



"It strikes me that of all the animals that have influenced mankind, we have felt the greatest affinity with the birds. We envy and admire their elegance and freedom. In the flashing eyes and hooked beaks of birds of prey, we instinctively recognize ferocious strength. In the dazzling magnificence of birds of paradise, we perceive beauty that we desire for ourselves. In almost every human society we find art and myth linking man and bird: people with wings, people with falcon's heads, people attaching paint and plumage to their own bodies..." — Malcolm Kirk

8 Free As a Bird

*The Raven, bringing light to the world...
The Peacock, marrying the Sun Goddess...
The Phoenix, rising from the ashes...
Look, up in the sky! It's a bird!*

In Mexican folklore, the hummingbird was here before the world was born, freshening the mouth of the Creator with drops of dew and feeding him with the nectar of flowers.



Flying so high above us, dwelling as they do in the realm of the gods, it is no wonder that birds fill our myths. They are the symbols of our aspirations. We put bird's wings on our angels.

Can we understand what a bird soaring above meant to our ancestors? A hunter could be as deadly as a snake, as dangerous as a tiger. In the water he could swim like the fish. Running through the forest he might feel as swift

as a deer. So many of the animal powers were within human ability. But only a bird could fly like that.

Whereas tigers are a symbol of power and butterflies a symbol for beauty and transformation, I see birds as a symbol of freedom. The freedom of flight, certainly, and a spiritual freedom as well. Freedom from the earthly realm. Free to move between this realm and the celestial one. A symbol for the spirit.

Once I sat on a hilltop in California and watched a hawk soaring high above me. It floated on the air currents, effortless. I watched as a smaller hawk, flapping its wings, rose up to join it. The smaller bird would soar alongside the larger for a few minutes before it spiraled back down. Then flap, flap, flap, it would climb again to the large hawk which continued to soar effortlessly.

I imagined I was watching a mother bird teaching its baby how to fly. That hawk made it look so easy. It hardly moved a wing. As if flying were a state of being. I wondered, if I watched long enough, would it teach me too?

Birds also inspire a freedom in their depiction on the human face. The swiftness of their flight, the softness of their feathers, invites a looseness to your imagery and brush strokes. Their freedom from the earth allows you to move them around the face. And so many types of creatures are described by that one word: bird. From the majestic eagle, to the graceful swan, to the exotic parrot, to the ridiculous chicken.

The hummingbird was also the messenger of the gods and could turn into a bolt of lightning to carry out their vengeance. In battle he would fly in the night over the camps of his enemies and kill their chief as he slept.

