

## A Painter Finds Visionary Art in Schizophrenia | City of the Seekers

Tanja M. Laden — Apr 14 2016



*Incident at Sheep's Bay, 2007, 13" x 20"*

*In the late 19th century, Southern California attracted misfits, idealists, and entrepreneurs with few ties to anyone or anything. Swamis, spiritualists, and other self-proclaimed religious authorities quickly made their way out West to forge new faiths. Independent book publishers, motivational speakers, and metaphysical-minded artists and writers then became part of the Los Angeles landscape. From yogis, to psychics, to witches, *City of the Seekers* examines how creative freedom enables LA-based artists to make spiritual work as part of their practices.*

Throughout her long and prolific career as a multidisciplinary artist, Linda Carmella Sibio has struggled to maintain her sanity, but when she found herself on 43 mental-health medicines, she decided against giving up her dogs and cat to move into a state-run institution. Instead, she packed up and moved to the Mojave Desert outside Los Angeles. That was almost 20 years ago, and she hasn't looked back since.

Born and raised in West Virginia, Sibio earned her BFA in painting at Ohio University in Athens and studied art history and sculpture at L'Ecole de Beaux Arts in Lucca, Italy. She's been working as a professional painter and interdisciplinary artist since 1975, supported by numerous grants and institutions. But just as she's been able to transform a blank canvas into a thought-provoking work of art, Sibio has transformed her sobering diagnosis into a theme, and in a sense, a tool for her own visual arts practice.



*Artist in studio, unknown photographer, 2003*

Sibio says she gained an education on the Greyhound bus, from the mouths of street people on the Bowery, and in the dark halls of the mental institution where her mother lived before committing suicide. "My teachers were schizophrenia, the



psychotic mind, dismemberment, and fragmentation," she says. "I live among the ghosts of my life in a time of discarded objects."

In addition to working as an artist, Sibio taught people with mental disabilities from 1985-2008, which provided her with a new approach to art she dubbed "The Insanity Principle." The approach involves using symptoms of mental issues as a catalyst for a "primal journey" that in turn enables those with disorders to function in society.



*Trilogy of the Dying Babies, 2006, 8'x4'*

In terms of her own art practice, Sibio believes her approach to art changes and evolves depending on her projects. At the beginning of her career from 1975-1985, she painted thick oil paintings using old silkscreen paint and found material. The next phase expanded to include writing, performance art, sculpture, and music. It's during this period, from 1985-1996, that she began tackling tough issues such as mental illness, homelessness, and suicide, through shows that included large-scale installations, including one involving a fabricated torture chamber, science lab, and a boxing ring.

"I am always discovering what my art will be made of, what materials I want to use, what concepts I will develop," she says. "I have already planned exhibitions for the next 20 years. I am obsessed with artmaking. I get bored easily and am always

trying new techniques to fulfill the images in my mind. Often while I'm working, suddenly I realize I haven't slept. Life's labors get in my way. I wish I did not have to brush my teeth, brush my hair, shower, etc.—All I want to do is make art."

