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### Some limitations and possibilities of image and form

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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**

**SOME LIMITATIONS AND POSSIBILITIES OF IMAGE AND  
FORM**

**By**

**Susan Elizabeth Forster**

**July 30, 2003**

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## CONCEPT

The primary goal for this thesis experience is to examine the connections and correlations between two-dimensional imagery and three-dimensional form. The concept for this exploration came from genuine personal interest and sensitivity for multiple materials, techniques, and the dynamics and energy they create in relation to each other and their environment. My intention was to create a total environment in which the viewer receives not just a single frame perspective of a visual image or object, but instead becomes an interactive part of the space.

This need to expand my work beyond a single object or pictorial frame of painting or photograph has evolved over the years from many different personal experiences and through my observation of other artists working in non-object orientations. Two artists that I have been particularly influenced by in terms of materials and use of space are the contemporary works of the Czech glass artists Dana Zamecnikova and her husband Marion Karel. Dana's work successfully utilizes both image and form by creating distinct interactive relationships between the two. She paints abstract yet recognizable imagery of people and animals on silhouettes of clear plate glass and then places them in specific public environments. (See Illustrations, # 1-2)

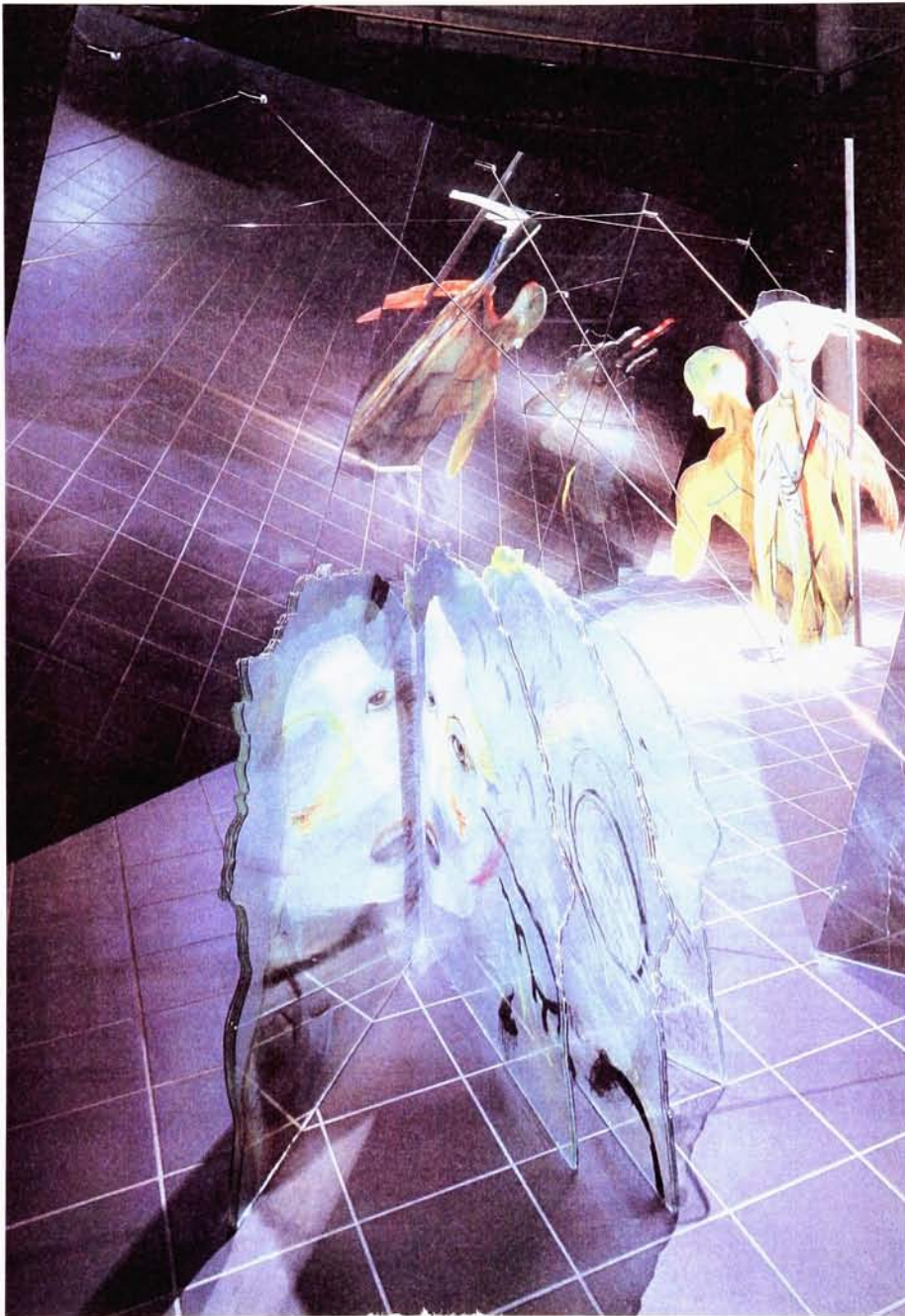


Illustration #1  
Dana Zamecnikova  
"Theatrum Mundi 2"  
(p. 98) Czech Glass

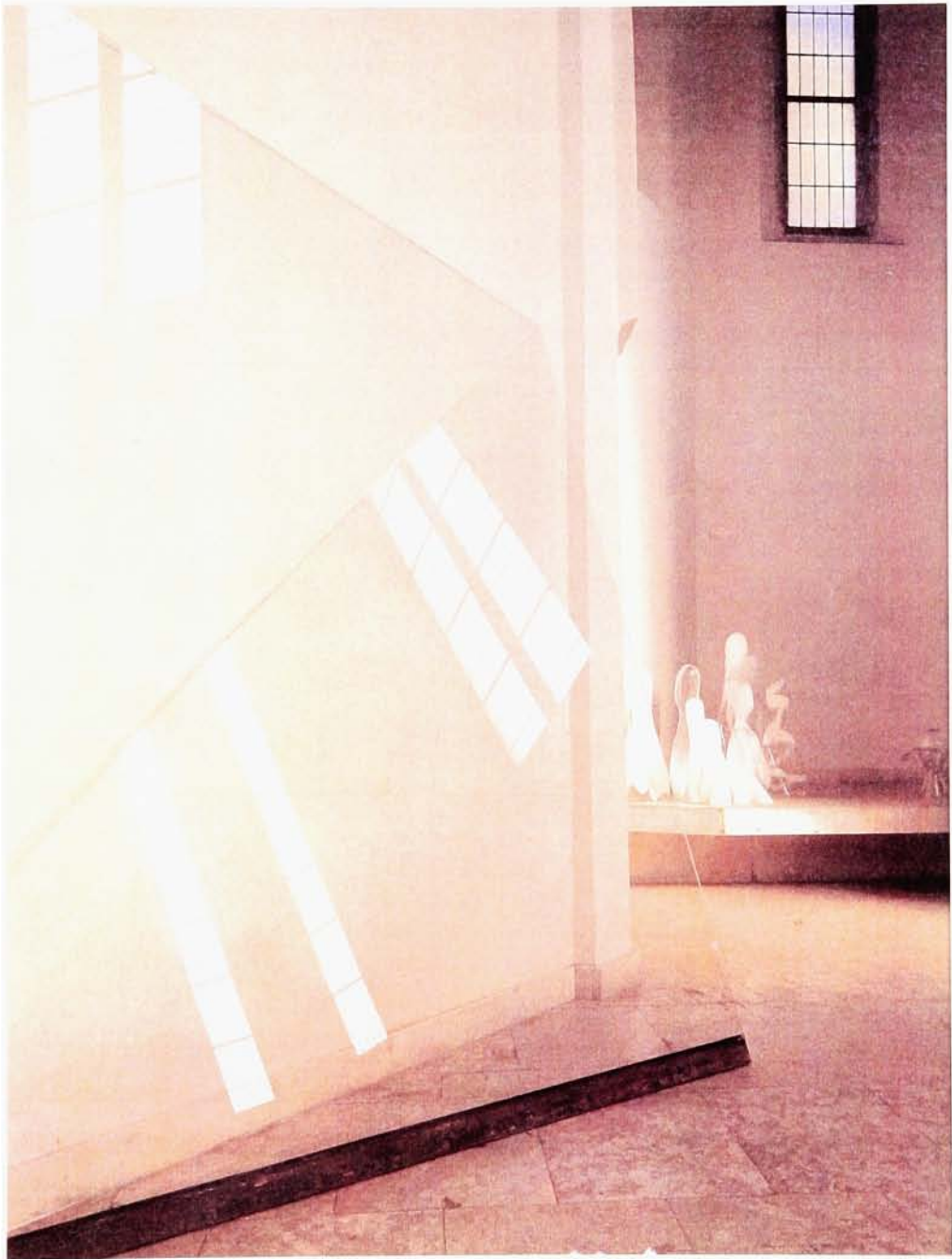


Illustration #2  
Marion Karel  
"Break"  
(p. 132) Czech Glass

She utilizes traditional techniques to establish a very personal approach to create fresh and conceptually powerful sculpture. Marion's work is radically different, yet is equally influential to my work. He also uses plate glass, but in its most minimal or purist state. He embraces the simple relationships formed between plate glass material and its inherent qualities and their specific environment. He uses light, reflection, and the natural optic character of the glass to transform a physical space into a surreal place. Listening to them speaking about their work and their process had a marked impact on the way I have personally expanded upon traditional formats and materials and developed my own work. Additionally artists: Robert Irwin, Robert Rauschenberg, James Turrell, Rebecca Horn, and Ann Hamilton, contributed to my interest in deeper exploration within the potential of the two-dimensional and three-dimensional format. Having decided to study how these two realms influenced each other beyond simplistic relationships of image and object. (See illustrations #3-#9)



