

## *Introduction to the project: “The Dialogue” Iconostasis for World Peace, the Door to the Future.*

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*“The Dialogue project” is an art installation for world peace, a portrait of past civilizations, their ethnicity and culture which is presented as witness to our Global dilemma. Humankind will compete in a world where food and energy, ecological insecurity and global poverty create pressure for our societies to develop and change. By embracing peace, cultural differences, practicing forgiveness and reconciliation, with those within and outside our individual faiths, all global citizens can move forward towards the creation of a more peaceful, just and humane society.*

*Our future, and that of our progeny, is dependent upon our planet’s resources. Our future depends on our searching for affirming solutions that honor humanity together with the environment, where collectively we use eco systems responsibly. The faith communities, as well as those who govern, have a responsibility to themselves and to the world, to promote a common residence on earth that is decent, dignified and a peaceful one, one where we live together with a new definition for what is ownership.*

*In the age of a globalized human community and a shrinking world, interfaith dialogue and action is no longer just commendable endeavor but a historical necessity. “The Dialogue Project” does not communicate with words, but through the portraits of those who teach and remind us of the mysteries that are fundamental to our experience of being human. Inter-religious tolerance that encourages understanding, acceptance, respect, celebration and action is essential to our survival. The faith community of today, worldwide has a duty to develop new initiatives and agenda for cooperation throughout our contemporary society.*

*“The Dialogue” addresses today’s crisis in nature and in the human soul. It is my hope that this work will perpetuate the already popular worldwide conversation about the planetary crisis that faces humanity. I, like many others, yearn for an honest global ethic that will be honestly global for humankind and creation, one that will see our planet as something sacred. We need to listen and respect the planet because it is our source for life. The earth is a gift that ought to be cherished for all of our survival.*

*I started the Dialogue Project for World Peace as a meditation to clarify my feelings about the human violence and global devastation increasing during my lifetime, a personal exploration of my thoughts and feelings throughout the past 4 years. The dialogue questions the viewer to ask, “What do I believe and love that is greater than me”? The creation of the work has been an exhaustive interior dialogue between my personal understanding of God and my own prejudices I am trying to get beyond.*

*This document includes:*

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*DIMENSIONS AND FORMAT*

*11' high x 32' long set in a curve you can step into.*

*Top tier – 17 symbols and deities without human form 18"x 24" each Cave painting, Gilgamesh, Many faced Buddha, Sumerian effigy, American Indian sand painting, Xochilco, Ganesh, Lilith, Nigerian mother goddess, Dianna, Mayan corn god.*

*Second tier- 10 masters and teachers enthroned 24"x 36"each*

*Christ, Mohamed, Moses, Copernicus, Plato, Confucius, Mother Teresa, Buddha, Lao Tzu, and Atisha*

*Third tier- 40 prayer wheels written in 40 languages, 9" high that rotate,*

*Saying, " ... Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."*

*Fourth tier- 70 circular archetypal symbols from around the world 6"x 6"*

*3 ascending steps to approach the door .....symbolic of Faith, Hope and Charity*

*Main doors are covered by a mirror, as if veiled with smoke*

*Portrait of the Planet Earth, with olive branches*

## ARCHITECTURAL CHOICE FOR THE ICONOSTASIS

*The structure for the project was inspired by the classic architectural feature found in most Orthodox Churches of Western Europe. The iconostasis is a wall of multiple icons layered in tiers, from floor to ceiling, stacked in layers. These icon screens have affected Christian spirituality for the past 1,500 years.*

*Traditionally, the iconostasis is the wall separating the sanctuary from the sacred nave. The sanctuary is the physical place before the screen where congregates gather to worship. The space behind the screen is called the nave and it symbolizes spiritual space. The relationship between the two is symbiotic; the visible world (physical) enlightened by the invisible (spiritual). The wall or screen of images represents a mystical location within the church for transformation.*

*I honor my eighteen year intense practice of Christian spirituality. With the installation, I found my mind exploring the relationship between viewers and viewed. My search for the true Christ inspired a voyage into concepts and images from other cultures and religions. The iconostasis is the structure and format housing my quest, representing my own discomfort with the divisions between beliefs as well as the separation between humanity and the divine. The installation is a door to the future where we might rejoice in the common threads which unite us.*

