

Artistic Musings

Layman Pascal¹

Commentaries by Kathryn Winter²

I've watched "Layman" make art for years. He comes from a family where everyone just does that periodically and nobody defines themselves as an artist. It's normal. I admire that. He talks about art and shamanism in much the same terms. I think he wants to make pictures to see another world. A world that thinks like nature but isn't nature. He thinks his mind isn't real except where it combines conscious and unconscious. But that's not everything. He also makes art as a public complaint or as what he calls "whim fulfillment as a spiritual practice." I've seen him get angry at a boring portrait of Bill Murray and then make dozens of his own until it was out of his system. I've seen him rant against the use of canvases and declare that he will only make art on discarded cupboard doors. For like a year he refused to draw any line that he could predict. So he just made these tiny erratic squiggles. There's a lot of intellectual passion in what he does but he also refuses to frame things or sign them. I guess he thinks art should be discarded as you go like a snakeskin. I've stolen some of his work over the years just to protect it from him.

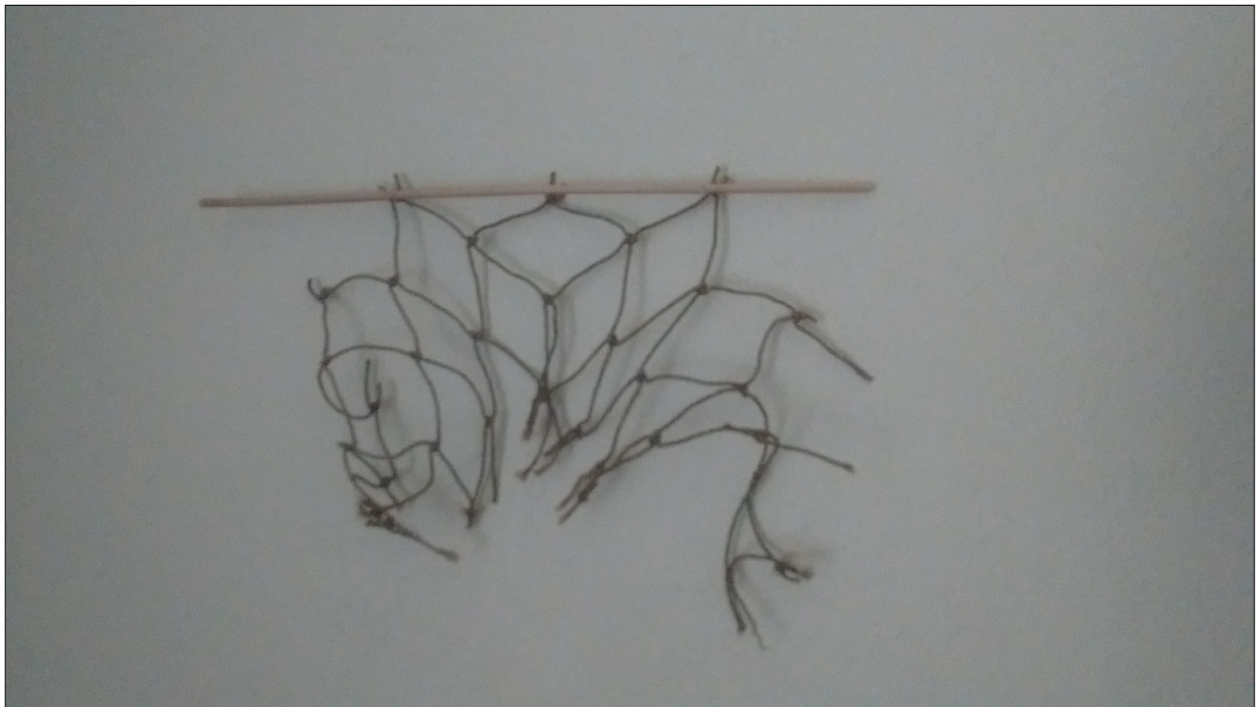
¹ **Layman Pascal** is a "white indian" whose family has lived for 5 generations among the remote islands of the Pacific Northwest. He also hates biographies & introductions so bear with him -- this is difficult! What we have done already is so much less interesting than what we have not yet done, but I digress -- He is (or has been) a meditation teacher, yoga instructor, public speaker, nondual theologian, lecturer on integral metatheory, shamanism advocate, author, artist, bad poet, co-chair of the Foundation for Integral Religion and Spirituality (FIRS), co-editor of the Integral Review Special Issue on Integral Postmetapysical Spirituality and strong contributor to IPMS forums, moderator of the Integral Life forum, and creator of such online oddities as: The Christmas Wiki, Pascal's Integral Batcave, the Integral Demonology Forum, the Integral Morality & Ethics Group, the Integral Gender Studies Forum and more. Currently he runs a Nepalese clothing store, cafe & sacred gift shop in Northern Ontario with his wonderful girlfriend while also practicing hypnotherapy and energy accupressure. Etc.
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THE TEMPLE OF THE COMING MAN is one of my favorite things Layman made. It was based on a vision he had from a gnarly root cluster he found on the beach. I think he made several versions using the bottoms of Ikea dresser drawers as a canvas. The speckly energy swirls in space are my favorite part but I think he sees a terrifying but organic mind emerging upon the Earth.