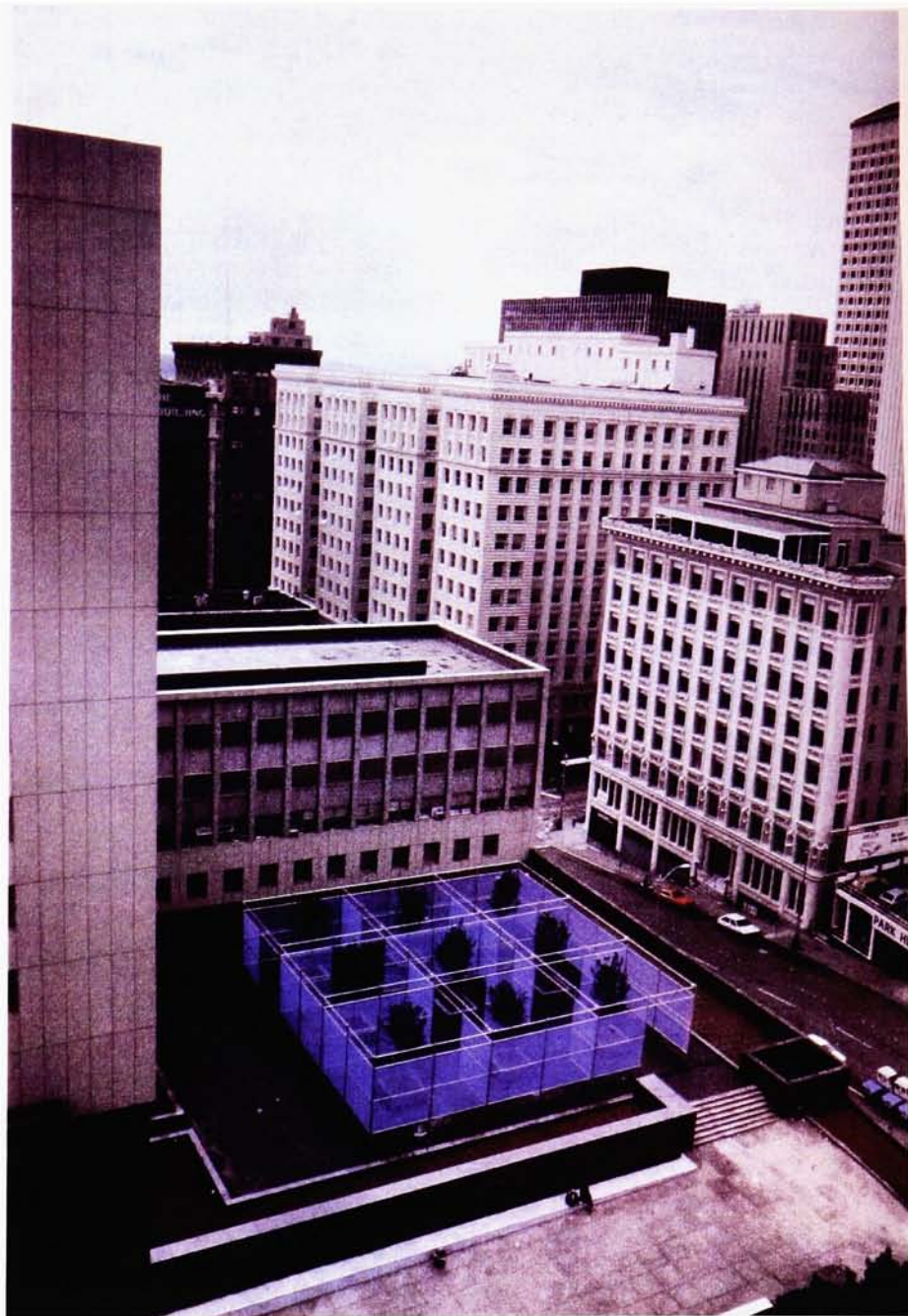


Illustration #3  
Robert Irwin  
"9 Spaces 9 Trees"  
(p.68) Being and Circumstance, Notes  
Toward a Conditional Art

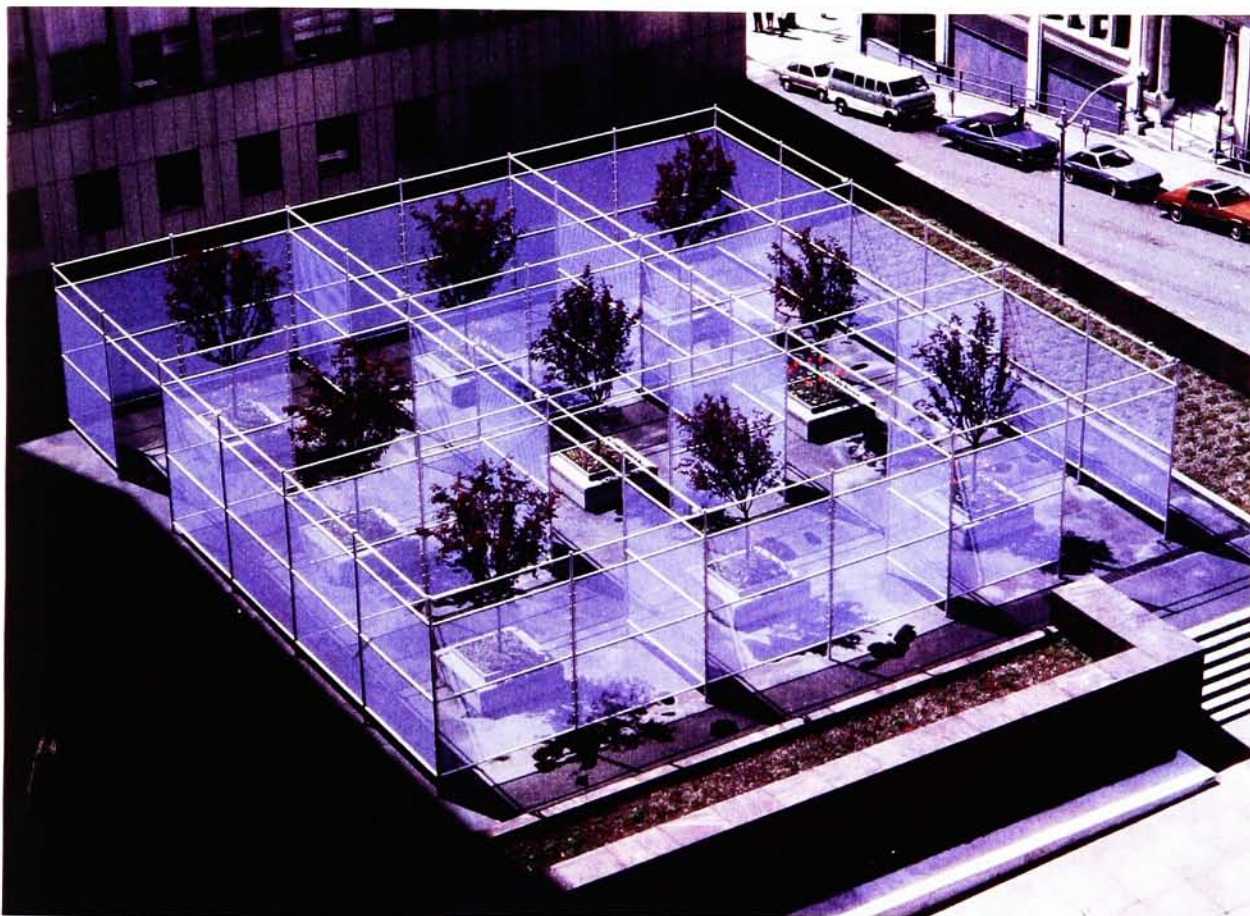


Illustration #4  
Robert Irwin  
"9 Spaces 9 Trees"  
(p.73) Being and Circumstance, Notes  
Toward a Conditional Art





Illustration #5  
Robert Rauschenberg  
"Solstice" 1968  
(p.140) Rauschenberg Art and Life  
1984-1997

