



O·A·T·K·A  
glass studio  
and school of glass

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## **THE FAMILIAR**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Annual Group Residency**

**\$1500.00 US**

Catharine Newell and Amanda Taylor – Co-Facilitators  
Guest Artist – Current Artist in Residence  
*50% Deposit due upon registering with remainder due 30 days before class.*

**August 19-25, 2013**  
**All materials, lodging, and meals included**

*The more one counts on a particular perspective, the closer one moves to an egocentric view and the smaller and more limited the world becomes.*

### **Residency Objectives**

As artists, it is particularly important to understand that what we are doing is living. We're not simply moving toward a goal, but are at the goal constantly, changing with it. We're continually becoming someone else, someone larger. On our best days, we operate in a place of not knowing. We have a rightness of instinct and are able to work 'beyond reason'. We collaborate with chance and exhibit an eagerness to deal with whatever comes next. We lose ourselves.

To fully lose one's self is a conscious choice. It is a complete surrendering and total immersion in what is present. To be fully present is to be capable of thriving within uncertainty, defenseless against the unknown.

Identifying and letting go of the familiar, allows one to make room for a new way of being. Therefore, this residency offers The Familiar as the departure point for a self-directed investigation into the unknown. How does one recognize the familiar? What composes the familiar? What is it that compels one to embrace it, surrender to it, recoil from it? What does it mean to live in between the familiar and the unknown? How does one go about finding that thing the nature of which is totally unknown to you?

We invite you to lose yourself in OATKA for seven days and eight nights during August 18-25, 2013. Designed to provide a stimulating and supportive environment for artists of all disciplines at transitional points in their careers, this invitational residency offers generous independent time in and out of the studio punctuated by artist presentations, mindful exercises, carefully selected

local outings and rigorous communal exchanges. By exploring various aspects of perception and diverse means of executing ideas, this residency focuses not on completed projects, but upon laying the foundation for future work.

Located within the expansive and historic farmlands of upstate New York, O-AT-KA, a Seneca Indian word meaning ‘through the opening’, invites participants to quiet themselves, breathe deeply, take measure, slowly unfold and, with a newly enriched perspective, expand again into life and work.



Chapin Mill Retreat Center, located in Batavia, NY, will be our completely private home base, where we have exclusive use of the entire facility and grounds during the entire residency. Located on 135 acres of woods and streams and adjacent to a pond, Chapin Mill is a state of the art meditation center and a perfect environment for reflection and creative work.

OATKA Studios, located nearby, will provide comprehensive studio facilities, dedicated to our use.



This residency is hosted by Amanda and Lance Taylor of OATKA School of Glass and is facilitated by Catharine Newell, and Karl, their Artist In Residence during that period, will also be participating as guest artist. The OATKA School of Glass, in existence since November 2007, is housed in an historic 19th Century Warehouse located in Batavia, New York.



Catharine Newell, recognized for her distinctive figurative work using glass powders, exhibits internationally. An ardent educator, Newell's teaching history includes Master classes at Pilchuck Glass School, North Lands Glass and Corning, as well as venues across Europe and the UK, Australia, China, and Norway. Juried four times into Corning Museum's New Glass Review, her work has been acquired for the permanent collections of Swedish Hospital, Hotel Murano, Bullseye Glass Company, Hunter Museum of American Art, University of Miami Lowe Museum and Tsinghua University Museum in Beijing. Newell maintains a private studio in Portland, Oregon.

We will be incorporating Buddhist perspectives within our residency, as they promote clarity and freedom of thought. With this in mind, we offer an article by Shaila Catherine, who is the Founder & Principal Teacher at Insight Meditation South Bay in Mountain View, CA.

### **Beyond the Familiar** **An edited talk by Shaila Catherine**

The fragility of personal identity is reinforced through association with what's familiar. Sometimes we cling to habits, even when we know that they may be unhealthy or inappropriate. Sometimes people judge what's unfamiliar as being wrong or disturbing. When we experience something that is familiar or known, we commonly feel confirmed; we feel validated. There is a feeling that "I'm getting it. I'm okay as a person. This is an okay situation -- because it's familiar."

