

# Les Éditions Lucie Lambert:

## *livres d'artiste* and The Wisdom of the Imagination

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"My books are my life . . ." Lucie Lambert, Publisher

It would be as inadequate to talk of books simply as sets of bound pages as it would be insufficient to discuss the *livres d'artiste* of Les Éditions Lucie Lambert in purely technical terms.<sup>1</sup> Discerning Lucie's books as accomplished works of art requires that we contemplate the heart and soul of the artist.

### LIVRES D'ARTISTE

Witnessing the hushed ritual of Lucie showing one of her books is a joyful occasion: a flat surface is carefully cleared and a clean cloth is softly draped; a precious book is slowly unwrapped to reveal the luxury of its outer casing; the casing is released, the book is embraced, the lush binding is caressed. In melodic narration, Lucie elucidates each element of her *livres d'artiste* as she gently frees the book from its cover and unfolds its pages; practiced hands smooth the textured paper, fingertips trace imprints of image and poem: text is recited, topic is illuminated, and technique is explained.

A title is set in a French font and imprinted in gold leaf on butter yellow Japanese bookbinding cloth; a symbolic insignia is inlaid in gold or ivory or boxwood; a silver medallion is seated in Belgian frog skin; a small bone latch is carved from Alaskan mastodon; a casing might be made of clear plexiglass or wrapped with black satin or leather. Obonai and Tairei papers are chosen for qualities of tone, texture, and absorption; etchings and calligraphies adorn pages folded to hold their histories and mysteries within; the book emulates the text and the text echoes the image.

The inquisitive viewer who admires the book is drawn into deep appreciation of the complex collaborative process involved in creating *livres d'artiste*—from conception to completion—among artist, writer, printer, binder, and publisher. In multiple harmonies of image and page, type and text, tint and texture, size and subject, cloth and casing, each book comes to light as a limited edition work of art. Such renditions of the *livre d'artiste* produced and published by Les Éditions Lucie Lambert originated in France and evolved in Quebec.

The traditional collaboration between writer and artist developed in *fin-de-siècle* Paris as a bibliophile's commercial collectible, orchestrated by a few Parisian publishers who combined original art, handmade



papers, and handset typefaces into luxurious hand-bound books.<sup>2</sup> These early *livres d'artiste* contained a simplistic “juxtaposition of original graphics and finely-arranged text,” usually resulting in a product representing considerably less than a creative collaboration between artist and writer.<sup>3</sup> It eventually evolved that celebrated writers sidestepped the publisher, however, to commission images from their own preferred visual artists whose work would at least serve to complement the poet’s text and the printer’s typography.<sup>4</sup>

Lucie takes a different approach, first producing a series of images and then inviting the poet to illuminate them through the text. She incorporates both the English emphasis on the text and the French emphasis on the image and, from this foundation, advances the tradition of the *livre d'artiste* through genuine collaboration at every ensuing step; indeed, she spends countless hours working closely with an international cast of collaborators on each new book: perhaps a French-Canadian poet, BC book and type designers, a Parisian typographer, an Asian cloth merchant, a Québécois printer and bookbinder, a European agent.

While a fine arts student at the University of Quebec, Lucie was influenced by her teachers who were producing *livres d'artiste*. Upon graduation she combined her talents as a trained graphic artist and multimedia printmaker in the collaborative production and publication of her first book, *Frayère*.<sup>5</sup> This experience launched Lucie into a succession of apprenticeships over the next 20 years that included printing and publishing, Haida carving and jewellery techniques, and Chinese and Arabic calligraphy, all of which she would bring to her *livres d'artiste*.

Lucie's books typically begin with the inspiration of images she creates through one of several printmaking techniques, such as etching, woodcutting, wood engraving, and silkscreening. She prefers to draw her initial images with ink and pen or brush in black and white and, as her strong hands hold an imaginary tool and dig into the air, Lucie describes the experiential power and pleasure of carving her images into wood:

It's not just drawing on the surface but engraving the surface, which for me is very good because I need the resistance of the material against the tool. The tool brings out my creative power. It's a tactile experience. It involves some kind of power because it also involves the type of tools. You sharpen your tools and prepare the work, and when you sharpen your tools you also sharpen your mind.

