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### A discussion of my work

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Fine and Applied Arts  
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

A Discussion of My Work

By

Lynne Hull

01-15-1985

APPROVALS

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Date: April 1, 1986

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FORWARD

Since graduate school, it's taken me three years to finally come to terms with my written thesis. In looking back, I realize I was in no position to even begin writing. Partly due to my lack of writing and editing skills, and partly because my thesis topic was too general, I needed this time to organize and focus my thinking toward a clearer understanding of the origins and directions my art has evolved from, and into, throughout the last three years.

I overcame my lack of technical writing skills through exercises ranging from personal journals and letters to statements about my work. Regarding the generality, I have worked at focusing in on some of the basic thoughts I have generated from my work. This has forced me to stop periodically and look at my work, seeing what it projects, while always questioning and evaluating, thus making me my own best critic. Since discovering this process, I have realized that it will be an on-going event throughout my life.

As I began thinking about one particular aspect of my work, another would appear. Analogous to peeling an onion, as I pull off one layer, another one appears. This is called multi-dimensional or layered thinking. Graduate school expanded my understanding of the world, of myself, and of my work. I saw those two years as a time when I



focused in on, and thought about, who I was, and what my work was about. Graduate school also taught me how to problem solve by taking an idea, focusing in on it and developing it to its fullest potential (expanding my horizons). I realize the importance of an instructional push and the other graduate students who helped build a family unit that was supportive and enthusiastic about each other's growth and development. Graduate school was a time for teamwork and participation, not a place to come and sit back and absorb. It was what I was willing to put into it, not what I expected to take from it. Basically, it gave me two years to find out how much desire and energy I had to give to my work, and its importance in my life.

## INTRODUCTION

I have approached the written portion of my thesis as an informal discussion of my thoughts, interests, and concerns as an artist. Through this writing I am fostering a clearer understanding of the many factors that have helped to facilitate my personal development as an artist. These factors include influential stimuli and sources that have shaped both my aesthetic and conceptual ideas.

I would like to begin by stating my intentions behind this written thesis, and by explaining why I feel a need to approach this paper in a different manner than traditionally

expected. Oftentimes, thesis papers are written from a technical standpoint that does not speak of the artist's influences, aesthetics, and conceptual concerns. My intent is to convey an understanding of my attitudes, thoughts, and feelings about my work in a written format. I want it to be a personal observation of myself and my development as an artist. This may not seem so unusual except for the fact that I have gotten so technically involved in the metal spinning process that it would be very natural to base my whole thesis around this technical information gained through my need to create vessel forms. However, I do not wish to address the technical sense of my work, except when it is necessary for me to show how I have approached a technique to gain a particular visual result. This is not to say that technique is not important, but rather to state that it is only a detail involved in my work. It is necessary to have good craftsmanship, so that it does not get in the way of the statements my work is trying to make. For me, the technical process of my work is much less important; therefore, I would like to address aspects that are of more importance to me, such as self-expression. In order to more clearly understand my processing and growth through my work I have chosen Intent, Influences, and Format as the three most important areas to investigate in this paper.

INTENT

As an artist, my work is an extension of myself and a means for communication. It expresses my feelings and desires, telling who I am, and the environment in which I live. It offers a personal interpretation of my surroundings and experiences. In a sense it is a self-portrait. When speaking of communication I mean that my work must offer its audience something, a feeling or an emotion; if not, then there will be no communication taking place. It should create an interaction. The work should project a thought, and the viewer should have some response to that projection. To get the viewer's attention, one has to offer a commonality; something that he/she can relate to before the interaction can take place. This is why I have chosen to use the vessel as my format. It is a recognizable source for the viewer to draw upon. But before I talk specifically about my work and the vessel format, I want to address the influences that are responsible for my development.

INFLUENCES: Experimental

So much of what I am as an artist is based on my life experiences and the environment I live in, as well as tradition and lineage. The choices and obstacles that have been put in front of me are all contributing to the development of my work. It wasn't until leaving the Pacific





Photo Number 1 "Four Cornered Vessel"



enough, and that there had to be more of my personal self put into the work instead of mimicking technical feats. It was always made clear to the graduate students at RIT that there is a tendency for schools to develop a particular style and look. Because of this awareness, I feel I pushed to create work that was from within me and not from the school I was attending. RIT is known for the industrial technology involved in its students' work, so I , like many others, chose to work with the machinery that was available. But I was not willing to compromise the personalized statements in my work. If anything, the machinery helped facilitate this. I will later address technological influences.

#### INFLUENCES: Materials

The materials that I chose to work with are very influential in my work. They not only stimulate my creative thinking but affect the actual making of the object. When creating a vessel out of a precious metal (of monetary value) I tend, like most, to be more conservative in my approach. While working with copper and especially with aluminum, I can work more freely, similar to an artist working clay. I don't worry about how much material I am wasting by trying things that I am not sure are possible. Photograph #1, called "Four-Cornered Vessel", is a good

example of what I am trying to portray. While working on the spinning lathe, I began thinking of the possibilities of forming something other than a round disc of metal, so I tried spinning a square which developed into an interesting asymmetrical form that didn't speak of the traditionally formed metal from the metal spinning process. It was a matter of thinking unconventionally. I was getting away from the norm of symmetry and consistency when it came to the industrial machinery that was at hand for us at school. Industry built these pieces of machinery for specific purposes, and as an artist one can get consumed by the machine instead of addressing it with a creative approach.

