

MANDALA POWER: THE MANDALAS OF SANDRA JORAN

By Rob Harle

Sandra Joran, an artist from Nimbin, Australia specialises in hand painted contemporary mandalas. She started painting mandalas in 1999 after RSI in her shoulder prevented her from pursuing a career as a tapestry weaver. She completed a Commercial Art course, followed by a Diploma in Arts Tapestry - a six year course which covered all aspects of art tapestry creation. Even in her tapestry work a fondness of symmetrical, geometric patterns and layout was evident. Many of these tapestries were inspired by the art of the Navajo Indians of North America.

Originally trained as a draftsman her training with and love of using traditional drafting instruments and methods has stood her in good stead in the creation of her mandalas which exhibit high levels of exquisite detail.

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. There is probably no other set of triangles that interlock with such integrated perfection based on strict mathematical proportions. Figure 1 shows one of Sandra's large, 1m x 1.2m mixed media paintings- *Sri Yantra*. The following note will help understand the complexity of this image.

This Sri Yantra is a complex arrangement of mathematical and geometrical outer designs and inner triangles. The inner core consists of nine triangles made of twenty seven lines. Four triangles point up and five point down. The two outer triangles are constructed so that their points will touch the circle drawn from the centre of the diagram. There are eighteen three line crossing points that must cross exactly. Altering the geometry of any one triangle will throw the entire co-ordination off. The Yantra expresses the unity of the cosmos and the balance of the principles male and female. The colours used symbolize fire, air, earth and water. The Yantra has a presence that emanates from the central point, flows outwards, connects, and converges back to the centre: a metaphor for life. This concept is embodied by this Sri Yantra.

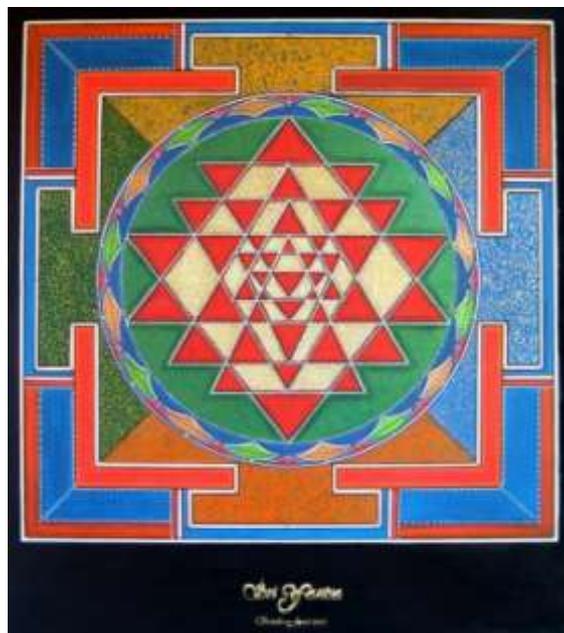


Fig. 1 Sri Yantra

Mandalas exist in nature, displaying incredible symmetrical patterns and order. Their exquisite beauty can be seen in such varied examples as the harmonic pattern formed in vibrating water and many of the biological species known as radiolarian, subatomic particles, meteorological and geological forms.

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. Figure 2 *Congruence* was created by Sandra for a person who wanted to use the mandala for meditation and requested some of the symbols important to them to be included in the final mandala design. It was commissioned by a man who wanted a bright and happy mandala to convey his love of life. The Yin Yang symbol in the centre represents balance and respectively the complementary polarity of dark and light found in all things. The eight I Ching trigrams were conceived as the basic polarity of all that happens in the Universe.



Fig. 2 Congruence 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.

Figure 3, *Journey* shows a mandala with the Merkabah and Om symbols in the centre, which was created for a person for whom the symbols had very important significance.



Fig. 3 Journey 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. These 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 chak-pur. 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 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. Figure 4, shows the mandala *Contentment* which contains such esoteric symbols and Figure 5, *Nurture*, is a mandala which relies more on coloured patterns.



Fig. 4 Contentment Mandala



Fig. 5 Nurture Mandala

As mentioned Joran 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 (almost two hundred to date), 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. Her book - *Mandalas: Symbols of Harmony and Peace* which contains almost ninety colour plates is unfortunately now out-of-print. This book has become a collectors' item and due to the high cost of colour printing probably will not be reprinted unless a large commercial publisher decides to do this. The purpose of creating this wonderful book was to share her mandalas with others - she gives a brief description of how or why each work was created, and has comprehensive source material and links to other mandala artists around the world. For further connections, galleries of Sandra's mandala and biography please have a look at her website: www.mandalasaustralia.com

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.

Bio:

Rob Harle is a writer, artist and academic reviewer, writing work includes poetry, short fiction stories, academic essays and reviews of scholarly books, journals and papers. His work is published in journals, anthologies, online reviews, books. He is currently a member of:

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