You get more concentrated and become more in touch with your inner world. With no particular book or theme in mind, Lucie might produce a set of images and then set them aside for several years. But idea and image eventually conjoin to suggest a book and initiate the long work of integrating artistic process and creative purpose. Integral to the book's conceptualization is Lucie's facility for entering into an 'unspoken' dialogue—between the artist's image and the writer's imagination—with a distinguished poet who consents to respond to her images, interpreting them through poetry without benefit of learning Lucie's own perceptions of her images. She has never turned away the poets' texts nor altered their translations.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE WISDOM OF THE IMAGINATION

Lucie's approach to, and perspective of, the relationship between her work and her life evokes *the wisdom of the imagination* as expressed in "the 'sacred art' of alchemy," a once-sophisticated philosophy that evolved over thousands of years and that, according to Carl Jung, "mirrored the complexities of the process of the creation of the self."<sup>7</sup>

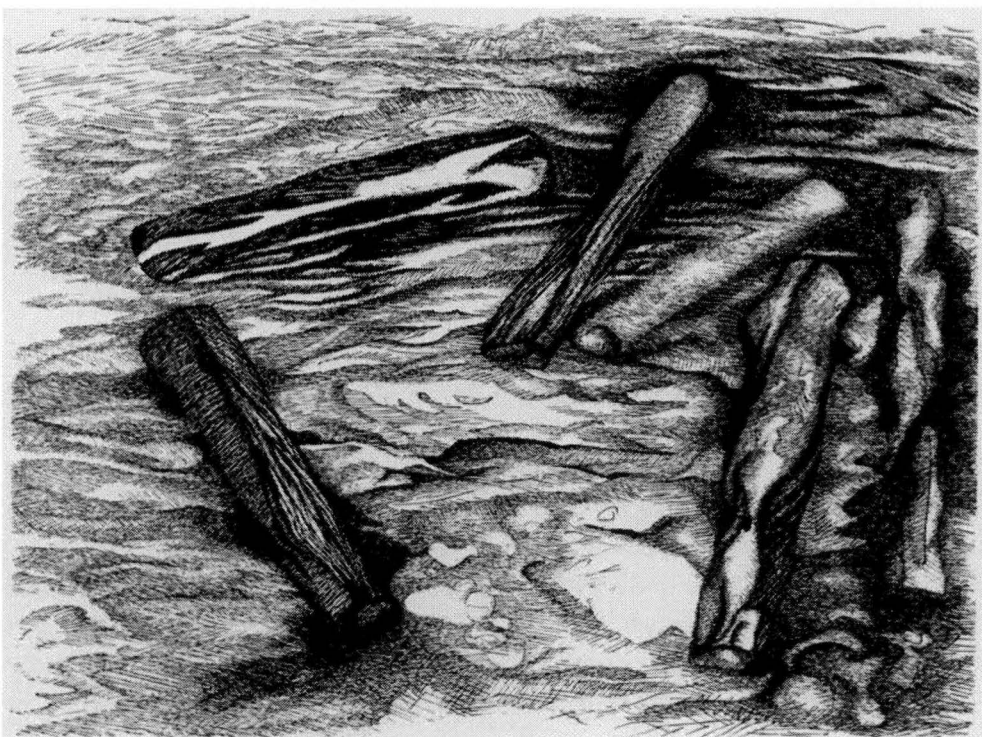
Ancient artisans and apprentices who practiced alchemy—involving the *ideal alignments* of entities, elements, and materials and interconnections of body, mind, and spirit—infused a blend of Egyptian technology and Greek philosophy into their elixirs of metals, textiles, and perfumes. The artisans synthesized process and purpose—*what we do* and *why we do it*—and came to comprehend that art and artist each transform the other. The sacred art of alchemy creatively linked subject