*As a Christian, I seek to honor all people throughout history who have and do seek to know truth, beauty, peace and love. We have all been created with the capacity for knowing a higher, more knowledgeable order inherent in all human life. Since childhood, I have always felt the presence of something "other" and it is this presence that I dedicate the work. This "other" has been called by various names: Allah, God, The Great Spirit, the unknowable known, the Secret Absolute, The Divine Spark etc. The sound is unique but in reality "It" is eternally the same.*

## WHY RELIGION, AND WHY INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE? *Age of Global Consciousness*

*No longer are we isolated enough to defend and legislate rituals of the past, rather we must develop ways to merge our differences and rejoice in our commonalities.*

*Religion is the only human endeavor which has consistently attempted to provide us with a model to pattern our individual lives harmoniously. Our religious traditions have always encouraged ordinary people to live and think at levels of integrated complexity that would be otherwise impossible. Misguided and destructive values are leading us to the brink of disaster, our future as a species will require us individually and collectively to reflect on who we are.*

*As we approach the 21st Century, interreligious dialogue will be an indispensable tool for charting a new course. A new dialogue will affirm the positive value of diversity through constructive interaction and open listening. A renaissance in the mind of humanity will open the possibility of integrating a living ecosystem with today's technology.*

*One day we will realize the sublime and enduring wisdom that the natural world has to offer. The living ecosystems are excellent examples of maintaining unity in-and-through diversity. Thus, living ecosystems provide an apt analogy of what may be accomplished with the new mind that emerges when humankind's religious and cultural traditions meet in dialogue. As with any ecosystem in the natural world, pluralism and diversity increase the system's flexibility, and therefore its viability.*

*Solving the interconnected ecological problems that threaten our future is of paramount importance. The health of the planet is the greatest challenge that has confronted the human race. Humankind will have to adopt a new attitude that reflects a better relationship with the planet. Social responsibility by the business community fosters the emergence of a new recalibrated eco matrix, where the planet's ecosystem is our friend; respected, protected and embraced for her uniqueness.*

*All living creatures are part of this profoundly interconnected holistic living planet. Developing an ethos from this perspective, humankind will evoke a sense of humility-- responding to each other and the earth with a new global consciousness. The emergence will transform humankind's consciousness(es)--into a "collective" consciousness.*

*We do not know enough about each other to speak about what we do not agree on.*

*Dialogue begins with the willingness to question, and to be questioned, to realize mutual understanding and working together toward common goals requires accepting differences. In part, dialogue is an effort to comprehend the inherent value of difference and commonality, caring for what "others" are "saying," as well as listening and caring for the earth.*

*The religions- in-dialogue represent an immensely valuable resource; a resource that should be constructively developed and expanded to include business, communications media, education and professional organizations. Step through the door where we all participate and learn from the oneness we all hold common.*

*Today the nuclear, ecological and physical threats we human beings have created and now must confront are forcing us to move from an Age of Monologue to an Age of Dialogue. In a world with so much information most of don't know enough about each other to speak about what we do not agree on. The Cold War, now a faded memory, has been replaced by a rising clash of civilizations fueled by religious , fundamentalisms of all sorts, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, nationalist, ethnic, tribal, are tearing at the fabric of the New World Order even as it is being woven.*

*Because of the Internet and international travel we are affected and influenced by each other's behavior and beliefs. Our individual ideologies are being challenged and we are offered an opportunity to engage in a whole new way of thinking and reflecting on the world and to open ourselves to a new level of consciousness.*

*We must collectively initiate new discussions and teachings where we develop ways to surrender our differences and rejoice in our commonalities.*

*Throughout history humans have used a wide assortment of symbols and images to express the divine. They are empirical and ontological realities that cannot be simply rejected as fantasies and fairy tales by anyone. Globally, through our leaders and day-to-day encounters we must correctly appreciate them as indispensable vehicles to communicate profound realities that go beyond the capacity of everyday language to communicate.*

