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### Fragments

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# Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in Metals and Jewelry Design  
Department of the School for American Craft

## **Fragments**

By

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Date: April 2017

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## **Abstract**

My work comes from my understanding and perception of historical fragments. I think imperfection is a natural beauty, which exists everywhere in our lives. My perspective was influenced by a Buddhist theory called “Wabi-sabi”, and I referred to the method of “architecture renovation” to create my jewelry work. During the creation, I was also inspired by a jewelry artist named John Iverson, with his work influencing the many forms and techniques I used for this project.

I also adopted a different method of constructing material to represent my interpretation of my observation of “fragments.” In my heart, fragments not only belong to the past— they also belong to our current selves.

## **Introduction**

My interest in “Fragments” was derived from my family. My father is a passionate antiques collector and has done research for many years. From a very early age, I have seen many antiques and have developed an understanding of the field. From this, I have realized that most of antiques are in imperfect condition, accumulating minor damage such as cracks or rust. To me, these imperfections are what helps attain an antique’s beauty. Broken pieces represent a natural and organic beauty, which have free forms without any artificial polish; their “scars” make each piece unique, meaningful, and inspires a person’s fascination.

I believe fragments exist everywhere. They can be broken items, or they can also be memories. I will explore various forms of fragments from history, nature and imagination for my thesis. In my mind, fragments are not useless. They are a record of past experiences. My hope is that when people look at my thesis works, they do not just see the intact parts, but the imperfections as well.

## Sources and Research

I agree with a philosophic theory called “Wabi-sabi”, or commonly known as, “the beauty of imperfection.”

Wabi-sabi represents a comprehensive Japanese world view or aesthetic that is centered on the acceptance of transience and imperfection. The aesthetic is sometimes described as one of beauty that is "imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete." It is a concept derived from the Buddhist teaching of the three marks of existence; impermanence, suffering and emptiness, or, absence of self-nature.<sup>1</sup> Characteristics of the Wabi-sabi aesthetic include asymmetry, asperity (roughness or irregularity), simplicity, economy, austerity, modesty, intimacy, and appreciation of the ingenuous integrity of natural objects and processes.<sup>2</sup>

Fragments have the same characteristics. They are manifestations of improvisations and are fruits that spontaneously erupt from the ground of time and chance. Though they are not perfect in most people’s eyes, each piece is unique and unduplicated. In light of the theory of “Wabi Sabi,” imperfection is the natural cycle of life, and thus it is important to accept it. As human beings, we always desire or want to make things perfect, but no matter how much effort is made, there will always be some level of error.

The theory is not just about teaching people to persevere. It has more profound meaning on how to improve ourselves: as long as we accept who we are, with our mistakes and flaws, we become faithful to ourselves, which can provide room for us to improve ourselves. My

attitude towards fragmented pieces is the same. Broken pieces are not useless, one can learn a lot from them. Taking historical relics for example, parts may be missing or some decorations are incomplete, yet we still obtain an abundance of information from their symbols, materials or techniques. These valuable artifacts help us to understand our history and development of human society. Our own life experience works this way. When we look back, our personal history is memorable; it helps to shape our current selves and to reach the dreams of our future.

We all have many dreams in our life. They may be dreams that we pursue, or one of the thousands that we have had during our childhood. Most are forgotten, but there are occasions where one will jump out to us in a random occurrence, only when we realize that dreams are still a fragment of our memories. I often say, “what you never forget is the true voice of your soul.” I believe it is important to be aware of these enduring dreams.

When the topic of “preservation” is brought up, many people may think of restoring a piece of art back to its original form. However, in this situation, while the past is certainly an indispensable part of a fragment, the “present” is another integral part as well in accordance with Wabi-sabi. In this project, I combined these two features in my thesis, which brings up the idea of “renovation”.

Renovation simply means the retention and repair of old buildings with the incorporation of new construction to transform itself into a new structure while maintaining a structural practicality and old charm. I have studied interior design and architecture for a number of years,



and I have found the topic of architectural renovation the most fascinating area of study in this field.

