



Luminous

An artist's story as a guide to radical creativity

Linda Dayan Frimer

Contents

VIII

forewords

1

introduction

7

1 becoming light

15

2 trees of life

25

3 the art of story

31

4 colouring the world

41

5 golden lustre

49

6 brown grounding

57

7 between chaos and shape

65

8 purple and violet fundamentals

73

9 wells wandering

87

10 beckoned by the light

93

11 white enlightenment

101

12 creating a perspective

109

13 colouring my constitution

119

14 black reconciliation

127

15 grey neutrality

135

16 green everywhere

143

17 integration

151

18 blue depths and shallows

163

19 rising up

173

20 uncovering more

179

21 the art of persistence

187

22 yellow radiance

197

23 a bridge of orange

203

24 delving deeper

211

25 red intensity

225

26 red-green heart

233

27 turquoise convergence

243

28 indigo intuition

251

29 silver sanctification

259

epilogue

268

acknowledgements

269

artworks index

270

index

274

about the author

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Excerpts from *Luminous*

foreword

Linda Frimer is known as an accomplished painter, particularly for her remarkably beautiful, light-filled studies of forests in Western Canada. She now brings us a book that paints her life story—and much much more. It is a book filled with wonder, wisdom, history and her beautiful paintings; a book filled with stories—ancient and modern—of family and community, artists and art, loss and hope. The stories are both personal and global, but they are rooted in the soil of her Jewish heritage and her Canadian childhood on Indigenous land.

Growing up Jewish in the interior of British Columbia, Frimer saw the world with a painter's eyes. Everything was saturated in colour, each one heavy with symbolic meaning that she would later learn to decipher with the aid of Jewish mystical traditions and a “cultural tradition of storytelling.” She experienced the world surrounding her home as a magical land of beautiful forests.

For Frimer, this land was never a *terra nullius*, “nobody's land,” an empty landscape with no prior claims and no genealogy. It was and is both the territory of the Dakelh (Carrier) First Nation who have interacted symbiotically with the land for thousands of years, and a natural society of plants, trees and animals who have interacted symbiotically for at least as long. It is alive with spirit and stories, which can be read by those with an intimate knowledge of the landscape and by those who open themselves up to the power of “sensate knowing” and the wonder and amazement it occasions to transform us, to unify us.

This land becomes central to Frimer's identity, and she comes to believe that her own natural reverence for it is also

