

A Complex Transition

By Roland Salazar Rose

Jesus was in the driver's seat. (No, *not* that Jesus!)

Jesús Zajarias, a neighbor and handyman in my *barrio* in *San Miguel de Allende*. I'd asked him to drive my 1992 Ford Taurus and me to *Nuevo Laredo* and the Laredo, Texas border crossing. The old station wagon was packed with clothes, paperwork, some small paintings and just stuff. The divorce with my wife, Helen, was finalized in 2007, but I was only now leaving my Mexican home and studio---a seminal day for me---March 3rd, 2012.

Helen had Stage 3 breast cancer, and unable to come back to San Miguel, she rented me our Mexican condo property, now Helen's under our 2007 divorce settlement. It was my *real* home, art making-1989-2012- kingdom; and what I thought might be my final resting place; as so it was my father's when he was living here, needing care because of his age and cost of custodial care in America. Reggie, died (1994) in Mexico, and our lives as father and son and the lack of communication we had about the family history was turned into a memoir, *My Father's Room*; it was to publish in 2011, when I returned to Maine.

I knew the journey from San Miguel to my new live-work studio in Biddeford, Maine was going to be a real test for me. I saw a journey to hell in the making. I was approaching my nonagenarian years, in okay health, with a token cash settlement payment that the divorce court awarded for my signing off on my rights to the SMA property to Helen. She did get a substantial number of my paintings, prior to her filing for divorce. This was by means of a 'gift' that I made. She ranted at me that she was entitled to get art that I created in Mexico, because she had provided financial assistance to me; although she did contribute finances, I provided her with the way she and her brother could get several large cash awards for the sale/lease of land to the USA Fish & Wildlife Authority; they wanted to pay, as on the land there were endangered birds: lease terns and piping plovers.



I *gifted* her “all” my finished art done in Mexico during my painting residency there, 1987-1999; over 300 drawings and paintings; 100 of which had shown at my *Ten-Year Retrospective* at the Diego Rivera Museum, in Guanajuato, Mexico. I provided my 'gifting' in writing just two years before she filed divorce. She provided a Sheriff, to evict me from her *Parsons Beach* residence. We had lived there as a couple since 1987, *snowbirds*, winter in Mexico, rest of the year in Maine. In Mexico, from my [Mexican](#) years, I now had left in my possession, only 150 paintings; these were not awarded to Helen under the divorce decree. I planned to ship these back to my new home in the States. I hired a local shipping company to deal with this daunting task.

So, the journey began, drive the old car from Mexico to Maine, and ponder every mile on this fool's journey what to do with my new bachelorhood, and my need to make my art sell in Maine. Not a question one wanted discussed in your head as you drove in America, where in many of the states I was to cross country drive you will find you needed to drive, pedal to metal to compete; if not so, you will be driven off the road by a twenty-something.

Settling in [Biddeford](#) was easier than I would have ever believed. It was a city that I never wanted to live in when I settled in Maine in the '50's. I would have to learn how to live *in* and with *it*...Biddeford and I had a history. I found it insular and politically narrow; with its notorious trash burning *incinerator*, now finally in the '90s ceasing to emit smelly odor over Biddeford and neighboring areas, finally shut-down--- not home for me.

The city lacked any artistic life for me. Portland, a nearby city (14 miles) did offer a good location for me, but it was too expensive. Biddeford and I needed a way to relate. *Lucky*, because I now rented, a live-work studio, with 1,200 sq. ft. of light filled space, high ceilings, and with central location on Main Street it also provided a non-profit gallery, *Engine*, that recently opened for art shows. It was directed by a 30's something mover, Tammy Ackerman; she established the non-profit artist space on the first floor in the same building I occupied. In addition, very *new* to Biddeford and the surrounding area, I was surprised to find a New York, Greenwich Village like bookstore, with espresso coffee, neat snacks, and beer and wine. I had pinched the fat lady...