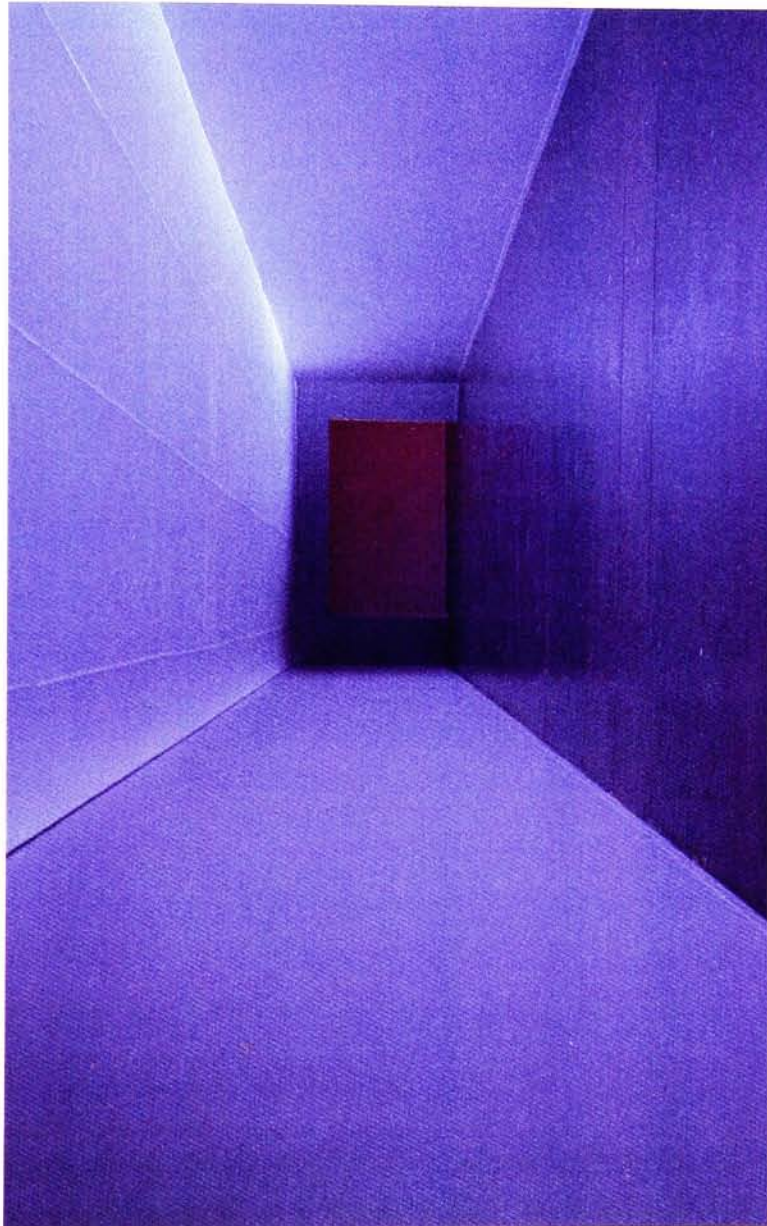
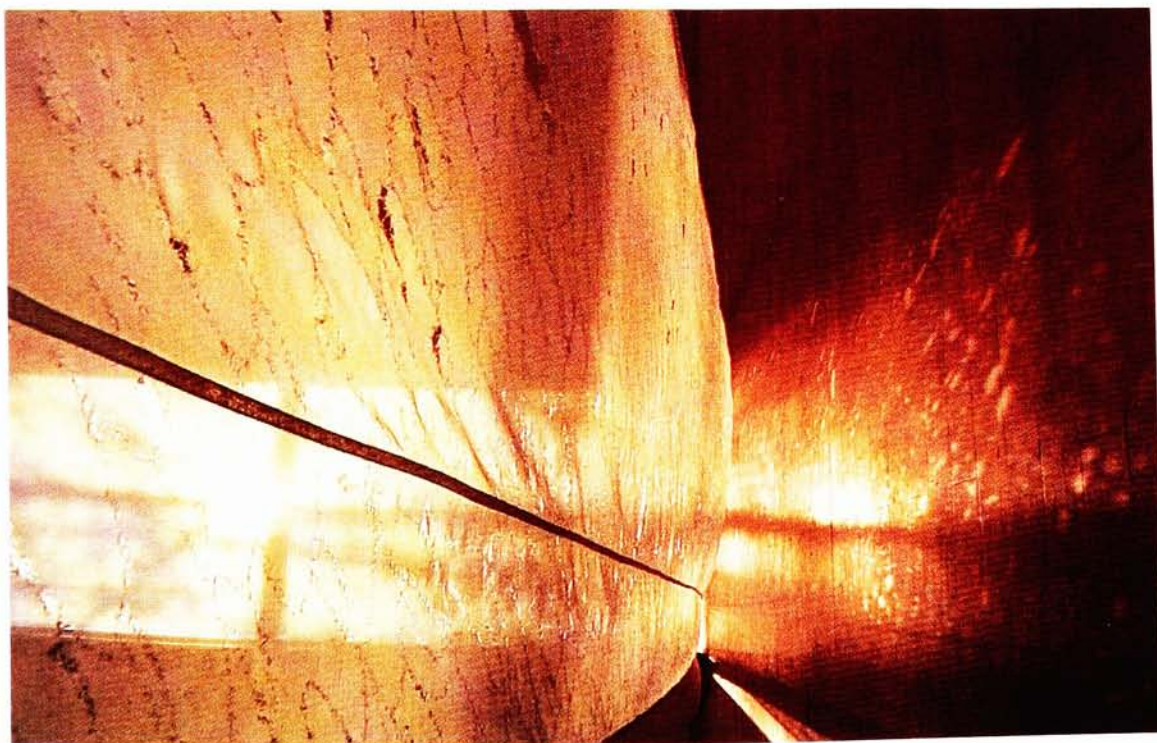
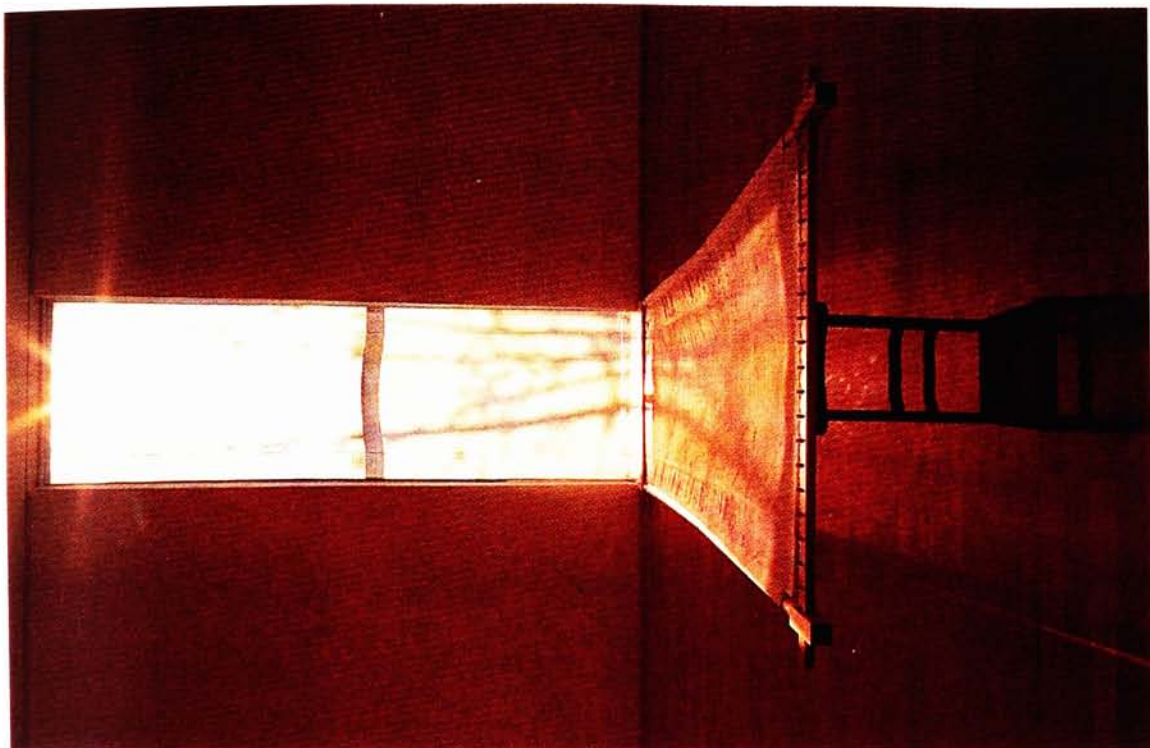


Illustration # 6  
James Turrell  
"Blue Walk " (night) 1983 (cp.17)  
James Turrell,  
The Art of Light and Space





Illustration #7  
Rebecca Horn  
“Concert for Buchenwald, part 2”  
1999 (p.180) Rebecca Horn



**Illustration #8**  
**Ann Hamilton**  
**"Bounden"**  
**1997 (p.33)**  
Ann Hamilton Present and Past 1984-1997





**Illustration #9**  
**Ann Hamilton**  
**“Bounden”**  
**1997 (p.34)**  
**Ann Hamilton Present and Past 1984-1997**

I found significance in Robert Rauschenberg, talking about his inability to work in one media.

*In most cases, my interest is in acknowledging the fact that man is able to function on many different levels simultaneously. Yet intellectually for hundreds of years the idea of uninterrupted concentration has been considered the most serious attitude to have in order to use our intelligence.... If we are to get the most out of any given time, it is because we have applied ourselves as broadly as possible, I think, not because we have applied ourselves as single-mindedly as possible!'. (Rauschenberg 1997, pg 31).*

Sculptor Robert Irwin is an additional influence in the way I consider my own creative process. Irwin talks about this “radical change” of allowing himself to think outside the frame.

*As one educated and practiced as a painter, my first hint (intuition) that the world of my perceptual and aesthetic concerns might not begin and end at the edge of my canvas was something that had no tangible reality. But my question would not go away and was soon joined by others. What kind of a “reality” was this that allowed itself such abstraction as to demand that the world end at the edge of my canvas? Yet what kind of world would it be if there were no such*



*limits? And is not the idea of a non-object art a contradiction in terms? What would this art be made of? Where would it exist? And how would we come to know it, let alone judge it? Yet again, if we are to continue to take the words "aesthetics" and "perception" as having serious bearing on art, can we simply continue to hold the dialogue of art to be subsumable to the making of objects? The surprise for me, when I stopped painting, was not the loss of something to do with my hands or the loss of my visibility (viability) as an "artist," but rather the loss of my thinking form (loss=gain?) the realization that painting had been both my process for selection and ordering of things and my philosophic method, and that the reality that had come to order my paintings was the reality that had come to order my life. Needless to say such a loss is unsettling."*

(Irwin 1985, page 12)

A part of my investigation has been given to this challenge of expanding my use of traditional formats for materials and presentation. Without eliminating the objects and images altogether as Irwin did, my goal is to play the object and image off one another in a visual dialogue. I addressed this concept by, for example, printing ripple imagery onto transparencies and presenting them, as a sky so when the light projected

through it as if you the viewer are standing under water as an experience within a controlled environment rather than merely observing a contained sculptural object or image on the wall. Working with many different methods and materials to invite multiple expressions of a similar concept, I expanded my physical boundaries by simultaneously creating these objects and images in vastly different ways.

My intention was to truly discover the essence of the original concepts. The result of this creative combination is a transformed space in which all the parts are related. Like individual chapters that tell a poetic story, each individual piece is considered complete and able to stand on its own, but as a composite, the works change the small corner gallery space into a visually and physically stimulating world of it's own.

## **MEDIA – TECHNICAL SEARCH**

Much of my exploration with material process was uncharted and experimental. I learned new techniques in both non-toxic printmaking and metal casting. At the same time I pushed myself to discover new forms of presentation for my photographic and painted images in combination with these new materials. The greatest challenge was to successfully utilize the materials both conceptually and technically. One way I explored this duality was by evolving all my work around related images, forms, materials and techniques. The patterns, textures and colors of nature, water, rocks, mud, and sunlight became the direct influence for my visual imagery as well as frames; windows, houses, tables and chambers were inspiration for the sculptural objects. The work began to build upon itself naturally, forming various layers to establish an expressive, sensory composite.