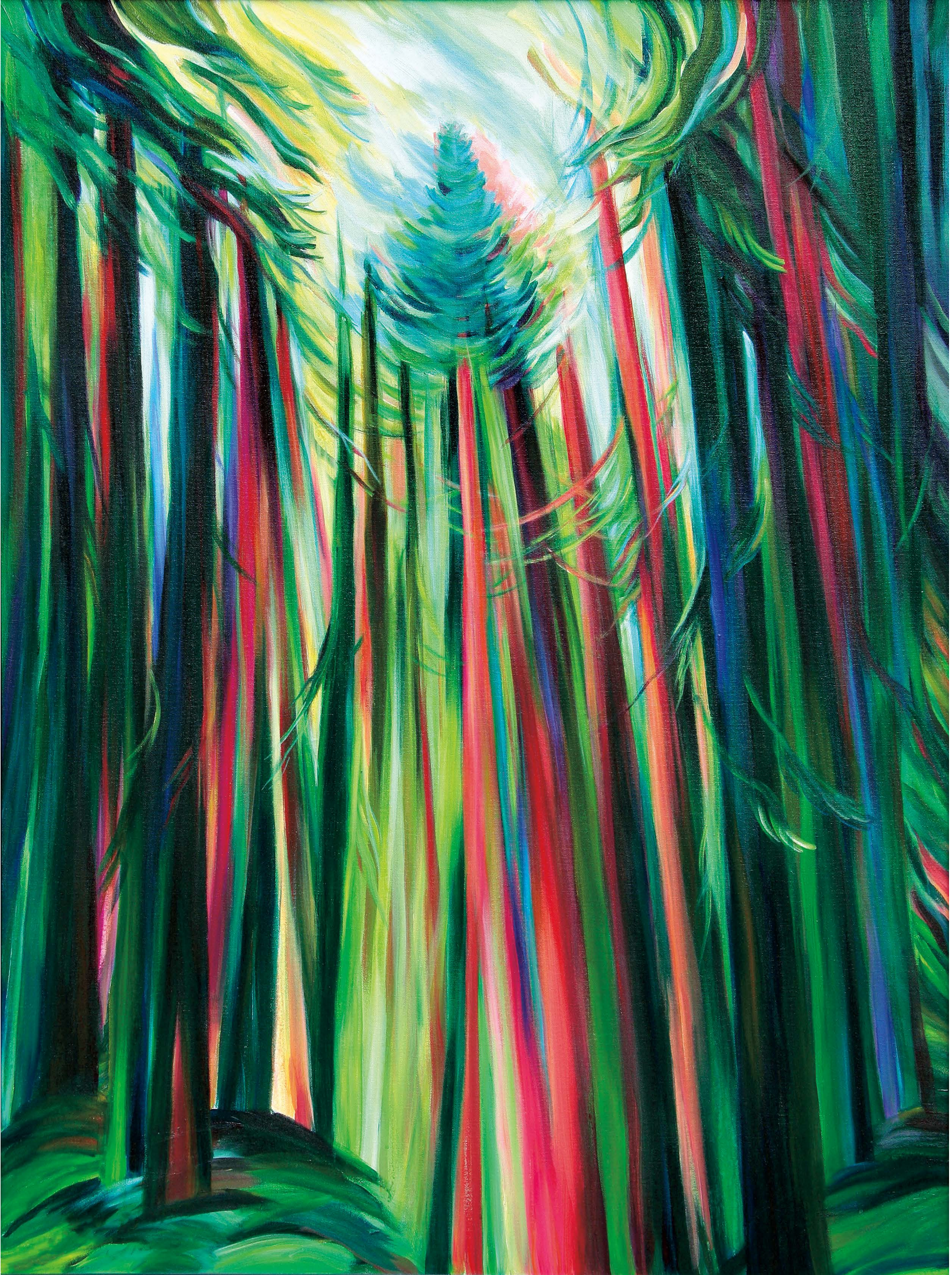
core to the identity of both the Jewish people and the Dakelh First Nation. “I would learn that these two separate nations . . . had much in common and much to teach me.” From a young age, she *felt* the connections between Jewish and Indigenous culture and traditions, and these connections are woven throughout her book.

The commonalities she identifies include reverence for the land, trees (especially cedar) and their healing power, and a creator, creation and creativity; remembering the ancestors and honouring their wisdom; a tradition of storytelling; observing rituals and practicing ceremony; the experience of genocide and cultural loss (as a small child, Frimer overheard stories of the Holocaust, a never forgotten “blow” to her “innocent spirit”); the obligation to repair and heal ourselves and the planet; and the central role of the heart in knowing the physical and spiritual realms and in any ethical approach to the world.

The theme of *connection* is broader than this, for Frimer wants us to appreciate the connections among all people, the connections that animate the natural world, the connections between humanity and nature, the connections that people create through compassion, empathy and caretaking of each other and the earth, the connections we create when we repair what has been broken and the connections we create through art—for the language of art is universal.

...





2

trees of life

The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness.

John Muir

Around 385 million years ago, billions of years after the first simple microscopic life forms emerged, small ferns began poking through the earth and pointed themselves skyward.



Draw a dot and turn it into a vertical line that extends the length of your paper. Draw fronds, the leaflike part of a plant, similar to the flattened blades of a fern, radiating out from this central line called a stalk or stipe. If you are unsure how they might appear, then just imagine them. This drawing represents the earliest prehistoric tree, *Wattieza*, which stood approximately eight metres high.

The first forests were populated by unimaginably unusual tree-like plants. The pine tree that we are familiar with today is one of the most ancient plant genera on the planet and first appeared around 200 million years ago. Its reproductive structure, the pine cone, is thought to be the evolutionary ancestor of the flower—perhaps even the forbidden fruit from the biblical story of Eden. Except for the outer bark, most of the pine tree, including the bark resin, pollen, pine nuts and cone itself, is edible.

