

GATEWAYS TO THE UNIVERSE: MANDALAS BY SANDRA JORAN

By Rob Harle

Sandra has been creating her hand painted mandalas for over sixteen years. Each one is a one-off original, some on canvas, others on art paper using mixed media. She uses a large range of inks, paints, coloured pencils, metallic gold and silver paints, and gouache to create these highly detailed works. All works consist of geometric symmetry and usually contain symbols referring to esoteric, occult and spiritual matters. In Sandra's own words, "*To me mandalas are symbols of harmony and peace. They represent beauty in the world, stillness and calm. Their centre radiates out to a circumference and outer circle that has no beginning or end, a wholeness, a completeness.*"

Mandalas are sacred symbols that have existed on this earth for thousands of years in their many forms, they are mystical symbols of the universe. The enclosing circle of a mandala represents the Cosmos and the various square or rectangular forms within the circle represent the material world and earthbound existence. The mandala is especially prevalent in Buddhist, Hindu and Tibetan societies and to a lesser extent in Celtic, Islamic and Native North American Indian cultures. The Yantra is popular in India as a tool or aid for achieving enlightenment and is a form of mandala without the circle enclosing it. It is characterised by nine interlaced triangles, five pointing downward, four pointing upward representing feminine and masculine energies thus forming forty five triangular fragments around a central triangle.



Fig. 1 Celtic Cross Mandala

Her most recent works, which this short article concentrates on, are slightly less detailed than her previous works but still contain powerful symbolism and are painted on a unique black velvet art paper. Great care is required when working on this medium as the black texture is easily marked.

Carl Jung, a pioneer in psychotherapy, brought mandalas to the attention of modern Western society through his use of them in his healing practice. He wrote and experimented extensively with mandalas and their associated Eastern meaning, one of his most interesting books is *Mandala Symbolism*.

Mandalas are used for meditation, contemplation, artistic expression and healing on many levels. A mandala artist may create a unique work for a person incorporating specific symbols, colours and shapes to aid in healing, or an individual may create their own mandala.



Fig. 2 Golden Om Mandala

Sandra's background is in drafting and it is this early training and knowledge of these techniques, and of - the now superseded instruments used in drawing offices - ink pens, compasses, protractors, lining pens and drawing boards which enables her to create such exquisite detail and varied effects. She does not use computers nor graphic arts programs at all to produce her mandalas.

After having to abandon tapestry weaving because of RSI health problems she started reading about and researching mandalas, again in her own words: *"Mandalas are sacred symbols of the universe and after reading about them I felt a great affinity towards them. Their symbolism was extremely interesting to me and what they stood for. I unpacked all my beloved drafting equipment that I had stored away many years ago. And with much enthusiasm and delight started on my new art journey. That is over sixteen years ago now and I have painted 200 mandalas since that day!"*

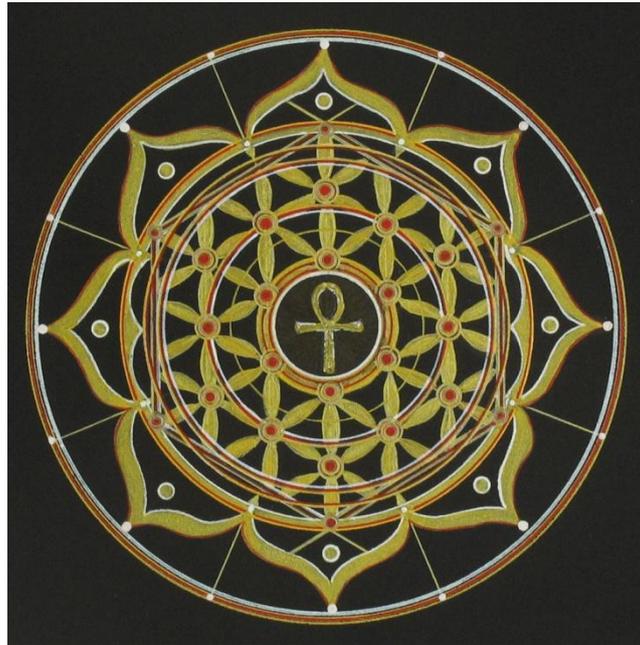


Fig. 3 Eternal Flower of Life Mandala

Below she shares her basic working process for interest sake and for educational purposes.

