

Sally Linder: Artist, Humanist, Activist

by Cynthia Close

Sally Linder’s environmental activism is her art. It is not some altruistic activity to be engaged in at a convenient time and place: her art is the core of her being. It is life itself.

Born in Brookline, Massachusetts, in 1951, this well-known Burlington-based artist has had a long and illustrious career.

At the age of 12, before she fell in love with art, she fell in love with Robert Linder, whom she married in 1971. They moved to Canada where Linder studied painting and creative writing at McGill University, ultimately earning a BA from Goucher College, followed in 1975 by a BFA from Concordia University, where she received the Board of Governor’s Medal for Creative Work in Visual Arts.

Accolades have followed Linder throughout her creative life, but they were not pursued. They were the results of her many journeys. Artists by nature are seekers of truth. For Linder this search involved deep, internal investigation, at times in isolation, surrounded by harshly beautiful, unforgiving environments. The first of these took place in 1975–1976 when Linder lived alone, in the winter, without telephone, electricity, or running water, atop a mountain in Harrington, Quebec. To say that this experience imbued in her a profound respect for the power of nature is probably an understatement.

This period of isolation gave way to a different kind of journey, one of building family. She had her first child, a daughter, in 1979 and that year moved with her family to a farm in Bethel, Vermont, along with four dogs, seven cats, five horses, and a raccoon. It was there, in 1983, her son was born. In 1989, the family moved to Burlington, where she continues to paint today in the light-filled studio behind her house.

It was in this studio that I first encountered Linder’s most recent work, a series generated by her two voyages aboard National Geographic icebreakers, accompanied by scientists, Inuit trackers, and photographers, that explored Iceland, Greenland, and Canada above the Arctic Circle. At one point they were 500 miles from the North Pole.

It was on their second trip, an attempt to sail through the Northwest Passage, when the ship, *The Explorer* got stuck in pack ice over six feet thick. What could have been a devastating experience turned into one of the most magical moments for Linder. The vessel remained trapped in the grip of the ice and as the blue-white mass crept



photo: Robert Linder

81 Degrees North Latitude

Somewhere between the heavens and Earth . . . Loveliness so pure and profound. It cracks open the heart and I fall to my knees.

—from Sally Linder’s Arctic journal



photos of artwork: courtesy of the artist

(top) Ilulissat Glacier and (left) Arctic Design I from the series Within the Circle. (right) Adrift from the series Approaching a Threshold. (below) Winged Messenger from the series A Part of this World.

up around the hull, the polar bears approached to do some exploring of their own. Linder told me the lumbering, curious bears got close enough that she could see their breath.

“The immensity of the Arctic Sweep humbles me as it enacts a story. Humanity is momentarily afforded a life-changing choice. The Arctic gifted me a vision of a land/seascape nearly undamaged, untrodden, untruncated

by human dominance. This is the treasure I took back to the studio to paint.” The quote is from the artist’s statement in a catalog for *Within the Circle* an exhibition of Linder’s Arctic works held at Champlain College in early 2016.

Inner Travels

Linder’s interior journey continued when at the age of 40 she felt she needed to “question my life’s direction and belief systems.” This led to her 1992–1993 series *Pelvis*, beautifully abstracted renderings of a pelvis bone, where she “found herself falling into the negative space of the birth canal, journeying backward into a darkness that once seemed forbidding and now beckoned.”

It was also in 1993 that she traveled through the canyons of Arizona with a Navajo guide. Then, with a Blackfoot guide, she moved farther on to Montana. These Native Americans gave her a buffalo skull and a pelvis. She read *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown. She learned about the US government’s policy of Manifest Destiny, a doctrine responsible for the massive genocide of our Native peoples and near extermination of the buffalo. Her deeply felt response to this experience led to the *Manifest Destiny* series of paintings, her gift to the Native peoples of North America. The American flag haunts several of these brightly colored works, red stripes merging like blood with flesh and bone of those sacrificed to its supremacy.



Perhaps it was the realization of the dangers of this path—this belief in our separateness from and dominion over nature—that led Linder to trek alone through the canyons of Utah to live in a cave where she sought a new awareness of Earth through meditation. It was in this same year, 1995, that she consulted with Grandmother Waynaha Two Worlds of the Lakota and Cherokee Nations on what ultimately became the *Connectedness* series of 11 mixed media paintings.

decomposed over a year and a half. She then painstakingly reconstructed its skeleton and made a series of drawings titled *Patience*, which she likened to an old man, calling him “Grandfather.”