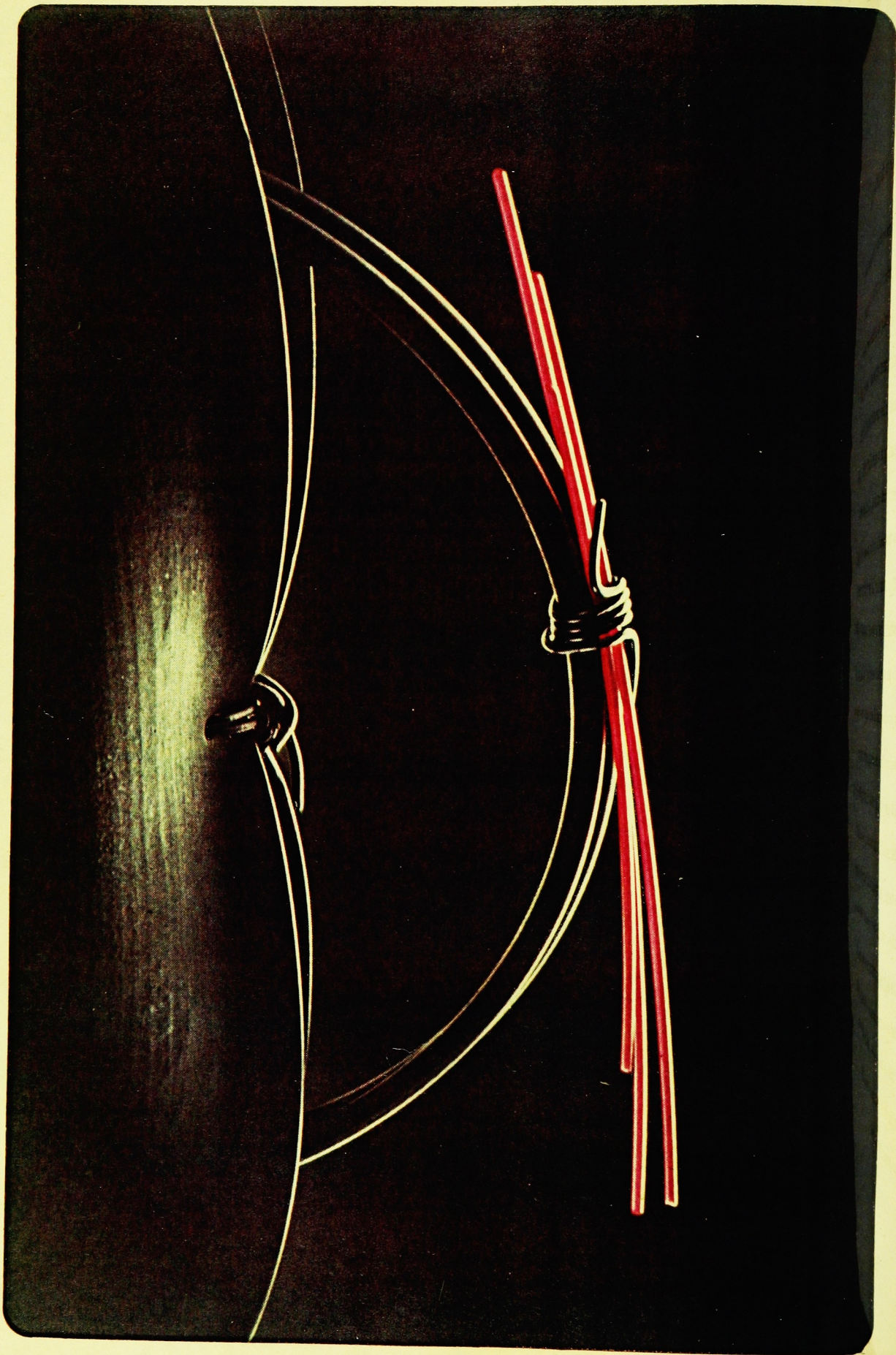
This tight technical approach which has been prevalent for many years in the metal-smithing field is what had held metalwork back in its development of the renaissance that all other media have been experiencing. Other contributing factors are the use of precious metals that I spoke of earlier, and the tremendous effect Danish Modern aesthetics have had on the American art schools. There will always be stylistic influences showing up in contemporary work, but to dominating influence such as the Danish Modern look can only be stifling to the young artists trying to develop their own aesthetics and style from within.