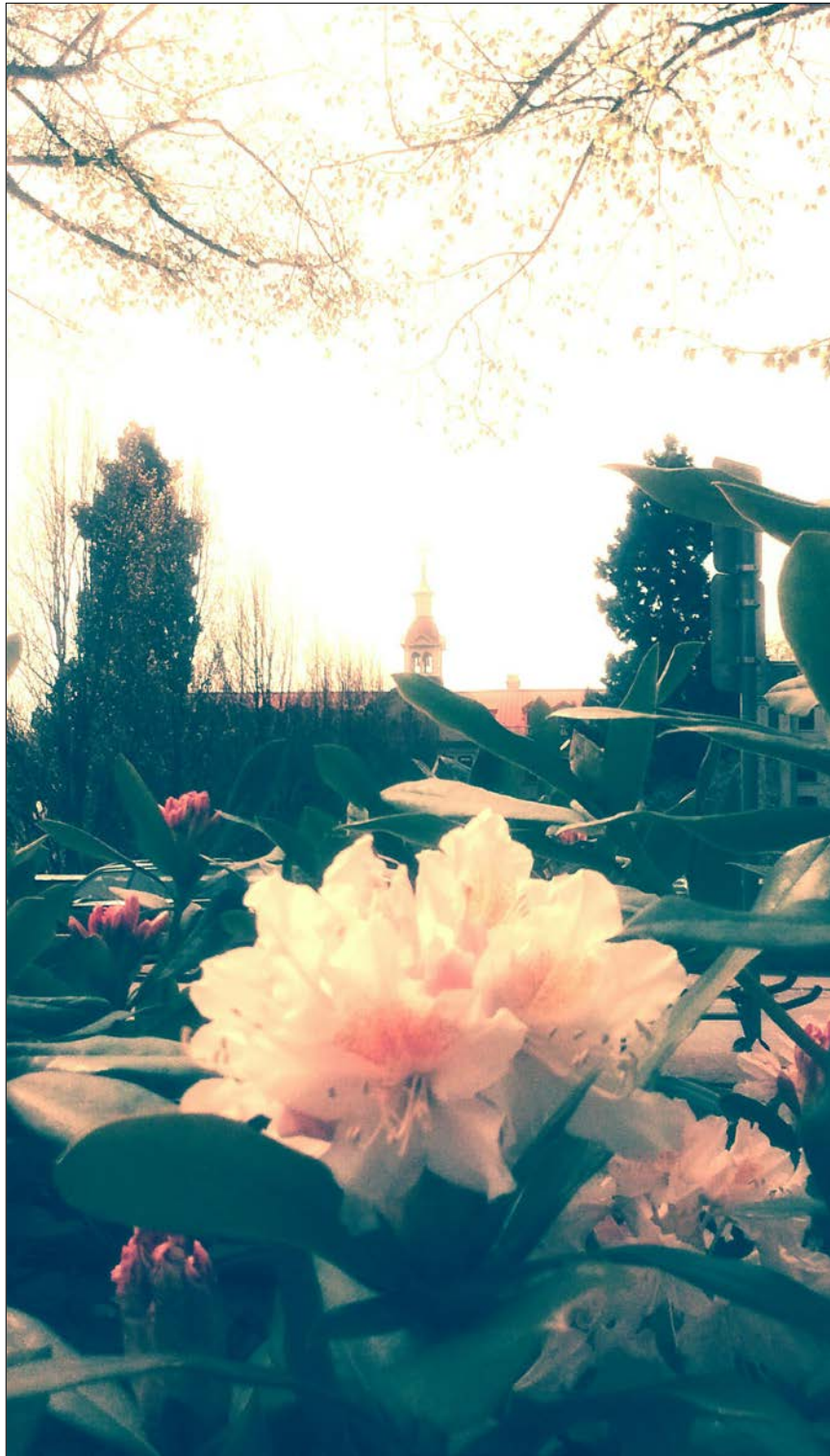
THE PATERNAL LATTICE used to hang on the wall of his apart. His family always used to cast I-Ching for people when they had dinners. His dad insisted they switch from coins to yarrow stalks. This is one of the few remaining stalks. Hanging from it is a patch of Seine fishing net recovered from the collapse cedar boathouse on the property where he grew up in the middle of nowhere. His father was a fisherman on a native fishboat. The old nets used to hang dusty in the boathouse. He told me about dreams in which he was floating and twisting in a world of those nets. I think it's the only piece of the family home he kept.