I began further technical exploration to develop the sculptural objects by experimenting with open-faced casting of metal into impressionable foundry “green sand”. This casting technique enabled me to more spontaneously create molds by pressing forms and objects into the sand making impressions and forms then pouring molten bronze or aluminum into my impressions. I worked primarily with bronze and aluminum, and also

some iron with this technique. I also generated pieces and parts without a specific preconceived idea creating frame and table like forms without a notion as to how they might be related in the end. I also experimented similarly with kiln casting and glass slumping. In these experiments I used both clear window glass and colored stained glass. I employed a similar method of improvisational mold making with the glass as I did with the metal by first creating wave impressions in dry silica sand that filled the bottom of the kiln. I then proceeded to gently lay the plate glass over top of the textured sand. The kiln temperature was slowly raised bringing the glass up to 1500 degrees to allow it to melt and slump into the waveforms I had established in the sand. Plaster silica molds and fired clay are the other materials I explored to create molds for the glass. I used a 50/50% dry mixture of plaster and silica mixed with water to make it possible to pour as a liquid. The silica was used to enable the mold to withstand the high temperature of the kiln. I used wet slabs of clay to create river -bed textures by pressing stones and shells into the clay to build a relief texture. Then I poured the liquid plaster mixture into and over the clay form that was made. The plaster, chemically hardens, air-dries and then the glass can be placed on top and slumped into the plaster. Accumulating numerous parts and pieces, I began to respond to what I had created and could then decide how

to interrelate potential composites. The different cast parts each visually “spoke” to me. They suggested possible alternative end results.

This type of experimentation can lead to surreal, dream resembling, object juxtaposition that may be more suggestive of a personal mood, feeling or space in time.

Photographs were the two-dimensional images which I then began to experiment with. I began a series of prints from images I had taken while in Maine. Images of the rocks and shells on the ocean floor, looking through the water as the sunlight was twisting with the ripples. I was interested in the meditative nature of sunlight’s play with the ocean floor. The rock series prints were a series of non-toxic intaglio type prints on paper using ImagOn film with a copper plate. I enlarged and altered photographs and created transparencies of the blown up compositions. I then created the Intaglio-Type plates using a specific arrangement of the transparent photo enlargements of the rocks. The compositions of the plates appeared faintly as if looking through a four paned window. The technique of using the press to collage colored rice paper onto the paper during printing is called Chin-Colle. This technique of exploration in the printing stage enhanced the visual and conceptual compositions. It allowed for distinct, yet subtle alteration of each print. This was a unique print series. No plate was ever printed the

same way twice. But the changes made are subtle, with progressions and relationships obviously related. I made alterations to the ink colors in addition to changing the printed result with the use of colored rice paper. The actual plates were changed after initial prints were made during the printing process by placing the plate into a more concentrated soft water stripping solution. By proceeding in this way it began to dissolve the image even further. I then cleaned and reprinted the partially changed plates. This technique gave the impression of erosion and for me symbolized the inevitable passage of time. I also experimented with printing onto various materials other than paper. Printing onto fabric, plastics, aluminum foil, and right over top of old acrylic and watercolor paintings on paper. This extensive playful experimentation lead me to the idea of Intaglio-Type printing onto acetate sheets which then became the inspiration for what became my final presentation and the ultimate connection between the three-dimensional sculpture and the two-dimensional prints. I had already begun to combine the printed fabric by upholstering it to a cast bronze piece and played with inkjet transparencies painted onto glass. However, up until near the end of the two investigations I seemed to be essentially on two divided tracks with few threads of connection.

However the concepts blended together with the final environment, the installation space was cubical with three sidewalls that held the printed images. The fourth wall was open for entry. A transparent roof with a related printed pattern on it enclosed the top space. Light filtered down through this roof, being twisted and altered by the patterns printed on it's surface. A floor with related imagery printed on it was made so it could be walked upon. Placed within the space were the three dimensional sculptures. These sculptures related to the overall concept. The essential visual/conceptual bond that connected the objects or sculptures and the images in the space created a unified whole.

The parts of this enclosure were a technical challenge to create. The roof was composed of twenty-four hand printed Intaglio-Type prints on clear acetate. Each print was coated with an acrylic gel medium and sealed with a second sheet of acetate. The individual prints were then attached to each other to form an eight-foot by eight-foot square. The imagery used to create the roof prints was that of rippling water printed in various hues of blue. A central two-foot square was then cut out of the roof piece to create a central clear passage of light into the space below. This transparent sheet was attached to a wooden frame. In the center the wooden frame was supported and held aloft by four eight foot high painted poles attached to the four



corners of the central opening above. These had square cast cement block bases. The external edges of the transparent, printed roof were then attached to the top of the gallery display panel walls to completely cover over the installation space. The central poles were positioned around the central sculpture, a glass-topped table made incorporating an old window frame and stressed scrap wood. The glass had been kiln sand cast to give the texture of rippling water. This texture was also echoed two dimensionally by the waves and blue stimuli of the transparent prints that were suspended up above as the roof. This was designed to enhance the feel of light refractions when the viewer was inside the installation space.

The floor panels were constructed with wood and Masonite, acrylic paint, Non-Toxic Intaglio Type prints on acetate, and coated with polyurethane. Using a photograph I had taken patterns of animal tracks in mud I enlarged the image to create the plate. With oil based ink I hand printed the plate onto sheets of acetate transparencies. Then I painted the Masonite panel with acrylic paint and placed the acetate prints face down on to the wet painted wood. These were left to dry overnight and then coated with acrylic polyurethane to allow the panels to be hard enough to walk on. I used a gloss finish to give the floor a wet glassy feel. I was amused to observe viewers hesitate to walk on the printed floor. "We have always been



told don't touch the art! Now we are allowed to walk all over it, what's up with that?" they remarked.

The overall effect of this installation created a space the viewer could walk into and interact with. Inside the space the viewer walked on the floor printed with visual texture as they viewed the two dimensional prints of the textural images of rocks and water on the walls. Then felt the physical sense of being under water as light from above filtered through the rippled water textures up on the translucent roof. The impact of this presentation was the viewer became an active participant as well as a passive observer when entering the space. (See Illustrations of body of work)

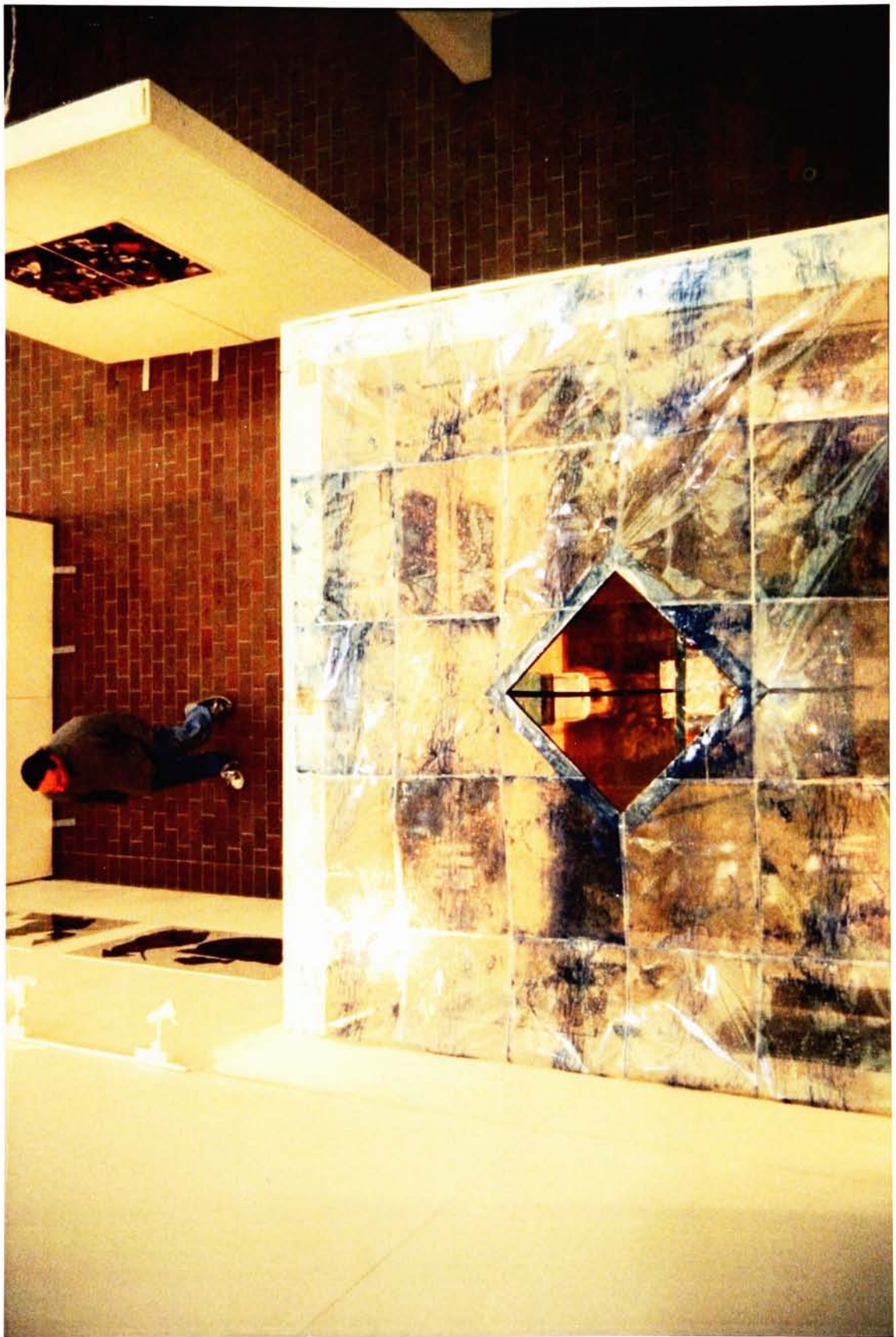


Illustration #10  
"Looking Down Upon the Installation  
from the Second Floor Balcony"





**Illustration #11**

**“Detail of the Installation Roof  
from Above”**





Illustration #12

"Installation View"



Illustration #13

"Installation View"





Illustration #14

"Underwater Table,  
Mixed Media"