INFLUENCES: Technology

Technology is another influential factor in my work. The industrial processes developed for metalworking during the industrial revolution took place around the turn of the 19th century, resulting in the controversy over handmade crafts and machine produced items. Even today the metal artists have a tendency to believe that metal formed on a spinning lathe has less value than a piece of holloware that was hand raised. I wonder why we metalsmiths are the only artists still struggling with this issue today. A comparison and contrast to metals may be made with ceramics. The clay world has accepted a potter's wheel as an extension of the artist's hand. The difference between this process and the spinning lathe is negligible. They perform the same functions in each of their respective medias. The use of the spinning lathe is a quicker process, less labor-intensive, and it affords greater precision for developing better fitted inter-connecting components such as lids. To throw clay on a potter's wheel takes skill and craftsmanship just as does forming metal on a spinning lathe. But because the industrial world has only used the process for forming cookware and parts for industrial machinery, there are very few artists and craftspeople using the process. My work involving the use of the spinning lathe proves that an industrial machine can be used by an artist to develop objects that project the philosophy and ideals while



Photo Number 2    “Purse Form”





remaining true to the intent behind the work.

One of the key factors in my development was the increased productivity of my work, due to the spinning process. I finally had the technical means to keep my productivity current with my ideas. I was able to create more pieces in less time which forced me to finalize my ideas, enabling me to explore different avenues. It also helped me to work out design, structural and aesthetic problems that normally would not have arisen in such a short time. This productivity led me to undertake conceptual series which helped me view detail in an entirely different manner. An example of the detailing I am talking about can be seen in photograph #2 which clearly shows the rings that are developed from the forming process on the metal. I chose to keep the rings instead of burnishing them out, like most, because I feel that they not only were a wonderful subtle detail, but they also tell of how the form was made. I see these rings as a clue to its formation. Even more so, just like each hammer stroke on a raised piece, each line speaks of the contact that was made by its creator, and how long it took to develop the form. I see the rings as being very similar to the growth rings on a tree, giving a historical perspective to the viewer.





Photo Number 3 "Tea Pot"



INFLUENCES: The Orient

Seattle's port, being the western stepping-stone on the way to the Orient, has definitely affected the environment in which I live. The Northwest has been influenced aesthetically by the Japanese in almost all facets of life. The architecture and landscaping so often speak of Japanese tea gardens and ceremonial dwellings. All of these have a horizontal "directioning" in their design and an incredible sense for detailing. In How to Package Five More Eggs by Hideyuke Oka, he shows the painstaking work involved in packaging. This book shows a universal sensibility carried through all objects down to the smallest and most inconsequential form and detailing used by the Japanese. It is their clear and simplistic design format that has always drawn me to their work. The importance of their traditions and their arts also draws me closer and has helped develop my interest in the vessel as my format. The tea ceremony shows the importance of the drinking vessel in their everyday life. Understanding this ceremony leads me to use symbolism in my work. Photograph #3 shows the tea pot I constructed which was inspired by the Japanese ceremony but developed by my own aesthetic ideals. After finishing this piece I came to the conclusion that it was not necessary for me to do functional items with specific uses in mind but more to create sculpturally oriented work which functioned as a beautiful object to decorate one's living space.





Photo Number 4 "Ceramic Vessel"



INFLUENCES: Ceramic vessels

After talking previously about technology and the clay artist's work, I now must speak of the ceramic influences involved in my work. I have turned to looking at other media for my influences because it lessens the chance of inbred ideas developing, and because clay work has such a sense of freedom about it that modern metalwork is lacking. Photograph #4 is a ceramic vessel that my father picked up in China during World War II. It led me to explore Chinese ceramics and find that certain dynasties created porcelain work that connected with me spiritually. The simplicity and clarity of form shows an inner strength and comfort about this vessel that I enjoy very much. The subtlety involved in the glazes, blue on blue, suggests an indication of the front from the back of the piece. This is done by drawing the viewer to a particular spot on the form through detail that distinguishes the vessel from others by symbolism.

Another ceramic influence is the Southwest Indian potter. The Pueblos developed some of the most beautiful ritualistic vessels made by man. These people value the function and meaning behind the vessel, treating it as something special. Knowing the life-giving and sustaining function of the vessel, the Pueblo people incorporated it



