

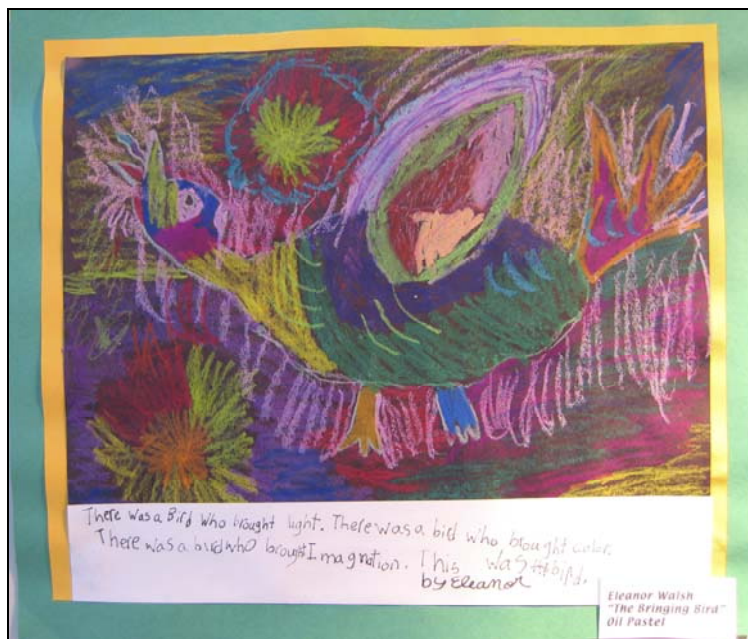
# MYTHIC PASSAGES

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## Little Hands, Big Spirits: How Children Myth the World by Tracy Alen Aiken

*An excerpt of a larger reflection on the Art of Children now in progress*



*"There was a bird who brought light.  
There was a bird who brought color.  
There was a bird who brought Imagination.  
This was the bird.*

*~Eleanor Walsh  
"The Bringing Bird"  
Oil Pastel*

As a "co-curator" of the "Ancient Spirit, Modern Voice" Mythic Journeys Art Exhibition last summer in Atlanta, I had the opportunity to work with the teachers and young artists from the Paideia School who contributed work to the exhibit. Anyone who had the chance to see the show and spend time with the children's art knows that these young ones, age 5 through middle teens, produced a body of work on mythological themes and stories that was one of the most magical parts of the exhibition.

I spent a long time at the gallery, and like most visitors, did not at first gravitate to the children's area. One day I let myself look, I mean *really look*, at what they had done, and I was astounded! I read the children's writings, which accompanied many of the works. How brilliant their insights!

Little hands, so much closer in nature to the divine than most of us adults (however "spiritual" and "enlightened" we like to see ourselves), enjoy a creative knowledge and impulse we adults would do well to acknowledge and encourage. It is an impulse to create from the sheer joy of the act, transcending the criticisms and judgments we place on our own and others work.

Picasso said he worked all his life to be able to master the immediacy and primordial creative impulse that children naturally possess. He painted as a Master at such a young age; in many ways his artistic "progress" circled back to the beginnings of artistic creation.

Many of us pass through that beginning when we're young and abandon it when we grow older. We may become too self critical and doubting, thereby abandoning any artistic aspirations. Or, if we do "grow-up" to become artists, we focus our energies and gifts on perfecting the *craft* of our art as the marketplace dictates. The cost is the experience of sheer joy in the *process* that children feel.

While I marveled at the beautiful use of line, tone, shape and color in so many of the pieces exhibited in the adult portion of the "Ancient Spirit" show proper, I returned again and again to the children's work for the sense of delight, whimsy, and pure imagination. The children's work spoke to me in a voice nostalgic for egoless creation. Have you ever watched a little child working his or her magic with a crayon or pencil and paper? They lose themselves so easily in what they are doing, oblivious to the "rules" of art, or whether it is "good" or not. To children, *all* creation is good. I think God feels the same way.