

# HOW THE PORTALS OF PRESENCE CAME INTO BEING

By Deborah Koff-Chapin

**THE FACE IS** The face is the most familiar visual pattern in the human psyche. From the moment we are born, we center our world on the faces of the people close to us. As we gaze into their eyes, they gaze back. In mirroring each other, we communicate on a level beyond words. There is mutuality in this meeting.

Can we use this primal visual language to open portals of communion between our psyche and consciousness beyond our familiar human world? A face in a printed photograph is only ink on paper. Yet we can attune to the presence of the person represented through focusing on the image. The faces in the Portals of Presence deck can be used as focal points through which to attune to a more expansive range of consciousness. Think of them as personifications of elemental life forms, ancient wisdom lineages, spiritual allies, or visitors from unfamiliar realms.

There is a mystery that fuels this deck; a sense that unseen beings want to engage with it as a point of contact with our human-centric world. In this time of accelerating challenge on the planet, the possibility of expanding our range of connection can offer hope that we do not have to face our challenges alone. Rather, we are in this predicament because we have lost our sense of communion with life. The Intention behind Portals of Presence is to help expand our awareness to our deeper humanity, subtle realms beyond the familiar human world, and the sentience of all life.

The 72 faces in *Portals of Presence* were selected from among thousands of Touch Drawings I created over twenty years. Each face in the deck was drawn in a particular setting. I used the process of *Touch Drawing* to translate subtle impressions into the form of a human face. Each face in the deck radiates a presence that is both unique and universal.

I have drawn at ancient sites such as the stone circles of Callenish in Scotland and Avebury in England. I have sat on the cold stone floors of Chartres Cathedral in France and Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland, and in the Mayan temples of Tikal and Uaxactun in Guatemala. I have carried drawing materials when hiking in the alpine mountains of the North Cascade Range in Washington State, into a rain forest in Costa Rica, and within the ancient Llanfeugan Yew tree circle in Wales. I have also drawn at many events, including the Parliament of the World's Religions and the Dawn of Interspirituality. Drawing at events has enabled me to create in the presence of inspiring people and lineage carriers. Here are a few stories of how the faces in the Portals of Presence came into being.

*"From my earliest memory, the drawing of faces has been central to my psyche."*

On journey to the Isle of Iona off the coast of Scotland, I carry a large cloth case with my drawing board, over a hundred sheets of paper, a roller and printing ink. Each day, I roam the green hillsides, ancient ruins and beaches - opening to the spirit of this mythic place. Each evening, I sit at a little desk with my drawing materials. My intention is to give form to the subtle impressions evoked by my immersion in this place. I dab ink on the drawing board, roll it smooth, and place a piece of paper upon it. Then I sit quietly and wait. My attention centers on my face. As I sense a subtle energetic shape within, I trace the sensations onto the paper through the movement of my two hands. My awareness travels through the inner landscape of my face until the whole form emerges. I can see very light markings on the page from the pressure of my touch. Lifting the paper off the board, the underside reveals marks created through the paper's contact with the ink. I can now clearly see an ancient being's face in its fullness.

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the forming of faces has been a centering practice."*

Over the waters within view my own island home is Mount Pilchuck. In all my years living here, I have never hiked to the top. I decide to just *do it* - taking a day to hike on my own to the lookout tower at the summit. Being the crazy person that I am, I carry those same drawing materials all the way up. After others depart on their hike down, I find myself alone on the mountaintop. I sit on the floor of the tower to draw. As on Iona, I focus on translating the spirit of this place into a face. It is elemental and crystalline, personifying the presence of this mountain. I carry the drawing outside and let it flutter in the wind.

His Holiness the Dali Lama and his dear friend Archbishop Desmond Tutu come to Seattle, as part of an event entitled The Seeds of Compassion. When I hear about this event, I contact friends who are organizing the event. I ask if I can attend as an interpretive artist. Having received permission to be in the press area, I sit on the floor among photographers with giant telephoto lenses. I listen to humble stories of the compassionate people who had inspired these great world servants. Touching the paper, I translate what I hear and feel into images.

