Body, psyche and symbol: the paintings of Kevin Roberts

Ingrid Stevens
Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa
E-mail: stevensie@tut.ac.za

According to Jung, everything is a manifestation of the psyche: thus the body in art is a manifestation of psyche, embodied in symbols. In the close link between body and mind, symbols relate to processes of human development. Kevin Roberts (1965-2009) was a well-known South African painter of beautiful, serene female figures in recognisable local landscapes, surrounded by ordinary objects that contribute to a layering of symbolic meanings. Although it makes a specific contribution to South African art, his work has been little investigated from a scholarly perspective. In order to interpret selected paintings, this paper uses a Jungian approach, because Jung's theories on the collective unconscious, archetypes, anima, nature and symbols are well established and provide suitable frameworks or 'myths' for rich interpretations that elucidate the connections between personal and universal meanings. A theoretical framework concerning mind and body from writings by Jung and the writings of neo-Jungians, evolutionary psychologists and psychoanalytic critics, is used to interpret selected paintings by Roberts, taking into account the body and its inter-relationship with the mind.
Key words: Jung, body, psyche, archetype, symbolism, Kevin Roberts.

Translated heading needed
Volgens Jung is alles 'n manifestasie van die psige, en dus is die ligaam in kuns ook 'n manifestasie van die psige soos vergestalt in simbole. Simbole verwys, in die hegte verwantskap tussen ligaam en syn, na die proses van menslikke ontwikkeling. Kevin Roberts (1965-2009) was 'n bekende Suid Afrikaanse skilder wat aantreklike, rustige vroulike figure vasgevang het in herkenbare plaaslikke landskappe, omring deur gewone objekte wat bydra tot die simboliese lae van die visuele beeld. Alhoewel sy bydrae tot Suid Afrikaanse kuns beduidend is, is sy werk nog skrams ondersoek deur die akademie. Hierdie artikel maak gebruik van 'n Jungiaanse raamwerk om geselekteerde skilderye te interpreteer aangesien Jung se teorieë oor die kollektiewe bewussyn, argetipes, anima, die natuur en simbole ingegrawe is in psigoanalitiese teorie, en 'n goeie raamwerk aangaande "mites" voorsien vir 'n gul interpretasie van kuns wat ook die verband tussen die persoonlike en die universele na vore bring. 'n Teoretiese raamwerk aangaande die ligaam-syn verband, gebaseer op Jung se skrywe sowel as die skrywe van neo-Jungiaanse teoretici, evolusie sielkundiges en psigoanalitiese kritici, word ingespan om geselekteerde skilderye deur Roberts te interpreteer. Hierdie interpretasie neem die nou verband tuseen die mens se ligaam en syn in ag.
Sleutelwoorde: Jung, liggaam, psige, argetipe, symbolisme, Kevin Roberts.

This article aims to construct a psychoanalytic reading of selected paintings by artist Kevin Roberts. A psychoanalytic interpretation, it should be said at the outset, is not a doctrine or a specific strategy, but an outlook and an approach. From a Jungian perspective (Jacobi in Jung 1978: 253), everything is a manifestation of the psyche, which in Jungian terms consists of the conscious, the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. For neo-Jungians and evolutionary psychologists, the psyche is as much biological as psychological (Stevens A 1982, 2000), incorporating body, psychology, genes, thoughts and senses in a psychobiological whole. Jung suggested that the psyche, this psychobiological entity, is manifest in our dreams, myths, psychoses and cultural artefacts.

So the body, one's considerations about it and the manifestations of it in art, are all manifestation of the psyche, or the 'self', and this often manifests in symbols. It has been largely as a result of Jung that any significance has been attached in the West to symbols in relation to the processes of human development (Cirlot 2002). "[T]he symbol functions as a psychic

mirror in which we perceive our human energies reflected...” (Stevens A 1999: 81). According to Arnheim (1966: 219), “... the psychoanalytic approach has reminded modern man of the fact that in a work of art every element, whether it pertains to perceptual form or to subject matter, is symbolic, that is, it represents something beyond its particular self”. The notions above, taken together, suggest a close link between body and mind, or body and ‘self’, and the act of making images, or producing symbols.