One of the most impressive projects of renovation is the entrance to the Louvre located in Paris, France. The new entrance was designed by a Chinese-American architect Ieoh Ming Pei (born April 26, 1917), commonly known as I. M. Pei, who is often called the master of modern architecture. The new entrance was created as a solution to a series of problems with the Louvre's original main entrance, which could no longer handle the enormous number of visitors on an everyday basis.<sup>2</sup> I. M. Pei designed a glass and steel pyramid at the center of the courtyard, which serves as an entrance and anteroom skylight. It is mirrored by another inverted pyramid below, to reflect sunlight into the room. Visitors entering through the new pyramid descend into the spacious lobby then re-ascend into the main Louvre buildings; the underground lobby beneath is a complex of additional floors for research, storage, and maintenance purposes. These designs were partly a homage to the fastidious geometry of the famous French landscape architect André Le Nôtre (1613–1700). Pei's transparent pyramid entrance is considered the "most compatible with the architecture of the Louvre, especially with the faceted planes of its roofs".<sup>3</sup>



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The Louvre is well-known as a historical place, but I. M. Pei designed a very modern structure to match it. At first this proposal aroused much controversy, but after a life-size "mock pyramid" appeared in the Place du Louvre, people were persuaded by its harmony and beauty. I have visited the Louvre years ago, and besides being astonished, I could not find any place that felt any disharmony as I observed all the buildings holistically. I think this is the most attractive renovation project--the combination of past and present; the marriage of conflict and harmony.

I pursued creating jewelry works in the same manner as constructing a building. Both ways are based on solid structure, and undergo rational layouts and appropriate materials to express creation or one's ideas. Jewelry therefore is in some ways is a miniature form of architecture with elements of the past and present, supporting an effort to make the future better.

## Critical Analysis

I chose contemporary jewelry as a vehicle to interpret my thoughts. Jewelry normally has a special meaning to people, for it is the thing people cherish and keep in the long term. Contemporary jewelry nowadays has more freedom with forms and materials which means I have less limitations to create different fragments.

One artist who inspires me in the creation of my own jewelry is John Iversen, born in Hamburg, Germany, and apprenticed in Vancouver, Canada. He has been creating his jewelry in New York for over 25 years. A master craftsman and artist, Iversen has been acknowledged for his work with the George Jensen Award at the Smithsonian Craft Show, the Ornament Magazine Excellence in Jewelry Award, and the Vendura Prize for Jewelry at the Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show. His personally executed designs and one-of-a-kind pieces have graced the covers of fashion magazines, exhibited worldwide, and presented to foreign dignitaries by past presidential administrations.



Iverson is an artist who is unafraid of using elements of nature and imperfections such as small cracks. His works are composed of small shapes adhered together with connection techniques that renders it invisible to the eye. In many ways, his pieces resemble a puzzle, with matching of each piece in order to create a whole component. I admire the way he plays with the "whole" and the "individual." Even single pieces have their own unique contour, but harmonious when they are combined together. I believe his creation comes from his sensitive vision for nature, and I appreciate his way of gathering large number of small pieces to create one composition. In my thesis work, I introduced this kind of accumulation as a main technical expression.

In my thesis work, I introduced Iverson's kind of accumulation as a main technique. In the first series called, "Fragments of History," I chose copper as the primary material. In order to make the appearance of my work organic, I closed my eyes and tore sheet paper into small pieces. I then picked pieces of which I felt were suitable, and cut copper according to the shapes that were chosen. For colors, I employed enamel and patina to mimic an antique rust appearance.

Chinese Bronze and Chinese literature were my sources of inspiration. These elements are typical symbols of China. They represent the ancient society's thriving and prosperous cultures, but today what we can see is merely a small part. Because of the bronze artifacts incomplete and inconsistent feature, I left relatively large and uneven spaces between each piece, which I then connected with wires and metal cords. The act of threading fragments together references the connecting of each piece of history to its entirety.

