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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

Biomorphic Abstractions: *Exploring the Relationship between Two Dimensional and
Three Dimensional Art Forms*

By
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October 2003

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Date October 31, 2003

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To Elisa Ventura Cahoon
(1925-1996)

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PREFACE

Growing up there were artists on both sides of my family and becoming an artist was always encouraged. My father's brother sculpted in wood and wire. My father's aunt was a painter. When she captured my portrait in oils, when I was wearing my favorite outfit for Easter Sunday at the age of four, I was fascinated. Her daughter, my father's cousin, also an artist, asked me to model for her as a child and again as an adult paid model (with my clothes on, in case you are wondering) for her art group.

My mother, Elisa Ventura Cahoon, came from a long line of artists. My great-grandfather, Giuseppe Donatelli, was a well-known and respected stone carver during his lifetime that created commission work for churches, public buildings, and private residences in the Abruzzi region of Italy, due east of Rome. My grandmother, Michelina Donatelli Ventura, was known to say, "Iso figlia de artiste" translated meaning "I am the daughter of an artist". Both of her brothers were also stone carvers. We often would let others presume, as many Italian names seem to vary in pronunciation and spelling over the years, that perhaps we are descendants of the great Italian Renaissance sculptor, Donatello. I have never seen any research to document this claim, so I imagine it is just family folklore. Besides artists, I come from a long line of family comics.

My mother, the daughter of Italian immigrants, was the only one of her six siblings to attend college. She was a University of Rochester graduate, on full scholarship, and

graduated Summa Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa. She majored in History and English, but told me her sculpture professor had wanted her to instead pursue a Fine Arts Degree majoring in Sculpture. Growing up during the Depression, my mother would walk or take a bus to the University of Rochester campus that is now Cutler Union Hall at the Memorial Art Gallery. There was no money to transport her sculptures home and they were too cumbersome to take on a bus, so she donated them all to the University. I always regret that no one would help her transport her sculptures home.

Her brother Joseph, named after my great-grandfather, my uncle, continued the family tradition of sculpting in stone or wood. He often would spend time teaching me drawing or painting techniques, because I shared a great interest in art. As a young girl, I would ask him to teach me how to sculpt. “No, Paula, darling,” he would respond, “You’re a girl.” This would eventually be the unforgettable comment that would motivate me to pursue creating sculptures during my studies at RIT.

Although I was expected to attain high academic achievement, I was always told by my mother that pursuing an art related career was not only acceptable, it was even desirable. When I read author Julia Cameron’s book “The Artist’s Way”, she describes that one of our chief needs as creative beings is support. She cites examples of creative individuals that were discouraged to pursue their artistic dreams, something I never had to encounter from my family.

“Parents seldom respond, “Try it and see what happens” to artistic urges issuing from their offspring. They offer cautionary advice where support might be more to the point. Timid young artists, adding parental fear to their own, often give up their sunny dreams

of artistic careers, settling into the twilight world of could-have-beens and regrets. There caught between the dream of action and the fear of failure, shadow artists are born.”¹

Throughout my lifetime, I have questioned whether becoming an artist and art teacher was the best pursuit, or should I have selected a more traditional path. Usually, I am questioning this when I’ve been recently rejected from a juried exhibition, or there is a newspaper article praising a “self-taught” artist. I’ve witnessed the person that marries an artist and becomes an artistic success simply through assimilation.

“Artists love other artists. Shadow artists are gravitating to their rightful tribe but cannot yet claim their birthright. Very often audacity, not talent makes one person an artist and another a shadow artist...”²

There are the art gallery board members that purchase posters for their home decor, or the businesspersons that believe artists are too foolish to promote themselves, so they will represent the artist to profit from their talents. In Tom Wolfe’s book, “The Painted Word,” he describes how the art world scouts for the various new artists of bohemia, and once selected, showers them with all the rewards of celebrity. He continues to describe the magnetic pull that the artist lifestyle attracts others to join this inner circle.

“The artist’s payoff in this ritual is obvious enough. He stands to gain precisely what Freud says are the goals of the artist: fame, money, and beautiful lovers. But what about le monde, the cultarati, the social members of the act? What’s in it for them? Part of their reward is the ancient and semi-sacred status of Benefactor of the Arts. The arts have always been a doorway to Society, and in the largest cities today – the museum boards, art councils, fund drives, openings, parties, committee meetings- have completely replaced the churches in this respect. But there is more.

Today there is a peculiarly modern reward that the avant-garde artist can give his benefactor: namely, the feeling that he, like his mate the artist, is separate and aloof from

¹ Julia Cameron, *The Artist’s Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1992), 25.

² Ibid., 27.

the bourgeoisie, the middle classes... the feeling that he may be *from* the middle class but he is no longer *in* it..."³

Although frequently I am feeling tainted about the art world injustices, my regrets of choosing the artist's path are fleeting. Nothing makes me feel more at peace than being inside a painting or sculpture in the process of creating my own artwork. Family relationships are extremely important in my life, my family is largely responsible for my decision to become an artist, and I feel it influences in turn all the artwork I create. The representational artwork I created before my most recent abstract series often featured family members as my models. The artwork assembled for my thesis exhibit, although abstract, for me still holds strong familial and spiritual connection to my ancestry.

"Art is a calling. Artists are not discovered in school. Artists do not just paint for themselves, and they don't simply paint for an audience. They paint because they have to. There is something within the artist that has to be expressed. Every creation reveals something more about the universe and about the artist."⁴

³ Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975), 21-22.

⁴ Audrey Flack, *Art & Soul: Notes on Creating* (New York: the Penguin Group, Penguin Putnam Inc., 1986), 3.

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Introduction

This series of paintings and sculptures explore organic forms as biomorphic abstractions and the relationship between two-dimensional and three-dimensional art forms.

Biomorphic is defined as abstract forms influenced by nature. The art I create reflects the things I find most meaningful such as my love of the waterfront and nature, family relationships and spiritual connections.

I begin by creating preliminary sculptures that emphasize flowing organic forms. By placing these sculptures at different angles and in different combinations, I create a variety of compositions for my paintings. Utilizing dramatic lighting to reinforce strong value contrast and the illusion of three-dimensional space and form, I paint each of these sculptural still-lives employing my own selection of color and whimsical vision.

I endeavor to evoke interesting figurative associations into my paintings in a biomorphic style. As I continue to incorporate the human figure in my artwork, I attempt for the figure to be blended, melded or fused together within the abstract organic forms.

To further investigate the relationship between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional art forms, I reinterpret new sculptural works based on the essence of these paintings, which have been cast in bronze.

I wish to create my visual interpretation of our natural world, celestial bodies and explore the relationship between the human experience and spiritual life. With an emphasis on flowing organic forms, I strive for the work through a fluid style of rendering, and the effect of light and color, to emit a spiritual and mystical sense. As I feel this work, in essence, is meant as a memorial tribute to my mother, it is my intention to depict the spiritual connection between us.

