

# The pool of the psyche: water in the work of Ariana van Heerden and Kevin Roberts

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Water is a material which pervades the earth and is the source of all life, the *fons et origo* (Cirlot 1971: 365). Humans are seventy percent water and it occupies seventy percent of the earth's surface. As a substance that can exist in a number of physical states, water is form and formless, material and metaphor, image and idea, substance and symbol. Thus it is hardly surprising that water is a powerful symbol: for the unconscious in Jungian terms; for purity and baptism in many religions; a symbol of spiritual or physical journeys and of aspects of the human condition. It appears in the work of many traditional and contemporary artists. Ariana van Heerden and Kevin Roberts are South African painters and both depict water in numerous works, in very different ways, varying from the wide oceans to the water in a cup. This paper will investigate their paintings of this substanceless substance, and aspects of the unconscious that are reflected in their works when the latter are approached from a Jungian and neo-Jungian point of view. For example, the differing contexts in which water appears in the paintings of Roberts and van Heerden can suggest the anima and animus as aspects of the psyche, the male or female principle, birth and death, the personal and the collective, the romantic and the classical, because of these artists' approach to this most liminal of materials. **Keywords:** water, symbol, Jung, Bachelard, archetype, van Heerden, Roberts.

## Die poel van die psige: water in die werk van Ariana van Heerden en Kevin Roberts

Water is dié element wat wyd verspreid oor die aarde voorkom; dit is die bron van alle lewe, die *fons et origo* (Cirlot 1971:365). Die mens bestaan uit sewentig persent water en dit beslaan sewentig persent van die aardbol se oppervlakte. As 'n stof wat in verskeie natuurkundige gedaantes kan bestaan, is water vorm sowel as vormloos, wesenlik en metafoor, beeld en denkbeeld, wese en simbool. Derhalwe is water 'n kragtige simbool: vir die onderbewussyn in Jungiaanse terme; vir reinheid en die doop in vele religieë; 'n simbool vir spirituele en fisiese reis asook aspekte van die menslike bestaan. Dit kom voor in etlike tradisionele en hedendaagse kunstenaars se werk. Ariana van Heerden en Kevin Roberts is Suid-Afrikaanse kunstenaars en albei beeld water uit in talle werke, op verskeie maniere wat wissel vanaf uitgestrekte oseane tot die water in 'n teekoppie. Hierdie referaat ondersoek hulle skilderye wat hierdie substansilose stof uitbeeld, sowel as aspekte van die onderbewussyn wat gereflekteer word in hul werke, gesien vanaf 'n neo-Jungiaanse sowel as 'n Jungiaanse uitgangspunt. Byvoorbeeld, as gevolg van die uiteenlopende verband waarin water, die mees drempelend van alle stowwe, in Robberts en van Heerden se skilderye voorkom, mag die anima en die animus voorgestel word as aspekte van die psige, die manlike of vroulike, geboorte of die dood, die individuele of die gemeenskaplike, die romantiese of die klassieke. **Sleutelwoorde:** water, simbool, Jung, Bachelard, argetipe, van Heerden, Roberts.

**Perhaps, more than any other element, water is a complete poetic reality (Bachelard 1983:150).**

**W**ater is a material which pervades the earth and is the source of all life, the *fons et origo* (source and origin) (Cirlot 1971: 365). As a substance that can exist in a number of physical states, water is form and formless, material and metaphor, image and idea, substance and symbol. Thus it is hardly surprising that water is a powerful symbol: for the unconscious in Jungian terms; for purity and baptism in many religions; a symbol of spiritual or physical journeys and of aspects of the human condition. It appears in the work of many traditional and contemporary artists. One can think of examples as different as William Turner, Claude Monet and Bill Viola's more recent installations, in which immersive baptism could refer to both drowning and a cleansing re-birth. Ariana van Heerden and Kevin Roberts are South African painters and both depict water in numerous works, in very different ways, varying from the wide oceans to the water in a cup (figures 1 and 2). In a previous article, I analysed a selection of Roberts's works, focusing on the anima images that pervade all his works. In this

article, I aim to explore a Jungian and psychoanalytic interpretation of the images of water in the works of these two artists. Key theorists are Jung himself, as well as Gaston Bachelard.

From a Jungian perspective (Jacobi in Jung 1978: 253), everything is a manifestation of the psyche. Jung suggested that the psyche, this psychobiological entity, is manifest in our dreams, myths, psychoses and cultural artefacts through symbolic images. It has been largely as a result of Jung that any significance has been attached in the West to symbols and symbolic images in relation to the processes of human development (Cirlot 1971). “[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”.