*In short, our understanding of truth and reality has been undergoing a radical shift. St. Thomas Aquinas stated, "Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower". We are slowly acknowledging the concept of "relationality", that is, all expressions or understandings of reality are in some fundamental way related to the speaker or knower.*

*Development of this basic insight will require that we learn not by being merely passively open or receptive to information, but by actively engaging in a dialogue with, extra-mental reality. I not only "hear" or receive reality, but I also think and "speak" to reality. I ask it questions, I stimulate it to speak back to me, to answer my questions. In the process I give reality the specific categories and language in which to respond to me. The "answers" that I receive back from reality will always be in the language, concept, and queries I put to it. It can "speak" to me and communicate with my mind, but only in a language and categories that I understand.*

*As we approached the end of the last millennium, the global community suddenly, albeit briefly awakened to the gross injustices in our world, came up with such slogans as "Education for all by the year 2000", "Water for all by the year 2000", "Food for all by the year 2000", "Health for all by the year 2000", to captivate the imagination of humankind.*

*Today, in many countries we have several national organizations dealing with ethics, such as the "Association of Physicians," "Association of Philosophers," "Association for the Defense of Human Rights" and "Association of Moralists." Africa is a huge continent of 53 countries and more or less 660 million people speaking about two thousands languages. This is not the only continent with such diversity. The idea of peace will require all of us to sacrifice our opinions, prejudices and judgments as to what is fact and fiction.*

*Interreligious, inter-ideological dialogue for peace will deepen if;  
We unlearn misinformation about each other and begin to know each other and ourselves as we truly are.  
We begin to discern values in our partner's tradition and wish to appropriate them into our own.  
We begin to explore new aspects of reality, meaning, truth and human potential that many of us had not even been aware of before.*

## DOORWAY

*The smoky mirror in the doorway suggests mankind's condition veiled in a kind of ignorance of the divine within. It encourages the viewer to look inward, to listen to the spirit calling to their higher self. Our human impact on the planet requires a new assessment of how we are seen and how we see ourselves.*

*We spend money and time inventing ways of destroying what we create, rather than enjoying what we have been given. We develop vast systems to protect what we produce while ignoring the diversity life has to offer and how it is self-sustaining. Our unquenchable thirst for more could potentially destroy us and the organism we live on. I know myself to be a member of the only species that has an ego and persona with a continuous interior dialogue that urges me to believe I am the center of all that happen around me.*

## PRAYER WHEELS

*Prayer wheels are commonly found in Tibet and are usually employed to decorate monasteries, homes and mountain passes. The wheels are an essential part of Buddhist worship by integrating the natural world and the human intent. Mantras are written onto the wheels. The belief is that they are spun; the wind will 'pick up' the words on the wheel and spread them throughout the world. Wherever the wind blows, the words and sentiments of the mantras will be carried. Prayer wheels represent both good luck and prosperity. Considering the positive nature of the mantras, enlightenment is carried throughout the world for all humankind's benefit. Or at least that is the prime intention.*

*The quote selected is a portion of the Lord's Prayer, a very old Hebrew prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us." Forgiveness is the highest form of prayer and the ground of compassion. The person spinning the wheel promotes the true spirit of belief and enlightenment through the world.*

## SYMBOLS

*The 70 symbols flanking the large images and trimming the door are from all over the world, chosen for their beauty, balance, familiarity and potential power. Some of the glyphs are archetypal and common while others may be obscure to some people. They are all the same size to bring them into equal harmony. The intent is to include representations for those who may prefer no image at all but only a symbol for their devotion.*

## CLOTH SKIRT

*The fabric skirt at the base was selected and included to give the structure more of a feminine quality. In addition to this, it is common to use a cloth to cover a table when used to create sacred space. Weddings, funerals, and most religious commitment ceremonies employ the use of a cloth to focus on a particular space. The cloth is used like a platform, to emphasize and elevate the activity to that of a mystical event. I want to emphasize the fact that we stand on holiness all day, every day, whether in a synagogue, temple, church or ashram. The earth is our home; sacred space that nurtures us.*

