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Linda Sibio, "Emotional States of Zero," 2019.
performance at Andrew Edlin Gallery, New York.
Photo by Dirk Rowntree, courtesy of Linda Sibio



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LINDA SIBIO: FROM "CRACKED EGGS," POWERFUL, PERSONAL ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS

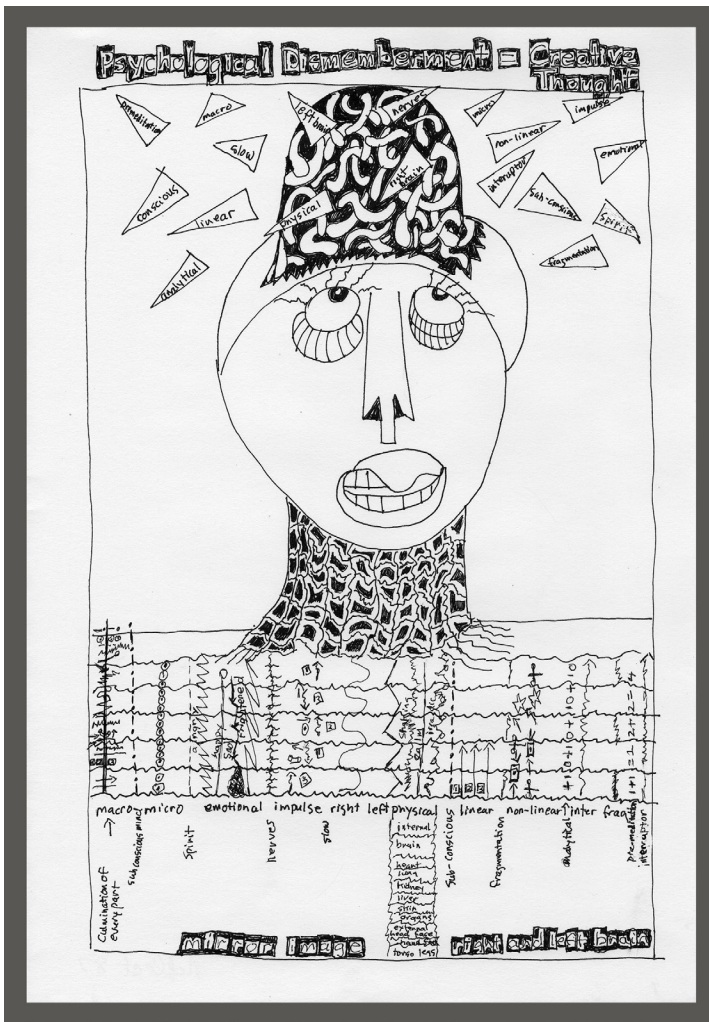
AN UNSINKABLE ART-MAKER TRANSFORMS TRAUMA AND HARDSHIP INTO EXPRESSIONS OF HUMANITY AND SELF-AWARENESS

by Edward M. Gómez, in dialogue with the artist Linda Sibio

The broad corpus of Linda Sibio's creations and teaching may be regarded either as one big, multifaceted, very personal form of conceptual art, or as a myriad of individual art projects, each of which has been prompted by some kind of big idea of its own.

It's fair to say that the genesis of all of this seemingly unsinkable art-maker's activity lies deep in a reservoir of pain, fear, darkness, and hardship, all of which, miraculously, she has managed to transform into expressions of humanity and self-awareness.

In the best senses of the word, Sibio is a survivor, someone who has had to pick herself up, pull up her socks, and keep putting one foot in front of the other with concentration



Linda Sibio, "Dismemberment," 2016, drawing from the manuscript of her unpublished book, *Reflections in a Broken Mirror*, ink on paper, 12 x 9 inches (30.48 x 22.86 centimeters). Photo courtesy of the artist

and resolve more times than most people would be able to count. Her motto very well could be that definitive existentialist *bon mot* from the end of the modern Irish writer Samuel Beckett's novel, *The Unnamable* (1953): "I can't go on. I'll go on."

Recently, Linda shared with brutjournal a summary of her life and art-making career, out of which we sought to tease those strains of thinking, observation, and experience that have formed the basic concepts that have shaped her art.

However, Sibio is one of those artistic individuals for whom life and art are inextricably fused. So, as it turns out, the artist's own comments and recollections are the best testaments to her development and growth. If conceptual art tends to emphasize the creative process more than its results, then, in Sibio's case, to understand the trajectory that has informed her creative processes (plural) is to grasp both her ways of making art and what she has produced.