Bachelard, a philosopher who constructs phenomenological, psychoanalytic interpretations of poetic images, uses a Jungian approach, for example in *The poetics of space* (1994). In *Water and Dreams* (1983) he continues his investigation of the poetic imagination, especially as it manifests in what he calls “the material imagination”. This is the imagination as it reflects in material substances, or elements, in images of *matter*, such as fire, earth or water. He argues that such images “plumb the depths of being” (Bachelard 1983:1). In other words, they reveal and reflect aspects of the psyche that may not be otherwise accessible to consciousness.



**Figure 1**  
Kevin Roberts, detail of *Waiting for rain*, 1999-2004, oil on panel, 100 x 120 cm, private collection (Stevens 2005: 20).



**Figure 2**  
Ariana van Heerden, detail of *Breast stroke*, 2012, pastel on paper, private collection (photograph van Heerden).

Jung is concerned with both the individual and universal aspects of the psyche or, in his terms, with the personal and collective unconscious. The contents of the collective unconscious are known as archetypes (Jung 1969:4), which are archaic, primordial energies that have existed in the psyche since remote times. They manifest as psychic energy and come to consciousness in myths, legends, fairy tales, and also in images and art, where they take the form of symbols. The relationship between the personal and collective unconscious as manifest in symbols and images

is expressed by Bachelard (1994:33) thus: “Great images have both a history and a prehistory... . Consequently it is not until late in life that we really revere an image, when we discover that its roots plunge well beyond the history that is fixed in our memories.” So archetypes are both our own and everyone’s.

Archetypes, images and symbols are inter-related in the sense that “[t]he psychological mechanism that transforms energy is the symbol” (Jung in Cirlot 1971: xxxv). So the archetype manifests in the symbol and gives rise to images. The meaning of archetypal, or in fact all, symbols is only partly accessible (Cirlot 1971: xxxvi). Symbols are rich in potential meanings and associations. In particular, what Bachelard (1971:xix) terms “the poetic image” is an image or symbol that does not duplicate reality or reconstruct the past but creates that which reverberates in the consciousness of both creator and viewer. Each creator would have preferred, pervasive images that unify the oeuvre, which it is the task of the interpreter to trace.

However, the interpretation of symbols is complex, as they are a “a penumbra of uncertainty” (Jung 1978:29). According to Cirlot (1971: xi-xiii), symbols are dynamic and “multivalent” in their meanings, and are “imbued with emotive and conceptual values”. They carry cultural, historic, spiritual or religious significance and the meaning of any symbol must take into consideration its form, material, construction; the interpreter must consider both what the symbol is (its form, its reality) and what it may signify (its potential meanings). Symbols are ambiguous, have both personal and particular as well as universal meanings, inner and outer significance, are microcosm and macrocosm, have objective and subjective aspects, and one could thus relate them to the personal and collective unconscious of Jung. It is important to emphasize that they are both material and meaning: “the invisible... is analogous to the material order” (Cirlot 1971:xvi) and “What is within is also without”. So all symbols can be interpreted psychologically, that is as having some deep connection to both the personal unconscious (of the artist) and the collective unconscious (of artist and viewers).

Important for this article is the Jungian notion that archetypes are mirrored in mankind’s relationship with, and knowledge of, nature and also in natural substances, such as water. Bachelard (1994:xiii) explores the “material imagination” which uses the elements of nature, such as water, to suggest that which is “primitive and eternal” through the symbolic potential of substances. Bachelard focuses on these “images of matter” which he felt were ignored by literary criticism and philosophy, and the creative response to and about nature. Jung (1969:6) refers to the “the mythologized processes of nature” as expressions of the inner, unconscious psyche, which becomes accessible to consciousness only by being mirrored in nature.