Forests of trees soon covered the earth and grew themselves into the dominant terrestrial ecosystem. Forests ruled. They would not only come to shelter an evolving creation,

but prevent erosion, recycle water, regulate climate and, in a future dynamic relationship with humankind, take in carbon dioxide and exhale the oxygen vital to our breathing. It would also come to be understood that trees feel sensations of pain, struggle for light and form alliances within their groves, even with other species, to send each other nutrients and share in mutual care.

Know that when you speak of trees and their history, you are talking about everything rustling with life on this earth. We are all related.



Create your own imaginary prehistoric tree.

Now imagine a multitude of colourful flowers covering the earth. They come in such an astonishing variety that they likely also experienced an explosive evolutionary burst of their own shortly after their origin. Charles Darwin referred to their emergence and rapid evolution as “an abominable mystery” and a “most perplexing phenomenon.”

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

Albert Einstein

...



3

the art of story

Undoubtedly the first man was an artist.

Barnett Newman

Colours and shapes are our symbols. Among the first artworks were imprints of hands soaked in iron oxide and clay, while the oldest cave art ever recorded dates back more than 45,000 years. At the cave of El Castillo in northern Spain, a red ochre disk, appearing as a large faint red dot, resides amidst stencils of hands formed by blowing pigment over hands pressed against cave walls. The handprints found on Paleolithic cave walls are much more than artifacts we can connect to our own hands. They represent the personal and universal symbols in our stories that began as a visual rendering thousands of years ago.



Soak your own hand in red oxide or any other acrylic paint colour and place your handprint onto paper as a concrete sign of your presence within creation.

Millennia after the first cave paintings, Spanish artist Joan Miró created his painting *The Red Disk* (1960). A large,

In Stillness Ascending

Watercolour 60" x 40"

This painting is inspired by and named for Brian Cherney's musical composition of the same name, and became the cover image of his compact disc. Cherney had been moved by the noble bearing and protective presence of a tall female figure amidst a group destined to perish in the Holocaust.

uniquely irregular red dot in the midst of white splatters set against a blue-black background, this dot appears as an emphatic, while radical, image of cosmic significance in the empty expanse of nothingness. Artists, though separated by thousands of years, were connected through their shared intuitive insight.

Why did these artists choose the colour red for their central dot images? The answer may be both scientific and mystical. The redshift colour of faraway galaxies occurs when an object's wavelength increases as it moves away from Earth. The longest wavelength, and the colour associated with our knowledge of the universe's expansion from an unimaginably hot and dense point, is red.



Look at Joan Miró's *The Red Disk* (1960) and at images from the *Panel of Hands* (c. 40,000 BCE) in the cave at El Castillo. Draw your own large red dot as a symbolic response to the vast nothingness. Then imagine yourself stepping into the mesmerizing firelight of the earth's first artists.

In the early stages of creation of both art and science, every-

...

colour connections

The Neutrals

Neutral colours are those hues that appear to be without colour. Often, however, they have undertones of small amounts of other colours.



Black for early humans was the colour of night, the pupils in their eyes, the charcoal they drew with and . . .



Grey was a thunderstorm, stones, wool, aging hair, charcoal, ash and . . .



White was clouds, snow, teeth, the moon, a nursing mother's milk, chalk, bone and . . .



Brown is a composite colour made by combining the three primary colours of red, yellow and blue. Brown was the colour of skin, tree trunks, eyes, roots, the raw umber they painted with, the earth and . . .



Yellow for early humans was the life-enabling sun, bile, the yellow ochre they painted with and . . .



Blue, though not part of the first basic palette, was the infinity of sky and water and . . .

The Primaries

Primary colours cannot be created from other colours.



Red was the colour of blood, fire, life, the red ochre that they painted with and . . .

The Secondaries

Secondary colours are created by combining two primary colours.



Green, created from combining yellow and blue, was, for early humans, the colour of grass, trees, new growth, seeds and . . .



Orange, created from combining red and yellow, was the colour of changing leaves, hair, shellfish, fish roe and . . .



Purple, created from combining blue and red, was the colour of veins, the sky at sunset, bruises, roots and . . .



16

green everywhere

Green is the prime colour of the world, and that from which its loveliness arises.

