



**A RIVER OF ONE'S ONE  
THE FLOWS OF ART & FEAR**

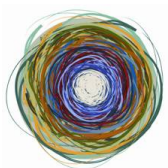
**BY MATTHEW DALLMAN**

**DRAFT — DECEMBER 2004**

There is really nothing external to fear anymore, is there? The taboos are gone. Artists can do whatever they like. The world approves. You can put a frame around anything, even a frame around nothing, and it is art. In public, you can clown to your heart's content, and no one will blanch. People almost expect artists today to make fools of themselves. It wouldn't be *artistic* to do otherwise, would it? The more outlandish you are, and the more brazen courage displayed in your art products, the more mysterious you are considered by others. And with mystery comes a buzz, and every artist wants a buzz around their art. Artists deeply desire to be talked about by the right people.

But what I want to talk about now is something else. I do not want to talk about the external world, and whatever fears you might have of its obstacles. Instead, I want to talk about the kind of fear that is inside. I want to talk about our interiors. I want to talk about the visions, intuitions, voices, energies, experiences, and resonances that pop forth within our internal terrain. Even more, I want to talk about the *relationship* you can have with that energy. For it is not the mere inspiration, but the relationship you have with it, that allows you to understand it, to try to talk and come to terms with it, to experiment with its outward expression and to fashion it into a piece of art as an artifact of internal phenomena, and to then share it with others.

So I want to explore with you the relationship that you can have with your creative interior. For the moment let's leave aside the external world, that world that wants you to be a clown, a diva, a misunderstood genius, or a blazing star in the sky. That world is not going anywhere. Let's put it on pause for the moment, and look inside. When we are done, we will all return to it, and perform and present on our stages of choice.



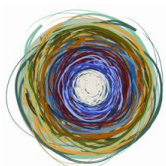
So we are in our interior space. I have a question. As you experiment in your studio and workspace, as you live your life with moments of clear inspiration, tell me—is there any reason *not* to listen to your this inner urge? Is there any reason to *not* follow your bliss? To listen to your heart, your soul, your authentic self? Is there any reason not to reflect what you hear in your deepest ear? Is there a good reason to ignore our Muse?

I think that too often we think that to produce an honest transcription of those voices is just too easy of a move to make. It almost seems like the obvious choice, too obvious to be of much value in our highly complex society. It can feel like to portray that which lies just behind our breath is, well, too easy. It is too immediate to be trusted, too *right here*.

In truth, we all can be skeptical of clarity, afraid of simplicity, fearful of the straightforward. We like our world to have ambiguities. Unambiguous inspiration must be too commonplace, too beginner, and too bourgeois. Things have to be more complicated. Art production cannot be this easy. We look away from the resonant beats, and instead we look elsewhere.

We come up with more intellectual solutions, or we come up with ways to produce art like others do, because they must do it the ‘right way’. We try to *figure something out*. We think that avant garde art is made of a big new idea, a brilliant solution, or a flashy novelty. It just seems so *ordinary* to create according to the present pulse of our inspired heart. It seems so mundane and pedestrian to faithfully reflect what lay apparent within our internal terrain.

But is it? Is it mundane and pedestrian to produce art that follows your excited moments as a faithful reproduction of them? I for one don’t think it is. To listen to your inner ear, your heart, your soul, and *follow through* on those intuitions and produce art made of that deeper call is most definitely not pedestrian. It is not commonplace. It is *not* obvious. To create at the cusp of your own pulse, with at least a semi-consciousness of that pulse, is the most avant-garde act you can perform, right now. No one else can create just as you can create in this moment. No one else has your ears, your heart, and your intoned voices.



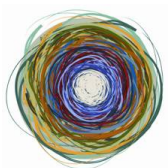
I am one to feel that those heart-urges are the *most* important voices to listen to. I am one to feel that those songs are the only ones that we, as artists, can really trust, day in and day out as we chop wood and carry water. If we can't follow to our heart, no matter how simple it pulses, what can we listen to? If we can't trust what feels like our next step, our next motion, our next movement, our next creation, then what can we trust? If we can't listen to the Muse, in its astonishing simplicity, then what song is ours? If the feelings we have and carry with us, perhaps even from our early childhood, cannot be explored right now in our art, when can the emotions be explored? When is the right time if it is not now?