The Fairy and Human Relations Congress is a gathering that honors the life and sacredness in all things. Central to the focus of this event is to develop skills of communication and communion with

nature spirits, elementals, devas and the vast range of conscious life on subtle levels. I bring my art materials each year and draw as I listen to inspiring presentations. On Saturday evening we hold a celebratory ritual in the valley where we meet. As the group dances in the twilight, I sit in the verdant grass and focus on drawing faces. Following the impulses I sense within, it feels like I am the face painter at a cosmic party; as if beings are lining up to 'try on' a human face as I draw. The funny thing is, I never actually 'see' anything. It is as if I am blind, but through touch of my fingertips I can sense their presence and make them visible in the form of a human face.

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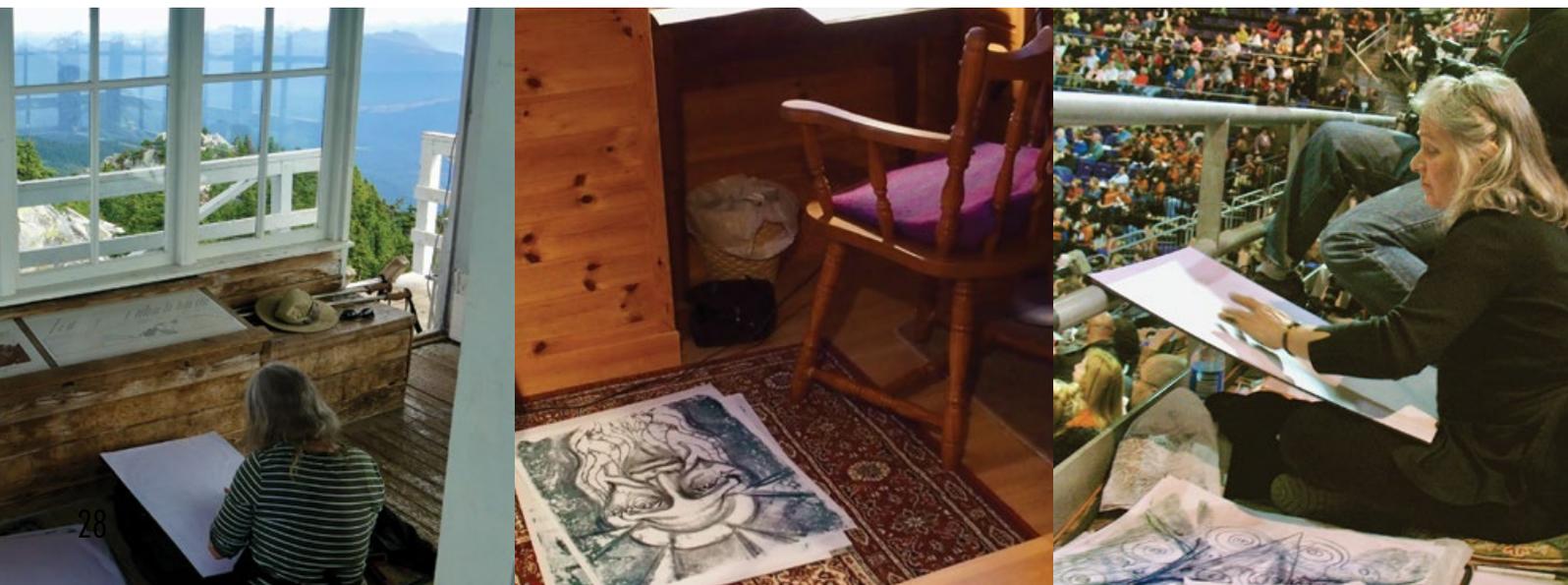
From my earliest memory, the drawing of faces has been central to my psyche. Over the years it has become a core practice through which I center myself and attune to deeper levels of awareness. One of my first memories is drawing a face. I was about two years old. Sitting at a table, I picked up a crayon and spoke out loud as I drew. "Here is Stevie's BIG eyes, and his BIG nose, and his BIG mouth!" I have quite a visceral memory of the magic of bringing a face into being out of nothing.

At fourteen years old, I was teaching myself to draw by copying fashion models in magazines. A display featuring fur coats included a fur-clad indigenous child staring out from the page. This was not a fashion

face. It felt to me like this child was holding the pain of all the children of the world. I got my charcoal pencil, placed a large sheet of paper on the floor, and began to draw. As the child's face took form on the page, I felt it coming alive. Feeling such a strong presence come though my drawing brought me to the edge of fear. I walked around it, repeating "Why are you looking at me? Why are you looking at me?" This moment revealed the presence and power that can come through the drawing of a face.

