



# 3 Interviews with Michael Bertiaux

by John Fleming, Nevill Drury, Bjarne Salling Pedersen

# An Interview with Michael Bertiaux

by Nevill Drury

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High up, on the thirty-third floor of a residential apartment block on South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, lives a Voodoo priest. He is a gently spoken man with intense eyes, heavy-rimmed glasses and a dark, full-bodied beard. By day he works as a government-counsellor, hearing welfare grievances mainly from the Haitian community in the city. In his private time, however, he celebrates the mysteries of Guede and Legbha, the Voodoo counterpart of the dead and risen Christ. Michael Bertiaux is by no means a typical occultist. Indeed it is difficult to say whether – in the traditional sense – he is a black or white magician. He's not really sure himself. Most occultists, he says, resort to techniques at both ends of the spectrum. However he does admit that "life is so complex that we sometimes have to do things to survive that would have been considered, at one time, forms of black magic."

Bertiaux, like many occultists, is a Capricorn, and also has a Neptune ascendant. Born in Seattle on 18 January 1935, he grew up in a family that was primarily Theosophical. His father tended towards Zen Buddhism, while his mother was interested in spiritualism and the development of psychic powers. The Bertiaux ancestry was a combination of English, French and Irish.



Like a number of ceremonial magicians, Bertiaux's career began within the ranks of orthodox religion and then departed for the fringe. Educated initially by Jesuit fathers, he later attended an Anglican seminary in order to train for a career in the Church. He graduated with honours, was ordained, and became curate of an Anglican parish in West Seattle. It was shortly after this that his career took an oblique turn towards the occult.

An opportunity arose for Michael Bertiaux to teach philosophy in the Anglican Church College in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He decided to go, and as part of his training in 'culture shock' transitions, studied with the distinguished anthropologist Margaret Mead.

The first visit to Haiti was only for three months but some interesting contacts were made. These included traditional Voodoo practitioners with French esoteric leanings who were keen to see their system of Haitian magic adapted for an American audience. They introduced Bertiaux to the key concepts and asked him to help them present the more positive side of Voodoo which, so far, had not been available in the West. Bertiaux was intrigued and promised to stay in touch. He returned to Seattle, maintained contact with the vouduns from Haiti, and began to see that his spiritual path was changing direction. It was becoming increasingly clear to him that he would have to leave the Anglican Church to join the Haitian mystery tradition.

The French occult connection in Haiti derives from two eighteenth-century mystics, Louis Claude de Saint-Martin and Martinez de Pasqually. The latter was a Rosicrucian disciple of Emanuel Swedenborg, and the founder of an occult group called the Order of the Elect Cohens. He was inspired by Gnosticism and the Kabbalah, and believed that one could only gain spiritual salvation by contacting the Divine Source of All Being, and by participating in an initiation ceremony to invoke one's Holy Guardian Angel. Saint-Martin joined de Pasqually's order in 1768 and after the leader's death in 1774 became the dominant figure in the group. Collectively they became known as Martinists. There were Martinist orders in several different regions of France: in Foix, Bordeaux, Paris and Lyons – and by the end of the eighteenth century, also in Haiti. However here the tradition tended to blend with Voodoo.

After a period in abeyance, Martinism revived in Haiti in the 1890s and between the two world wars the so-called Neo-Pythagorean Gnostic Church came into being. This church advocates the invocation of angels and planetary spirits, is highly ritualistic, and regards the Eucharist as the central initiation. Members of the clergy claim to be clairvoyant, often have visions during the Mass, and speak in a mystical language which – as Michael Bertiaux later explained – is a type of 'Slavonic Voodoo', resembling the Pentacostal speaking-in-tongues.



The present head and supreme hierophant of the Gnostic Church in Haiti is Dr Hector Jean- Maine. Born in Haiti and educated in France, Dr Jean-Maine was initiated by a Martinist bishop and now lives in the mountains near Leogane. Michael Bertiaux's role within the Church is to be its representative for all Caucasian-American members. He was formally initiated into the Gnostic-Voodoo mysteries on 15 August 1963.

The following year he resigned from the Anglican Church and moved to Wheaton, Illinois, where he worked as a researcher for the Theosophical Society. This brought him

into contact with several prominent Liberal Catholics, including Dr Henry Smith, Bishop Stephan Hoeller and Bishop Gregory, who was also a key figure in the Russian Orthodox Church. Liberal Catholicism maintains a high degree of ceremonial, and appeals to many mystically inclined Theosophists. Its influence has left its mark on Bertiaux to the extent that in his ceremonial workings he could easily be mistaken for an Eastern Orthodox priest. However it becomes apparent that the forces he is invoking lie well outside the range of mainstream Christian beliefs.