Pedro Calderón de la Barca



Where do I look to find the colour green? Deep rich tones of emerald, juniper and fern residing in the forested mountains of British Columbia

intimately connect me to the wilderness. Green makes an impression that lasts.

The colour of fertility, renewal and harmony, green is found between yellow and blue in the spectrum, where it occupies more space than any other colour. Green is dominant. Because of this, it is difficult to classify the variety of green hues in nature. In ancient Greece, blue was often understood as a shade of green, with *green* used to describe the natural world, including the trees, ocean and sky.

The earliest sources of green were “green earths,” grey-green to blue-green pigments primarily sourced from the minerals celadonite and glauconite. Among many early artworks featuring green earths are the rock art at the Cueva de las Manos in Argentina and the Buddhist paintings in the caves in Ajanta, India. Celadonite green earths are also prominent in the art of the Haida Nation in coastal British Columbia.

Popular in ancient Egypt, where green was a symbol of regeneration and rebirth, malachite, a copper-containing mineral, was ground and used on tomb walls and sarcophagi. It was also common in ancient Rome, as evidenced by wall

paintings at Pompeii and at Roman imperial sites as far north as Germany. Malachite pigment fades over time, leading to the use of other green pigments, such as verdigris, made from the weathering of brass or bronze. The ancient Romans would soak copper plates in wine to produce this pigment, causing green to become associated with the colour of Venus, the goddess of the green garden, wine and love.

In the Middle Ages and Renaissance, green was associated with wealth, merchants, bankers and the gentry—in comparison to the nobility, who wore red. In his famous work the *Mona Lisa* (1503), Leonardo da Vinci painted Lisa Gherardini in a greenish-brown dress, as she was the wife of a wealthy silk merchant. Chrome green, a mixture of lead chromate and iron blue, with its excellent covering power, replaced the highly toxic and hard-to-mix verdigris. In the Romantic period, a variety of greens conveyed the emotional tranquility of the verdant countryside.

Before the nineteenth century, artists mixed their own paints from raw pigments. The collapsible paint tube, invented in 1842 by American painter John Rand, now revolutionized both the colour palette and the immediacy of those painting amidst the multiple greens en plein air.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote that the colour green causes our eyes to experience a “distinctly grateful impression.”

When yellow and blue are mixed in “perfect equality so that neither predominates, . . . the eye and the mind repose . . . [and] the beholder has neither the wish nor the power to imagine a state beyond it.”

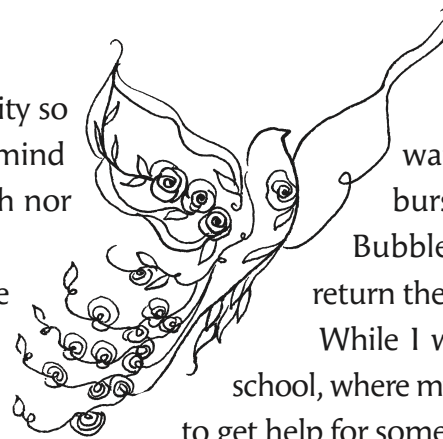
Because green falls in the middle of our visible spectrum, and therefore occupies the place where our perception is best, our eyes don’t have to work as hard to perceive it. This colour’s calming and sedating nature affects both mental and physical health, causing it to be said that those who live closer to green have a longer life expectancy.

There are almost as many ways of ascribing meaning to the colour green as there are variations in its hue. In Islam, green represents paradise and is the colour of the prophet Mohammed’s banner. In Ireland, green is the national colour and has been poetically associated with leprechauns, clovers and St. Patrick’s Day. Green is also the inventive Emerald City in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, where the entire population wore green-tinted spectacles in order to protect their eyes from the “brightness and glory” of this eternally optimistic green place. Yet green has a dark side too. In his play *Othello*, William Shakespeare wrote of the “green-eyed monster,” also known as envy.



In my childhood I am a fresh green thing, learning to choose from the many variations of tones and values in my midst, while defining and then communicating my evolving attitude. I call this “being in the middle of my own spectrum,” where green is not only a colour, but an active process.

I sit on the back porch and blow wondrous bubbles into our garden in Prince George. Their extraordinary colours, created from the interference of light reflecting off of the layers of soap and water that enclose a pocket of air, miraculously enable them to appear like circular rainbows. Water and air, said to be there before the beginning of time, are now making bubbles within it.