When I went to art school, I focused on minimalist abstract painting, which was the predominant style in the art world at that time. Once, in my final year, I picked up a pen and began doodling silly little faces. I wrote on the page *What's wrong with drawing faces?* I tucked the embarrassing piece of paper away. But something was gestating in my psyche, a seed of what was to come.

On my very last day in art school in 1974, I was helping a friend clean up in the print shop. Before wiping the ink off a glass plate, I placed a paper towel down and playfully moved my fingertips upon it. Lifting the paper off the ink, I saw the imprint of my touch on the underside — lines coming directly from my fingertips! I laughed ecstatically with this discovery. Gestures moved through my hands and onto successive paper towels. Soon the organic marks took form as faces. Childlike





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and natural, they were direct imprints of my psyche on paper.

Although this experience appeared to be simple play, beneath the surface I sensed something profound. This drawing process was emerging into this moment from a realm outside of time. It had a purpose that was larger than my personal use. I had a knowing that this direct and fluid art form was meant to serve an evolving human consciousness. I felt called to share it with others.

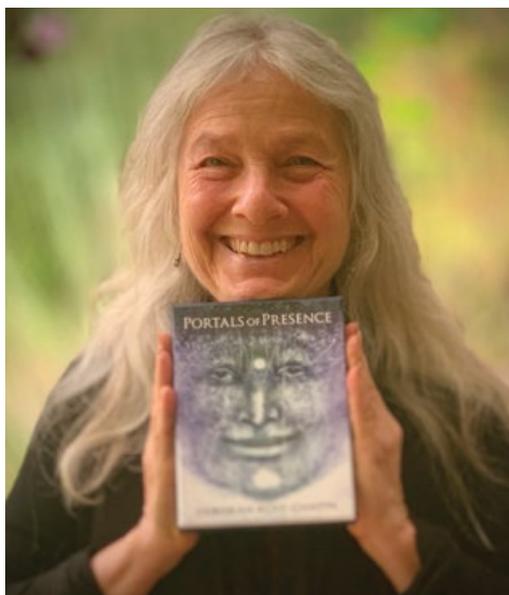
But first, Touch Drawing became my own lifeline. During difficult times, I would turn to the drawing board to release emotions. I witnessed my feelings as they poured through my hands onto the page. This enabled me to move through a range of states without judgment. At the end of a session, I would reflect upon a series of drawings depicting the transformation of my psyche. The process left me feeling clear and whole.

As time went by, I began to draw from a more transpersonal impulse. It was like dipping my hands into a universal pool and pulling out archetypal forms and figures. I began to put more time into the crafting of each Touch Drawing, enriching the images with layers of color. This is the body of work out of which SoulCards 1&2 were selected. Through this format, my art has found its way into the hands and hearts of people all over the world.

Though all my images are created through Touch Drawing, the forming of faces has been a centering practice. It provides a simple, centering pattern that is infinitely variable. As I bring a face into form, I am gazing into a mirror that takes me beyond myself. When am I drawing my self and when am I drawing another? This is a question I ponder. In the midst of drawing a face, self awareness is a sensory tool. As a point of contact with life, I experience impressions that are expressive of the other in my own being.

I have had much practice in this kind of attunement through the creation of *Inner Portraits*. These are sessions in which I sit in the presence of a person with the

*The creator of SoulCards releases a new deck, 20 years in the making!*



intention of creating drawings for them. We begin by setting intentions and gazing into each other's faces. I then enter an intensive drawing session, creating 12-15 drawings in a couple of hours. As I gaze at each successive blank page, I sit in a moment of emptiness. Within moments, I feel the initiating impulse for the next drawing. When reflecting upon the drawings, the subject of the Inner Portrait often recognizes aspects of their psyche. I have come to trust this process. It encompasses more than my conscious mind can comprehend.

So many faces have passed through my fingertips over the years! Again and again I have wondered - *What I should do with all these faces?* Is there a reason they have come through my fingertips? Is there a purpose the beings they depict want to serve? The idea of creating a new deck with only faces emerged in the early 2000's. Over the years, it would rise, then fade then rise and fade once again. Finally the time is right to offer these faces to the world. I trust that Portals of Presence will find its way into the hands and hearts of people who will enliven them, and be enlivened by them. My hope and prayer is that this set of cards contributes to a deepening relationship with life and the subtle realms, and helps us find our way through these transformational times.