

WOLF
Book of Sacrifice

by

Martin Berkovitz

INTRODUCTION

In the winter of nineteen sixty eight while living in New York City, I had an unusual dream. In fact, it was more than a dream, it was a vision. I found myself lying on the rough floor of a large log cabin in full lucid awareness. At the cabin's far end I could just make out two floating white shapes. I arose and walked slowly through the darkness towards them. As I approached, I could clearly discern two elegant long white hands, seemingly disembodied. They then began to move.

And as they moved, they opened a medieval illuminated manuscript that was resting on a table. As the pages were turned the clear story emerged of a knight searching for a holy relic, a cross in which was contained a plank from the original cross of the crucifixion. The illustrations began with the scene of myself viewing this very book and ended with the knight's discovery of the cross. What came before and after was a mystery.

For three years I tried to reconstruct this story and did preliminary drawings. But it was not until nineteen seventy, while spending time in Germany that the story fell into place. While sailing down the Rhine one afternoon, I knew that this story must be told very simply. Ten pages of text and ten illustrations, succinct and direct. And how appropriate, as my knight came from what is now Germany.

The next year saw both the text and drawings complete, while living in London. In the second to last drawing the scene is clearly the Soviet Union, then very much alive and thriving. So not only is this an historical tale, the project itself is now historical. Since completion it has been stored away in a portfolio and has been seen by only a handful of people. Just as I first witnessed this story emerging from the dark on those illuminated and haunting pages, so now, after all this time the darkness of that portfolio can be opened to the light.

(all artwork within these pages)

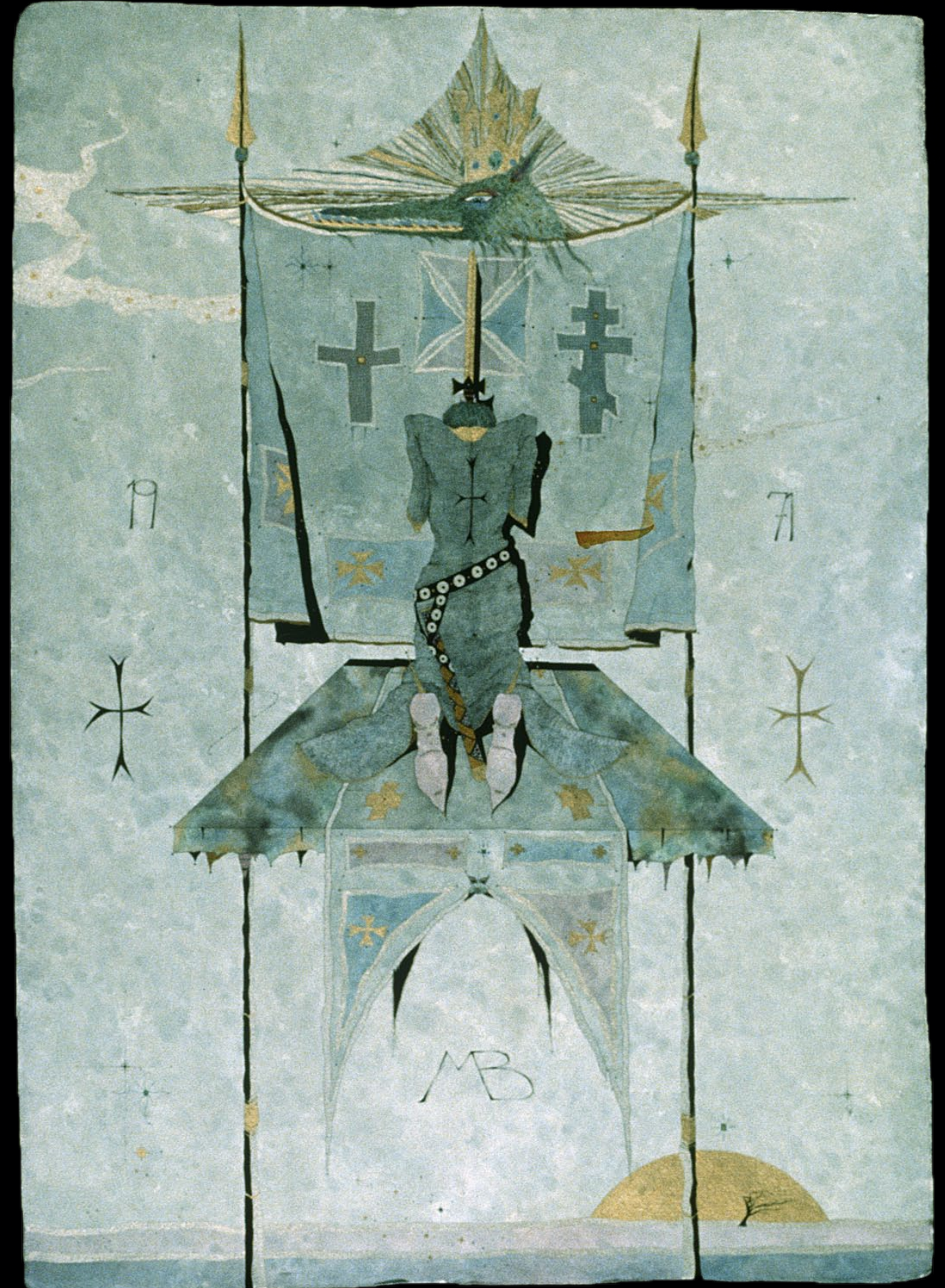
Ink, watercolor and gouache on watercolor paper 22 x 30 inches