In the late 1960s Michael Bertiaux began to swing back more heavily into the Voodoo tradition. Several Haitian vouduns had moved to suburban Evanston – there was a sizeable Haitian community in Chicago at that time – and Bertiaux was consecrated as an adept within an organization known as the Monastery of the Seven Rays. Bertiaux considers this occult order to be the ‘magical offshoot of Roman Catholicism’ although it is rather less likely that the Vatican would consider it so.

Certainly, the role of the dead and risen Christ remains central to the cosmology, but the spiritual atmosphere is quite different from that in Christianity. There is a strong input from Voodoo – a central magical technique is to transform one’s consciousness into that of an ‘astral tarantula’, and one’s occult powers are obtained from Voodoo spirits of possession known as loas. A far cry, indeed, from the orthodox scriptures. The Monastery’s cosmology – or map of higher consciousness – resembles the Kabbalistic Tree of Life except that the Hebrew god-names are replaced by their Voodoo counterparts. In Bertiaux’s magical ceremonies – which feature monotone chanting, specific ritual gestures made with the fingers, and the extensive use of implements like the censer, bell and magic crystal – most of the real work is done on the inner planes. The key to working magic, says Bertiaux, is the development of powers of visualization.



On the walls of Bertiaux’s apartment hang numerous oil paintings of Voodoo gods, and these are used as an aid to stimulate the imagination, to summon the Spirit from what he calls the “ocean of the unconscious”. Among these works, which Bertiaux painted himself in a primitive, atavistic Haitian style, are representations of the Voodoo witch-goddess Maconda, “a powerful and stabilizing influence in ritual”; the Voodoo god of lakes and rivers, who confers telepathy on his devotees; and the crucified Guede, god of

the dead. The latter, says Bertiaux, is associated with Christ as the resurrected saviour, but also demonstrates that “while the body may die, the spirit comes back many times, taking on a physical embodiment and resurrecting itself continuously through a cycle of reincarnations...” But it is Bertiaux’s concept of the astral tarantula and the idea of the temple as a magical space-ship that are the most extraordinary of all.

One of the techniques advocated in the Monastery of the Seven Rays is to visualize oneself surrounded by creatures so horrible that they ward off magical attacks from the hostile possessing entities of inner space. As the magician energizes himself in ritual, or during his meditations at night, he begins to attract what Bertiaux calls “negative vampires” – the spirits of the dead. It is vital, he says, that one should appear strong and impregnable on the astral planes – and it is for this reason that he has to imaginatively extend the magical circle in his temple into a strong psychic sphere, guarded at the eight points by different Voodoo loas. Meanwhile the magician transforms in the astral imagination into a were-tarantula and prepares to direct his space-ship to different regions of the inner cosmic terrain. As a “spider-sorcerer” or “spider-magician”, writes Bertiaux in one of his order papers, “you have woven your web by meeting with your own magical force each of the eight sources of cosmic energy. Thus, cosmic energy is met by god-energy...”

Bertiaux explains this further within the broad context of Voodoo ritual: “Every time we do a ceremony we participate somehow in the god consciousness, or the energy behind the ceremony. I think it is a form of possession without a doubt, and represents the way in which the gods manifest themselves in human experience...”

“Voodoo and Gnosticism both work with the number eight because it is a significant power zone. In Voodoo it is represented by the mystical symbolism of the spider of space, the space deity. It represents the way in which the mind of the priest makes contact with all the possibilities of the world of space and time. For the magician to achieve a certain state of power he becomes that being in order ‘to mediumistically receive the powers from the god behind the animal form.’”

So how does the temple actually become a “space-ship” and how does the spider-magician function within it? “The Temple is a space-ship because it is a way of moving through the different spaces of consciousness. In fact the gestures of the ritual are designed to build a spherical vehicle for the priest’s activities in other worlds. The priest is a spider because what he is doing is actually bringing into his own life the experience of other worlds, and then he’s joining himself through the web of his consciousness, to all the different parts of the spiritual experience.

“Every time he does something – a gesture, a word, a movement with some object – he is, in a sense, making contact between his web and something outside it. What he is doing is connecting himself to those worlds and dimensions.”

However, in the particular forms of Voodoo practised by members of the Monastery, there is also something of a magical trade-off. As the order papers make clear, some

spirit-entities are allowed to penetrate the protective web and draw on the magician's life-force in return for providing specific occult powers that are desired. Summoned as the magician arouses himself erotically, the spirits 'come down upon his body' draining the vitality of the mind and replacing it with psychic power. It is a method fraught with dangers for it is the very epitome of spirit-possession and leaves the occultist – at the moment of mental surrender – open to all manner of occult forces. As Bertiaux warns his students: "Does this occult exchange provide sufficient compensation for the man who must sacrifice himself to nocturnal appetites of the most perverse type?"

Presumably, in his own case, the risks have proven worthwhile. Also known to order members as Michael Aquarius, Bertiaux is now one of the chief adepts of the Monastery of the Seven Rays and has been largely responsible for disseminating its mysteries by mail to correspondents around the world. And although Voodoo magic clearly has its dark side, Bertiaux believes that a substantial part of what he does ritually has a positive side too. The invocation performed before us in the temple is intended he says, "to distribute force." It is "a healing intended generally for the whole face of the earth, for all humanity, and for all those beings in need of some kind of spiritual strength."

