

# Finding my diamond centre

## Viscountess Marina Cowdray describes how her awakening to the spiritual life and sculpting brought her inner peace

I am in the fortunate position of having found two profoundly rewarding passions in my life – following a spiritual path and sculpting.

I was 18 when I first had a taste of the changes that are possible through turning to a life of inner reflection and spirituality. At the time I spent many days as a teenager with a monk who guided me in my exploration of inner awareness. Through him I discovered the importance of specific breathing techniques and the necessity to connect with Nature.

Certain books also filled the void of inquiry, notably Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*, which I read many times.

I was a typical, volatile adolescent, pushing the boundaries of society, but enjoyed a very close relationship with my grandmother, a very simple, loving lady who became my anchor. She introduced me to her dearest friend, The Reverend Dr Martin Israel, a distinguished pathologist, and a former lecturer at the Royal College of Surgeons and a priest in the Church of England.

He has been described as 'one of the most sought-after spiritual guides in this country'; he was also a co-author of the bible of pathology. Martin married Michael and I, and christened all our children, becoming a very close and valued family friend; I have a lovely sculpture of him in the Chapel, which he left me when he died.

Society has expectations of people in my position and during my life I have

also taken on the pressures that come with such a role. I quickly fell into the routine of taking on responsibilities in the community, sitting on different committees and raising money for various charity events, etc, and generally acquiescing to any requests on my time. After some years this began to affect my health and, after a period of evaluation, I decided to give up most of these duties.

Instead I chose to nurture my spirit, which seemed to have been totally overshadowed by my sense of duty and responsibilities, a theme common to lots of busy women. This decision has been hugely beneficial and has wider repercussions on the people with whom I come into contact.

Some people may look upon these aspirations as being totally selfish. Personally I feel it to be possibly the most selfless act one can perform, not just for oneself but for humanity, involving a path of total commitment and a yearning for peace and understanding.

### Love of sculpting

At the age of about 30 I discovered pottery and sculpting and have spent the last 15 years sculpting in various different materials, clay, wax and plasters. I have produced many sculptures which I have used to express my varying emotional and mental states. Sculpture is vital to me and to my well-being, it brings me into a place of peace and I love the stillness it evokes in me.

Through submerging myself in the unconscious mind, through meditation and visualizations, I have discovered hidden treasures that have freed me and allowed my creativity to expand. As a result I have found that I am more instinctive and intuitive than I believed and when I am alone, my creative spirit comes alive.

I have mainly kept my work for my family and close friends to observe but I have also taken great pleasure in donating sculptures over the years to various charities.

My art has been inspired by Frieda Kahlo from Mexico, who was able to express herself through her art without hiding her emotions; Antoni Gaudi for his textures and his extraordinary creativity; and Salvador Dali, for his talent to express hidden meanings in his art. As for formal training, I attended Heatherleys



School of Fine Art in London and West Dean College in West Sussex.

### Spiritual life

I have been drawn to a life of spirituality to get to know myself on a deeper level and free myself from the conditioned mind and the constraints of the past. I travelled the globe looking for answers only to discover that there was nowhere to go and that everything I was searching for was right here inside me.

I have been blessed with five children and I understand the importance of taking responsibility for myself as this personal journey into healing will heal my children and prevent unwanted patterns repeating themselves. I believe this to be one of the most beneficial aspects that I as a mother can play in my children's lives. My children have been my greatest teachers, together with my soul-mate husband and devoted father, Michael, with whom I have shared a life together joyfully for over 25 years.

One of the greatest benefits of meditation for me is the peace this can bring to my mind. When life becomes overwhelming, I can sit and watch it all happening objectively and feel calm. It is the greatest gift that I can bestow on myself.

I have now reinstated a nearby chapel as a place for peace, meditation, contemplation and prayer as I would love to be able to share the wisdom and knowledge that can be obtained through silence!

My vision is that it will become a place of healing, where people can come for self-development such as workshops and retreats. It is in a quiet spot which backs onto a lovely chestnut avenue and woodland walk. It is open for 'drop in meditation' and for anyone wishing for a moment of quiet. For more details visit [www.cowdraychapel.co.uk](http://www.cowdraychapel.co.uk) . ☺

Above: **The Meditator** This piece has been made in silver and gold as a pendant to be worn around the neck. I originally cast it as a 6ft statue for the garden in bronze and I have also created a polished, black granite and a white marble version at 5ft. The diamond-shaped head is a symbol of the Ultimate, Truth, Wisdom and Knowledge connecting us with universal wisdom. This image represents to me the feeling of expansion and connection that I experience whilst meditating. Photo: Jeremy Harpur.

The diamond in the heart space represents love and compassion; love for ourselves and universal Love. The diamond in the abdomen area expresses the wholeness and integration of emptiness and matter. I like to think of this piece as a symbol of healing; a reminder of our connection to the perfection of creation which is in each and every one of us. I have committed the profits from the sales of this piece to the Cowdray Chapel and my hopes for a future residential centre of self-development. I am holding an exhibition and sale of my sculptures at Cowdray House, Midhurst, West Sussex, in late May; for the date and more information go to: [www.marinacowdray.co.uk](http://www.marinacowdray.co.uk) .