

Art, Politics & Spirituality

Spiritual Refugee (Part 1 of 2)

By Junko Chodos, Artist
Los Angeles

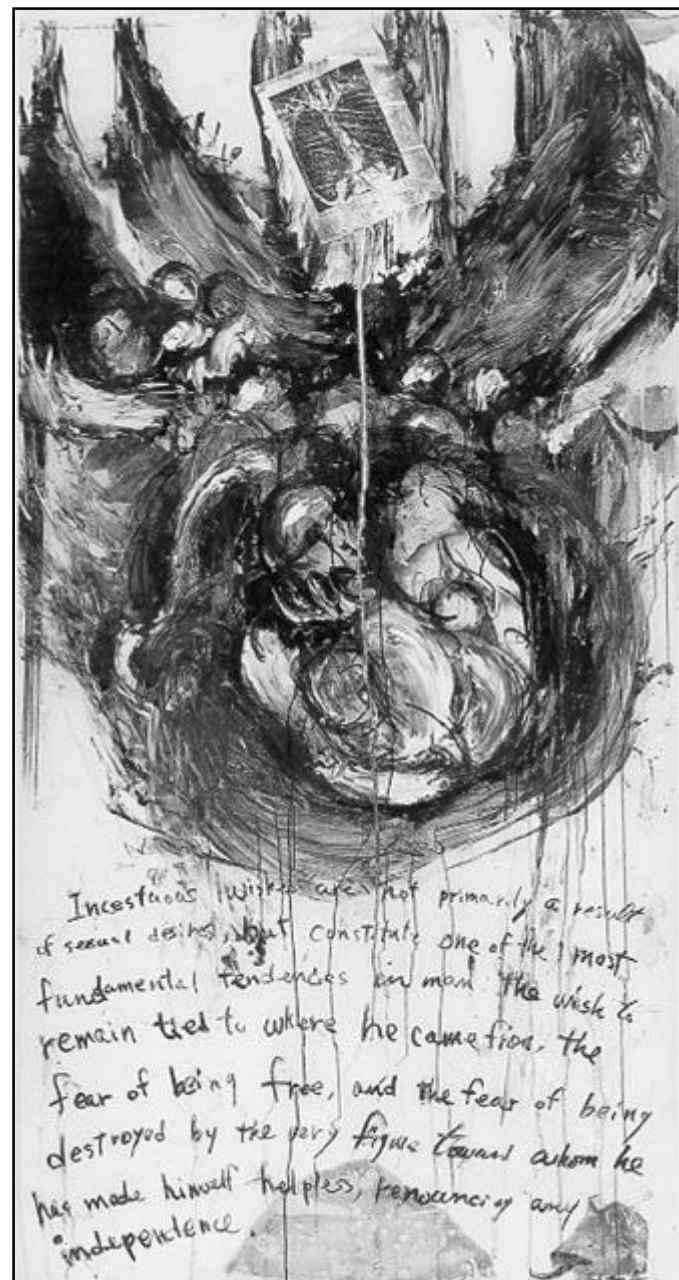
I was a child in Japan during World War II and my early memories are of destruction, death, misery, and of the grandiosity of rampant tribalism and totalitarianism. I have been an artist since I was four years old. My struggle against the repression of freedom and the hatred of individuality was never political or sociological: it was personal, psychological, philosophical, and most of all, deeply spiritual in its nature. Art had always been my core of strength: art is where I am connected

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to eternal reality and it became the battlefield of my stormy fight.

There are some people who leave their native land only in order to preserve their integrity and live with honesty towards themselves. One must have, after all, a certain amount of freedom to be honest as an individual. Without this freedom there is no way for one to take responsibility for his own actions and thoughts and therefore there is no inner life, no place where one experiences himself as an ethical being. Without that private place, others are merely strangers and one is a stranger even to himself.

In a society that does not allow for the existence of individuality, the effort to become an individual invites persecution. Although this sort of persecution is not as visible as political persecution it is nevertheless fatal to one's spiritual being, so the persecuted person becomes an exile - a spiritual refugee. One usually goes into this sort of exile only after a sustained battle against the cultural system in which his whole life is wrapped up. The battle is painful. Wounded and bleeding, one becomes an exile. These people I call "spiritual refugees", and I consider myself one of them.



Individuation Journal No. 5 (1995) Acrylic and Sumi ink on mylar; 80x42 inches
Inscription from *The Heart of Man* by Erich Fromm.

Concept of Spiritual Refugee

According to the Convention signed at the United Nations Conference on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons, Geneva, 1951, the word "refugee" is defined as a person who (1) has a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or holding a political opinion, (2) is outside the country of his nationality, and (3) is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

The key word in the definition of refugee in the Convention is "persecution" -- more precisely, "a well founded fear of being persecuted". The reason for the persecution has to be some violation of fundamental human rights. In this way, the concept of "refugee" is related to notions of fascism, dictatorship and totalitarianism, all of which are forces destructive of human rights and individuality. I believe that "persecution" in this same sense is an element of the notion of "spiritual refugee" even if the persecution might not involve the application of legal force in a literal sense. These are the

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reasons that I identify myself as a "spiritual refugee".

