

THE LUMINIST

by MARYCLAIRE WELLINGER

*On the loom of light
where sea is woven to sky in one seamless mantel
there, on the invisible breath of horizon
appears my vision...*

Libretto for the opera "The Luminist"
2001 by Maryclaire Wellinger

Over the past 25 years I have worked as a poet and painter – this period (1980-2005) coincides with the development of the INI movement. In this paper, I explore how my own journey as a poet/artist reveals a congruency with the development of INISMO and the journeys of my Inist colleagues. Let's go on a ramble together across this compelling landscape.

First, an invocation to the muse:

Song to My Muse

She is starfish soaked in sun
radially symmetrical in form –

when you take her
from the dorsal view, or the ventral view
from either perspective,
you will see her five arms
fall against the seabed
extending from her central disk
of brain and flesh.

During the Act,
she is dismembered
but she is a member of class Asteroidea,
has the power to regenerate.

An Invitation. In the year 2000, I was invited to become a member of the INI-USA movement by artists Mark Fisher and Robert Ferry. I was married to Mark – by the grace of poetry we had met in 1995, at a literary festival celebrating the life

and work of poet Jack Kerouac in Lowell, MA. We married in 1997. But I had not met Robert, his old friend from high school who lives on the other side of the continent, in Portland, where I have never been. Mark and Robert were carrying on a remarkably creative correspondence via e-mail.

I had begun to work in the digital medium, a new and welcome direction. Also, I was engaged in a challenging project, to write an opera and dance drama in poetic form for five voices – based on the life of the American painter/lithographer, Fritz Hugh Lane (1805-1865).¹ Princeton University art historian John Wilmerding characterized Lane as “the first luminist” American painter, and I corresponded with Wilmerding, who was pleased with the poetry and intrigued with how a contemporary artist reinterpreted Lane’s work. During the 1^{1/2} year period of writing and research, I rendered many studies in watercolor of selected paintings and lithographs by Fitz Hugh Lane.

The digital medium allowed me to break through from the linear narrative of representational landscape painting, into abstract forms – where imaginal, internal landscapes are realized².

Genesis. At the same time, in 2000-2001, I began to study the websites of INI’s founding poet-artists, including Gabriele Aldo-Bertozzi, Angelo Merante, and others... I read their manifestos, essays and words establishing INISMO’s significant intellectual framework and theories on poetics, which I felt a great affinity for. Image and word, painting and poem, the warp and weft of life – yes, my own journey as an artist, powered by the fulcrum of my imagination, is an illustration of how the two mediums of poetry and painting are dynamically woven together. As a woman and feminist, I often use the metaphor of weaving, or quilting to describe the creative process. A dream or a vision becomes a poem – a poem becomes a painting, or a musical score, or a garden planted, or a hearty stew beautifully architected, or a silk pillow elegantly embroidered... and so on.

There are many streams running into and feeding my river – this life of the imagination.

Fast flowing or still, I am moved to create. In 1990, after nearly 20 years studying poetry, writing, developing my voice as a poet, working with my teachers/mentors/poet colleagues Ruth Whitman (Radcliffe College) Lloyd Schwartz (Harvard University) and Frank Bidart (Wellesley College) and working exclusively in the poetry medium – to my own wonderment – I was compelled to work in a new medium as a painter.

“Black Joe’s Pond.” The catalyst was an encounter with a Great Blue Heron³ at a glacial kettle-pond in Marblehead. **“Black Joe’s Pond,”** as it is called, is situated idyllically at the crest of Gingerbread Hill only a stone’s throw from Little Harbor and the sea – **a supra-ordinary encounter** (“supra” meaning “beyond”) when my poet’s psyche was **“cracked open”**⁴.

INISMO – A New Language of Forms Evolves

Now let's explore how my work as an Inist has evolved since 2000.

- **Fotografia inista** are found images, sometimes from a different time period – painted, manipulated, or recomposed... OR “DI-Constructed” (Mark Fisher’s term).

Fotografia inista can also emerge as images I have captured myself with my digital camera. Sometimes they emerge as a finished works without any editing or changing. Some do have a socio/political message which analyzes or comments on particular contemporary events – critically, ironically, or emphasizes their absurdity. In October, 2003, I created an image when Arnold Schwarzenegger was elected California’s governor in a bizarre and unconstitutional recall election. Its title, *INI Recall – Portrait of the Governator*, highlights the absurd claim by the former bodybuilder and action hero actor, that he alone can rescue the state of California and resolve its complex problems. We can see that Arnold the Governator is the kangaroo holding in his powerful arms the helpless damsel in distress, who is California. In the midst of this chaotic and disturbing situation, we feel the presence of INI. The transcendent power of art, of INI or the INI movement, is represented in the form of antique biplanes – and is a mystery which we can only attempt to resolve as artists by creating INI art.