### **The personal context**

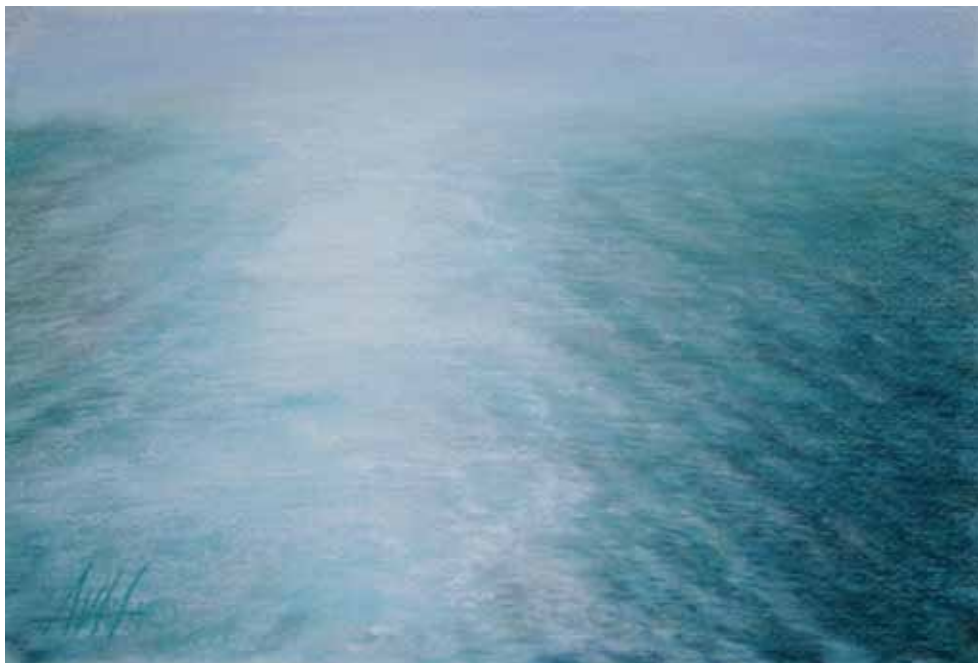
A psychoanalytic reading should be most concerned with analysis of the artworks and not the artist, as argued by Jung (1978: 86) amongst others, who says this reduces creativity to a mere symptom, detrimental to both the work and the artist. However, Anthony Stevens (1995: 57) argues that a first step in interpreting artefacts, dreams as well as art works, is the personal context. This article aims to psychoanalyse the images and not the artists, however, this may be unavoidable and 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 painter of serene, dreamlike and very symbolic female figures, situated in recognisable local landscapes, often in the presence of water and surrounded by a variety of ordinary objects that contribute to the layering of symbolic meanings in the work.<sup>1</sup>

From this more personal perspective, it seems worthwhile to note three personal facts about Roberts: he was kept apart from his mother for a considerable time in his early youth due to family circumstances; as an artist he painted obsessively and repeated certain themes such as the female figure 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’s use of images, such as the woman next to or in water, could “as easily have been dreamt as turned into poetry” (Stevens A 1995: 155).

Van Heerden (b 1956) is an academic who is also a committed artist. She is obsessed with the sea and has depicted it in numerous paintings and drawings done over a number of years. She had a complex relationship with a troubled mother who died when she was a teenager. She grew up in various tropical locations because of her father’s work in the diplomatic service, and is a keen traveller, swimmer and diver. However, she remembers almost drowning at an early age, so the sea is an ambivalent space and place for her.

### **Water as archetype**



**Figure 3**  
**Ariana van Heerden, *Recollections, Azura, Quirimbas Archipelago*, 2012, pastel on paper, 400 x 465 cm, private collection (photograph van Heerden).**

Scientists tell us that water has existed on Earth for some four and a half billion years and that it was a decisive factor in the development of life on earth: humans are seventy percent water and it occupies seventy percent of the earth’s surface (Dixon in Freschi 2011:13). Thus it is hardly surprising that water is a powerful symbol and an important archetype. Bachelard (1994:72) writes that all great images, such as landscapes, “reveal a psychic state.” Considerations about water, as an aspect of landscape, lie deep in the human psyche, and a relationship to it is elemental in human existence. According to Cirlot (1978: xxxviii)<sup>2</sup> water fertilizes, it purifies, it dissolves, and these attributes combine with its lack of fixed form to begin to explain its complex symbolism. Jung (1969:17) considers water as one of the most central archetypes<sup>3</sup>

As the origin of life, the strongest association of water is with the maternal force, or Great Mother (Cirlot 1971:364), and the receptive female side to the personality. For Bachelard (1971:xxi), it is a feminine element, and can have different meanings depending on how it is described or depicted, for example, calm water (figures 3 & 4) signifies the cosmic mother and the “beneficent milk of a momentarily calmed universe” (Bachelard 1971:44). Bachelard describes the milky image of a lake beneath the moon, which gives rise to many poetic associations for him, of warmth and happiness, safety and softness, the milk of mother nature, of the womb. He calls this “the wife-mistress landscape” (Bachelard 1971:61 ) because of the deeply feminine character of milky water, which he sees as an anima archetype projected onto nature.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 4**  
**Kevin Roberts, *Continuum-Point*, 1999-2004, oil on panel, 114 x 114 cm, private collection (Stevens 2005: 11).**

In these paintings 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, or to swim or sail over a calm sea. As Jung (1969: 22) writes: “[i]n every human being...there is a special heaven, whole and unbroken”, the sense of an unbroken, ongoing integration of psyche, body and environment.

The water in both Figures 3 and 4 can be seen as representations 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). This archetype is in its totality a symbol of love, nurture, union, fruitfulness. 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. The women in Roberts's painting directly represent the archetype of the anima.<sup>5</sup> The anima might also be symbolised as the Great Mother, typically Mother Nature or Mother Earth, so in van Heerden's depiction the calm sea can also be seen as a benevolent Mother Nature, or anima.