“I draw the mandala outline first in pencil on canvas or paper using my “ancient” hand drafting tools, measuring it all up correctly, getting everything symmetrical and the correct degrees. No computer is ever used or has anything to do with my mandalas, they only come from me. I then paint in the larger main colours and then proceed with my layers of colour and the intricate designs start to show up in front of my eyes, like magic! I start to paint these with metallic paints and inks in gold. I continue painting until I feel the work is complete, which can be a very, very long time and many hours work. But when I'm painting I'm not consciously aware of the time going by, as it becomes a meditative process and I'm lost in the mandala being created. Is this the journey to the centre? Namaste.”

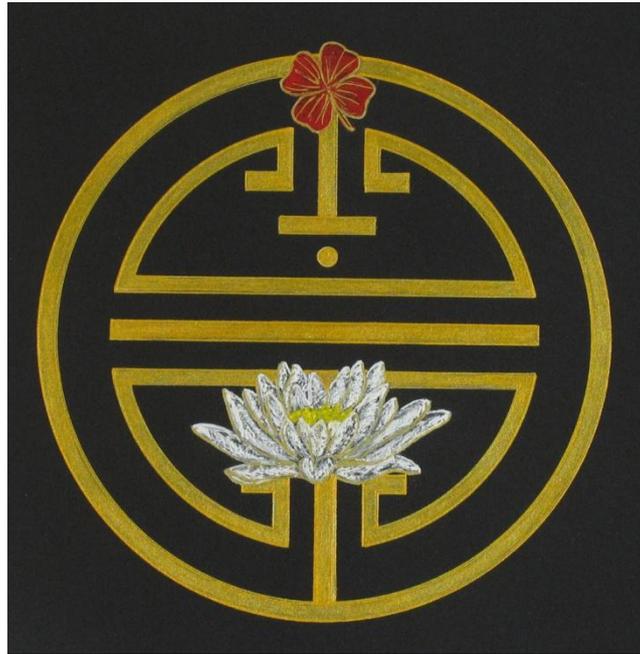


Fig. 4 Long Life Lotus Circle Mandala

The process of either, colouring an existing line mandala or starting the whole mandala from the beginning can have very powerful transformative effects. This may be immediate or may take place over time as the person compares earlier mandalas with later ones. Christian mandalas, typically in the form of Rose windows or bas relief stone friezes in churches and cathedrals, aid in sacred worship by allowing the individual to focus prayer or thoughts from the outer circle - the universe in its totality, to the indivisible Bindu or centre of all things. Whilst the circle is a fundamental attribute of mandalas, so too is the centre. Often the centre contains a powerful or universal symbol such as the Om or Yin-Yang symbol. In a personal mandala it may be the very symbol that holds the secret to the healing process. The Merkabah or Om symbols in the centre for example may have very important significance for the creator of the mandala or perhaps the person who finally lives with the mandala.

One level of Buddhist and Hindu practice involves meditating upon traditional mandalas chosen from within their vast sacred scriptures. The devotee in a sense, internalises the

principles of the mandala, which were specifically woven into it by enlightened monks. This has the effect of attuning the aspirant harmoniously to the vibrations of the universe. The creation of sand mandalas in the traditional Tibetan Buddhist way is quite an experience for both the monks and the observing participants. The observers become participants as the calm, meditative energy from the monks seems to transform the very room in which it is being created.



Fig. 5 Heart Centre Mandala

These sand mandalas are traditional in form and are known as Kalachakra sand mandalas. The various fine coloured sands are applied with incredible precision by the monks via a small metal funnel device called a chakpur. After the mandala is finished it is deconstructed according to an ancient ritual and the sands returned back to nature by, for example, pouring them into a flowing river or stream.

Sandra has been fortunate in being able to experience the creation of these sand mandalas in person as Tibetan monks often visit Nimbin and the Northern Rivers, Rainbow Region

are to spread the wonder of mandalas to all those that are interested. Mandalas can be very small, such as engraved on the surface of a ring or extremely large, such as the Yantra created by Bill Witherspoon in the Oregon desert in 1990 which covered forty acres. Generally though they are of the size suitable for viewing from a few metres away, so that they fulfil their purpose of a meditational or healing artwork, but they may contain complex esoteric symbols or be rather simple relying on coloured geometrical patterns to weave their magic.