THE MISSION

A thousand years ago I was born into a dark and violent Europe, a continent of feudal states, each one fortified against the other. The only communication was war. When I was twelve years old, my father's army was defeated by a neighboring barony. The only surviving member of my family, I escaped into the forest.

I lived in the woods, existing as a hunter, and occasionally in small villages, laboring at menial and hard tasks. I began to avoid such settlements, dwelling as much as possible in the forest.

One autumn evening in my nineteenth year, I chanced upon a decrepit castle. Winter was approaching and it being too cold to sleep in the forest, I determined to enter past the castle's heavy oak doors. I did not leave the castle for two years. When again I resumed my travels, it was as a knight of a sacred order, with a mission that was to take me far to the east, into the land of the Slavs.



JOURNEY TO THE EAST

My mission was to find a holy relic, a cross lying unknown to the world. It contained a plank from the cross of the crucifixion, and was believed by my Order to have the power to heal those who prayed before it. I was to find it and build a shrine, a place of solace for all men.

Traveling eastward, I encountered much suffering and disease. A plague had recently devastated the countryside and clusters of silent men could still be seen disposing of the victims. I neared a great pile of corpses that had just been set to the torch. On this monument of death I saw a pregnant woman, her hair a mass of flames. She looked at me with pale green eyes, already resigned; then a wall of smoke separated us.

After riding on for a distance, I stopped and looked back. Figures of gray smoke curled mockingly into the low sky.



THE STEPPES

One evening I came to the edge of a steep cliff. Below me the great steppe stretched endlessly into the east. As I began to dismount a savage giant brandishing a sword came galloping on horseback towards me. His blade cut deeply into my shoulder. He retreated and charged a second time. I quickly reined aside. Unable to stop, horse and rider plunged over the precipice!

My invisible guardians had not forgotten me. I survived despite the deep wound, the loss of blood, and my failing strength.



FROZEN HORSE

Two years of futile search passed and a terrible winter fell on the great plain. My coat of mail had long since rusted, my spurs were frozen tight. Icicles hung from my unkempt beard. I slept huddled against my horse. One night I awoke to find my animal frozen beside me.

In the morning I discerned some black shapes against the horizon. Numbly I stumbled in their direction.



