



The Universal and The Esoteric

An Interview with
Howard Lamar, Howard Lamar Fine Art



Howard Lamar at work (left); Infinite Woman (above) Infinity icon (below)

EDITORS' NOTE A career artist for more than 45 years, Painter and Sculptor Howard Lamar has branded his own artistic aesthetic based on the mastery of the techniques and influences of French Modernists. Incorporating into his artwork a unique language of his own, Lamar's individually developed and trademarked icons further distinguish his artistic vision and expression. He continues to develop his artistic exploration in the traditional disciplines of painting and sculpture and, more recently, in the painting of both hand-blown glass and large-scale hand-thrown ceramic vases.

COMPANY BRIEF The artist Howard Lamar (howardlamarfineart.com) works from a private atelier in Santa Barbara, California. His work is available for purchase by referral, and is shown by private engagement. Thousands of Howard Lamar's etchings, drypoints, serigraphs, stone lithographs, drawings, watercolors, pastels, oils, stone and bronze sculptures, painted glass, and painted ceramics have been purchased by prominent collectors worldwide.

Perhaps the most unique aspect of your work are the symbols we see in each piece. Would you explain the meaning behind the symbolism?

My "icons" first appeared when I was in my late 20's. They continue to appear as the exploration of themes within my art continues, and as the refinement of the visual and conceptual elements demand. As the basis of my artwork, they can be categorized into two groups: the universal and the esoteric. The first includes symbols more readily identifiable: the sun, moon, hearts, and stars, and others that are recognizable yet tend to have an expanded meaning within the body of my artwork. Flowers indicate friends or loved ones, and a cat represents domesticity and/or abundance. The second category contains symbols I've created, which are not as generally self-explanatory, are specific to my work alone, and are more esoteric in meaning: Bird of Discernment, Energy, No-Time, and Infinity.

Is there one icon you feel holds more significance than the others?

The appearance of the Infinity icon represented a major breakthrough in my thinking and, therefore, my artwork. In 2007, when this icon/symbol showed up in my work, it delineated a new era of investigation. In contemplating consciousness and the concept of infinity, it seems to me that the common symbol for infinity represents the very opposite of infinity. While it may be useful as a universally recognizable mathematical symbol, it

seems quite contradictory to the actuality of infinity, which exists without a discernable end. Indeed, the closed figure-eight loop feels to me to be more accurately representative of inertia rather than of unending space, and of contained, predictable movement rather than expansive.

The icon I developed to express infinity is intended to reflect a human experience – a perceptual concept, an ideation perceived through directed awareness and point-of-view rather than as an absolute definition, since our individual personal experiences create filters rendering that impossible.

Much like in those 3-D pictures where one can see the camouflaged image only when one actually stops trying to see it, my face-in/face-out Infinity icon can only be seen in its entirety when one looks without focus, as if from afar; otherwise, the brain is capable of seeing only one profile at a time. There is no separation of these profiles, just one continuous line expressing a duality and balance of the simultaneous awareness of without and within. This icon represents an axis rather than a mere line, which can be spun in nearly limitless directions from a center-point, which is transient and fluctuating as it reflects and emanates from a viewer's own evolving consciousness and viewpoint.

This seems to be largely uncharted territory as far as the art world. Is there a particular philosophy at work here?

Indeed, there is. Cubism laid a road map in declaring that simply because something is unseen doesn't mean it isn't there. While this notion has been tendered as obvious and irrefutable, the premise of Cubism as an "objective" exploration is workable only within very specific parameters which must be limited in scope to be supportable; i.e., a cultivated context. My interest lies in what I consider to be the undeniably subjective reality of existence, which in my mind can't be anything other than subjective, because even information labeled as "empirical", once acknowledged, is then organized into understanding by and through the filters of personal individual experience.

The challenge explored by Cubism was not new – only the approach. The challenge was and still remains: how to express three or more dimensions on a two-dimensional surface. To continue this exploration, we must push past the restraints, and build on the strengths of Cubism; to further

develop the scope of inquiry. A Cubistic rendering of the "objective" world, remains limited by a 180-degree viewpoint; i.e., it is reflective of only (more or less) half of the actual objective world. Yet the entire world, even though one may not be able to view or experience it entirely at once, still exists. And while a complete 360 degrees does establish a centralized point of reference, it still limits one's spatial perspective to a plane for investigation – it remains what I refer to as "flat-world" thinking. Full perspective requires access to 360 degrees in all directions simultaneously.

Hence, from an omni-directional stance, a mere quantum shift in perspective creates an entirely new center point, ergo, an entirely new sphere. There is no limit to the number of times this can be repeated nor to the number of possible new vantage points. Rather than one, or two, or even three planes, we now have a spherical reference encompassing what is above, below, before, behind, and between.

Peripheries, transitions, borders, thresholds, interstices, of and surrounding spaces can be defined, but if we look closely, for example, at a border, it reveals itself to be delineated by yet more borders. Continued examinations create new vantage points, new borders, and new peripheries. At the center of awareness is a very subjective establishment of definition, being that every individual is unique, and this process is limited only by our individual abilities to perceive, decipher, and comprehend both external and internal realities. In 2007, I came-up with the term "meta-liminal" to describe this concept as inclusive of both the position and the process of observation and study of the shifting elements of identity, awareness, consciousness, comprehension, and definition, that shape our worlds.

How does being self-represented in the marketing and sales of your artwork impact your visibility and accessibility?

Through my galleries, I've established a tremendous network of patronage. I remain accessible to my patrons, and have created a structure whereby new collectors may be introduced by existing patrons, or via other partnerships and affiliations. My patrons are not limited to individuals but include several high-level corporate entities, so my patron base, while exclusive, is also quite extensive; thus, I am accessible through numerous and increasingly expanded channels. ●

