

Contrast And Catalyst
~ by Zina Nicole Lahr

Lately, I have seen how introducing a single element can provoke action towards significant change. As my lungs fill with mountain air again, my body reacclimatizes itself to the change of altitude, I realize that this body has found its way back to Colorado. This is my third venture back to this base since I started my travels to California a little over a year ago for what started as a simple adventure of delivering wedding rings, and turned into an odyssey without a definitive end. In my coming back to Colorado, seeing the contrast between the worlds of California and Colorado, I can't help but feel a sense of transcending past everything I thought I knew; a strange discord contrasted by my concepts of what exists within this measurement of time and this physical plane on which I am currently living. Even this form of marrow, tissue, blood, and sinew that, somehow, collectively compiles to form what many will associate as the tangible embodiment of Zina. This amalgam of functioning parts and pieces, as delicately tuned as the gears of a watch, tell the time I have lived in this place by the age others see, and my physical presence in-body, tells others of my comings and goings between Colorado and California. At a particular time when I first returned, I found myself in the Colorado outdoors, sharing the company of the moon. The light cascaded off once-silhouetted objects in its path, revealing the parts of their forms while the rest receded into the contrasting dark of the night.

That morning, news networks were stirring about the very prospect of such a sight... one they so dubbed "Supermoon." "The closest, and biggest, the moon will appear all year" they said. All year, staring at the moon, mostly from California, and such a time that both it, and I, found ourselves closer to Colorado. "Supermoon" received its title because of a point of reference; where it was before, and where it was on that particular night. Its proximity closer, and the light it is putting out being seemingly more bright, made it something noteworthy, which would, in turn, cause the news to report that morning, and dub something that we see every night with a new title; "Supermoon." Likewise, Superman was always Kaleb, but, because he was different than what was typical on earth, different than us, beyond human, he was titled "Superman." We had a point of reference in our interactions with the day-to-day humans... and here is someone who looks similar to everyone else, but his abilities exceeded our point of reference. As I have said before, "home" is not a physical place to me, but rather something that exists beyond a direct tangible location... just as I feel to my body being associated with myself; it's something I can define dimensionally, something that gives people something to wrap their minds around and understand, but its purpose, to me at least, is simply that... a container bringing tangibility to vision. In spirit, things seem clear, but in body, I often have the same feeling as being in a vehicle; like I am driving this body of mine... like a 'mech suit' of sorts. Sometimes even this sense of intentional awareness drifts to the wayside of my own state of consciousness, and I start to feel as if I am somewhere else altogether, a place juxtaposed with my physical environment. I begin to live outside of myself and see it as only a means to navigate about this place. I treat my body like a shell, a vessel, and not like it is me. Like Peter Pan trying to catch and stitch his shadow to himself; that two parts should come together and for me to bring those two parts together, can prove a challenge. Everything is backwards: I have to try and live in body and, as a dear friend once told me, learn to translate my 'inner-personal language' into fodder for successful conversation of 'interpersonal language.'

I once went on a juice fast, and, after a period of time, I ate my first 'solid' food: a steamed, baby carrot. In a strange moment, I found myself in hysterics. Having not had the consistent action of eating solids in some time, I found a greater awareness to, not only the gist of the action in and of itself, but the process in which the action was being completed. In a sense, an action that would normally be considered mundane, in this case: eating solid food, was suddenly emphasized in its greatness by contrast to my reference point; having only consumed liquids. I was sending brain surges to my muscles to make every movement of my jaw as it moved up and down, the carrot smooched against my palette and tongue, and the action of my esophagus swallowing a food that had changed from one form to another in a matter of seconds, sending the compacted mush to my stomach where, and get this, it was transformed into fuel necessary for my body to function! My dissociation with the seemingly natural association of body: what people saw externally, and spirit: who I was internally, lead me to realize that the combination of these two elements could bring about change beyond the obvious and mundane. It was the contrast of living a certain way, and then injecting something different, contrasting that method, infusing with what's already there, that made it all the more emphasized. What was completely normal to Superman was completely supernatural to us here on earth... and it was that difference that made him able to inject himself into any given situation and save the day, but, perhaps even more importantly, the key to every superhero's superquest of superness is their simple ability to contrast up against what others deem 'typical.' The powers, gadgets, and costumes all come after that notable variation in action contrasting up against the day-to-day. It then becomes a choice; a moment in which one decides that they have the ability to conduct themselves in a way that is comfortable, living how everyone has sized us to be, or to put something forth that goes beyond the charts of auto-piloted interaction. I made a trip to The Getty Museum of Art while in California, and was able to see my favorite painters' beautiful works. From Vermeer to Van Gogh, I was surrounded by inner vision translated into outer visuals. It's in a moment when I am standing in a room with Van Gogh's "Irises" that I see the elegant vision of the artist; that something like this very work came from the trials of his life, and that THE Vincent Van Gogh painted this work in 1889. The very essence of our identities rests within us, and that need to communicate who we are and the frustration that drives us when there is limited materials to do so efficiently, is what causes us to create art. It then seems that our bodies are constantly at war with who we are inside them, and every action we perform either agrees or disagrees with the essence, the artistic vision of who we truly are. In other words, one sees a painting like "Irisis", and a personal association with it arises that stirs memories of encounters with it over the years, as well as relating to what the subject means to you personally. Did Van Gogh paint with the intent that his painting would speak to each person in such a way, in this time, and in this space? Or did he paint his own vision, placed it within this physical world, and allowed it to be the incitement for others to not only see through his eyes, but to see it through theirs? Such works allow for an audience's interpretation, while still existing within the root core of the artist's own vision. In doing fabrication work that requires any two-part system, like in the case of mixing silicones, foams, and adhesives... I learned very early-on of the importance of the catalyst; the igniting part of the chemical reaction that completed the action... or, as the dictionary defines it:

CATALYST

~ 1:

a substance that enables a chemical reaction to proceed at a usually faster rate or under different conditions (as at a lower temperature) than otherwise possible

~ 2: an agent that provokes or speeds significant change or action

In seeing the results of putting this type of agent with another, and seeing the chemical reaction proceed exponentially, it made me realize how our actions, as people and individuals, could spawn a great reaction based on what we choose to put forth. Contrast can be fodder for catalyst. 'Normal' is relative. In order to make an assessment of what is deemed 'normal,' one has to have an example, a blueprint of it to follow... and then make the assessment of something that steps outside of such pre-determined bounds; just like Supermoon, Superman, new environments in relation to where we have been, art of any kind... eating solid baby carrots.... or anything that contrasts a set standard of what we consider typical. If there is some sort of 'blueprint' others have for their lives, and, if ours suddenly doesn't match up with everyone else's, it runs the risk of being dubbed as an insufficient way to live. It then becomes a goal we live as everyone expects, as everyone's vision of who we are; succumbing to the interpretation rather than the true vision. What causes us to wake up from our agenda-driven lives? It seems too often we live by our goals and forget who we are... and why we're really living. Yet, that constant frustration of "if only they could see the real me" brings about a catalyst for action that conjures the most elaborate art. There is no easy way to display the raw essence of who we are as effortlessly as we display the visual interpretation of our person; but there is something beautiful in that it causes us to try. It's a type of frustration, but even such a 'push' can lead to fodder a catalyst of action... that moment where we want our inner-personal language to be understood interpersonally... we want it so much that it causes every part of our beings to push past levels of contentment and expectation and deliver something, that element, that catalyst. That catalyst is then injected as a tangible manifestation that everyone else can see. How do we expect to see any change if we are always performing the expected? As Sir Isaac Newton said "For every action, there is an equal or greater reaction." Why not choose to put forth an action that will provoke a significant change in our surroundings; something greater than even ourselves? We put that element of who we are forth, and, though we know the true taxonomy of our intentions, our audience will always interpret it for how they see it; they translate it the way they see the art. It's our choice in what we create that can lead to a reaction which ignites beyond how people see us, how they 'don't understand' us...beyond ourselves. It will contrast. It will inspire. It's living with purpose; a catalyst for change. What beautiful works of art we are, crafted perfectly. We carry the art of who we are wherever we go, and allow each brushstroke, each small, detail, and even the very fingerprints of individual identity in our crafted compositions. Knowing we are all art pieces, and knowing that there is an artist's hand behind it... is what makes for something beautiful. There is no need to prove anything when one knows the interpretation. Whether that interpretation ever becomes known or not does not matter; what matters is what the artwork does to change those viewing it. We all have an inner vision; the raw essence of who we are, it's what we choose to paint upon our lives that becomes the outer visual, and the determinant for the kind of catalyst we place in others' lives. We see a painting, a sculpture, a photograph, or any piece of art and we take in what it is, what it is in relation to us, and even what it is relating to the scape of time, and then we take in what it is to the artist who put thought and action into creating such a work. We