This paper will make use of a variety of inter-related psychoanalytic theories from both psychoanalysts such as Jung (1957, 1961, 1978, 1989), neo-Jungians such as A Stevens (1982, 1993, 1995, 1999) and Hollis (1995, 2004), and psychoanalytic critics, such as Arnheim (1966), Fuller (1988), Kuspit (1993) and López-Pedraza (1996), in agreement with Kuspit’s (1993: 301) view that “[b]ecause of [its] cultural situation, and its own history, the psychoanalysis of art has many theoretical options, and must take advantage of them all... for none are completely satisfactory and none privileged over the other...”.

The personal context

A psychoanalytic reading should be most concerned with analysis of the artworks and not the artist, as argued by Jung (1989: 86) amongst others, who says this reduces creativity to a mere symptom, detrimental to both the work and the artist. It nonetheless seems appropriate to start with the artist as a subject, taking art, along with religion, mythology and psychology, as “mirrors of the Self” (Stevens A 1995: 319). Kevin Roberts (1965-2009) was a highly regarded South African (Pretoria) painter of serene, dreamlike and very symbolic female figures, situated in recognisable local landscapes and surrounded by a variety of ordinary objects that contribute to the layering of symbolic meanings in the work. His work has been relatively little investigated from a scholarly perspective, perhaps because of his early death, and the fact that his works were sold to collectors and corporations almost as soon as they were produced.

A Stevens (1995: 57) argues that a first step in interpreting artefacts, dreams as well as art works, is the personal context. From this more personal perspective, it seems worthwhile to note three aspects: Roberts was kept apart from his mother for a considerable time in his early youth due to family circumstances; he painted obsessively and repeated certain themes many times, and he said his aim was to find “the poetic”, by which he meant both the lyrical, as well as that ambiguity that could create webs of associative meanings, feelings and atmosphere (Stevens 1995: 154). Roberts’ use of images, such as the woman, could “as easily have been dreamt as turned into poetry” (Stevens A 1995: 155).

What does one see in these images? Almost always there is a centrally placed figure of a woman, and one who seems inevitably to be the same woman, although in related and matched paintings there might be two women, ‘twins’. (Figures 1 and 2) There are the merest suggestions of rooms, semi-interiors, and man-made objects like chairs, veils, hangings, pools, bowls, tables, as well as landscapes that are usually dry and recognisably South African, juxtaposed with cultivated fields or flowering plants. Animals appear, sometimes mysteriously: fish, cows, birds, insects. Minute images reveal details of fossils, embroidery, thorns, feathers, piles of salt, with words and numbers, and signs like arrows, dots, hourglasses and circles. Dense patterns, whether of cloth, grass, skies or foliage, cover everything in a web-like mirage of miniscule marks. All exist in a clear but soft half-light, and all seem more icon than reality. Never nightmarish, these are dreams of quiet paradise.

Figure 1
Kevin Roberts, *(Title unknown)*, 1999-2004, oil on panel, size unknown, private collection.

Figure 2
Kevin Roberts, *(Title unknown),* 1999-2004, oil on panel, size unknown, private collection.

López-Pedraza (1996: 73), in a Jungian reading of the work of German artist, Anselm Kiefer, suggests that this artist has become "submerged to the point of obsession" with certain themes.[1] So, in a personal interpretation, one might see Roberts' repetition of the female figure as a search for the mother, an attempt to assuage the separation from the mother, a symbolic recreation of the mother, a reflection of that "primary, affectively charged imago of one's life" (Hollis 2004: 43). Because this search can never really re-create 'the good mother', it is bound to be reiterated constantly. This compares to Fuller's notion (1988: 41) that Michelangelo's *pietas* and sculptures of the Virgin and child were a manifestation of his longing for his lost or absent mother. Roberts' women might furthermore be seen as a psychological attempt to make himself and his world whole: to "repair, through his artistic activity a harmonious internal world... [so] he has to externalise the completed object, and to give it a life of its own in the external world" (Segal in Fuller 1988: 116).

Roberts himself, however, in notes that accompany some of his works, did not necessarily see this as a primary meaning, but refers to the woman as muse, poetess, Madonna or other mystical or mythical females, but he is mainly concerned with a "poetic generation of meaning" (Roberts S.a: sp), in a process of meaning-making that is "non-logical, non-verbal and poetic, almost like a piece of music transferred onto a two-dimensional plane and frozen into an instant of time".[2]

An artwork naturally has many personal meanings and might tell the viewer something about the artist's life and psyche, but Jung sees an artwork as supra-personal: "[p]ersonal causes have as much or as little to do with a work of art as the soil with the plant that springs from it. ...Indeed, the special significance of a ... work of art resides in the fact that it has escaped the limitations of the personal and has soared beyond the personal concerns of its creator" (Jung 1989: 71). This brings one to the archetypal context.

