

## Aves Altar, 2008

These cabinets began as a result of seeing a book about the Ghent Altar\* with its opening and closing panels, which presented different aspects of a story. I was fascinated by the interactive capability and the concept of looking inside a painting.

This Aves Altar represents an alchemical altar for the transformational process of the psyche or soul. Each stage of the transformational process is symbolized by a bird. The alchemical reference for this series is based upon readings I've encountered that describe the five phases of a physical or spiritual transformation. These birds are found in the mythology of many cultures and religions throughout time, illustrating the continual desire of humans to learn from nature in an attempt to explain our own existence. Birds resonate with me; they share the most basic natural human conditions and experiences; the need for food and shelter, survival and care for the family. They can also be interpreted to have much deeper meanings in a poetic sense.

Here is a very basic description of each phase of "The Work", which is what the transformational process is called in Alchemy. As the viewer, please feel free to bring your own interpretation to each of these.

The Nigredo (Crow) phase is the dark place where our shadows lay. Facing these dark times during life is a valuable and necessary stage for personal and spiritual development. There are times when one must delve deep into the psyche, to confront one's own Shadow. It is a very difficult time. Not necessarily bad, but important to acknowledge.

The Albedo (Swan) is sometimes described as Illumination. It represents a glimpse of something beyond physicality. The second there is awareness of the potential, it disappears. The Swan signifies this stage of transformation because it is white and floats on the surface of the water, above the deep subconscious. The swan being on the surface reminds us that this type of enlightenment is superficial; it is a glimpse of what is, but just one phase and we must dive deeper to continue to work on ever expanding awareness. Venus or Aphrodite is represented here as an ancient symbol of love, which is one of the sensations where we may experience a sense of enlightenment.

Epiphany (Peacock) represents an all-seeing phase, which is very hard to achieve. It is like an out of body sensation where there is an inner realization of being a part of everything, seeing the colors of the universe all around.

Sacrifice, (Pelican) is the symbol for selflessness. The mother bird was originally thought to be feeding its chicks blood from her own breast, and became a very ancient symbol for sacrifice. This is a relevant stage for any changes to occur, as one must let go in order to grow and change. Feed and care for that which is new so that it may blossom and grow.

Rebirth (Phoenix ). The Phoenix builds a nest which is also its funeral pyre. Setting it on fire by fanning its wings, it cremates itself only to arise anew from the ashes, transformed. Here is the ultimate archetype of a spiritual transformation.

Kim Saul  
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*\*The Ghent Altar is a large multi paneled altar, which is regarded as the most monumental example of medieval altar painting of the Middle Ages. It depicts in beautiful sequential panels the story of Salvation from the Fall of Man to the Redemption. The panels were begun about 1420 by Hubert van Eyck and completed by his brother Jan in 1431/32.*

*Aves - The Latin word for "bird" and also the name of the class of animals that consists exclusively of birds.*