When we encounter something unknown, we might feel uncertain, insecure, perhaps even confused. We may be forced to reorganize our experience of who we are or reexamine our views, opinions, or interpretations of the situation. We may even question the primacy of our personal perspective. New demands will require a fresh response, and sometimes this process feels disorienting or unnerving if we do not know how we *should* respond. We may not have a plan.

So how do you deal with the known and the unknown? Is there fear? Is there excitement? Is there curiosity? Fear of the unfamiliar will have huge ramifications in our lives. A number of years ago I was exploring a kind of awareness-based bodywork that trains one to notice information that is usually excluded from our conscious awareness. It was a training to observe experiences that don't have the familiar reference points. It's an invigorating practice to notice information that is different than our habit and undo habits in the midst of action.

In the early 1970s, there was a movement in conceptual art that examined the institutional structures that support the art world. In 1974, Michael Asher, a Los Angeles based artist produced an exhibit by removing the partition walls that conventionally divide the gallery

exhibition space from the administration offices and storage spaces so that the gallery personnel, the people who were working at the desks and answering the phones, became part of the exhibition space. It was an aesthetic practice that exposed systems that are usually hidden. Spiritual practice is also a process of exposure. In our meditations we inquire into, explore, and expose aspects of our inner life that we may never have opened to before.

I read in a magazine that one of the things that Darwin did whenever he found anything that contradicted his cherished beliefs was to write it down immediately. He knew that the human mind was conditioned to reject contradictory evidence, so unless he put it down in black and white very quickly the mind would push it out of existence.

### **Notice something new**

Each day we experience millions of sensory contacts -- you might try to notice how much is new each day. Does your consciousness even register that which is new? You might experiment -- notice one new sensation, one new sight, one new experience in your daily routine. The familiar places that you visit can be where you suddenly observe something that might contradict your cherished beliefs. It may be a belief about yourself -- "I'm an angry person". But are you angry all the time? Or "I'm a kind person". But are you kind all the time? Or "I'm a capable person". But are you capable when you get sick or when you're tired? Question your beliefs about the world, about your families, about how you think things should be. Question the narratives that float through your mind about how your life should be. Question your views about culture and values, and question the significance of your own perspective.

### **Is your mind obsessed?**

There's a wonderful teaching that the Buddha gave to the monks living near the village of Kosambi (*MN 48*) who were deeply divided about some minor rules for monastic conduct. When their argument continued to escalate, the Buddha went personally to instruct these monks. Even though the disagreement was about rules that the Buddha had established, he did not enter into the debate as an arbitrator declaring which position was correct. Instead, he instructed the monks to individually reflect on the state of their own minds, to recognize if there might be some view or conditioned pattern that so obsessed their mind that it prohibited them from seeing clearly.

I'd like to read a paragraph of the teaching that the Buddha gave them. It is part of the instruction on six memorable qualities that lead to love and respect:

*"Here a bhikkhu gone to the forest or the root of a tree or to an empty hut considers thus: Is there any obsession unabandoned in myself that might so obsess my mind that I cannot know or see things as they actually are?"*

It's a lovely reflection that we can employ. We can extract ourselves from an argument and reflect: Is there anything preoccupying my mind and preventing me from seeing clearly? And then the Buddha continues teaching:

*"If a bhikkhu is obsessed by sensual lust, then his mind is obsessed. If he is obsessed by ill will,*

*then his mind is obsessed. If he is obsessed by sloth and torpor, then his mind is obsessed. If he is obsessed by restlessness and remorse, then his mind is obsessed. If he is obsessed by doubt, then his mind is obsessed. If he is absorbed in speculation about this world, then his mind is obsessed. If a bhikkhu is absorbed in speculation about the other world, then his mind is obsessed. If a bhikkhu takes to quarreling and brawling and is deep in dispute, stabbing others with verbal daggers, then his mind is obsessed."*

This instruction asks us to consider the attachment, reactivity and conditioning of our own minds when we are caught in an argument. Have we taken a position that we feel obliged to defend? The Buddha asks us to reflect and expose the places where habit, attachment, and clinging fester. How attached are we to views, to feelings, to desires, to doubts? Is our mind obsessed?