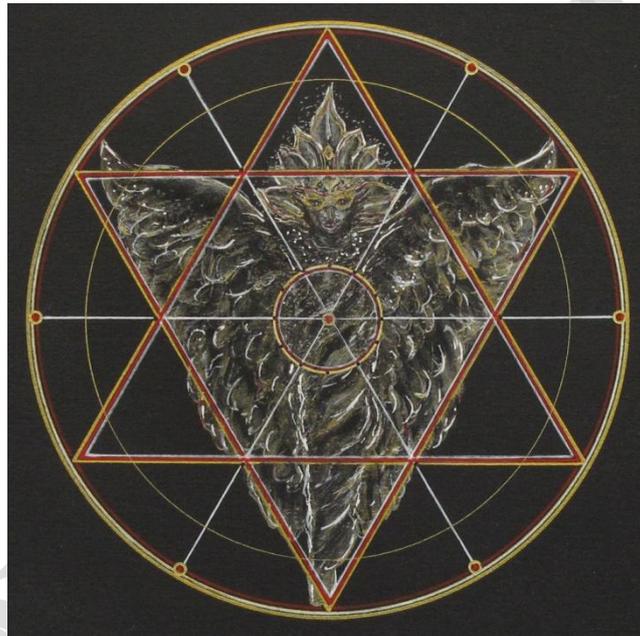


Fig. 6 Dweller On The Threshold Mandala

As mentioned Sandra started focusing totally on creating mandalas after repetitive strain injury became too painful to weave tapestries any longer. Both tapestry weaving and painting mandalas have the similarity of both being highly contemplative and meditative art processes. This peaceful, quiet process is vital to Sandra in her art practice and has been significant in her own journey. It is important to note she does not paint mandalas for any overt religious reasons – she paints mandalas to bring about an inner calm, to centre her mind, away from all

the clutter and chaos, and to transform her state into a harmonious peaceful order. She has created mandalas both for herself and specifically for others, incorporating their favourite colours, symbolism, numbers, talismans and important icons in their lives which makes for a totally unique artwork. Each mandala is a one-off work painted by hand, using mixed media on the highest quality art papers or canvas. She stresses she does not use computers at all in the creation of her mandalas and she does not produce prints of her works for sale. Part of the charm and popularity of her mandalas is the texture and inherent kinetic energy which comes from an individual applying paint to a surface. Even to a casual observer this surface quality is what gives Sandra's mandalas their power to transform. Her work is owned by people in various countries around the world, and is featured in numerous books and publications.

It is most encouraging, in this copy-and-paste, quick-fix, superficial commercial world to see that many individuals still appreciate a one-off unique work of art, and that there are numerous artists exclusively creating mandalas. The personal and collective transformative power of a mandala is quite extraordinary and defies adequate rational explanation.

We are all "dwellers on the threshold", whether we realise it or not, perhaps mandalas help us cross that threshold to a more enlightened way of being?

Bio:

Rob Harle is a writer, artist and academic reviewer. Writing work includes poetry, short fiction stories, academic essays and reviews of scholarly books and papers. His work is published in journals, anthologies, online reviews, books and he has two volumes of his own poetry published – *Scratches & Deeper Wounds* (1996) and *Mechanisms of Desire* (2012). Recent poetry has been published in *Rupkatha Journal* (Kolkata), *Nimbin Good Times* (Nimbin), *Beyond The Rainbow* (Nimbin), *Poetic Connections Anthology* (2013), *Indo-Australian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry* (2013) and *Rhyme With Reason Anthology* (2013), *Asian Signature* (2013), *Building Bridges Poetry Anthology* (2014). *Voices across The Ocean Poetry Anthology* (2014)

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His art practice currently involves digital-computer art both for the web and print. His giclée images have been exhibited widely. He is especially interested in promoting the inclusion of visual art in academic and scientific journals.

Formal studies include Comparative Religion, Philosophy, Architecture, Literature and Psychotherapy, his thesis concerned Freud's notion of the subconscious and its relationship with Surrealist poetry.

Rob's main concern is to explore and document the radical changes technology is bringing about. He has coined the term techno Metamorphosis to describe this.

He is currently a member of the: Leonardo Review Panel; Manuscript Reviewer for Leonardo Journal; Manuscript Reviewer for the Journal of Virtual World Research; Advising Editor for the Journal of Trans-technology Research; Advisory Editor for Phenomenal Literature (India); Member Editorial Board, Episteme Journal (Bharat College).

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