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COMING UP FROM THE STREETS

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WHISPERING STONES

**UNLOCKING THE SECRETS OF THE WEST'S
ANCIENT CIRCLES WITH ART**

Stone muses

Devon's stone circles hold the inspiration for one woman's art, and many women's healing, writes Alex Fisher

Five years ago Kathryn Trenshaw visited Devon's ancient stone circles for the first time, with life changing consequences.

"It was amazing," she says. "I felt completely at home." As a result, the American artist and workshop facilitator soon decided that the stones would be the inspiration for her next project.

"I felt they were places of sacred celebration and I was just awe-struck by the fact that people had taken the time to build such permanent ritual sites. I love the idea of people gathering together, dancing in circles and being held by these very open spaces. I suddenly tweaked that, besides a relationship I was (and still am) having, these sacred sites were the reason I was being drawn to Devon."

Trenshaw moved from Michigan to Totnes in 1995, and has subsequently produced a vast body of work entitled *The Wisdom of the Stones*.

Trenshaw works both in delicate water-colours, recording the day-dream visions that she experiences whilst visiting sites, as well as in clay, producing her own raku-fired stone circle sculptures.

Trenshaw scours ordinance survey maps to find obscure and rarely visited sites. "It's always a risk," she says, "because you can never tell whether the stones will actually be visible or buried, but I have found some really beautiful and secluded sites this way."

After finding a site, she then meditates in and around the

stones and uses the images that emerge in her "waking dreams" in her work. "It's as though I reconnect to an ancient wisdom that the stones are still holding. I like to think that this is from the memory of time, or the stones or the people that have gone before."

"I almost see them as wise folk, whispering back what they have learned. Very simple truths surface. Going back to simple beauty, life as art, art as life, bringing the sacred into the mundane. I just act as a channel for what comes through, then try to share that through my paintings."

The female body, in many forms, is a re-occurring image in Trenshaw's stone circle work: "The stone circles were built in a time when goddess worship was still prominent," she explains. "I find that if I circle around a standing stone, figures of women emerge. I recreate this more tangibly in my sculptures, bringing out the subtle images I perceive."

The theme of the female form is explored more deeply in Trenshaw's workshops. She runs a course entitled *Affirming the Female Body* to help women overcome the limiting stereotypes they are fed by modern media. "We are bombarded with images of anorexic cover girls," she says. "Women are basically being told that they should be a size 10. If they're not within this tiny pigeonhole, they are made to feel like they're wrong, bad or need to change something about themselves. My art and work-

shops are about celebrating the lushness and diversity of the female form.

"I'd like to see more women in their authentic radiance, just comfortable being who they are and connecting to their bodies in a very real way. I don't feel like we necessarily have to confront culture-at-large to achieve this. I had a professor at university that used to say it's like trying to kick a big ball of chicken fat - you make no impact on the chicken fat, and you come out covered in slime."

"I find a more useful approach is to go inside, into your own cellular memory and connect to the wisdom of women's circles thousands of years ago when beauty wasn't something someone could sell you, it was something you carried within."

Trenshaw makes use of creativity in her workshops. "People's subconscious emerges when they paint, dance or sculpt. They



KATHRYN TRENSHAW IN ACTION (ABOVE), 'MOORLAND MAY' WATERCOLOUR (LEFT), 'STAR DANCE' RAKU FIRED CERAMIC (BELOW LEFT)

are able to get in touch with parts of themselves that they might not have been able to access through their thinking minds. Even when we're just ripping up newspaper and making a collage, we are expressing our deeper selves, so all of a sudden you might see this amazing side of a woman that you wouldn't have been aware of otherwise.

"We create costumes and use theatre improvisation to help women create positive sacred rituals and rites of passage that this culture does not provide."

Self-empowerment is a central issue for Trenshaw: "My wish is that women can redefine beauty on their terms and ask for what they really want for themselves, as women, not what the media say we want, not what men want or our friends want, but what we want for ourselves. If we can find the answers to those questions, then we can do anything."

"In my work I try to encourage women to celebrate the most basic things, starting with their own bodies and their own connection to the sacred as a sacred vessel themselves. We have wombs, we are the expression of creativity in our bodies and to really celebrate that, to enjoy it, have fun with it. I hope that my work is a catalyst for people. Even if it just gives women a glimpse of what it would be like to be comfortable in their bodies, whatever they're like, then I'd be really happy."

Kathryn Trenshaw is running an 'Affirming the Female Body' workshop on September 1-6 1998, at Monkton Wyld Court, Dorset. She also runs a year-long group called 'Drawing Down the Moon', beginning in January 1999. Both workshops are women only. She can be contacted at PO Box 3, Totnes, Devon, TQ95WJ. Tel: 01803 863552. Email kathryn@shines.swis.net