Pain as Muse

In my first discussion with Linder, she told me “pain was her muse.” That was certainly the case when she learned of the tragic 1995 Christmas Eve fire in the Philadelphia Zoo in which all of the zoo’s 23 primates



The Arctic gifted me a vision of a land / seascape nearly undamaged, untrodden, untruncated by human dominance.

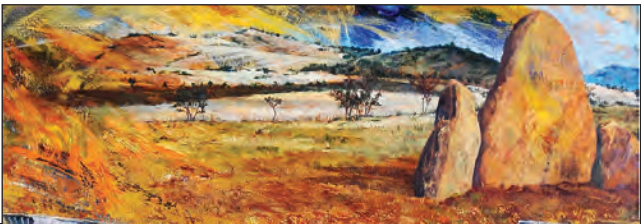
— Sally Linder, from her artist’s statement, *Within the Circle*

Even her forays in city life brought Linder into close contact with spiritual reminders of the connection between the human and animal worlds. A great horned owl apparently died of old age and fell from a tree into a snowbank on the sidewalk near her Burlington studio. She found it and carried the newly dead body home where she watched, like a guardian, as it slowly

lost their lives. She was moved to visit the zoo and collected data and photographs of each of the endangered animals from the zoo’s lead primate keeper. These included six gorillas, three orangutans, four white-handed gibbons, six ring-tailed lemurs, two ruffed lemurs, and two mongoose lemurs. In the creation of these mixed media works, she fell in love with the



(above) Gossamer from the series Approaching a Threshold. (right) Snickers and Maandazi from the series Remembering the Primates. (right) Diepsloot (inside hinged triptych) from the series Luminous People and the Land.



reimagined beings of these zoo captive primates. Each piece was more of a ritual object of remembrance than simple artwork. In 1998 Linder traveled with these primate portraits to the jungles of Borneo, Madagascar, and Cameroon, where, with the assistance of the indigenous Dayak, Antandroy, and Bakweri people, she buried the paintings of the 23 primates, allowing their spirits to symbolically return home.

Sally Linder's restless spirit seeks expression in words as well as in visual art. She wrote *Re-Membering the Primates*, a book about the experience of painting the primates and returning them to their natural home. Her engagement

with indigenous people during this time heightened her awareness of the power of myth. For them, mythical animals possessing magical abilities had once lived on Earth but were hunted to extinction by humans. These tribal peoples also held physically and mentally challenged children and adults in high regard, believing they had special talents. These two ideas, combining the power of myth with the disabled, led to *A Part of This World*, a series of paintings that seem quite unlike anything Linder painted previously, harkening back to the visionary work of the 18th-century artist and poet William Blake.

The *Ark of Hope* is one of Linder's most well-known and internationally celebrated projects. It is a wooden chest, designed and painted by Linder and crafted by cabinetmaker Kevin Jenness from a single plank of wood. It was created as a place of refuge for the Earth Charter, an international people's treaty for building a just, sustainable, and peaceful world in the 21st century. It also holds over 600, hand-crafted *Temenos Books*, made by children and adults from around the world in response to learning about the Earth Charter. Linder conceived of the book

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FINANCE

Socially Responsible Investing

by C.D. Moriarty

You’ve got some liquid assets: you’ve saved a nice chunk of money in your bank account; or you just sold a tangible asset or inherited some money. Maybe you just want to keep your money in the relative safety of the bank. Or maybe you’re ready to venture out into the stock market and get a better return on your money. But you wonder about the risk and are also concerned about where your money is going—you want to invest in socially responsible companies. When does it make sense to invest in the stock market and how do you go about investing wisely?

Keeping Your Money in the Bank

First, you need an investment strategy, which means having a larger view of your money and what you want it to accomplish. Having cash in the bank is a critical part of an investment strategy, whether you invest in the stock market or not. Cash is the resource you need to back up your daily life—and the ups and downs of the

market if you decide to invest.

The banks are not paying much interest these days, and you may be tempted to jump ship and invest in the stock market, but that may not be the wisest decision for you, depending on your situation. If you can afford to make a long-term investment—you don’t need the money right away—then it may make sense to get involved in the stock market. But if you need the money for a car next year or to buy a home in three or four years, exposing your money to the stock market is unwise.

Why are the interest rates in the bank so low? The Federal Reserve lowered interest rates and has kept them low since the financial crisis of 2008. The low rate is not altogether a bad thing. This same low interest rate makes it possible for banks to offer historically low mortgage rates. If the bank was paying you more, you would have a higher interest rate on your car, home, and other loans.

The bank also provides stability. The Federal Deposit Insurance (FDIC) guarantees your money in the bank up to \$250,000—even if the bank goes out of business. Bank accounts are not volatile so offset whatever is happening

in the stock market.