'What we are doing in our rituals is describing what is going on in the spiritual world,' – portraying and summoning the spirits through gestures, magical implements and ceremonial regalia.

There is no doubt that in his dramatic red and gold robe Michael Bertiaux presents an imposing form. Seated on a chair beside his paintings of Voodoo spirits, he has a regal air – a high priest serving exotic gods before an even stranger altar. Yet it is this sense of ceremonial grandeur which makes one pause and take stock, just for a moment. Many storeys below us, in the streets of Chicago, up-tight taxi drivers and frenzied commuters bustle about their daily routines unaware that strange spirits move among them.

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# An Encounter with Chicago's Black Magic Theosophic Neo-Pythagorian Gnostic Master

by John Fleming

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Even though Aleister Crowley lived for a while during the 1920s in a studio apartment off Belmont Harbor, and despite the theme of a book published some time ago called *Psychic City: Occult Chicago, Center of the Universe*, Michael Bertiaux isn't overly impressed with the mystical atmosphere around here. "I don't really believe that Chicago is a biomagnetic center," he said the other day. This is bad news for the local gurus who say the city is built above the ruins of ancient Atlantis, but it's probably true, because Bertiaux knows about such things. Not only a veteran time-traveller in "the dimensionless gaps between universes" and "the icy realms of nothingness called Meon," Bertiaux also has a "trans-yuggothian transmission station" set up in his high-rise apartment on South Michigan Avenue; he claims to use it for direct astral communication with "the space adepts, sothyrii, genii, and Voodoo Bon-Pa spirits."

Bertiaux calls himself a Voodoo Gnostic Master, but he doesn't resemble those movie characters who favor slinky black outfits and elaborate Egyptian fertility bracelets that suggest a certain interest in bondage and domination. Instead, wearing a baggy sport shirt and constantly fussing with his spectacles, he looks like a mild-mannered social worker, which in fact he is. Since 1966 Bertiaux has worked as a caseworker and supervisor at the state social service office in Woodlawn. "Most successful" according to Bertiaux, who 15 years ago left his job in Seattle as minister in an Episcopalian church ("a country club on its knees, a box lunch with religion thrown in for dessert") and went to Haiti for instruction in the Cult of the Black Snakes. After settling in Chicago, he formed the Neo-Pythagorean Gnostic Church. "You might say that I am the bishop for the Chicago area," said Bertiaux, who has about 100 followers across the country with whom he conducts voluminous correspondence. To qualify as one of Bertiaux's correspondents, "You need to have read as much Husserl and Jung as I have, which means everything they ever wrote. You also need to know Wittgenstein and Cassirer, a German who was the 'in' thing when I was coming up in philosophy, and you also need to have read a lot of Hegel." Bertiaux actually sees his followers only occasionally-at the five weekend seminars he holds yearly at the downtown Midland Hotel, and on the expeditions he leads from time to time to a deserted lake in Wisconsin that he considers a "power zone" for "the Deep Ones" whose "point of entry to the earth-plane" lies within the lake.

Bertiaux's style is soothing enough-he speaks softly and hesitates precisely between each sentence-but a little elusive. Over lunch last Sunday he held court at a table in the back of a Greek restaurant on Clark Street with some of his biggest fans-three young men from a

small town north of London who stayed in Chicago with him for two weeks this month. Several years ago, after reading about Bertiaux, the Englishmen had begun exchanging letters with him, and now they were here to go through a mysterious and indecipherable series of tests and “Neo-Platonic dialogues.” Apparently successful, these tests had ended the day before when the Englishmen were consecrated as the first bishops in the’ English chapter of the Gnostic Church in a ceremony conducted by Bertiaux in his living room. Some blurry Polaroid snapshots from the occasion showed them all draped in what was described as “\$10,000 worth of liturgical robes” and wearing miters similar to what the pope puts on for high mass.

“I thought it was insipid,” one of the Englishmen was saying at the restaurant. He was talking with Bertiaux about a peculiar service they’d just come from a ceremony of the Holy Transfiguration Eastern Orthodox Parish held in the attic of a three-flat on Southport. The head-shop decorations, the cardboard Christ, the little plastic bottles labeled “Holy Water,” and the thick cloud of incense that filled the attic were ridiculous, the Englishman said. “And what about the deacon in cowboy boots and heavy denim.” “It could be worse,” said Bertiaux, who admires the minister of the tiny church, Father Elias, because of his “dedication and sincerity.” Elias recently switched his services to a traditional early morning hour, a move that Bertiaux said was a “sincere” effort to buck “the priorities of the gay community that is, staying in the bars late Saturday night, going to brunch on Sunday, and then, if there’s time, maybe getting around to church in the afternoon.”