The archetypal, collective and psychobiological context

According to Jung (1961: 411; 1978: 57-59), the psyche, in terms of the personal and collective unconscious, is hidden but manifests in the archetype, the "irrepresentable, unconscious, pre-existent form that seems to be part of the inherited structure of the psyche...". Archetypes are instinctual and primordial, and are unconscious, inherited psychological structures, which may manifest with a variety of content, as ideas, themes or as images that recur in the myths, tales, art and dreams of people everywhere, and always in the form of metaphor and symbol (Hollis 2004: 7-8).[3] Archetypes are not themselves images, but are rather "the inherent psychic structures responsible for the production of... images" (Stevens A 1982: 51). Furthermore, they have emotional content and are "both images and emotions" (Jung 1978: 87), which makes them dynamic, powerful and energetic, to use some of Jung's phrases. Some typical symbolic manifestations of archetypes are the hero, anima and animus, wise man, great mother, the shadow, the self, the child, the trickster, the devil, animals and even landscapes (Olivier 2011: 108).

According to the neo-Jungian evolutionary psychologist, A Stevens (1982: 82), archetypes are biological entities, in other words, they are the products of evolution. They are the "characteristic patterning of the mind", whereby certain adaptive psychological patterns are passed from generation to generation. Using a similar approach, López-Pedraza (1996: 87) states that Jungian psychotherapy is a movement of the psyche towards the body, thus a way of integrating mind and body. So, for example, all people would experience, either as child, mother or both, the mother-child bond which gives rise to images such as the anima, mother nature and the great mother and other related symbolic images. Archetypal images are collective, symbolic and multi-valent, or even ambiguous in their multiple meanings.

Fuller (1988: 12-13, 22, 106) discusses this archetypal mind-body, or what he terms the psychobiological, response in detail, as a means to answer his core question, "How can a work of art outlive its origins?" and resonate across time and across different cultures.[4] He argues that all individuals have a relatively constant underlying biological condition and experience similar sensations and emotions: bodies and their function are the same across generations and societies; all individuals experience motion, gravity and space in similar ways; all have sexual instincts, fear death, mourn, etcetera. So all understand some collective aspect of the human condition and art that speaks to this, whether consciously or unconsciously, will therefore resonate with artist and viewer. This can be argued to be the case without resorting to a notion of an essential human condition, which poststructuralist theories have done much to question and overturn.

In Roberts' work *Continuum-Point,* (Figure 3), two women sit on the edge of a pool with their feet in the water. In the water fish swim, and behind the pond is a trellis, a dry ploughed landscape, a sapling and foliage. Because everything, in a Jungian sense, is psyche, all the elements in the painting are the artist, so the central figures of the women, as well as the water, landscape, fish, are the artist and are archetypes from his psyche. But equally, as archetypal images, they resonate with the collective unconscious of many other psyches.

Figure 3
Kevin Roberts, *Continuum-Point*, 1999-2004, oil on panel, 114 x 114 cm, private collection (Stevens 2005: 11).

The women, in a Jungian analysis, represent the archetype of the anima. This is the supreme or essential female (Henderson in Jung 1978: 150), as well as the "personification of all feminine psychological tendencies in a man's psyche...and his relation to the unconscious" (von Franz in Jung 1978: 186).[5] This is much more than the actual mother, although it may be grounded in her, but is a psychological aspect whose realization leads to a more complete actualization and individuation of the psyche. Jung (1978: 69) associates the anima with symbolic females such as Eve, Helen, Mary and Sophia, as well as the Great Mother, who epitomises Mother Nature or Mother Earth, whose symbol is the tree. She is in her totality a symbol of love, nurture, union, fruitfulness. There are two women in this painting (twinned with indications of natural growth), one looking outwards, the other downwards: introversion and extraversion. This duplication points to duality as well as union: life and nature; the conscious and the unconscious, inner and outer or even different aspects of the seasons.[6]