Supposing you’re not ready or able to invest in the stock market but want to give to organizations you believe in. You can think socially even with the cash in your savings account by using your local bank or credit union. The institution then loans the money to local businesses to support growth. Even charitable giving locally is a way to be

servative than men when it comes to money: they want their money in a safe place with a reliable return.

First, it’s good to understand that despite the market’s volatility, the overall trend is up: the potential return, over time, far exceeds interest earned on a bank account. The caveat is that you need to be in it for the long term and be willing to ride through an occasional downturn.

However, the market does, indisputably, carry a risk. One way to mitigate the risk is to invest in a mutual fund. A mutual fund is a group of stocks professionally managed. The money you invest is diversified—meaning the risk is spread among different companies. Best of all, you can start with a small amount of cash, sometimes as little as one hundred dollars.

Investing in companies that align with your values creates a conscious use of your money. If you want to in-

“ More and more investors are putting their money into companies they believe in. ”

responsible and attentive to your values with your money.

Investing Consciously

You’ve got that extra cash and you’re ready to take the stock market plunge, but you’re hesitant. Often the reason people give for being hesitant about investing in the stock market is concern over its unpredictability: they watch the market go down periodically and worry they will lose their investment. Women tend to be more con-

vest just to make money that’s OK: we all want our money to grow. Just know what your time line is for needing this money and how the investment fits with your goals.

More and more investors are putting their money into companies they believe in. Investing is having equity in the company. So buying stock makes you an owner. If you want to own socially responsible companies, consider investing in socially responsible mutual funds.

There are many socially responsible

Socially Responsible Investment Companies

The following websites are for investment companies and mutual funds that specialize in socially responsible investing.

www.Domini.com
www.Paxworld.com
www.Parnassus.com
www.Calvert.com
www.GreenCentury.com
www.Arielinvestments.com

companies, mutual funds, and investment opportunities out there. Be sure to understand what their investment specialty and focus is. Some specialize in companies that are environmentally focused, other mutual funds stay out of alcohol and tobacco, and some focus on a religious principles. If you know your major concerns, you can easily sort through the possible investing options and find the ones for you.

Take care of your personal financial world. Offset the inevitable investment volatility with your solid foundation of cash. Invest where you feel good about your money going and create an investment strategy that meets your goals. Then, no matter what happens “out there” in the financial world, you will have a plan to handle your financial life.

C.D. Moriarty writes from Bristol and is a financial speaker and coach dedicated to empowering others around their money. Her financial advice and information are at www.MoneyPeace.com. □

sally linder

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project, as part of the ark, along with fellow artist Cameron Davis. The *Ark of Hope* was dedicated at a celebration of the Earth Charter held at Shelburne Farms on September 9, 2001. The event featured keynote speaker Jane Goodall, along with musician Paul Winter, global peace walker Satish Kumar, and Dr. Steven C. Rockefeller, who was a founding member of the Earth Charter Commission. Two days later, on September 11, 2001, following news of the horrific terrorist attacks in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC, Linder’s immediate, spontaneous response was to begin walking the *Ark of Hope* to New York City. For two months, hundreds of people joined Linder on the 350-mile pilgrimage, carrying the ark through four states. In 2002 it was exhibited at the United Nations as the artistic expression of The Earth Charter. From there, Linder traveled with the ark to Johannesburg, South Africa, where she experienced the strength and dignity of black South Africans living after apartheid under harsh conditions in Diepsloot, Zandspruit, and Soweto. As with all her life experiences, her time in Africa spawned a creative burst, leading to *Luminous People and Land*, a series of triptychs flooded with the color and celebration of life that she found there.