The significance of water changes if it is depicted as deep or dark (figure 5 and 6). Such still and dark water can be melancholy, "dreamy, slow and calm... the embodiment of tears" (Bachelard 1983: 7,11). It can represent the unconscious, particularly the collective unconscious. Jung (1969: 18) writes of water as the living symbol of the dark (or hidden) psyche, of the depths of the unconscious. "Water is the commonest symbol for the unconscious" and thus dreams of water are common. Water is furthermore the shadow, the dark self:

... the world of water, where all life floats in suspension; where the realm of the sympathetic system, the soul of everything living, begins; where I am indivisibly this *and* that; where I experience the other in myself and the other-than-myself experiences me. [T]he collective unconscious is ... as wide as the world and open to all the world (Jung 1969:21-22).



**Figure 5**  
**Ariana van Heerden, *Lap pool*, 2012, charcoal on paper, 310 x 490 cm, private collection (photograph van Heerden).**



**Figure 6**  
**Kevin Roberts, title unknown, 1999-2004, oil on panel, size unknown, private collection (Stevens 2005:14).**

So deep or dark water has a significance, other than the maternal force, as does “heavy, dormant water ... [or] violent and energizing sea” (Bachelard 1983: 12). It signifies the pre-formed state, before death and rebirth, or the transition from life to death. Here, water becomes as heavy as blood. “To disappear into deep water or to disappear toward the far horizon, to become a part of depth or infinity, such is the destiny of man that finds its destiny in the destiny of water”. This relates to baptism, the washing away of the old and the creation of the new. Water it thus birth, and in its depths, a sinking into the sub-conscious or death. It is liminal, a “mediator between life and death” (Cirlot 1978: 365) between the “surface and the abyss”.

Furthermore, for Bachelard (1983: 6,55) water is the most transitory element, and thus a symbol of transformation: “Water always flows, always falls, always ends in horizontal death”. For him, essentially water is associated with death and the ultimate human destiny. It is “an invitation to a special death that allows us to return to one of the elementary material refuges”, which he calls the Ophelia complex (figure 7).



**Figure 7**  
Kevin Roberts, *Ophelia is only dreaming*, 1993-94, oil on panel, 142 x 127 cm, ABSA collection (photograph ABSA).

### **Visual aspects of works by Roberts and van Heerden**

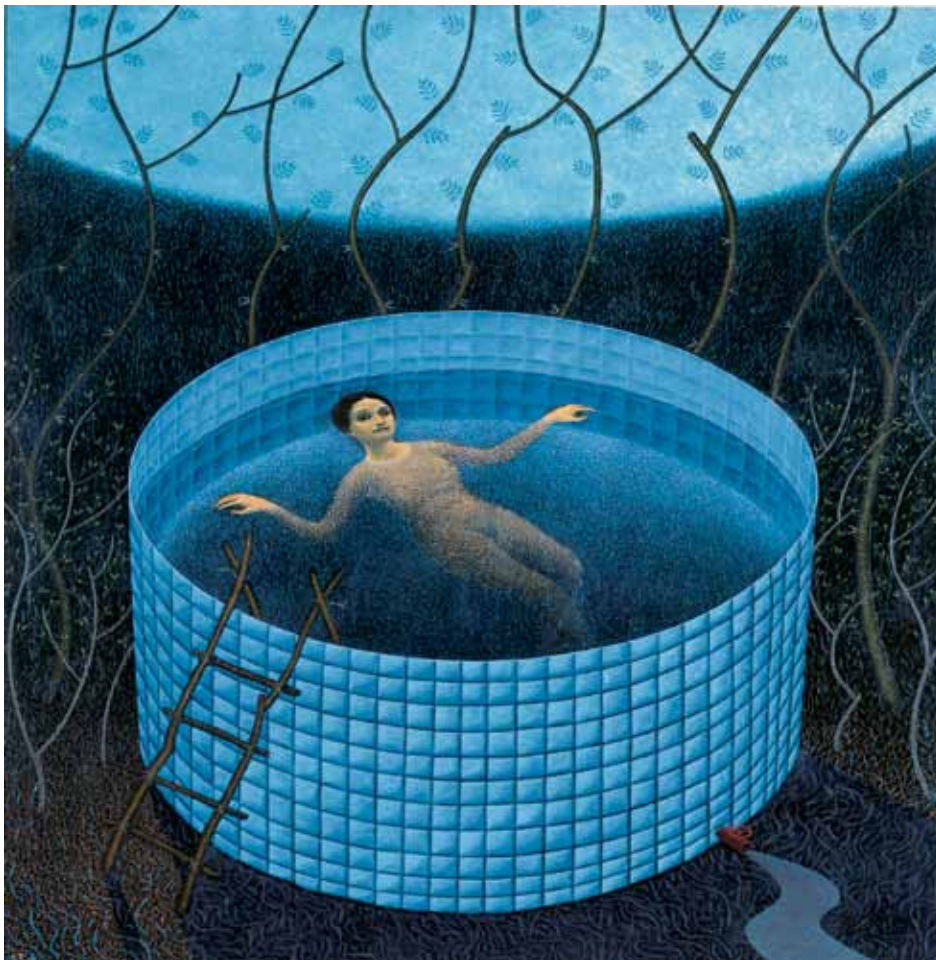
For Bachelard, there is a strong correlation between water, death and beauty. Both Roberts and van Heerden undoubtedly deal with aesthetics and seek to create a kind of beauty. They do not concern themselves with social commentary, criticism or intervention, or any of the other more contemporary strategies in art, but seek the heightened aesthetic experience which Kuspit argues is the artist's essential task, although they use different visual means.