The women are both protected by the trellis which suggest an interior, and are simultaneously in a landscape, or exterior. This suggests a dual position in space, balanced between interior and exterior, and thus a kind of integration in space. Landscape is itself, according to Jung (Stevens A 1995: 173), an archetypal given and so people relate to landscapes with intensity. López-Pedraza (1996: 82) refers to a ploughed landscape as the mortification of the earth,[7] which suggests a mortification of the psyche and thus a transformation of it. While Roberts' landscape is indeed barren, a ploughed landscape also symbolises potential growth, as well as male authority, in contrast with López-Pedraza's reading, especially in view of the symbolic reading of the earth as female (Cirlot 2002: 260). Cultivated land is nature "partially surrendered" (Arnheim 1966: 320). Together with the water, it can refer to rituals such as harvest and baptism (or purification and cleansing), which are not only Christian but also Dionysiac (Henderson in Jung 1978: 138). In the sapling, foliage and the leaf pattern on one woman's dress, one can read the fecundity of nature, in which case, the trellis pattern on the other dress becomes a sign for the order of culture. The small, detailed fossils in the stone of the pond refer to time, life and death, and evolution (Cirlot 2002: 112). The fish is traditionally a symbol of the unconscious, but is also phallic and sensual (Cirlot 2002: 106), suggesting a balance between the female anima and the male animus.

Additionally, in this painting, the combination of elements is quiet and, in a sense, idyllic. As an embodied viewer, one understands what it might feel like to sit in a dry landscape with one's feet in cool water, and experience a sensation of pleasure and ease. As Jung (1989: 22) writes: "[i]in every human being...there is a special heaven, whole and unbroken", and this might be the *Continuum* of the title, the sense of an unbroken, ongoing integration of psyche, body and environment.

The banal, man-made, industrially-produced objects that are usually present, the plastic chairs and bird feeders, the labels, hosepipes, metal runners and wires, can be read as references to everyday life and the ordinary surroundings of the artist, but are also a means of grounding these otherwise very romantic, idealised images in a local context. They are points of connection, perhaps the *Points* of the title. So, in the male-female, nature-culture, interior-exterior, dryness-fecundity, stillness-motion, life-death balances of this work, one might experience a sense of wholeness and integration.

Water is an archetypal element that appears in many of Roberts' paintings, such as *Lady with trellis and two cows,* (Figure 4) where it fills the bowl, flows in the stream and is suggested by the clouds. Water is an element essential to all life on earth, and all can relate to images of it. For most cultures, water symbolises life itself, as well as the spiritual and the unconscious (that which is under the surface). In many of Roberts's works, the water appears in a round bowl or pond, the "pool of the psyche" (Hollis 2004: 72): the circle is a perfectly balanced and harmonious form and a sign of wholeness, as well as a symbol of the womb. For Arnheim (1966: 217) vases, pots, rooms, are all wombs. In this work, flowing in the stream amongst other, more static elements, water could represent the flow of time itself, and in movement of the clouds, the transience of everything.

Figure 4
Kevin Roberts, *Lady with trellis and two cows,* 1999-2004, oil on panel, 200 x 110 cm, private collection (Stevens 2005: 22).

Roberts frequently depicts animals, birds and fish, and the cow is one of his much used symbols. While it might be difficult, in a post-modern and multi-cultural world, to support the notion of universal symbols with universal meanings, nevertheless, animals are primal symbols in many cultures, ancient and modern.[8] All animals represent nature as well as the instinctual aspect of human psychology (Jaffé in Jung 1978: 265). The cow, an animal associated with the female principle, and with the earth and the moon (Cirlot 2002: 65), often has the horns of a lunar goddess in ancient depictions, as in this painting. The female principle is here depicted again and again, in echoing symbols.

Another aspect of the collective or archetypal potential of art could be said to be culture and cultural artefacts. Art can refer to other forms of cultural or collective endeavour: to myth, to other art, to history. (Figures 5 and 6) In this way, in looking back at history, art speaks to art and one artist speaks through time to another. This is an act of memory and a memorial. It can also suggest that a going back equates to a going down, i.e, into the unconscious, the psyche and the collective unconscious. Through recalling and reviving symbols from art history, the artist connects not only himself but potentially the viewer to a collective memory and a collective unconscious.

