



**Dreaming Art: A Written Conversation
with Deborah Weber**

Interview conducted by Terry Lee Getz

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a zine by Terry Lee Getz

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Vital Statistics

Born: July 2
Raised: Chicago, IL
Educ/Degree: Masters in clinical psychology
Media: Mailart, collage, assemblage, beadwork-
primarily off-loom techniques. I'm fascinated
with all paper arts and do lots of
experimenting. I have no formal art training
and am a low-tech kitchen sink technique
artist.

Were you creative as a child and what did you enjoy doing as a child? Did you rediscover creativity as an adult, or did you continue from childhood?

My fascination with paper seems to have started at a very young age. According to my mother, from age two forward all you needed to do was put a magazine in front of me and I'd contentedly spend hours ripping it into tiny shreds.

As a kid I loved cutting and pasting stuff – I was forever making up “catalogs” of things I had cut out of magazines. And a new box of crayons was heaven. While I did the typical crafty things kids do, I wasn't particularly creative.

It was my mother who was “arty.” Unlike other mothers I knew, mine was something of a cross between bohemian and Martha Stewart. The bohemian in her work kooky clothes and used bejeweled cigarette holders, fancied herself an undiscovered sculptress who had given up her dreams in order to have a family, and who hated to cook with such a passion that her repertoire of really awful meals is worthy of inclusion in the Guinness Book of World Records. She split that personality with one who cleaned with a dedication that Martha would approve of; and she made the most amazingly detailed things like 64-pointed paper star

ornaments done in tissue paper with the points rolled around toothpicks. She reigned as Queen of Precision and Perfectionism for many decades.

As a kid I aspired to none of these things. I was an inveterate bookworm and fully intended to become a detective. Mysteries, secrets, clues – that's what called to me. My interest in inner workings began early with my fascination with dreams. I may not have been doing any external creating, but I certainly was cranking out terrific theatre of mind.

Was there one defining moment when you acknowledged your creativity?

I tend to believe that people have huge resources of power and skills available to them, but we don't necessarily tap into them. I certainly was that way with my creativity for decades. I sort of danced around on the edge, but it took a good long while for me to start manifesting.

I'm not sure there was one defining moment that I took hold of my creativity. I rather think my foundation was built slowly and in small steps without much notice on my part. But then alas, one day there it was firmly in place. It was a matter of opening my mind to see it.

I don't think it's possible to do healing work with people and **not** end up transformed yourself. I know in my work as a therapist I was daily witness, not only to the endless capacity of people to survive, but how they can flourish and blossom with proper care. Sometimes I think of my creativity like that – a really tight bud that needed time and attention to blossom.

Truthfully I needed someone to encourage me. I needed to be in a position to let myself listen. We all need our own little cheering sections, and that's something we can work on doing for each other. I found my supporters in a core group of feminist friends and my partner, who to my unabashed delight thinks everything arty I do is wonderful.

And for me that nurturing gave me the courage to open my eyes. It was a huge revelation to see all the ways I **was** being creative in my life – my poetry, my dream journals with their sketches and stream-of-consciousness asides, my altars, my magic. Then, with a clarity that still surprises me, I understood I could live my life and express my creativity in any way I chose. And that the nagging sense of being off-balance and not quite knowing what it was, was from cutting myself off from this huge source of pleasure. Sometimes I simply have to laugh at myself – life’s important lessons don’t all get mastered early.

So now I make stuff. I share stuff. I play and have fun. But mostly I trust what I to be saying need will find expression in what I do. Just consider me like the tarot’s fool – headed off onto a journey.

What did you bring from your professional life to your creative life, and vice versa?

I think my professional life stocked me with an enormous stash of tools that are helpful to my creative work. I have immense curiosity and the desire to explore. I understand how important it is to find your voice and the power of expression. I’m fascinated with uncovering things, with making the hidden known. I love archetypal work, symbols, levels of meaning, layers.