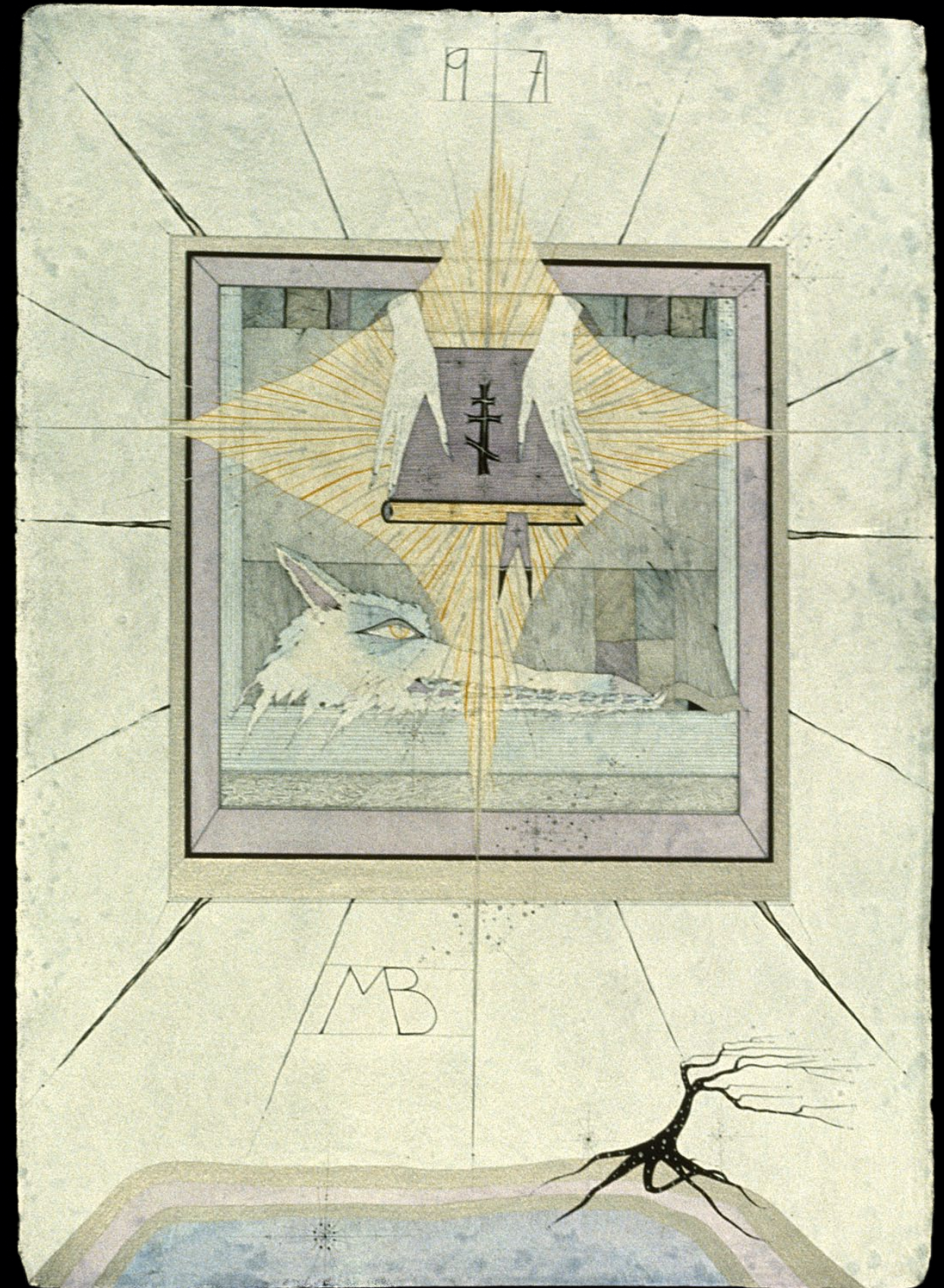
THE BOOK OF SACRIFICE

At nightfall I came to a large log cabin. The dark shapes...a village...still lay in the distance.

That night I had a strange and wondrous dream. At the far end of the cabin, I saw two disembodied white hands resting on a large book, floating in the darkness. This eerie manifestation impelled me to approach it. The long-fingered hands slowly began to open the book and turn its luminous pages. As I drew close enough to see its exquisite text and radiant pictures, I was shaken to the very core of my being.

This magnificent book told none other than the story of the holy cross and the searching knight. On those slowly turning pages I saw my past, I saw a picture even of the slender white hands that were now before me, I saw myself at last entering the chapel of the cross. There it abruptly ended.

I awoke violently, in tears and with a pounding heart. I looked around, the cabin was empty in the early morning light.



THE HUT; REALIZATION

When I recovered from my ecstasy, I set out for the village, no longer plodding hopelessly, but with sureness leading me on.

The village lay across a steep hollow. As I started down the icy slope, I slipped and fell, my rapid descent halted by the trunk of a large tree. My old wound reopened and I felt the warm blood oozing down my sleeve.

When I regained consciousness I was lying in a small hut, a peasant woman standing over me. With the help of a local hunter, she had carried me to this place.

After several days I was finally able to stand and walk. It was Friday. From a frosty window I could see most of the bleak village. At some distance from it lay a small building. I questioned the peasant woman, who replied that it was an unused chapel. My blood surged through my veins...THE CHAPEL!



THE CHAPEL

Despite the woman's protestations and my great weakness, I managed to dress myself. My shoulder still bled with even the slightest exertion.

I reached the building late in the afternoon, just as the sun was setting. The windows were broken and the door was barred. From some unknown source, strength welled up in me and I forced the door open. It banged noisily against the wall. The chapel was exactly as in my dream, except that there were two crosses.

At once I knew the real cross. My heart leaped towards it.

I decided I must bring the cross to the village. The simple woman who had so kindly nursed me would be the first to know of this miraculous discovery.



