
**ALPHABET & NUMBERS: The PANDEMIC PRINTS
The COVID CREATURES
& SELF PORTRAITS**

by Rebecca Gray Smith, 2021

PHILOSOPHY: Looking at Death

The Alphabet was conceived years ago, in the late 1980's as my artist's graphic response to the AIDS Pandemic and the reality of so many deaths. At the time, the only major art work addressing the plague crisis was the *AIDS Memorial Quilt*.¹ The quilts, while heartfelt and beautiful, I felt, did not fully address the horrific scope of the tragedy of so many lives lost, thus the Alphabet was created.²

Some thoughts on the reality of death....

In the *leitmotif*³ inherent in life's journey, when we are born, all of us become automatic members in the club of Death, no one is immune—no one can escape.

The Alphabet is an *Abecedarius*⁴, a poem of Death, using intaglio etchings to illustrate how Death will come to us all, eventually. The forms may vary, but the end result will be the same.

The properties of intaglio etching, using black and white as the matrix, mirror the ying and the yang; dark lines and shadow contrasted to white and light spaces; the graphic equivalent of the ones and zeros in the structure of computer code.

Death, present to the tune of the *Final Exit Blues*—is life's last gift—a journey into the infinite.

¹ *AIDS Memorial Quilt*. Washington DC. 1987. <https://www.aidsmemorial.org/quilt-history> (accessed 7 May, 2021)

² There have been 32.9 million persons dead from AIDS, worldwide, as of 2019. <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/fact-sheet> (accessed 5 May 2021)

³ **Leitmotif**, an associated melodic phrase or figure that accompanies the reappearance of an idea; a dominant recurring theme. "Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary," 11th Ed. Springfield MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc. 2004.

⁴ **Abecedarius**, a type of acrostic in which the first letter of each line of a poem or the first letter of the first word of each stanza taken in order forms the alphabet...The word is from the late Latin for "alphabetical" and is derived from the names of the letters *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/art/abecedarius> (accessed 6 May, 2021)

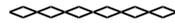
Through the actor of the skeleton, the vertebrate architecture of our existence, I am looking at the reality of Death head-on—only by confrontation can one know and befriend the adversary.

The naked skeleton, devoid of the stigma of race—is stripped of the skin—we are all the same.

Our consciousness, trapped in present time, like insects in amber—dreams of the future, while bound by the cobwebs of the past, slogs on ahead step by step toward the exit clause....

Caught in time—all life hurdles forward at the speed of light ever closer to the black hole of Death.

Death, always flying under the radar—enters through the cracks of the plaster of our existence—in the small the corner of the room....



MATERIALS & METHODOLOGY:

I.) **ALPHABET & NUMBERS: The PANDEMIC PRINTS:** c. 2014, 2016, and 2020.

67 Intaglio etchings on copper (c. 2002 - 2020) and zinc (c. 1990 - 2002) plates, on 100% cotton paper; limited edition of 5, with 3 artist's proofs.



II.) **The COVID CREATURES:** c. 2021.

Mixed media sculpture in the round: 6'3" feet tall by 20" inches in diameter:

- **Heads:** Canvas on cork wig head forms, with "skin" colors of pastel and Prismacolor pencil: representing all four races of Homo sapiens: Black, Brown, Yellow, and White.
- **Spikes:** Golf tees with luminescent acrylic paint representing the COVID crisis.
- **Masks:** Cotton shop cloths (as used on printing presses) with embroidery and backing sewn by hand.
- **Spectrum Ribbons:** Around the necks of the CC heads are ribbons with the Spectrums of the basic elements of: Hydrogen; Carbon; Nitrogen; and Oxygen, the building blocks of all life, which radiate from the dust of the stars in the cosmos. All life and matter comes from from the Big Bang and subsequently from the stars.
- **Bodies:** Canvas in the round, with graphite, pastel, and paint on two cardboard drums. Two female, and two males—the pelvises indicate their sex.
- **Stars:** Graphite and luminescent acrylic paint, behind the bodies' bottom portions are the star constellations representing the passage of the seasons and time in the Northern & Southern hemispheres. Constellations are listed in clockwise order, with the Northern hemisphere's above the knee and the Southern below the knee:
 1. **Black, Head # 1 (female); July, June, May:** Constellations: *Gemini; Canus Major; Puppis; Pictor; Volans; Taurus; Pleiades; Perseus; Orion; Lupus; Fornax; Eridanus; Horologium; Reticulum*
 2. **Brown, Head # 2 (male); April, March, February:** Constellations: *Perseus; Pleiades; Triangulum; Aries; Phoenix; Hydrus; Archemar; Cassiopeia; Andromeda; Pisces*
 3. **Yellow, Head # 3 (female); January, December, November:** Constellations: *Lacerta; Pegasus; Pisces; Sculptor; Cygnus; Aquila; Capricornus; Aquarius; Hercules; Corona Borealis; Coffin Ophiuchus; Sagittarius; Libra; Scorpius; Lupus; Norma; Are; Triangulum Australie*
 4. **White, Head # 4 (male); October, September, August:** Constellations: *Little Dipper; Bootes; Virgo; Centaurus; Southern Cross; Musca; Big Dipper; Leo Minor; Leo & Sickle; Cancer; Hydra; Antila; Vela; Carina; Chamaeleon*
- **DNA:** Braided ribbons around the bottoms of the top and bottom of the bodies represent the double helix.
- **HUBBLE DEEP FIELD Spirals:** On top of each body half is a composite of Hubble Deep Field photographs, arranged in spirals representing the *Fibonacci* number.⁵

