

The Weaver

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Change is one of the world's most significant, mysterious unknowns, yet it is our only constant. Change is inevitable. It happens whether we want it to or not. It happens in our natural environment, our physical self, and within our soul. Change allows us to dig to the depths of our very own roots and will enable that exploration to transform and cultivate growth. Change is vital to all life, for it allows the idea of self to be realized. Change is the heartbeat of the world that all beings beat to. Through this series, I explore the interconnectedness of transformation in the natural world and within human beings.

Everything changes around and within us, from the seasons and plants to the moon and sun's rise and fall each day, to the very cells in our bodies and emotions. The natural world's cycle of change inspires and drives the universal cyclical processes that appear in all aspects of life. Each day as the sun rises and casts its first light into the window upon your pillow, we awake a different version of ourselves. Change does not have to be drastic or noticeable but instead found in each moment, one second never being the same as the last nor its future self. As human beings, the same goes for us; we are never who we once were, finding ourselves transforming by the minute. This transformation mimics what the natural world has set as our constant, our cycle of change. The natural world's cycle of change inspires and drives the universal cyclical processes that appear in all aspects of life. Ecocentrism is the core principle that "humans are not more important than other entities on earth" (Weintraub 7). Non-western ideologies, especially ancient cultures, reference this ecocentrism connection and relationship through their myths and religious iconography depicted in their art. Their interpretations of their gods and goddesses into great statues and myths depicting the control and impact on nature blend

the physical and spiritual world. Showing Gaia, the personification of the earth or, in other words, "Mother Earth," gives life and personal attachment to the natural world so we can relate to ourselves. Even today, "Ecocentric artists may choose to manifest this theory by inviting living entities and inert forces to create physical, structural, and functional attributes of their works of art" (Weintraub 7). This idea of connecting the earth to supernatural, mythic, and personal meaning is not seen in western ideology and art. A more primitive origin in ritualistic art and practices, "archetypal themes give form and meaning for life" (Gablík 46). This way of art and connection making, to go beyond the explainable and scientifically proven is essential for us to find ourselves and our connection to the world as a whole, "it is a way to make life alive; a way to discover that the world is enchanted and not dead" (Gablík 51).

In Buddhism, there is a word for this impermanence and connection of change in both the natural world and ourselves called *Annitya* or *Annica*. *Annica* in Buddhism translates to impermanence, "the concept that nothing stays the same and everything is always changing" (BBC, 2021). Everything in life, including our idea of self, is subject to this impermanence. In other words, everything in life is constantly in a flux of transformation, in a continuous cycle like a flowing river. There is no control over own change, just as there is no control over the luminous moon changing phase each night or the rich emerald leaves budding and growing back after a cold, harsh winter each season. Nature does not fight this change but embraces it with open arms, like a bird returning to its home, Northward bound after a long migration South. We can not escape from this cycle of change no matter how hard some of us try to; however, we can choose to use and view this time as a time of self-transformation. In Freudian terms, this term of self is referred to as the Ego, the version of ourselves presented to the world constructed by both the Id and the Superego. Our Ego or Self is connected to all changing things, including the

natural world; we are all connected in this cyclical cycle "to apprehend things as they are to uncover the inevitable side of nature, since all things, as creations of our personal, are permeated by a personhood, just as a painting carries the personal stamp of its painter" (Coleman 116). We can not escape from this cycle of change no matter how hard some of us try to; however, we can choose to use and view this time as a time of self-transformation.

Artists for decades have seen this change as a catalyst for creativity and seeing this connection as a time when "myths from all times and cultures are available to us; we touch into a seemingly magical dimension from which emanates a sense of the mysterious and the sacred; we have experiential access to the past or the future, and the limitations of our cultural conditioning are transcended" (Gablik 52). An artist is thus trying to create and perceive their understanding and interpretation of this dimension in their work. In Taoism, the creative process of art-making is when these moments of transformation happen where we discover and meet our true selves, "when a man is in this creative process, he is truly egoless: as egoless as the Moon and the stars" (Coleman 79).

This idea of transformation has long fascinated us as beings, leading to specific practices and explorations to understand this transformation better. Artists are "not just observers of the pattern, but its cocreators, and our relationship with nature is not that of something external and independent of ourselves" (Gablik 55). More commonly known as the Luna Moth, the *Actias Luna* is an insect known as a giant silk moth. These moths and other insect species in the same family of Saturniidae go through the process of metamorphosis (Hall, 2019). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines metamorphosis as "a major change in form or structure of some animals or insects" (Merriam-Webster). This process changes the form of this being into something else entirely. A once tiny Caterpillar emerges from this self-made chrysalis as a

beautiful winged creature that is eye-catching and full of life. This change that this being underwent was dark, mundane, and even chaotic; however, what emerged from that chaos was fresh, light, and hopeful. This same idea behind metamorphosis can be held with change within ourselves. Metamorphosis has a second, less commonly used definition, being used to describe “a change of physical form, structure, or substance especially by supernatural means” (Merriam-Webster). Through exploring and diving deep into the depths of our souls, we do transform into new beings through the power of change. We go through this metamorphosis and emerge on the other side full of hope and clarity. It is in these moments of transformation we discover and meet our true selves.

