

Sala Onírica
Ca'l Risa
Riera Pare Fita 10
Arenys de Mar, Barcelona, Spain

(Updated Fall 2025)

Dedicated to M. Isabel Pinyas de Mills, for our home in Arenys de Mar, Barcelona, Spain, as a gesture of love for her, who is frequently my muse, in recognition of her innocence, strength, vulnerability—and her impressive transformative powers.

I commenced this mural in November 2022 with an initial impression that the mural would utilize, as a starting point, Lewis Carroll's renowned *Alice in Wonderland* (*Alicia en el País de las Maravillas*), a long-standing favorite of Isabel. Far from an illustrator, I approached the work with my own ideas that may or may not align with that captivating narrative. Over time, Isabel and my personal histories and psychologies assumed an increasingly significant role in the development of the imagery, as did unforeseen improvisational and rather enigmatic impulses. We also came to identify with the principal characters.

The work remains incomplete, and may remain so for some time as ideas and associations continue to evolve. I suspect that as I continue working, particularly when the murals ascend the spiral staircase, a more comprehensive interpretation may become available. However, here is where we stand as of October 2025, after some significant additions, most notably the dragon head. The work is executed in



charcoal, acrylic paint with some over-painting in oil. The walls are approximately 4 meters tall (roughly 13 feet tall) and feature beams and intermittent Catalan vaults. The house was constructed in 1887.

The Oníric: My fascination with the unconscious, the dreamlike, hallucinatory, half-formed realm of **Morpheus**, particularly as it relates to creativity, has been, for me, a unifying intellectual-spiritual-artistic and emotional conduit through life. The interest has animated a persistent interest in improvisation, as a teenager dabbling in automatic writing; having been inspired by Tom Wolfe's *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (which ultimately got me into trouble, pitting Christian conservatism against modern psychology) later, and perhaps because of that formative event, coupled with Jungian studies and dream work, notions such as the *anima*, active dreaming, and improvisation became a fundamental and ecstatic process, both in music and painting.

Through reading D. H. Lawrence's romp through the unconscious as "another word for life" (*Fantasia of the Unconscious*); Phenomenology, especially the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty; Carlos Castaneda's wild and inspiring exotic ride through Yaqui shamanism with the "second attention" of the *brujo*; *nagualism*. These intellectual-spiritual notions have continued for me as an artist and through field studies of indigenous animism and shamanism as a Fulbright research scholar in Costa Rica (since 1986) with my colleague Jorge Luis Acevedo. These artistic and intellectual activities eventually led to a large mural on Quetzalcoatl in Cuernavaca, and other mythologically informed mural works in San Pedro, San Ramón and Santa Ana, Costa Rica and in Corvallis, Oregon--and now in Spain.

The present mural is another manifestation of a conscious, voluntary



submission of will to unconscious impulses through my art. Most of my previous murals have been infused with a great deal of preparatory study to understand and compose within mythic traditions appropriate to the location and thematic purpose. At that point, I improvise and hopefully it becomes more than I realized initially.

This work is more personal in many ways, and spans and hopefully conjoins many literary, psychological, and mythic references pointing toward a reading that is perhaps accepted intuitively as a whole rather than as a coded text, per se. And so, dear reader, I can here offer my understanding of my own work, but I am aware that there may be much more that my unconscious mind has embedded without asking permission. That is what I accept and embrace as an artist. The abstract theme concerns dreamlike, hallucinatory, half-formed imagery; the realm of Morpheus (Morfeo in Spanish), a Greek god of dreams working vis-à-vis with his muses; the main characters wrapped in a dreamlike oneiric sense of time, creatures, and memory where things are capable of being more than one thing at once. They emerged in my reveries rather than appeared as ideas, per se.

Sacred Time, the Rabbit Hole, the Realm of the Marvelous: The mural, particularly in the niche to the right as you enter the space, is about a mythic, primordial time, sacred time in Eliade, an innocent, nascent place of beginnings, prior to adult judgments with the inevitable traumas, complications, and rationalizations that compose so much of rational thought. It is about the child's safe, protected experience amid the spectacle of magic, the unexpected, the "marvelous" in surrealist thought. The experience of delight. The entire salon is in effect the Rabbit Hole...a refuge from judgments, losses, and unhappiness, free of criticism, misgivings, a space of imagination, dreams, fantasies, and impossibilities. To be "in the arms of Morpheus" means to be asleep. It is also surrounded by coils of an immense and largely misty half-formed beast, the dragon.



Muse/Calliope/Iris/Anima/Queen of Unspoiled Hearts, the lover and muse of Morpheus, Calliope is one of the Greek muses who inspire creativity. She appears multiple times as the anima, the feminine principle. She is in mythology as the muse of epic poetry, the “fair voice” eldest and more important of the muses. Iris is also associated with Morpheus as his lover. She is the goddess of rainbows. In the mural, the female archetype is depicted in several forms, most notably in the mural as a maiden over the fireplace, but also in the inset niche as a child, a fetus, and a young girl watching all that transpires from aloft. The maiden is also the **Dama de las Espinas**, related to the rose thorns. The half shell on which the maiden is standing is, of course, a reference to The Birth of Venus by Sandro Botticelli. The shell (conch) is also a symbol of life, the sea, and of the Camino de Santiago. It is also a leitmotif of the carved antique furniture in the house.

The red rose the figure carries, and the falling petals were originally felt to be poetic offerings; gifts of love, reminiscent, I later found, of the Saint Queen Isabel who carried roses that transformed to bread for those who were hungry. This detail is an example of either a happy accident or an emergent memory in the unconscious. That my wife’s name is Isabel, to which this mural is dedicated, makes the “coincidence” all the better.