Some excerpts from our recent exchange:

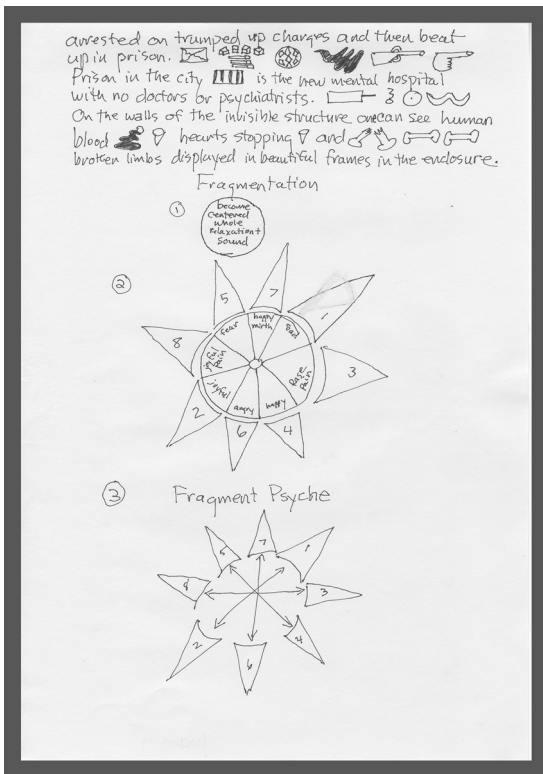
brutjournal: From what you first told me about your childhood, to say that it was dramatic – and traumatic – is an understatement. Tell us about that very formative period.

Linda Sibio: I was born in Montgomery, West Virginia. My father died in 1957, when I was four years old, and thus began a long history of my mother having nervous breakdowns and driving to Florida, through long, winding mountains, at 90 miles an hour. We lived in Florida for a couple years; there, my mother cut her jugular vein while peeling potatoes. Later, we landed in an orphanage back in West Virginia. It was there that I learned about pain, isolation, emotional difficulties, and desperation. But the proprietors of the orphanage gave me a basement room, where I went every night to draw. Drawing helped me to be able to go to school and have some [kind of] communication with other [people]. It put me in a better state of mind.

brutjournal: In time, your interest in art further opened a door for you to the wider world – and, through art, you explored an inner world, too.

Linda Sibio: In 1971, I won a scholarship to study at the Art School at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, where I earned an undergraduate degree in painting. I studied such subjects as art history, including medieval art; philosophy, including phenomenology; and print-making and sculpture.

My mother committed suicide during my second year of college. I took a year off, then went back. After college, I moved to New York and attended the Fashion Institute of



Above: Linda Sibio, "Fragmentation," 2016, drawing from the manuscript of her unpublished book, *Reflections in a Broken Mirror*, ink on paper, 12 x 9 inches (30.48 x 22.86 centimeters).

Below: Linda Sibio's drawing for the cover of *Reflections in a Broken Mirror*, a book about her life experiences and their influence on her art and ideas about making art, for which she is now seeking a publisher.

Photos courtesy of the artist



Technology on a textile-design scholarship. During this time, I lived in Hoboken, New Jersey, across the Hudson River from Manhattan. Then I moved to the Washington Hotel in New York, where a prostitute threw her baby out of a third-floor window. I left New York, because I was almost killed three times, and I moved to Los Angeles.

In L.A., I met Eric Morris, an acting teacher who taught me how to manipulate and conjure up raw emotions. I also worked with Rachel Rosenthal, an interdisciplinary artist whose peer group included such well-known modern artists as Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Cy Twombly. Just being around her was inspirational. An expert with regard to lighting, sculpture, and movement, she taught me what I know about interdisciplinary art. Rachel taught a "Doing by Doing" workshop in which we did a transformative performance that changed my life. Never had I gone so deeply into my psyche as I did in that workshop.

brutjournal: It might be said that all works of art are educational tools or conveyors of knowledge and truth. In your case, it seems that you were becoming keenly aware of art's power to communicate your deepest thoughts and feelings, and, in turn, of how you might be able to teach others to use art for similar purposes. How did your role as a teacher evolve?

Linda Sibio: Today, I teach mentally challenged persons, and emerging and established artists in a group setting that's known as "The Cracked Eggs and Insanity Principle Workshop." I developed two modes of teaching — one for beginners and one for more advanced students. I've taught [and presented my ideas] in various mental-health facilities and in fine-art contexts, too, at such venues as Andrew Edlin Gallery and Cooper Union in New York; and High Desert Test Sites, a nonprofit organization co-founded by the artist Andrea Zittel, which is based in several locations in the southern-California desert.

