

pink movement  
a retrospective show curated by lenore herb  
plus new works from bill bissett  
yaletown gallery 2008

"But, – and there it is, – we want to live and move, though we have no reason to, because it happens that it is the nature of life to live and move, to want to live and move. If it were not for this, life would be dead. It is because of this life that is in you that you dream of your immortality." – Wolf Larsen.  
From *The Sea-Wolf*, by Jack London (Thanks to the band Sea Wolf for quoting this.)

"in sew manee kulturs world wide pink is an inkrediblee hi kolour from the part uv erthling kultur daringlee iuv alwayze wantid 2 inklewd pink its still konsidrd how it is heer on brkfast teevee ths morning wun kommentator was hiliting in his komments that anothr morning anchor man was weering a pink shirt ths is sew strange anothr reeson why not 2 pay 2 much attensyun 2 mainstream kultur oh theyr still dewing that fine whatevr" - bill bissett

During my forced 2 month sojourn, in a tiny hacienda on a small beach named Las Animas, south of Puerto Vallarta, way past the place where they made "Night of the Iguana", I went on a sponsored "tour" of the Huichol who live in the midst of obscene poverty, the only government support being a "birth control" clinic, and, being broke as usual, ended up being able to afford only the painting below.



"Aqui vemos como los diferentes dioses se comunican entre ellas. Vemos al dios del viento, con el dios del viento, en la parte de arriba, y el dios del viento abajo." - S. Fleuterio

"Here we see as the different gods communicate amongst themselves we see the God of the wind, with the God of the wind, in the bearing of above and the God of the wind down." - S. Fleuterio

As it turned out, it gave me a key to understand the painting that bill had given me some years earlier, which I had a hard time liking. The animism occurring in bissett's "spectoramas" are nothing short of shamanistic communing with god through the lesser deities. This would also explain the recurring appearances of artist as shaman such as Jean Cocteau and bill bissett.



"Orpheus and his guide drag their feet, alternately halted and carried away, by a strong inexplicable wind" - Cocteau



bissett and Cocteau both have this shamanistic ability to transform energy through image, for Cocteau, churches became his speciality. Because bill is a poet, poetry is translated into his art, and back, because bill is an artist, he brings his artistic vision into his writing.

Here, symbolism representing the word, the chant. Visual Chanting. This prescient ability is not accessible through the academic realm, it is feral, arising from the combination of free expression on every level that is rarely permitted in this society. Through feral art, we set ourselves free of conventional thinking, but there is no escape, the compound is larger than we imagined, encompassing the entire planet.

"As much a painter as he is a poet, bissett has largely supported himself since the 1960s by selling his paintings and by reading poetry. The Vancouver Art Gallery hosted an extensive one-man show of bissett's art, curated by Scott Watson, in 1984, called *fires in th tempul*. "The magical world of the child," wrote Watson, "with all his libidinal precociousness, is what bissett is after in his painting..." That's a bit much. Sometimes he's trying to make a buck or two in order to eat." - Allan Twigg

When Cocteau discusses visibility in the public realm, he speaks of a joker god who makes him visible and asks "at what cost". So too with bissett who's type of public visibility as an artist has also restricted his freedom as an artist.

Both are multi-disciplinary artists, both demonstrate the spiritually connected material world in their work. Also, they both have an intrinsic love of film which manifests in their work, in the use of movement in their paintings. As a filmmaker, regarding both with a cinematic eye, I am comfortable using film theory to describe bill's work.

Ken Kelman states, "visual stimulation is of course related to fetishism, the power of an object through association to stir our unconscious urges.... through an interplay of perspectives, brings us out of mere involvement and to a conscious view of these powers... a temporary disengagement, and estrangement from the seductions of overt illusion--a strange demonstration that the unconscious may function with objectivity .... rather than being plunged into the inner world, the images of desire and dream, than having our perspective subtly lengthened, objectified, the converse occurs: we primarily from the outside, in the third person; we encounter the effects of primal urge on characters, and do not relate to them immediately, "subjectively", in the first person."

bill's first big ambition was to be a movie star, brought on by spending years in the 50's in hospital with peritonitis, sustained by his love of film and later during the most traumatic periods of his life escaping into the fantasia of film and seriously wanting to write film reviews for a living. For someone who has never taken film theory, he has an astounding knowledge of film and film history. He often refers to major turning points in his life as an MGM moment.

Through the usual themes of cinema we begin to approach the nature of longing, the loss of love, the lover, the birth, life and death of love, and the nature, of course, of lust. One cannot ignore the sexual tension in bill's work, an intrinsic element of film making, the interplay of love's labour, the sisyphian task of spiritual love in a materialistic and brutal world.

The sexual energy in the paintings are visually tantric, as such, "makes the spiritual connection to sex, channelling what moves them most, their sexual energy into a larger container enabling them to connect their feelings to the rest of their lives."- Gina Ogden, Tantric practitioner.

The "ecstasy" of bissett's nudes, vaginas, clitoris, penises, cunnilingus, fellatio, is not something left over from the sixties, but was an inspirational teaching for the sixties, when we seemed on the verge of getting our sexual, religious and political freedom. These are not artistic "dirty pictures" but a representation of transcendence through the sexual act.



"Poets die and come back to life. Dali invented a very beautiful science, phoenixology, that means, people often die in order to be reborn, it burns in order to turn into ashes, which in their own turn, change back into the phoenix." - Cocteau

Here "Orphee" stands within the multi-levels of consciousness, a practitioner of tantric love. His being/longing visible to everyone. The arms are long, trapped beside the body, encased or enveloped in the thickness of the corporal world but at the same time dissolving into it. "Orphee" gives us an orgasmic vision of life in a world of elements, the ability to start anew, regain something that we lost, of our innocence, of our pleasure, of our soul. This ability, this phoenixology, named by Dali, is repeatedly expressed by bissett in his poetry and in his painting.

This rebirth is even more applicable in the case of bill bissett, who suffered a major head trauma, was given up for dead, or worse, to live as a vegetable, never walk, use his arms or talk again and who, through his indomitable spirit, regained all. Is this why the arms extend so?