“Sincerity” is a recurrent concern for Bertiaux, who is not exactly wild about a lot of the various occult and mystical groups in Chicago. “There has been an explosion of popular interest in the occult,” he said. “But there’s also been an implosion. Ten years ago there were six occult businesses in Chicago. Now there’s only one. Too many of them went in for tacky gimmicks like card readings, and in the end 75 percent of the businesses that failed were simply massage parlors and fronts for prostitution.” With mild scorn, he went on to describe a “pagan cult” that features shaved heads and royal blue garments trimmed with rabbit fur. There are also at least three covens in Chicago, Bertiaux said, and one of them is led by a witch queen called Lady Donna. “We do have a lot of groups who like to run around in long, flowing white robes.”

“Let’s gather our consciousness together,” Bertiaux announced to the table, as he signaled for the check. The new bishops were going back to the apartment, and Bertiaux was heading for the regular Sunday session of the Theosophical Society. He is a vice-president of the organization and often lectures for it as “a public service.”

In the downtown Fine Arts Building, on the same hallway as the Meher Baba Information Center (“Don’t Worry-Be Happy”) and the Jesus Only Youth Society, the “T.S.” room is furnished with a grand piano, an American flag, a couple of dusty cabinets filled with books, and several dozen folding chairs. Last Sunday’s speaker was Dr. Clarence Rodney, a 90-year-old West Indian who runs a place called the Basilica of Divine Wisdom. “He’s mediumistic, clairvoyant, and a psychometrist,” said Bertiaux, smiling at Rodney’s “porn-porn hat” and floor-length gown. Rodney was an impressively eccentric



sight, but among the two dozen people in the audience there were several equally distinctive figures.

“That young man at the front with the beard and long hair wearing a T-shirt is the leader of a group that regards him as a Christ figure,” Bertiaux said. “A little Manson-type, a messiah. He used to interrupt meetings here by standing up and saying, ‘There’s, something powerful happening in the room. Let’s all join hands and meditate.’ Very extreme, but lately he’s toned down, because he’s lost so many of his followers.”

About five minutes into Rodney’s talk on astronauts, angels and ghosts, “weight-lace-ness” and “luminous bodies,” there was a commotion at the back of the room. It was the entrance of an old man in a bright lemon yellow, bowler and a dirty, ruffled shirt. Carrying a shopping bag, he had a cigarette protruding from one of his nostrils: “He’s supposed to be quite wealthy,” Bertiaux whispered, “but very eccentric. An expert on Swedenborg.”

“Where does Theosophy stand on the Second Coming?” the man barked at Rodney. But before the doctor could answer, a blowsy old woman stood up, flashed a girlish smile that exposed a row of ruined teeth, and said to the man with the cigarette in his nose, “*Please*, can’t we hold our questions to the topic?”

Walking along Michigan Avenue toward his apartment after the meeting, Bertiaux laughed at a description of the Theosophists as “Jesuits on mescaline.” That’s right, he said, “It’s a real trip.” At home Bertiaux slipped off his shoes and disappeared into another room for a quick nap on his “id sofa.” With a terrific view of Lake Michigan, the apartment is a riot of vivid paintings, plants, and mystical paraphernalia. The Englishmen were reading in the living room, and one of them said, “If you nudge Michael a bit, he’ll admit to being a black magician.”

When he returned Bertiaux was nudged. “Yes,” he said, “but black magic is merely a sensational term designed to keep the frivolous away and create barriers. What we’re doing here is the very serious matter of studying metaphysics and the occult, and the way that mathematics weaves these elements together in the invisible, unconscious world behind appearances.” This is not tremendously original, but what distinguishes Bertiaux is his reliance on the images of science fiction and fantasy—especially from the books of H.P. Lovecraft—to try and communicate what things like computers and radar and radioactivity all mean.”

“I’ve had a few flights of astral projection and out-of-body experiences,” Bertiaux said. “It’s fourth dimensional mental activity.” “That’s one of the best descriptions I’ve ever heard,” said one of the Englishmen, as he passed around glasses of Greek wine. Maybe so, but mostly Bertiaux is pretty obscure, especially in discussing the various “psychic machines” scattered around his living room. One is a rectangular box of, polished wood equipped with dials and switches and connected by wires to a series of brightly colored metal panels. It’s attractive in a weird sort of way, and perhaps it does represent the “Bergsonian relationship between technology and spirituality,” but what does it do?

Amazing things, according to Bertiaux, but they're not really explainable in ordinary language. "All forms of art are machines," is the way he puts it, "within a certain context."