This idea of transformation has long fascinated us as beings, leading to specific practices and explorations to understand this transformation better. Perhaps one of the most known practices of transformation is Alchemy. Alchemy is typically known as "a medieval chemical science and speculative philosophy aiming to achieve the transmutation of the base metals into gold" (Merriam-Webster). This ancient practice is the transformation and changing of physical elements. It is essentially the metamorphosis of physical objects. However, there is another definition of alchemy that is lesser-known. Alchemy can also be defined as “a power or process that changes or transforms something in a mysterious, inexplicable or impressive way” (Multhauf, 2021). This type of alchemy encapsulates transformation, physical and metaphysical, worldly and otherworldly, self and outside of self. This practice as an alchemist uses this supernatural power of transformation to better understand the world around you and be in the moment of self-realization. "Solve et coagula" is an old Latin Alchemist aphorism translated into modern-day as “Dissolve and Coagulate” (Multhauf, 2021). This idea is that one must release and change all prior thoughts and forms to transform and come back into a new state, a new self.

This form of alchemy still follows the stages of alchemy as a process, starting with the condition that undergoes a change to emerge transformed.

This body of work encapsulates that magic and mystery of transformation by taking the viewer on a journey within its narrative. Through photography a new relationship is strengthened and that connection to create a new reality where anything is possible is born. As a photographer, the medium itself lends itself perfectly to creating something new from reality, a new way of seeing things and choosing to manipulate them to be what you want to communicate, "a photograph bears witness to a human choice being exercised" (Berger 25). Within these surreal images, the personification of change is born, capturing the fleeting and almost indescribable feeling of transformation. The personification of change tells her story by taking us on a journey through different seasons, times, beings, and elements of change.

Quintessence, the meeting of two celestial bodies is symbolized through the Luna Moth (*Actias Luna*) and the Golden Sun Moth (*Synemon Plana*). With the soft light from the horizon, it is neither dawn nor dusk, but rather a time when the sun and the moon share the same sky and all life is meeting around them. The Weaver here is the connecting element between them all, weaving and wrapping her strands of transformation between all life forms and elements.

Visita (beginning of the journey), the essence of freedom marks the start of a freeing and powerful journey felt within. Releasing all that is holding her back, the Weaver realizes what was and openly accepts change and transformation in whatever form that may take on this journey. The passage of the birds resembles the passage or migration the personification of change must embark on to realize her true self.

The Philosopher of Fire, burning brilliantly and brightly, the personification of change is engulfed with flames. Chaos, energy, and passion are weaved together through fire and soul. The Weaver takes on new life, seemingly untouched by the roaring flames of change around her, consuming and transforming her.

Spiritization of the Synemon Plana, embodying the essence of the sun in this image, the personification of change has Golden Sun Moths emerging and gracefully flying around her. These moths are less chaotic in their flight, offering a new light to a new emerging day. *The Evening of the Actias Luna*, embodying the moon's essence in this image, the personification of change is releasing the Luna Moths into the night sky. They flow out of her heart, the center of change, and into the world to become a part of the naturally transforming world forever.

Sal Salis (salt of the stone) ashes from the philosopher's stone, what was once pure flames of chaos and energy has now dissolved into ashes and smoke. Returning to the earth, the Weaver has been changed by the flames, made into something new, and, like a phoenix, rises from these ashes of change more vital and more resilient than before. The ashes encircle the personification of change, revealing her emergence and descent from the earth's core.

As Above, So Below, being lifted into the air and yet pulled back down to earth, the Weaver's golden ties are the connecting element between us. We rise with the help of others' transformation, yet we are constantly brought back down to grow and change together. One can not exist without the other, nor is it more critical. The personification of change embodies this dueling relationship making us realize that we are the same, with the difference being our constant.

Terrae (of the earth), the personification of change is a part of the earth through this image, being overgrown with beautiful blooming flowers emerging from within. This shows the

spirit of new growth and that it can happen anywhere, even within the darkest cracks where there seems to be no hope of change.

Telos (the end of a journey, final place for a soul to reside, center of the soul), the final breath of fresh air after a long journey of self-discovery ends within the water. Emerging but also returning to the water, the Weaver is raw, untamed, and knows her true authentic self. The personification of change is reborn within these waters, realizing her connection and the cycle of rebirth and death.

These photographs each have their own story and meaning held within, but when displayed together their narrative is even stronger. On display at the Samuel Dorsky Museum on campus these photographs were arranged on the left wall upon entering the museum under the overhang (Image 1). Hung horizontally in a line mirroring each other in order to break up the elements and show the rise and fall of the cyclical cycle, starting and ending with an emergence and return to water.



Image 1: Front View of installation of “The Weaver”, a total of nine photographs in the series.

The installation also included a book with the images on spreads as well as a foreword intended to inform the viewer and provide a little bit of background (Image 2).



Image 2: view of the installation with accompanying book and show cards.

This story being depicted is cyclical, never really ending, but instead coming full circle. The emergence of the personification of change was the beginning and the end of her journey at the same time. Just as the Luna Moths emerge out of the chrysalis, marks both the start of life and the end. This transformation is the driving force that keeps the world turning, nearly as strong as the gravity that controls the tides and keeps the moon shining bright above us each night. Everything within us and around us is ephemeral. We continuously grow from chaotic and mundane moments within this sense of fleeting, leaving a new version of self. Within these moments of self-realization, we exist in a constant flux between impermanence and transformation.

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