

Jung in the World | Image or Art? with Nora Swan-Foster

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Patricia:

[0:00] Welcome to Jung in the World. I'm Patricia Martin and I'm your host. Carl Jung embraced creativity believing that the creative impulse was the maker of the individual.

After his bitter breakup with Sigmund Freud in 1913, Jung retreated into a soul - searching period where he pursued writing and creating images from his inner realm. He would consider this years later to be the most important time of his life.

Work from that period was eventually bound and published into the Red Book.

Joining us today is Nora Swan Foster, a Jungian analyst, author, and art therapist.

She has led workshops and clinical training seminars around the world on a range of Jungian topics.

She is in full private practice in Boulder, Colorado and her books include Jungian Art Therapy, Images, Dreams, and Analytical Psychology, and Art Therapy and Child - Bearing Issues.

Hello, Nora, and welcome to Jung in the World.

Nora:

[1:08] Thanks for inviting me to do this. I'm glad to be here with you.

Patricia:

[1:12] It's our pleasure. I am so curious about a number of things regarding the creative process and your work as a Jungian art therapist, but I want to jump in on something that you've written about art therapy and the images in Carl Jung's Red Book.

I'm curious to know why Carl Jung turned to making images as part of his own healing process. Tell us about that.

Nora:

[1:47] Well, that's a great question. I think for him images and symbols were actually integral to who he was.

If we look back at, you know, how in memories, dreams, and reflections, he tells us when he was little, he was thinking about images.

He was using the mannequin as an object that he had created and stored away as a symbolic talisman for himself.

He did have kind of an art trauma where a teacher told him he didn't know how to dra

w and was kicked out of a drawing class, but then he went on to really discover that, you know, as he developed his own drawing skills and painting skills of the outside world.

[2:34] He was bringing form to something about himself, psychologically, emotionally .

And with the Red Book and the emotions that he was dealing with, separating from the Vienna School and Freud, I think he began to make a differentiation between art that's made from the inside and art that's made from the outside.

And so the images, if I'm answering your question, the images really allowed him to understand the creative process as a way to work psychologically and emotionally with inner states of being and what was becoming in him, what was coming alive, not as an artist but as a human being on an individuation journey.

Patricia:

[3:20] Yes, I think about that, how when we're in deep emotions and we're working our inner realm, it's hard to give words to that.

It's hard to pull that up and frame it as something that you can even understand yourself and I think it's fascinating that Carl Jung kind of leapt over that hurdle and just decided to start moving a brush across a page, or pastels across a page, or a colored pencil across it.

You know, it's very interesting that he allowed himself the grace to explore it through images.

And you talk a lot about the power of image in your book.

What, tell me what you think the power of the image is for us.

Nora:

[4:19] Oh gosh, so many different things really, you know, and I think she was discovering that too, is that it really can bring form to the unspeakable, it brings form to who we are, perhaps who we're becoming, an image that's spontaneous can be developed into something deeper and it begins to talk back to us as a kind of a act of imagination. But then, you know, as he said, you know, all of us can make a Red Book, our own Red Book, and it's a way of going back and looking at who we were.

[4:55] As we'll be coming and moving into our future, right?

So there's so many different ways that it serves us.

And it really, in many ways, like when I'm making art, there's that confrontation of my ego self, my identity has to really soften and lower in order to deal with some of the defeats, right?

It's like, oh my God, there's a drop. Oh, there's, oh, I didn't mean that to happen. I didn't want that line, right? we can get really constricted.

And so, the art making process, I think, is meant to be able to open up and to be able to use the psychic energy to connect more with our playfulness and our spontaneity. And I think that's what Jung was really talking about, why he really didn't want to call it a method.

He wanted to call it, he wanted for us to use it as a way of working psychologically and emotionally with ourselves, to change our consciousness, you know, to further consciousness and isn't that what we're needing today, right?

Patricia:

[6:00] Absolutely. I, it's a, it's a form of engagement that is also very gentle, I think.

Nora:

[6:07] Very. It can be. I mean, it can also be quite a confrontation sometimes, you know, something can come up in an image that is, can be shocking or can disturb someone in a direction that maybe the image of truth - telling in a way that we didn't quite expect.