My mother had written a beautiful poem about the life and legend of Saint Lucia, a patron Saint of both Italy and Sweden. I had offered to create a sculpted bust of Saint Lucia to accompany her poem while she was still alive on at least two occasions. “No, dear, your Uncle Joe will sculpt it for me,” she responded. I never did create one during her lifetime, nor did Uncle Joe, one of many regrets I had once I lost someone I loved so dearly. I took some comfort when I finally did create a Saint Lucia bust in bronze to accompany and memorialize her poem only a year ago.

I originally believed that piece would be included in my thesis exhibition work. I was researching Saints for a thesis topic as a possible way to investigate my family heritage and spiritual connections along with the legends, which are often quite macabre and gruesome, of martyrdom and Sainthood that integrate my Catholic religion upbringing.

When Dejan Pejovic, sculpture professor, was torching the bronze Saint Lucia’s face for the patina process, he said he felt as if he was practicing some sacred ritual. I replied

maybe I'll create Joan of Arc next and it will be fitting when we torch her face. There is a Saint Paula in *Sister Wendy's Book of Saints*, I had discovered, and she was neither a virgin nor martyr. (Although my friends say I'm no saint, and I've never professed to be). Maybe she should be next, I thought. Then a natural progression would be goddesses and to refer to the work of artist Audrey Flack (American, born 1931), where her series of goddess sculptures that reinforce the theme of empowerment to women would be also fitting.

I have seen Audrey Flack speak in person, once many years ago in the New York Catskills, and again in 2001 in Albany. I take pleasure from knowing she became renowned as a contemporary representational painter, but for over twenty years now she works completely as a sculptor. During her lecture in 2001, she showed examples of how she was inspired by a Spanish sculpture of Mary she found in the outskirts of Seville, Spain, in a section called Macarena, in a church in Triano. It was a life-sized sculpture made of polychrome wood, with glass eyes, false eyelashes, hair, glass tears, real gold on her crown, and real emeralds. When I saw that beautiful sculpture and the artwork that Audrey Flack created by its inspiration was when I thought Saints would be an interesting topic to research for my thesis as well. Somewhere along the line, however, the thesis work moved, although not entirely, in a new direction.

Process and Exploration

The Preliminary Sculptures

I begin by creating preliminary sculptures that emphasize flowing organic forms utilizing plaster, foam, wire, screening and plaster draped gauze and cheesecloth. I envision forms that relate to my interests in gardening and nature, inspired by floral, vegetation, foliage, and rock formations.



Figure 1: Preliminary sculpture still life- plaster, wire, and cheesecloth.

Professor Robert Heischman suggested the imagery of my paintings and sculptures reflect the Tai Hu stones that are found in Chinese Gardens. An avid gardener myself, I was intrigued to research about these stones that adorn Chinese gardens. Landscape design has been of great importance in Chinese culture for more than 2,500 years. Tai Hu stones are magnificent rock formations that are named after Lake Tai in Jiangsu Province. For centuries, these treasured boulders of eroded limestone have been taken from Tai Hu and Chao Hu, a lake in nearby Anhui Province to place in gardens around the world.

I am partial to the Taoist philosophy where the essence of everything in nature is c'hi or spiritual harmony with the universe. Ancient Chinese Garden design, which has been transformed through centuries of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, seeks to create a sanctuary separate from the distractions and stresses of everyday life. I enjoy that my sculptures and paintings have a strong resemblance to these treasured Tai Hu stones that have graced impressive gardens for centuries. ⁵

In the preliminary sculptures, I also attempt to incorporate a sense of the waterfront, fluid, rippling forms of water, sea forms, and seashells. Lastly, I attempt to capture in these preliminary sculpture forms a sense that may elicit spiritual connections, through the illusion of tunnels, labyrinths, feathers, and wings.

⁵ _____. Tai Hu Stones. (<http://www.mobot.org/hort/tours/cgtour2.shtml>, Missouri Botanical Garden Chinese Garden)

My main concern at this point was creating the organic forms related to my interests rather than artist inspiration. In retrospect, I can see a relationship in the preliminary sculptures to the works of sculptors Henry Moore (English, 1898-1987) and Louise Bourgeois (French, American, born 1911).

A proponent of direct carving, and an advocate of biomorphic abstraction, Henry Moore's work advanced modernism in sculpture. What gives his work universal appeal are the simplified stylized forms that represent the bare essence of his subject matter imagery.

“His work is dominated by the two main figurative themes of the reclining nude and the mother and child relationship, which he acknowledged as his ‘obsessions’.... Shapes derive from a variety of sources most especially from natural sources, such as plants, bones and geological formation, but also from human endeavors such as prehistory, ancient art, primitive (non-European) art, modern art, even – later in his career – the Renaissance and old master traditions...”⁶

I believe there is a strong resemblance to these organic and figurative abstracts to my preliminary sculptures that later are reflective in the paintings.

Louise Bourgeois also creates stylized organic and figurative forms that are similar to my preliminary sculptures.

“Motivated to express deeply autobiographical content, Bourgeois followed her own rhythm. Although her work explores abstraction, allusion to organic form permeates most of her pieces, naturally strengthened by the suggestion of fragments of human anatomy.”⁷

⁶ Dorothy Kosinski, ed. *Henry Moore: Sculpting the 20th Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 264.

⁷ Charlotta Kotik, Terry Sultan, and Christian Leigh, ed. *Louise Bourgeois: The Locus of Memory, Works 1982-1993* New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994), 16

She frequently speaks of the turmoil and chaos of her adolescence caused by the presence of her English tutor, Sadie, who was her father's mistress and lived with the family for ten years. Her pieces that have a twisting, spiraling appearance are her interpretations of how she envisioned strangling the neck of her father and his mistress. Other works such as *The Devastation of the Father* exemplifies how even by it's very title, and through her artwork she may resolve issues of her father's betrayal.

"In these early sculptures, Bourgeois created a special brand of animism that continues in her work to this day. The figures or objects represent personages close to her not in appearance, but in spirit; they constitute, in fact, a surrogate family... She concentrated on the spiritual function of her sculpture, using form, materials, techniques and scale to give tangible expression of her own life in an heroic attempt to exorcise them."⁸

In reading about her work, it seems she apparently has deep-rooted fear and emotionally psychological reasons to inspire her sculptural forms. Both of us perhaps are creating to connect to family issues that are significant to us. In a way, we are both using our artwork as a form of art therapy. Mine I am certain, however, being based on happier childhood memories.

There were two main sculptures that I would use as visual reference for my first ten paintings. Four of these paintings were included in the thesis exhibit. I would place them with drapery, light them from an interior space, and integrate the background architectural features in my studio. By placing them in differing angles and from various positions, some individually, some placed together, I could create a multitude of potential

⁸ Ibid., 18.

compositions. Sometimes other objects are added for visual interest, but at a certain point I allow my imagination to alter these sculptural still-lives.