The nature of this poetic/visual game is what interests me more than investigating issues or sociological concerns. In a sense, I endeavor to understand my condition as a human being by looking inwards towards a poetic, mystical, seemingly irrational set of concerns, the interplay of which give me a glimmer of something that may be general to the human condition (Kuspit 2004:31).





**Figure 8**  
**Ariana van Heerden, *Ebb and flow*, 2004, oil on canvas, 120 x 200 cm, collection the artist (photograph van Heerden).**



**Figure 9**  
**Kevin Roberts, *Portapool epiphany*, 1999-2004, oil on panel, 133 x 110 cm, private collection (Stevens 2005:21).**

However, neither Jung, Bachelard or indeed any of the neo-Jungians offer any approach to the visual aspects of symbolic images, as they concentrate purely on their content, so one must turn to an art historian for such a system. One way to understand the different visual strategies used by van Heerden and Roberts is by applying the Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin's notions of the linear and the painterly.<sup>6</sup> Wölfflin (1932) writes that Renaissance art is linear: it seeks perfection of form at rest, every form delimited but fully developed, complete and co-ordinated so the whole is made up of independent parts. Each part has its own colour, with a composition based on horizontals and verticals, symmetry and balance. This characterises Roberts's approach (figure 9). On the other hand, the Baroque replaces this with the "restless, the becoming, ... the limitless, the colossal", and focuses on movement and a general ground colour which can dissolve clear form, with an unstable balance, in an approach Wölfflin (1932:9-117) calls 'painterly'. This is an apt definition of van Heerden's approach (figure 8). It is essentially the difference between tangible, clear, closed form, constructed by outlines, and limitless formlessness or open form, constructed by mass. Furthermore, the linear constructs a series of planes having multiplicity, while the painterly emphasizes depth and unity. One could apply Wölfflin's description of the linear to any image in Roberts's paintings, for example the way in which each leaf on a tree is clearly delineated, or in his use of distinct patterns across objects.

Linear style is the style of distinctness plastically felt. ... The tracing out of a figure with evenly clear lines ... has an element of physical grasping. The operation which the eye performs resembles the operation of the hand which feels along the body, and the modelling which repeats reality in the gradation of light also appeals to the sense of touch (Wölfflin 1932:21).

By contrast, what could be more painterly than the wide and deep seas of van Heerden? One could describe them thus:

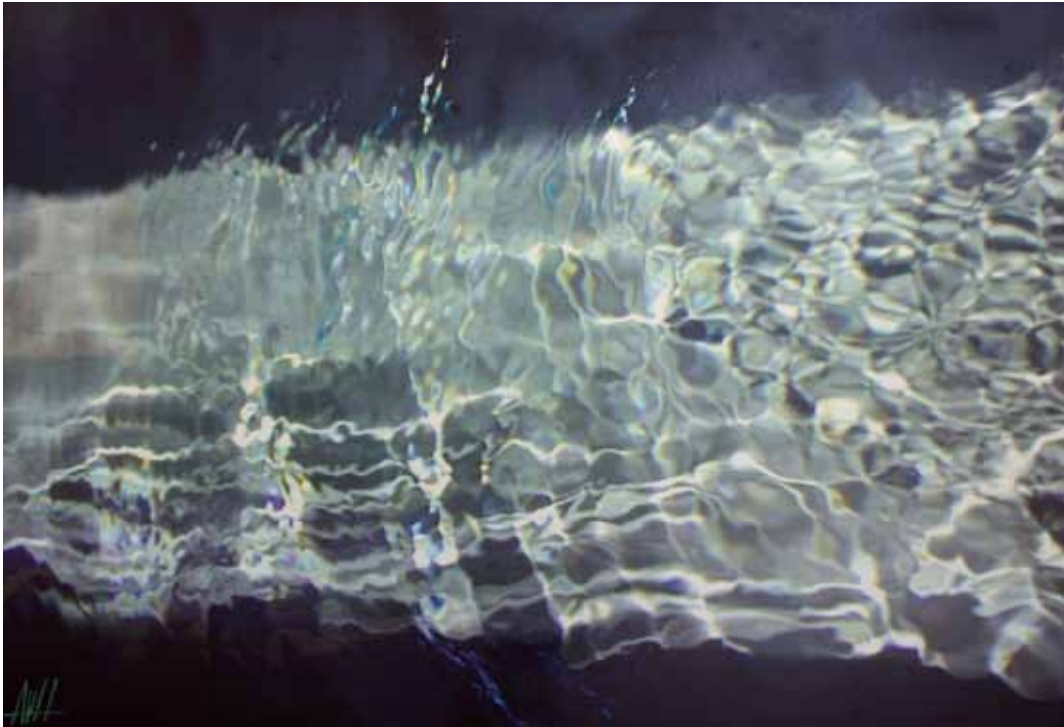
[E]verything ... enlivened by a mysterious movement. ... [F]orms begin to play; lights and shadows become an independent element, they seek and hold each other from height to height, from depth to depth; the whole takes on the semblance of a movement ceaselessly emanating, never ending (Wölfflin 1932:19).