## TECHNIQUE

*The paint medium employed for the project is called egg tempera and was selected because of its rich texture. It is in actuality powdered stone mined from the earth and suspended in egg yolk. Million year old stone symbolizes eternity and egg yolk symbolizes the raw potential for life. In using earth pigments I felt the earth and moved it with a small brush to form these images.*

*Egg tempera (painting with egg yolk and ground pigment) and repouse (hammered and tooled pewter) are both old world arts, having reached their climax throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The skill required for egg tempera and Repouse require commitment and devotion to what is simple, organic and beautiful.*

*Valentin Gomez is the skilled technician of Repouse. He has become a master at tooling the pewter, embellishment and trim for the paintings. The metal is cold and shiny and contrasts greatly with the ground stone of egg tempera. The two mediums along with natural wood armature are organic. The whole installation will one day decompose and return to the earth where it came from.*

## IMAGES

*Images honor humankind's efforts to authenticate the unexplainable mysteries in life. The iconostasis is a visual dialogue, a teaching tool with one intention: to entice the viewer into an encounter with the divine. Words and doctrines can often be divisive and destructive but images can touch our hearts. Art gives us permission to feel and understand things on a deeper level which ultimately brings unity rather than division.*

*We still need images that portray the holy, the mystical, the miraculous, and the forever impossible-possible. Whether it is new age spirituality or ancient wisdom, the undercurrent of divinity is shared by all. Civilizations have come and gone, each with their own devotional image. The installation encourages us to stop struggling and competing over who is best or right and begin to live as One.*

*Religious images are anchored in the past and replicated in the present. Devotional Art brings the rituals and praxis of a culture to life and documents the belief system in history. Around the world, a variety of ritual and sacramental images suggest the same teachings portrayed through different forms. The influence over time gives the image its power and integrity. The Divine world and human world are reconciled through spiritual practices which fulfill us. When we can understand our relationship with the universe, we identify our place in the cosmos and become what is divinely expressed, we become walking icons.*

## *The word icon means image*

*Christian icons teach through visual windows to the divine. The frequent viewing of these images enlivens the soul and gradually reveals the bond between self and divine. Devotional Art is not unique to Christianity. Tibetan Tanka Paintings, Pueblo Sand Paintings and the Calligraphy of Islam are akin to Icon painting. Images are windows to humanities sacred reality and the grace that heals. These images awaken in us where we truly see and are seen.*

*Art History is rich and abundant around the world; each continent possesses its own individual expression and interpretation. Sculptures of stone and clay are evidence of mankind's dedication, devotion and talent to create and record. My vision was to design a harmonious representation of 5, 000 years of art and spirituality. All the images I chose find their origin in spirit and at some point have been manifested in stone or clay, and have endured in their beauty and message. There is a great irony in creating with something as small, insignificant and humble as dirt. Here, Dirt, Stone, Earth, Stone, Ground, Land, and Dust, are contrasted by the God, Spirit, Essence, Source, Energy, Presence, Oneness and Awe which they represent.*

*All cultures and religions are rich with symbols of deities and their teachings. Islam, Christian, Judaism, Buddhism are rich in sign and symbol. Native American Indian, Whirling Dervish, Celtic and Sikh: have fewer followers yet many of the same core principles. Philosophers express reality through conceptual thought while spiritual teachers seek to bring us directly into the experience through rituals. The institutionalized religions of the world paint portraits of their understanding of God. I am attempting to represent each image as a piece of dogma and expression of faith.*

*This contemporary iconostasis is presented as a screen to display divine teachings and a wall that alludes to our prejudices. My intent is to broaden the path of learning by enlarging the message and affirms the belief that "God" is the "all in all" always has been and always will be.*

*Moving beyond our individual understanding of God teaches us to cooperate and potentially progress towards a more compassionate, loving, and peaceful place. Believing in God intellectually is worthless without knowing God experientially. The source of creation, whether it is called, God, the big bang or energy: "It" is what animates matter and life. "It" cannot be measured or weighed or even calculated in time and space as we know it.*

*These masters have left their methods and practices in layers throughout our societies, and their ideas are still explored today by millions of individuals. In each of their teachings the "I" has the potential to become "we."*



