

# The Magdalene Project

(a working title)

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION



*"Mary, blessed are you who came into being before coming into being, and whose eyes are set upon the kingdom, who from the beginning has understood and followed my teachings. Only from the truth I tell you, there is a great tree within you that does not change, summer or winter, and its leaves do not fall."*

*(Gospel of Mary)*

## COLLABORATION: ARTIST PROJECT ROLES and STATEMENTS

### **Angela Bennett: Concept, Co-Writer/Composer, Producer**

I was raised in a devout Christian household and studying the scriptures was the catalyst for leaving organized religion. The emphasis put on the “word of God” and the meaning humans gave that word at the expense of my personal experience of god, led me on a lifelong journey. This path also informed me as an artist and a spiritual woman who lives in a decidedly patriarchal world. As I studied spirituality and the roots of the Christian religion, I discovered many sources referencing a divine feminine, including Mary Magdalene, not only as Jesus’ disciple, but also his “beloved companion” to whom he entrusted “higher” teachings. When I realized there was a Gospel of Mary that was historically as legitimate as any of the gospels in the Bible, I delved into the subject of Mary Magdalene, reading everything from scholarly, historical based texts to those with information that was either imagined or claimed to be revealed through spiritual means.

One of the most compelling, in a category of its own, is “The Gospel of the Beloved Companion: The Complete Gospel of Mary Magdalene” (Jehanne Dequillan):

*It is believed that this gospel was brought from Alexandria (Egypt) to Languedoc (southwest France-which was then Roman Gaul) during the early to middle part of the first century. Originally written in Greek, it was first translated into Occitan during the early part of the 12th Century. This particular version has remained preserved within our families and spiritual community. To maintain its original integrity, this Gospel has been translated word for word, with no concession to preconceived interpretation, comparison, or dogmatic and doctrinal requirement.”*

### **Sandra Hughes: Writer, Director, Choreographer/Mask Theatre**

I’m passionate about the excavation and creation of artistic work that focuses on little known histories that offer inspiration, meaning and relief to the human race and acknowledge the power and wisdom of the feminine. Three decades ago during a period of deep spiritual distress and dislocation, the mysteries, metaphors and miracles that surround the legends, lore and facts about Mary Magdalene streamed into my life. While en route to perform and teach in Hungary and Slovenia I had my first primary encounter in the black marble Lady’s Chapel within the Cathedral of Einsiedeln in Switzerland. I couldn’t find lodging the night before and slept in my car in the parking lot:

*The chilly morning air awakens me and I find myself following a bevy of sweater clad women as they scurry into the chapel. The dusky Madonna in full regalia, the black marble that surrounds me and the hundreds of ex-votos on the walls are arresting, but what captures and claims me is one word repeated over and over during the mass - “Magdalene”. Each time I hear it uttered by the priest and the people, the aching void within me recedes and is replaced by a feeling of incredible joy.*

During my formative years Christian Existentialism as envisioned by Paul Tillich with its emphasis on the exploration of a personal relationship with God along with the arts were major

influences. This foundation enabled me to journey throughout Europe to connect with Black Madonnas and the lives of devotees such as Jehanne d'arc.

*She (divine feminine) promises a new pacific bond between men and women . . .*  
Robert Graves, *Mammon and the Black Goddess*.

### CONTEXT: PUBLICATIONS

*One of the most important Christian texts outside the New Testament canon, is the Gospel of Mary, a telling of the Jesus story that features Mary Magdalene as one of the most powerful leaders. This Gospel was lost through suppression or neglect during the early period - just as the real Mary disappeared the writhing misery of a penitent whore and women evaporated from the church's inner circle. It reappeared in 1896 as a well-preserved, but incomplete, fifth-century copy dating to the second century. During the 20th century scholars slowly began to appreciate the revelations contained in this re-discovered Gospel. This process culminated with the 2003 publication of "The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle" by Karen L. King. (Secrets of Mary Magdalene" edited by D. Burstein and A J. De Keijzer)*

### PERFORMANCE DESCRIPTION

A conversation between Mary and the Apostle Peter in the Gospel of Mary Magdalene inspired this production. Peter asks Mary to relate what the resurrected Jesus revealed to her in private. Mary tells a metaphorical version of the path to enlightenment, which culminates with the soul enfolded in the Mother's arms (divine feminine). Peter scoffs and dismisses Mary. He complains to his fellow disciples: "Did Jesus choose her over us?" Peter spends the rest of his life preaching his version of Jesus' gospel, which creates the foundation for the Roman Catholic Church. The current outline for the live performance begins with Peter stuck in purgatory due to his unresolved guilt. We hear the voice in his head denying Christ over and over as he screams in anguish.



There's faint music and then the voice of Mary Magdalene calls and sings to Peter. As an enlightened being, she touches his soul to remind him of the light that he truly is. Her calls become stronger and the sounds of hell wane.



Peter is "drawn out" of the darkness and "birthed" into the light. He wears a white robe and is in a fetal position center stage. As he gains his bearings he acknowledges Mary as his personal savior and as Jesus' most beloved companion and disciple, which he couldn't accept when he was wracked with guilt. Peter is determined to rectify his role in the suppression of Mary. He recounts her life prior to and after she meets Jesus, alternating between the role of narrator and re-enacting historical events with the other characters.



Act I ends with an exchange between Peter and Mary described at the end of the Gospel of Mary. He asks Mary about the revelation the resurrected Jesus gave her. The action freezes and Peter tells the audience that it is now time for the world to hear the revelation that was given to Mary - which he previously suppressed.

Act Two is a multi-disciplinary/sensory version of this revelation. It employs movement, dance, mask theatre and multi-media (light/projections). It also functions as an invitation to initiation for the audience. Mary speaks and sings words of revelation as Peter becomes the subject of Jesus' parable of the eightfold path of enlightenment.



Seven distinct powers/forces personalized as demons are symbolically overcome Peter as he ascends.



His path becomes progressively more clear until it is unobstructed. Peter's enlightened self is embraced by the Mother/Goddess who appears as Mary Magdalene. In this final moment we witness the physical manifestation of the divine feminine/masculine in balance.



## RESIDENCY ACTIVITIES

- Interactions with research and human sources in the area, to include visits to nearby sites relevant to the project.
- Additional independent research
- A draft of the script is developed
- Excerpts from the work presented for other residents
- Programs from the artists' existing repertoire are offered to the community



Basilica de Sainte Marie Madeleine, France



Grotte de Sainte Marie Madeleine, Riboux, France