I am also absolutely convinced that you can start the journey from any point – it’s all an endless spiral. This knowledge is very helpful creatively. It takes the pressure off – to find the perfect medium, the perfect piece, the perfect message, the perfect mission. And it’s ultimately very reassuring.

I think the lessons I can bring from my creative work to my profession are more subtle, but not less important. Just as it’s possible to create an internal environment that’s conducive to create from, it’s also important to create an external environment that’s more helpful and nurturing to work in. Despite momentary lapses of confidence, I respect what I do creatively. I call myself an artist. I’ve carved out space for a studio. My space is small. It’s filled with all manner of things that delight and inspired me. That’s what our lives should be like, no matter what we’re doing.

Another thing my creative work has encouraged in me, and allowed me to take into other parts of my life, is a sense of humor. I’m not all cerebral and serious – art is fun! I confess I absolutely love having discovered I have a sense of humor.

How, why and when did you discover and begin to participate in mail art?

I’ve probably been involved in mailart for about eight years. I think my discovering mailart was one of those serendipitous occurrences of synchronicity. Being a lover of zines from way back, I’d certainly heard mention of mailart, but hadn’t really seen any or knew anyone who played. One day while armed with the latest *Factsheet Five* (a now defunct compilation of reviews of zines) and a stash of cash to send off for those that looked appealing, I was interrupted by the postman. Into my hand he delivered my first ever piece of mailart, sent by a collage artist friend who I had no idea was also a mailartist. It was an add-to and pass-along kind of thing, so from that one piece I culled several names of other mailartists. I put the world out that I was a new player and began building my network. I was looking for some sort of creative outlet – my job as a therapist, while rewarding, was a source of stress and I felt I needed some acknowledgement of my artistic side to balance things. The mailart bug bit me hard!

How do YOU define mailart?

Ask a hundred mailartists and you’ll get a hundred different definitions of what mailart is. But for me the defining principle is art mailed out freely into the universe. That means it is truly given freely, without expectation of acknowledgement, and it is guilt-free. Mailart isn’t a “you send me something and then I’ll turn around and send you something comparable within a few days.” Kind of thing. It isn’t like a swap, and a cardinal rule for me is there is NEVER an exchange of money. There is often, although not necessarily, a political edge to mailart. And while I think I play around more with humor than overt political messages, I tend to think my philosophy embraces the very political tenet that art

belongs to the people. How our society defines and values art shouldn't be left up to rich gallery owners who over-display safe art made by white males. Art shouldn't be about exclusion and it shouldn't be focused on commercialism. I believe art is soul speak, and it should be valued as such, with decent compensation for all artists, not just a select few. But that's just me up on my soapbox, probably preaching to the choir. Of course, when I'm express of the world, things will change!

Some mailartists insist that mailart has to have direct contact with the mail system, preferably being marked by the system. So only postcards and objects mailed without envelopes or packaging fit their strict definition. While I send plenty of both, I'm not a purist on that issue. I figure even things in envelopes get handled by the system, and I've gotten plenty of envies with tire track and footprints on them to prove it.

Calls are another important aspect of mailart. Someone will put out a "call" for responses on a certain topic, and then send out documentation of responses received. At the very least the documentation is a list of everyone who played, but often it is a more elaborate sending, sometimes incorporating copies of some or all of the art sent.

What do you get out of mailart personally, in the making, sending and receiving?

Mailart appeals to me on all sorts of levels. I like being able to play at my own pace. That's the beauty of the guilt-free part. There is no deadline. Life interferes with our best intentions, our level of participation in art-related activities ebbs and flows. That's the natural course of things and mailart accommodates that. Sometimes I'm wildly active and other times less so. While it's true you have to send things out or eventually the flow of received things dries up, there's a lot of flexibility built in.

