



*"Madonna in the Meadows" by Gerhard Reisch
1958 mineral pigment on paper (77 x 68 cm) NE 01*

The Healing Power of Art

An example in the Life Work
of Gerhard Reisch (1899-1975)

Art reveals the soul of mankind. The most ancient traces of our evolution which demonstrate the activity of our ancestors, are their works of art, formed from, engraved in and painted on the stone above and under the earth. We can still feel how, before human beings were even in a position to wish to transform earthly matter 'alchemically' (i.e. artistically, technically), how their primordial artistic activity welled up in their evolving consciousness, just as it did for example in the aboriginal 'Dreamtime'. Thus, by schooling a waking 'dream-consciousness' through conscious development of our imagination as a faculty, it is possible for us today to feel our way into our own artistic creativity and that of the world. In the middle, between the forming activity of thinking and the creative activity of the will, each individual feelingly shapes his own self - the greatest, most passionate, elevated, precious and healing work of art in our entire evolution ... the human 'I'.

Already as a 25 year old student at the Breslau Academy of Art Gerhard Reisch realised that he wanted to follow the path described by Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) in his work "Knowledge of Higher Worlds and How to Achieve it". On his fourth birthday, whilst looking out of the window onto a winter landscape, he said to himself "I am going to be an artist" ... and through suffering and endeavour he fulfilled this in his Life Work ... but in a very different way from the one most of us can or even want to imagine. Gerhard Reisch became an artist in the ether sphere of the earth. That path is still a very lonely one.

This he was only able to achieve by continually developing his being through the healing, artistic and creative shaping of his human 'I'. Gerhard Reisch has built a small bridge between the Earth and the Heavens, to be more precise between the physical and etheric realms of the Earth. This is the achievement of his artistic creation. It is comparable to the sacrificial deed of the serpent in the Fairy Tale "The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily" by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1782-1832).

Since the beginning of the second third of the twentieth century numerous people have confirmed the supportive, beneficial and guiding effect of meeting and engaging with his pictures and writings. Some may even sense a redemption by the Holy Spirit appropriate to this stage of human evolution. This is a process which becomes possible by going through the creative suffering of a death in the Being of the Son ... a true metamorphosis. This is a process which still receives nourishment in the womb of the ancient temple of the gods, in 'God's Studio'.

In every culture the arts have served not only the soul-spiritual shaping of human beings, but also their healing. Already at the beginning of the European epoch one needs only to think of one exemplary masterwork, "The Isenheim Altar" (Unterlinden Museum, Colmar, France) by Mathis Grünewald; before which people afflicted with the epidemic of ergot poisoning were laid, so that they could contemplate the sequence of tableaux. Why did this sometimes lead to recovery? Was it a matter of luck? Did it only happen to people who were karmically ready? How can a work of art facilitate healing or act as a catalyst?

Let us take as an example art of a completely different order, namely the occult 'picture book' called the "Tarot". Irrespective of whether one values it, shies away from it or disapproves of it, its phenomenology has been respected throughout too many centuries for us to deny its influence as a work of art. When we observe its history, from its origins in the Egyptian civilisation, and its worldwide transmission through certain tribes and occult streams as an instrument of esoteric schooling, soul-spiritual healing and destiny transformation, whilst undergoing manifold metamorphoses to become an instrument of everyday use in the New Age movement, we may ask ourselves: Why do such small, widely reproduced images have such an effect? How does this really work?

We can ask all these questions in relation to the pictures of Gerhard Reisch. We are concerned here with some 300 paintings covering a multitude of themes, which he preferred to call 'sketches' or 'trials', rather than 'works of art', which can serve the schooling of human beings. The artistic technique which he developed especially for this purpose looks rather like 'veil-painting' using water colour, but is a method more akin to pastel media on paper. He applied his own preparations using pieces of cloth, building up sealed layers. The paintings are imbued with a luminosity often associated with plant-based colour, yet he used only mineral pigments, to ensure the longevity of his pictures ... and they ARE luminous! Over and over again people are amazed how, after a few minutes on the easel, the pictures begin to change, to come to life, to reveal themselves. Why do these pictures have this effect on human beings?