start to see the artist behind the art, like a window, a portal of sorts, was opened and what we are viewing takes on much more meaning than simple oil on canvas, clay on armature wire... there is life behind it. We can't see the sun behind moon we see it as the moon. We can't always see the artist behind the art, we see the art. We can't see the artist behind the artist, the raw essence beyond the form, which is what makes it beautiful; it allows for a connecting point because the art becomes personal, it is the catalyst for us to feel something that will effect us one way or another. Then we make our own assessments, we start calling the moon "Supermoon"... and that catalysts to a perspective, it sends a chain reaction, it changes atmospheres. A single action, contrasting against what is expected, can be the catalyst for something bigger than we ever expected to see. Yet, most of the time, the most simplest of actions can become something so much more; it's been proven that smiling, the very action of it, can bring about the emotion that corresponds to it. A single smile given to someone, a sense of acknowledgment to that person, contrasting amongst a sea of people driven by their own agendas, can cause that person to return it, and give the very catalyst they received. There is something beyond what we can explain that happens in these instances, and it's not just scientific, it's not just a 'pay it forward' mentality, it's something more... and can often be found in the most unexplained instances. One might follow a system given to them because it is expected, what we know, but sometimes we learn who we are by knowing what we're not. After all, catalyst does not match the surrounding elements in which it is injected, that's what makes it inspire a different course of action... because it, itself, is different. Yet, it is easy to become a chameleon; matching our environment as a defense mechanism, when we can use our power of change to brilliantly change our color as contrast rather than blend. The only hindrance is the fear that people might not understand, we horde away the precious essence of who we are because we are so afraid of being judged as a result of not being understood. This is where embracing truth over life has to break through, and the question must be asked; who really cares if people don't understand? We lose ourselves in our concern of others' interpretations rather than embracing who we are and letting others interpret all they like; it does not have to ever change the intention behind the art. There is a core root of a person, a vision that remains true even when the world tries to make their interpretation the vision. If we know who we are, and the intricacy in how we are crafted, we abandon fear of what others think we are, and we know what catalyst we can become. A little more than a year ago, I left this town and went on an unexpected adventure. I injected myself into another environment; an outside part into a different atmosphere; an action that would affect the course of it... and the catalyst for it changing me. In the last few months since my last venture in a small, single-engine plane back to Colorado to visit, I have taken part in the construction of a dinosaur; a *Parasaurolophus* named "Lily" for the Santa Barbara zoo, sculpted a sea creature, and have even been a zombie. I have learned so much about art, creating, and even learned skill sets I never imagined learning... like piloting that very plane that brought my friend Lizzy and me back to Colorado in March. Yet, all of this knowledge bears the feeling equivalent to that of a small side note. This body has been in the proximity of something beyond it; these hands have touched dinosaur skin, which has, in turn, been touched by children whose eyes glowed as they interacted with a *Parasaurolophus*... they have formed material, that malleable gateway into worlds once only existent in one's mind: clay... they have opened doors to places containing art and people that this mind never thought these eyes would see. This mind never thought these eyes would see these hands touch these doors, and to move this body to enter through them, share its physical placement in the company of such greatness; such greatness in the crafts of the visual, the

audial... the tangible, but, more so, share in the company of the greatness of those behind them. When watching a traditional artist draw... or an animator animate... or musician write a song... or a practical effects/ puppet fabricator...err.. fabricate (?), there is a beautiful process in the way it unfolds. More often than not, whether at the start, middle, or even the end of the creative process, there is a moment where something breaks, and an unbounded freedom is ignited... and, more often than not... that freedom looks rather messy. Drawings take form through scribbled circles and center lines. Animation takes movement, but often with subtle 'hiccups' in the illusion of said movement. Song breaks out in starts and stops, voice cracks, and twanged, misfired notes. Parasaurolophus puppets start to look like giant, plucked, spastic chickens. Yet, usually driven by the catalyst of inspiration, stemming from the welcomed frustration of getting the vision inside us out into the tangible world; it becomes just that; getting it out, laying it all out on the table, and then refining it. It's a step of faith to lay it all out and give credit to the process of creation rather than just the goal of it being final. There is a layered depth to creation that stems forth from that, and that drive is the catalyst for the final creation of whatever is being created to bring forth inspiration to those who encounter it... becoming a recyclable catalyst from which many can grow. Yet, it takes that initial push, combined with the vision to bring to others what is so inside us that we start to see such a reaction. Creating isn't centered around just the end result. There is value in the process of creating, as much as what is being created... even when, through the process, others cannot understand the vision being conducted. One doesn't have to be understood to stand up. Inner-personal understanding allows for an awareness of what art we are conducting interpersonally; driving ourselves through unhindered vision, casting to the wayside fear of judgement, putting it all out, and seeing the ripple effect of our actions both around us and in what we create. If vision is the art's soul: it's raw intent; knowing our core identity behind what others see, allows for oneself not to seek to change it, but for it to be the catalyst for change around it. We are all art pieces, created with purpose... and we are all creators, as we create words and actions put forth for others to see, hear, and wrap their minds around a mere concept of the immensity such art contains. When those two elements combine, and our identity, our essence, the raw vision, collides with our form, the physical manifestation of who we are, the vessel, the part of us always left to interpretation... we reflect the light, the art, and the Artist behind us; we become...

Catalyst.