## WHY I AM INSPIRED TO PRESENT SUCH A PROJECT

*Perhaps with such a large population on the planet we are failing to express well what it is that we love. As a consequence, we have managed to integrate anger, gluttony, lust, fear, sloth, greed, pride and envy in much of what we do. These human qualities are reflected daily in our floundering legislation and justice system, inequality of women, glorified superstars in both sports and film, obesity, illness, trafficking of children for sexual pleasure, economic development with disregard for human vitality, outrageous consumption of resources, lack of gun control, the fast fix, fast food, I pod, I phone, My space, and all the war and violence that surround us.*

*In the age of globalized human community and a shrinking world, interfaith dialogue for global leadership and ethics is no longer just commendable endeavor but a historical necessity. "The Dialogue Project" does not communicate with words, but through image, to provoke a new way of understanding, thinking and reflecting on the religious beliefs of others and their meaning.*

*Interreligious dialogue and cooperation between faith communities is of paramount concern if we are ever to find world peace. We need to continue to reestablish interfaith communities that embrace both the grass-roots level and the religious leadership that offers solutions to problems where political and diplomatic approaches have failed. The voices of misery across the globe are signs of the world's leaders and faith community's failure to address problems and provide alternative solutions to the plight of humanity and to the continuing destruction of the environment. The faith community has a responsibility to the world, to itself, to each other and to fellow creatures to make our earthly common residence a decent, dignified and peaceful one.*

*Religious and cultural diversity is often exploited by political agendas for conflict and war, rather than an opportunity for mutual enrichment, understanding and respect. In the present age, we are challenged by globalization, militarization, poverty, social injustice, oppression, and environmental degradation. New curriculums for peace education are critically important and can potentially reverse the trend towards mutual destruction. Interfaith and peace education curriculums might one day be required in every school at every level, as well as religious education and tolerance programs in every temple, church and mosque world-wide.*

*Believing in God intellectually is worthless without knowing God experientially. The source of creation, whether it is called, God, the big bang or energy: "IT" is what animates matter and life. "IT" cannot be measured or weighed or even calculated in time and space. The smallest object is a universe of open space and our entire solar system is but a speck of dust in the cosmos. "IT" is the incomprehensible all. "The Tao which can be spoken is not the Tao" said Lao Tzu. Africa has no divine images of God because God is not expressible.*

*I think that every one of us, every particle, every atom and every galaxy, in fact all matter and spirit is moving towards God, the unknown. When we say, "our world" the two words say nothing about the magnificent indefinable and unknowable. If I can find God, the "IT", in any small mystery and add one more small mystery to "IT" every day, in the end I will live as if it is all mystery. The infinite unknown God is everywhere ongoing and forever.*

## EVOLUTION OF THE PROJECT IDEA

*It was crushing and at the same time, expansive to find that after 18 years of painting traditional icons in the orthodox tradition I was still empty, feeling I knew little about being fully human. I had studied the icon language in detail, the history of icons and their makers, the pigments, the prayers and so on. I knew all about what a "good" icon was and how to honor sacred image. Yet, I was still without a sense of peace in the world. It became increasingly uncomfortable, the deeper the decent into the process, the less union I would have with those outside the "Faith". I was attentive to words like, "you live in me and I in you and we are complete", "peace and know I am with you", or "There is no where you can go where I am not".*

*During those years I was also committed to Tai Chi as a daily practice. The teachings, precepts and philosophy of Tai Chi seemed clearly Christian at the core. The Yin Yang symbol and Christ's dual nature, all flesh and all spirit became interchangeable. I found no contradiction between the interior work with energy and the outward flow of it and Christ's essence in all things and everywhere.*

*I began teaching meditation and icon paintings as a process, not so much to teach the process of creating beautiful icons but rather to promote the experience of being seen by the divine eye. Your true self sees your hidden self. Each 5 day session brought me closer and closer to the idea we are all one. I saw in each student the same struggles I had always had. Without a doubt I saw that any deep loving practice with your intent on the "IT" will bring you closer to your true self. I wrote a book on the practice of painting icons, filled with meditations and "how to" instructions. By the time I finished the small book there was no doubt awakening can be found in other practices.*