### **Exploring habits & attachments**

Sometimes attachment may be so gross that we feel pain -- we know that we have lost perspective; we know we are caught. Sometimes the attachment is so familiar that we believe it is necessary. It may seem to define the kind of people that we are. Meditative investigation invites us to explore attachment, in subtle and gross manifestations, and to discern which structures provide valuable discipline for awakening, and which constructs are merely repetitive causes of suffering.

In simple ways people can be creatures of habits. When I visited my grandfather in a nursing home I was struck by the highly structured routine. At a particular time each day the patient meals would arrive, the nurses would make their rounds -- each event occurred without much flexibility. The structure created a sense of order in a life where patients had no control. The illusion of control came through expecting things to be a certain way, and having those expectations confirmed.

I remember watching the movie "Rain Man". The autistic brother had peculiar and humorous habits that structured his life. He read at night -- there is that funny scene where he reads the telephone book. He had to eat particular meals on particular days -- Friday it's tuna fish or Wednesday it's hamburger, or whatever. And the light had to go out at a certain time each night. These little events punctuated his day, creating a structure in which he could function.

We may not act in such an extreme manner, but we might feel discomfort when things aren't the way we want them to be. Do we argue and dispute like the monks at Kosambi? Or investigate the mind as the Buddha instructed? The moment of dissonance can be a place for curiosity. However, if we don't allow the space for the unknown in our lives, we might inhibit our natural curiosity. Meditation practice sparks curiosity in how the mind works, how perception operates. It can be amazing how much we can learn by sitting in silence. Meditators often recognize aspects of the mind that they had not encountered before.

When was the last time that you actually paid attention to the flight attendants during the preflight safety lecture? I was on a plane flying from Katmandu to India one time, sitting next to a first-time flyer, a young man from Nepal. He listened with rapt interest to the speech, and as soon as the flight attendant said there were life vests in the compartment above, he reached right

up and pressed the button to inspect the life vest and practice putting it on. We were going to fly over the Himalayas where the chances of falling into water are very slim, but he was curious. Unfortunately life vests are pressure-packed and we couldn't squeeze it back into its compartment. For the remainder of the flight he had to keep it near him. Although it caused trouble for the flight attendants, I appreciated that spirit of investigation and curiosity.

### **Let the unfamiliar into awareness**

It can be part of the practice to let the unfamiliar into awareness. What would be truly unfamiliar? There's so much demand in our culture for newness: new DVDs, new products, new songs, new commercials, new television shows, new styles, new everything. This quality of new isn't new. It's the standard commercialization of desire. Boredom has become a kind of a monster in our world. The desire to overcome boredom sustains so many activities. People indulge in extremes of thrill seeking, sexual exploitation, drug use, or addiction to video games -- activities that may or may not be worthy of our precious time. I'm not suggesting that we abstain from athletics, sexuality, music, theater, film, or dance, but to notice if we obsessively entertain ourselves. Can we also sit still and be quiet?

I'm frequently amused by the assumptions people make who've never meditated. Commonly, people think that sitting in silence must be boring, and they can't imagine why someone would meditate for months at a time. But those of us committed to a spiritual life usually find that the petty personal preferences of worldly activities -- trying to have things exactly this way or exactly that way -- spark much less interest than sitting in silence and experiencing the depths of our own being. Often in the very first days of a retreat people discover that just feeling the breath or just taking a step in walking meditation is a radically new experience of life.

For several years in the 1990s, I was tutor for a correspondence course in meditation. I would often get desperate letters about 3-4 months into the course from students terrified that the next breath might not come or the next step might not happen. To some students careful attention was so unfamiliar that it sparked fear, fear of being present to one's actual experience, fear of feeling the intimacy of simple sensory experience, fear of feeling one's own breath, fear of impermanence.