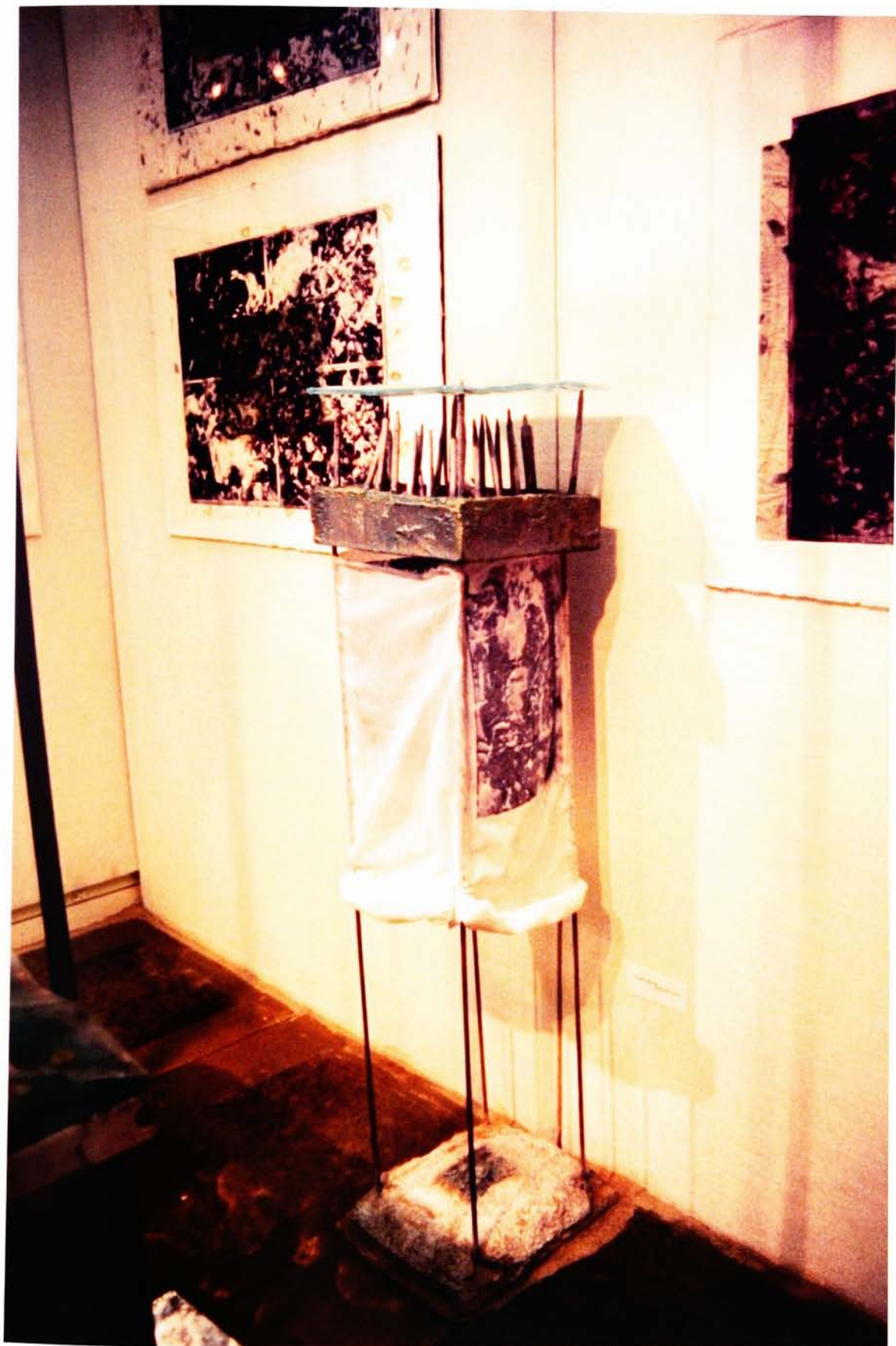
Illustration # 15

"Tall Tuffet"

65" x 13" x 13"

cement, clay, copper,  
fabric, and print





**Illustration #16**  
**"Lost Chicee"**  
**43" x 16" x 18"**  
**Cast aluminum, glass, cement, wood,**  
**fabric, and acrylic**





Illustration #17  
"Four Feet"  
49.5" x 15" x 15"  
Bronze, wood, cement, and steel





Illustration #18  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30"  
Watercolor,  
Non-Toxic Intaglio-Type



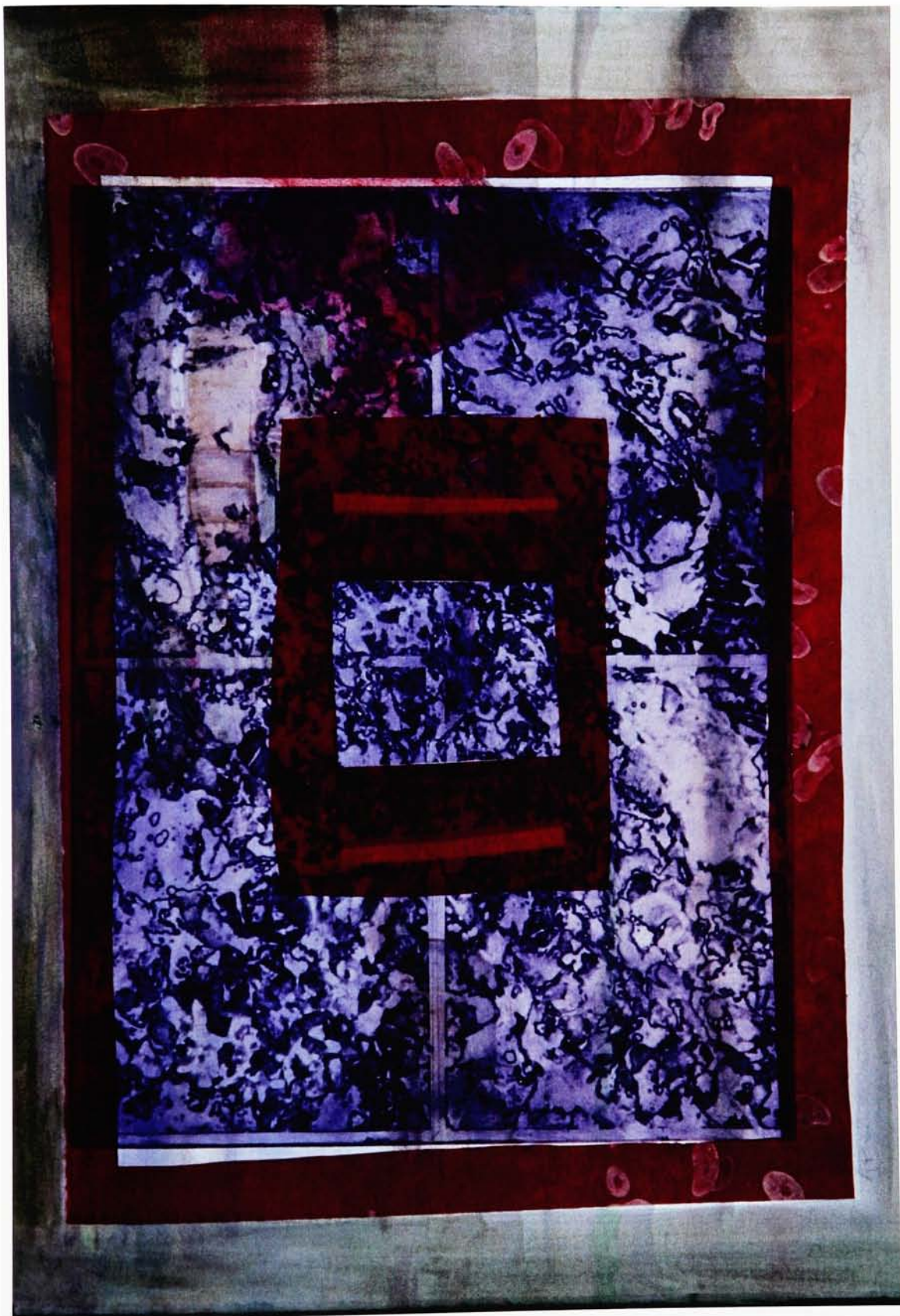


Illustration #19  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30"  
Watercolor, Chin-Colle



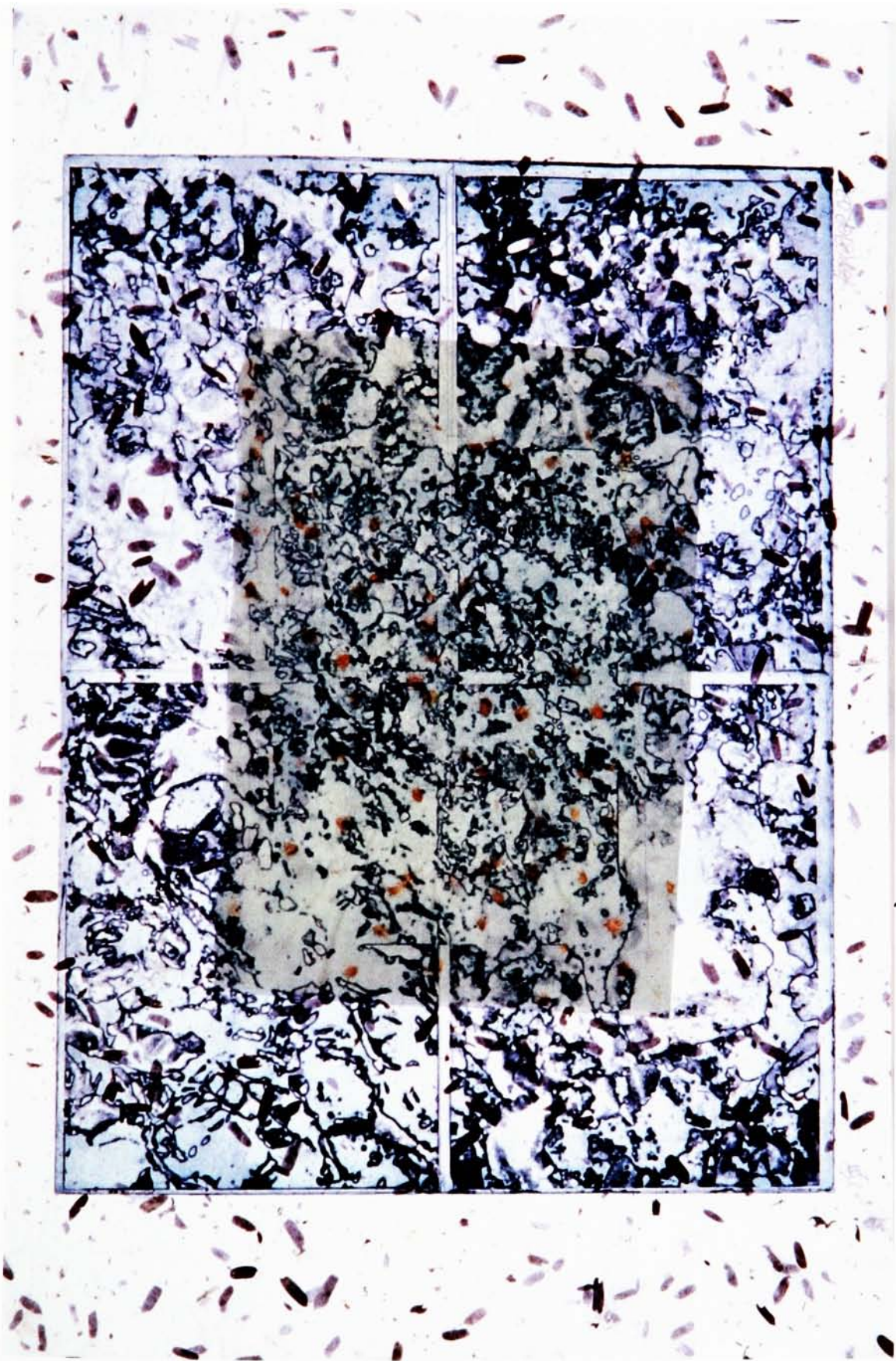


Illustration #20  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30"  
Chin-Colle