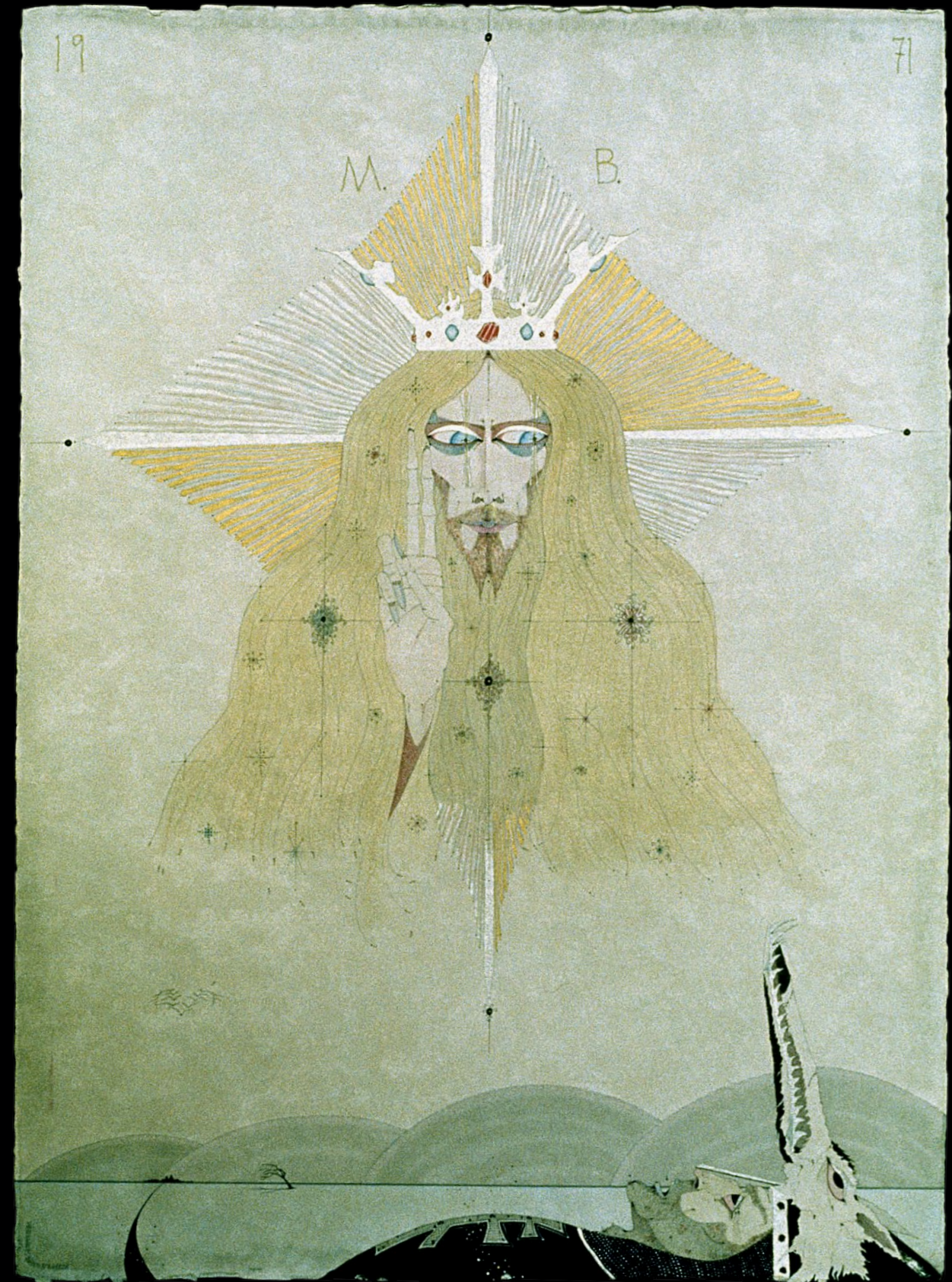
THE DEATH OF WOLF

Outside the chapel it was dark and cold. I lifted the heavy cross onto my back and struggled towards the village. Halfway there I stumbled and fell; the cross pinned me against the hard snow.

The cold became piercing and I trembled uncontrollably. Gradually the trembling stopped and I began to feel warmer. It came to me then that I would never build my shrine, never tell people of the miraculous cross. Bitterness filled my heart and angry tears clouded my eyes. After all that searching, striving, suffering, the secret of the cross would die with me!

I looked up into the darkness. Suddenly a vision of blinding brilliance appeared. It was as if all the stars had joined together to create a Christ clad in knightly armor, teaching man to search for love and light. I knew then that the search and the reward are one and the same.