Patricia:

[6:23] Is that how we know that we are really encountering now the unconscious?

Nora:

[6:30] I think so.

Patricia:

[6:32] It doesn't have an editor.

Nora:

[6:34] Right, exactly. It doesn't have an editor. It has a life of its own as Jung says, right?

It's autonomous and it communicates what it needs to communicate.

The objective psyche has a life of its own.

Right? We can't control it. We can't, you know, just say, oh, I'm going to manifest this, you know, only, right?

It has a life of its own and we have to deal with that. It's humble. It's very humbling.

Patricia:

[7:00] It is. It's very humbling. And to open ourselves to that, I, you know, I'm reminded of another psychologist, now late Mike Csikszentmihalyi who studied this business of flow and I had this rare opportunity to interview him and I asked him about Carl Jung and he had heard a lecture by Carl Jung talking about, the creative self and the creative impulse and it he said it stayed with him his whole profession and it became it be

came a mission to understand how the unconscious calls up to us through our work whether you're an artist or someone else you can work in lots of fields but the unconscious just wants to join you in that.

And that is part of how flow works. You're not, you're just in it.

Do you feel that way when you're teaching the practice of art?

Nora:

[8:15] Yes, I think sometimes, you know, in anything we're doing, we can be in the flow and we forget ourselves, right? We're just engaged with the material.

We forget about, you know, for lack of better words, maybe our identity, our beingness in it. We're just absorbed and immersed.

And I think I read somewhere that Cézanne said that we wait and try and extend that moment.

And I was talking to some artists and we were saying, in response to what Cézanne was saying of how we want to extend that moment of flow, that that's when sometimes everything goes wrong because we've overworked it, right?

Because there's this desire to stay there, right? It's working.

It feels so good to be there.

Patricia:

[9:00] Well, it's hypnotic as well, right?

Nora:

[9:02] Yeah, it can be, right? Yeah, it feels so good because we're connected to our true nature too.

You know, we're connected into something that's numinous and deep inside us.

Patricia:

[9:14] So, we're connected to something numinous and deep inside us.

As I listen to you, Nora, I'm trying to imagine you as a younger person, and I wonder if there were clues about who you would become, this person who uses creativity as a force for healing.

And I wonder if there were moments from your childhood where this showed up for you, where you were able to see that there was something about you in this.

Nora:

[9:59] I'm sure there were many times because I grew up with parents who were artists .

It wasn't a perfect childhood or upbringing by any means, but it was the one thing I can say that my parents provided was an environment for music and art and our houses, because they built them, they were semi-finished.

We were always living in a liminal space and seeing that there was potential.
We knew when my parents got carpeting that they were going to sell the house.
So there was this, we knew before that, right?
So there's this spaciousness of creation going on. My mother making art in the living room.
My dad was always painting when he wasn't at work and there was bread making going on.
And so they were kind of like the after World War II hippies, living sort of an alternative lifestyle.
And I think what I learned very early on was that that was a refuge for me, my creativity, my being able to go make mud pies or go build forts.
Later, it was taking refuge in, as a teenager, in the art room or modern dance.
So there was this place where like, I knew that was a touchstone for me.
That was a place I could go where it was mine.
I didn't have to perform for the culture as a girl coming into young adulthood.

[11:28] And that was a place for me that was mine and private and intimate if I wanted it to be, right?

A place of expression, inner feelings.

Yeah, so creativity has always been so important to me, but it's not just about making art.

It's, you know, it lives in so many different ways. And I think that's, I always try and communicate that to people because people will say, oh, I'm not creative.

I can't, I don't know how to use art materials.

Well, you can pick flowers from the field and put them in a used bottle and put them, you know, on the table in the sunlight and enjoy that beauty and that aesthetic quality, right?

We all have an aspect of our own creative impulse that's living.

Patricia:

[12:13] So, now I am curious as well, this is always a big curiosity for me about how people come to the work of Carl Jung.

And so, I'm curious about where you were at in your life when you discovered his work and decided, oh, this is for me.

Nora:

[12:36] Well, it is kind of a story for me because I was really in a liminal space. I was coming back from Greece on a bus called the Magic Bus that traveled like three days from Greece back to London.