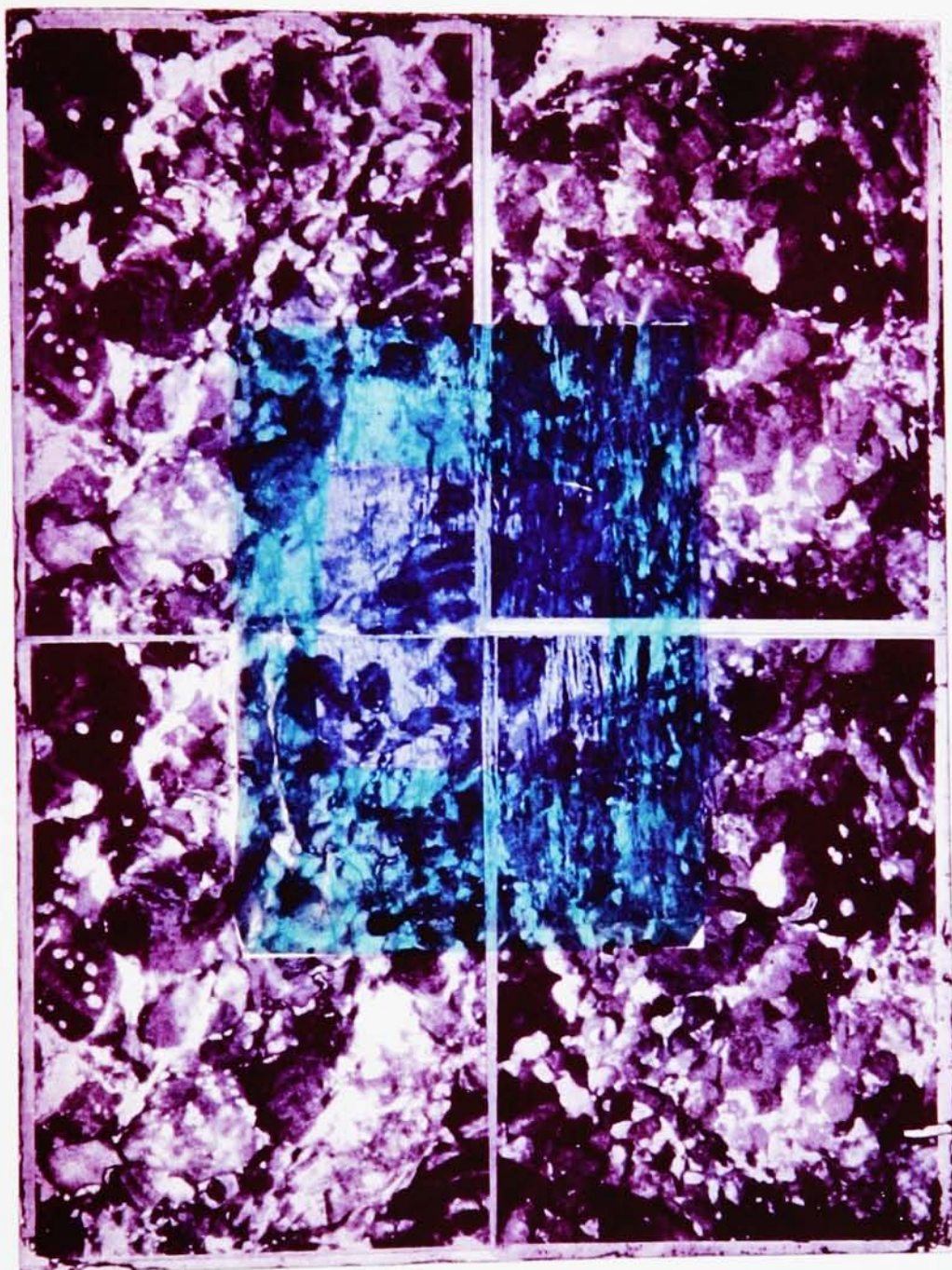


Illustration #21  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30"  
Chin-Colle



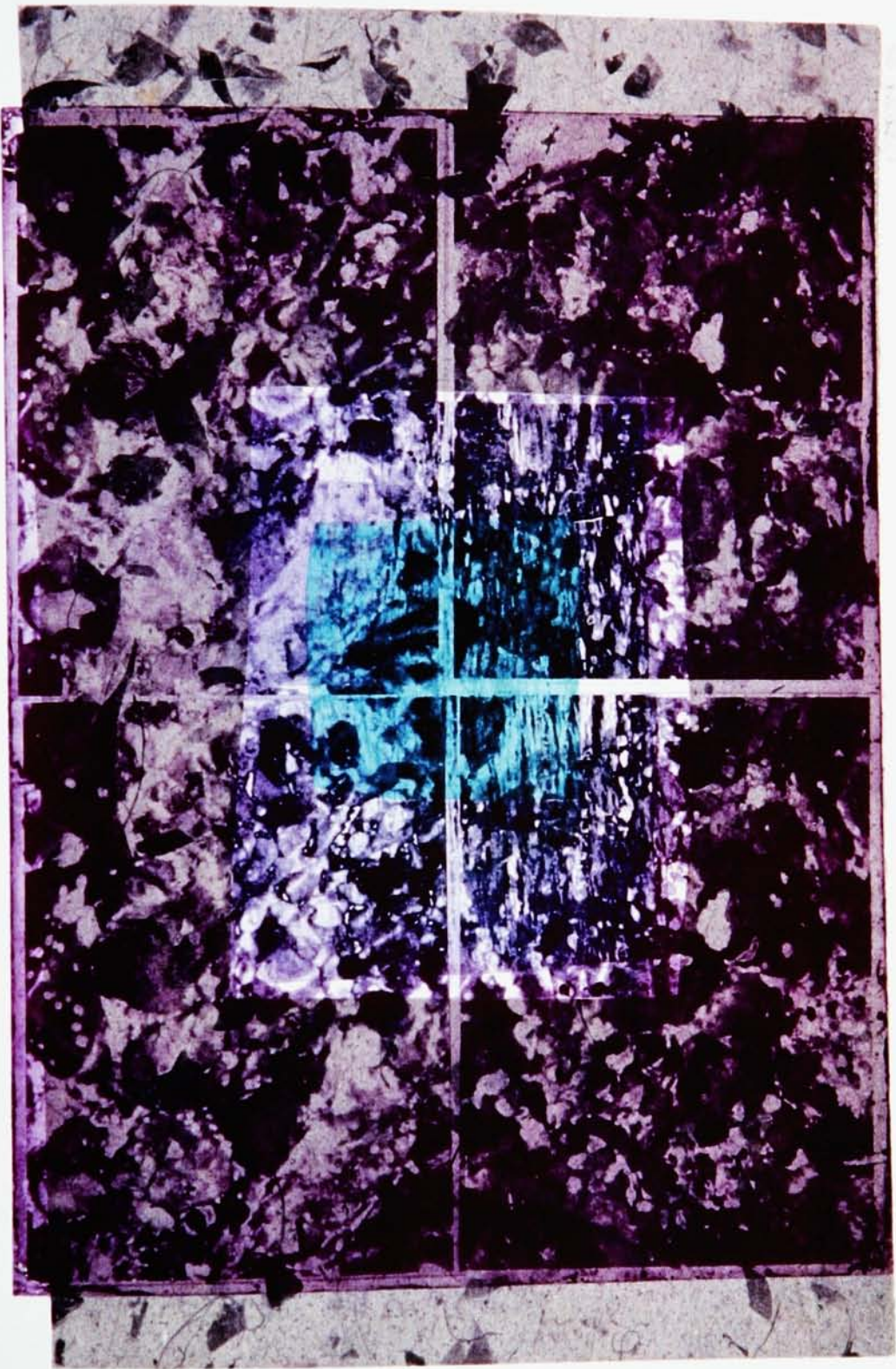


Illustration #22  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30  
Chin-Colle