## Two Rivers

Between you and me, here is what I think is an open secret. Every person on the planet who is alive has a river of their own. That means that you have a river, and I have a river. The waters' origin supplies everything, and all rivers come from a single source, more or less. At the mouths of the rivers, the waters eventually converge and recollect. But in between, all humans have a river of one's own. And each and ever river is unique, intimate, and mysteriously *yours*.

For a moment, let's look at my river. I grew up in this river. Me and the river are like the oldest of friends, with our most discreet essences absorbed in silent alchemy. It flows through me and I flow through it. It was here before I was born. It is a river of energy, thoughts, memories, love, plans, images, feelings, smells, karma, and everything discreet. Sometimes it rushes wild, and sometimes it is a lazy calm. There are plenty of adventures and plenty of ordinary days. My river is my life, in a subtle energetic unfolding.

In truth there are times when I am so used to the river that it doesn't surprise me anymore. I take it for granted. This is natural. After all, this is the water I drink. This is the water I use to bathe. I float down the curves and bends of the river everyday in every movement, thought, and personal exchange. It is so *known* by me that I don't feel like anyone would care to know about it. Why tell anyone? It seems so damn *obvious*. The



river is *right here*. Can't you see it? Can't you see where it flows? It is not big deal. If you can't, you don't have to see it, because you can trust me—it is no big deal.

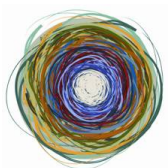
But the real truth is that it isn't. It is a big deal. It is the only river I have. Yours is the only river you have. While all is made of sound water, the particular characteristics of your river give it is unique flavor. The really crazy things is that the only way I can find out about your river is to watch you, talk to you, and absorb your artwork as its waves hit me over time. I have to suspend disbelief, and if I can, then your river intrigues like no other. You or I might take our rivers for granted, but 99% of everyone else does not. Why? This is because one person's tap water is another's exotic elixir. That is just how it works.

And when you are *transparent* about your river, and honest about your river, guess what happens. Your art tells a story, and the story *thrills* me. I find so much of value, resonance, and rich granularity, and so does everyone else who can suspend disbelief and absorb your art. I am completely turned on, at all levels of being. I love how I learn about my own river from the artistic gestures you use to evoke yours. Your artwork, when honest to the river from where it came, reminds me what I had taken for granted about mine. It reminds me about how precious my river is, and how wondrous its flow is. Somehow, through some kind of small miracle, when I absorb your art, I learn more about my own river. And I learn the most when your art is as finely-crafted and nuanced as possible. The more particular you are in your art, the more universal its sound.

## Fear

And what is the fear that you have? Well, contrary to what your head might tell you, the fear is *not* that your river is too small. Trust me, I know your head tells you “this is no good, and no one will care.” That line is a variation on the lie your mind likes to produce. You misinterpret it as fear of a lack of recognition, and that people will look upon your art and think “oh, this is so small, I can forget about *that*.”

But here is the truth that your mind sometimes won't let you believe. What you really fear is that your river will be too large. You fear its expanse. You fear where it



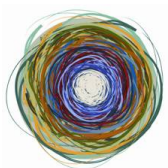
might go if you let go of the reins, and release control of the flow. You fear it might really rock people, and rock yourself.

In your river might be one or two dams that you built, or dams that were built by others. When you fixate on your fears, and allow the fears to control you and your river, what you actually do is protect the integrity of the dams at the expense of the integrity of your art, and the river from where it flows. What you fear is not smallness, but the vibrant sexuality of artistic immensity. You fear that your river will flow everywhere. You fear a flood.