And a woman handed over, you know, a receipt. She said, have you read this? And she handed me *Memories, Dreams, Reflection*.

And it had, you know, she was in the, you know, those lights on the bus that kind of shine down in kind of a triangular way.

She was in that light, you know, and she had sort of this, this newness kind of quality to her, even though we talked, you know, most of the trip, but she said, you know, you've got to read this.

And I began to read it and I couldn't put it down because I, you know, in there he talks so much about his creative process and the symbolic and the importance of metaphors

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And I thought, wow, this is me. This is, I could really relate to it.

And I thought at that time, I think I was, I don't know, 19 maybe, 18, 19.

[13:43] And I thought, oh, maybe there is a place for me in the world.

I didn't know what that looked like.

I hadn't been in therapy, so I didn't really know what therapy was, but because he was writing about it and he was bringing meaning to it, there began to be, I was stitching myself into some kind of path, you know?

Yeah. So that was my introduction to, you know, really.

[14:10] And then after that, I found my way to expressive arts therapy at Lesley College where Sean McNiff had started a program, and his was very much about the image, working with the image Hillman would come and give lectures there and you know, so there was a whole piece of the creative process and the expressiveness and the integration of the different modality that was very powerful.

I focused in on art therapy but that idea of working with the image in a way that is honoring whatever is coming forth from within.

Meaningful.

Patricia:

[14:56] You know, as I listen to you, Nora, I'm tempted to ask about a big concept of, Carl Jung's, which is the transcendent function.

Nora:

[15:06] Yeah. Well, I think it's important.

Patricia:

[15:10] Yes. All right. So, it's the reason, you know, you can tell I'm kind of easing my way into this because it's a big idea, but there's some, I can tell that you have an intimate understanding of how the transcendent function works.

Nora:

[15:29] Well, I'm excited you've asked me that question because I really am passionate

about that idea if I think about one of your concepts.
And it's not an easy concept, but it's a really important one.
And I think at the base of it is that we have to be willing to trust the unconscious.
We have to be willing not to defend ourselves against what comes, right?
Because the transcendent function is really the tension of these opposites between conscious and unconscious, and allowing those two opposites, which is fundamental in Jung's idea, the opposites.
We all have opposites within us, and with the opposites comes some tension and some friction.
And it's that friction that really begins to move in the unconscious and create some reaction, some energetic reaction.
And it's that reaction that then forces something into consciousness, you know, like a rocket coming into consciousness where we then see something new.
And so what he said about the transcendent function is that the transition transitions us from one attitude to another and so it changes our understanding or our perspective and gives us a new attitude, a new place of viewing ourselves, our world, whatever it is we're wrestling.

[16:54] And that transcendent function for me is really, it explains for our therapists why they do what they do and why expressive arts people do what they do, really.
For art therapy, there isn't really an explanation about how this happens, but Jung's transcendent function explains it.
And he wrote this essay in 1916 and he thought, nobody's gonna understand this.
He shoved it away and it didn't come out until somebody found it in the drawer and it was published in 1957.

[17:26] So that's a long time that he was holding on to these ideas about how energy works in our psyche, that spontaneous autonomous energy, and how our attitude toward it.

Can resist it, and we can fight against it, and that struggle and that wrestling that's so important for us, because it's out of that that we find the living symbol, the healing image.

Something comes that says, oh, there it is.
I didn't even really know. So, you know, the images can be what it's unknowable to us, not just what's unspeakable, but also maybe it wasn't known to us.
And then we begin a new journey of relating to that image.

Patricia:

[18:14] When we begin a new journey, it strikes me that maybe those images stayed in a drawer in the same way that most of Emily Dickinson's poems stayed in a drawer, because it wasn't about the performance.

It was about the process.

Nora:

[18:35] Exactly. Exactly.

Patricia:

[18:37] And when you're teaching, how do you get people out of their heads and onto the canvas?

You know, how do you get them out of the performance?

And into the process of connecting with something deep within themselves that then become an image on the page, on the paper, on the canvas.

I know I'm asking a big question.

Nora:

[19:04] Well, it is kind of a big question, but it's important because I think it incorporates a lot of different things around teaching.

It's cultivating an environment that says, hey, we're going to honor whatever comes that we're not going to judge it, we're going to put the critic aside.