The reassuring thing about bubbles, watching them float upward, is that they burst before I can grasp them in my palm.

Bubbles get away from human interference and return themselves to nothingness all by themselves.

While I would rather blow bubbles, I must go to school, where my inability to read has prompted my parents to get help for something called dyslexia. According to author Ronald D. Davis, this may mean I have a “gift” instead of an impediment. Dyslexics see mental images as if they are real and perceive these images from many different perspectives.

I am a picture thinker, and like some dyslexics, I see multi-dimensional images that form pictures for words as I attempt to read them. Many words, such as *the*, *was* and *it*, do not have picture meanings, and so my over-circuited picture-thinking process gets interrupted each time I come upon them. This accounts for my frustration, mistakes and trouble focusing in the two-dimensional world of symbols and print. But it also accounts for my very active imagination, insightfulness, curiosity and vivid awareness of the environment.

At my new school, I gleefully discover that the solution for my dyslexia was to be a creative one. I am Auguste Rodin again, but instead of making eyeballs and snakes with clay, I create letters and numbers. In my element, I regain control and slow my thinking down enough to fill in the blanks. Soon my dyslexia improves significantly.

Green has a strong correspondence to emotional safety.

I’m filling my brush with water and pushing it into the hard cakes of watercolour in my little metal paintbox. I turn and turn my brush until it holds a small amount of yellow colour the consistency of peanut butter. I dip my yellow-filled brush into blue colour and turn it again.



Make one brushstroke of green. Then take varying amounts of different blue and yellow hues to create a variety of greens, and add tints of white and shades of black and perhaps a







Linda Lavin

25

red intensity

Some red star had come too close to the earth.

Oscar Wilde

Red is signalling danger as I find myself standing at the gate of a locked garden, behind which lie the skeletal remains of Eastern European Jewish culture. I am looking over the gate, hoping to glimpse the remnant flowering of my grandmother Fannie's life. I touch the gate and the frozen lock adheres to my warm hand. As I pull away, drops of red fall upon grey ash. I climb over the gate, and the garden disintegrates.

I wake up with my heart racing as our plane touches down in Prague.

Red might be one of the oldest colours. As historian Michel Pastoureau writes, red is “the archetypal colour, the first colour humans mastered.” The colour of our life force, and the colour with the longest wavelength on the visible spectrum, red is fierce in the attention it demands. Societies and the individuals within them develop many names for those colours that impact them most strongly, and so a vast variety of reds, such as garnet, scarlet and crimson, have come to uniquely represent passion, love, seduction, willpower, rage, vibrance and more.

If one says “red”—the name of colour—and there are fifty people listening, it can be expected that there will be fifty reds in their minds.

Josef Albers



The Gate, Varniai, Lithuania (photo taken c. 2000)

Most of red's symbolism arises from powerful associations reaching back millennia. Over 40,000 years ago, red clay was used to decorate cave walls, while the ground powder of red ochre or hematite was buried with people to protect them in the afterlife. The colour of magic, religion, health and victory, the ancient Egyptians painted their faces with red ochre while women used it on their cheeks and lips. In Rome, a new mineral pigment, cinnabar, ranging in colour from brick to scarlet, was symbolic of heroism and of love and fidelity, as represented in a bride's shawl. And in Mexico, the pigment was so prized that the Mayan Tomb of the Red Queen was

...



*The Shadows
Surround Me*

*Over the distant horizon,
the glance fades
into brilliant hues
of suffocating light.
Surging energy,
rushing through
the fractured earth
The line is blurred
between heaven and earth
between hell and the
moment frozen,
encapsulated
in life's open wound.*

*Walking amidst a crowd
a sea of hues,
a sky of blue,
reflections of heaven looking in the mirror in judgement.*

*Faces surround me.
The sky is covered with faces.
The streets of the ghetto
reveal corpses,
emaciated figures,
the building, Negroes, so the look
The little girl sits in the
sacred throne of heaven's gate.
For a moment she comes to me
a piece of me sweeps
and falls to another reach.*

*I am lost
between the world
and the past glaze.
Cascading shadows surround me.
It is an eternal and left shore.*

*In honor of all the innocent spirits
- Shabana Durrani*



About the Author

Linda Dayan Frimer is an internationally recognized artist whose work addresses questions of culture, memory, trauma and reverence for the natural environment. She is a celebrated facilitator and painter who produces cultural, commemorative, educational and esthetically powerful contributions, and whose artworks have been described as “impactful,” “stunning,” “emotionally moving,” “enthraling” and “meaningful.”