and object, and inner and outer worlds, neither confusing nor conflating these concepts.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the craftsman was technically *and* psychically engaged in the alchemical “art-act” of perception *as* intention,<sup>9</sup> involving both inanimate article and spiritual awareness; most certainly, “his own spirit was put into his work” in the intense unity of process and purpose.<sup>10</sup> During the artist’s practices and philosophies of right alignments the material mixtures were almost mystically transformed into another state and, through “the purpose and the oneness of process,” the artist was also transformed.<sup>11</sup>

#### A SYNTHESIS OF THE SELF

This interactive process of transformation is personally experienced as a sense of self-integration over time. The fragmented parts of self and/or of life re/unite in what Mead characterizes as “a subtle embodiment of the mind” and what Jung calls “a body that was at the same time spirit”: a synthesis of self acquired through the myriad re/actions of mixing and fixing raw materials.<sup>12</sup> Lucie similarly expresses this sensation and consciously connects her life—her self—with her work:



Logs © 2005 Lucie Lambert

It's such a satisfaction to see that there is no separation between myself and the world. It's all interconnected. It's like I'm breathing what I am, I'm reflecting who I am, and I am receiving a lot of synchronicity, which is a way to show that my life—the microcosmic and macrocosmic life—are all one. . . . It's like an undercurrent is there all the time, leading me. I don't see it but it's there, it leads me exactly where I'm meant to go. And I see that my life is not only becoming a reflection of me as an artist but as a human all around, as a spiritual being.

As Lucie and her work continue to grow she is becoming, not the agent of her art, but the mediator of her spirit, avowing that "I am the servant of the artist in me; I am less the artist than the one who serves the artist." In Lucie's hands a book is more than a book: art and artist embody process and purpose and invoke spiritual, synchronistic, and transformative experiences. In alchemical conditions the insightful artisan turns technique into gold and talent into art.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, a fundamental principle of alchemy is *union*: between self and spirit, between spirit and substance, between substance and self; these *interrelationships* are filled with a desire for harmony between, and transformation of, the elements in "a rhythmical dynamic of separation and fusion, with neither polarity dominating."<sup>14</sup> Thus, we see in Lucie's publications and in her collaborations with prominent poets and master bookbinders, for example, syntheses of elements and synergies of expertise, with no one component ruling; all unite and relate. Here we find the sacred art of alchemy and the wisdom of the imagination, inherent in Lucie's oeuvre of *livres d'artiste*:

Just as the images influence what the poet writes, so the length of the poet's lines determines the size of the pages. The binding is a wrapping, a skin, a meeting point between the content and the reader. The box hides the text and the images but it also announces them and reveals their spirit.

### THE SYNCHRONICITY OF EVENTS

An intense awareness of re/union informs Lucie's sensations of synchronicity, both in her work and in the world around her. In one of many such cases, she explains:

A strange coincidence occurred with the poet, Jean-Marc Fréchette, who I had contacted to work with a series of fruit images for *Terre d'or*.<sup>15</sup> And he said, "I don't work from images but I have poems about fruit. If you want to read those poems and they work for you, fine." So there was a synchronicity between this



poet, who had already written those poems, and me making those images 15 years ago, now coming together in a book.

Lucie constructs and encounters synchronicity as a mobilizing and meaningful force in her life and as the lens through which she perceives that “the book is already there somewhere”:

The genesis of the project often starts when I don’t know it. I remember, for instance, *Aléa*.<sup>16</sup> I wanted to make a connection between my practice of calligraphy and my printmaking. So I had ten copper plates and . . . I was exploring to see what I could do. . . . But then when I finished I realized that a book was there. Oh, what a surprise! I sometimes say that the books were done in spite of me. I don’t get up in the morning and decide to make a book. The book is already there somewhere.