The Second series of “Fragments of Imagination” is my envisioning the past. I applied “fragments” into a freer form in this series. Just like time and memory, there are no certain shapes to symbolize imagination. Thus, I spontaneously wove wires into various shapes without a clear plan ahead. I used metal wire as a primary material first because of its soft and malleable qualities, thereby easing my ability to create random shapes. Furthermore, using wire as opposed to other materials were preferable as it could shape a transparent space in contrast to a hard surface. I then applied enamel with various levels of thickness to cover the wire as a representation of snow or moonlight, a reflection of the natural world. Last but not least, white is the main color in this subject; to represent a dream-like state of nature.

My third series, “Fragments of Earth” stems from the fragments originating in nature. Certain aspects of nature work at an individual level. These different spheres of the certain ecosystem intercalate to form a functioning whole. For example, the image of a tree can stand on its own. However, under a backdrop of the Sun a new image is created, which exudes a different set of parameters. In this series, I convey images of leaves, moss, and minerals as the “fragments” of the earth. These provide organic properties, and thus I employed mixed material to express earth fragments. I used metal as the frame of construction, which I sew into a basic canvas and the materials are then painted to coalesce with mixed wood, dust, and sand to form a hardened, organic texture. Oil paints were chosen as a main coloring media to create earthy tones.

## **The Work**

### **Fragment of History #1 (Figure 1,2,3)**

This collection derived from my thoughts of history and inspiration from the Chinese antiques I previously encountered. I decided to adopt those elements during my work in progress. Antique colors and uncompleted Chinese writing present an imprint from history. Colors in my thesis mimic bronze oxidation by using over heated enamel to achieve blueish and greenish colors and emphasizing contours with black oxidized edges, which resemble the fire burnt imprint from various wars. On the surface of the work I wrote poems from "SiJing" (this is the earliest poetry collection originating from the Chinese sage society in 11th century BC). SiJing is the model for Chinese literature and reflects the social aspects of life. According to historical records, there were as many as three thousand poems in the collection, but only three hundred exists today. I use black wires to connect each fragment, because black wire is a symbol of a time line, which as a vehicle brings us back to witness the happenings of yesterday. One cannot truly say they know everything about the past, no matter how advanced our investigative techniques. This gap is the space from which my work comes to be.

### **Fragment of History #1 (Figure 4,5,6,7)**

In order to lead the audience further into my concept, the element of water was added into my thesis show. It is said "history is a mirror," and water reflection shares the same symbolization with the mirror. In this work, I used wavy thin wire and knots to connect pieces, which resemble the ancient Chinese technique of using knotted ropes to record events.

### **Fragment of Imagination #2 (Figure 8,9)**

This collection reflects on how fragments exist in abstract ways. Since this concept came from my viewpoint, the works more specifically express a female's thoughts and imagination. I combined wire and enamel together, in one aspect to express a woman's delicate mind or disorganization; in another aspect this means our imagination is unreal and free.

This group of works are body pieces that are shaped in armor forms because I think thoughts and ideas are very powerful-they give you power to battle with any difficulty and give you power to fight for your desires.

### **Fragment of Imagination #1 (Figure 10,11)**

I adopted leaf shapes and fruit shapes to depict my imagination about the Garden of Eden. I use wires to weave my dreamed life, which is not just about love, but also about a peaceful and carefree natural life. This is the reason I chose a cross shoulder form body jewelry, which resembles a hunter's dress. This is a place you can willfully run free and be content.

### **Fragment of Imagination #1 (Figure 10,11)**

I wove a vessel to represent our minds. I think the human brain is like a soft and transparent container, in which our ideas continually come and go, and always having space to freely grow.

### **Fragment of Earth #1 (Figure 14, 15)**

Moss is the sign of moisture. Whenever I find moss, I can imagine the presence of passing rain or a stream not far away.