Much to do; find household items for my space, get all the local paperwork done, so I could get low-



income funds to help me survive. If I had to pay down my living expenses and art expenses from my meager divorce cash settlement, I'd soon be *on* the street. My rent was higher than I should pay, but I thought that the business nature of the building, with the bookstore-coffee emporium and gallery on Main Street, I might get some sales...sure Roland, dream on, you don't have anything market-smart

to sell!

With art supplies I brought back to Maine from Mexico in hand and with what I needed bought locally at an art store in Biddeford, I started to produce Maine art that might sell; I blessed these with titles, then photographed and added these to my website: "Maine Years," *Landscapes & Seascapes 2012-13*; about 20 paintings, 12 x 14 to 24 x 28; then I produced another body of work called *Sky, Land & Sea: Maine 2014*; thirty paintings on Stonehenge paper, done in Mixed Media. I was painting like a wild young artist, fresh out of art school and in your first studio.



Landscape painting by Salazar, 2018

I was working on publishing my memoir; the one I wrote in San Miguel, *My Father's Room*. It was edited by my friend, Jef Taylor; and professional book layout contracted by a third-party source I found on the Internet. I managed to get it done properly and offered it sold on Amazon and other venues. The book was also to have a companion piece, a DVD, *The Four Seasons of the Master Myth*. This didn't make it easier for sales, yet it accomplished what I wanted; it was written/narrated/and produced by me. Jef, again was involved, this time as filmmaker. No small accomplishment, this book and DVD, but obviously not paired together as a package, or even if marketed separately, not destined to generate any sales.

In Mexico, during 2007-10, I did produce and publish nine *e-books* on my art making in Mexico. I made these available through e-book Internet distributors; although thousands did read them on free e-book sites, sales were out of the question. But, like my long history in art making, I did it because it

was what I was, a visual artist by choice and dedication. With contacts re-established with old art friends, re-joining membership in the Barn Gallery, in Ogunquit, Maine, as well as the [Union of Maine Visual Artists](#), in Portland, I felt that there was a possible way to channel myself and my art to a

