

With this spiritual elevation comes the release of self, the unburdening. Assured vitality of belief emerges into the individual creativity displayed by the ALCHEMICAL ANCESTRESS. Backed by the communal power and wisdom of our foremothers, she presents herself, self-contained, listening to her heart, inviting comment from the world outside.

I portray the Oracle Women adorned with the superstitions and customs that are part of our past. The Hamsa, the ojo, the evil eye, the protective power of blue, the Greek and Turkish Nazarlik: do they have a place in the modern world? It is part of our identity, an ancient defense mechanism, a token of patterns repeated by Sephardim that remains far beyond the reach of memory.

The ADORNED ONE might flaunt her individualism and creativity, but her garb, superstitious pendants, beads and jewelry not only celebrates the wealth of her intelligence, it places her firmly within the social structure of her culture.

Various extracting the powers of each Oracle Woman, I unveil my PATH TOWARDS TIKKUN . Unlike the LABYRINTH where once discovered, the route into the soul will never be forgotten, the Path Towards Tikkun, due to its inherent nature will never end. It is a journey of loss and understanding, of pain and discovery, of bewildered frustration and celebratory joy.

Each generation holds within them the cellular memory of the past. Emerging from innocence, the future generation, THE DAUGHTER embarks on her unique role, using her individual ability to embrace and change her world. Hopefully, diluted by the efforts of my shadow work, I pass on my cellular memory to Monique Levy, my daughter.

Instinctively existing within the sefirah of Tiferet, Monique draws strength from other branches of the Kabbalah's Etz Haim. Unto herself, Monique is the contemporary warrior spirit, Gevurah, who remains stalwart amidst constant change: in country, language, culture, bereavement, and family illness. Undaunted by what life throws at her, she plots the foundations of her future, finding a source of healing for both herself and others by becoming a health psychologist.

By presenting the ancestress archetypes before you, I present the souls and spirits that provide the inspiration to animate and enrich our lives as we draw from the light that radiates from our foremothers.

I like to think that by painting my Oracle Women - the protectors, nurturers, healers, and providers - portrayed within the context of my heritage, it keeps it alive and passes it on.

The home is one of the major support systems on which Jewish life is mastered. At home the spiritual life has been sustained through everything: inquisition, expulsion, nomadic episodes, ghettos, and genocide. Home is the sanctuary of ritual observances - life ceremonies, traditions, kashrut, entertainment, restoration, and nourishment - the harbor from which we venture out, beginning our individual and collective spiritual voyages towards healing and wholeness.

Through the security of home we heal the soul, Tikkun na Nefesh, and endeavor, through the collective conscious, to heal the world, Tikkun Olam. Home is the Oracle Women's refuge, that which they fight most fervently to protect.

I invite you into my home, and to take a piece of my journey with you.

ASE/SH is dedicated to preserving and supporting the rich cultural traditions, spirit and history of all Sephardic communities as an integral part of Jewish experience and heritage.



15 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10011
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AMERICAN SEPHARDI FEDERATION/ SEPHARDIC HOUSE presents

Paintings by Stella Cohen *Selections from Oracle Women*



Reception with the artist
July 24, 2008

Exhibit will continue
through
Summer 2008

Oracle Women

Throughout our lives there is the need to dig deep within our psyche and call upon certain dynamic characteristics, held within each of us, in order to cope with the trials and tribulations that life flings at us. These characteristics reside deep within our soul; to each they mean different things, archetypes, Tribal Mothers, the varying faces of God, Shechinah - to me they are my Oracle Women.

Separately compassionate, innocent, mystical, understanding, protective, intuitive, defensive, warm, conniving, wise, and mysterious, they are powerful internal forces emanating from the wisdom of our ancestors, from our intuitive defence mechanisms, but perhaps mostly from the facets of our shadow selves awakening. Seeking clarity, the Oracle Women guide us along the 22 pathways between the 10 Sephiroth of the Kabbalah's mystical Tree of Life. To acknowledge the Oracle Women, is to acknowledge yourself, your history, and your future: to bridge the gap between yourself and the Divine.

My Oracle Women have seen me through the traumas of pain, loss, and illness, the joys of motherhood; they have sought understanding of my heritage; embraced a 500 year old cycle of discrimination, rejection, and the subsequent renewal of my Sephardim ancestors; they have challenged my true spiritual soul to emerge, and set me on the course to Tikkun, through constant attempts at healing myself and the greater consciousness.

I present to you My Oracle Women, my personal visual exploration of spirituality and healing.

Each reflects a kinship with an aspect of my Sephardi heritage. Each is a direct result of a journey begun by the painful death of my sister Vera. Vera was just 21 when she was struck down by Scleroderma. Helplessly witnessing the tremendous suffering of someone who was such an integral part of my existence caused the shock awakening to my psyche, creating a crucial catalyst for my desire to paint. Reflecting the emancipation of the true self FREEDOM'S CHILD illustrates the onset of my painting, which released me from the shackles binding me to the existential questions arising from Vera's inexplicable death.

