

## The Black Madonna of Montserrat, *by Roman Verostko*



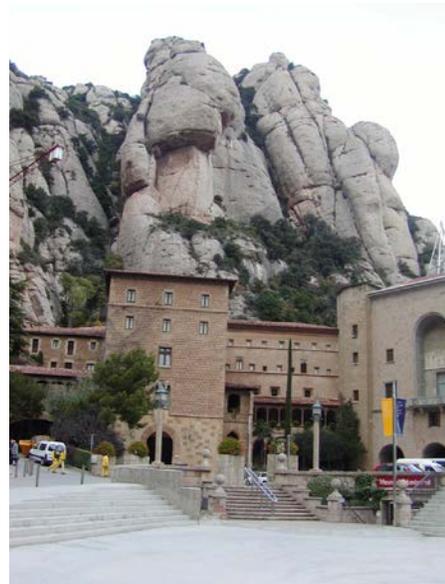
**Left:** View of the serrated mountain terrain driving up to the Monastery of Montserrat. (*serrat=serrated*)

**Below:** The Monastery. The Basilica is to the right side.

*Photos by RV*

On January 6, 1963, I arrived as a guest for a few days at the Abbey of Montserrat. In the spring of 2002, some 39 years later, my wife and I, traveling in Catalonia, headed for Montserrat. As the serrated mountain loomed up, memories of my earlier experience returned. I recalled driving up the mountain in 1963, attending choir, hearing heart-lifting Gregorian chant and seeing the Black Madonna.

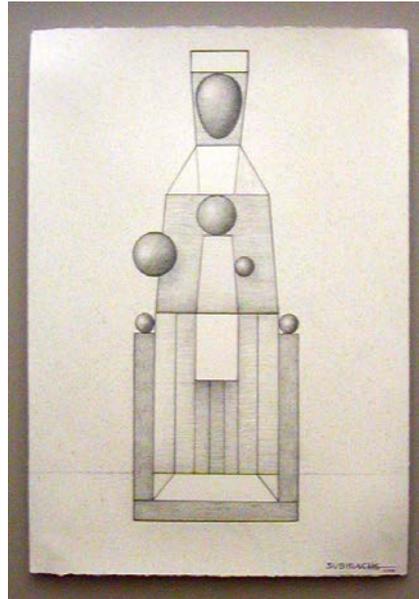
The magic of driving up that wondrous mountain was still there. Upon arriving I was shocked to see a row of buses, a long line of parked cars, and streams of tourists – hardly the quiet monastic setting I remembered. Following the exodus of a group of tourists, we found quiet moments in the Basilica and followed the worn steps leading up to the Virgin. Mounting the steps one senses the deep devotion of pilgrims and the mysterious nature of this place.



**Left:** Views of the Black Madonna encased in a protective shield on an elevated pedestal. Pilgrims can mount steps from a passage-way for a closer view and personal devotion.

*Photos by RV*

Later, I was surprised to find their museum's impressive collection of works related to the Black Madonna. Most interesting to me were two works by J. M. Subirachs (1927-2014), a Catalonian artist whose work I had known and appreciated since the early 1960's.



**Above left:** The original Black Madonna of Montserrat

**Above center:** Schematic drawing for a Black Madonna sculpture. by J.M. Subirachs.

**Above right:** Black Madonna of Montserrat by J.M. Subirachs

Photos by RV

While viewing other work in the museum I thought I might attempt an algorithmic Black Madonna after returning home. But, like so many things we plan, this idea slipped away as I got involved with various projects.