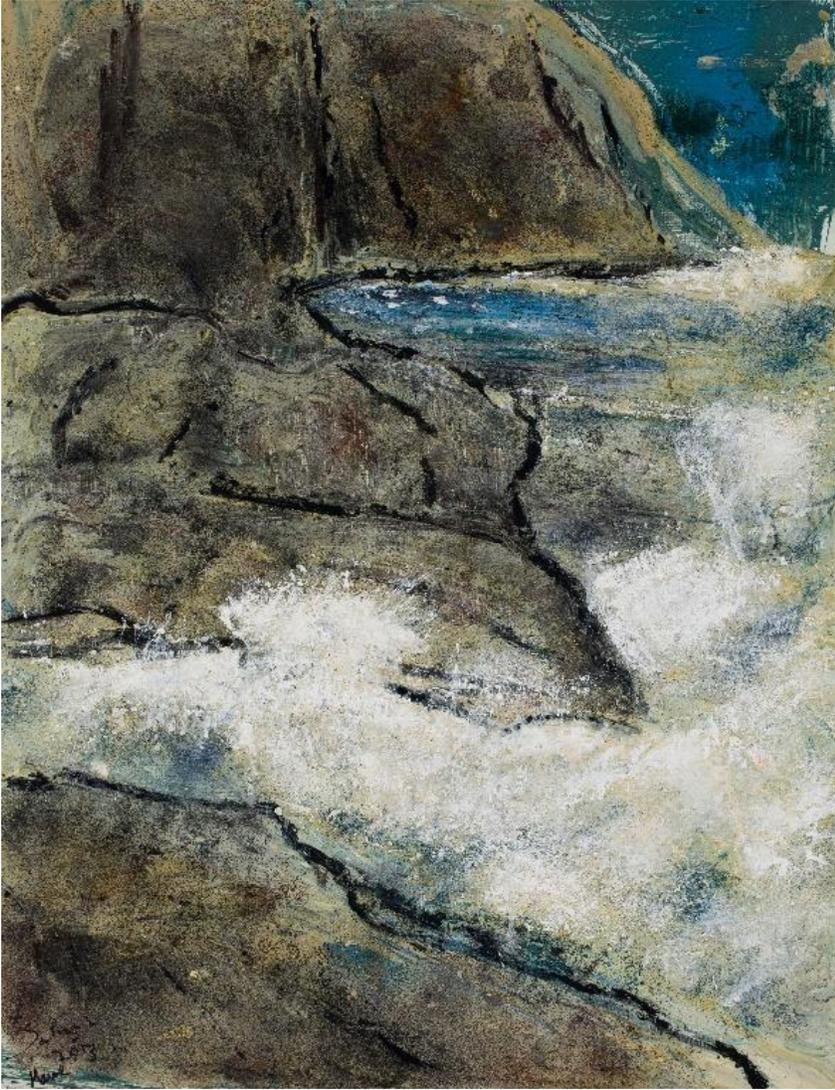


successful conclusion.

Salazar, At the Barn Gallery, Ogunquit, Maine

My painting name Salazar was associated with the original *Danforth Gallery (1987-2010)*; *The Maine Artists' Space* located at 34 Danforth St. Portland, ME 04101; University of Maine, Augusta, and now UMA artist space is "Danforth Gallery." I was one of the founders of the 'original' non-profit Danforth Gallery; I acted as artistic director. This well known, much respected artist run space in Portland provided me contact with thousands of Maine beginning artists and established artists. It had a distinguished presence and respected position in the art scene, from its beginning to end, 1987-2010. My ex-wife, Helen, was Director and assisted in making it a success; she was unpaid but supported the quality shows and its promotion in Portland and surrounding area; she stayed the course until director burn-out made her quit. She started her own professional writing career in the '90s.

Did I sell? Yes, here and there, but mostly in my studio. On the third floor, with an elevator available, I arranged my art to have a nice display in my working space. Visitors could see finished work and visit in an artist-work space; and although I was not a young artist, I was a professional artist. My work was mostly 'strong,' a fresh view of Maine,



From the: Sky, Land & Sea Series, Maine

certainly not lighthouses and brightly colored lobster traps. Local and area-wide shows



helped me get known in Maine.

See: [YouTube](#).

The *Engine* gallery had very good exhibitions, and these, with great wine and cheese openings, brought art seeking people to the building.



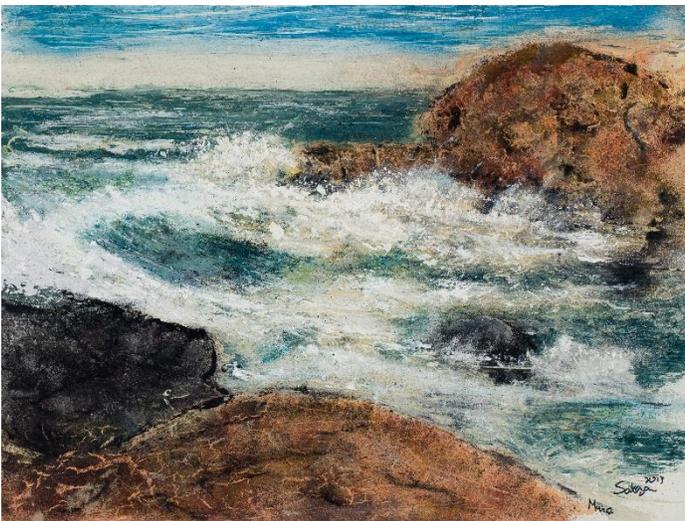
Salazar at his live/work Studio 2012-17, photo by Dave Wade

My studio on the third floor was an easy elevator ride choice for an art viewer. Furthermore, under the direction of the City's design and promotion departments, and *Engine*, there was the local Biddeford Art Walk. This brought new people, first time art seekers to Biddeford's growing art scene; moreover, you have the 'old' Biddeford Mills, that were undergoing a transformation, and with low rents were taking Biddeford in a new direction; tenants were setting up new venues, along with crafts and artists, new venture manufacturing and related business services were streaming into the million square feet of space it offered; a wonderland and new opportunity center for Southern Maine.

