

Between Heaven & Earth

The Painted Objects of Dennis Ríngering



CEDARHURST CENTER FOR THE ARTS
Mt. Vernon, Illinois October 23 - January 2, 2022

by Rusty Freeman, Director of Visual Arts

True aesthetic experiences begin beholding the object and the ensuing awareness of the harmonious rhythm of relationships, parts relating to the whole. The petroglyph inspired art of Dennis Ríngering invites such moments connecting us to a primordial past, a history where our ancestors were much more in touch with the spirit and magical realms of nature.

Petroglyphs are from the distant past, many created thousands of years ago. Petroglyphs are engraved into the stone; pictographs are painted or drawn on stone. These markings in and on stone reflect a time when humankind had a different relationship to nature. Nature provided all that was needed through the animals and plant life. Humans were grateful and acknowledged this gratitude by communicating through petroglyphs. Ancient petroglyphs mark sacred spaces between heaven and earth.

Their fragility, ephemerality, the fleeting moments of actually seeing petroglyphs drives the art-making of Dennis Ríngering. A deep, abiding interest over decades was nurtured by

ABOVE *Canyon*,
2021, mixed media
on wood, 24x18"

RIGHT *Red Dog*,
2020, mixed media
on wood, 11x14"



Ríngering's respect for the ancestors' spiritual resonance with the lands they inhabited and the animals and plant life they depended on for sustenance and for their communion with greater forces. We might desire to know these ancient peoples and how they regarded the land as spiritual and how they interacted with that spirituality through their art-making. Ríngering's art gives us that opportunity.

Ancient petroglyphs though fragile marked a space as sacred and could be returned to again and again. The marks were bestowed



by the makers with qualities and values we will never fully know. Their marks developed a presence infused with their values. Petroglyphs perhaps reflected their need to recognize a wondrous and giving world.

By carving their images on the sides of rock walls, ancestors were participating in their landscapes where every feature—stone walls, forests, plains, the plants and animals—were all sacred. With these images, they created relationships from themselves to the land, plant life, and animals.



ABOVE *The Die is Cast*, 2020, mixed media on wood, 18x24"

LEFT *Cougar*, 2020, mixed media on wood, 14x11"

By identifying in stone their representations of animals and plants, they created sacred sites mythologizing the animals and plants and land with magical powers. To mark their land with art was to sanctify the landscape. Through intuition, the ancestors sensed the presence of creation in the animals, plants, and land and thereby spiritual principles that informed their communities. Where they lived now had spiritual relevance.

These art works became myths—visual reminders—connecting the people to their



LEFT *Crane*, 2020, mixed media on wood, 24x18"

BELOW *Diversion*, 2021, mixed media on wood, 18x24"

sacred places. The “artists” who pecked these images into stone were what we would call today “mythologists.” Myths connect us to our sacred places. Art can form that connection.

The shared theme of world mythology reveals a palpable invisible plane supporting the visible one.

In a sense, Ringering is a latter-day mythologist, an artist reconnecting us to our very distant past.

For Ringering to create his images—inspired by ancient petroglyphs—is to provide us with visual reminders of who we came from, where we originated, what values we once shared.

These ancient images are today fading from memory, literally and psychologically, because as moderns we no longer believe what our “primitive” ancestors believed or practiced, but are also disappearing to due weather erosion, land development, vandalism, and simple neglect because we no longer have time or the inclination to pilgrimage to these sites.

Ringering’s art reminds us that we used to have direct and intimate connections and relationships with the animals, plants, and land.





Kismet, 2020, mixed media on wood, 12x12"

What human memories are lost as these fragile, decaying art works fade?

The Great Plains were sacred spaces for the hunter and the planter, both were transformed there. Sacred places are the center of transformation. The land becomes like a temple, a place for meditation. It may be impossible for us today to reimagine what it was like when the whole entire world was a sacred place with spiritual relevance.

Ringering preserves this ancient wisdom. The artist has not merely recreated an image, but has created an entirely new object, made for today's sensibilities. His art speaks to contemporary audiences celebrating and giving respect to our ancestors.

Dennis Ringering is Professor Emeritus of Southern Illinois University Edwardsville where he taught art for 31 years.

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RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, *The Power of Myth*, NY: Doubleday, 1988.

Sabra Moore, *Petroglyphs: Ancient Languages/ Sacred Art*, Santa Fe: Clear Light, 1998.

Geri Schrab and Robert Boszhardt, *Hidden Thunder: Rock Art of the Upper Midwest*, Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2016.

These works are for sale by the artist, please ask for contact info at front desk.

Cedarhurst Center for the Arts is an activity of the John R. and Eleanor R. Mitchell Foundation.

Support for this program has been provided, in part, by the Schweinfurth Foundation and the Illinois Arts Council Agency

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