The vision disappeared. I saw only the black sky. My anger and despair vanished. I felt a deep and infinite peace.



POWER DAM

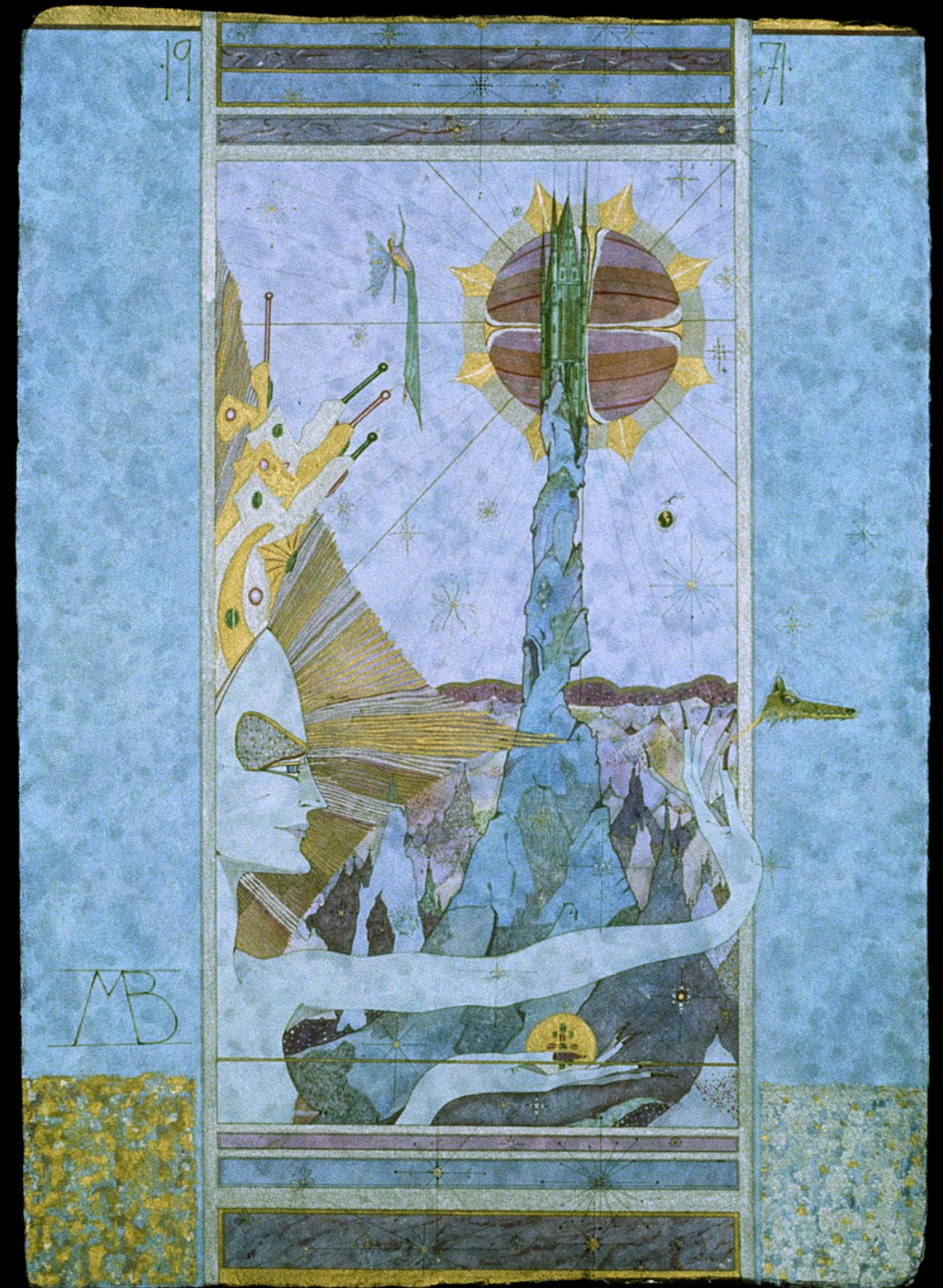
The following morning the hunter found my body, frozen to the cross. He dragged my corpse and the cross back to the hut of the peasant woman. They buried me in a nearby forest, between two young evergreen trees. Not knowing the special meaning of the cross, they used it to mark my grave.

Today, a great power dam is built on a mighty river. It is surrounded by a forest that has within it two of the tallest trees in the land. To the local townspeople they seem like sentinels, and in truth they are just that, for they guard an ancient shrine.



IN A LAND OF MIGHTY MOUNTAINS

In that terrible and sublime winter of long ago I ascended
to a castle in a land of mighty mountains.



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