Luck Be a Lady! I was in the center of what was a 'maybe' in the rebirth of Biddeford. The question was can Biddeford change from the old, tattered and backward thinking community to the new

millennium craving kind-of-place I wanted to be involved in? Doubters were always on hand, and with Biddeford's past to be reminded of, I too feared, that what was a 'start' in a creative art center in Biddeford, would be fumbled away by the local powerful commercial old money interests; they gained more by holding to the past then attempting to reach out, join hands with a tech driven, tat-marked, hoodie, population. The types who were rapidly reshaping America's last decade: the so-called decade: "twenty-tens"/ "the '10s" OR "Ten-sions" or "One-ders." I like *Ten-sions* to describe the past decade, 2010-19; *Wikipedia* uses: *The '10s*.

So, I was back in the art making saddle, during 2012-2014. I produced some strong pieces.



Painting by Salazar, 2013, NFS, PC

I certainly shocked myself. I'll tell the truth here, I never thought that ["Land, Sea and Sky"](#) as a body of work, was what I wanted to do, or that I could be successful in creating it. But "necessity is the mother of invention" and so it was to be my mantra, too.

I was knowledgeable of government by previous education studies at NYU under-graduate and graduate schools, and with change agent experience in D. C. I knew how to work the system. I managed to get funds to sustain the meager SS payment and TIA payment I received. A few friends bought art, and along with a stock market increase in my divorce fund, I could pay the rent; pay the damn auto expenses incurred in fixing the needed repairs to the old Taurus wagon. Hell, I could also afford a haircut. Not bad for a painter at 87, years old.

The decade (2010-19) of the *Ten-sions* was overflowing with pressures that impinged on all of us. High on any list of the ten events of the *Ten-sions* must be the launch of I-phone in 2010. The decade of the *-tens* can be examined in more detail by this Link.

My artistic output didn't just show a calling for Maine. I did have a definite purpose in mind in my Maine art making from 2012-14. I established as a goal for my Maine art to express Maine's true essence. For I paint Maine as unforgiving—the land, sea, and sky as uncompromising, demanding your daily awareness and testing your ability to live with nature as a constant in your life. No people, buildings, lighthouses—only the land, sea, and sky. You may want to ask: What can I do to help guarantee this fragile environment is maintained and not destroyed by our very human presence?

But no artist is blinded by the art he/she is creating alone in one's studio. Society is challenged in the age of mass media and Internet access to happenings all over the world; and so is art. You also have, the very apparent high prices in the art market, and everyday announcements of some new 'great' talent; every artist, although at odds what to do, was still rushing to stay on top, trying to not easily show she/ he copied the latest trend. Let's not forget how women are in great numbers in the art field today, and how they took charge of many of the galleries and certainly most of the art schools. Well, good for them! In music and painting more and more people felt they had a right to look at art and not pay for it, and hear music and sign and play it, and not pay for it.

I've always done most of my best work in a [series](#). It's a 'series' that enables me to memorialize, show and write what I was thinking and feeling...clarify the series of paintings I do, share these series by using “words and images.”

My art in Mexico is distinctly different. I attribute this to the light, 7,000 feet with natural light to paint with, my work is bright and intense colors are used. While in Maine the colors are more muted. I owe much to Mexico, and my ten-year retrospective at the Diego Rivera Museum, [“Gods, Land & People of Mexico”](#) testify to the debt I owe the people and to the light.