CTHULHU FOR PRESIDENT. These tentacled shells were actually hanging at my house but he was obsessed with them. He took a lot of photographs. Always of three. He liked the paper clip I used. I think it's more of the idea that art has to capture the point at which rational forms break down. That's what he likes about Lovecraft and Cthulhu. Cosmic complexity and unconscious order that you can almost grapple with. But not quite.



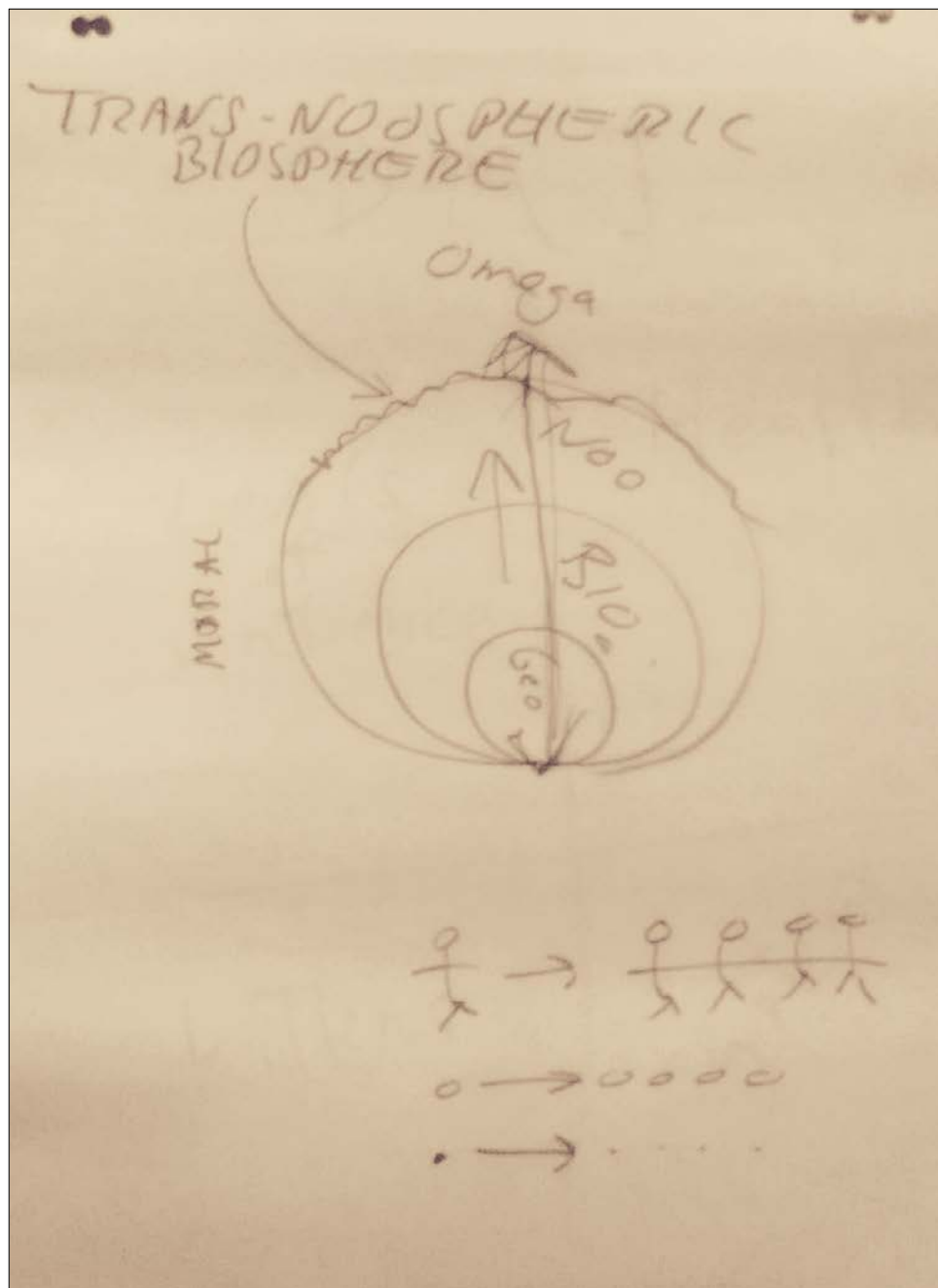
SPIRIT IS NOT AN ATTITUDE. This was two big cupboard panels. A diptych. He was doing a lot of fin de siecle poster art. Stripped down modernist style but with creepy spiritual messages. Layman always had a complicated relationship to positive emotional states. He lived in a Buddhist sangha for years where they practiced spiritual emotions like gratitude, love and contentment. He said it was undeniably good to have these “heart coherent intentional feelings” but they were insufficient. Too socialized. Too Hallmark. The force of chaos that becomes order in the eternal beginning is not necessarily nice or domestic or related to our ideas of kindness. And you don’t grow spiritually just be having the right inclusive attitude, I guess.