Tension in Opposition

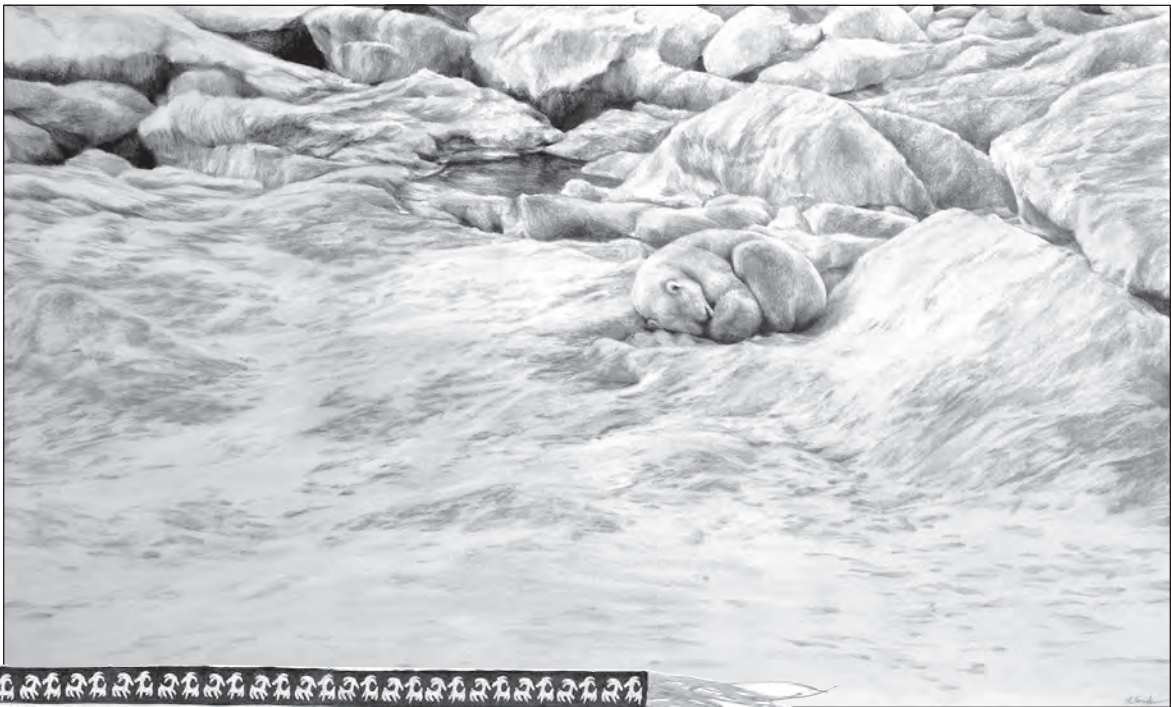
The years following her segue out of Africa seemed to be a time of reconnecting with elemental aesthetic concerns. Her work has moved from being figurative and specific to abstraction. It appears to be a moment of stocktaking for Linder, which is perfectly expressed in the last stanza of her poem to explain the *Metamorphosis Series*:

*This—a concerted self discipline
To drive out my lazy preoccupation
With all that is wrong
And going wrong
Between Us and Earth.
I have been cartwheeling in meadows*

*of wildflowers
And floating amongst the monarchs
Putting my love affair with Earth into
paintings,
My gentle footprint upon her belly
Keeping love alive between us.*

Perhaps it is the tension between opposites—the warmth of the South African sun giving way to the chill, stillness of the Arctic, utter despair over climate change and the undeniable beauty that still exists in the natural world—that continues to drive a prolific artist like Linder.

When we sat in her Burlington studio, looking at her breathtakingly beautiful paintings of the Arctic, she told me “the most toxic human milk in the world comes from women living there.” The pollution that we are producing in the industrialized world is being carried north



Courtesy of the artist
(above) Vulnerability of Trust II from the series Approaching a Threshold. (left) Black and White Ruffed Lemurs from Linder’s series Re-Membering the Primates.



by air and water currents that circulate around our planet. We are all indeed connected. Of all her work, it was the polar bear paintings making up the *Approaching a Threshold* series that moved me to tears. Linder has used the materials most responsible for eroding their habitat, materials produced by the fossil fuel industry—mylar or drafting film, asphalt, tar, oil, along with more

standard artists’ supplies—to create the most powerful works involving animal subjects I have ever seen depicted in art.

The individual paintings are large, making them impossible to ignore. Linder’s skill and understanding of the anatomy of her subjects is evident, but it’s the undeniable empathy and overwhelming sadness permeating the paintings that tugged at my heart.

The 2010 painting *Taking Control* showing a bear rising like a specter, dressed in robes that suggested royalty or the ravages of war, made me think of paintings by Velasquez or Goya. But it was the last painting of the series, the 2015 *Adrift*, that left me weak. A mother polar bear sits protecting a single cub on a floating nest of meticulously drawn pieces of rope and plastic detritus. Her head is raised toward the

heavens, as though searching for a final escape. A ghostly ladder dangles from above, leading to either nothing or, we might hope, an afterlife. To quote Diane E. Gayer, director of the Vermont Design Institute: “Finally, as an artist, Linder leads us to the brink and asks us to see, whether we want to or not.” As a single species, our overwhelmingly negative impact on this Earth, and indeed on the Arctic, is undeniable. If it leads to our own undoing remains to be seen.

Cynthia Close is a contributing editor for Documentary Magazine, art editor for the literary journal Mud Season Review, and an adviser to the Vermont International Film Festival. She lives in Burlington, Vermont, with her doggie, Ethel. □