While Donald J. Trump had not yet announced his presidential bid to the general public in 2014, a large motley field of Republican contenders was outshouting each other, creating a Republican stage crowded with potential candidates “boasting different degrees of conservatism, from tea party favorites like Ted Cruz to moderates like Peter King and liberal-leaning Republicans like Chris Christie. The GOP again was facing the daunting task of wading through a large field of prospects to pick a candidate to challenge the presumed Democratic choice of Hillary Clinton.”

The economic recession the nation faced in 2008, inherited from the end of the Bush era, worsened in 2009. In March 2009, the stock market fell, panicking investors who thought the worst was over. “Foreclosures rose, despite government programs that just didn't do enough. In October '09, the unemployment rate rose to 10% for the first time since 1982. The Obama administration pushed a \$787 billion plan that created jobs. Economic growth finally turned positive by mid-year. Technically, the Great Recession was over.” Internet sources

But this was all myth...the *Ten-sion* years 2010-19 were pure hell for low-income and Middle Americans. The Nation crisis was covered in a cloth of debt, this continued until real economic recovery was on hand, around 2017; only to be devastated by a COVID-19 [Pandemic](#).

In my studio, painting, yet hearing about the America that I returned to, so different than the America I knew; I found myself convinced that the democracy I proudly served during the end of World war II, and then re-called (M/Sgt, MI, dispatched to Germany) out of graduate school in 1951, to once again serve that democracy during the Korea War, was more threatened than ever before...I was quite shaken by all of the news: the ranting, Hillary bashing, Rush Limbaugh right wing politics, and the split in America. A blue state, red state mentality that challenged my very sanity; but much more: a real threat to our democracy.

I created a series: *AD 476: The Fall of the Roman Empire: Is the U.S. Subject to a 'Fall?* Small works on paper, 6 x 8. One hundred in the series. I thought it to be a strong body of work, completed in 2015. I was to show a sample from the series at an invitational group show that was held at the University of Maine, Augusta campus at the Holocaust Center, in 2016.



Displayed at the Holocaust Center, USM, 100 small works from the series: AD 476 The Fall of the Roman Empire: is the USA subject to a 'Fall'? Photo of artist Salazar by Bruce Brown, Curator Emeritus.

What I came to believe was that any comparison of the 'Fall' of the Roman Empire to the possible 'Fall' of the United States of America today was pure speculation in historical data and current history. It's worth considering as a possibility and it's justified to raise questions that deserve answers, but one can't draw any successful conclusion without hedging what you say by adding, 'unsubstantiated.'

However, let's take a moment here to reflect on today's USA policies and actions, nationally and internationally: the economic, military, trade, social and other actions we take that can be said to show striking similarities to conditions and policies existing during the declining years of the [Roman Empire](#). There is much written on this subject, and political issues are often discussed.

I didn't seek to answer the question or make a comparison of the 'Fall.' I was interested in creating images freely without a defined purpose in mind: do good work and let what was stored in my mind at the time just happen. My series is what it is, a time in which I was thinking what is happening in the USA today, and what needs to be changed, and what can be done to assure that the USA will not 'Fall'; that its best days are still ahead, not in the past; that we have the will power and leadership to take on the challenges; deal with the many issues as a world power in the 21st Century, and deliver a better tomorrow for the American people. To do anything less is a tragedy, as possibly we are the last best hope for democracy, and for a "spaceship earth" that is sustainable, and will benefit all creatures, all life.

Then 2015, and out of nowhere politically, riding down his elevator from the upper floor of his suite in the Trump Tower in NYC, with wife dressed to the nines, here comes Donald J. Trump. By many, he was thought as not a real possible presidential contender. But he wiped out the Republican contenders, got nominated and in 2016 he became president. A great deal can be written on his uncanny ability to work the system and succeed. And of course, his 'fall' from office in 2020.