Now, there may be some people who are so experienced with meditation that it is meditation that it is be just a little too easy to sit quietly. If this is true for you, engagement may be a skillful balance for your practice. You might explore volunteering at the soup kitchen, speaking out on an issue of social justice, or organizing a dharma event.

Consider for yourself: how can you explore beyond the patterns that have become comfortable. Notice if there's a tendency to judge the unfamiliar as wrong or to push the unfamiliar away. Fear of difference can trigger aversion or, more strongly, hatred, cruelty or prejudice. Meditative practice encourages us to value, rather than fear, diversity. We don't need to fear change. We can sense how dynamic momentary experiences are -- each breath, each step, each moment is unique. Observing the continual changes in our own experience teaches us to rest at ease with differences. We don't need to protect our sameness to find security. We can honor change; let people change, let our friends and family grow. We can be comfortable living with people of

different religions, different ethnicities, different cultures.

There's a lovely story of the Sufi saint Mullah Nasrudin who's kind of a wise-foolish saint. A friend asks the Mullah if he could borrow some money. Mullah Nasrudin thought that he would never see that money again but he gave it nonetheless. Much to his surprise, the loan was promptly repaid. But Mullah Nasrudin brooded. Some time later, this very same man asked for a loan of another sum, saying, "You know my credit is good, I've repaid you in the past". But Mullah Nasrudin roared, "Not this time, you scoundrel! You deceived me the last time when I thought you'd never return the money. You won't get away with it again." Too often people view others within the constraints of their perceptual boxes, perceiving them to be how we think they are. When change occurs it is not always noticed or appreciated.

### **Travel as practice**

One great practice for experiencing change is travel to foreign cultures. When you travel, you have to extend yourself a bit. Things are definitely unfamiliar and often beyond your control. We can embrace the uncertainty that's inherent in travel so that our travel is infused with the spirit of pilgrimage. When traveling, we leave aside the false securities of our carefully structured lives to experience a different pace of life -- different rhythm, different activities, different climate, different food. We might wear different clothing, discover different ways of washing dishes, different ways of cooking food, different ways of disposing of trash. The relationship of people to their government and authorities may be different. What's allowed to be printed in the newspapers might be different. Etiquette and communication styles may be different. Bargaining and trade customs vary. By traveling, we intimately experience the varied, relative, and conditioned nature of things.

When we stay at home, our lifestyle can be narrowly defined. Some people might conceive of themselves as being open minded just because they eat Thai food one day, Japanese food another and maybe we go to Taco Bell for a little Mexican food, or because we see people of all colors in the shops and streets. Yet we may not be aware of the multitude of choices that blindly conform to consumer pressures or social assumptions. Unless one dares to walk out of this cultural inundation from time to time, it's difficult to even recognize the invisible sea of cultural assumptions in which we swim. Travel invites us to change our cultural perspective. It alters the way we see things, the way we feel things. It often throws us into a position of being the outsider, the minority, the one who is not 'in the know'.

I've been to India quite a few times, but the very first time I went to India affected me the most. At first, cultural differences glared out at me -- I saw things that looked so strange to my culturally narrow eyes. After staying in India for some months, I still witnessed things that seemed strange, but I no longer felt bewildered. I only felt that my reaction to them was strange. During this phase of adjustment I frequently reflected back on American culture, pondering if perhaps my previous experience was actually what was odd. I was seeing my own cultural conditioning from another perspective and the memory of it seemed odd. Then there came a time when I was simply living there and the mind stopped comparing. It was just normal life. Then, of course, I came home, and things looked really weird here. Returning home brought another kind

of cultural shock.

Sometimes what at first appears bizarre simply becomes ordinary through repetition. We might experience that in walking meditation -- did anybody see walking meditation before you did it? It looks a little weird. But with some experience it seems normal. I don't even feel uncomfortable doing it in public. I pace slowly back and forth, walking mindfully while waiting for a bus or an appointment.