- **INI Digital collages** are composed with elements in ways to suggest a nonlinear narrative which emerges from the internal landscape. With her gift of imagination, the poet/artist can create a collage which is a place, or “**locus**” where profound transformations occur. It is “**there, on the invisible breath of horizon**” where the observer of the image (or reader of the poem) can go to, a kind of resting place, where the observer/reader can experience profound transformations.
- **Imaginal Language with INI “glyphs”**. INISMO has allowed me to move into abstract form in a more powerful way. Recently, I am creating abstract paintings in the digital, watercolor or oil mediums, images with glyphs – gestures emerging from the “sky” or “ground” (foreground or background). These glyphs or gestures are abstract forms which suggest a new imaginal language that might be nature-based, or might be recreated from an ancient language. These images appear to us as if they emerge from the landscape of the “**kingdom of INI,**” – again a place created where profound transformations take place and where we hear “**... the sound of a voice, fast-fettered in our ancient memory...**”.

Artistic interventions in everyday life

“Artistic interventions in everyday life” occur whether spontaneous or planned, and are spawned intrapsychically or in response to the “Other”, the mysterious “Other”. These interventions can be interpreted as “attempts at intimacy”, the artist creating connection – a process I refer to as “one-ing,” similar to Heidegger’s concept of “in-dwelling”. I find it difficult to separate out art from everyday life – the activities of the artist from the activities in my various roles as a wife, a therapist, a gardener, a teacher, a sailor, or a cook – all are interwoven throughout the day. As I am writing this paper, a metaphor comes to me – the artist as a fisherfolk who weaves her own fishing nets, and who mends her nets every day by the shore, in anticipation of the momentous epiphanies which occur from moment to moment, to be “caught” by the perpetually vigilant artist, in a state of patient “supra-awareness” and transformed into art.

How does the artist intervene, literally, through her art in the day-to-day lives of others? During my student-artist period (1990-2000), I worked as a therapist developing therapeutic modalities using art and poetry. One example: I worked in the ghetto of Lynn with various groups of people whose psyches had been wounded – One group was my beloved women addicts, mostly African-American, who were heroin/cocaine addicts, incest survivors who had “picked up” their drug habits upon reaching puberty to numb their pain and had lived their entire adult lives on the street – whom I met some years later, washed up and broken into shards on some dark, forsaken inner-city shore.⁶ The notion of “**bearing witness**” to the “Other” as a poet/artist will be explored – this concept as it relates to the themes of “**one-ing**” mentioned earlier, and to “**artistic interventions in everyday life.**”⁷ In this process the so-called artistic “subject” of the painting/poem is rather, transformed into the artist’s “**love-object**”.

Infinitesimale

Special thought is given to the notion of “Infinitesimale”, and let me share with you my reflections on this idea. Keep in mind, that I am on a learning curve in regard to INI theory, and Bertozzi’s own theories will supercede my own notions. My ongoing inquiry asks how the notion of “Infinitesimale” relates to “the Kingdom of INI”, “the island” of INI” or “the universe of INI” as referenced and illustrated in my INI paintings and digital images. And further, I continue to explore how the imaginal landscape acts as a “place” or “**Locus**” on that “**invisible breath of horizon**” where we go to, by the grace of poetry, as either the artist/poet or the receiver/reader of the artwork – a place where profound transformations take place.

Marblehead, MA, USA

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M. Wellinger, *INI Recall - Portrait of the Governor*, INI digital collage, October, 2003.



M. Wellinger, *New Orleans, Lost*, INI digital collage, September, 2005.



M. Wellinger, *First Day of Summer*, June, 2005.

¹ I was commissioned to write this libretto by my colleagues, classical composer Jeffry Steele and dance choreographer Carl Thomsen, of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The production of six performances in 2001 was partially funded by grants from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts. A more recent performance by members of the New England Conservatory at Jordan Hall in Boston, MA occurred in December of 2004.

² Letter of February 7, 2001 to M. Wellinger from John Wilmerding, Sarofim Professor of American Art, Princeton University and former Director, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

³ In the *Listuguj* dialect of the *Micmac* tribe “*tmgwatignej*” (Pronunciation: dêmm-kwa-di-gê-nech).

⁴ A term used by Chellis Glendinning in her book, *My Name Is Chellis and I'm in Recovery from Western Civilization*, Shambhala Publications, London, 1994. She writes that aboriginal, nature-based people often routinely have these experiences.

⁵ Formerly on the faculty of Pratt Institute, New York, NY. He is retired from teaching, and lives in Maine. See Ronald Kullaway's website for images of his newest oil paintings: www.kullaway.com

⁶ My work with these women became a poem entitled “Iris, Messenger to the Gods,” a song of laments and blessings by Iris, daughter of Zeus, to the women of the halfway house. Like the earlier Iris who brought messages to men on the frontlines of the Trojan wars, she brings messages to the women, who are placed on the frontlines of our society's endless war against the human spirit.

⁷ See also, Martin Heidegger's *Poetry, Language and Thought*, wherein he talks about the poet's need for “in-dwelling”, for the need to walk in the Other's shoes, as opposed to “framing” where the artist's own agenda is projected onto the subject, causing great distortion. My manuscript *Black Joe's Pond*, is informed by the ideas expressed by Heidegger in this book.