In order to achieve a wearable weight and semblance to moisture at the same time, I employed metal frames and canvas together. Colors are created from oil paints, and textures from mixing glue, fine wood dust and sands together. I used organic shapes and color to show a natural look. Moss is very common in nature, but I am always surprise with its beauty which cannot be ignored.

**Fragment of Earth #2** (Figure 16,17,18)

Minerals are wondrous fragments of Earth. In this collection I set raw tourmaline, quartz crystal and amethyst in a metal and canvas frame with texturing techniques to simulate the rough and raw beauty of mineral deposits. I embedded the crystalline into each piece to generate a visual picture for the audiences-the vision of exquisiteness deep within Earth.



## **Conclusion**

It is not about nostalgia

It is not about regret

Fragment is a common and natural thing in our life

To accept how the world is

To accept who we are

keep moving

And we will become better us

## Figures

Figure 1. Fragment of History (Stud)



Figure 2. Fragment of History (Earring)



Figure 3. Fragment of History (Necklace)



Figure 4. Fragment of History (Necklace)



Figure 5. Fragment of History detail



Figure 6. Fragment of History in collection #1

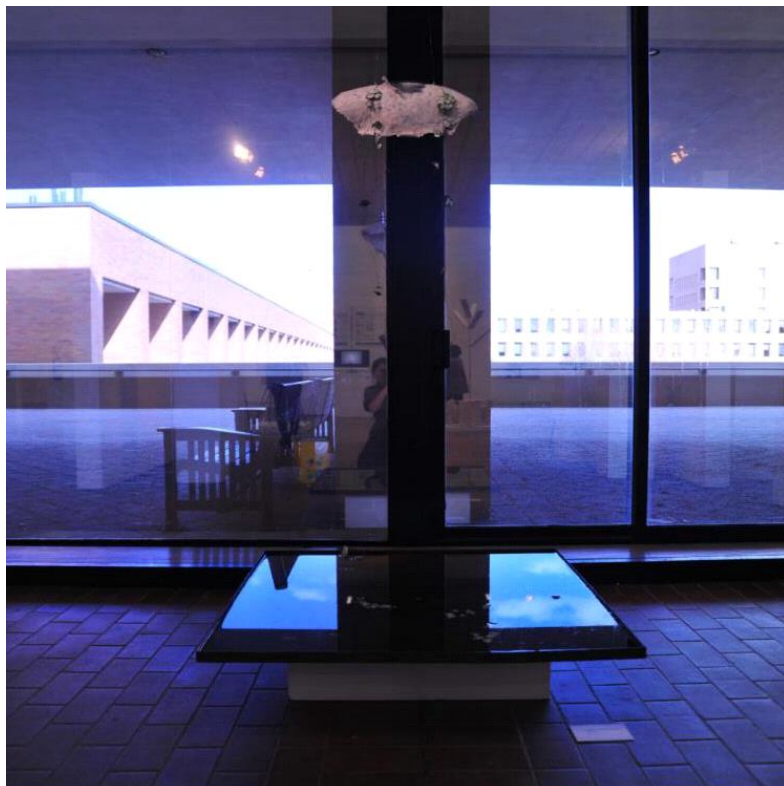


Figure 7. Fragment of History in collection #2



Figure 8. Fragment of Imagination (Body Jewelry)



Figure 9. Fragment of Imagination (Bracelet)



Figure 10. Fragment of Imagination (Earing)





Figure 11. Fragment of Imagination (Body Jewelry)