CHAPEL & FLOWER is kind of the world I think he lives in. Like he's secretly living in a himalayan monastery overlooking a lotus point in the 13th century. I don't think he thinks it's lovely. I think he thinks it's familiar.



I like OMINOUS. What the heck is that silver balloon? A UFO? Layman used to talk a lot about God being “cheerfully menacing.” And about “the dark bounce.” He find hints of apocalypse to be beautiful. Not full on holocausts but just the scent cosmic moodiness impinging on the human realm.



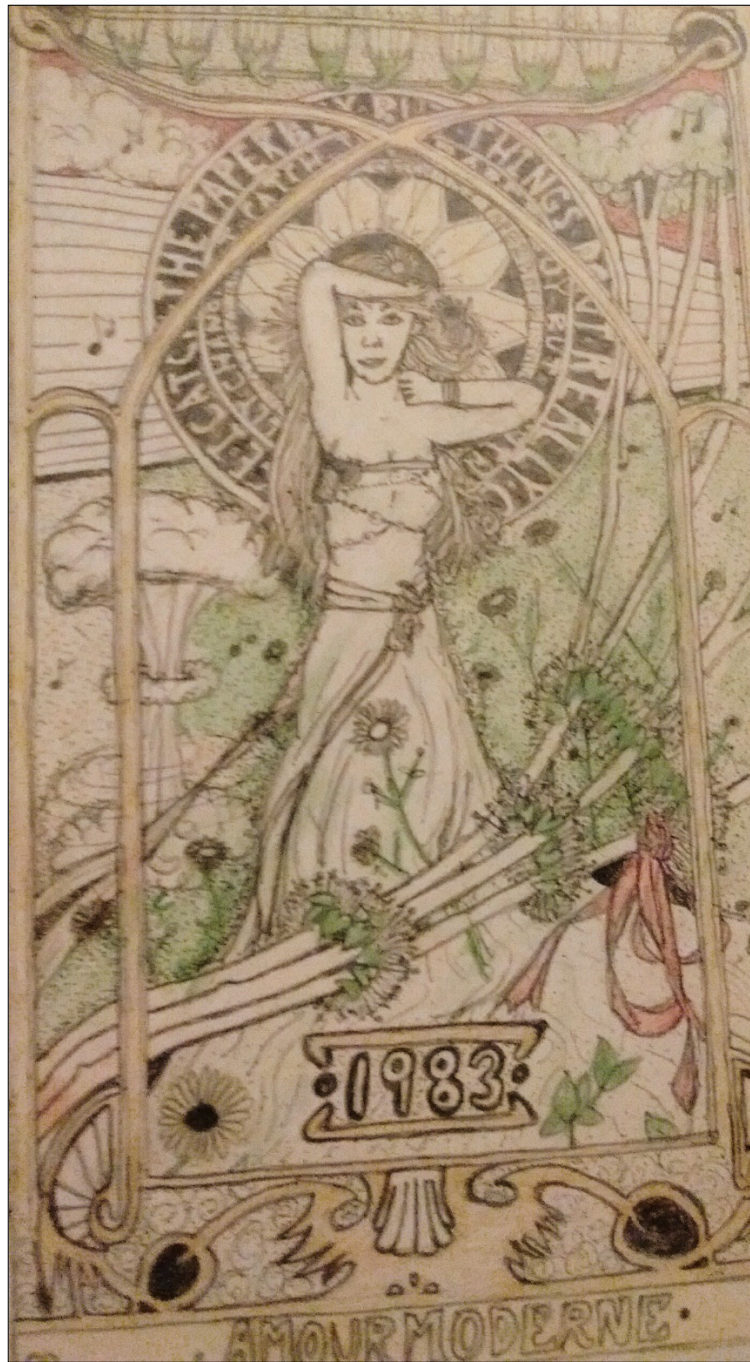
PLANETARY SHAMANISM is the only diagram he kept from all those talks he gave on *Integral Theory*, *Subtle Energy* and *New Shamanism*. He told me it shows how a personalized mythic experience of the natural exceeds the human just like the human exceeds the simple realm of nature. And that the biosphere isn't bigger than us. I find that argument hard to follow. But I love his diagrams. He destroys most of them but they exist in notebooks, scraps, slides, jpgs. I think he thinks mostly visually. Like a manic architect. And then tries to put those shapes into words. And then tries to put some kind of sly, uncertain persona on top of the ideas so that they don't like just like a person who believes in their own ideas. Something like that. I'd love to make a book of just his diagrams.



Layman loves Feng Shui. He always says, “That really Shui’s the Feng!” But he hates formalized systems of meaning. He thinks you should be able to invent Feng Shui by yourself on a desert island. Any encyclopedia of associations or meanings he hates. Dream Dictionaries drive him crazy. The interpretations aren’t anywhere near what he needs. But I remember his girlfriend at the time insisting on using the traditional Bagua hexagram for their apartment. She wanted him to put something in the TRAVEL & FRIENDLY PEOPLE corner. He tore up a giant mandala he was working on and did this on the back. I think his destinations and allies live in this cartoon twilight between the worlds. I like the giant orange beaver too. At least I think it’s a beaver.