Wölfflin (1932:27) touches upon a possible psychological explanation for the choice of a linear or painterly approach: The linear comes from the *hand*, and a consequent interest in, or desire for, enduring, solid form and material, measurable and finite, the "thing in itself", while the painterly emphasizes the *eye* that seeks the changing appearance, movement, the "thing in its relations", the immaterial and immeasurable. So while both artists paint nature, Roberts may be seen to affirm the measurable, knowable exteriorized world and its objects while van Heerden seeks to escape the world into another, less definable, possibly more universal realm, a space of pure light, movement or colour. One might see these two approaches as representative of the classical and romantic spirit in artmaking.

Another point of departure for comparing the work of these two artists is the degree of mimesis, or closeness to a representation of reality: Roberts is clearly more mimetic than van Heerden, whose surfaces, while recognisable as water are closer to colour-surface abstraction. For Kuspit (2012:3), this near abstraction too has psychological dimensions, with the rejection of the mimetic in twentieth century art indicating:

[an] increasingly problematic sense of self in a world that aroused more anxiety than its representation could manage. In mimesis, the ... artist invests himself in an alien world so that he can feel safe and secure in it. He emphatically burrows into it to make it his own.

So while mimesis is a coming to terms with the world, abstraction can be seen as withdrawing from or transcending the world.



**Figure 10**  
**Ariana van Heerden, *Doppler*, 2010, mixed media on canvas, 830 x 1170 cm, private collection (photograph van Heerden).**



**Figure 11**  
**Kevin Roberts, *Rainmaker, s.a.*, oil on panel, size unknown, private collection (photograph the author).**

Yet another aspect of Roberts's depictions of water in relation to van Heerden's is relative scale: his intimate, smaller and familiar (figure 11), hers vast, extensive and strange (figure 10). Bachelard (1994: 65) refers to the need of the poet, when creating images, for retreat or expansion, for simplicity or grandeur. This leads to considerations of the domestic versus the cosmic; the intimate or inner life versus the life in the larger world, or even the classical versus the romantic. So one might describe Roberts's paintings as dealing with the local, the known, the domestic and intimate while van Heerden's might be described as referring to the cosmic, unbounded and foreign or strange other world.

One could furthermore examine differences between the two artists' depictions of water in terms of orientational metaphors: according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:25), there are different metaphors involved in images that are near, bounded or centred (Roberts) or on the other hand are far, peripheral or boundless (van Heerden). Containers, such as Roberts's containers of water, project the self as contained, controlled, a self meeting the world, while far, boundless images such as van Heerden's visual water fields suggest an encounter between self and void, the potential dissolution of the self in nothingness. Of course, these differences in approach can be seen, in a more nuanced way, as overlapping: Roberts's repetition of patterns and marks become seemingly infinite, while van Heerden's water masses project into the viewer's space and come closer.

The next section will consider aspects of the artists' works individually and in more detail.

## Roberts

Water is an important, recurring image in Roberts's paintings, taking its place alongside other images, such as women, plants and earth.<sup>7</sup> Roberts often paints water that is contained: in a bowl, cup, pool or furrow (figure 12). Bachelard (1994:3-6) sees such containment as domestic and intimate, symbolically related to other images of containment such as the house, which is a safe, contained space of the imagination as much as a functional space.



Figure 12  
Kevin Roberts, *Waiting for rain*, 1999-2004, oil on panel, 100 x 120 cm, private collection (Stevens 1995:20).

These images suggest interior space, a female space which is sustaining and sheltering, and permits peaceful dreaming. As Bachelard (1983:50) writes, “[a] pool contains a universe”. It suggests and contains the intimate acts and moments of life, the familiar made beautiful or valorized. These are the positive mother or anima images, comparable to the vessel, the womb, the home, the garden, paradise. Of course, the constant presence of a female figure in all Roberts’s paintings supports this reading of water as anima.