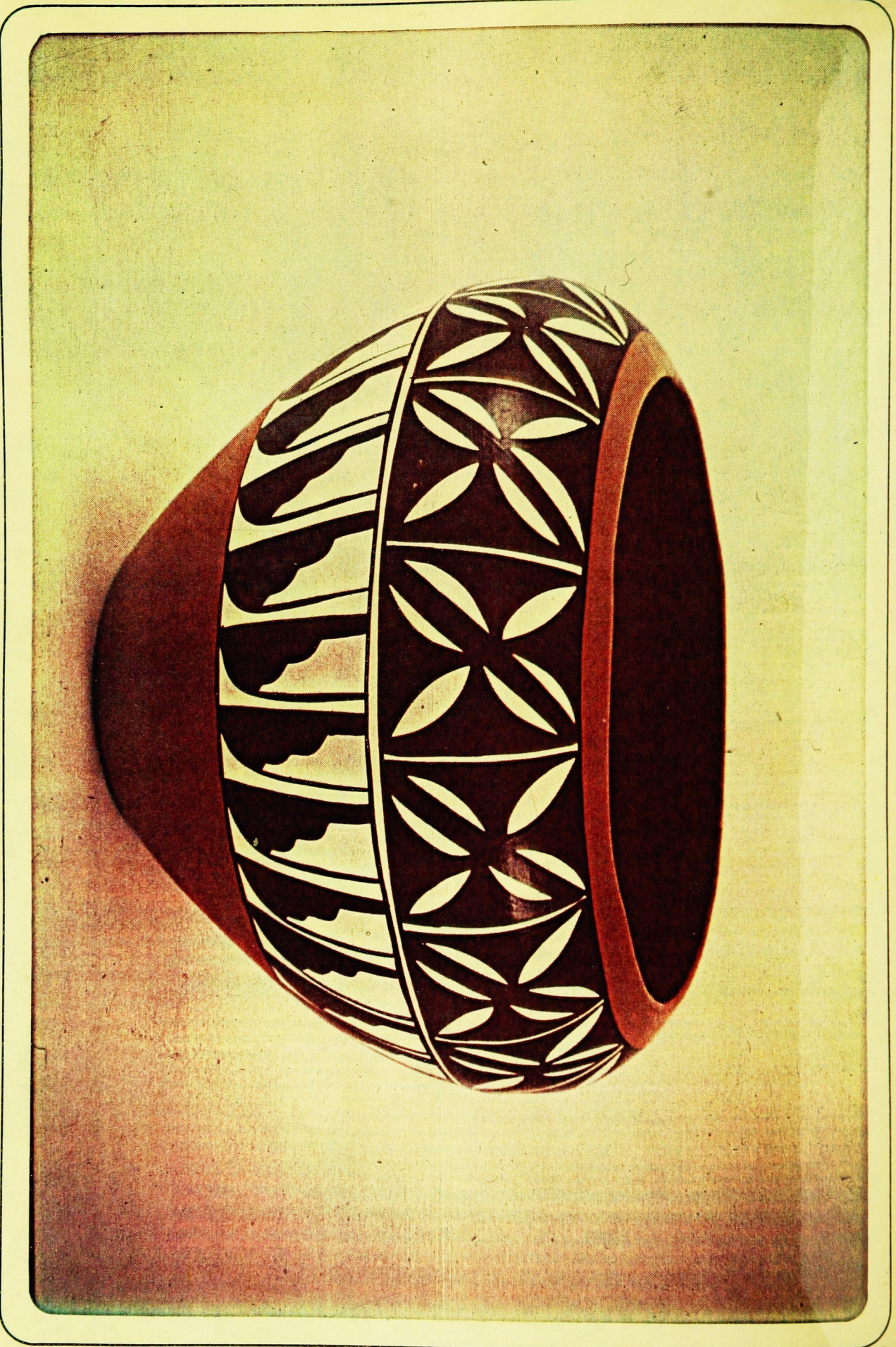


Photo Number 5 "Pueblo Indian Vessel"



into not only their functional lifestyle, but also their spiritual world. They simply saw it as an extension of themselves and their art. Oftentimes they decorated the surfaces with painted symbols that told of their tradition and lineage. Photograph #5 is an example of a piece of ceramics that I acquired from the Taos Pueblo Indians on a recent trip to New Mexico. Even though this piece is a contemporary production piece that they have created for market, it still has the interrrlated symbolism that is behind all of their work.

FORMAT: The Vessel

I have chosen to use the vessel as my form for communication. The vessel creates a sense of presence and mass that symbolizes myself and the world around me. This idea of using the vessel as a metaphor for human form has been evident since the beginning of art. There are many examples throughout history indicating that the form of the vessel is realistically defined as a woman. Even today potters use anatomical terms to define the different parts of their pots. The bottom of the bowl, which comes in contact with the ground, is termed the foot. The rims of the containers are often referred to as the lips. The actual walls of the vessel are most important to my work. They define a space and create a presence of their own that

I see as representing woman. The vessel symbolizes woman's ability to give life to another being. Prehistoric findings like the "Venus of Wildondorf" clearly illustrate the symbolic representation of life and fertility. I have abstracted the forms into a vessel format. In doing this I see my vessels as feminine and an extension of myself.

The other connection with life-giving properties of the vessel is the development of its original function. The vessel was developed to ease the effort of nourishing oneself. It is thought that much of the early utensil development was created by the women who were responsible for the preparation of the food while the men were hunting. My vessels not only represent woman in general, but specifically they are self-representational. As my work has developed, I have found that each piece has taken on certain personality traits from within myself. Some are serious and formal, some playful and whimsical and some sensuously casual. This has not been necessarily intentional on my part but more an evolutionary development from the process itself. It is as if the mood I happen to be in while designing gets transferred to the work. This reassures me that all parts of myself go into the creation of my vessels.