This isn't about making anything beautiful.

This isn't about making anything, making something that is aesthetically acceptable.

[19:31] It's about experimenting and discovering and being curious.

And so I'll do, I have different things that I encourage people to do.

We'll do little exercises, you know, scribbles and then and see what you can find in that scribble.

So it's like I try and get people to first play and then that moves us into more of a deeper attending phase of really holding something and working it so that it becomes less of a sign.

You know, Jung talked about the difference between the sign and the symbol, it becomes more symbolic, more meaningful.

So it comes alive. There's a wonderful word actually that he used in German, it's betrachten, but it's to make an image, is to make something pregnant.

And he used that word, fabulous, right? Isn't that beautiful?

So he used that, yeah, he used that word to, you know, as a way to encourage people to put energy into the image, right?

Give it love, give it your attention, listen to it and see if it can come alive.

We're so quick to say, oh, I don't like that. Ooh, that's ugly. Oh, I did that wrong.

I don't know how to do this, right? That just shuts down all the possibility.

[20:50] And what we want to do is give it, give it our attention, give it our love, give it our present and sit with it and allow it to be a guest into our, our life, right?

Welcome it in and see what it has to offer.

We might not like what it offers, but, but you know, that's okay. We can handle it.

Patricia:

[21:10] Aren't we all pregnant with the self, the idea that Jung had that the seed of the self is born within us.

And I think it was Hillman who actually wrote more about this in the soul's code that, you know, we will not go too far astray because the seed of who we are is within ourselves.

And I'm wondering if art sort of helps that seed, it nourishes the seed a little bit more. So, what we're making images that can bring the self on the path to individuation, is that how it works?

Nora:

[21:57] I love that, yeah, I love that because there are all the different facets.

You know, the psyche is made up of, it's a multiplicity. It's all ranges of feelings and thoughts and experiences.

And so there the images become those seeds of potential and places of expression and when we bring form to them and color and line, they can encourage us and inspire us, you know.

Patricia:

[22:29] So this is something I've always wondered. It's so great to have an artist and an art therapist to talk to about this.

I've always been a little bit jealous of artists because they get to pre - engage their muse.

They, you know, they handle the materials, they stretch the canvas, they put the water in the jug.

And, you know, on days when I, I'm staring at a blank page. I think, oh gosh, to be an artist, what is it about the handling of the materials themselves that opens us up?

Nora:

[23:08] Yeah, that's a great question. You know, I mean, just looking at the blank page, either as a writer or a painter, I mean, both are sort of like this, it's formidable kind of presentation of like, oh God, what, what goes there, right?

But I think the materials have a quality where, you know, the colors come together.

For me, it's, you know, it's always the colors, you know, my just putting colors next to each other as I'm putting the paint out on the palette can be very stimulating.

The ripping of paper or the sorting through supplies, right?

There is that, right? It gets the energy going. I think it activates the psychic energy and it wakes us up as sort of calisthenics in a way, you know?

So I don't know. I mean, you know, I also do a lot of writing and there is a process always before we enter into the creative process or it's part of the creative process, really, I should say, because we're preparing ourselves.

I know before I'm writing, I might take a walk and I might be thinking about it and I might be, you know, throw a wash in or, you know, cut some onions or, you know, and I'm thinking about the writing, I'm not thinking about what I'm doing, right?

So there is this process of how do we enter in and I think it has sometimes the ritual is so important to be able to create the space, to be able to enter in.

It's almost like we're asking permission to enter into that creative space.

[24:36] It's, you know, we're being called into a creative process, and we have to be willing to sacrifice ourselves a little bit to it, right?

Patricia:

[24:46] So, in other words, As we prepare, you know, and come up to that threshold, whatever our ritual is, eventually we are called into it.

Nora:

[24:58] So we are called into it.

Patricia:

[25:00] Yes. There is something about the making of images, the making of art, whatever the medium is, that is its own calling.

Nora:

[25:11] Is its own calling. Yeah.

Patricia:

[25:12] So I think about how much we live inside our heads these days, how much information we're swamped in, how much time we spend on our screens, and yeah, you know, it's causing all kinds of problems that I'm sure you see in your practice, in your private practice out in Boulder.