In part it is because Gerhard Reisch cultivated an intimate relationship with elemental beings - of which he also made pictures. We are dealing here with created objects, into which the life and development of elemental beings has been intimately woven. But that is not all. One experiences how these images illuminate the human soul. Look at an image, shut your eyes, it lives on in your soul, you can work further with it creatively, as if you are 'modelling', without needing to stare at the picture. The images metamorphose spatially and temporally in the soul, depending on how one decides to work with them. How is it possible that an image, be it an original or a reproduction, can have this effect on us?

This body of work, abundant with motifs, sustains something within it, which has to do with the development of the human being. Its content is appropriate to the spiritual activity of human beings, challenging them to pursue their research, to ask further questions, to go on ... but where to, what for and why? Of course Gerhard Reisch tells us about his own developmental process through his paintings. Nevertheless one can be certain that his images are not just saying something about his own life. They are able to touch deeper layers of one's own biography and the biographical development of human beings in general: I am on a path. I meet signposts along the way. These speak to me. I understand them. They also speak to others. Each of us experiences something different, yet we can understand one another.

Together we can cultivate this language, which speaks to us about the constitution of the spiritual world - invisible supersensible realms - in their heights, but also in their widths and depths. This language is understood not only by human beings but also by angels, hierachical beings. Adversary beings experience this work, as do human spirits who have crossed the threshold of death and those who gather before the portal of birth ... the elemental beings as well, of course.

All these beings can become involved with this artistic activity ... but only when human beings are also connected to it. It is all about human beings. Put more exactly it is about the development of humanity, concerning which all of the beings just mentioned are intensely interested. The images function like doors and windows. Any person may open them and go through. These 'openings' are not locked, but they are crafted with spiritual scientific precision. In this case the artistic creation has been executed by a person who has demonstrated the highest spiritual integrity and capacity for self-sacrifice and devotion. The evidence is the Work itself: it leaves one free - indeed it requires the observer to approach it in freedom. This collection of images, the artistic creation of Gerhard Reisch, is not what everyone is seeking. Sometimes the windows and doors remain closed, no meetings take place, the person goes somewhere else. There are many sources, many 'openings'. However, if an individual decides to engage their own inner activity to open and use these windows and doors, and really does this in freedom, then he or she receives the help which is necessary according to individual need.

Purification, healing and transformation can occur because people take their fortune into their own hands, and because they are willing to creatively and consciously develop the karmic constitution of their destiny. This is the path of the development of the human 'I'. The windows and doors metamorphose into signposts to a realm, where each of us has to journey alone first all, until we find our spiritual community.

We are involved here with a quite extraordinary artistic work; pictures which during an encounter may be remodelled through the exercise of consciousness. This aligns, for example, with Rudolf Steiner's conviction that a work of art actually only really comes into being at the moment of the meeting between the perceptual consciousness of the observer and the object created by the artist. Perhaps because of this Gerhard Reisch would want to say this about his work, "My pictures are not to be viewed as works of art, because the actual work of art is created only when *you* freely engage in a meeting with my images, and are willing *as well* to become artistically active, by pursuing a path which also enables you to creatively transform your life through the development of your 'I'."

How is such a collection of pictures to be understood then or, more appropriately, to be perceived or experienced?

Perhaps an 'imagination' can help to make this visible. In the Earth's ether a temple is being built: a temple which is dedicated to human evolution. A great work of art is being created. The master builders are the leaders of humanity. There are many construction sites. From every vantage point the Work in process looks different. Everything is just beginning, coming into being. Through the creative development of our own biographies we are all able to contribute as craftsmen. Each building block is the 'I' of a human being. In a humble corner a tiny 'chapel' is being built - this is the real work of art which Gerhard Reisch is creating.

What happens is that, time and time again, individuals visit this 'chapel' ... some tell of having experienced healing of their body, soul or spirit. More often they relate about creative transformation in their destiny. Yet one would never want to claim that this Work incorporates the power to heal. This would not be respectful of human freedom. Rather the power of healing lives within human beings themselves. The Work serves in that it helps facilitate a meeting. A meeting ... between the individual and the higher purpose of his or her own true being. The healing power of art ... is the developing human 'I'.

*by Christopher Bee 26 01.2006
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