone Woman is calm and at rest in her contemplation. In this half-light of dawn or dusk, or of dreamtime, there is a great silence.

15 Bates, Catherine.
Nature Vivante. From
"Ecology Series".
52"x67", acrylic. 1987

Our Ancient theology put people's roots deeply in Earth and all that comes from Her. Feeling and moving with the pulse of the cosmos becomes an important part of the way life is lived...very different from the patriarchal myth which gives men dominion OVER, not with, the earth. Being at one with earth, not the dualistic concept of over or against all other, is repeated insistently by those who are re-visioning the Judeo-Christian traditions. For this reason, women's theology, Creation Spirituality, Unity with Nature, and those organizing around this new point of view are making an extraordinarily strong and deep call to peace-making and ecological wisdom -- certainly a healthy and powerful religious reason for the environmental movement.

16 XVII Moon
Motherpeace Tarot,
Karen Vogel & Vickie
Noble.

Not just burial practices, but how we view time needs to be re-examined. Let me mention a few of customs which reinforce our separation from Our Mother Earth. First, women in touch with their bodies keep a moon calendar. Many civilizations still do. Our sun calendar can be disorienting to menstruating and pregnant women.

17 X Wheel of
Fortune *Motherpeace
Tarot*, Karen Vogel &
Vickie Noble.

Electric light and daylight savings time cut our ties with sunrise and sunset. How many of us, when children, were suddenly faced with being put to bed when the sun was still up? I threw a weeklong fit, knowing that there was a bigger authority than my parents being disobeyed.

And incidentally, the English language conspires to trick us. The sun does not set, we on earth roll away from the central,

stable, unmoving sun. I like to wake up thinking that we are, once again, rolling towards the light and warmth.

18 XXI World
Motherpeace Tarot, Karen
Vogel & Vickie Noble.

And let's look at the difference between linear and cyclical time. Today our reliance on linear time reinforces our separation from Mother Earth. When we live with clocks, time is like a line, which has a beginning and an end. With cyclical time, think of a spiral with no beginning and no end. Each turn of the spiral represents a year, including, spring, summer, autumn and winter. Imagine our Paleolithic grandmother, when spring rolls around, putting away the furs and looking in a different place for food. She knew the endless stream of grandmothers before her had done just this and expected that succeeding generations would too – without end, as in a spiral. Nowadays some find that by doing a ritual at each change of the season, they enrich their spiritual life because it raises their awareness of how their inner light changes with the outer light.

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If we could begin to eliminate this annual springing forward and falling backward, use language which acknowledges that the sun does not move around the earth and add awareness of cyclical time to our understanding of our life here, it would help us to develop a deeper relationship with Mother Earth, and, hopefully, with each other.

Segue Gerard, Paula.
Vortex. Silver & Gold
point & watercolor on
parchment.

End of Part I