Both Vera's passing and my need to paint have set me on the road towards spiritual discovery and the healing of my past, my present, and myself. Like EVE, it forced me to reassess my perceived status in life, to face difficult choices; to face the consequences of my actions. It took away the bliss of innocence and replaced it with an uncertain course to follow.

Core to the process of my healing has been facing the traumas of my family's history. Ours is a history of the Sephardim, constantly uprooted, trying to pick up the threads of a vanished culture, expelled from Spain in 1492 and dispersed across the Mediterranean basin - and now spread from Istanbul to Bombay, Harare, Zimbabwe to New York and Houston.

Waiting constantly in the wings, the WARRIOR has helped me cope with a lifetime of motion and uncertainty. Moving from Zaire to Brussels to Zimbabwe required an inner force to take on the vicissitudes of life: separation, loss, resurrection, and discovery. The current destabilized situation in Zimbabwe - the very real threat that we might be forcibly evicted from our home - has brought the Warrior, embodying the spirit of Gevurah, to the fore again.

I am very interested in the power of healing. Recently attuned as a 2nd Degree Reiki healer, it is my journey. I have emerged the wounded healer through my helplessness and the emotional loss of my sister; the continual fear of illness in those I love; the physical pain of my Fibromyalgia; and the psychological self-healing that is part of the process of enticing the shadow self into the open.

Here emerge the Healers - the Oracle Women dedicated to the power of harmony, users of ancient knowledge, wisdom, mystery, goodness, and compassion. They tap into our oneness, our interconnectedness, they free those around them from their physical and mental constrictions.

THE HEALER's powerful ability to restore health recalls a deeply traditional art, immersed within every contemporary woman. Only able to function when she has found inner security, the Healer gives us the courage to search for our inner wisdom, the courage to achieve our own full potential.

THE INTUITIVE HEALER connects us to the mystical paradox; she reveals to us the vision of oneness, reconnects us to the membrane of light. She sees, she loves, she banishes the loneliness, and focuses on the healing energy that surrounds us always.

A force of my African home, THE TRIBAL ANCESTRESS, calls upon the memory and wisdom of the spirits of the ancestors. She heals our presence by linking us to the souls of their past.

Women have always been the bearers of tradition; their path experiential and mystical. The STORTELLER holds within her heart, and enriches us with, our heritage of wisdom. She imparts the stories of the past so they can be absorbed into, and be renewed by, the practices of the future.

To me, women now - more than ever before - play a pivotal role in enhancing the spiritual and traditional awareness in all aspects of our daily lives, by defining an attitude that permeates our communal being. We must re-appropriate the role of women, giving the life-cycle events greater emphasis; each event aimed at affirming and honouring the role of women in Sephardic culture.

Motherhood links us to all women around the globe. As we wander along the path of life, creating life completes us by passing on our spiritual and physical heritage - just as I did to my children, Monique and Claude. As the EARTH MOTHER, the nurturer, the provider, the caretaker, our maternal instincts flood to the fore.

Yet we should be cautious of what we unintentionally pass on. We must take that fearful step - as the mother in MOTHER TO CHILD realises she has to - in confronting our internal shadows; in transferring only the joys of her cellular memory, not the anguish. Young, hesitant, the Mother is at the beginning of her shadow work; a work that requires the painful, yet victorious, emergence of the MYSTERIOUS SELF.

The individual quest of each person to bring out their shadow is as unique as their fingerprints, but it is a characteristic of all. For me this process has been vital. Intimacy with the neglected part of myself has brought me closer to understanding and contentment, banishing the loneliness within, and opening my healing channel to others.

It has brought me to the doorstep of the WISE WOMAN. Settled within her self, she has the confidence to counsel others, imparting the wisdom of years of experience and the knowledge of our foremothers. Cradling the scales of life, she creates balance between the body and the spirit. Having experienced earthly pleasures, she looks towards spiritual understanding.

The Divine connection is supported by the spirituality of the Kabbalah. Jewish mysticism, the blessing way, weaves the luminous thread of light, love, and godliness in our world. Our walk along the 22 paths between the ten Sephiroth - the powerful emanations of Etz Haim, the Tree of Life - sustains and nourishes us; it restores innocence and golden peace within our heart. Through understanding we heal and restore ourselves, piecing our fragmented soul towards wholeness, Tikkun na nefesh. Once our inner self is healed, we can direct this power towards healing the world, Tikkun Olam.

By tapping into the collective spirit of womanhood, cultural and traditional beliefs are transcended. Banishing the confusion without, THE MYSTIC objectively brings out the mystery within; she magically elevates our spirituality, raising us up towards a higher consciousness, where THE PROPHETESS resides. Displaying the ecstasy of her inner confidence and faith, she eloquently communicates, informs and educates those who seek a more complex, intuitive interpretation of life, self and the universe.