I remember the first time I heard Buddhist chanting. I was in junior high school and we were studying Asia. Our teacher took us on a field trip into San Francisco to the neighborhood called Japantown. She had arranged with one of the Buddhist temples for our class to listen during the ceremonial chanting. I'd never heard sounds like that before -- half our class burst out laughing -- to the horror and shame of our teacher who swore she would never take another class on a field trip. We laughed because it was just so unfamiliar. We were uncomfortable with the unfamiliar. Now I appreciate chanting.

Do we just become more and more familiar with things, incorporating the new into the framework of our routine? Is growth just an experience of reconditioning our minds? There can be a popular fascination with the bizarre, grotesque or the amazing. The strangeness of things is one of the attractions of circuses or "believe it or not" type of shows. But fascination is not the same as freedom. The dharma teachings ask us to relate to the unfamiliar in a way that does not create separation. We relate to experience in a way that neither confirms who we are through contrasting the differences that we observe, nor through returning to the known by identifying with the new experiences. We don't identify with to new objects or new experiences. We don't need to acquire new perceptions. We don't need to pick up new beliefs or new views. We liberate the mind from all the places where it is confined.

### **Balanced as we face the unknown**

The dharma training teaches us balance. We neither grasp at sensory experience nor use objects of perception to construct a sense of being someone. The dharma teachings describe a way of living that does not construct a false sense of security through belonging to a social group, a political party, a religious structure, or a spiritual group.

At some point in your practice, you may find yourself facing the unknown. It may feel like you're at the edge of a spiritual cliff. The bondage of the past is clearly behind you. You have had a deep insight into the patterns of suffering, and you're unwilling to return there. You recognize the old habit; you know you don't need those old patterns any more. You're no longer clinging to that which you recognize as the cause of suffering, and yet, there's nothing perceivable in front of you.

This is a critical moment in our dharma practice. We need a firm decision not to return to the known tendencies, but to go forward, as they say in Star Trek, "where no one has gone before." It may not be comfortable. It may not be easy. And there can be grief with the loss of the familiar life that we've lived. But commitment, faith, and a yearning for truth will be our trusted guide on

the Dhamma path.

Freedom is not a familiar habit

Freedom will not be a familiar habit, and yet it may be the most intimate experience, the most delicate encounter, the feeling of being already, always at home -- a home that was only forgotten, more intimate than the habits, more ordinary than our ordinary daily life.

When I lived in India, I stayed for a number of years with a teacher named H.W.L. Poonja. During the first several weeks that I spent with him he often said, "You're just a half step from liberation." Well, of course I was excited! I thought he was saying that I was close to having an experience of enlightenment. Then one day while we were staying in an apartment in Haridwar which overlooks the sacred Ganga River, I was chopping vegetables and looking at the river. Suddenly I understood. Liberation is *always* only a half step away. Lifting and moving -- that's all. Why do we need to fix the attention and attach it to our various experiences? Why do we need to take our sensory experiences, our views, our opinions, our contacts, all the things that change in life, as a standpoint for who we are? Just lifting and moving, lifting and moving, lifting and moving.

Freedom is as uncomplicated as not grasping objects of mind, as simple as that -- not clinging and not grasping that which is known. Freedom is a possibility of relating to experience beyond conditioning, a way of relating that's utterly fresh and without a reference point. When free, we are so purely present that we're not comparing ourselves to others. We're not comparing our past to our future. We're not trying to grasp a memory from the past and project it onto the future. We are not trying to predict and construct our self-image. We're simply at ease in the uncertainty of lifting and moving, lifting and moving, without the compulsion to become attached to a fixed perspective.

### **Look beyond the familiar**

We look beyond what's familiar. *Lift, move, place* can become familiar. But will that half step ever become familiar? People commonly operate based on assumptions that limit their experience. Traditionally, this limitation is described as similar to looking at the sky through a straw and declaring, "Ah, it's so vast!". But we're seeing just the tiniest, tiniest, tiniest speck.