While painting *Jagged* (figure 3) for instance, I was eating cherries. It occurred to me that the painting needed some additional forms in the lower left corner, so I threw a couple of cherries on the table holding the sculptural still life. At first I thought I would use them as visual reference to add some organic sphere like forms where the cherries were, but eventually decided that I would keep them as representational cherries among the organic abstract forms. It was one of my whimsical decisions that others thought were much more symbolic in meaning than I had intended. I suppose that is the pleasure in creating abstract work, the way it is open for audience interpretation.

After creating ten paintings from the two plaster sculptures, I was ready to create some new preliminary works to include as visual reference. I had supervised a sculpture installation, "The Future is Now," that was on display at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center in 1992, for the New York State Art Teachers Association Annual Conference. It was a collaborative work created with my high school students and Professor Jennifer Hecker's sculpture major class at State University of New York at Brockport. Included in the sculpture installation, the many figurative pieces were created by draping cheesecloth coated with plaster, over live models, my students, in various poses.

I have since researched the artwork of sculptor artist Muriel Castanis (American, born 1925). Castanis uses epoxy-soaked cloth, which necessitates she drape a mannequin form rather than live models, into distinguished poses. She covers the mannequin with a plastic wrap and then carefully places the cloth, previously soaked in epoxy, on the form. The quick drying time of the epoxy requires she complete the shape in approximately twenty minutes. Her largest works are reinforced with fiberglass over aluminum armatures, and her method of working produces rigid yet lightweight sculptures. The sculpture pieces I have seen have a female, classical appearance reminiscent of Classical Greek and Roman marble statues, yet have no faces, just shrouded or hooded forms that emanate a mystical look.⁹



Castanis, Muriel, *Untitled*. Cloth and epoxy, 6'4" x 4' x 2'.

⁹ Arthur Williams, *Sculpture: Technique, Form, Content*, (Worcester, Massachusetts: Davis Publications, Inc., 1995), 261-262.

They were very similar in style to those I had created with my students many years earlier. I created two new figurative plaster sculptures that I refer to as “Spirit Sculptures” in this manner. I used these in combination with the other plaster sculptures for visual reference for the final six painting compositions included in the thesis exhibit. Although I feel the paintings I created up to this point still have a strong figurative and sensual style, these preliminary sculpture pieces offered new visual reference composition possibilities for the paintings. They facilitated incorporating the human figure as well as an illusion of a spiritual being into the work.

The Paintings

The paintings most apparently resemble the style of artist Georgia O’Keeffe, but I know I am influenced by many more artists and art movements. I have always loved and have been inspired by the Impressionists with Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926), and Mary Cassatt (American, 1844-1926), being two of my favorite artists. I am fascinated by how they captured how light effects color and that their subject matter portrayed the enjoyable and pleasurable side of everyday life. I have favored an Impressionist palette in my work throughout the years, employing violets and blues in my shadows, and I utilize crosshatched and broken color brushwork. Mary Cassatt, being female and the only American to join the Impressionists, is especially inspirational to me. I enjoy that in her most noted work her subject matter features her mother, sister, or a mother and child relationship. My mother, sister, niece and nephews have been my favorite models in my work for many years, as well.

Edgar Degas (French, 1834-1917), is included in the French Impressionists movement, however, he did not care for the term Impressionist and instead believed himself to be a realist. The recent exhibit in October 2002- January 2003, “Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion” at Memorial Art Gallery of the University of Rochester featured Degas’ seventy-three bronze sculptures from the collection of Museu de Arte in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Often the very same figurative poses from one of his bronze sculptures would again be seen in his pastels and paintings.

Degas is best known for his paintings and pastels of young dancers, yet he admitted that they were a subject matter selected to explore movement. “They call me a painter of dancers without understanding that for me the dancer has been the pretext for painting beautiful fabrics and rendering movement.” Degas was obsessed with the figure, with movement and pose. The sculptures provided a means to explore movement and positions, Degas could work out his ideas in a tactile, three-dimensional form, to solve creative problems, and that could relate to the two-dimensional work.¹⁰

Some scholars have suggested that Degas turned to sculpting in wax when his eyesight began to fail. But we now know he was creating sculpture even before his poor vision became a major disability. He made all the sculptures originally in colored wax or a combination of wax with plasticene over wire armatures. He only had one piece cast in bronze during his lifetime, the “Little Dancer of Fourteen Years” created in 1881, which received such harsh criticism Degas never again showed his sculpture in public.

Degas said to friend Francois Thiebault-Sisson in 1897,

“The only reason I made wax figures of animals and humans was for my own satisfaction, not to take time away from my painting or drawing, but to give my paintings and drawings greater expression, greater ardor, and more life. They are exercises to get me going: documentary preparatory notions, nothing more. None of this work is intended for sale.”¹¹

¹⁰ Joseph S. Czestochowski and Anne Pingeot, *Degas Sculptures*, (Memphis: The Torch Press and International Arts, 2002), 40.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 39, 277

Degas went on to explain:

“My sculptures will never give the impression of being finished, which is the termination of a sculptor’s workmanship, and after all, since no one will ever see these rough sketches, nobody will dare talk about them, not even you. From this day forward until my death, this will all be destroyed by itself and this will be best for my reputation.”¹²

Approximately 150 wax/clay models were found in Edgar Degas’ studio at the time of his death in 1917. Degas’ heirs and his dealer, Joseph Durand-Ruel, authorized the Parisian foundry of A.A. Hebard to cast twenty-two complete sets of seventy-three of the sculptures in bronze. It is quite a controversial issue to consider whether sculptures cast after an artist’s death should be recognized the same as those created during his lifetime.

I am of the opinion that these pieces were intended as studies, not finished work, and as an artist I can appreciate them as such. I dislike, however, the fact that Degas’ heirs disregarded his wishes for them not to be cast in bronze. Regardless, I thoroughly enjoyed the “Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion” exhibit, even to see his bronze sculpture studies which is rarely referred to in art reference books. I had never before seen any of the sculptures in museums except the “Little Dancer of Fourteen Years”. When visiting this exhibit, I was delighted to see his sculpture pieces along side his paintings and felt closeness to Degas where my sculptures are used as reference studies for my paintings as well and where the two-dimensional and three-dimensional work correlate.

¹² Ibid., 28-29, 277

I also favor the works of Post-Impressionists Vincent Van Gogh (Dutch, 1853-1890), Paul Gauguin (French, 1848-1903), Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (French, 1864-1901) and Henri Matisse (French, 1869-1954). I admire their style that took Impressionism a step further by utilizing a palette of rich jeweled tones, bold broken color and expressive brushstrokes in their work. Paul Gauguin formulated the aesthetic principle he named “Synthetism”, a style characterized by a symbolic representation of nature and the use of massive, simplified forms and large, bright planes of color. Besides painting, Paul Gauguin tried his hand at sculpture during his last years.

Henri Matisse started his artistic career in the Post-Impressionist style but headed the Fauvist group where he displayed a tendency towards monumental, decorative compositions. Sculpture also occupied a significant place in Matisse’s artistic effort.¹³ “For Matisse, sculpture provided a means by which he could find solutions to the problems he encountered in his paintings.”¹⁴

I see the inspiration of these artists in my own work by the jeweled toned color choices that my recent work employs and how Matisse used sculpture as an art form as well, to enhance his paintings.

