

## **Canada Council for the Arts: Research and Creation Grant:**

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S. Portico Bowman

I've never met Paulus Berensohn anywhere but in my imagination. He died at age 84, six months after I heard about him for the first time. *Would You Give Up Arms for Wings* is a work of literary fiction, non-fiction and magical realism based upon Berensohn's unpublished memoir, *The Silver Sword*. This text recounts the period from 1974-1982 when Paulus thought he was dying from a terminal cancer. However, Berensohn died in 2017. The New York Times obituary described him as a dancer, potter, teacher and environmentalist. This was my second notification of his existence.

I was eleven-years-old in 1974 when the right taillight of Paulus' Volvo Amazon winked west for the open and unknown road to San Diego. Two years before my 4th grade teacher asked me to write an essay about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I had heard of conservationists. I was interested in saving the world. I wrote my essay and drew a cover of cattails and a Saskatchewan sunset. The typewriter paper blazed with color. But by the 1980's tie-dye tee-shirts, braids and ideological bravery were replaced with polyester, pinstripes and hairspray. Conservationists were hard to find. The revolutionary mindset of the counterculture prepared to overthrow the systemic ideologies destroying the earth had disappeared except in vintage clothing stores, poster fonts and album covers. It seemed saving the planet was as outdated as vinyl records and picnics.

From the early days of this project I've wanted to validate my claim that the parallels of Berensohn's bodily malaise are reflected in the ecocatastrophe of our time. And while Paulus healed himself through a full immersion in the craft art of Bargello tapestry, emerging as he did, dedicated to deep ecology, and seeking a solution to the healing of Mother Earth, he had also healed from unintended, but well-placed psychic wounds of his own biological mother. Hurting people hurt things. Psychic healing on a global scale is a condition for freedom.

I continue writing *Would You Give Up Arms For Wings?* for two main reasons. I want to understand the forces that swept away those fledgling years that inspired Earth Day, recycling and alternative energy. We've lost decades. This can't happen again. And I want to understand the creative and visionary experiences of Paulus Berensohn.

What's come to be of exceptional interest to my research and writing is that while I have sought to understand Paulus Berensohn, his source ideologies and the man himself through the vast archives and unpublished trove of written materials, I have found him to be an intuitive force and source of wisdom connected to a very deep and vulnerable investigation into his own fear. Paulus' life is a narrative study of the human psyche's essential longing for freedom and the potential for natural fulfillment through enchanted mystical experiences, that for most of my life I've felt were taboo. However, writing this book is breaking that for me. Paulus' example and relationship to his artistic practice, and Deep Ecology is the alchemical transformation and potential for world-wide global healing, and my own.

Furthermore, and perhaps of most significance is I've discovered mind-bending connections between Paulus' original visionary experience and the cultural forces most impactful on my life and times. Paulus' *Silver Sword* experience and memoir was inspired by his attendance at the matinee screening of Ingmar Bergman's film version of his staging of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's opera "Die Zauberflöte", also known as The Magic Flute on Christmas Day in 1974. It turns out that that the very ideology that inspired the opera, is the ideology and philosophies that inspired the entire counterculture of the 1960's and 1970's, however I didn't know - did any of those hippies know - these ideas are embedded in ancient Greek and Egyptian philosophies known collectively as Hermes Trismegistus. Certainly I didn't. Now I do.

At the same time I now know that as early as 1975 Dr. Wallace Broecker connected emissions of CO2 with rising temperatures. The recent publication of "Losing Earth: A Recent History," reports that by 1979 we knew nearly everything we understand about climate change and how to stop it. But we didn't. What happened to the world. What happened to me?

I became an artist, and now a writer. But the materialism and careerism that drives our world can infect the studio and writing table. Courage atrophies into fear if spirit and soul are shut out. Paulus Berensohn's life is his greatest artistic achievement. He held the heart of the world in one hand and his pipe in the other. He pumped blood iron stardust through soul and spirit into the capillaries of clay particles. These practices were the medicines he imbibed and prescribed. All matter was his companion. The vast cosmos did not terrify him. Berensohn was humorous. Curious. Fearless. And I'm his new student.