Bertiaux is very proud of his education – four years under the Jesuits at Seattle University, and graduate work in philosophy at Tulane and the Divinity School of the University of British Columbia – and he gets especially worked up about what he calls "the logic-choppers" of the academic community. "I don't need an academic position. The important thing is to be a pioneer and to break and smash every intellectual barrier in your way: Like the hotshots from the university theology schools, I lecture on Jung. But I don't look at the Jungian system from the outside. *I live inside it.*"

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# Arts and the Occult: An Interview with Michael Bertiaux

by Bjarne Salling Pedersen

First published online by the Neo Luciferian Church

Author and occultist Michael P. Bertiaux (born 1935) is an influential character in the revival of western magical tradition that began in the late 1960s. In this interview he discusses the connection between occultism and art, his views on several occult societies and the attraction of Voodoo in the western world.

## ***Docteur Bacalou Baca***

Michael Bertiaux, a modern day explorer of the occult, was born in 1935. Raised in a Theosophical household he's been influenced by the esoteric approach to religion since his youth. In 1963 Michael Bertiaux got acquainted with Voodoo Docteur Jean-Maine during a stay in Haiti that year. Returning to the USA his studies with Docteur Jean-Maine continued until 1975. Michael Bertiaux is the author of *Lucky Hoodoo – A Short Course in Voodoo Power Secrets* (1977), which he gave out under the pseudonym Docteur Bacalou Baca. The book is a course in magical techniques to gain money, love, good luck and progress. The core teaching forms the basis for his *Voudon Gnostic Workbook* (1988), a much prized collector's item today. Michael Bertiaux has been connected with various occult and esoteric organizations during the last four decades. Some of the orders include Ordo Templi Orientis Antiqua (O.T.O.A.) and Fraternitas Saturni, at one time associated with the occult currents of English magician and Golden Dawn member Aleister Crowley. Bertiaux is also associated with Monastery of the Seven Rays and La Couleuvre Noire (The Black Serpent), both orders associated with Voodoo technique. Drawing heavily on French sources, he's also a Martinist and a leader of the Ecclesia Gnostica Spiritualis, a gnostic church of French spiritist origin. The latter years Bertiaux has been relatively silent. He's recently retired to focus on his writing.<sup>1</sup>

“Well, I'm happy to be still on the planet,” says Bertiaux. “I think the important thing is that I am quite focused on my areas of interest, which I first outlined in my Monastery of the Seven Rays papers. I think I have always been indebted to the Haitian spiritist tradition. I have always been indebted to things that have come out of that tradition and I've always preferred to stay within those boundaries. But that would also include art because so many of the Haitian occultists were painters.”

“Many Haitians, little known, express their ideas through art, simply because so many of the ideas couldn't be expressed in words only. There was such a problem of what type of energy they were speaking of; how could it be communicated? Sometimes it could only be communicated with colors like abstract expressionism.”

*Q. Why is Haitian art so powerful and why are artists so special?*

“I think it is a high form of expressionism. I think they portray energies in a way that the abstract expressionists (1940s-1960s) in America and Europe haven’t succeeded in objectifying. And I think in many ways that Haitian art is similar to many of the paintings of Crowley, because they use colors expressive. Very, very strong and large amounts of colors to emphasize the dramatization and actualization of powers and force-fields.”

Bertiaux’s apartment is filled with works of art, many of them being his own, but several are gifts from pupils and magical students. A greater part of Bertiaux’s own paintings are colorful expressions of the spirit world.

“I think what’s so important in Haitian esotericism is that everything can be represented in some kind of art,” Bertiaux explains. “If it can’t, I really believe it is only a matter of concept. A lot of Haitian art comes out of the Voodoo religion, but if you look closely you’ll find that it goes beyond the religious perspective. They’re going into the occult science behind the Voodoo. They are taking a voyage into the spirit-painting.”

*Q. What do you mean?*

“They’re not only artists. They are meta-physicists. I think that what they wanted to do was to talk about how spirits work. In Voodoo there is so much passive petitioning of the gods. It’s a very pious religion. In fact, it is in many ways a religion of fear of the spirits, but once you admit the factor of possession,” says Bertiaux, “you actually have the individual being possessed by a god, which is an infinite personal experience – of cosmic cause – for they’re sharing the same consciousness. Then you overcome this feeling of petitioning and move towards a kind of pure identity where you understand the mind of the god, as if you were the god, or possessing the mind of the god for a moment. I think much of esoteric Voodoo has to do with understanding the mind of the gods, from within. I concur that possessions are facts and an accomplishment. I think that in terms of their mystical way of living – they see Voodoo not as much as a religion, but rather as an environment; a psychic occult environment in which they live. Everything about it is sanctioned by gods. It is a religious universe of mysteries possessing humans or initiates.”

## ***Art and the Occult***

Michael Bertiaux’s interest in art as an occult form of expressionism, he explains very specifically.

“I think art is one way in which magical symbols and images can be presented to the public in a way that will not appear threatening. We know from the history of art in the past 100 years, that many genuine schools of occultism came forth to present themselves as what I am going to call mystical schools of painting, of sculpture and so forth.”