Born in the wilderness town of Wells, British Columbia, from a young age Frimer was immersed in the wonder of the forest, rivers and mountains. It was in these formative years, surrounded by the awe-inspiring natural landscape, that Frimer developed her creative vision. It was also during these early years when she first learned of war and cultural suffering. Becoming determined to champion and protect the sanctity of all life forms, Frimer turned to the creation of art as her natural medium.

Frimer’s artworks have repeatedly been called upon to represent—through fundraising, awareness and education—the work of environmental organizations, such as the Trans Canada Trail, the Raincoast Conservation Foundation and the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, who promote Canada’s vast cultural and geographic diversity, wilderness preservation and the interdependency of nature and wildlife, and spread knowledge about endangered species. Paul George, former Director of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee, has offered that perhaps equally important to the fundraising, Frimer’s work “touched upon the emotional and spiritual cords, where real change occurs.”

Alongside Frimer’s artworks championing the environment, significant collections and donations of her works have support-

ed Margaret Laurence House, Canadian Red Cross, Canadian Cancer Society, Vancouver General Hospital, Richmond General Hospital, Children’s Hospital Foundation, Wells Community Hall and the Vancouver Art Gallery, among others. She is the recipient of many awards, including an Honorary Doctor of Letters from the University of the Fraser Valley. Her murals illuminate hospital walls, synagogue sanctuaries and university corridors, where it has been said they “offer healing colours that

contain emotional, life enforcing light, a calming rhythmic movement and imaginative forms that are visionary.”

Frimer has facilitated cultural healing workshops between various cultural groups. She is co-founder and facilitator of the Geshar Holocaust Project, in which she developed techniques and worked with multi-generations of Holocaust survivors and their children to release trauma through art. This project resulted in the creation of powerful commemorative works of art that were exhibited throughout major cities in North America under the auspices of the Montreal Holocaust Centre.

Frimer is co-author of *In Honour of Our Grandmothers: Imprints of Cultural Survival*, a collaboration between two Jewish and two First Nations artists and poets that brought together research and creative exploration as a means to process trauma associated with cultural oppression and attempted genocide. In her book *A Wilderness Journey*, Frimer explores the inextricable link between her own ancestral story, her love of the wilderness and cultural resilience.

To read more about Linda Dayan Frimer, please visit her website at lindadayanfrimer.ca.



Index

Specific art movements are shown in **fuchsia**, while individual artists are shown in **turquoise**. Page numbers of art and photos are in *italics*. Family relationships (e.g., brother, mother) are in connection to Linda Dayan Frimer.

Abstract Expressionism, 2, 39, 76, 77, 80, 82, 96–97, 102–03, 111, 117, 121

Abstractionism, 38, 96, 121

Action painting, 38, 76, 96, 103

af Klint, Hilma, 253

Anti-Semitism, 47, 99, 146, 146, 206–07, 184, 188–89, 216–17, 219 234–35, 256
badges (incl yellow star), 185, 188, 189, 192, 194