For example, in *Lady with unicorn II,* (Figure 7), Roberts makes associations with two other cultural artefacts: myth and art, particularly western art. He depicts a woman seated in a plastic chair, holding a pendulum, with a second woman behind her who is half-woman, half-cow, as if clothed in an animal suit. She holds a unicorn horn. They are inside-outside, protected from dry grassland and looming hills by a decorated canopy and a circle of sticks. Signs of nature are close to them: a bird's feather, a vine, a bird and a pattern of flowers.

Figure 5
Kevin Roberts, *For good measure.* 1999-2004, oil on panel, 72 x 58 cm, author's collection (Photo Stevens).

Figure 6
Fra Filippo Lippi, *The feast of Herod, Salome's dance,* 1460-1464, oil on panel (free internet).

This theme refers to an ancient myth first recorded by the Roman writer, Pliny, and a theme of medieval western art; the lady and the unicorn, as seen for example in the tapestries in the Musée de Cluny, Paris (Kearney 2011: 1-13). According to Kearney, this has a number of interpretations and traditionally represents the lady and her guest: the female and the seductive male; the Virgin and Christ; the tradition of Courtly Love; Beauty and the Beast, but in addition, and in a psychological sense, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the normal and the uncanny, the known and the unknown, the mind or soul and the body, sensuality and purity, good and evil. The unicorn is a liminal figure, "crossing borders and boundaries...: resisting definition and capture" (Kearney 2011: 2), and can be seen as 'dark', as the shadow, in Jungian terms.

In Roberts' painting, the woman herself (for both figures appear to be the same woman) is a liminal figure, in the process of startling change and transformation, halfway between human and animal, but both her aspects are part of the female principle. This might suggest one phase of the personality changing into another, a symbolic representation of transformation. This is balanced against the unicorn horn, a male, phallic symbol. One could say that the woman's instinctual and cognitive aspects, her conscious and unconscious aspects, her self and shadow, are becoming integrated in an individuated whole. Furthermore, the female-mother archetype, according to Hollis (2004: 48) signifies life and death, home and journey, because the same force that creates life also ends it, as personified by the Hindu goddess, Kali.

Even the two birds are dual: in the painting there are both a painted 'real' bird and a painted bird within the tapestry. Symbolically, the bird is a messenger, and in Renaissance art represents an angel, therefore is spiritual. In another duality in this work, culture, in the beautifully patterned hanging and brightly coloured structure, is in contrast to the barrenness of nature, and provides a place of beauty and safety, but is itself filled with references to nature. The landscape is dry savanna, or what Hollis (1995: 142) calls "the savanna of the soul".[9]

Figure 7
Kevin Roberts, *Lady with Unicorn II,* 1999-2004, oil on panel, 160 x 160 cm, private collection (Stevens 2005: 3).

Such a space almost seems mysterious and even sanctified, a *sanctum sanctorum* (Hollis 2004: 70).

So, in an archetypal reading, the painting balances two women in transformation, with aspects of human-animal, male-female, interior-exterior, body-spirit, nature-culture dualisms. The three paintings discussed combine personal narratives with cultural and collective myths, and suggest wholeness and the integration of dual and multiple aspects of the psyche, embodied in symbols and their combinations. The interpretations above do not, however, yet deal with the meanings of technical and formal elements in the works.

The visual context: form, means and the act of painting

While psychoanalytic interpretation has dealt and can deal in detail with the themes and imagery of cultural artefacts such as art, it is less easily able to analyse the technical and formal elements of art. According to Kuspit (1993: 314), psychoanalytic interpretation "can never disclose aesthetic immediacy", so it cannot elucidate the aesthetic experience of the viewer nor the aesthetic intentions of the artist. Arnheim (1966: 220) further argues that the visual form of a work is far more immediately present, both in a sensory and a psychological way, to the viewer than its symbolic aspects.[10] I will briefly attempt to show that a psychoanalytic approach can indeed be used with regard to aesthetics, both in terms of the artist as maker and the viewer as recipient of the artwork.