Another reason for the use of the vessel format is the aesthetic qualities it offers. The vessel has a unity that is comforting through its self-containment. There is no



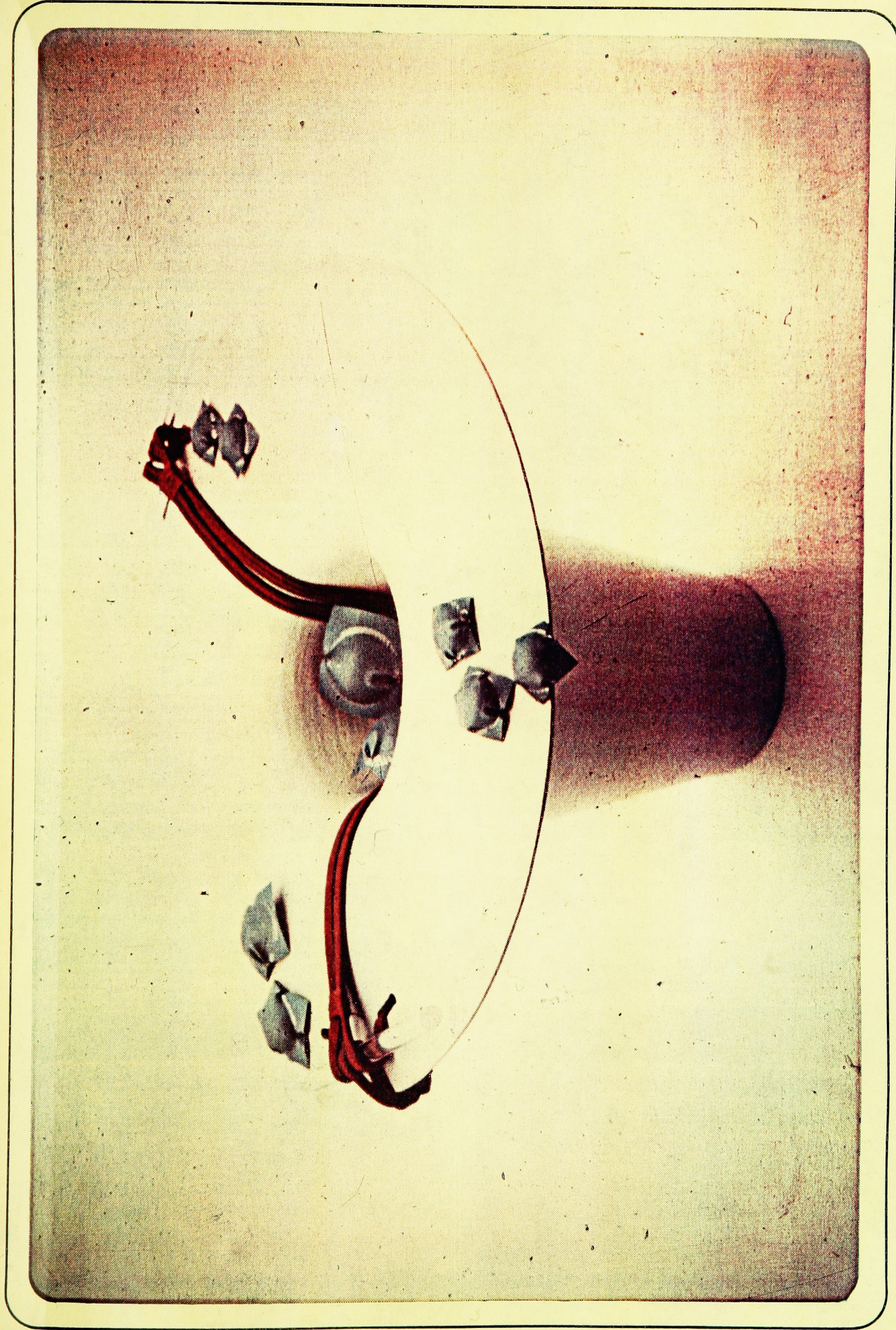
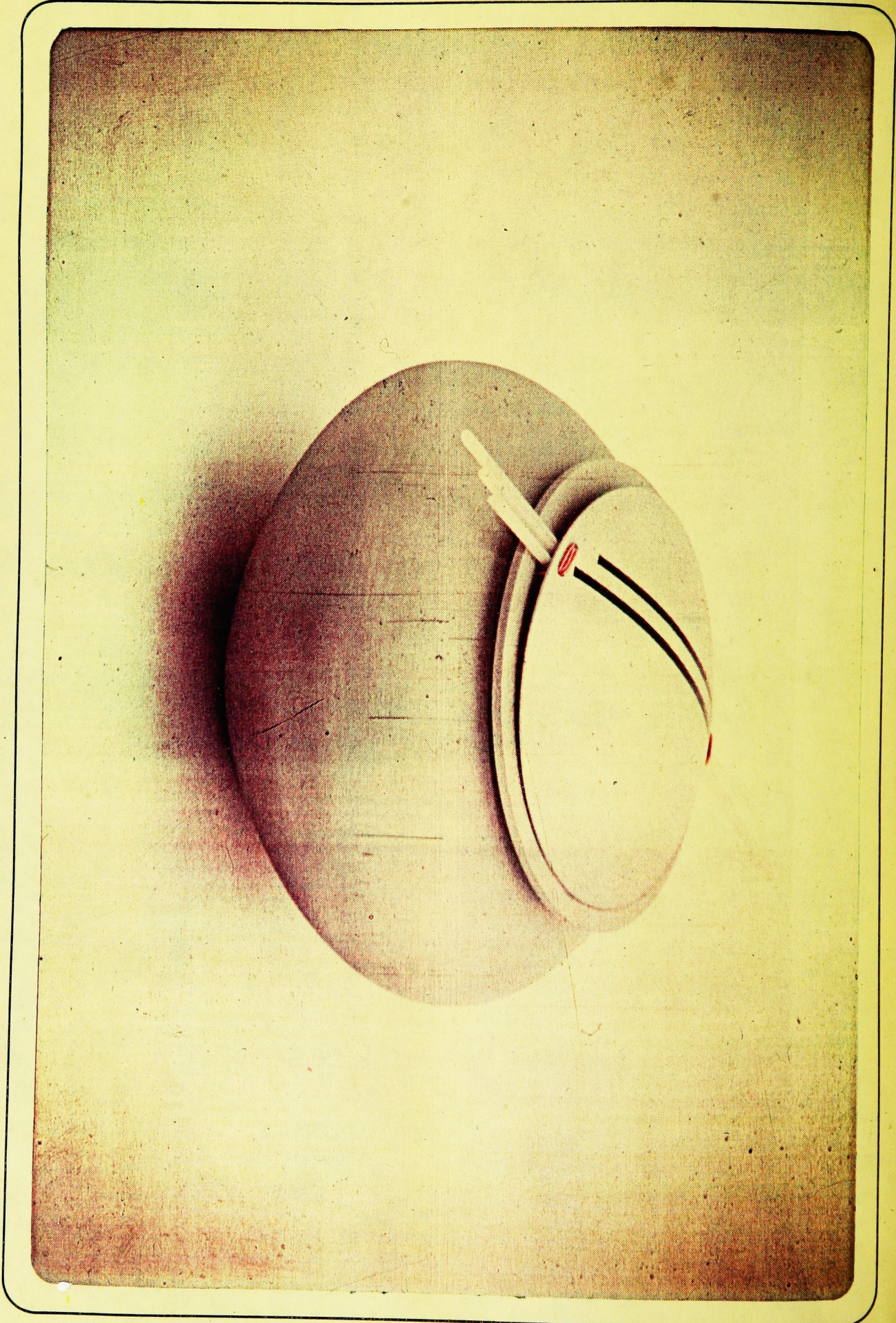