“I am particularly concerned about one French school, says Bertiaux. It is the pataphysical school. It was allied to Dada, surrealism, spiritualism and trance mediumship. The whole idea was that we would explore structures of the unconscious and come back renewed with a new kind of imagery and energy we can focus through works of art. The pataphysicians are my favorites, because what they sought to do was to create a kind of alternative science. I remember a pataphysician telling me, that as metaphysics is to physics, so pataphysics is to metaphysics, which meant an intuitive extension into the abstract or the transcendental or the less known aspects of experience.”

*Q. What were the characteristics of this school?*

“One of the characteristics would be their drawing of inspiration from dream states and a kind of somnambulistic meditation, says Bertiaux. Another would be the idea that everything has a psychic history. This is related to “the cult of the found object” in modern art, the discovery of “the given.””

“We know that there are many artists who will go around looking for what they call “a found object” – actually they wouldn’t have to look very hard. According to the theory a found object would “speak” to them and indicate to them that this was what was needed for the artwork of the artist.”

“The famous American sculptress Louise Nevelson – who worked with large assemblages and collages made from wood and wooden pieces – she had what I call her esoteric school,” Bertiaux explains. “These helpers of Louise Nevelson would get up very early in the morning. She lived in a town house in Manhattan, I believe; and they would go up and down the alleys, looking for discards. They were all kinds of individuals who were perhaps misfits in the outer world, but she believed them to be tremendously psychic. They all worked for her as her technicians, her helpers, in finding objects and wrapping them up in newspapers and paper bags, bringing them home; and then when they had all these treasures before them, they would let the objects tell them where to use them. And this came from a kind of psychic dialogue with the found object – which, I might add, was very similar to what Carl Jung taught many of his patients, to engage in with many natural things in their own experience. I myself, have developed a kind of found object-obsession with cardboard, as you can see. I don’t like to throw out pieces of cardboard that can be used as works of art!”

Several of Michael Bertiaux’s works are shaped out of cardboard and painted. He’s working on a series of what he calls Golem figures intended as guardians of the magical circle, of the esoteric space of exploration. “I will only throw out a piece of cardboard if it tells me to,” laughs Michael Bertiaux.

## ***Lost and Found***

Michael Bertiaux’s apartment is decorated with numerous small statues, photos of relatives, magical items, huge plants, books and art in an endless symbolism that leaves

the impression of a mixture between an art studio and a well-arranged temple. Michael Bertiaux explains:

“I think one of the important things about found objects and the occult is that the found object was a way of making magical art more and more dynamic, by infusing more and more mental and psychic concentration – and force the creativity of the artist – into the very fabric of the subject matter.”

“And it’s had a tremendous focus in a variety of spin-off types of art where found objects are now sometimes arranged in magical spaces which are defined by old wooden boxes which people find, and they create a magical universe in which the found objects or the objects from the individuals past that are re- found after many years of being lost, are placed “to live”. They’re re-found and placed into the space to convey a kind of psychic memory; but to also take on a new life and growth.”

“Now many individuals would say: Is it possible for us to truly share the vision of the artist – to engage in this kind of pataphysical creativity? I think so. My own emphasis is that the pataphysicians, like metaphysicians, open things up in a very wonderful way for discovery and sharing on the part of any number of people who have always had some kind of psychic link with these objects. And in a sense, what you’re doing with the found object – you’ve created the found object work of art and it has your own personal momentum in it – is that you place it out there and you use it for attracting the psyche or the principles of individuals to that same area of consciousness. And they see in it something they will recognize; from a kind of psychic recollection that they practice when they approach the found object.”

*Q. Can this be compared to the magical techniques of Pascal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875), who suggested mixing bodily fluids with paint to bind a spirit to a painting?*

“I think so,” says Michael Bertiaux. “I think he created artificial elementals. Definitely. Now, there’s some questions as to whether or not the elementals in the works of art, are natural or simply they are re-arrangements of the energy. I think they are both. I have always believed that magic, rather than being a level of interpretation, and a kind of conceptualization of the subject matter, is that which gives it another direction and I will say therefore that it makes it become a new type of being also.”<sup>2</sup>

*Q. Do you think the same influence could occur in a mass-produced form of art, such as posters that decorates the apartments of many people?*

“I think so and I’ll tell you why. I think anything is a break through into the spirit world or the continuum of the psychic experience. I think that if you buy something, like one of the millions of copies of Monet’s paintings of a garden, that’s fine. It is still a doorway into the realm of nature spirits associated with Monet and with the art of his period. You have to understand that when he recreates them, he interprets them. So he constructs them in a different way than they’re given; but by so doing, he places them psychically in a new garden.

## ***The Obsession of Collecting***

Michael Bertiaux explains the different items in his apartment as a source of inspiration and power. I asked him about the human obsession of collecting all sorts of things from stamps to stone.