Connection between Refugee and Art

Being an artist and being an exile at the same time is no coincidence, for there is an intrinsic and essential relationship between art and the status of "refugee". Art is the means for searching out the truth, and creating art is itself the process of reaching integrity. It has always been that way and it still is. But especially since the development in the last century of "Modern art", the process of creating art has become a process of individuation. So art creates individuality and, at the same time, art needs tremendous freedom to let individuality grow. For many decades now, artists have been engaged in a fight for the freedom to reach individuality -- and this is the essence of being a spiritual refugee.

The word "individuation" was made up by Jung. He called the process of realizing the possibilities which are innate in each individual and the effort and desire to heighten those possibilities towards higher integrity and wholeness, the individuation process or self-realization, and he considered it to be a goal



Requiem for an Executed Bird, No. 13 (1991) Mixed media on paper, 40x32 inches

of every human being. Individuation does not imply any isolation from society nor is it another word for egoism - as is often misunderstood. For the fact is that only when one is individuated can he become a responsible member of society.

Erich Fromm, who was himself a refugee from Nazi Germany, described the process of individual growth as a process of cutting the "primary ties" with the mother - the figurative umbilical cord which still fastens the child to the mother and to the outside world. This cord gives the child a sense of security and a feeling of belonging even though it restricts his freedom. Primitive societies are built on the foundation of this umbilical cord, on the strong tie to the mother -- and by extension to the family, the tribe, the nation, to blood and soil; and the relationship of the individual to the world is symbiotic.

The process of individuating is a process of getting out of this symbiosis to reach the stage where man can be free and yet not alone, critical and yet not filled with doubt, independent and yet an integral part of mankind. This freedom can be attained only by man's being himself and actuating the spontaneous, integrated personality. In order to reach that stage, each man has to go through a separation from the mother, blood, and soil, and has to stand alone and face the overwhelming reality of the world. This induces a painful feeling of insignificance in the face of the world and leads to enormous fear and anxiety.

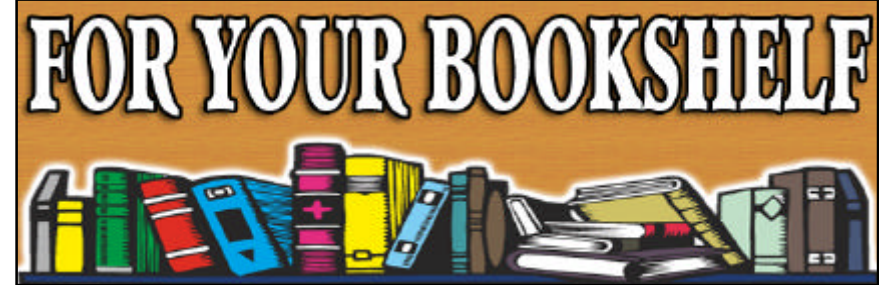
[to be continued]

Junko Chodos is a Japanese-born artist who came to America to live over 30 years ago. She has exhibited at many venues throughout the United States, Germany, and Japan. Her recent one-person show at the Long Beach Museum of Art closed in January 2002, and another one-person show of her art will be open at the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art in Colorado from June 28th through August 31st.

Her recent book, Metamorphosis: The Transformative Vision of Junko Chodos, won the Independent Publishers Art Book of the Year Award. These articles are based on lectures she gave at Claremont Graduate University and the Getty Research Center in Los Angeles.

Having been exposed to Junko Chodos' lectures, books and exhibitions, and as an immigrant from Egypt to USA who is rooted in Coptic monasticism, I passionately and intellectually related to her expressions of the "spiritual refugee." Upon my invitation, she graciously contributed this 2-part series for Watani International.

S.M. Saad, Senior Editor



Politics, Religion & Spirituality

Upon reading S.M. Saad's article "Antoun Sidhom: When Politics Are Backed by Spirituality," in *Watani International* of 5 May 2002, Y.B. from North Carolina, sent us the following list of books on the interaction between politics, religion and spirituality.

Christian Faith and Modern Democracy: God and Politics in the Fallen World.
By Robert P. Kraynak, 2001. \$25 PB

Religious Freedom: History, Cases, and Other Materials on the Interaction of Religion and Government.
By John Thomas Noonan, 2001. \$74 HC

On Two Wings: Humble Faith and Common Sense at the American Founding.
By Michael Novak, 2001. \$24 HC

Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations.
By Michael Walzer, 2000. \$21 PB

The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology.
By Oliver O'Donovan, 1999. \$28 PB

The Luster of Our Country: The American Experience of Religious Freedom.
By John Thomas Noonan, 1998. \$35 HC

Christian Justice and Public Policy (Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion, No 10).
By Duncan B. Forrester, 1997. \$28 PB

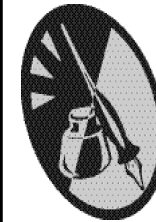
Faith and Politics: What's a Christian to Do?
By C. Welton Gaddy, 1996. \$14 PB

Church and State in Early Christianity.
By Hugo Rahner, 1992. \$17 PB

Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought).
By Harro Hopfl, Ed, 1991. \$14 PB

HC Hardcover, PB Paperback

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