

## What does the term mean?

The concept of Centripetal Art was born out of the life-long experience of the artist, **Junko Chodos**. The term is borrowed from physics: “Centripetal force is the force that tends to impel a thing or parts of a thing inward toward a center of rotation.” The main characteristic of Centripetal Art is the force to reach the center in order to go deep inside.

It refers to art created by an artist who strives towards her center and encounters Divine Presence there, where people go beyond the barriers of ethnicity, gender, religious denominations, dogma, and of confined ideas of blood and soil. For such an artist, the process of creating art itself is a spiritual journey on which every step must be taken with honesty, with discipline and with courage. When the artist’s journey is successful, the viewer participates in it and starts out on his or her own journey. Then the process of creating art and the process of viewing art become one and the transcendence that the artist reaches becomes the viewer’s own transcendence.

## How the Concept of Centripetal Art was Born and How it Developed

**Junko writes:** I was born 1939 and raised during World War II in Japan. As a four-year-old girl I hid in hand-dug trenches and created art in secret – as a way of surviving the death and destruction of the carpet bombings, and the rampant fascism of my own Japanese Government. When the war was over, Tokyo was a burnt field covered with debris and dead bodies—and that became part of my archetypal landscape. After the war, I witnessed the rebuilding of a new Japan.

Through deeply mystical experiences, which started at an early age, I came to realize that art has a more intense power than merely seeking beauty and comfort as is often thought. The desire was born in me to create art work completely truthful to myself, because truth is the only thing that can make human beings go through the most hideous, insane conditions and reach the sublime. So the realization was born in me that I must offer my work to the viewer, no matter how ugly it might look and no matter how deeply it might make the viewer uncomfortable. Art and religion became Immanent Themes for me: What is art? What is religion? What can they do for human survival and dignity? and, What is the essential relationship between them?

Since my first one-person show at a gallery in Boston in 1973, until today in 2011, there have been numerous solo showings of my work, and I have delivered serious lectures in Museums, universities, galleries and other institutions in New York, Tokyo, and Osaka. including the Tokyo Central Museum, the Getty Museum, the Fresno Art Museum, the Long Beach Museum, the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art, the Museum of Contemporary Religious Art in St. Louis, Claremont Graduate University, the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, and Barnard College in New York City. On each of those public occasions I had the opportunity to talk to many viewers: the number of people with whom I had such conversation must be well over 1000 by now. And besides those, many people were good enough to send me serious letters and essays about their own experiences of

my art. I was amazed to find that the experiences I myself had many times as a viewer in front of art works—soul-awakening experiences—were shared by others; and that many of the issues I grapple with through creating my art, actually have universal meaning—even more than I thought. I came to see that the artist stands behind the work and the viewer stands in front of it: they encounter each other in the plane of the work and then both are surrounded by the Divine Presence. In this way, Art can transform the world.

In 1998, I named my art “Centripetal Art” to identify it and distinguish it from art which was created for a different purpose and in a different state of mind. In 2008, Rafael and I established the Foundation for Centripetal Art and in 2009, Rafael published a book based on my selected works and writings: *Why on Earth Does God Have to Paint? / Centripetal Art*. The Foundation’s mission is to send the ideas of Centripetal Art out into the world in order to make an impact on history and transform society. The Foundation’s activities include placing my art works in suitable public venues, publishing books and multimedia products, and sponsoring symposia where serious issues concerning contemporary art are discussed.

## **The distinct features of Centripetal Art**

The term “centripetal art” does not refer to a particular style or category of subject matter. Rather it refers to the artist’s attitude in creating her art: how the artist reaches her center, how she explores her inner truth with honesty as her compass. The most distinct feature of the centripetal artist is that she does not create work by translating any preconceived idea into a particular desired result. This does not mean that the artist should not have any plan, but it does mean that art is an essential, primary form of human activity, dealing with reality at first hand it is not simply a means of manifesting existing ideas and philosophies. This strong message came from R.G.Collingwood’s term, “art proper,” in *The Principles of Art*. The idea that art is an independent endeavor is found also in Ernst Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* where he writes, “None of these forms (art, myth, cognition, every function of the human spirit) can simply be reduced to or derived from the others: each of them designates a particular approach in which and through which it constitutes its own aspect of ‘reality’.”

In these ways, Centripetal Art is different from all religious art through history. For religious art is an expression of pre-existing ideas, a particular result is expected, and it is derived from another endeavor, religion, rather than designating art’s own particular approach. Centripetal Art is different.

## **What is the place of Centripetal Art in history?**

**The loss of the center** • After the “death of God” man’s loss of faith drove him into a long and lonely journey of exploration: he found a startling, dark, unconscious world boiling like magma inside himself. Shaken from the inside he was forced to confront

the loss of human dignity and confidence and to question the meaning of his own existence.

On mankind's journey of exploration, it is the artists who walked ahead and looked down at the unfathomable abyss: it is they who set themselves the task of showing the rest of us what they saw and what it was possible to see while standing at the precipice of destruction. In this way, many great works were created in the modern art period.

But art strayed further and further from the center, forcing separation of the human and divine in man. In the tearing apart of one from the other, the forces of nihilism became more and more powerful and propelled the artist into self-denial, self-fragmentation, and even into deliberate emptiness of the image. Soon the artist would become self-abusive and have doubts about the power of art itself and by the end of the 20th century, people had begun to talk about the death of art.

**Centripetal Art: a new consciousness** • Radical doubt, nihilism, the loss of confidence—these things can lead to a new start. But we should never try to replace the empty center with something familiar and comfortable: that kind of easy way out has been destroying serious art. After the severe experiences we went through in the latter half of the 20th century, To have a relationship with the Divine is not a matter of going back to the past. Instead a new relationship with the Divine is required now.

We are standing in a burnt field covered with debris and dead bodies, even today. It is only when the artist and viewer can sustain, with intense honesty, the tension between that burnt field and the inviolate concept of Man, that we will be on the way to our new world. In order to do this, we must deal with today's reality at first hand—not from some serene, other-worldly place, but standing in a firm relationship with eternity and universality, and with the divine that is inside of us. Art born in this way I call "Centripetal Art" and its mission is to lead mankind to a new consciousness.

**Junko Chodos • February 2011**