The centrality and closed shape of these contained waters is complete and balanced. Centrality itself is an important archetype, manifest in images such as mandalas, magic circles or stone circles. The circle is contained and secure, a place of safety: according to Bachelard (1994:234) images of complete roundness “help us to collect ourselves ... and to confirm our being intimately, inside”. These shapes furthermore suggest the association between water and the sacred, and one thinks of the font, the sacred spring, pool or river. Roberts wrote in a series of commentaries on his paintings: “The shape of the pool is that of a perfect, womblike enclosure, a spatial device that by extension includes the viewer in the space of the painting. Thus the painting is about inclusion and completion”.

Bachelard (1983:11,14) analyses cool, clear waters such as these. They create and represent order, unity and organization. These waters are pure, and show “the superiority of fresh water over sea water”, for suggesting nurturance and ease. This would account for their relationship to birth, baptism and re-birth. In the case of the artist, I would argue that he seeks (but perhaps never finds) a rebirth into a kind of wholeness with each recreation of particular images, and attempts self-actualization and integration of the anima into his own psyche.



**Figure 13**  
**Kevin Roberts, Title and size unknown, 1999-2004.**  
**Oil on panel (author’s image).**

Time in Roberts's work seems, in the perfect placement of every object, the centrality and stillness of water, foliage and figure, to stand still. Time slows, calms and is frozen in a perfect moment. Everything is in repose. Even reflections on the water's surface are still, as are occasional shadows. Bachelard (1983:22) writes of still water as the perfect mirror, "living and natural" in a way no mirror could be. Water, as an element of material imagination, is more profound an image than a mirror, which is part of what he refers to as formal imagination, imagining with objects (Figure 13). Reflections in water suggest such myths as Narcissus, an idealised, fragile and delicate image of beauty: Bachelard (1983:25) refers to such a "watery reflection" as a world tending towards beauty, which is just the kind of imaginary world Roberts meant by his "poetic image".

A woman floating in water, which Roberts painted in at least two major works (Figure 7 and 9), is seen by Bachelard (1971:18) as an image that, although of historic origins, can remain active in a poetic sense, and is a meditation on death, the "most maternal of deaths" (Bachelard 1983:73). For Jung (1969) the descent into water is the descent into the unconscious, which is an image often present in dreams, and signifies a descent into the hidden depths of the self. So the Ophelia image might be a descent into the psyche. Bachelard likens such images to the many depictions of woman at her bath, involving female nudity in a female context or setting. Such images are sensual and sexual, but arguably in an innocent and dreamy way rather than an active or masculinised way.

For Roberts, the compulsive urge, as I have argued elsewhere, is to recreate and make whole the mother, and most images in his works are anima archetypes. He recreates the safety, the ease and predictability of home, of the ideal Mother.

## Van Heerden



**Figure 14**  
**Ariana van Heerden *13'S41'E – 5-45 am*, 2012, chalk pastel on paper, 310 x 490 cm, private collection (photograph: van Heerden).**

Van Heerden repeatedly paints water as sea. These all-over paintings might be compared to an abstract artist's such as Jackson Pollock. Kuspit (2004: 60) suggests that Pollock's rhythmic surfaces seek to maintain an order even in formless chaos. Van Heerden paints vast and deep waters, which sometimes are calm, still, white and warm, almost milky, and certainly maternal, the calm sea being that "greatest and most constant maternal [symbol]" (Bachelard 1983:115) (Figure 14) . This is the nourishing water of Mother Earth. It can in addition be a rocking element, again maternal.

These vast seas that van Heerden depicts are, on the one hand, memories of a tropical paradise experienced but, on the other, their limitlessness and lack of any horizon or land (except occasionally far away and often underwater), must read as the lack of a safe haven, as danger and potential death. There is no horizon to offer containment or safety. There is often a merging of deep water and sky, and both become the substance of a yet more boundless space. Van Heerden states that: "Staying adrift is always an option", suggesting that the space of greatest belonging for her is "not home" and that solitude or wandering is her natural condition. These works seek to explore the limitless, which according to Bachelard (1994:188) is the non-I, rather than the I, or at least the ultimate depths of the self, the vast collective unconscious or the primal. These images, where water becomes space, suggests isolation, remoteness or solitude, this "water [that] bears the mark of limitlessness" (Bachelard 1994: 205-206). Bachelard refers to diving in deep, heavy, dark water as "the magical operation that... allows the diver to loosen the ordinary ties of time and space ...".

Bachelard (1983: 74) writes of the danger of death in vast waters and "the immense risk of setting out over the water". The dark side of the mother archetype is suggested, which Jung (1969: 82) equates with other dark mother images such as the abyss, the grave and the sarcophagus, spaces that are secret, dark and hidden, inescapable as fate.



**Figure 15**  
Ariana van Heerden *Between the void*, 2012, chalk pastel on paper, 310 x 380 cm, private collection  
(photograph van Heerden).