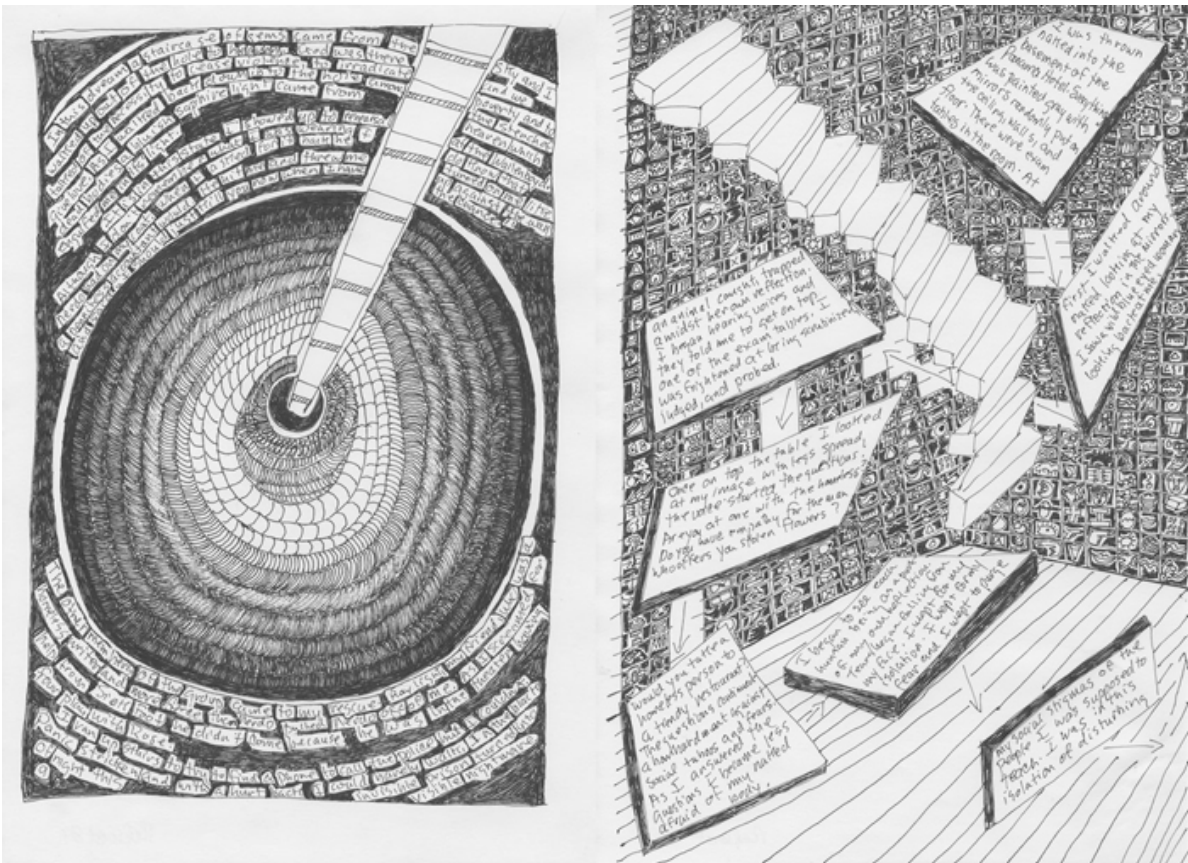


*L: Trapped, 2002, 8' x 4' R: Hammer Rhetoric, 2014, 13"x20"*

Sibio came to Los Angeles in 1984 and quickly encountered equal parts insanity and inspiration. "When I hit the streets of Los Angeles, I was an emerging artist who was frustrated with just painting. It was here that I found the freedom to find my own unique vision and methodology of working to make art," she says. "Life and art were intermixed in Los Angeles. I did some of my best work in this totally free atmosphere."

After what she describes as a "nervous breakdown" in 1997, Sibio moved to the Mojave Desert to begin anew, discovering meditation along the way. "A floodgate opened in my psyche and soul, and out poured hieroglyphs and glyphs, which I am still exploring today. In a way, I think I have developed my own personal mythology and corresponding original visual vocabulary."





L: *Reflections in a Broken Mirror*, 2010-present, artist's book R: *Reflections in a Broken Mirror*, 2010-present, book in progress

Ironically, Sibio says she finds less support from the gallery scene in LA than in New York, where she is represented by Andrew Edlin Gallery. Still, it's Southern California's landscape and its vast expanse, both physical and intellectual, that enables her to translate her visions, usually following a certain type of ritualistic preparation.

"I prepare for a minimum of two hours by going into a slight trance state where my focus and concentration are heightened," she says. "When I do a large exhibit, I am in an altered state [...] I completely change my thinking patterns. It is from this fragmented state that I create my best work."

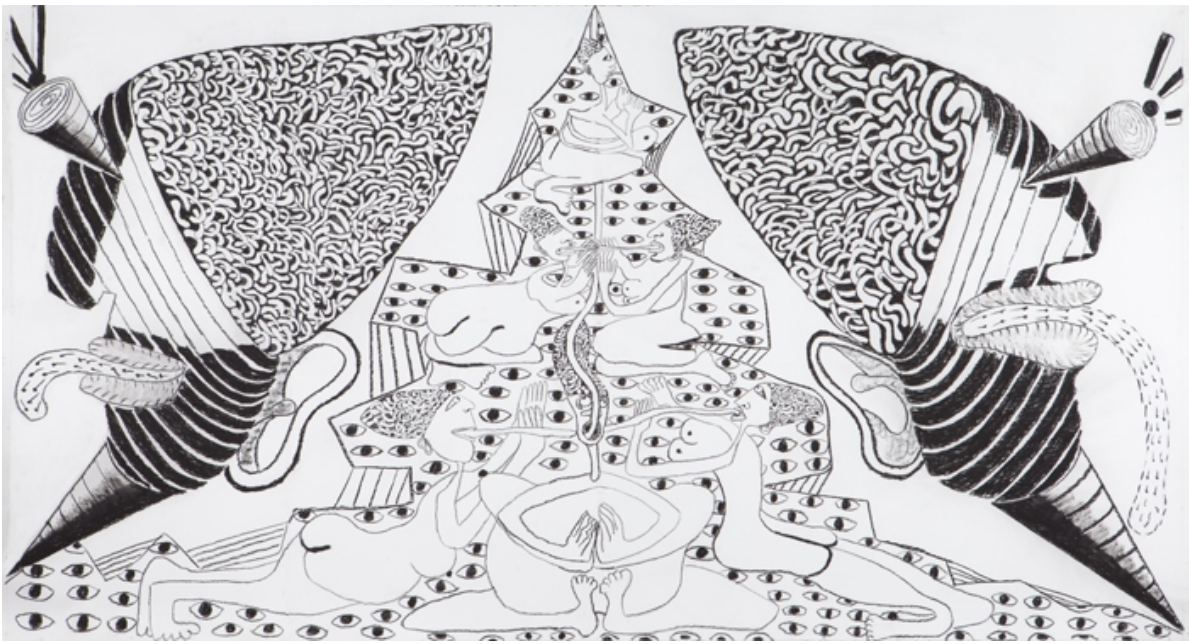


*The Seventeen Gates of the Encoded, 2012, Rachel Rosenthal Collection*

Right now, Sibio is working on a project called *The Economics of Suffering*, a series of 500 different small pen-and-ink drawings about finance and hospitalization, which will then be assembled into an immersive sculpture. She's also working on a book, *Reflections in a Broken Mirror*, and has spearheaded a fashion project called *Crazy for a Day*. But whatever medium she's using, whether she's exploring form or function, it's Sibio's so-called "madness" that is actually her sanity—a lifeline that allows her to go deep into her own thoughts and make them visible.

"The intention and impetus behind my work is to discover, learn, and explore the states of my schizophrenic mind," Sibio explains. "I feel that part of my job is to start from my personal vision and make it universal in nature. Art helps me to find my place in a complicated world."





*Holy Mountain, 2013, 8'x4'*



*O Ye Nurturing Death, 2015, 9"x11"*





*Schizophrenic Brain Trust, 2015 R: Schizophrenic Brain Trust Two, 2015, 9"x11"*



*Checkmate Monkey Stew*

[Click here](#) to visit Linda Sibio's website.