¹³ Irina Freshko and Donald Goddard, ed. *Impressionism and Post Impressionism*. (Tokyo: Toppan Printing Co., 1986), 206, 298.

¹⁴ Czestochowski, 39.

I have always enjoyed the Pop Artists with their bold and humorous approach. Andy Warhol (American, 1928-1987) would take the same subject matter image and change the color scheme for an entirely new look, to easily compile a series of related work.

Considering I used the same two plaster sculpture studies for at least ten paintings in my biomorphic series, I was able to gain a lot of artistic mileage in a comparable manner.

James Rosenquist (American, born 1933) began his graphic art career as a billboard painter before he became noted for his large Pop Art paintings. I was a set designer for ten years and annually painted several fifty-foot show drops. Making the transition to painting large oil paintings on canvas for my own personal effort rather than for theatrical productions is very easy for me, as I would imagine it is also for Rosenquist.

Professor Robert Heischman suggested I should research the work of an artist that I was not familiar, and I was able to see this resemblance to my own work. Albert Pinkham Ryder (American, 1847-1917), referred to as an “Old Master” in the modern movement, was chosen as a spiritual father to the progressive group of artists that organized the famous 1913 Armory Show in New York City. He was the only American painter that was so honored, where ten of his paintings were displayed in the center galleries with foreign masters – Ingres, Delacroix, Goya, Corot, Daumier, Manet, Gauguin, Cezanne, and Van Gogh. Ryder’s romantic, dreamy subjects along with his shy, introverted personal manner, likened him to artist Vincent VanGogh, and his paintings were believed to anticipate abstract expression.

The critics of his time described Ryder's move beyond concrete symbolism into pure abstraction. "The challenge was clear: how to "paint an idea," avoiding illustration, delving below narrative and even below consciousness."¹⁵

I see a resemblance in my own paintings to Ryder's latter paintings, especially those depicting boats and water. In his paintings of marine and moonlight scenes there are the essences of a few simple forms with glowing color, relying on powerful light and dark contrasts that made his "compositions dramatic and commanding. ...so that even water and clouds present a sculptural aspect." Exactly what I envision my paintings to have- a sculptural aspect. ¹⁶

It is difficult to trace the exact origin date of his painting, *Moonlight Marine*, but the heavily worked surface and simplified forms are consistent with paintings he made in the late 1890's. It was exhibited in the Armory Show, and was exhibited often after that 1913 date. *Moonlight Marine*, with it's strongly patterned composition, has become one of Ryder's most recognized marine paintings and has served for numerous forgeries.

¹⁵Elizabeth Brown, *Albert Pinkham Ryder*, (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press and the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1989), 110.

¹⁶ Ibid., 108



Albert Pinkham Ryder, *Moonlight Marine*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Samuel D. Lee Fund

Another painting by Albert Pinkham Ryder that I can correlate to my own work is *Moonlight Cove*, one more work without exact date of origin but again believed to have been painted, in the 1890's. "Clouds swirl close around a deserted shore as if concealing a precious mystery in *Moonlight Cove*." ¹⁷ It's strong, rhythmic patterns echoing the motion of the sea, "brooding mystery, lightened by the brilliancy of flooding light that streams from the moon on the water." ¹⁸

¹⁷ Brown, 112.

¹⁸ Brown, 260.



Albert Pinkham Ryder. *Moonlit Cove*. The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

In researching artist Arthur Dove (American, 1880-1946) it is interesting to note he was born in Canandaigua, New York and his family moved to Geneva, New York in 1882, where his father owned a successful brick plant. He attended Hobart College in Geneva, New York, for two years then transferred to Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y. to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. After college he moved to New York City and began a career as a commercial free-lance illustrator. His travel to Southern France, with one trip to Italy in 1907 until 1909, was spent mainly painting in an Impressionistic style. He returned to Geneva in spring of 1909, but returned to New York City and illustrating in the fall of that year.

In all his paintings Arthur Dove attempted to extract from an object it's essential "spirit." He believed all things had what he called a color condition or a "condition of light." It was through this condition of light that one could represent the essence of an object and that color can reveal qualities, which cannot be seen with normal vision. The reduction of objects to a few simple color and form motifs and a relationship to nature in his imagery, were the basis of Dove's work throughout his life.

"Dove communicated his feeling of oneness with nature in all his works, He perceived nature, not as an observer would perceive it from without, but as if he were an inseparable part of it." ¹⁹

In 1910, with the birth of his son, William, Dove purchased a farm and moved his family to Westport, Connecticut directly from the hospital. He hoped to support his family and his painting by farming and illustrating. "I made a living farming and illustrating to support painting" he was known to say. ²⁰

The difficult physical hardships and financial struggles of farming left little time for painting. Despite these difficulties, Dove produced a body of work in the first eighteen months living in Westport, that was a radical leap from his Impressionistic style and placed him in the forefront of American modernism. His relationship to the land as a farmer, brought about the serenity and sensuous feelings toward nature that was communicated in his paintings. Dove writes, "Really loving anything means the

¹⁹ Barbara Haskell, *Arthur Dove*, (San Francisco, California: San Francisco Museum of Art, 1974), 7-8.

²⁰ Frederick S. Wight, *Arthur G. Dove*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1958), 42.

incapacity to do anything else”²¹ and “Everything we do is a self portrait,” he once told his son.²²

His first non-representational paintings had a tendency towards geometric abstractions with a simplification of shape, overlapping of planes in a shallow three-dimensional space and somber, earth tone color/form relationships.

”As the only American artist to have developed his own non-representational style, before the Armory Show, Dove became a symbol of deranged modernism in the eyes of the American public.”²³

His commitment to the inner spirit allowed him to remain true to his personal ideals, and his resolve to paint despite a hostile public with little financial support were the source for his moral strength.

Alfred Stieglitz, and his gallery “291”, provided immense and perhaps the main support and encouragement for Dove. Alfred Stieglitz, his gallery “291” and his subsequent galleries, were not profitable as commercial galleries. His objective was to support artists and provide them an opportunity to exhibit their work, neither to please the public nor to make money. In fact he never took a salary, and much of his own money went into the upkeep of the gallery. He would instead take a painting from each show as payment. Three artists that Stieglitz consistently supported were John Marin, Georgia O’Keeffe, and Arthur Dove.²⁴

²¹ Haskell, 14

²² Wight, 56.

²³ Haskell, 21.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.



Arthur Dove, *Below the Flood Gates*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 24" x 28", Private Collection.

Abstracting from forms in nature, with swelling, rounded curves, would be typical of Dove's resultant work in the twenties and thirties. His paintings *Waterfall*, 1925, *Below the Flood Gates*, 1930 and his *Sunrise series I, II and III*, are paintings I prefer that are reflected of nature. I see a similarity to this work and my own. The *Sunrise series* with repeated convex curves and an interior light are similar to my painting *Destiny* (figure 2).