I developed my instructional techniques by embracing the symptoms of mental disorders and using them as an avenue for creative expression.

brutjournal: We sense the emergence of a concept.

Linda Sibio: I've worked with people who were homeless, mentally disabled, or very poor. I lived beneath the poverty line myself until a year ago. After 30 years of teaching, I've written a book, *Reflections in a Broken Mirror*, wherein I've laid out the ideas that have served as subtexts for my work, including interdisciplinary projects that have combined performance, writing, and visual art — such concepts as schizophrenic thinking, fragments, and dismemberment.

Linda Sibio, "Wall Street Guillotine," 2022, digital image, performance presented via webcast on Franklin Furnace Archive's Lofi platform. Photo courtesy of the artist



The drawings in my book represent how I teach my class and develop my ideas.
[Editor's note: Sibio is now looking for a publisher for her book.]

brutjournal: You've made it known that you are schizophrenic. Meanwhile, you've been earning recognition for your teaching efforts.

Linda Sibio: Last year, I received a grant to further my work on my Cracked Eggs Workshops and on how to prepare students to teach the program in a way that will allow its exercises to become a permanent part of a county government's mental-health programming.

brutjournal: Tell us about your own art.

Linda Sibio: I began my work in New York as a painter. I was influenced by Jackson Pollock and Frank Stella as I tried to create art that included highly charged emotions and pop elements. This involved painting bed springs and other found objects. I lived in a cold-water flat in Hoboken. My Provincetown friends deserted me. I was truly alone and isolated from the world. I began hallucinating and saying things that didn't make sense. I became fragmented, and the associations I had developed with anyone fell apart.

The second phase of my work was performance-and-installation-based, which put me in the interdisciplinary-art category. My first solo large performance was "West Virginia Schizophrenic Blues," in which I played my mother. It was a four-and-a-half-hour-long piece that I presented at Highways Performance Space in Santa Monica, California; at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; and in New York at such venues as the Franklin Furnace Archive.

During this period of creating performance/installation works, I started investigating insanity and how it relates to me as both a participant in it and as its observer. I read a lot of psychology books, but this was different. Through performance, I could [portray insanity's] symptoms, and through art I could become [its] observer. I was both at the same time. I could also play the psychiatrist/



Linda Sibio, "Bus Boy," 2020, gouache on watercolor paper, 96 x 48 inches (243.84 x 121.92 centimeters).
Photo courtesy of the artist



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psychologist and whomever else I might want to “have it out with or just spend time with.”

My life growing up was terrifying, but through art I could re-experience [past traumatic] moments in both an intellectual and a visceral way. This discovery was to be my pathway to what I call the “insanity principle,” by means of which I use an insane subtext in all of my art, whether it be aural, visual, written, or intellectual and creative.

I think this is the keystone to the “conceptual” part of my work.

In my piece “Energy and Light and Their Relationship to Suicide,” for example,” first I drew a machine in a sketchbook. I drew lots of these mechanical devices, which I knew I could build. The machines would commit suicide, I would fix them, and then those experiences could last a lifetime. I had suicidal ideation for 20 years. In this piece, I faced my fears and lived with them for four years. As they culminated in the concept for this work, I also lost my suicidal ideation. When that concept and its execution met, it was a powerful experience.

My first exhibition at Andrew Edlin Gallery in New York, titled “The Insanity Principle,” featured works related to psychotic episodes, visual and audio hallucinations, and depressive symbols.

brutjournal: All of that self-analysis and artistic activity appear to have been deeply cathartic for you. In turn, it seems that you then brought your insights and discoveries into your teaching work.

Linda Sibio: My work has addressed such subjects as homelessness, mental health, addiction, and other conditions that have emerged from the underbelly of society. The voices of the oppressed, of those who do not have a social voice – I feel I can lend a hand to those who live in poverty and darkness or whose hope has been long lost by displaying how they may feel about finance or religion. I’ve had to invent a language to do this. I gave up my academic influences in order to chart an art methodology that I identify with and understand. I’ve made up hieroglyphs in my paintings and writing to more fully communicate with the world.

My work is a cross between intuition and analysis. Behind each brush stroke is the concept I’m working with. Yesterday, I finished a piece I call “Genocide: Rwanda,” which explores financial issues, the G8 countries, and the horror of being dismembered and of no one caring. I created a whole piece around [the subject of] wealth disparity and how it affects the poor population psychologically. But [such] works are not expressionism; instead, they are modes of painting [that emerge out of] a scientific approach that connects to intuition.

My work is scientific in that it is made [based on] my “insanity principle,” which I’ve written down in a detailed manner, much like a research scientist would do – collecting data and then formulating it into an approach to art.