One of the most striking aspects of these paintings is their order: the compositions are balanced and organised on clear horizontal-vertical, left-right, up-down axes; objects and figures are evenly placed across the surface; objects reflect in and refer to other objects. Most importantly, patterns create order and unify all surfaces (Figure 8). The artist could be said to create his own cosmos, a word which means 'order' (Hollis 2004: 27), and he creates meaning by "imposing pattern upon chaos" (Hollis 1995: 21). While Nietzsche spoke of the will to power, and Dostoyevsky of the will to destruction, one might see here the will to order, a "patterning energy" such as manifests in all archetypes (Hollis 1995: 74). For Arnheim (1966: 128), symmetry, order and pattern are rational, and are models for certain types of art, as well as for the mind that shapes such art. Patterns and a will to order can be found, not only in all Roberts' paintings, but in the art and artefacts of many cultures in many different times, and could therefore be said to be collective, if not universal.

The patterned surfaces are reminiscent of weaving, stitching and embroidery, and have a symbolic significance, reaffirming women's arts (Stevens 2005), just as the patterns formed by ploughing can be seen as masculine. Both are creative and have ritual significance. This 'threading' and 'stitching' of every surface suggests the interdependence of all elements in the paintings, thus the interdependence of all things.

Order here is allied to complexity as, according to Arnheim (1966: 124), it must be, for "complexity without order produces confusion; order without complexity produces boredom". For him, high order and high complexity are requirements of good works of art. The repetition of elements, marks and patterns across the surfaces of these works creates a "...constancy provided by the regularity and evenness of change... a stationary flux... duality within unity" (Arnheim 1966: 225), so, I would argue, the symbolic depictions of duality and unity are enhanced by the duality in unity of the formal elements of the paintings.

The act of painting itself, particularly in crafting such densely patterned and detailed works, could be said to be 'heroic', in that it demands great dedication and commitment. The hero is another Jungian archetype, and refers to one whose task is "inescapable. It is renewed every day... . Showing up, and dealing, with whatever must be faced in the chasms of fear and self-doubt, that is the hero task" (Hollis 2004: 62). Producing such paintings requires an act of concentrated craftsmanship and intense focus in an almost meditative experience that might be compared to painting an icon. Temple (In Brewerton 2011: 13) states that "[t[o paint an icon is to bring about a transformation of matter that is only real as a result of a transformation in the inner being of the painter". Making art is a personal mission, a transformative task when undertaken in this spirit.

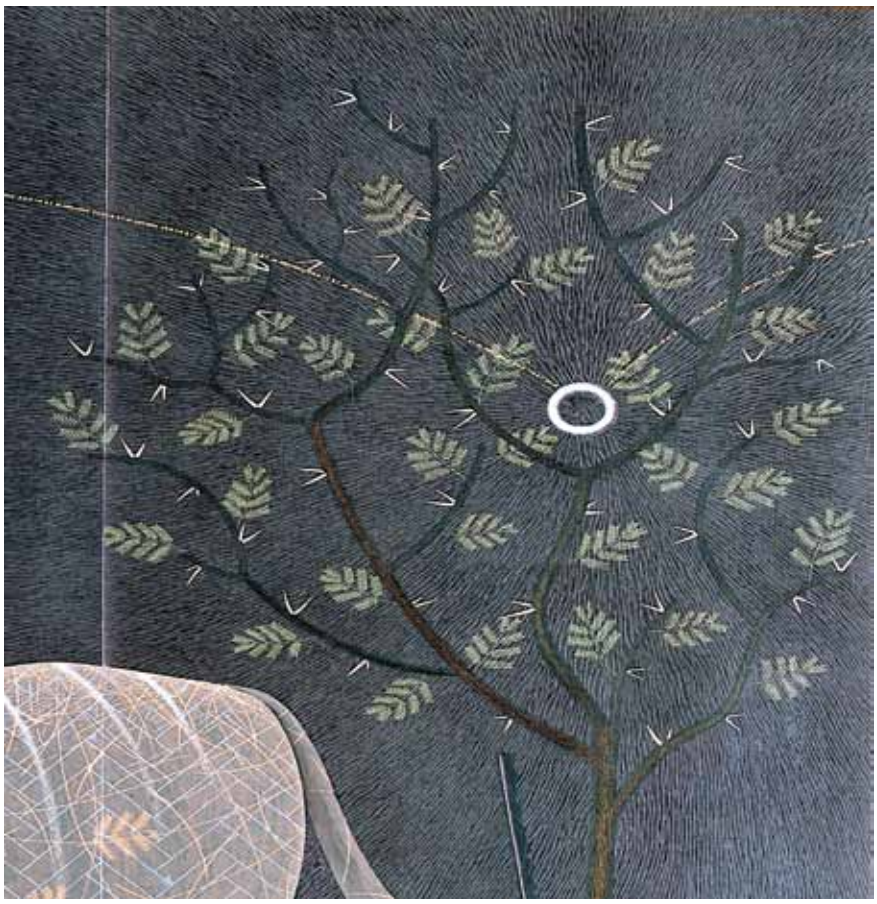

Figure 8
Kevin Roberts, Detail of *Tree song and kudu cow,* 1999-2004, oil on panel, 150 x 150 cm, private collection (Stevens 2005: 37).