Aristotle, 41

Art Nouveau, 143

Arts and Crafts movement, 114

Avery, Milton, 265

Bachelard, Gaston, 155

Bacon, Francis, 214

bar Yochai, Shimon, 8

Barker, William, 44

Barkerville (BC), 44, 45, 73, 180, 181, 184, 254

Baroque art, 21, 36–37, 95, 127

Barthes, Roland, 194

Basquiat, Jean-Michel, 189

Bauhaus school, 114, 116

Beaver Hall Group, 116

Beckmann, Max, 57–58

Begbie, Matthew Baillie, 44, 181

ben Eliezer, Israel, 18

Bendixson, Fanny, 44

Berlin, Isaiah, 43

Beth Israel synagogue, 163

Blake, William, 230

Boccioni, Umberto, 57

Boraks, Basia, 201

Boraks-Nemetz, Lillian, 200, 201

Bosch, Hieronymus, 49

Brandt, Georg, 152

Branman, Annie (great-great-grandmother), 21–22

Braque, Georges, 131

Breton, André, 45

Bruegel the Elder, Peter, 127

Buber, Martin, 99

Buck, Pearl S., 147

Cahana, Ronnie, x–xi, 177, 234

Cain, Susan, 248

Calliou, Louis, 61

Cameron, John Angus, 44, 180

Campbell, Joseph, 8, 28, 54, 122

Campbell, Judy, 111

Caravaggio, 49

Cariboo Gold Rush, 4, 42–45, 73, 76

Cariboo region (BC), 4, 17, 42–44, 45, 73, 76–77, 79–80, 102–103, 165–66
see also Barkerville (BC); Wells (BC)

Carr, Emily, 53, 170, 255

Carrington, Leonora, 61

Carson, David, 248

Carson, Rachel, 259

cave art, 25, 49, 65, 135, 151, 187, 211

Cézanne, Paul, 76, 148

Chagall, Marc, 76, 220

Cherney, Brian, 25, 205, 218

Chinese brush painting, 158

Chow, Raymond, 160

Cochran, James, 160

Cohen, Leonard, 225

Collyer, Nora F., 116

Colour Field painting, 2, 38, 80, 82, 96, 97

colour wheels, 112–14, 116, 129

Colours,

31–39, 65, 76, 110–11, 112–13, 114, 116, 119, 154, 187, 193

black, 9, 32, 109, 116, 119–21, 122, 124–25, 127, 129, 247, 248

blue, 32–34, 36, 151–52, 154, 155, 157, 160–61, 195, 233, 243–44

brown, 32, 49, 50, 53–54

buff/olive, 35, 50, 54, 136

gold, 41, 42–44, 47, 54, 99, 251, 256

green, 33–35, 37, 114, 135, 136, 137, 139–40, 151, 225, 226, 228, 233

grey, 32, 35, 49, 116, 127, 129, 131–32

indigo, 34, 111, 152, 243, 244, 245, 247, 248

orange, 33–35, 197, 198–201

pigments, 31, 36–37, 49, 65, 93, 95, 135, 151–52, 187, 197, 211–12

pink, 113, 213, 214, 220

purple, 33–35, 65, 66–67, 69, 71, 212

Drawing exercises,

art movement-inspired, 22, 28, 45, 53, 69, 80, 103, 107, 131, 143, 203

artist-specific, 25, 28, 36, 37, 38, 39, 47, 59, 69, 70, 76, 84, 97, 99, 102, 109, 111, 117, 121, 131, 132, 137, 148, 155, 156, 189, 205, 230, 247, 265

celestial, 11, 12, 154, 187, 197, 208, 238, 243
colour, 9, 25, 36, 38, 41, 50, 53, 65, 69, 84, 95, 97, 99, 107, 109, 114, 117, 119, 120, 121, 129, 132, 136, 151, 152, 155, 156, 187, 190, 197, 199, 208, 212, 214, 219, 226, 243, 252

colour-mixing, 37, 38, 41, 50, 65, 95, 110, 111, 114, 116, 120, 127, 129, 136, 190, 197, 214, 226, 233, 243

dots/circles, 7, 8, 9, 25, 31, 36, 38, 93, 97, 99, 107, 228, 238, 243

emotions/healing, 28, 39, 45, 53–54, 102, 121, 125, 132, 139, 144, 165, 182, 189, 191, 193, 198, 199, 208, 213, 226

mixed-media, 28, 45, 59, 80, 111, 156, 174–75, 205

nature, 15, 17, 28, 53, 97, 102, 110, 111, 125, 132, 143, 148, 154, 165, 187, 197, 203, 205, 230, 243, 245, 248, 253

sensory, 22, 103, 109, 117, 120, 130, 151, 219, 245, 265

shapes/lines, 7, 9, 28, 39, 45, 69, 70, 76, 93, 99, 109, 117, 121, 137, 143, 165, 208, 213, 226, 228, 265