*My brother Philip once said that "If we could know everything about a common household fork we would know everything about everything." It took me years to figure out what he meant. I think he was talking about what it is to see the same patterns reflected in all things. There are many kinds of forks, a tree is shaped like a fork, you can use your hand to eat and it also is like a fork, a fork is useful, a fork is sometimes at rest, a fork was designed by someone, a fork works in union with other utensils, etc. Buddhists' have used the expression, "become the tree". See yourself as the tree and, all which is valuable in a tree, along with all of its functions and history, and its life giving properties and beauty. If we can see it in a tree, we can see it in all of life. Working on the installation opened my awareness to life's interconnectedness and the diversity of practice that is available to all. I sincerely want to open the door to the experience through the Dialogue and in Dialogue.*

## TARGET THE PROJECT AND TO WHOM AM I DIRECTING IT?

*The Experience of just standing before open-ended potential is exhilarating and gratifying to the soul. Humankind loves beauty and awe. The installation reveals my search for where i have come from and where i choose to go. There is no one doctrine that will fill all of humanity. Each of us must first make peace within ourselves. "The Dialogue" has one objective: to ignite the question, "What do I love?" then listen and watch interiorly for the small burning flame of hope, joy, peace, charity, forgiveness, abundance, love, etc. and let that become the reality.*

*Are we willing to allow Jesus and the philosopher Lao Tzu, to be positioned beside the Mayan corn God and Buddha beside Mohammad? Our minds will try and make sense of all these philosophies in one time and place but the heart will reflect our success.*

*Already I have had the experience of scholars and their criticism of the work, Let me assure all of you who read this, life is full of errors and this project is no different. In reality we understand so little. Food said to be good for you when it is not, constructions are made to look strong when they are weak, war and killing is justified in some acceptable situation, etc. This little project is also full of paradox and incongruent aspects. What's the value of prejudice if it not to make us think where is our focus and what do we hope to achieve with our condemnations and ridicule? Life is so short; generations have been replacing themselves for so long, let us live in peace and remember we are but sand trying to control the beach.*

*Thomas Merton says "My dear brothers and sisters, we are already one. But we imagine that we are not. What we have to recover is our original unity. What we have to be is what we are. When we're no longer trying to become somebody, when we've ceased struggling to be anything, we are able to rest in the truth of what we already are. The dignity of every life comes from the fact that every being is an expression of the universes evolutionary mystery." Spiritual teachings of the world called this mystery God, Allah, Yahweh, Krishna, Tao, Mind etc. They are words and not the reality; they are concepts not the experience of oneness.*

## TRAVELING EXHIBITS

*Installations elicit social change; they provide a format for humans to behave in a civilized awestruck fashion. Installations such as "The Dialogue" have the potential for enhancing communication. Our fundamental being unfolds and permeates everyone around us, through our private practice. Each of us has a powerful and explosive effect on the world around us, what we contribute energetically to society is fast becoming instantly effective.*

*Einstein said, "We cannot solve the human dilemma with the same mind that created it." Einstein is correct; we do have a human dilemma! Ask, "how can we live with what WE have created, on a planet WE did not create?" Many of us cannot answer such questions. Any one answer will change from moment to moment and from person to person. I made the installation to honor the great minds and spirits which have wrestled with these questions. Their answers do not teach us how to own God or the planet, only how to live in communion and harmony.*

*In one of the Quran verses, we read: "Verily, God will not change the condition of a people, unless they change their inner selves."*

*Publicity for the installation might offer open discussions, a formal series of lectures, and comments from the viewer, interactive computer programs, etc. The formats for such activities might focus on either the spiritual teachings or on the global crisis we are in because of our beliefs.*

*The entire installation is a free standing, curved to the width of 30' X 11' high, 7'deep. It is assembled in 16 pieces. Curtains are available, attached to the sides, flanking the unused space to either side, extending to either wall in the event the space is larger than the actual construction.*

*The entire project is available for purchase, includes, web site, videos and any and all information to date.*

Peace be with you