"The character of Dove's paintings in the late twenties and thirties is dominated by nature imagery. The irregular, circular shapes swelling outward with halos of modulated color that Dove favors during this period, suggest growth and explosive energy."²⁵

I have long been an admirer of Arthur Dove's paintings, but when researching his life more fully, I was genuinely intrigued with the close connections he and his family had in

²⁵ Wight, 73.

upstate New York regions for a large portion of his lifetime. I also realize why I am impressed with his work when through the research I discover Dove's work is based on his love for nature, and his extracting from each object it's essential "spirit", objectives I share for my own work. His dedication to the arts and non-conformist lifestyle was equally fascinating. In 1920, Dove admits the failure of his marriage. He lives on a houseboat on the Harlem River with Helen Torr Weed "Reds", who later in 1930 becomes his second wife. They purchased a forty-two foot yawl, "Mona," and for the next 7 years, cruise Long Island Sound, Port Washington, Lloyd's Harbor, and Huntington Harbor.

A close personal friendship and professional respect existed between Georgia O'Keeffe and Arthur Dove. Definitely an artist I admired for a long time, Georgia O'Keeffe (American, 1887-1986) is the most obvious artist inspiration for my series of paintings. Georgia O'Keeffe is recognized as a major figure in American Art. Many of her abstract designs were created in the years around World War I, a period of turmoil both aesthetic and social during which she was teaching in Columbia, South Carolina, and Canyon, Texas. She also taught with Alon Bement at the University of Virginia, and in the summer of 1912 visited one of his classes. She wrote:

"I hadn't been painting for several years but he had an idea that interested me. An idea that seemed to be of use to everyone – whether you think about it consciously or not – the idea of filling a space in a beautiful way. Where you have the windows and door in a house. How you address a letter and put on a stamp. What shoes you choose and how you comb your hair." ²⁶

²⁶ Georgia O'Keeffe, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, (New York, the Penguin Group, 1976), 11.

Despite her sisters urging to take one of Bement's classes, she felt he was a colleague that influenced her in other ways. It was Bement's suggestion that she read Wassily Kandinsky's treatise *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, which greatly influenced her over the years. She expressed the following narrative to accompany her painting, *Music – Pink and Blue I* created in 1919.

"I never took one of Bement's classes at Columbia University, but one day walking down the hall I heard music from his classroom. Being curious I opened the door and went in. A low toned record was being played and the students were asked to make a drawing from what they heard. So I sat down and made a drawing, too... This gave me an idea that I was very interested to follow later – the idea that music could be translated into something for the eye."²⁷

Influenced by her surroundings for her subject matter selections, she was noted for her various painting themes of abstractions, city views, desert landscapes, bones, shells, flowers and other natural forms. Her style to simplify forms, often enlarge to immense scale so that realism appears abstract and utilize a bold, intense color palette brought her work great reaction, both acclaim and criticism during her career.

She arrived in New York in 1918 and lived for a while in the studio of Alfred Stieglitz's niece Elizabeth, a dramatic change from her prior home in the Texas panhandle. O'Keeffe joined other artists inspired by the industrial energy and created many New York City scenes during this period.

²⁷ O'Keeffe, 14.



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Music-Pink and Blue I*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 35x29"

Insisting that “shapes and colors are more exact to me than words”, Georgia O'Keeffe writes about her work and her evolution as an artist.

“There are people who have made me see shapes and others I thought of a great deal, even people I have loved, who make me see nothing. I have painted portraits that to me are almost photographic. I remember hesitating to show the paintings they look so real to me. But they have passed into the world as abstractions – no one seeing what they are.”²⁸

²⁸ O'Keeffe, 55.

Stieglitz, like many urbanites past and present, joined his family at his mother's summer home in upstate New York at Lake George. In August 1918, his family warmly received Georgia when she accompanied Stieglitz there. I am especially drawn to her work that was inspired by her time at Lake George, it reminds me of moments spent at Lake Ontario that influence my own artwork.

"One of the couple's favorite pastimes was rowing on the lake at night, escaping the crowded family homestead for private moments alone in the darkness. A study, *Lake George* (c. 1926), was probably inspired by such an evening; the dark tiny canvas – six by eight inches, small enough to have been painted in the stern of a rowboat – belies the large scale of the landscape composition. In subject and in mood, it is redolent of moody motifs from the turn of the century, for instance the moonlight marines of the vastly admired Albert Pinkham Ryder, subjects and attitudes to which O'Keeffe was logically an heir." ²⁹

This landscape study became the basis for an extended series of marine and nocturnes, including the "suavely patterned abstractions" such as *From the Lake No. 1* that I admire.

"Here she pushes the landscape into abstraction, celebrating the rhythms and colors of the stormy Lake George country in a design that grows simultaneously from her more representational views and from her abstractions.

The dynamic arrangement of forms suggests the search for an abstract equivalent for the forces of nature that motivated O'Keeffe's pictorial imagination. Like Arthur Dove, her artistic soul mate, she tended to simplify natural forms, seeking to distill their essence over extended treatments of a motif." ³⁰

²⁹ Charles C. Eldredge, *Georgia O'Keeffe*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, in association with the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 51.

³⁰ Eldredge, 52.



Georgia O'Keeffe, *From the Lake No. 1*, 1924. Oil on canvas, 37 1/8 x 31", Des Moines Art Center.

I often think that men don't necessarily relate to a woman's choice of colors, or at least not to mine. Apparently she experienced similar bias when she referred to the somber, earth toned color choices of her contemporaries and colleagues as "dreary".

"It was in the time when men didn't think much of what I was doing. They were all discussing Cezanne with long involved remarks about the 'plastic quality' of his form and color. I was an outsider. My color and form were not acceptable. It had nothing to do

with Cezanne or anyone else. I didn't understand what they were talking about – why one color was better than another.”³¹

When Georgia began to paint her series of flowers, she was a young woman of thirty, and very much in love with world-renowned photographer and New York gallery dealer, Alfred Stieglitz. The first large-scale canvases were completed in 1924, the year of their marriage. They were first displayed at the “Seven Americans” exhibition held by Stieglitz at the Anderson Galleries in 1925. By the end of her career, she painted over two hundred flower paintings, the majority painted in a creative period lasting from 1918 to 1932.³²

“A flower is relatively small. Everyone has many associations with a flower – lean forward to smell it – maybe touch it with your lips almost without thinking – or give it to someone to please them. Still, in a way, nobody sees a flower – really – it is so small – we haven't time – and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time. If I could paint a flower exactly as I see into one would see what I see because I would paint it small like the flower is small.

“So I said to myself – I'll paint what I see – what the flower is to me but I'll paint it big and they will be surprised into taking time to look at it – I will make even busy New Yorkers take time to see what I see of flowers.

“Well – I made you take time to look at what I saw and when you took time to really notice my flower you hung all your own associations with flowers on my flower and you write about my flower as if I think and see what you think and see of the flower – and I don't.”³³

I am often amused by how my paintings are perceived by others as sensual or arousing, when I am not consciously trying to foster that effect. The same holds true for the work of master artists such as O'Keeffe. As Dejan Pejovic and I discuss my thesis work last winter for instance, he remarks he sees a strong influence of Georgia O'Keeffe in my

³¹ O'Keeffe, 31

³² Nicholas Callaway, *O'Keeffe: Selections from One Hundred Flowers, In the West, The New York Years*, (New York, Callaway Editions, 2001), 123.