Photo Number 6 "Sculptural Vessel"



Photo Number 7 "Container"





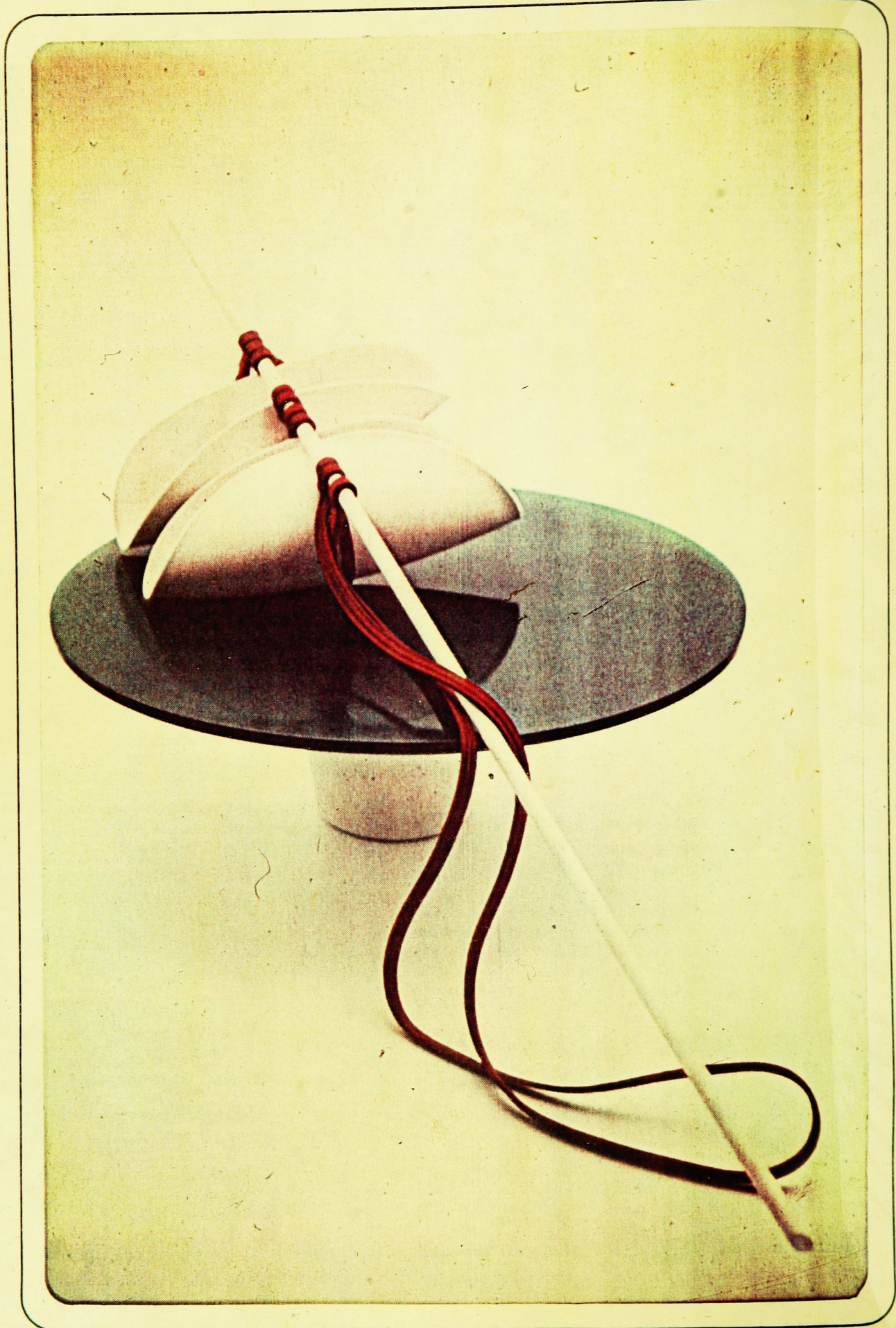


Photo Number 8 "Bound it Two's"



need for structural elements in it. The base and the form are all incorporated within its body, creating continuity. It can also be viewed from 360 degrees. The metal spinning process creates a symmetry which in turn makes a piece that may be viewed from all angles. So many times sculptural pieces have a weak vantage point; however, the spun vessel has sides with equal strength. I chose to use volumetric forms because they suggest strength, weight and stability while physically they are very light and delicate because they are made out of aluminum; I appreciate this contrast.

Another aesthetic pleasure involved in the vessel format is its ability to suggest different moods and emotions. Photograph #6 shows a form that is uplifting, light and open-armed, while Photograph #7 shows a form that is closed and very hidden from the viewer. A closed-lidded form like this suggests privacy and separateness from the viewer. I, like most people, have both of these tendencies. So the different parts of me, at one time or another, are incorporated into my work. The detailing added onto each vessel is another way of developing a personal touch. Sometimes I use the vessel as a stage to present other various elements as seen in Photograph #8 "Bound It Two's". Mostly the detailing is created as decoration. Just as jewelry is worn for the adornment of the body and as an individual expression that draws attention to the wearer, the detailing on my vessels is used for that purpose. It