People are burnt out, they're high anxiety, there's rampant depression.

How can art help us with this?

Nora:

[25:41] Yeah, boy, I think that's so true.

You know, the screens are so helpful for us in many ways. We so depend on them, you know, as a resource.

But I think we know also so much about the brain connection to the body and how important that our making engages our body in a different way.

It's using our hands, our arms. We might be standing, we're moving. There's movement included in the art making, right? It's so healthy. But then there's also a lot of research about just art and creativity that lessens anxiety. It reflects back to us, parts of ourselves, affirming, it's satisfying, it's calming.

[26:31] It really, you know, is that creative process just engages all of our juices, all of our senses. So I think having time away from screens is really, really important. Building a relationship with our inner self is so important. I think screens are so, kind of extroverting that energy rather than introverting and listening to ourselves.

So that's another way that the art in any kind of art process. Now, what is going on inside of us? Are we listening to ourselves? You know, you matter, right? What you think and feel inside matter.

Patricia:

[27:11] Right. I'm tempted to ask you another big question just because you're creative and so you know how to make things that become their own reality, they become their own realm, they come from a place that then takes form.

So if I were a genie and I'm not, you know, I had a magic wand and I could say, Norris Swan Foster, if you could have any wish in the world, about the current condition of the collective that you could change, what would it be? What is your wish for the world?

Nora:

[27:59] You know, when I do these groups bringing art into an environment where people come together, What I noticed so much is how much we need each other.

And I think loneliness is a really big piece of how isolated we've become.

And that sort of ties into the screens, you know, like we do think we connect with people, but there's something about coming into a room together and being in person with each other.

[28:30] So I would say that loneliness and recognizing that there's a lot of love out there. Love is very important to heal the world.

And I think sometimes we have this idea that it's all negative and there's only conflict, but we're missing the stories of love and connection and how much glue there is that comes from love and care.

And those can be felt in working with art, personally working with art within groups, and we can feel that. we can feel our connection to the self when we're working on our project.

And that has an element of love and I think healing some of the loneliness that has been kind of taking over the collective in a way that I feel is very sad.

I really do.

It's so interesting how.

[29:30] You know, when you see people talking that don't know each other, you know, various places and just how much, oh, you, you know, you recognize that I'm doing that, right?

And how much joy that brings when you talk to somebody in the world who you don't know, but you might say, you know, oh, hey, look at that hat, that hat is really cool. And they were like, oh, wow, thank you.

You know, small connections with people mean a lot.

And I think, you know, that's kind of on that superficial world, but it matters.

Acts of kindness matter.

Patricia:

[30:04] So you will be gathering people in Chicago at December 8th.

The C.G. Jung Institute of Chicago is hosting you for a workshop where people gather and co-create.

They're going to work on their own things, but they will be building small bridges as they stand with other creators. Can you tell us a little bit about what you're going to be teaching and a little more about the workshop?

Nora:

[30:35] Sure. It's going to be some lecture and some workshop, and I really want to bring into people's consciousness Joe's relationship to his own creative impulse, his art, from beginning to kind of into the book, not just the Red Book, but then also using his idea of, you know, everybody can make their own Red Book and giving people an opportunity to explore and consider ways that they might work in their own journals or bring their, a new journal and start their own Red Book or transform a book, right, an altered book.

So, I'm going to be.

Doing a little bit of lecturing, but also encouraging spontaneity and creativity and discovery in various ways.

So there'll be materials there, people are going to bring their own materials, we'll see what happened.

A lot of times, you know, it's who shows up is what makes the event, right?

So it's a collaborative process. It's really how I like to look at these workshops.

It's what people bring and what I bring and that synergy that comes together.

So I'm looking forward to it.

Patricia:

[31:53] Well, we're looking forward to hosting it. And by the way, we will post a link f

or anybody who's interested to go ahead and enroll.
I know that the amount of participants is limited, did, but we still have slots.
So we'll host a link.
And you know, sometimes I interview people, Nora, and it's delightful.
And sometimes I interview people and it's an honor.
But this interview has been both a delight and an honor. Thank you for joining us.

Nora:

[32:34] Thank you, Patricia. I really enjoyed the questions and being able to think about these things together. Thank you.