

## F A C E T S   A N D   R E F L E C T I O N S

## *Trance and Art: Milton Erickson's Influence on an Artist*

### *Elijah David Herschler*

Interviewed by Roxanna Erickson Klein

*Elijah David Herschler is an accomplished artist who invented Ribbons in Space, stainless steel sculptures that are an embodiment of balanced fluid movement, space, time, and light. The sculptures are designed to create a mildly hypnotizing experience and lift the viewer into a more relaxed, blissful, timeless state of being. The sculptures are a catalyst for the transformation of consciousness bringing one in touch with the source of being: our universality and our infiniteness. The moving hypnotic sculptures, invented in 1967, are now on display in museums, private, and corporate collections in 16 countries. Herschler describes himself as having been fortunate to meet the Dalai Llama, David Bohm, Huston Smith, Moshe Feldenkrais, John Lilly, Gregory Bateson, Karl Pribram, Joseph Campbell, and Ninian Smart. As a result of his 25 year association with NASA, he also met three astronauts who walked on the moon. He says "I was interested in understanding the effects of outer space on the inner space and consciousness of the astronauts." For more information about his artwork, visit <http://www.elijahdavidherschler.com>*

*This interview between Elijah David Herschler and Milton Erickson's daughter, Roxanna, seeks to touch upon the extent to which participation in Erickson's seminars had a broad and rippling effect on Herschler. He had the opportunity to study briefly with Erickson, and maintained a long friendship with Elizabeth Erickson after Erickson's death*

**Roxanna Erickson Klein (REK): Tell me about your interest in psychology.**

**Elijah David Herschler (EDH):** I have always been a meditative person, often becoming lost in everyday trance, and in many ways a "natural" at psychology. As I observed nature, animals, art, and people I developed an interest in the study of psychology that began in my early teens. I was trying to understand myself and how my mind worked--the different voices in my head, the different parts of me talking inside my mind: my conscience, unconscious, self-consciousness, etc.

During the 60's and 70's I was exploring the work of Anton Mesmer, Alan Watts, D.T Suzuki, Krishnamurti, Taoism, Zen Buddhism, and Buddhism. I later became interested in Aldous Huxley who approached drug experiences in a scientific way. I smoked pot and took LSD a couple of times, which led to new perspectives, insight, and altered states of consciousness. In the 70's and 80's I took many New Age workshops with some of the best leaders in their fields. All of this helped develop my awareness and consciousness, simultaneously preparing me for hypnotherapy and trance work.

**REK Did those understandings help your work as an artist?**

**EDH:** As an artist I am sensitive to human interaction, emotions, and moods. I am aware of color, form, light, changing light, and movement. The interactive effects of all of these affect my awareness, feelings, moods, and states of consciousness.

As an artist I have spent hours in every day trances when looking at nature, birds, streams, mountains, trees, water flowing, art, sculpture, paintings, and lis-

tening to music. I experience intense concentration with a heightened sense of awareness. I use this perspective naturally to absorb and become one with the experience.

**REK: Tell me about meeting Erickson.**

**EDH:** In 1978 after a workshop at Esalen Institute in Big Sur, I was invited to someone's room to hear a tape recording. As I listened I was immediately drawn in, fully engaged, captured by the man's voice and his hypnotic induction. Prior to the tape, I knew nothing of Erickson, but I was struck, hypnotized, fascinated. I had to meet him.

A week later I called Erickson's home and spoke with Mrs. Erickson. Although I was not a therapist, she explained that he occasionally made exceptions to include a creative person in the seminars. I was put on a six-month waiting list, and while waiting I had a few sessions with Ernest Rossi and with Jeff Zeig. A cancellation gave me the opportunity to join a group earlier than scheduled. I still have the letter of invitation to attend a seminar in his home on Oct 8-12, 1979.

I was very moved by the seminar. Milton expressed so much total attention and love, and seemed to work simultaneously with several people each of whom was in a different stage. Much of the time it wasn't possible to know with certainty about with whom he was working. There were ten or twelve of us including myself, and it seemed as if we were wandering in and out of trance.

One of the assignments that he made to certain people was to walk up Squaw Peak (now Piastawa Peak). I did it. It took a lot of persistence and getting lost on the trail before I finally made it to the top. On the peak, with the grand panoramic view, I found a wonderful sense of accomplishment and learned lessons about perseverance and overcoming obstacles.

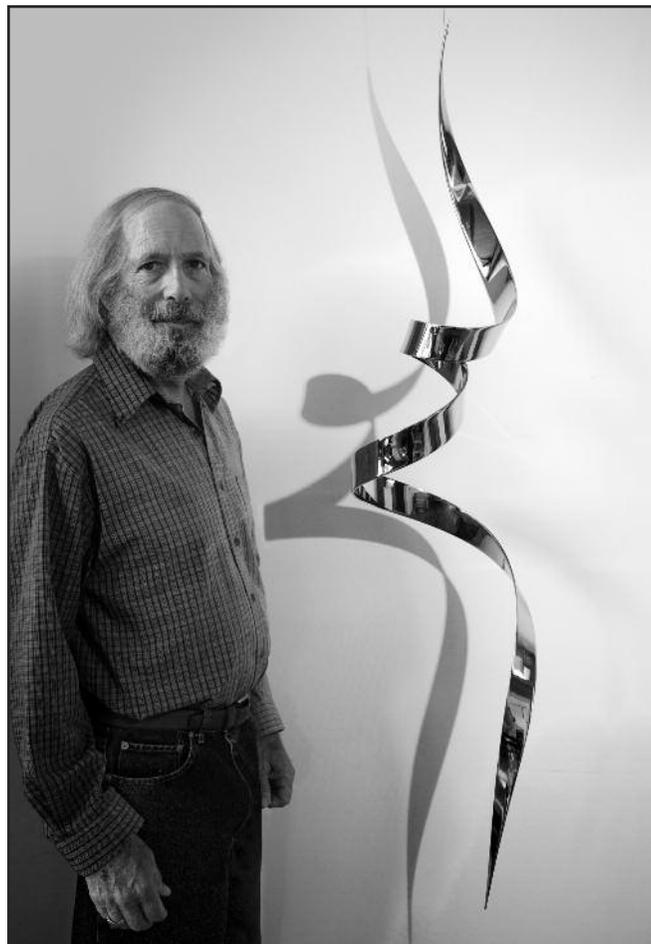
After the initial seminar, I returned for three additional days with Dr. Erickson. It must have been in Jan or Feb of 1980 because he died on