Everyday events are catalogued in Lucie’s library of connections, coincidences, and synchronicities, exemplifying the lively relationship between artist and art:

When I was in Paris I produced a book called *La naissance des nuages*.<sup>17</sup> This book is about rain and I didn’t know that I would come to live in Vancouver, where there is a lot of rain, the year following publication of that book! The other one is *A Thousand Hooded Eyes*.<sup>18</sup> I worked at one point on a crocodile drawing and following publication of this book I went to Egypt where I could have seen



Wave © 2005 Lucie Lambert

crocodiles in the Nile! And this book *Terre d'or* is the most serene book I have ever produced. Well, serenity came into my life a year after the production of this book. And *Les Roses*.<sup>19</sup> I was working on those roses for the last two years and then I was invited to stay at this house where there is a garden of roses!

### LES ÉDITIONS LUCIE LAMBERT

The most recent publications of Les Éditions Lucie Lambert are *Les Roses* (2004), a serendipitous departure in process and production for Lucie, and *Au coeur du bois / In the Heart of the Wood* (2005), an advanced culmination of the collaborative and interpretive powers that epitomize her *livres d'artiste*. Having glimpsed the spirit of the artist in relation to her art, we can return to the art of the book.

### AIR & WATER: *LES ROSES*

In 1986 Lucie's friend Robert Stéhelin, a print and book collector living in Strasbourg, gave her his original edition of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Les Roses*, published in 1927.<sup>20</sup> She had no notion at that time that one day she would produce a new edition of this book and that she would be the illustrator:

But it came one day that this is what I had to do. I had this beautiful edition of 24 poems and I knew that it was manageable. I really got myself into roses and studied them as a discipline. . . . And it gave me the chance to work again with the first person I published a book with, Yvon Rivard. So the poet I worked with 25 years ago comes again. It's like a circle, you know, a cycle. He's not known as a poet today but as a novelist and he wrote an extraordinary Preface of 15 pages for this new book. So it seems that you have cards in your hands and you play with what you have. This book was given to me many years ago. I worked on these images for two years, put them aside, and then used them in this production.

Though Lucie's images intend to inspire the poems, this time the poems inspired the images. Printed on double-folded Japanese Tairei paper, her edition of *Les Roses* presents Rilke's poems in French with new English translations by the gifted poet D.G. Jones, Preface by Yvon Rivard, and original rose woodcuts hand-engraved by Lucie Lambert. In collaboration with her trusted colleagues—Robert Reid, book designer; Jim Rimmer, typesetter; Martin Dufour, letterpress printer; Pierre Ouvrard, master bookbinder—Lucie produced and published 33 regular copies, their casings cloaked in crimson-coloured Japanese bookbinding

cloth, and 24 deluxe copies, the boxes lined in rose-tinted taffetas and bound in found ends of goatskin suede already dyed in a multitude of hues that mirrored the splendour of a rose garden.

Just as rose petals bear the bruise and beauty of their existence, so do markings on the skin embody the life of the animal. Rilke likens the flesh of the rose to the soft flutter of an eyelid, to the satin surface of a breast, to the moist texture inside the mouth. Similarly, intuitively Lucie, "the life in the skin" is true to the nature of the animal: the fleshy suede underside of the pelt lies close to the animal and carries irregular etchings of bites, seeds, scrapes, and veins, now mapped by dye and design.

In Lucie's healing hands Rilke's *Les Roses* finds renewed life: as a sublime work of art showcasing a collection of classic poems; as a breathtaking field of wild roses saturated in shades of seashell and raspberry, lemon and peach, sky and cloud, stone and earth; and as an ode to the rose that remarks the flesh of the flower in the skin of the animal.