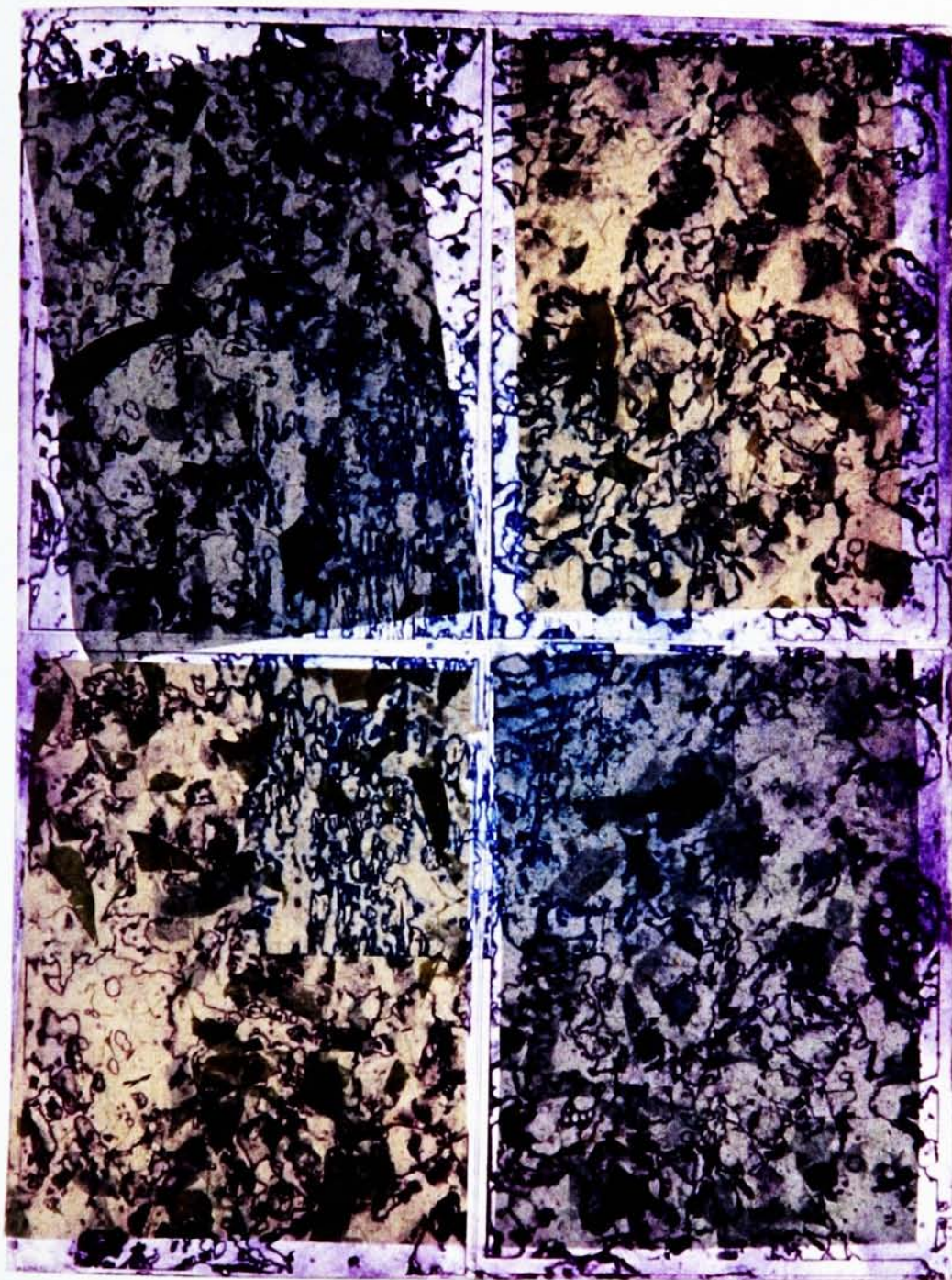


Illustration #23  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30"  
Chin-Colle



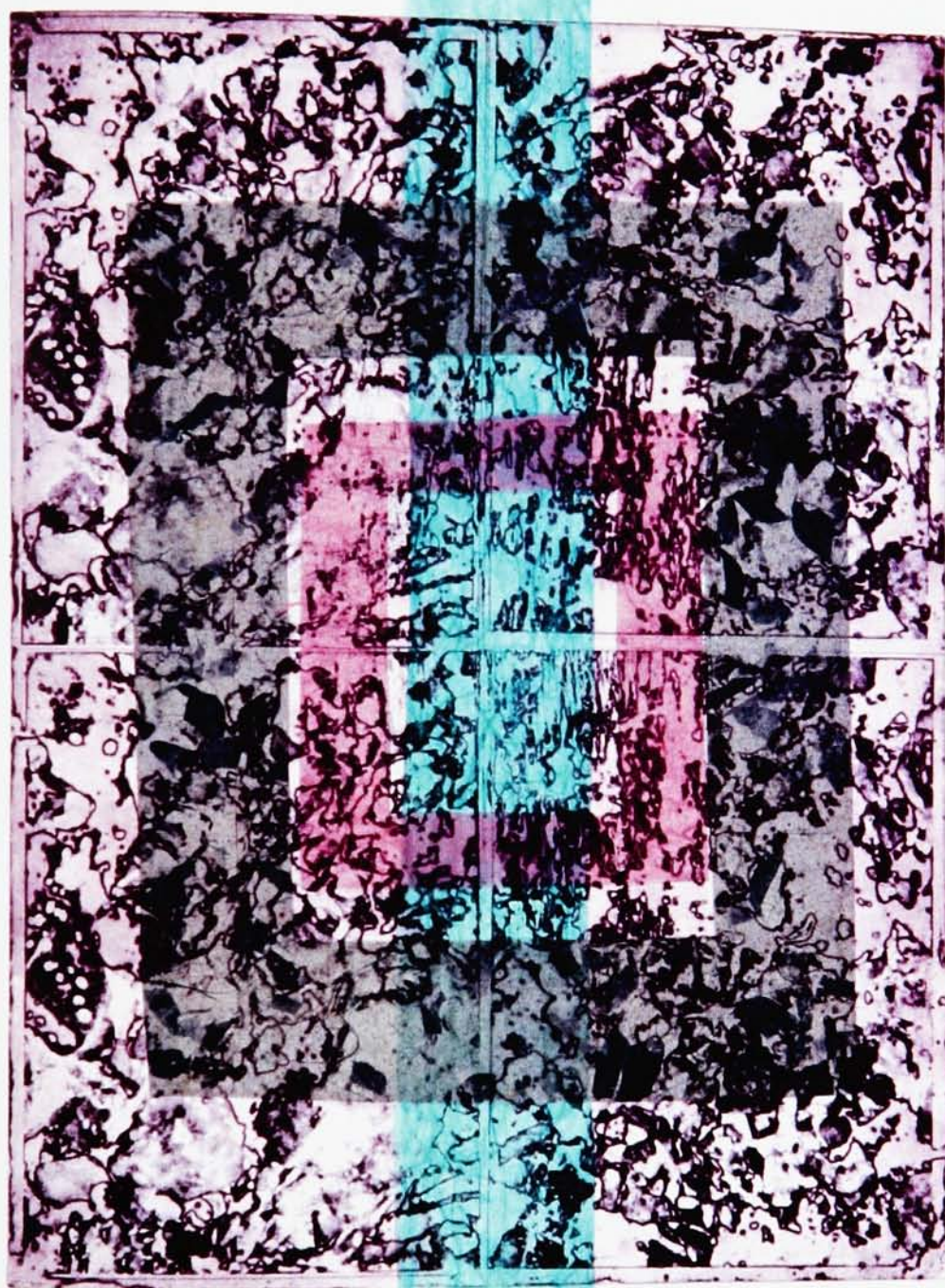


Illustration # 24  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30"  
Chin-Colle



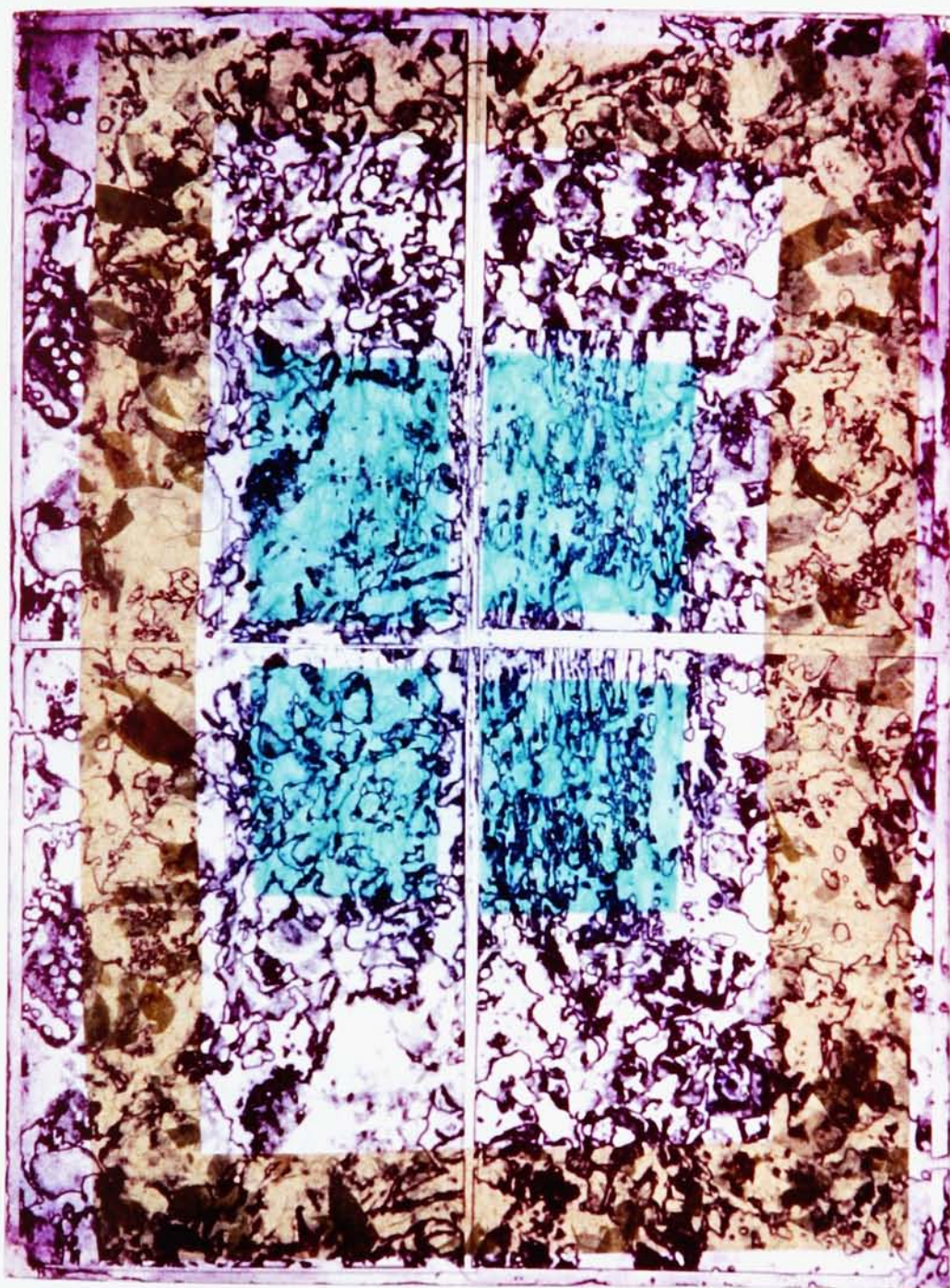


Illustration #25  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30"  
Chin-Colle