³³ O'Keeffe, 23-24

paintings. He continues discussing something about flowers, bones and female anatomy. I told him I read a lot about O'Keeffe. She claimed she was surprised that people associated sexual imagery in her work, but it was never consciously her intent. He countered, well she can claim it wasn't consciously done, but sub consciously, it's there. A light bulb moment, as usual, perhaps he is right. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, than possibly so is everything else.

The connotations of the flower paintings caused a great sensation among the public and critics. Many found them sensual, in some cases overly erotic. Some considered them to be spiritually chaste.

"One thing she said about Jack in the Pulpit was that other people tried to make other things out of it but that it was what it was, a flower. 'I had to work very hard on that painting to get it right, to get it simple.'" ³⁴

I respect Georgia O'Keeffe, as an independent woman, an early supporter of women's rights, and a self-reliant female artist during a time when the art world was almost exclusively male.

"I get out my work and have a show for myself before I have it publicly. I make up my own mind about it – how good or bad or indifferent it is. After that the critics can write what they please. I have already settled it for myself so flattery and criticism go down the same drain and I am quite free." ³⁵

³⁴ Christine Taylor Patten and Alvaro Cardona-Hine, *Miss O'Keeffe*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992), 125-6

³⁵ O'Keeffe, 31

Throughout her final decade, even as failing health kept her from the public eye, the artwork continued to garner attention and new enthusiasts; and with that recognition, the artist's mystique grew as well. In 1983, when Georgia O'Keeffe was ninety-six years old, Christine Taylor Patten, an artist herself, was hired as a nurse, cook, companion and friend, one of those who took care of her. In her book, *Miss O'Keeffe*, she illustrates their close relationship.

"On her dining room table there was one of her sculptures. It was white, eight to ten inches high, and it looked like a maquette of the very large bronze that ended up in the yard in Santa Fe while I was there. There was a larger version of the maquette in the studio. She told me that whenever she had a painting that she wasn't sure about she would put it next to that sculpture and if it looked all right with it she would know the painting was good. When I asked her when she had done it Georgia couldn't remember but according to her, it wasn't done in clay at first. And she told me, 'If whatever I painted didn't stand up against that I knew it was wrong. '

I asked her if that happened much.

'Oh, I don't think it happened very often,' she grinned."³⁶

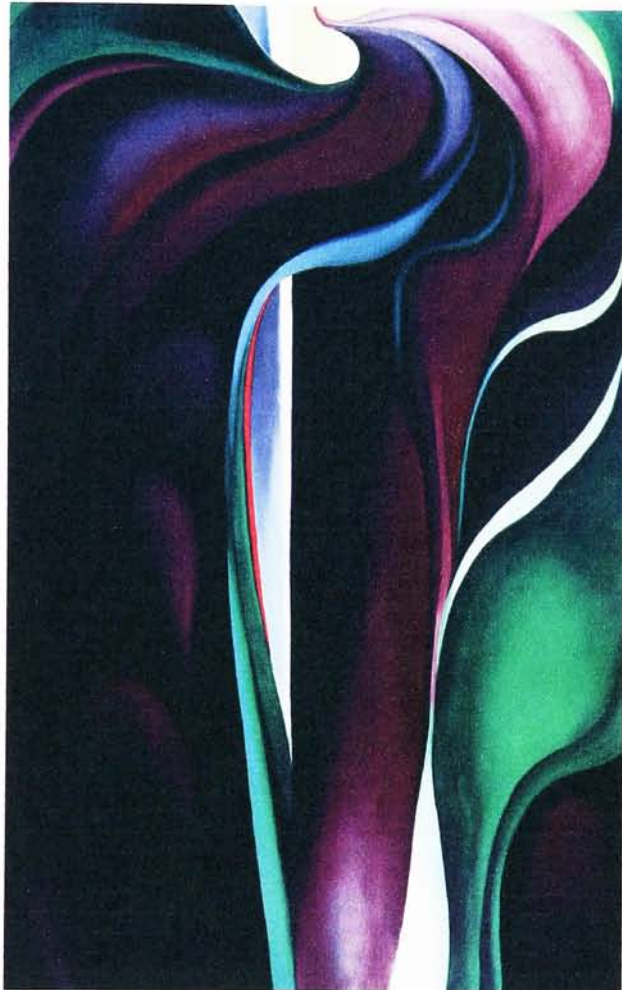
Again, when she discusses the importance she placed upon her sculpture to the relationship of her paintings, I find another similarity between O'Keeffe's work and my own. And a final insight from Georgia O'Keeffe to Christine Taylor Patten is great advice that I will heed as well.

"When people asked her did she miss painting, she'd tell them, 'Well, what makes you think that I am not painting anymore?' She told them she was painting inside her head.

The only advice she ever gave me was, 'Never let them keep you from doing your art work!'"³⁷

³⁶ Patten, 124-125

³⁷ Ibid, 126



Georgia O'Keeffe, *Jack-in-the-Pulpit V*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 48 x30"

I have longtime been an admirer of artist Chuck Close (American, born 1940), but I absolutely love his recent works. I admire how his signature style has evolved over the years. He takes a small representational reference and by utilizing a grid system enlarges to an immense scale to create tightly rendered, jumbo photo-realism portrait paintings, cropping below the neck in a mug shot style pose. His recent works have progressed from

realism towards increasing abstraction. I enjoy the wildly, intense colors employed while still utilizing the grid, where each small box is an abstract painting of it's own with coloration that appears almost neon cool and hot. "...these paintings squirm and squiggle and slither with a visceral biomorphism whose fluidity speaks increasingly of pooling, puddling, spillage, overflow and confluence."³⁸

He refers to his sense of using color as "color chords", and likens his knowledge to placing these perfectly placed color chord combinations in each grid box in the manner that a musician knows which chords to play on a piano for a beautiful song.

"On some days, Close says, he may feel like a jazz musician or an athlete in 'the zone,' seemingly capable of endless improvisation, hitting on all cylinders as the brush flies along through square after square, inventing effortlessly."³⁹

I can liken my own working style to that of Chuck Close. My preliminary sculptures as references are relatively smaller in scale to the finished paintings, and I develop a vivid, imaginative color scheme rather than representational such as he does in his recent work.

"I remember a critic once writing that the Seaforms were so buoyant that they would float to the ceiling during the middle of the night when the lights were out. I love that."

-Dale Chihuly, Seaforms

³⁸ Kirk Varnedoe, *Chuck Close: Recent Works*, (New York: Pace Wildenstein, 2002), 8.

³⁹ Varnedoe, 10.