#### **FIRE & EARTH: *IN THE HEART OF THE WOOD***

Lucie's latest publication, *In the Heart of the Wood*, is rooted in a woodcut depicting a "loose interpretation of trees," which she had etched in mahogany many years ago. She retained a print of the original image but gave away the woodcut to a friend for firewood, thinking it had no further value! Eventually re-encountering the print, Lucie began to "cut small windows" out of the larger print and reframe them in a newly envisioned series of images:

All I had was the print, not the woodcut. It would have simplified my life so much if I had kept the wood! . . . I had to re-engrave all of those smaller pieces. I've had this same [piece of] wood for 30 years now and it is getting harder and harder because it's dryer and dryer. But I cut the wood the size of those new prints, the small ones.

Giving her energy and expertise to the new woodcuts, Lucie's latest book was born of the passion between fire and earth: "It has been through a process, it's like a Phoenix. It has lived, I could show you the print as it was years ago, and it has died in the way the wood got burned, and now it has been revived in pieces!" *In the Heart of the Wood*, Lucie asserts, was "born from the back and not from the front"; she likens it to a 'breach birth', the book being "born from the ashes" of the original woodcut and the design of the bookbinding preceding the text:





Tree © 2005 Lucie Lambert

editions are covered in a deep brown Japanese bookbinding cloth embellished with a textured strip of cedar-wood paper that bears the name of the book in French and English. The 11 deluxe editions are wrapped with dark bark-brown pigskin suede, each box featuring a leather latch secured by a sculpted steel tool forged by Lucie and the covers inlaid with thinly-lathed strips of either lace or apricot wood cut by local boat builder David Bradford.<sup>21</sup> Upon seeing the print of Lucie's original woodcut, he had introduced her to the grain of Australian lace wood because of its similarity to her etchings:

So I asked him, "Well, do you have lace wood?", because it's a rare wood. . . . And he sent me some samples. And when I came back he had a plank, a board of lace wood, and he said, "I have been keeping this piece of wood for 20 years and you are the one who deserves it." Oh, I could not believe it!

Printed on Japanese Obonai paper as silky as mother-of-pearl, each two-page spread features a window on the larger woodcut to accompany the French poems on the left and a smaller wood-grain vignette set in the margin to ground the page and accentuate the English poems on the right. The text, which is typeset in *Nicolas Cochon*, achieves a new dimension in the

interpretive process: first, Jacques Brault responded to Lucie's woodcut images with 11 French poèmes and the prominent poet E.D. Blodgett agreed to translate them; then, after reviewing the material, Blodgett

Normally I go to see my bookbinder when everything is more or less finished and we discuss the design when everything is there under our eyes. But in this case—because there is a film being made of Pierre Ouvrard as a master bookbinder and I was invited to participate, to represent his collaboration with publishers of the *livre d'artiste*—it was urgent to start with the bookbinding, to film him at work.

But if this book was 'born backwards' it was also a labour of love and a collaboration among polished professionals. The 25 standard