But listen. You might think what you have is a mere river. But just know that no one else does. For us—your river is a deep mystery. We don't take your river for granted. And if we don't, then why should you? All you have to do in your art production is to be true to the river as it flows. When you don't take it for granted, you are able to appreciate the mundane routine of it as instead a miracle of spirited ritual.

You can use whatever outward sheaths that you happen to use at the moment of object creation. You might choose a particular camera stock and street corner to evoke in art something that is of your river. You might choose a specific metal, or a combination of stone hazes. You might choose a haunted sonority, or an image that you feel a curious attraction towards. You might like a dramatic sequence, or a particular combination of raw ingredients. Some materials might work better than others. You learn all this through trial and error, in tactile and pragmatic ways. And that is part of the fun—the puzzle of assembly so that there is an accord with your inner intuition.

It is so simple that we think it is too simple. The mystical simplicity is this: Be true to your life, in what it is, in what passes through it. Be true to the places you have gone and wandered, in the little bits of mundane transcendence that you have found around the corners, bends, and offshoots. Be true to your moments of sheer absorption in whatever experience that juices and gooses your river, no exceptions. Be true to the water you drink, and the dirt you have washed off. When you assemble and produce your artwork, be true to the materials that really grab you, and provide you with meaning. These, too, are part of your river. Very little that is important to you isn't. Most times you do not have to explain your artistic choices, because your mere being is all the explanation



required. And this is precisely because your river can flow to everyone else without you having to do much of anything except offer trust to its own native wisdom. For this is the same native wisdom that created you, created me, and created all of life as we know it.

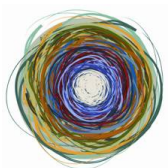
### The Flow of Artwork

And when you hit it, friend, when that *pop* sounds from your art (and it will, be patient), when one of your experiments forms as a whole piece of manifest spirit—oh the story that your art tells! We marvel at the expanse that comes from your humble bow to your source. From your art, the river flows in every direction at every speed. All of creation seems like a drop in the ocean. The infinite is in *this moment*. And the wonder takes the breath away. The boundaries between all of the rivers fall away, and we are all made of the ocean.

It is your river that can do this. It is your river that can provide this astonishing transparency. And it is your faithful depiction of your simplest intuition that can astonish us in a way that is entirely yours.

What a river you swim in. It is so exotic, so mysterious, so intoxicating. I want to know everything about it. I want to find out how you swim, how you float, what makes you sink, what the shore is like. I want you to relate what you know, what you see, what you feel, what you touch, when you know you are immersed in your river. All you have to do is record your intuitions, unencumbered and without undue hyperbole. And I'll get it. It is clear. It is your river, and *I want to swim in it*.

And yes. It is the same river that you feel bored by. It is the same river that you have swam in, and know most every contour of. It is the same river that you can take for granted. It is the same river that has made you cough and gurgle when your head sinks too low. It is the same nasty river that you want to forget, leave, and pretend isn't there. It is the same river. It thrills me. It may seem like nothing. It is nothing. It is everything. It is the exotic *and* the mundane all in one current. Same river. You see it one way, the rest of us see it another way. And so one river is actually two rivers—the one you call “mine” and the one we see as “yours”. Our recognition of your river's adventurous



contours grows in direct proportion to your ability to recognize your river's intimate nuance.

So just swim and tell us a good story of the motion. Others listen when you give yourself to your art production, *as a river would*. Others are hooked by your humility, about your ongoing flow. When your art is available for public display, the experience is rapture. The flow echoes in every beat of our heart.

Slow but sure, rivers cut and massage indelible marks on this earth. Yours has already done this, for to do so is the simple nature of any river, and of water wherever it may flow. Can you recognize the imprints? Can you feel the contours? Can you produce in a motion wild and steady, pre-cut yet in ever-flux?

And can you see in your river what is you, originally? I tell you, in this world of ambiguity and overload, your simple sight of what is most clear to you would sure help us see what can be most clear to us. For as an artist, your eyes are our eyes, and we see and feel our world as your see and feel your river. So, swim my friend, swim. And let us know how the water tastes.