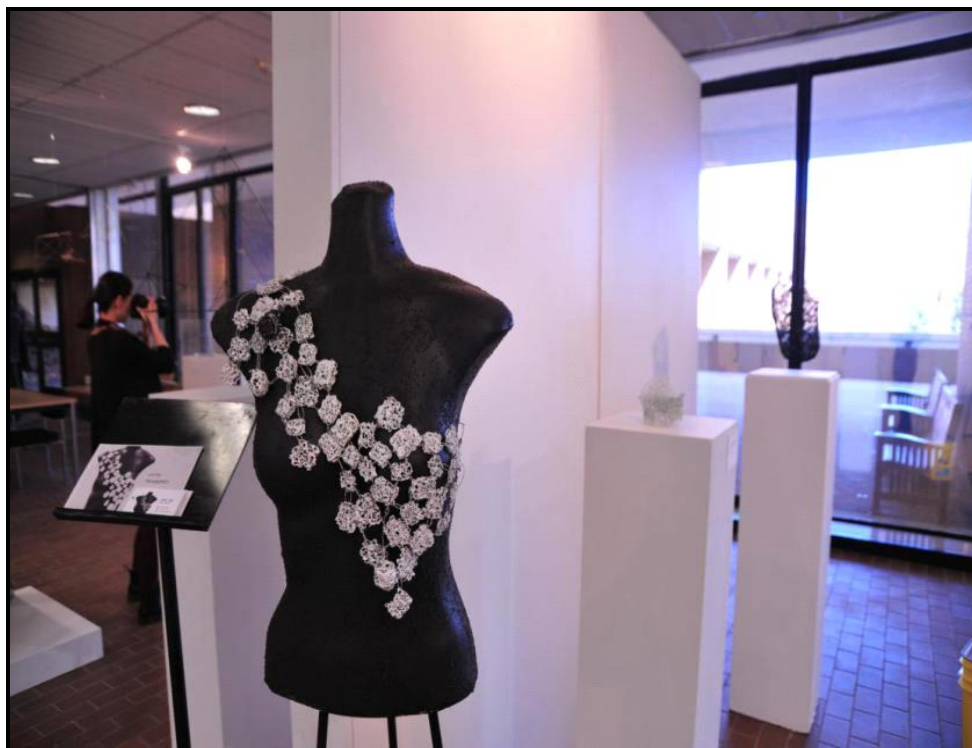


Figure 12. Fragment of Imagination detail



Figure 13. Fragment of Imagination (Vessel)



Figure 14. Fragment of Earth (Brooch)





Figure 15. Fragment of Earth (Brooch)



Figure 16. Fragment of Earth (Brooch)