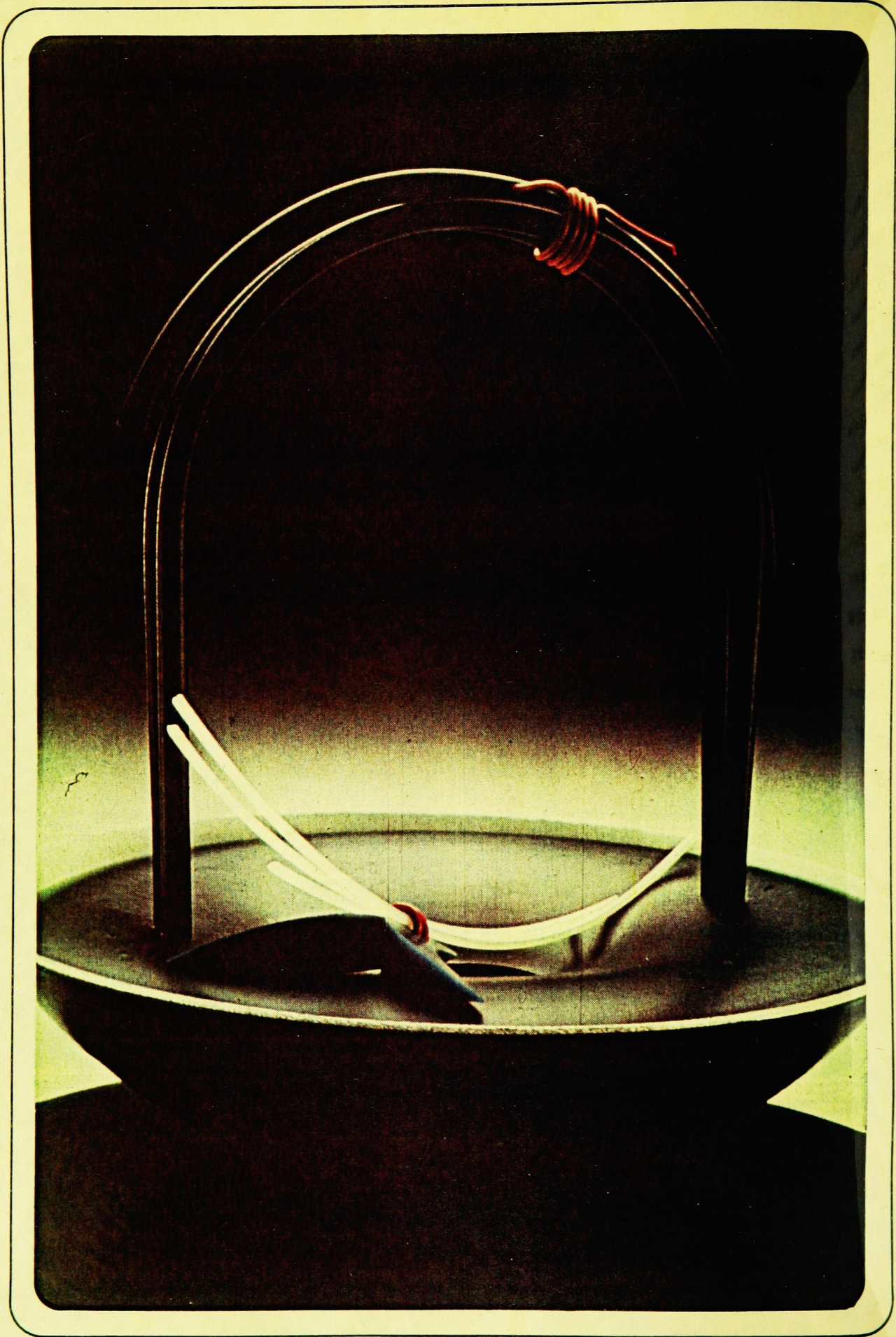


Photo Number 9 "Tiered Vessel"



also draws attention to the front of the form, suggesting the front from the back of the piece just as the eyes of a person are an entrance to the spirit within. The detailing also is used to overcome the limitations of working with aluminum, which must be joined by some system other than soldering. I wanted the solution to have a concept in a vein similar to the rest of the piece. This is why I chose to use a three dimensional detail rather than paint or texture. Photograph #9 is the best example of this influence. The bundling of rods is used not only for an exciting visual element but also for the concept of man gathering and harvesting crops. This collecting of elements suggests an intellectual being with the ability to gather and store for later use. Therefore, my detailing, which has a continuity and appropriateness, has become a symbol distinguishing my work from that of others.

Finally, the use of the vessel in my work draws a common link between itself and the viewer. Throughout history the vessel has been an important element in the development of the human species. Photograph #10 shows this connection by suggesting old and new together as one. The