The purpose of art: the personal and the universal

Art unarguably has a personal function for the artist who creates it, even if one dismisses the simplistic Freudian notion of the purpose of art. It is certain that Roberts was obsessed with painting and with certain themes, He had an inner vision and a way to express this, and it could be assumed that he was psychologically fulfilled by this activity.[11] As he expressed it, "I continuously want to create and am searching for the beautiful". For Arnheim (1966: 339), "art is a way of dealing with life, [and a means by which the artist is able] to scrutinize and to understand the world, to find order and law outside and within himself". Just as art needs order balanced with complexity, so too the functioning individual must balance the richness of complexity with the predictability of order.

According to Jung (A. Stevens 1982: 315), "creative formulation" (which could be active imagination, creative fantasy, dreams, symbol construction and art making) has a transcendent function and encourages integration of conscious and unconscious. It furthermore has the function of increasing individuation. According to A. Stevens (1999: 33), individuation is the elevation of psychic energies and potentials from their lowest origins to their highest modes of expression.

While making art is a psychological process for the artist, it is simultaneously a "material and highly bodily process. ...[It is] intimately enmeshed with the body" (Fuller 1988: 232).

For Fuller, this psychobiological aspect of art makes it potentially universal, i.e., a work of art can arouse deep and meaningful responses in the viewer, and so has a collective function in addition to a personal function. It provides some satisfaction of a basic human need – the need to perceive meaning and to comprehend it (Stevens A 1982: 35). The experience of art can arouse a psychobiological response in the viewer, which Fuller (1988: 197) terms the "aesthetic experience", an arousal of emotions, sensations and psychological reactions:

> ...that fleeting instant, so brief as to be almost timeless, when the spectator is at one with the work of art. He ceases to be his ordinary self, and the picture or building, or statue, landscape or aesthetic actuality, is no longer outside himself. The two become one entity.

For Fuller, as for Roger Fry (1920) before him, this experience depends more on the formal qualities than the imagery and iconography of the artwork, or at least depends on all aspects of the work. Although the imagery does indeed have the psychological potential to bring the viewer into contact with the archetypal realm, the formal qualities arouse the psychobiological response. The healing potential of art is arguably psychobiological and might relate to the viewer's potential sense of the restoration of wholeness, of completion:

> We are intact only in so far as our objects are intact. Art of whatever kind bears witness to intact objects even when the subject-matter is disintegration. ... whatever the projection of narrow compulsions... whatever the primitive and enveloping relations that ensue, the reconstitution or restoration of the outside and independent whole object... remains a paramount function in art (Segal in Fuller 1988: 116).

Psychoanalytic interpretation: a critical overview

Kuspit (1993: 304), while using psychoanalytic interpretation, nonetheless acknowledges that "psychoanalysis of art privileges and elevates psychoanalysis while sharply delimiting and diminishing art". A psychoanalytic approach to the interpretation of art has limitations, and cannot ever fully explain all the features of artworks. Creative decisions, achievements and effects cannot always be rationally explained, a fact accepted even by psychoanalysts (van Franz in Jung 1978: 378), and this resistance to explanation is compounded in much contemporary art. It could even be argued that a psychoanalytical interpretation, or indeed any interpretation, robs art of the very mysteriousness that makes it worth making and viewing. Art must not be reduced, in a psychoanalytic analysis, to a mere symptom or an attempt at self-healing.

