

BETWEEN MULADHARA AND SAHASRARA: FROM ROOT TO CROWN

The seven chakras:

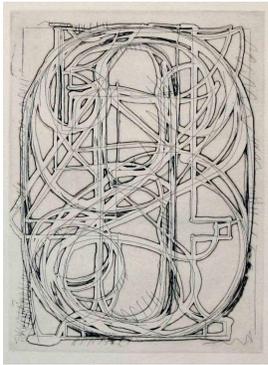
Sahasrara	The crown chakra
Agni	3rd eye point, between the eyebrows, associated with the pineal gland
Vishuddha	throat chakra
Anahata	heart chakra
Manipura	solar plexus, Plexus: a nexus of nerves & vessels, a Grand Central Terminal of the human body.
Svadisthana	sacral chakra, centered near the sacrum
Muladhara	root chakra, base of the spine

This journey begins at the base of the spine and moves upward through the spinal column toward the crown of the head and asks the viewer to consider a system of mapping energy in the body that originated in India a thousand years ago and has evolved substantially over time and transition to a new continent. My use and transformation of the Indian chakra system is a process of inquiry used to draw connections between our biological wiring, neuronal alchemy, and the impulses that pull like riptides, subverting our best intentions. These prints explore themes of addiction, grief, healing, and the tension between yearning for a more spiritual/realized way of living in the world, and the patterns of habit that hold of us back from realizing our full potential.

There are layers of questions embedded in the work. How do we process grief and continue to build a life that encompasses loss? How do we, as homo sapiens sapiens, as "knowing bipedal mammals with big brains," move from base desire toward enlightenment?

The 7 letters of the LIQUORS sign are superimposed on the 7 chakras of the chakra system as it has currently evolved in the West. Each story of a person caught in the web of substance abuse is unique, but for many it begins with alcohol. The letters of a 70's era LIQUORS sign become a metaphor for addiction that interweaves with the chakras and their symbolic imagery, much altered in this configuration from what an ancient yogi might recognize.

In making this work I have been influenced by a few key artists. First is Jasper Johns, whose work with numbers over several decades and across a variety of media is a huge inspiration.



Jasper Johns, *Numbers*, from *1st Etchings, 2nd State*, 1969, etching and open-bite, edition of 40, Plate: 13 x 9 5/8 inches; Sheet: 25 3/8 x 19 1/2 inches



Jasper Johns, *Numbers*, 2007, Aluminum, 107 5/8 x 83 x 2 1/4"; 273 x 211 x 6 cm. © 2011 Jasper Johns / Licensed by VAGA, New York, Courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery, New York.

In these works, Johns takes a deep dive into the form of the numbers, explicating their expansion via repetition and variation. The numbers are the basis for an overtly formal investigation, and yet they also point to deeper and less discernible references to the ineluctable nature of time, a subtle or perhaps not so subtle reference to their Arabic origins, and of course the grid.



Adam Pendleton, *WE (we are not successive)*, 2015

Another artist whose work is has been much on my mind this past year is Adam Pendleton, although I have yet to see the work in person. In *WE (we are not successive)* from 2015, Pendleton has silkscreened on cast stainless steel letter forms that appear to lean on the gallery wall.



Adam Pendleton, Installation at the Lever House, NYC, Summer 2018

A primary preoccupation of Pendleton is racism in America, and the works are overtly political. Yet like Johns, there is a broad concern with how letter/number forms function in a 2-dimensional space, and the palette is limited.

The original 1960's era LIQUORS sign is vertical and lives in Ayer Massachusetts (figure 1). Early iterations of the sign are also vertical, Spartan, and bright (figure 2). The sign signifies addiction and the ubiquity of alcohol in our culture, which makes maintaining sobriety difficult for people in recovery.

A major leap in my thinking took place when I realized that the 7 letters of the LIQUORS sign each have a corresponding chakra, a spinning energy wheel in the body. The first version of this is a hanging mobile (figure 3) in which each of the chakra/letters can twirl and the use of transparent film allows the viewer to see through the imagery.

For this iteration, the sign becomes horizontal so that the viewer can see the detail in the individual images. I have long been an artist who enjoys solitude but in working with my fellow Arts 323 students in Dactyl Press, they have taught me much about camaraderie and collaboration. A key moment that reinforces the value of this collaboration came when I was working on the I, also the Agni or 3rd eye chakra. I had

decided that the 2 wings of the moth would serve as the form of the chakra but it wasn't working. Murily came by and said pretty much the same thing without any provocation on my part, that it looked different than the others. As a result, I went back into my research and found an image of the chakra that had a form I could use, and superimposed and integrated that shape into the moth imagery.

As I worked on the imagery for *Between Muladhara and Sahasrara*, I realized that I wanted to find a way to include my sister in the work. Chris died of health complications due to heroin addiction in the brutal winter of 2015. The use of the Polyphemus moth evolved out of the *Ayatana Nocturne* research residency in Ottawa, Canada last summer. In an earlier print, *Polyphemus Scenting False Love*, the moth uses its antennae to search for a mate, scenting instead a radiolarian with the chemical markers of heroin. This alludes to how heroin alters the brain chemistry and the pleasure pathways, even the personalities, of people suffering from opioid addiction. In this series, the pattern of Chris's armband tattoo is now part of the moth, repeating throughout the 7 prints.

Other imagery includes a cross section of a tree that once fell across the path I walk most frequently near my house, an x-ray image of the sacrum and hipbones which alludes to sexuality and birth, an image of the solar plexus from a 1932 edition of *Gray's Anatomy*¹, another image from *Gray's* of a cross section of the heart and its vessels combined with *Ustrasana*, a heart opening yoga asana also known as camel pose. Moving upward, the throat chakra corresponds with the letter Q and incorporates words from a relaxation exercise that pertain to the loss of a loved one due to substance abuse: "I am releasing the weight of all things said, and all things unsaid."

The altered moth becomes the wings of the 3rd eye chakra, a symbol of intuition and inner seeing. Finally, at the crown of the head is a Purkinje neuron (with respect to Santiago Ramón y Cajal), branches of which grow toward and tangle with a radiolarian²/ heroin molecule.

Moving forward, I am in the process of researching how to make clamshell boxes for the edition, and how to sign and number an edition of 3-5 that encompasses 7 individual silkscreen prints. Online research has led me to the work of Iris Grimm, a Boston area artist who makes books and boxes. I'm looking into procuring the

¹ Gray, Henry. *The Anatomy of the Human Body*. Lee and Febiger, Philadelphia and New York, 1932.

² Hockel, Ernst and Breidback, Olaf. *Art Forms From the Ocean, The Radiolarian Atlas of 1862*, Prestel, 2005 (reprint, public domain).

materials and potentially consulting with Katherine Ruffin in the Wellesley Book Arts Lab.



Iris Grimm, clamshell box.

Once this series is packaged up, so to speak, I'm planning to move on to the next phase of transforming it into an immersive and potentially interactive installation consisting of a handmade book surrounded by the 7 letter/chakras, which will move off the wall and hang from the ceiling so that they can twirl and be seen from both sides. As the viewer/participant leafs through the book which tells perhaps more of the story of what happened to my sister and how her life was derailed, they can look up and see light shining through the chakras, and perhaps find a hint of a path through the maze of an individual life.

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