On my wall I have posted pictures of our sun, and images of a nebula and distant solar systems. I like pictures of things that are beyond anything that makes sense to my mind. The universe of possibilities is vast. Pictures of planets and galaxies remind me that life is awesomely unknown. There are so many things we can never really know, but can we be honest and just say: "I don't know?" Or does admitting that we don't know make us feel uncomfortable. Do we try to contrive answers or form spurious opinions? Instead, we can express a depth of integrity simply by the statement "I don't know."

It's interesting in Buddhism that there's right view and there's wrong view. Wrong view in Buddhism is defined as not merely the holding of views that are wrong, that is, not factual or incorrect; but wrong view includes the holding of a view against something when the truth is that

we just don't know. Right view includes the expression of profound not knowing -- to simply and honestly recognize that there's a limit to what our minds can conceptualize.

During the Buddha's forty years of teaching, he deliberately left certain questions unanswered. He was asked philosophical questions that were being debated in his era, such as "What's the origin of the world?" "How will the world end?" "What happens after death?" "What happens to the enlightened mind after death?" "Are the body and the soul the same thing or are they different?" "If they're the same thing, what happens after death?" "If they're different, what happens after death?" "Can the body exist without the soul, or can the soul exist without the body?" People still have similar questions. They've never been fully resolved. But when the Buddha was asked these questions, he said that these questions should be left unanswered; they are not beneficial. It's more profitable to teach the four noble truths -- to recognize suffering and the end of suffering -- than to waste one's time engaging in endless philosophical speculation.

To some, this can be an unsatisfactory answer. In fact, the person whom the Buddha was teaching was not satisfied. This desire to be knowledgeable, to have the answers, to belong to a group that shares our views, is a deeply conditioned pattern in a human mind. Very often children, when they're asked a question in a class, feel embarrassed to say "I don't know". When adults engage in social discussion, they may support their opinions with facts that they don't even know are true. It can be frustrating for meditation students to ask a dharma teacher a question and find that the teacher doesn't know the answer, may even say "I don't know" or "The Buddha never said", or "The Buddha didn't teach that". Too often people want to know, and they want their teachers to know. The Buddhadharma is directing us to another order of knowing: a knowing beyond fixed answers, a quality of knowledge that goes beyond all concepts, all information, all description, and all perceptions.

By leaving the philosophical disputes of his time unanswered the Buddha invites us to cease using beliefs for consolation; to learn to not reach for ideas to ease the discomfort of not knowing but to stay present in the very experience of not having an answer. We need to be willing to let the unknown remain unknown while we're investigating it; to stay engaged with curiosity, but not grasp for the answer; to listen and remain present in the midst of any feelings of confusion or disorientation, and sense of being ungrounded or uncomfortable, so that we can open to the possibility of a vastly different perspective.

### **Look again at the obvious**

To see the unfamiliar we may not need to look in a different direction; we may not actually need to go to another culture or a different situation but just look again at what's obvious in our daily life. It may be the breath. It may be a step. It may be our routine. It may be what we do when we walk into the house, or what we think when we wake up in the morning. What we take for granted or expect is what we may not even be seeing.

The artist I mentioned earlier, Michael Asher, had another work reproduced in the Museum Of Contemporary Arts in Los Angeles. Museum visitors rarely examine the infrastructure of the museum; usually they focus exclusively on traditional forms like paintings and sculptures. In this work, Asher developed a series of what he called "pressured air works." He redirected the cool

air from the air conditioning system so that the viewer felt it directly and immediately. Normally you don't even feel the air when you walk into a museum; usually you feel a nebulous sort of temperature. Asher's work highlights what usually goes unnoticed, yet may structure and define the experience of art.

Very often there are ways that we structure our own practice, our own lives, or our own sense of who we are. We can expose, reveal and see those hidden structures and influences that constrain and pattern our lives. A fresh and present attention with the obvious, with the interest and willingness to go beyond the familiar, can bring amazing revelations.