

“What is now proved was once only imagined.” – William Blake

**d**URING 1992 while completing my Bachelor of Arts degree, I had the pleasure of taking a 20th Century art class from Dr. Kurt Von Meier at Sacramento State University. The professor arranged that much of the class would be taught by the students, each one of whom had to pick out some specific aspect of modern art and report on it. My proposal was to discuss the influence of psychedelic drugs on art. I suggested that I might cover: early historical and cultural references; the psychedelic art of the 1960s and its connection to rock music; blotter acid art and the concept of imprinting; fractal geometry and its relationship to psychedelics; the late-1980s/early-1990s computer-assisted “rave” art; and the spiritual content of psychedelic art. Since LSD, mescaline, and psilocybin had only really been available to the masses of the Western world since the late 1950s, this topic seemed particularly relevant. Dr. Von Meier kindly took me out to lunch to deliver the blow. “You’ll have to find something else to talk about. The subject of drugs is taboo. People would think that you’re encouraging their use.” It struck me then (as it still strikes me today), that being shut down on this subject was ludicrous. Perhaps in a high school... but in a university? Whatever happened to a liberal education?

Nevertheless, my interest in the creative influence of psychedelics on the visual arts has—if anything—grown stronger since then, and I was honored to be asked to co-edit this issue of the *MAPS Bulletin*. A few creativity studies were completed with LSD prior to its being scheduled, some of which were directly related to visual art. (See the *MAPS Bulletin* 10(1), 1999, for a retrospective of Oscar Janiger’s work in this area.) And though officially sanctioned research has nearly ground to a halt, underground use has clearly mushroomed. While there have been quite a few magazine articles written about the use of psychedelics in the arts, surprisingly there has only been one book produced in English, *Psychedelic Art* by Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, published in 1968. Although this book is an invaluable tome on the topic, it is also quite obviously dated.

Those who feel that the term “psychedelic,” when applied to art, is overly invested in connotations of sixties popular culture haven’t been paying much attention to the myriad of approaches taken by *today’s* psychedelic artists. From the digital evolutions of Steven Rooke, the geometric abstractions of Allyson Grey, and the Fantastic Realism of Robert Venosa, to the spiritual X-rays of Alex Grey, the surreal visions of L. J. Altvater, the botanical narratives of Donna Torres, and the neo-tribal erotica of Stevee Postman—there’s a hell of a lot of diversity that

can’t be pigeonholed into an antiquated “sixties psychedelia” idea of what the word “psychedelic” means when applied to art. Indeed, an artificial segregation of “psychedelic art” as a mere artifact of the sixties ignores the fact that work produced in the sixties is just a small slice of a much larger tradition of “soul-revealing” drug-influenced visionary art that has been going on for thousands of years. From the possible inspiration of *Amanita muscaria* or *Datura* use on early rock art to ancient psychoactive snuffing artifacts, from peyote-based Huichol yarn and bead work to yagé-related Tukano decorative geometric art, from the ceremonial San Pedro pottery of the Nazca and Mochica to the mushroom effigy stones of the Guatemalan highlands—the inspiration of psychedelic consciousness on art is nothing new.

To help update those who feel that “psychedelic art” equals “the sixties,” we have provided some additional color in this issue. However, just as psychedelic art can’t be merely relegated to the 1960s, so too drug-induced creativity can’t be relegated to the realm of visual art. Hence, this issue of the *MAPS Bulletin* also focuses on the creative mind states that psychedelics can engender in a variety of other pursuits. From problem-solving in engineering and the creation of Virtual Reality Modeling Language to influences on architectural design, music, writing, community-building, spiritual-insight, and much more, psychedelics are tools that—despite their outlawed status—continue to be useful for many people. Valuable enough that these folks skirt the law to use their psychedelic tools. And while the *MAPS Bulletin* usually focuses on the medical applications of psychedelics and attempts to gain approval for such applications, this issue is predominantly about the use of psychedelics in ways that are currently not “accepted” by society at large. The fact remains that people do use these drugs, and many use them in manners that clearly contribute to a more creative lifestyle in general. Anyone who has attended the experiment in temporary community called Burning Man (see page 6) will surely attest to the fact that much of the life’s blood of this creative community is pulsing with various inebriants, psychedelic and otherwise. Drug use has inspired artists, writers, poets, musicians, and others for thousands of years; the time we live in is no different. The words and images presented herein from various contemporary users of psychedelics are just scratching the surface. For me, this issue of the *Bulletin* exemplifies the “multi-disciplinary” nature of the MAPS organization by helping to illustrate how psychedelics can be valuable creative aids in many areas. Enjoy!

Jon Hanna, Editor