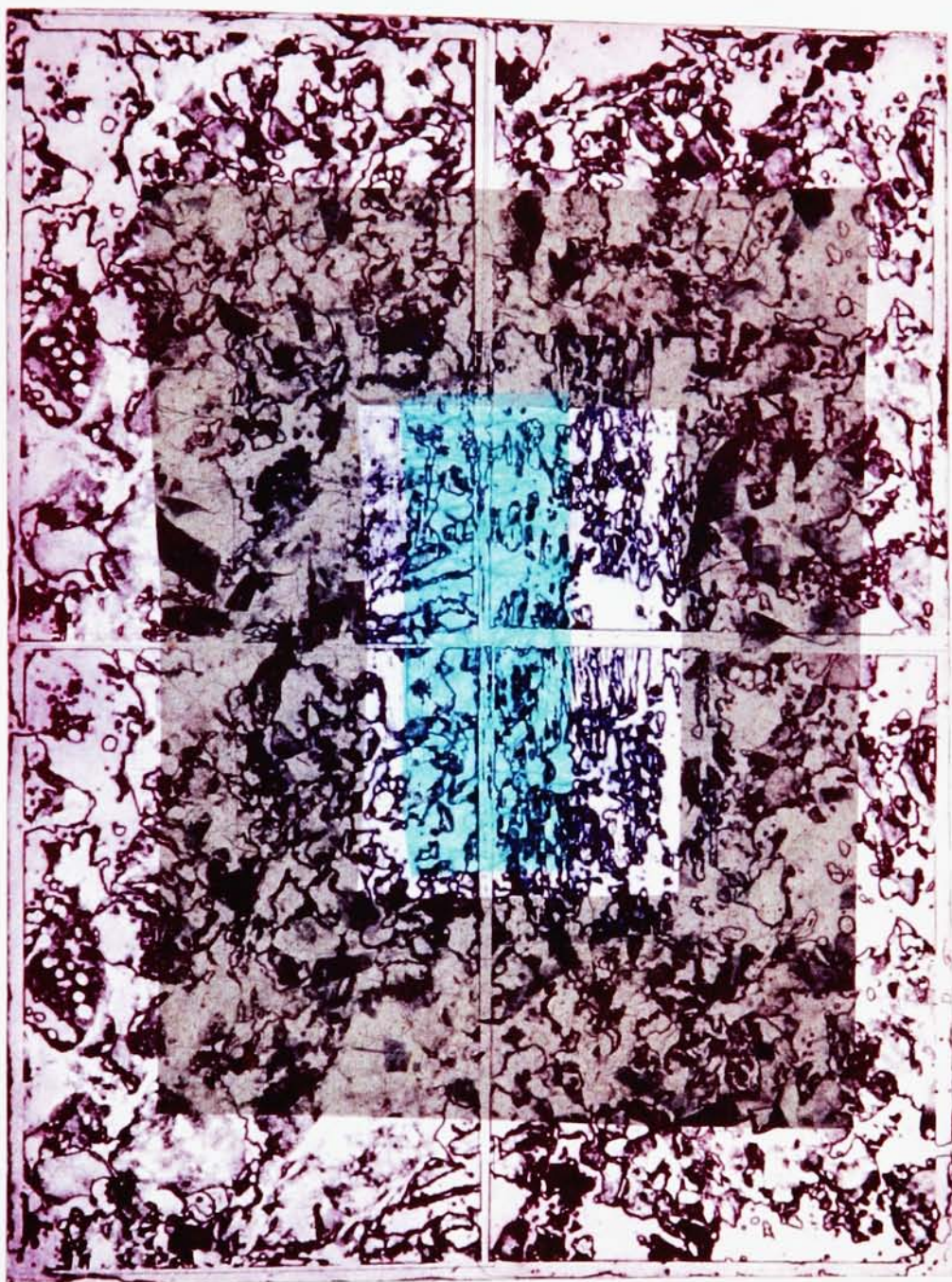


Illustration #26  
"Rock Series"  
22" x 30"  
Chin-Colle





Illustration #27  
"Dreaming"  
82" x 4" x 4"  
Cast aluminum, clay

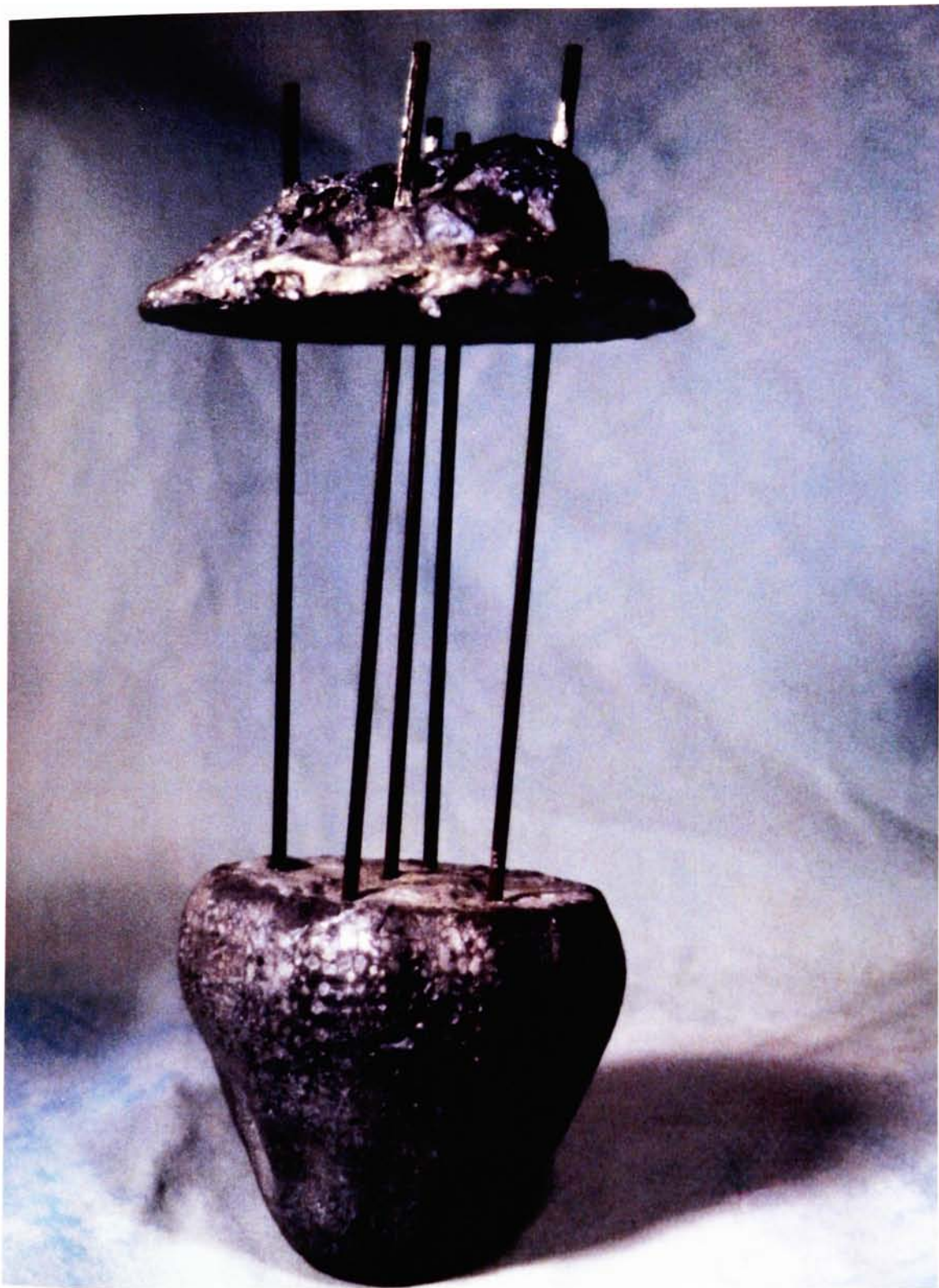


Illustration #28  
"Pagoda"  
18" x 4" x 4"  
Cast aluminum, steel



## CONCLUSION

Through this thesis examination I have broken down many individual boundaries both technically and conceptually between 2-D and 3-D. I now recognize more clearly the impact of space and place. I have developed new systems, approaches, and techniques for producing and presenting my own work. Through research and hands-on experimentation with process in metal casting, glasswork, printmaking and painting; I have expanded my visual vocabulary. This experience has allowed me to establish a personal approach to producing work. I have drawn different influences from each of the artists that I admire. Rauschenberg uses photographic images by using silkscreen of recognizable imagery in a very painterly way in combination with many other materials to create sculpture and even some installation. I appreciate his play with image and materials. The paths of Robert Irwin and James Turrell are examples of a complete embrace of environment for the sake of the space using the natural occurrence of light. The use of light has become a key component in my own work. Rebecca Horn and Ann Hamilton both have a quiet poetic storytelling aesthetic that has the feeling of a theatrical experience. They both have key reference to the constraints of human existence, which appeals to

me. From Marion Karel, and Dana Zamecnikova I have adopted a new appreciation for simplicity and innovative use of traditional methods and materials. All of these people have contributed a portion of their brilliance to guide my artistic exploration. I have come back to the conclusion that I am more thrilled about expanding my work beyond a single pictorial frame, or solely object-orientation. I have become preoccupied with the environmental relationships that are created within a space when certain elements are choreographed using image and light in relation to structural form and components. Art that has physical presence is what excites me most of all, work that is larger than life or at least is on a scale that has a direct relationship to the human body. It is moving to feel that you are not simply an observer of an object but more an active dweller of a particular place. Many of the artists that I have researched and included in this thesis go beyond traditional expectations of presentation of art both two-dimensionally and three-dimensionally. This shared sensitivity and awareness, I believe, will be an important component in my future endeavors as an artist and as a person.

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