One of the most memorable art related experiences I have had was first seeing the work and meeting artist Dale Chihuly (American, born 1941) at the opening of his *Seaforms* exhibit at the Memorial Art Gallery two years ago. I had taken my art students there and he showed up with his entourage including a camera crew. He stopped to answer some of my students questions about his glass sculptures and then instructed his assistant to send me a copy of his video that would best explain the glass blowing process that he and his studio use. I received the copy quite soon after of *Chihuly - River of Glass*.

His titles such as *Seaforms* suggest the natural world and conjure images of sea urchins, corals, sponges, anemones and other incredible ocean creatures. Author, oceanographer, and former Chief Scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Sylvia Earle, depicts the creation of Dale Chihuly's Seaforms:

“Here, I would like to describe something that goes beyond the realm of art – how the Seaforms and the beauty and spirit reflected in each glowing rendition inspire those who see them to value and care for the living sea. Whatever else these wondrous glass objects are as reflections of skill, passion, teamwork and sheer genius, they are also tributes – a celebration of the sea that the child Chihuly first knew in Seattle, the wild ocean where he later sailed as a fisherman, the New England shore where he developed as an artist at the Rhode Island School of Design ... and, in due course, the Northwest Coast near the phenomenon known as the Boathouse, where the creative team who works with him now create miracles with glass.”⁴⁰

In *Chihuly Over Venice*, William Warmus, a writer from Ithaca, New York and former curator of the Corning Museum of Glass, writes a prologue in a journal style, observing Chihuly and his team as they construct their glass sculptures in 1996. He first questions

⁴⁰ Sylvia Earle, *Chihuly Seaforms*, (Seattle, Washington: Portland Press, Inc., 1995), 4-5.

Dale about this project. “Again I question him about *Chihuly Over Venice*: Is it about art? media? performance? “I don’t know what it is but I hope it’s original” was his response.⁴¹

As William Warmuth witnesses the hanging of a Chihuly chandelier at the double arch at Campo San Maurizio, his colleague, Jeff Smith, provides insight on Dale Chihuly as an artist.

“Such beauty. You know you yourself could never create that. This genius with an eye patch and funky shoes: he’s eccentric and loves being eccentric. People see an artist like that and realize that he’s more human, not less, and the hunger he causes, he also satisfies.

...He’s a very odd artist. He could never repeat. I think he finds that cheap. Repetitive is when a guy never changes the menu. *Chihuly Over Venice* is like an enormous dinner party that will never be the same again.”

Charles Cowles, the New York City gallery owner and Chihuly’s primary dealer at St. Mark’s Square, offers the following comments:

“Dale has gained entry into the art world as an artist. Dale is shooting for the top - as he should. He is a showman, but with guts.” The chandeliers? ‘Technically, the parts are not difficult but the Chandeliers are creative and successful. I think the big yellow one in the Barovier Gallery is spectacular.’ And the steel supports? ‘Dale has not yet talked God into giving him a skyhook. I don’t even look at those. They are like a stretcher to a painting.’”⁴²

Warmuth describes another Chihuly’s chandelier installation, the Lampadario del Doge, being placed directly beneath one of the palace’s chandeliers in the Palazzo Ducale as brilliant. While witnessing the installation of this piece, he is reminded of an ongoing

⁴¹ Helen Abbott and Barry Rosen, editors. *Chihuly Over Venice*, (Seattle, Washington: Portland Press, 1996), September 8

⁴² Abbott, September 9

debate regarding the finial in abstract sculpture, where it negatively impacts the sculpture by making it instead decorative or ornamental. He determines Chihuly's chandeliers do not suffer this negative consequence.



Dale Chihuly, *Chiostro Di Sant Appollonia*, Finland, 259 pcs/1036 lbs., 5'5" h x 7'4" w

“ With Chihuly's Chandelier-sculptures, the finial melts into the sculpture, the sculpture and ornament are one. Another way to write this: Chihuly is making contemporary sculpture that, while advanced from an optical and colorist point of view, is not abstract, is not decorative, is not realist.”⁴³

⁴³ Abbott, September 14



Figure 2 *Destiny, 2003. Oil on Canvas, 48 x 92"*

He describes Chihuly designing another chandelier with “swelling ocean forms, glowing hot, covered with sea creatures.”⁴⁴

His epilogue notes, written when he returned home to Ithaca, New York from Venice, conclude that the chandeliers were best appreciated at night when a chandelier is meant to dominate a room. He was surprised that he had not documented that while in Venice, but rather as an after thought.

“There is something about Chihuly that makes you experience everything all at once. And as you are overwhelmed you know that there are still secrets, back there in the furnace room, with the glassblowers, where he is at work to catch every scrap of inspiration. That day at the Double Bridge, when Chihuly dismissed all the technology with a few words, it made me think that *Chihuly Over Venice*, as much as anything, was about traveling back in time, down that dark corridor to whatever is best in the past and worth propelling into the future. That’s a trip you don’t take with the media, its one you make with your heart.”⁴⁵

I have debated Chihuly critics that unjustly believe because he is unable to produce the glasswork himself since his eye injury resulted in the loss of his peripheral vision and his crew must now execute his designs, that he should relinquish being an artist. Some oppose he has become too commercial citing for example his spontaneous squeeze bottle acrylic paintings. But I counter that the “Ideation and Series” course I had taken would advise the very same approach to producing enough artwork to satisfy your gallery and clients.