spirituality, 7, 9, 25, 93, 99, 125, 193, 228, 265

watercolour, 110, 148, 158

writing, 54, 137, 139, 144, 191, 192, 198

yourself, 7, 8, 9, 25, 93, 102, 174–75, 182, 198, 191, 198, 230, 247

Drogo Sacramentary manuscript, 189

DuChamp, Marcel, 58

Dufy, Raoul, 38

Ecclesia statues, 189, 190, 195

Edson (AB), 57, 59, 60, 61–62

Edson Leader newspaper, 61

Einstein, Albert, 31

Elder, Collin, 260

Ellis, Havelock, 260

Emily Carr University of Art and Design, 160

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Linda Dayan Frimer's *Luminous* is a complex and intriguing work that mixes memoir, spiritualism, and meditations on art and colour with reflections on Judaism and her own family's roots through generations going back to Romania. One subject that unites her work is trees and their healing ability. Some paintings beg comparison with Emily Carr's famous forests, but Frimer's light-filled spaces and Post-Impressionist/Fauvist palette will hit a stronger emotional chord with many people. She uses acrylics, oils and watercolours, and collages photographs into mixed-media canvases. Some of her paintings are quite representational, others almost abstract, while still others explore mystic images and juxtapositions. A notable aspect of the book is the words of advice to aspiring artists and spiritual seekers that are announced on the page with a graceful, simple outline of a dove. . . . In fact, the reader is invited to join in, to tear a piece of paper and examine it, to paint a brushstroke, to put two marks of different colours side by side. Although it is her journey, we are urged to have one as well.

—in *British Columbia Reviews*
by Michael Kluckner, artist, author

Linda Frimer's *Luminous* takes us behind her colourful and gracious paintings, offering glimpses into how they came to be and how we might create similarly bold works. . . . Frimer tells us how place and people have shaped her art. She shares the ways in which she sees the world and reflects it back in luminous colour. The book is proudly Canadian and authentically Jewish, setting its sights as much to the future as it does on the past in its attempt to inspire others toward the courage it takes to make truly personal works of art.

—Rabbi Dr. Avi Rose
arts educator and writer

"Colour and I are one," contemporary BC artist Linda Frimer quotes German abstract painter Paul Klee (1879–1940) as saying. The quote might well be applied to Frimer's account of her own creative life in *Luminous*. Her narrative is suffused with her intense response to colour as she braids together her family's story, Western art history, cosmology and Jewish mystical lore interwoven with her own life and growth as an artist. A constant throughout her tale is a sensuous relationship with nature, especially the forest, that has endured from her childhood to the present.

—Tom Wayman
poet, author, reviewer, recipient of BC's 2022 George Woodcock
Award for lifetime achievement in the literary arts



Luminous by Linda Frimer takes us on a journey through the heart and soul of an artist. Frimer's life story is enriched with insights into its historical context and the cultures and colours that her amazing abilities enabled her to perceive even as a young child. We see the growth and expression of her artistic talent described and illustrated in this valuable volume that is generously sprinkled with drawings of little doves. Each dove provides simple instructions as to how we too can produce our own creative works of art. We do not even notice how we have pleurably absorbed an entire course on the history of visual art. After reading this book, we see our whole world explode into exciting new dimensions of vibrant colour.

—Dr. Roslyn Kunin, consulting economist, columnist
editor of *Prospering Together*

Linda Frimer's magic lies within layers of built-up transformation and colour. A literal painterly language of an array of life force coming from the narrative of love of all things created and expressed through her touch from her mind / body / spirit and emotions that she pours out into her canvases. She is a dreamer and a wise old soul, who feels deeply through the Creative spirit that is in her. Words for Linda, my soul sister / friend.

—George Littlechild
Cree artist and author

I vividly recall my first glimpse of Linda Dayan Frimer's artwork, and my feeling of awe at the interplay of emotion and passion, intelligently expressed, through paint, on paper. That glimpse confirmed all that critics had previously observed: her distinct ability to cultivate colour, light and motion within the watercolour medium. Linda Frimer's artwork is so fundamentally powerful that it transcends aesthetic beauty to express a depth of spiritual awareness and sensitivity. . . . Her message is one of reverence for all creation.

—Valerie Pusey
Former Director, Northern Passage Gallery, Victoria

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