*Q. Where do you think it stems from?*

“I think it is because we’re mammals or animals. I once noticed that various animals, especially our domestic animals – cats especially – collect all kinds of little things. They have little objects they stash away for various purposes. I think it is because of the animal instinct.” Michael smiles and adds “I think it’s very sad that socialism has made humans too angelic, because if we were more like animals we’d be more capitalistic,” he laughs; “but socialism is a caring mother who protects and makes safe her children.”

“When I was in Japan I was associated with a lot of Japanese artists. They told me that art in Japan is really based on extreme individualism, which is very different from Japanese tradition where everybody acts in the same way in a group. So an artist has to set his own life apart from everybody else’s. And while he may cooperate with other artists, he’s really not part of a general class of people, who are tied into a different kind of psychic experience. The less egotistical life of family and groups.”

“However, what is always part of pataphysical vision is that individual reading and seeing of your energy field as your own unique vision; otherwise you’re not satisfied with what you have produced. I think it is important for the artist to achieve a certain amount of satisfaction in order to motivate himself to continue, to actualize his universe.”<sup>3</sup>

“I would say that the artistic rays of the pataphysical philosophy have permeated many avenues of modern creativity. Many writers who have abandoned traditional methods are using pataphysical inspiration for how they express their creative matter; and many modern musical compositions we know are inspired by pataphysical and radical innovation and a departure from a conventional straight-jacketing of their creative energies.”

## ***Satanic Inspiration***

During our talks we came to talk of the different occult groups in the western world and we entered into the field of satanic artwork.

“I think it is therapeutic,” says Bertiaux. “I think many people were brainwashed with a lot of negativity. I think the school of Felicien Rops broke through that says he. The school of Rops, founded by the same artist in Paris in 1888 was the nucleus in modern Satanism. Some members later left the school of Rops to start the more theistic organization Temple of Boullan, headed by Paul Micha’l Guzotte, a Haitian esotericist.”

“I do not really think that their viewpoint is true in the same sense that the viewpoint of the Church of England is true,” he says smiling. “But what I do like is that they do a lot more art-astherapy than the Church of England. And another thing is that I think a lot of the modern psychotherapists – I’m talking about Wilhelm Reich and even J.P. Santae – a lot of their ideas are reflected into an awareness of satanic art. Now if we want to talk about the Temple of Boullan and Satanic art as options for spiritually minded individuals, I think they’re very exciting.”

*Q. In which way?*

“I think they’re exciting because they’re very challenging and they cause individuals to wanting to be creative in a different and new way. Many individuals became artists as a result of this impulse, called “Luciferianism.””

“I don’t think that rebellion is necessarily harmful to all individuals. I think what they do, is that they challenge ideas and open doorways faster. I think that for example the school of Rops is more creative than the Russian Orthodox Church, but the Russian Orthodox Church is more beautiful and more powerful in the long run,” he adds laughing. “But I still think they can co-exist and each has their work to do,” says Michael Bertiaux. “They exist as the right wing and the left wing and balance each other. And I think that the Temple of Boullan is for serious minded individuals who are interested in what we’ll call the darker tradition. I personally think that modern esotericism has for the most part been a movement of liberation of individuals from, what I’ll call, repressive misconceptions of religion; and especially from protestant or evangelical fundamentalism. But one thing in esotericism that’s always been interesting is that there’s always been a link with art. I’ve always seen this as an excellent barometer.”

“As I see it, esotericism and Luciferianism – once studied – opens new worlds for the imagination. I am not saying that because you’re a Satanist you’re going to be a bad person. Most people that are Satanists actually tend to be very depressed because Satanism, like the power of Saturn, tends to be quite heavy – a heavy load or heavy burden. But at the same time it can be terribly illuminating, because individuals have different approaches, and we see new spaces and worlds.”

“I think some satanic groups are important as a catalyst to the stifling effect of too much social theology, in Protestantism, says Bertiaux. I think that when an individual is programmed too much by Puritanism it is very sad. I remember hearing a story when I was a child: There was this little boy in our community and he wanted to be an artist. His parents said no, we want you to only read the Bible and not to paint. Painting will get you too close to demons. Well, the kid was of course very frustrated. When he was old enough he ran away from home and lived in a kind of hippie-like commune in California and broke out of his puritan and fundamentalist evangelical conditioning. He ran off and lived on the coast in a cave and produced abstract paintings and sold them at a truck stop for his food; but he was happy about it. He said that he was happier than he’d ever been before.”



## ***Voodoo, New Aeon and Alchemy***

Michael Bertiaux, as other magicians, bumped into the works of English occultist, poet and adventurer Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), and the Choronzon Club of C.F. Russell's work. Aleister Crowley's writings had a come back in the 1960ies and new groups surfaced founded on Crowley's new religion of Thelema.<sup>4</sup>

“At one time I was saddened that there was no emphasis on Voodoo, says Bertiaux about this occult network; but I thought of it later as a kind of retirement of energy to return stronger, which it did. And the individuals who were strongly involved with “*the slaves*” or the Crowleyan idealism, the New Aeon metaphysics, they were just in the order as a magical retirement for the time being, as if they were getting their breath before they went on to their next adventure. So actually nothing destructive or negative happened, to the powers of alchemy and art.”