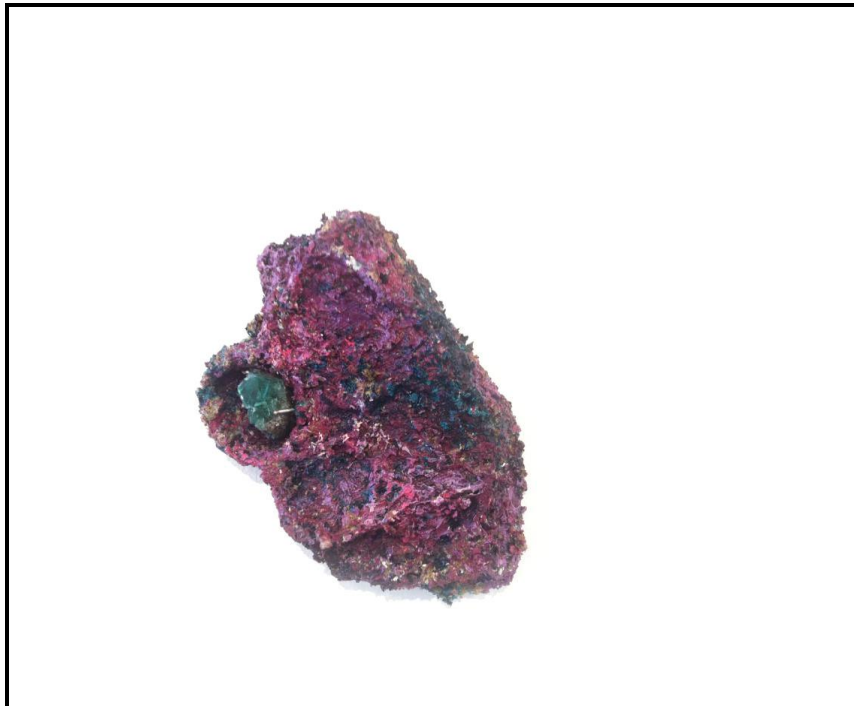


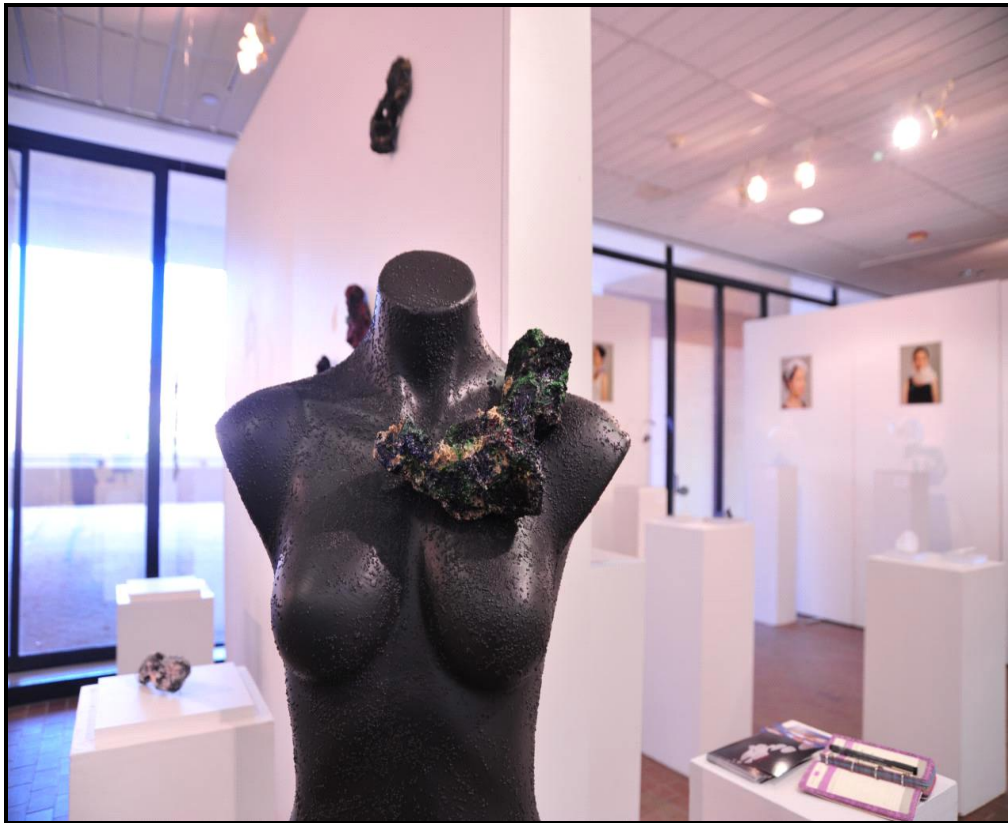
Figure 17. Fragment of Earth (Brooch)



Figure 18. Fragment of Earth (Brooch) Detail



Figure 19. Fragment of Earth in collection



## Endnotes

- 1 The term “Wabi-Sabi” is defined on Wikipedia at  
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wabi-sabi>
- 2 “Wabi Sabi: The Japanese Art of Impermanence” by Andrew Juniper, November 15, 2003
- 3 “Louvre Pyramid” Wikipedia,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louvre\\_Pyramid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louvre_Pyramid)
- 4 “Louvre” Wikipedia  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I.\\_M.\\_Pei#cite\\_ref-Boehm.2C\\_p.\\_84\\_102-0](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I._M._Pei#cite_ref-Boehm.2C_p._84_102-0)
- 5 photo “Courtyard of the Museum of Louvre” from Benh Lieu Song created at 18 April 2010  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Louvre\\_Museum\\_Wikimedia\\_Commons.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Louvre_Museum_Wikimedia_Commons.jpg)
- 6 Jhon Iversn E.R.Butler&CO  
<http://www.erbutler.com/designers/iversen>