I like the anonymity factor, and that was particularly important to me when I first started playing. I think with some folks it was years before I revealed any personal details about myself. It makes me laugh to think I was earning a reputation as the "mysterious" Lunar Daughter. Certainly a good part of that was

shyness. But I think it was also very helpful in the beginning when I was first discovering and experimenting with my artistic voice, to be able to do so in a way sort of detached from real life identity. Not that the two can actually be separated, but I felt folks didn't have to clutter up their view of Lunar Daughter with facts about Deborah Weber. Revealing myself in bits is very appealing to me, in part I suppose, because I'm utterly fascinated by what you learn about people, without in fact needing to know any particulars about them or their lives. People fascinate me and puzzling them out has been one of life's joys for me. I suppose the need to control my sense of anonymity changed somewhat when I discovered computer mailart lists. Maintaining anonymity is hard on the computer I think – people frown on lurking. In any case, I'm much more comfortable these days in having folks "know" how I am. Still, it's amusing to send mailings out with coined names. So just pick a name, or several names, send stuff out and see what comes back.

I enjoy the egalitarian nature of mailart. I have no formal training in art, and I'm sure that's true of a good portion of the movement. On the other hand, there are also well-established artists who play. I find this very exciting. I've never, to my knowledge, been the victim of an elitist attitude, dismissing me as too insignificant to play with. This sense of connectedness is something I hold dear; there is something very vibrant about it all.

I shouldn't forget to mention that one of the most important joys of mailart is getting stuff in the mail! Every day I get something wonderful. The mailbox as a museum is a very apt analogy.

What sort of friendships have you developed over the years through mailart?

Developing relationships with folks is half the fun of mailart and if you're in it for the long haul, you certainly get to. I have a network of many hundreds of people, and through the years I've been blessed to become real friends with some very special folks. Some I've met in person, others cyberly, and the relationships extend beyond our mutual interest in mailart. Undoubtedly many folks I'll never know other than through the mailstream and in the limited context of a mailart connection. As you would expect the

mailart community is simply a microcosm of the universe, with plenty of divergent personalities.

One of the entertaining aspects of mailart for me is how receiving a piece of art can “hook” you. Often something gets sent that requires/inspires a specific response, and sometimes you get a sally going back and forth on a specific theme. One mailartist and I have sent each other things on the theme of hair for years. Another has a depository for street bits, and I’ve incorporated many ally finds into small pieces of art for her. I think of mailart as a laboratory, a sort of personal experimental form. I’m by nature very shy, but I find mailart is the perfect medium for risk-free exploration. It’s a delight to have a huge pool of people to play with.

You mentioned dream journaling earlier and I know you enjoy researching dream symbols and recording your dreams. How do you go about doing this, and what do these studies/activities bring to your art work? What made you start doing dreamwork?

Dreams have fascinated me for as long as I can remember. I’ve paid attention to them since I was a child – they have always struck me as too wild and wonderful not to. It was a surprise to me growing up that no one seemed as interested in their dreams as I was. That didn’t dampen my curiosity or enthusiasm though. Although I didn’t start keeping regular dream journals until my teens, I remember a number of vivid childhood dreams clearly even today. Once I experienced flying in dreams, and then later lucidity (becoming aware you are dreaming and using that awareness to manipulate the dream), there was no turning back. I am quite simply mesmerized.

With my background in psychology, I have been formally trained in dreamwork, but my personal approach is fairly eclectic. While I’m very interested in symbols, I don’t particularly advocate the “decipher your dreams via a dictionary” approach.

Symbols DO tap archetypal imagery deep in the mind. There are also symbols taught by our particular cultures. Symbols can

clearly be intensely personal and subjective. I’m interested in them on all these levels.

I have no problem remembering my dreams and usually record them in the morning. I long ago taught myself to keep paper and pen on hand and to write in the dark. For a number of years now I’ve typed my dreams out. I find it makes them easier to work on.

Although I almost always record my dreams, I certainly don’t necessarily “work” with each. Sometimes just thinking about a dream while I’m recording it is enough. But dreams I’m working with get clipped into a journal so I can keep referring to them constantly. Then I use the journal pages for associations, amplifications, sketches – whatever it is I’m doing to work with that particular dream. Sometimes it’s just as interesting to me to look back and see how I’ve played around with a dream, as the dream itself.