“What is interesting to me is the fact that so many Scandinavian people are attracted to Voodoo through groups like “*the slaves*”” Bertiaux adds, “long after Dorothy Olsen's passing. Years ago there was a magazine called *The Occult Digest* in Chicago. They published an essay by Anna Josephine Olofsson. She was a Scandinavian woman who was a medical doctor and she was writing on the topic of whether Voodoo was an occultism. She said that it was. And she started attacking the witch coven in which she was, for being anti-black. Well, I thought this was really quite revolutionary, because you usually do not see these kind of articles, by such diviner of fates and trends.”

“Then people in Finland would set up Voodoo altars – and of course the Finns have a shamanic tradition through the Saami people and the Lapps. There's also quite a few interested in Iceland, as well as individuals in the rest of Scandinavia. So I felt that Voodoo was like chocolate – it needed simply to be put in the right package to be irresistible everywhere, as long as it was workable and pro-environmental.”

“So what I try to do with my writing is to emphasis to the positive side of *positive and negative*. Of course I do not shy away from zombies and all the other hidden matters. I might add that the first book I wrote on zombies was a comparison of the zombies to the Golem, the Hebrew cabbalistic concept of the mannequin. I've always felt – I have always, always, always felt, that somehow Hebrew magic and Voodoo have many cognates, as many books have sought to show, e.g. Milo Rigaud, etc.; but found in the Gnostic Brotherhood of Alchemists in California.”

“Voodoo is like closet Zionism. Almost”” adds Bertiaux with his usual smile. “It is the vision of the holy kingdom and the holy faith. I'm always amused by the way coincidences amplify life,” says Michael Bertiaux. “There was a little girl walking down the street and she saw a book on astrology. She picked it up and looked in it. Then an Irish nun came by and told her that it was Satanism and that she's going to be a prisoner of the demons if she continued reading it. So the girl just put it in her bag and went home. That girl, years later, moved to New York City and she was feeling quite isolated. Then she saw one of the underground newspapers advertising for a satanic group,” continues

Bertiaux. “And she knew how happy she was when she read the book on astrology. She called the number and said she was an astrologer and could she come to the meeting? And they said: Of course, you’re more than welcome. We always welcome newcomers. So she went to the meeting and there she sat down. A young man sat down next to her and eventually they fell in love and became husband and wife. He was also an astrologer. They opened up an astrological service giving tips to stockbrokers and the stock market. Now I use this as an example of whatever is put down rises up. And no matter what it is, it can become positive. Even though it was a satanic gathering she met someone just as herself, and she wasn’t ravished on an altar at the first meeting,” Bertiaux smiles, “as some people would think,<sup>5</sup> just because she read a book on astrology.”

“You should not pass judgement on things,” adds he. “What you’re doing is creating a mental block – and that’s going to block energy flow. I’m not saying that you should be like a rolling stone and go all over the place, going to meetings after meetings; but I think that what you should do is realize that everything speaks and grows and lives, and again we get back at what I said at the beginning. It is the found object that communicated with the artist, not the object being communicated by the artists mind. So it is with opportunities. They open doorways and energies come to us. After all, Crowley’s wife, Marie-Therese, was “*the high-priestess of voudon!*” And I’ll close with that!”

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## **Notes**

1. Michael Bertiaux “sees art as the most efficient way of expressing how occult energies are manifest. Art is really its own Gnosis, and the alliance between art and esotericism is more verifiable today, than a century ago” – Commentary on Interview, from Bertiaux to Pedersen, September 25th, 2003 e.v. [back to text](#)
2. “For pataphysics, if all objects that are found are psychic or ‘alive’ – then all elementals and parts of nature and ‘artificial elementals’, are really natural or parts of ‘the continuum of nature and inquiry’ which must include all aspects of art within its evolution.” – Commentary on Interview, from Bertiaux to Pedersen, September 25th, 2003 e.v. [back to text](#)
3. “In this sense pataphysics is the true child of H. P. Blavatsky’s esoteric system, because she taught the ‘ways of world building’ long before anyone in the west in her ‘transactions’ of the Blavatsky lodge of the T.S.” – Commentary on Interview, from Bertiaux to Pedersen, September 25th, 2003 e.v. [back to text](#)
4. “One such group was the Slaves of Crowley, a surviving tradition of art from Crowley’s sex-magical teaching through his wife Dorothy Olsen.” – Commentary on Interview, Bertiaux to Pedersen, September 25th, 2003 e.v. [back to text](#)
5. “who read certain Irish born authors, who focus on Demonology!” – Commentary on Interview, from Bertiaux to Pedersen, September 25th, 2003 e.v. [back to text](#)