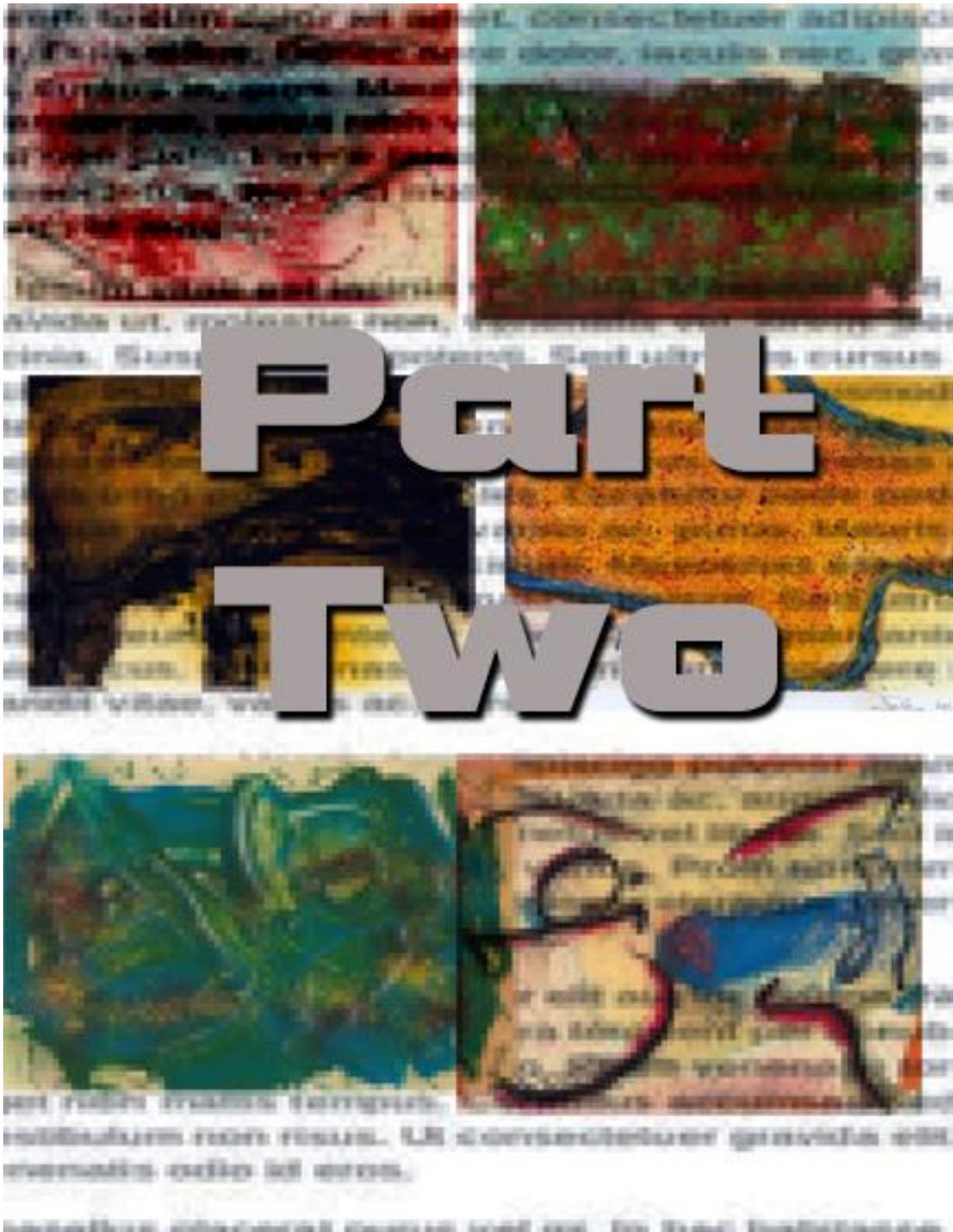
But it wasn't what engaged me as much just before his election in 2016. For in 2016, while he rapidly gained popularity politically, I worked on a new series on paper; paper 8 x 10; image 6 x 8; I called it *Complex Transition*. It was a body of work, 100 in number that I pondered on and then decided possibly worthy of greater exposure, maybe with collaboration. The goal I believed was to have a collaboration of talents who narrate, and display images in a digital format that inform on my thesis that our current social-political period (2010-2020) in America demonstrates that it's in a *Complex Transition*. My multi-media presentations I thought could illustrate that the social, political, cultural life we live today [2021] exhibit a 'complex' and 'transition' life. As they have somehow become combined over time, these social-economic-political forces that cry out for resolution can't be