“Elizabeth (Isabel in Spanish), born in Zaragoza, Spain in 1271, was the daughter of Peter III of Aragon and was married off to King Denis of Portugal in 1282. From the beginning, Elizabeth showed great compassion to the poor. Legend says she would leave the palace disguised in order to take food to the poor. She was very devoted to God and also passed a great part of her time in prayer. One of the miracles attributed to her is the “miracle of the roses”. After the king had discovered she was leaving the palace to take food to the poor, he forbade her to do it. He threatened to lock her up and confine her to the palace. She never gave up, and every day she was still leaving behind the king’s back. One day in the wintertime, she was carrying pieces of bread hidden in her dress. The King saw her going out and stopped her, asking, “What are you carrying?” She answered, “Roses, my lord.” He didn’t believe it



because it was winter. He asked her to show him the roses. Obediently, she unfolded the dress, and there were roses instead of bread.” (Carlos Ferreira)

Morpheus/Mad Hatter Sorcerer: Morpheus is derived from the Greek for ‘form’ or ‘shape’. In Greco-Roman mythology, one of the sons of Hypnos (Somnus), the god of dreams and nightmares, was Morpheus, father of a thousand siblings. Hypnos, his father, had many children, but he selected Morpheus to be the god of dreams because of his uncanny ability to assume forms and mimic living beings. Morpheus is said to not have had a wife, but some interpretations would have seen him paired with Iris, another messenger of the gods and the personification of rainbows. Some statues of Morpheus have been sculpted that depict him having one winged ear. This is said to symbolize him listening to dreams through his regular ear and delivering messages from the gods through dreams with his winged ear. Other sources suggest he has two full wings. In most versions, he has two wings on his back that allowed him to travel great distances and at great speed. Morpheus is said to arrive in the underworld through a horn and to sleep himself with poppy seeds, the sedative in morphine. He came to people in sleep and assumed the forms that people dreamt. Morpheus was an artist of dreams; he could shape images and visions and make them seem alive. He could perfectly imitate a person, their voice, their walk, mannerism, and moods.

The Mad Hatter character from *Alice and Wonderland* is here generalized more broadly as a Morpheus character, a magician, a mago, a shaman, and a trickster, creator of transformative creatures, the lover. I associate with this character, a bit whimsically, but I do. A little intoxicated with magic, with the sublime, the beautiful, and the marvelous. He is our host in this fanciful world. The Rabbit and the Cat are his naguals, animal spirits, his allies, his familiars. He is the ultimate transformer, composed of his own creations. Thus, Morpheus is the god that forms the dreams, his “thousand children”. Like the Mad Hatter in *Alice and Wonderland*, he welcomes us to the table, to enter into a stage of dream, imagination. The dragon appears overhead as the source of the power to conjure, to spawn new life.



Dragon, the *Id*, the *Life Force*: dracs” in Catalan, are ubiquitous in the portrayal of the patron saint George and the Dragon; a carnal, primordial energy, over which George triumphs. Here dragons are shown in nascent form, reminiscent of our dogs, Frankie and Calçot. The dragon is about raw energy, not yet a threat, per se, but as a symbol of teeming vital force, the id, the energy to permeate existence. The Life Force. The room is surrounded by huge coils of dragon scales...emerging and submerging, wrapping the walls in muscular coils that remind us of the powers, seen and unseen, that which composes and surrounds us.

Yet until 2025, I was unable to fully visualize and paint its huge head. I finally did so, and like so many issues in creative life, I only then understood my own meaning, the key to understanding my own allegory, that of the almighty, omnipotent, amoral, and ubiquitous force that surrounds us, present and looming but mostly unseen by mortals, here represented in a gentle form, behind the maiden, in a dramatic moment when the dragon observes her in her innocence as she plays with morpho butterflies, in delight, curious about creation. The two complete the poem. The dragon as a hidden force animates Orpheus to conjure the thousand things and to bridge between delirium and sobriety, between wakefulness and dream. Also, to me, this image surrounding the mural, dead meeting tail, completes something similar to the Ouroboros in mythology.

Morpho Butterflies and Dragonflies: The blue tropical Morpho butterflies reiterate Morpheus and are drawn from a personal memory from Isabel and my travels to Costa Rica. To me, they add to the theme in a beautiful, poetic way, consistent with Calliope’s inspiration and an exotic magical moment. The butterflies are allies who hover in space...transform and transfix the viewer, they



portend happiness and joy. Dragonflies are intended to represent happiness, new beginnings. In world mythologies, the dragonfly frequently signifies hope, change, and love, and is a self-chosen symbol of Isabel's independence and sense of freedom. To some Native Americans, the dragonfly represents the souls of those who have passed into the realm of the nonphysical. In general, they represent to me happiness, freedom, and prosperous new beginnings, signifiers of Isabel; her nagual....light and pretty, delicate.

Intertwined White Swans: Symbols of purity, beauty, and elegance. Swans are known to mate for life. And so, having a dream of interaction with two swans could be a premonition of love and what's to come. Spotting two swans together is a symbol of true love, intertwined even more; an unfolding romance, a good omen of a long-lasting and happy relationship with a partner. It is also a representation of the trust and loyalty that is shared between two people in love. They represent, in the context of this mural, healing, protection, and magic. Swans also symbolize harmony and the ability to endure with grace and purity in your heart. In Ancient Greece, the swans were associated with Aphrodite.

Landscape: The forest, hills, and sky are depicted in Catalonia in winter, and later I plan to leave it out this summer, but time is not linear or consistent in this realm. I was inspired by the local landscape in Alella around Isabel's old family home, in Tossa del Mar, and in the hills of the Willamette Valley in Oregon.

Local references: The murals incorporate elements inspired by the carved cornices at the Calisay Cultural Center in Arenys de Mar and the fountains throughout the town. They have been substantially reworked.