precision turning of the vessel suggests the new, while the aged surface which is created through a patina process suggests the old, connecting where we have been and where we are going. Simply, it speaks of tradition and lineage.



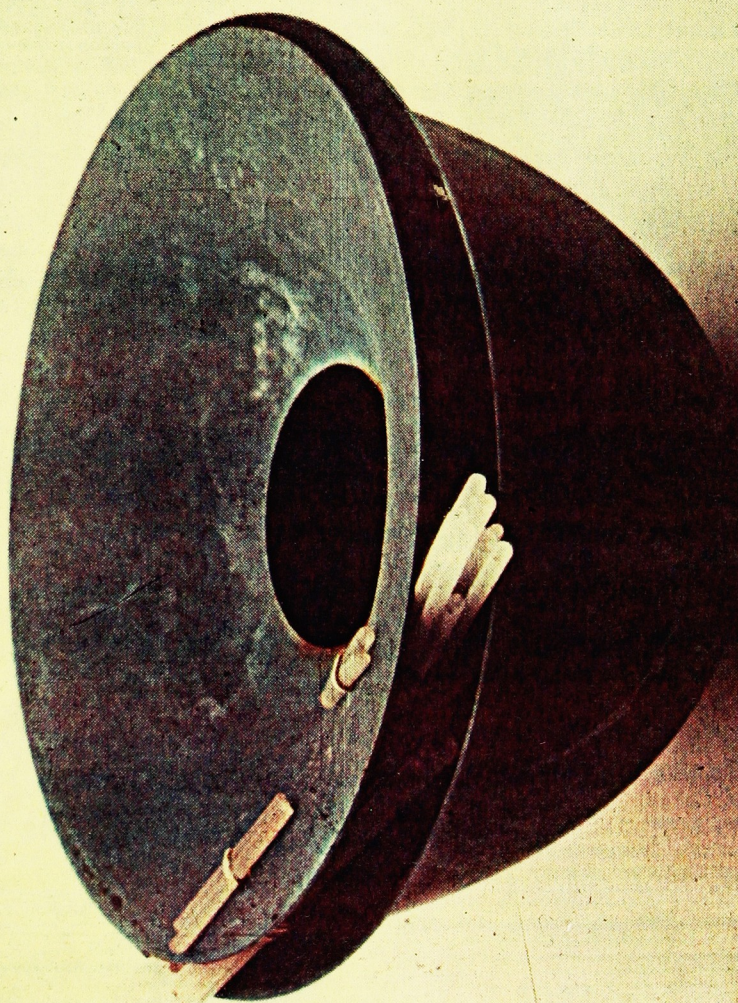


Photo Number 10 "Vessel"



CONCLUSION:

These two years of graduate school have been only a beginning to my work. During this period I was able to build a solid foundation on which my work can stand. In creating this body of work I found out much about myself. I have grown tremendously as a person while my work solidified into some basic elements that will carry me throughout my life. My work will continue to develop, and the communication skills that I have begun building into it will grow as I do. The closing of the school experience cannot be looked at as an ending but only as a good beginning. I look forward to seeing my work growing to its potential, not only conceptually but also in scale. These two years were also a time for me to find out just how important my work is to me, and how it is going to fit into my life. It is what gives me life and the knowledge that whatever energy I am willing to put into it comes back in return. Simply stated, my work is my religion.