Simultaneously, the sea is an invitation to adventure, to sailing, journeying, swimming or diving. Swimming is an act of conquering the alien element, or overcoming fear (Bachelard 1983:163) and thus is a masculine act. So van Heerden's projection via water images has an element of the animus, or male archetype, both in its suggested violence and aggressive activity, but also in the inference that the artist/viewer is a swimmer or diver, is active and thus taking on a male role (figure 15). So the sea here can be seen either as ambivalent or as a sign of psychic integration: anima and animus, pleasure and pain, nourishment and danger.

All depictions of water must refer to the female principle, and on this scale to the Great Mother or Mother Earth. However, those of van Heerden's works that depict aggressive movement in waves or storms might thus be said to represent animus as much as anima; to project the male archetype that completes or is missing in the female psyche. Women move from "an exclusive relationship with the same (the mother) and then discover a relationship with a different other ... the masculine". Bachelard (1983:15) also sees such violent water as a form of anger as "[t]urning malevolent, it becomes male" (**Figure 16**). He suggests that such immense, threatening water arouses cosmic fear, an ancient, archetypal fear that humans have always experienced in the face of violent nature.



**Figure 16**  
Ariana van Heerden, *34.4'S 18.5'E*, 2007, oil on canvas, 120 x 100 cm, private collection  
(photograph van Heerden)

## Conclusion

In the discussion above, I interpreted a single symbolic image, water, in the work of the two artists and simultaneously used Wolflin's framework to formally distinguish the two sets of images with the aim of showing nuanced, different meanings that can arise from an image. So, it is evident that the meanings of images lie not only in their symbolic or archetypal aspects, but equally in their visual and material properties.



From a psychoanalytic and Jungian perspective, the importance of these paintings, or indeed any paintings that succeed in communicating to the viewer, lies more in their potential meaning than in their visual form. As Bachelard (1994: xxiii) notes, even in an art that requires skill, the success of the work is independent of any skill. It depends on its ability to communicate and move the viewer, and a vital strategy for this is through the archetypal symbol. Jung (1969:13) argues that, with the slow collapse of collective religious images/icons, we suffer from a lack of meaningful symbols that would speak via archetypes to the personal and collective unconscious. He writes of “the alarming poverty of symbols that is now the condition of our life”. Thus, whether by their creation or by viewing them, the integration of such archetypes can be a healing one.

However, while a Jungian approach can indeed elucidate archetypal and symbolic images, ie, the iconography, it is limited in that it does not take any account of visual form. This is its major failing, and I hope that in the interpretations I offer, I have shown that both a Jungian and a visual reading may be necessary and may support each other in richer, more complete interpretations of artwork. The interpretations that I have explored, like all interpretations of artworks, are however neither true nor provable, but hopefully are persuasive, and add something to or enrich our viewing of the works. I would argue, along with others such as psychoanalytic critic Kuspit (2004: 9) that art has purpose for both artist and viewer: “[t]he serious spectator’s aesthetic re-affirmation of the painting is a kind of re-creation of it, serving the same spiritual purpose as the artist’s creation of it: creativity is a means of escaping from... everyday consciousness of the life-world.” In making art, “the artist transfers his primitive feelings into his material, which becomes the medium through which they are transferred to the spectator” (Kuspit 2004: 15).

Kuspit (2004: 13) sees the role of art as a healing one, even if such healing is temporary and incomplete, as it involves insight into the core of the self. For both artists, images such as water are strong projections and for both there is arguably, from a Jungian perspective, a seeking for healing and wholeness, as there is an element of this in all artmaking. Water, whether depicted as a contained and small amount, or as vast and boundless, is always an element of healing, of washing clean and making whole, as well as a sinking away and dissolving into nothingness.

## Notes

- |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Roberts’s 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. |   | water such as a mermaid, siren or water nymph, reinforcing the association of the archetypal female with water.   |
| 2 | Cirlot (1978) considers water such an important symbol/archetype that in <i>A dictionary of symbols</i> he analyses it in detail in his introduction, which seeks to define the symbol as fully as possible.                        | 5 | I have previously analysed the anima images in Roberts’s work in more detail in <i>Body, Psyche and Symbol: The Paintings of Kevin Roberts</i> (2012) .   |
| 3 | Jung like Cirlot considers water an important archetype and discusses it even before that other key one, the anima, in <i>The archetypes and the collective unconscious</i> (1969).   | 6 | Although Wolfflin’s use of formal and stylistic analysis of artworks, as well as his distinction between style and content, are outdated and old-fashioned, yet I would argue that his examination of the differences between linear and painterly approaches to painting may be useful here. |
| 4 | Jung (1969:24-25) in <i>The archetypes and the collective unconscious</i> introduces the anima, or feminine archetype, as a creature projected into   | 7 | Bachelard (1983:13) refers to the side-by-side images of earth and water as “paste ( <i>la pâte</i> )”, the very essence of matter, the exemplary compound.   |

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