March 25, 1980. I wish I had been able to spend more time with Milton, particularly one to one...just to talk and get to know him as a person. I felt bad that he died so quickly after I met him, and therefore I was not able to get to know him better.

**REK: Can you describe what it was that you learned from him?**

**EDH:** Being with Erickson, experiencing his presence, his voice, his sensitivity, and my awareness of his kindness and warmth has remained with me for all these 30 years. The experience has had an ongoing positive influence on me. I have such great respect and admiration for him and feel fortunate to have known him, studied with him, and was hypnotized by him. Erickson had a marvelous presence

When I think of him, I think of how loving he was -- his ability to put people in trance with his incredibly creative inductions. It was both wonderful and amazing to experience his creative ways of treating people and dealing with their problems. After the morning seminar in his office, he would sometimes invite us into the house where he took great pride in sharing with us his collection of beautifully crafted, Seri ironwood carvings. It felt like a special privilege to be in his home and to see his personal collections. I felt even more of a connection as he smiled and with great enthusiasm told us stories about the carvings. It was a time to get to know him, outside of the office.



*David Herschler and "The Dance of Life"*

**HERSCHLER** *continued from page 4*

Erickson also influenced me in another important way. He suggested I read the book, *Black Elk Speaks*, by John Niehardt. It is the story of Black Elk, the famous Lakota Indian visionary and healer. I had already been interested in religion, spiritual leaders, prophets, great teachers, and enlightened people, and I have maintained an interest in learning about mysticism, Gnosticism, near death experiences, and past lives.



*"Time Space Light"*

What I learned from Erickson became part of me, integrated in an intuitive, sensing, feeling, experiential way. We had a special connection, beyond words, which made it very easy to work with him. I felt like he liked me very much and that he liked my art very much. I learned even more than I can put into words. My ability to use hypnotherapy on my own self and on others was born and substantially developed. For the next years I continued to work on my trancing and my work with hypnotic sculptures. Through the experiences with Milton, my moving ribbons sculptures became more refined, more elegant, and closer to the perfect images I held within. I gave Milton a sculpture after the first seminar of his I attended; they are trance producing in their own way. I would have really appreciated knowing his response and comments about them, and it would have been so meaningful. Unfortunately he was not able to see one of my suspended moving sculptures that are even more hypnotic.

**REK:** Wow, I remember the beautiful ribbons that you gave to us. I was at home then, and I knew he had a close relationship with you. I remember when he had just received the sculpture; it was wrapped up in a soft cloth. He asked me to unwrap it, and in a ceremonious way had me assemble the two parts. We watched as the sculpture gently found a balance, and we both became absorbed into the way it sort of drifts into a harmonious equilibrium. It was a memorable moment. Dad and I enjoyed the movement, and connected through our reaction to a sculpture. To share powerfully trance-producing feelings with Dad and to enjoy the trance together was special. My parents both loved that sculpture and kept it in their bedroom. Later after Dad died and I had a home of my own, my mother gave it to me. He also liked the words, a Ribbon in Space and all of the metaphors and suggestions held within that image.

**EDH:** Thank you. I would like to have seen your reactions myself. It is my desire to create sculpture that changes consciousness in a positive way – using movement with pure form, space and light, to create hypnotic states and a natural form of trance.

My Ribbons in Space are a reflection of myself, of my desires, of my values and goals. They are my ideal work of art. I think trance touches on the universal, connects me deeply, intimately with what I am experiencing, seeing, hearing, and feeling.

**REK:** Do you continue to integrate trance work in your art?

**EDH:** Going into trance helps me to experience things more fully, more subtly, with greater focus, concentration, and awareness. The integration of art and hypnosis came about naturally, unplanned, through intuition, and a combining of awareness. I had been working with hypnotism and trance with my kinetic sculptures for twelve years before I met Dr. Erickson; my thesis in graduate school was on kinetic sculpture. Since having had the privilege of working with Erickson, my ability to go into trance naturally and easily has greatly improved. I also have been able to refine my kinetic sculptures to have a greater effect in creating a trance by gently hypnotizing the viewer. I work with graceful movement, optical illusions,

space, time, and light.

What I gained from the contact with Dr. Erickson has become a major part of the way I experience things and my life itself. With his positive influence, my sculptures became more hypnotic, more trance producing, more elegant, and timeless.

It seems as though I knew Milton for a long period of time and yet it was actually only over a six-month period. It was a deep, intense connection for me that had a great impact and that is why the time frame seems much longer than it actually was. I kept in contact with Betty after Milton's death, and later sent her another sculpture to honor the important role she played in your family, so supportive of Milton.

**REK:** Would you like to say a word about your art?

**DEH:** My art is universal.... beyond language, beyond cultures, beyond countries and borders. I believe it connects people to our universality our oneness with life and all things.

**REK:** It is no wonder that my Dad felt so connected to you. Your art is expressed in such a unique and profound way.

**DEH:** Thank you.