So it must be acknowledged that the interpretations above only touch on some potential meanings in these works, for example the reading of symbols is in no way exhaustive. In order to interpret and contextualise such dense paintings I might have used various interpretative strategies, from art historical to semiotic, structuralist or post-structuralist, but I decided to limit my approach to a psychoanalytic perspective, largely a Jungian and neo-Jungian one, because Jung's theories on the collective unconscious, archetypes, anima and animus, man and nature, symbols, dreams and myths are not only well established but they would seem to provide suitable frameworks, narratives or 'myths' that could offer the possibility of rich interpretations that elucidate the connections between personal and universal meanings in such works. Precedents exist for such Jungian interpretations of complex art works, for example López-Pendraza's readings of the works of Anselm Kiefer (1996). The assumption is that a rich interpretative strategy is appropriate for rich 'texts', such as Roberts' paintings, and that a psychoanalytic approach can offer subtle and differentiated interpretations (Jacobi in Jung 1978: 377).

In conclusion, and in spite of the limitations of any interpretation of art, I would argue that the analysis above shows the usefulness of Jungian and neo-Jungian psychoanalytic approaches in enabling rich interpretations of certain kinds of art, such as the paintings of Kevin Roberts, and in exploring potential connections between personal and collective meanings of both the imagery and the formal qualities in artworks. It is in this inter-relationship of personal and collective meanings, in exploring and establishing both collective and personal symbols and their combinations with particular formal qualities, that the work makes a specific contribution to South African art, and thus is worth such an investigation.

Notes

1 According to Freud, the artist obsessively repeats images, because art making is not sufficiently therapeutic to resolve conflicts permanently. However, it must be noted that, in spite of Freud himself producing somewhat tentative psychoanalytic interpretations of the psyches of Leonardo and Michelangelo based on their work and information about their lives, he later doubted his views. His views on art have been recised on at least one ground: his focus on subject matter rather than on any aspects of form, of which he admitted to having little understanding (Fuller 1988: 36).

2 Generally Roberts would not interpret his works, but preferred to leave interpretations up to the viewer of the work. He did occasionally write, in a markedly poetic and philosophical way, about certain works, avoiding specific interpretations.

3 The Jungian and neo-Jungian view of archetypes and their manifestations in symbols can be compared to the structuralist view of language and words: according to A Stevens (1999: 28), structuralists posit that all language, which manifest in words and grammar, arise from a universal structure embedded in the human brain. So, too, archetypes are deep structures embedded in the brain, which manifest in symbols.

4 Fuller (1988: 16, 20, 109-110) relates the psychobiological response to a number of concepts: Fry's "esthetic emotion" which is an emotion about form; Williams' biological response to form; the aesthetic experience as in Kleinian psychoanalytic theory, amongst others.

5 The animus is the equivalent male aspect of the female psyche.

6 The two women might symbolise the anima and the shadow, that negative aspect of the female embodied in the witch, femme fatale or siren, for example, although the women in this painting are too alike to make this a very convincing interpretation.

7 This 'dark' interpretation of ploughed earth should be seen in the context of Kiefer's work, which explores the darkness of German history and the German psyche.

8 The argument that universals exist can be found in folklore, mythology and in the works of many cultural anthropologists, evolutionary biologists, Jungian analysts, art historians, art critics, structuralists and others (Stevens A 1995: 180).

9 Interestingly, research has been done on the kinds of landscapes most people prefer, and this corresponds to the savannahs of Africa, which could be considered an archetypal landscape, given man's origins in Africa (A. Stevens 1995: 267). This preference is marked in children.

10 Freud (In Gedo 1985 :44) himself later doubted his ideas about the psychoanalysis of art, writing, "[w]hat if... [we] have taken too serious and profound a view of details which were nothing to the artist, details which he introduced quite arbitrarily or for some purely formal reason with no hidden intention behind?" This indicated the limitations of psychoanalysis with regard to formal and visual concerns, a limitation that psychoanalytic art critics such as Arnheim, Kuspit and Fuller have attempted to address.

12 I acknowledge flaws in the assumption that the art directly reflects the mind of the artist. If the art is ordered and rational, the mind behind it is not necessarily equally so. As Gedo (1985: 20) points out, a tragic life may not necessarily produce 'tragic' art, but may produce 'happy' art as a defence mechanism.

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Ingrid Stevens is an associate professor and is the head of the Department of Fine & Applied Art at Tshwane University of Technology. She has a D Tech (Fine Arts) degree from that institution, which focused on sustainability in South African craft projects, while her master's degree investigated contemporary art criticism. She has published extensively, both in the popular press and in scholarly journals, on contemporary art, South African crafts and theories of art criticism.