independently solved; but must be viewed and addressed as 'complex' and in 'transition' simultaneously.

[Definitions: **Complex** can be said to be “having parts so interconnected as to hamper comprehension or perception of the whole”; **transition** means “a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another.”]

That pipedream changed when I found that what I thought possible was beyond my ability and was not adequately structured to ever take on as a possible project. *No* funding also came into play, and this project needed a great deal of modification. I didn't feel that what I was asking of myself was possible, as to still go-ahead lacking funding, with design problems; and just the fact that seeking others to get involved always can cause massive communication issues. In 2016, 100 works went back in the cardboard box, until 2020 when I decided that I would try once more to seek collaboration and secure funding from the Maine Arts Commission.

My project's artist thesis was clarified for writers and general use by help provided to me by John Gold and John Ripton. Both have professional writing experience and they helped clarify what was expected. I still faced several issues. The big hurdle was how to get writers to submit to the 'call for papers.' The 'call for papers' that was displayed on writer groups and other venues stated: “In 500 words explain how social interactions *and* institutions have changed in the past decade and include the effect caused by other social and political forces.” To combine the essays with the images raised another serious challenge. John Gold was concerned that when it came to what to do in my project with words and art not planned as a collective presentation created problems; for he correctly pointed out that there needed to be some association between what was written and the art. But, how? I wasn't going to send my art to the writers and ask them to comment and fit art into their submission. I wasn't going to read their essays and tell John Gold that this or that image belonged with this or that writer: no way! What do you do? *Pixilate?*



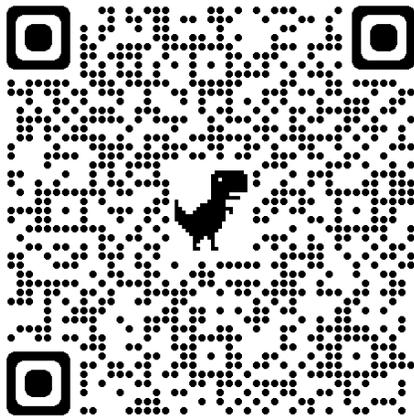
Digital Image by Anne Taylor

The Maine Arts Commission denied (2020) my grant to fund four writers to address their views in my project grant thesis, "Complex Transition." *America is in a Complex Transition in which the social,*

political, and cultural aspects of our life today have become combined over time. These social, economic, political forces can't be independently solved; but must be viewed and addressed as 'complex' and in 'transition' simultaneously.

So, in September 2021, I decided to proceed with my project without grant funds, and to attempt to answer how our society is in *A Complex Transition*. I asked Historian, John Ripton, PhD how he has come to understand our society in the past decade demonstrated to be in "A Complex Transition." He wrote that it showed especially in the past decade (2010-19) that society to be at "an 'inflection point' in which social, economic, political and cultural forces converge and fundamentally reshape our lives. These are the moments in history when societies and art transform from one era to another, when traditional values and ways are transformed into another way of life, and artistic visions."

I selected [20 abstract images](#) from the series of 100 images I did in "A Complex Transition" and these show on the video on [You Tube](#). The process now is to design an e-book and include other written comments and images and offer the e-book for sale on my website and distributed by other e-book venues. You can scan the QR below and it will enable you to see the video Complex Transition, on your devices.



-----end-----

