

Nancy J. Adler

*"What we cannot comprehend by analysis,
we become aware of in awe."*

In the midst of chaos, how do we see beauty? Surrounded by turbulence, how do we discover simplicity? Living together on one planet, how do we simultaneously celebrate our collective humanity and the unique resonance of our individual voices? Given the power of analytic understanding—driven as it is to claim life as *knowable*—how do we re-recognize the *unknown* and *unknowable*? How do we surrender to the humility it takes to stand in awe of life's mysteries? Where do we stand when we stand in awe?

Allowing a painting to be born is to stand in awe of one of life's most beautiful mysteries. Invited by the blank paper, the best of my intentions and experience enter into a dance with uncontrollable coincidence. Neither the process nor the resulting art are ever completely defined. Which way will the colors run? What surprises will the ink reveal as it, ever so gently, touches the paint? I purposely use primarily water-based media that do not stay where I place them on the paper. There's never any illusion that I control the process. I only enter the dance; paintings emerge out of the dance. For me, being an artist is about giving birth to the possibilities inherent in mystery. Creation—whether on a canvas of words or visual images—is, in fact, about relearning to dance with God.

Drawing from both Asian and Western approaches to painting, I have been lucky to have had many mentors: some known personally to me, many of whom I've studied with. They include visual artists (Jeanne Carbonetti, Elizabeth Galante, Frances Grafton, Gyokusen, John Leonard, Lew Yung-Chien, Tony Onley, Jacinthe Tétrault and Heather Yamada), poets (David Whyte), musicians (Tim Wheater and Ben Zander), and spiritual leaders (Andre Delbecq, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and Lise Sparrow). I draw inspiration from such artists as Chagall, Jamali, and Kandinski. During his lifetime, many of Marc Chagall's contemporaries wrote him off for having refused the avant-garde's invitation to create art strictly for art's sake. They dismissed Chagall as a colorful, friendly painter whose art simply conveyed his *joie de vivre*. Years later, in a major 21st century retrospective of Chagall's work in Paris,² critics no longer wrote him off, but rather acclaimed the striking humanity of his paintings, and offered him their highest praise, "Marc Chagall gave this nihilist century a worthy concept: hope."³

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Nancy J. Adler has been painting for more than two decades, and has more recently been involved in making monotype prints. She has been an artist-in-residence multiple times at The Banff Centre and a guest at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in Vancouver. Her ink and watercolor paintings have been exhibited in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, and Washington D.C. Her paintings are currently held in private collections in Canada, England, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Slovenia, Switzerland and the United States. Since coming to Canada over 30 years ago, Dr. Adler has been a Professor of Organizational Behavior and International Management and currently holds the S. Bronfman Chair in Management at McGill University's Desautels Faculty of Management in Montreal.

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¹ Abraham Joshua Heschel, in *I Asked for Wonder* (Samuel H. Dresner, ed., New York: Crossroad, 2001).

² "Chagall: Known and Unknown" an exhibition of 180 works of Marc Chagall at the Grand Palais in Paris through June 23, 2003. After Paris, the exhibition moves to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

³ From Alan Riding's "Anxiety and Hope in a Mystical Fusion: Paris Show Offers Chagall's Intense Humanism Beyond the *Joie de Vivre*" (*New York Times*, April 22, 2003: p. B5).