⁵ **Fibonacci number:** by Leonardo Fibonacci, Italian Mathematician, c.1250. An integer in the infinite sequence 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13...of which the first two terms are 1 and 1 and each succeeding term is the sum of the two immediately preceding [numbers, as evidenced in the *Chambered Nautilus* molusk shell and the patterns in pinecones represent the known expansion of the universe.] *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*, 11th Ed. 2004.



III.) **SELF PORTRAITS:** c. 2018.

Bavarian limestone lithographic prints on mold-made 100% cotton paper. *Self Portrait I*: edition of 18; *Self Portrait II*: edition of 10.



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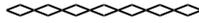
LITERATURE

The Vision of the Dry Bones:

“The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he led me out in the spirit of the LORD and set me in the center of the broad valley. It was filled with bones. / He made me walk among them in every direction. So many lay on the surface of the valley! How dry they were! / He asked me: Son of man, can these bones come back to life? “Lord GOD,” I answered, “you alone know that.” / Then he said to me: Prophecy over these bones, and say to them: Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! / Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Listen! I will make breath enter you so you may come to life. / I will put sinews on you, make flesh grown over you, cover you with skin, and put breath into you so you may come to life. Then you shall know that I am the the LORD. / I prophesied as I had been commanded. A sound started up, as I was prophesying, rattling like thunder. The bones came together, bone joining bone. / As I watched, sinews appeared on them, flesh grew over them, skin covered them on top, but there was no breath in them. / Then he said to me: Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, son of man! Say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: From the four winds come, O breath, and breathe into these slain that they may come back to life. / I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath entered them; they came to life and stood on their feet, a vast army. / He said to me: Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel! They are saying, “Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off.” Therefore, prophecy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: Look! I am going to open your graves; I will make you come up out of your graves, my people, and bring you back to the land of Israel. / You shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and make you come up out of them, my people! I will put my spirit in you that you may come to life, and I will settle you in your land. The you shall know that I am the LORD. I have spoken; I will do it—oracle of the LORD.”

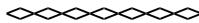
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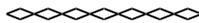
*“Is not life on earth a drudgery, its days like those of a hireling? Like a slave who longs for the shade, a hireling who waits for wages,
So I have been assigned months of futility, and troubled nights have been counted off for me.
When I lie down I say, “When shall I arise?” then the night drags on: I am filled with restlessness until the dawn.
My flesh is clothed with worms and scabs; my skin cracks and festers;
My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle; they come to an end without hope.
Remember that my life is like the wind; my eye will not see happiness again.
The eye that now sees me shall no more behold me: when your eye is on me, I shall be gone.
As a cloud dissolves and vanishes, so whoever goes down to Sheol shall not come up.
They shall not return home again; their place shall know them no more.”*

The Bible: The Old Testament, the Book of Job, Chapter 7, verses 1 - 10. 6th Century BCE (approximate).
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/job/7> (accessed 6 May, 2021)



“No matter where. Of comfort no man speak!
Let us talk of graves, worms, and epitaphs,
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.
Let’s choose executors and talk of wills.
And yet not so, for what we bequeath
Save our deposed bodies to the ground?
Our lands, our lives and all are Bollingbroke’s,
And nothing can we call our own but death
And that small model of the barren earth
Which serves as paste and cover to our bones.”

Shakespeare, William. 1595. *“The Tragedy of King Richard the Second.”* 3.2. lines 144 - 154. [Shakespeare’s Histories](#). Bevington, David; Editor. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Pearson Education, Inc. 2007. p. 765.



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(I am standing with one foot in the grave). 1729.
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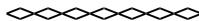
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