

‘Circumambulation’ an installation of works by Karen Ebbs at Rathfarnham Castle, opening 16 November at 3pm and runs through 5 January 2024.

“Move outside the tangle of fear thinking.

Live in silence.

Flow down and down in always

Widening rings of being”

— Rumi

Jung described the journey of life in two stages.

Cast from the Eden of childhood into Keatsian “vale of soul-making” we find ourselves locked in the arduous Sisyphean struggle of firing our ego in the kiln of the world. We learn the rules of the game, we climb the ladders of status and competence, we love and beget new generations — all while navigating the vicissitudes of the World. Jung identifies this first stage’s orientation as an “aspect towards life”.

At some point, however, the tide of our being turns. The great flow of libidinal life force that impelled us into this life “trailing clouds of glory” gives way to the ebb. The “currents turn awry”; the ground loses solidity. Yesterday’s pride dissipates and today we find only ash. Our tastes have changed, seemingly overnight and our former orientation unravels. Jung calls this the “aspect towards death”.

What we supposed to be a linear path away, towards, above, beyond, we instead discover to be a return, a circling, an orbiting; we discover it to be, in short, circumambulation. The flight of teenage rebellion from parents of all scale, wakes up one morning surprised to find all they fled from staring back in the mirror.

As yangian flow becomes yinian ebb, the gravity of life sends omega falling back into the arms of alpha. A new perspective emerges. The linear geocentrism of ego-life undergoes a revolution. Ego/I meets self/subject. The geocentric psyche becomes heliocentric: a Copernican revolution of the soul. No longer moving by its own whims, the ego discovers that all along it was part of a much greater, more mysterious reality; this humbled I awakens to discover itself no longer as centre but satellite. The wheel of time grinds on and behind the manifestations of the finite we find ourselves upon the narrowing gyres of infinity.

Journeying through the world in search of alchemical gold we ultimately find it buried where our quest began as we take the long pilgrimage to our start/end point — as we circumambulate from Eden to Paradise via the vale of soul-making.

“I began to understand that the goal of psychic development is the self. There is no linear evolution; there is only a circumambulation of the self. Uniform development exists, at most, at the beginning; later, everything points toward the centre. This insight gave me stability, and gradually my inner peace returned.”

— Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*

James Cussen,
The Living Philosophy