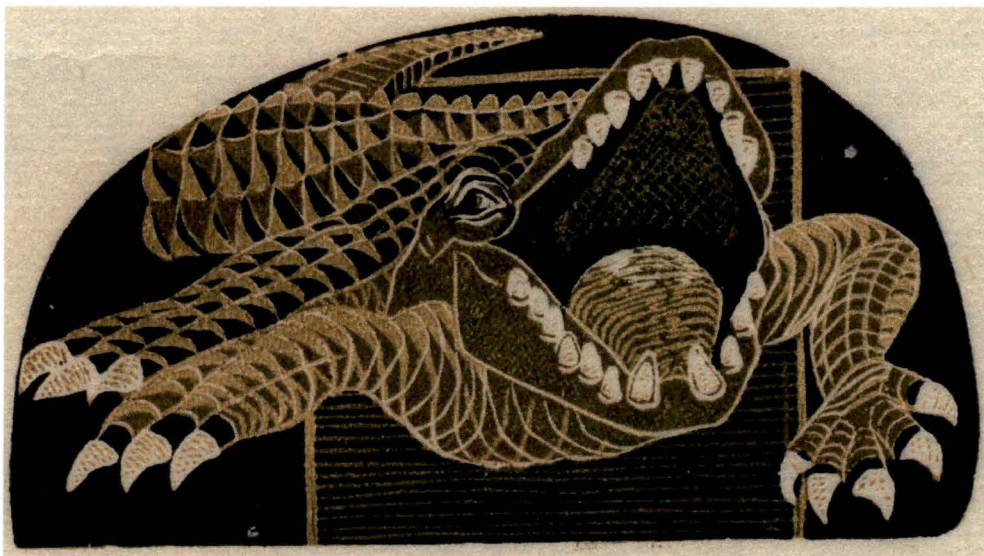
*Les Roses* covers © 2004 Lucie Lambert

offered not to translate but to interpret both Lucie's images and Brault's poèmes with a second set of poems, to which Lucie happily agreed. Consequently, the conceptual transition of each spread moves from initial image to poetic response to complex interpretation.

Glancing over Lucie's woodcut images, carved both in and of the grain and growth of the tree, I suddenly see zebras and leopards leaping in concentric circles among playful apparitions of stars and lightning, flames and flowers, leaves and roots, all reiterated in the heartwood, its core a fractal of the forest: the wood cut and carved from the tree and, in the first and last image, the whole tree revisioned in the heart of the wood. My eyes fall upon Blodgett's resonant lines of verse: *deep within the wood there is no distance*; and here are *the trees that would possess the stars and the dragon of the dark and the open heart*.<sup>22</sup>

With a nod to Lucie's sense of synchronicity, she could not have known of Blodgett's reverence for Rilke's work, nor that he would write for her of the Phoenix rising: *Phoenix in the ashes of itself, everything it was it is* . . .<sup>23</sup> Indeed, everything it was, it is, and more, in this the tenth *livre d'artiste* of Les Éditions Lucie Lambert.





Crocodile © 2005 Lucie Lambert

### FOREST FLOWERING MY FIRST BREATH . . .

The forest and the flower appear in Lucie's favourite poem, "the first poem of my first book,"<sup>24</sup> *Frayère* / Spawning Pool, which fittingly foretells her journey:

D'aussi loin que je vienne  
Forêt fleurissant mon premier souffle  
Où que j'aïlle  
Écorce soumise à l'usure de l'eau  
Je ne me connais d'autre mémoire  
Que le flanc arrondi des montagnes Ici  
Nul séjour nulle mort  
Qu'aucune rive ne saurait achever.

Far as I may have come  
Forest flowering my first breath  
Wherever I may go  
Tree-bark broken and waterworn  
I hold no other memory  
than of the mountains' rounded flanks  
Here neither sojourn nor death  
That some shore might not finish.

*Far as I may have come*, from *Frayère*, the spawning pool, *forest flowering my first breath*, toward a distant field of roses, *wherever I may go*, into the heart of the wood, *tree-bark broken and waterworn*. Lucie's love of ideas and images, the ceremonial presentation of her materials, and the wisdom of her imagination find full expression in *livres d'artiste*. If alchemy involves the transformation, and synchronicity the synthesis, of one's inner and outer worlds, these phenomena are everywhere evident in Lucie Lambert's work and worldview: "I live my life as an artist; it's a whole life . . .,"



Dragon © 2005 Lucie Lambert

### **I HOLD NO OTHER MEMORY . . .**

It's like I am the mother of these children that are my whole world that I have come to create over 30 years. I coordinate, I try to harmonize with people I want to work with . . . I collaborate, I embellish. All that I know today is there to serve the books. They become more and more sophisticated because I have more awareness of what I can do and of what can be done. Each book has its own personality, it has a style, it has a subject; the technique often is different, the paper is different, the binding is different.

Each book is a whole world in itself.