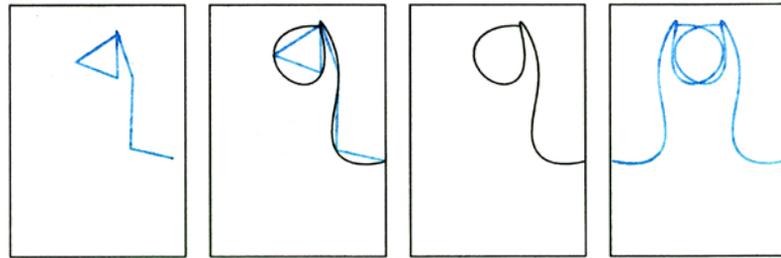
## My Studio Work

Since the early 1980's my work has been entirely concentrated on creating my art work with detailed drawing instructions for a computer. These procedures are software instructions (*algorithms*) coded in a computer language. With these software instructions, my computer guides the drawing arm of my drawing machine known as a "pen-plotter".

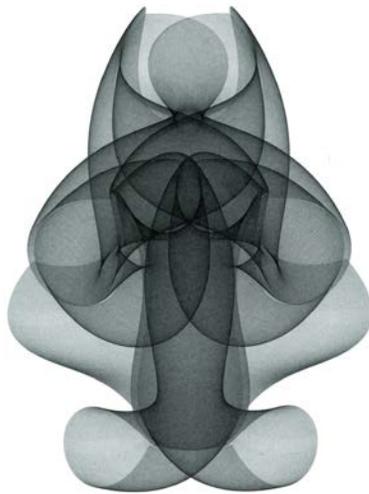
One of my procedures begins by creating a set of coordinates that control the visual character of the form as shown in the frames below. This form, controlled by six coordinates on an  $\langle x, y \rangle$  grid, was achieved with an algorithm that throws dice within controlling parameters.

Other instructions use information from the initiating coordinates to position and draw hundreds of lines to achieve the finished form. As an artist, I design the "rules" whereby each minute position is determined. Much of my studio work concentrates on creating and tuning the instructions that guide the pen in drawing the form. One could think of such procedures as a "score for drawing", similar, in many ways, to a "score for music".

**Right:** The illustrations show development of a curve from initiating coordinates. This curve, known as a Bezier curve, served as the basis for drawing the Black Madonna shown below



In early December of 2002, while experimenting with code initiators for a project, one configuration emerged that struck me as a possible *Black Madonna*. As I recall, the idea of a Black Madonna had disappeared from my agenda. But this configuration emerged with a strong, memorable form that I could not put aside. Over the years I have come to place a very high value on what I judge to have a “memorable” form. A memorable form, in the sea of forms my software can generate, emerges as a treasure, something like that rare pebble on the beach – the one among thousands.



Above are pen plotted illustrations drawn with the code that emerged on that day. The first frame in the illustration above shows the coordinates on a Cartesian plane connected with straight blue lines. The second frame shows an overlay of a black curve based on those coordinates, a third frame shows the smooth curve alone and the fourth frame, drawn in blue, shows the same curve coupled with its mirror image.

From years of experience with symmetries I had learned how certain shapes, when distributed with select coded procedures, could generate evocative forms wherein others might see images of religious figures like the Buddha. Careful selection of ink, scaling and drawing densities required considerable attention. By the end of the day on December 2, 2002 I had achieved the first example of a modular base for my Black Madonna of Montserrat.

Over the years I modified the procedure. The drawing shown here is one of several based on the original form initiator. Drawings have been made in different sizes and with varying shades of a blue & black ink. Each Black Madonna drawing is an original pen & ink drawing, drawn line for line, with my pen plotter in my studio. While ink colors, rag papers, sizes and density of lines may vary, all draw on the relationship of the same six coordinates on a cartesian grid. For some of the works I added one of my studio seals.

While I could identify other drawings in my *Gaia Series* as evocative of “Madonna” or “Buddha” forms I found this one to be appropriate as a *Montserrat* version.

Roman Verostko, Minneapolis, January 2002

Modified in July 3, 2017

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**Note:** I consider every pen ink and/or brush drawing, plotted in my studio, to be an original. The Black Madonna drawings are not numbered and they are not for sale. They have been given to family & friends to be passed along among family & friends.