Because dreams come from the unconscious, they share the same language of symbolism in art, myths and folklore. I guess I think of my dreamwork as inner work and my art as a journey to somehow express that voice. I feel the same sort of excitement when I’m creating something as when I work on my dreams. It’s as though I’m tapping into this resource deep inside. An inner secret language that needs to come out to be deciphered and interpreted.

Sometimes I think creating is like poking holes in myself and seeing what comes out. There’s always something interesting to discover. Why wouldn’t you want to try and figure it all out?

I know you are very fond of poetry and search it out in all kinds of places. Can you tell me about your love for poetry, your favorite subjects or poets, how you write it yourself and anything else you want to say about it?

I carve out a lot of space in my life for poetry. I start every morning reading some on-line and most evenings I end up soaking in a tub with a book of poetry, reading until I’m wrinkled and the water has long gone cold. Living in a large metropolitan area also means there are plenty of opportunities to attend readings, which

is great. Immersing myself in poetry is one of the most important ways I care for and feel my soul.

I find poetry quite exciting. It appeals to my sense of modern day alchemy. Poetry is quite simply magic. How else can you explain taking ordinary language and transforming it into irreducible art?!

I'm always intrigued by the simple/complex dichotomy. What at first appears simple turns out to be complex and the complex is often layers of simple things. I think lots of folks are turned off from poetry because what they've been exposed to seems unreasonably obscure or adolescently sappy. That's too bad. Reading poetry is like being visited by words. You can never quite predict how it will unfold. And good poetry engages you on several levels, so there's always something to grab hold of.

I often incorporate poetry I like into my mailings. In fact I make it a point to do so with every solstice and equinox sending. It's become a ritual way of marking the seasons, and it's always fun to turn friends on to a poem that they may not know.

I'd be really hard pressed to say who my favorite poets are. My moods and opinions are in constant flux and there are always new discoveries to be made. But to give you a sense of my interests I might name off the top of my head, Kim Addonizio, Mary Oliver, Lucille Clifton, Rita Dove. Contemporary women poets appeal to me the most. For a number of years I didn't read much of anything – poetry or otherwise written by men. And I still feel a very strong sense that we have a particular obligation to support our sister artists. However, I've lifted my personal moratorium and think there's an awful lot of good poetry out there I enjoy, regardless of the poet's gender.

I'm also enamored of prose poetry. Probably because I can relate my own style of writing and thinking – almost pure stream of consciousness. I adore the work of Morton Marcus.

A couple of years ago I made a decision that I wanted to do more than occasionally dabble in writing poetry, and so now I work on it consistently. I tend to think of lots of things in my life as exercises in creativity. As a way to try to be in this world – open and

expressive. I don't want to be cut off from my inner workings or my conscious connection to the world, and I suppose art, poetry and dreamwork are the ways I try to both express this and maintain a conduit.

I like writing poetry because it is such a clear personal metaphor of finding my own voice. And I consider writing poetry an excellent way to find out what you know.

I don't do "morning pages" per se, but do write a couple pages daily which amount to what I consider brain unloading. These pages prove excellent culling ground for snippets and ideas for poems – all those little treasures amid piles of dross.

I basically keep my writing organized in three categories. The ideas notebook has the kernels – observations/thoughts/phrases/topics that I want to turn into poems. Then there is poetry in progress. These are works in various states. And finally, there is the "nearly finished" pile. These are poems needing some level of polishing/editing, but feel pretty close to finished.

While I try to work on my poetry regularly, I don't try to force myself to work in any particular category. Sometimes it's weeks before I feel like polishing/editing – other times that's exactly what appeals to me.

I'm clearly the kind of person who likes options. I always have dozens of projects in various states of completion, and I like being able to move among them. Admittedly it's not a tidy way of working or being, but it is dynamic.

It's interesting to see how a thread of interest influences everything I'm thinking about/doing. Often I need some distance down the road to actually see clearly, but I suspect that's just how I am. Always looking for connections – gathering loose threads into the current fabric of my life.