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*Sheila Martineau has a PhD in Social & Educational Studies (UBC, 1999) and is currently conducting qualitative research with women artists in relation to their art. Previously a fabric artist, today she also tinkers with book layout and graphic design. Sheila can be contacted at [sheila@shaw.ca](mailto:sheila@shaw.ca).*

*Lucie Lambert invites readers to visit her website at [www.lucielambert.com](http://www.lucielambert.com) for an overview of her lifework and her philosophy. Also, see "About the Artist" in this issue of *Amphora* for the full list of publications of Les Éditions Lucie Lambert.*





## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> The recipient of several art grants and awards, Lucie Lambert has produced 10 books to date and has shown her work in solo and group exhibitions in Canada, England, and France. Her books are held in numerous private collections and are on display in over 50 public collections held by museums, universities, national libraries, and corporations. Details of Les Éditions Lucie Lambert are available at [www.lucielambert.com](http://www.lucielambert.com).

<sup>2</sup> Véronique Plesch, "From Image to Word: The Books of Lucie Lambert" (Unpublished Paper, presented at Sixth International Conference on Word & Image Studies, Hamburg, Germany, July 2002): p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Plesch, *ibid.*, p. 2. Plesch cites Riva Castleman in *A Century of Artists Books* (NY: Museum of Modern Art, 1994): pp. 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> Plesch, *ibid.*, p. 3. Plesch cites an early example of the image making the text visible in Pierre Lecuire's celebrated *livres de poète* titled *Cortège*, published in 1959 with poems by Lecuire and collages by André Lansky.

<sup>5</sup> English Translation: *Spawning Pool* (1976).

<sup>6</sup> The text is typically written in French or English by one poet and translated by another.

<sup>7</sup> Nathan Schwartz-Salant, "Introduction" in *Encountering Jung: Jung on Alchemy* (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995: pp. 1-43): pp. 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Founded in ancient Greek and Stoic thought, alchemy eventually devolved into occult practices (e.g., séances, tarot cards, ouiji boards, and horoscopes) and was ultimately subverted by empirical science. The rich philosophy of alchemy continued to attract great minds, however, including Sir Isaac Newton, Roger Bacon, and Carl Jung. See Schwartz-Salant, *ibid.*



In contrast, such literary notables as George Bernard Shaw and William Butler Yeats were taken in by the occult and joined the secret society of the “Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn” in the hope that auspicious celestial alignments would magically transform their spiritual natures and creative powers. See Mary K Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (VT: Park Street Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989): pp. 17-8

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz-Salant, op. cit., pp. 11-12. Note: In discussing the art of alchemy I have retained the masculine pronouns common to the historical era.

<sup>11</sup> Schwartz-Salant, *ibid.*, p. 11. One of Schwartz-Salant’s examples is an ancient craftsman attempting to affix dye to a piece of cloth and confronting factors of absorption, resistance, retention, and so on; the craftsman’s “state of mind” was inherent in, integral to, and transformed by, the overall outcome.

<sup>12</sup> Schwartz-Salant, op. cit., p. 16. Citing G.R.S. Mead in *The Subtle Body* (London: Stuart & Watkins, 1919): pp. 1, 14; C.G. Jung in *Symbols of Transformation (Collected Works)* Vol. 5 (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953): para. 511; Arthur E. Waite, Ed. in *The Hermetic Museum* Vol. 2 (London: Robinson & Watkins, 1973): pp. 167-8.

<sup>13</sup> See Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (NY: Vintage Books, 1979), in which he illuminates, among other insights, talent as gift and gift as art.

<sup>14</sup> Schwartz-Salant, *ibid.*, pp. 8-9, 32.

<sup>15</sup> English translation: *Golden Earth* (2001).

<sup>16</sup> English translation: *Contingency* (1982).

<sup>17</sup> English translation: *The Birth of Clouds* (1985).

<sup>18</sup> (1991).

<sup>19</sup> English Translation: *The Roses* (2004).

<sup>20</sup> Published by Joh. Enschedé en Zonen (Haarlem: Halcyon Press); Preface by Paul Valéry.

<sup>21</sup> Alder Bay Boat Company, Granville Island, Vancouver BC.

<sup>22</sup> *In the Heart of the Wood* (2005).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Poem by Yvon Rivard; English translation of the poem by Judith Cowan.