BIOLUMINOSITY is really what it looks like in Layman's head. The naturalness of trees, the creepiness of hanging moss and the brilliant light that bleeds through everything.



MODERN LOVE is funny. It's was a huge image. You can't see in the photo that it was like six feet tall. He did it when David Bowie died. The song Modern Love from 1983 obsessed him. He couldn't get over the line, "I catch the paper boy... but things don't really change!" He would rant about why anyone would suppose that things would change if you caught the paperboy? And caught him how? He would spin these elaborate scenarios where David Bowie had a paperboy trapped in a suburban basement and just couldn't figure out why things still weren't changing. There's a kind of early 80s cold war apocalypse here but with surreal greenery. It used to always make me chuckle.



UNTITLED ALPHA is an example of the kind of abstract photography he did for years. Look closer into the world and you'll find mixed feelings, I guess. He loves a threshold at which things could go in a number of different directions.



ALICE & THE FISH is from what he called his “inhumanist phase.” I think it’s important to him to play with the edges of attention, focus and meaning. Often he would make these images that were like tarot cards after a car accident. And frequently he put odd questions on them that can be answered. They just hold you at the threshold of a trance or a foyer between realms. This is him outputting what he receives. He always wanted to make a version of whatever he appreciated. But the thing he appreciated the most was this cheerful, focus confusion where you can’t tell if things make sense or not. I think he thinks that a superior state of consciousness. Better than knowing.