⁴⁴ Abbott, September 16

⁴⁵ Abbott, October 27

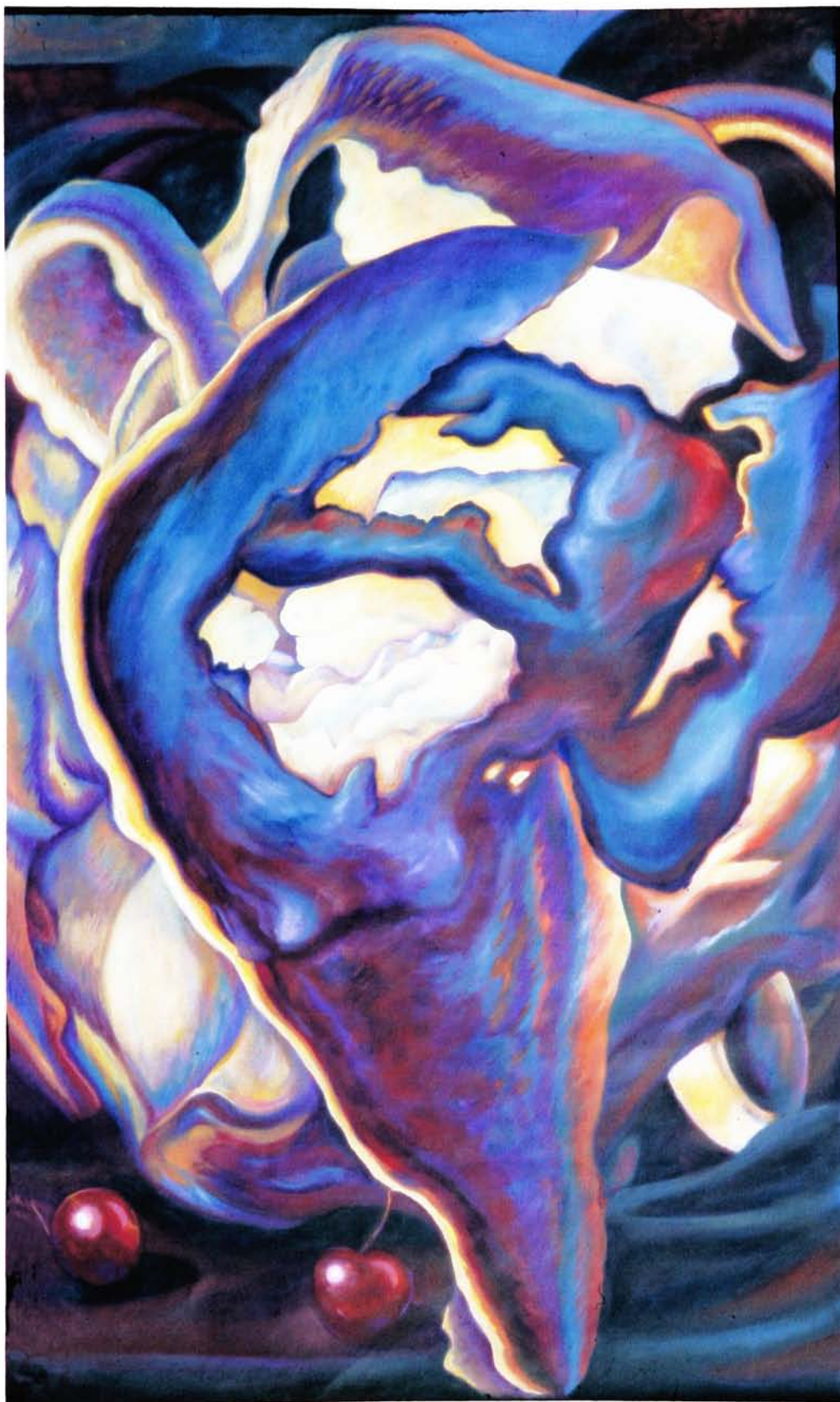
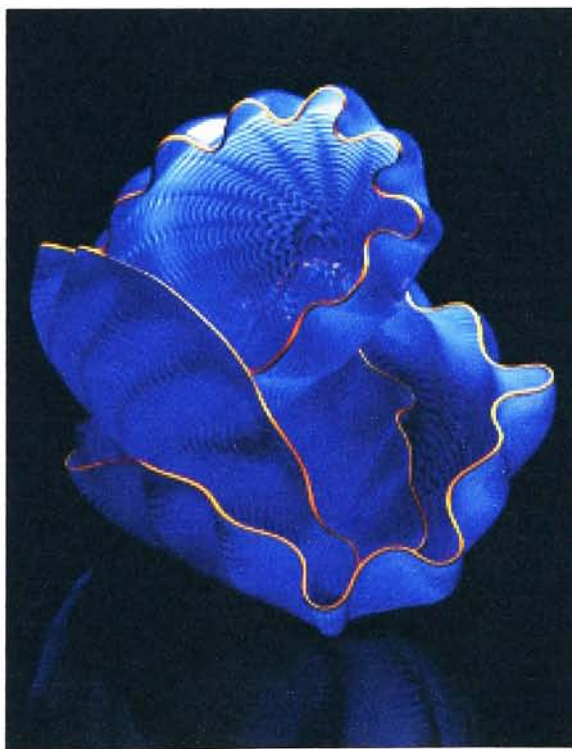


Figure 3 *Jagged*, 2001. Oils on Canvas, 80 x 48"

He's a unique artist, and I believe his work is gorgeous, just breathtaking when I was able to look at it up close. An ongoing ultimate goal I have is to capture the light, color and reflection of a Chihuly glass sculpture or installation in my paintings. I believe my paintings of *Destiny* (figure2) and *Mollusk* (figure 4) are inspired by Chihuly's Seaform pieces, and *Jagged* (figure3), *Celestial Blue* (figure 5) and *Inner Light* (figure 8) have complex organic forms that resemble the organic forms found in chandelier styled installations such as those in *Chihuly Over Venice* and *River of Glass*. I recently noticed the piping edges that he refers to as lip wraps on many of his glass sculptures, I subconsciously add to several of the edges of abstract shapes in my paintings. An example of this is Chihuly's *Lapis Seaform Set with Yellow Orange Lip Wraps*, 1994 with my paintings of *Mollusk*, *Jagged*, and *Celestial Blue*. I suppose that is a beginning.



Dale Chihuly, *Lapis Seaform Set with Yellow Orange Lip Wraps*, 1994, 16 x 32 x 17"

And the final inspiration for my paintings I will address is contemporary artist Sandy Skoglund (American, born 1946). I vividly recall seeing the first example of Sandy Skoglund's work. A friend from New York mailed me a Christmas card in 1989 featuring a photograph of *Sock Situation*, the Christmas season window display she had designed for Barney's of New York City in 1986. She designs wild and whimsical room sized installations that include her own sculptures and other objects, almost as a set designer for a theatrical production, utilizes a unifying color scheme and often uses live actors and/or mannequins. The surreal and poignant three-dimensional installations are displayed but are also documented through two-dimensional photographs. I set up sculptural installations with figurative elements, drapery, and additional objects that are basically white, and later I paint them on the two-dimensional canvas in intense, vivid colors.



Skoglund, Sandy. *Sock Situation* (installation), 1986. Christmas window for Barney's Department Store, New York, New York, December 1986.



Figure 4 Mollusk, 2001. Oils on Canvas, 48 x 80"

How the Original Concepts and Series Evolved

After my mother's death, although I have a strong faith that life after death exists, I needed assurance that she was safe and secure in heaven, and most importantly that we would be someday reunited. So as my usual response I engrossed myself in research regarding death, life after death experiences, para-normal phenomenon and spiritual healers, leaders and conduits. I read every book I could find on these subjects: Shakti Gawain (*Creative Visualization, Living in the Light*), Gary Zukov (*Seat of the Soul, Soul Stories*), Betty Eadie (*Embraced by the Light*), Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (*On Death and Dying, The Wheels of Life*), Deepok Chopra (*Quantum Healing*), and others until I felt at peace that all would be well.

Gary Zukav, a spiritual leader, and author of *Seat of the Soul* and *Soul Stories* writes that when a deceased loved one appears in your dreams, it is their way to contact you. My dreams held great importance when my mother came to me in dream-like visits on two separate occasions, once on the day of her funeral, and again about ten months later. The second time she appeared with a glow emanating, opening her arms to embrace each one of us and telling my sister, my nephew (an infant at the time), and me that she loved us and all would be well. I felt healing, love and a great sense of tranquility. It felt as if they were more than dreams, so vivid and realistic, they were rather mystical experiences. I was very relieved of all anxieties that had burdened me and was at total inner peace after the second dream visit occurred. I have ever since wished to capture that experience, of

heading toward glowing light in celestial surroundings, and gaining that sense of inner peace. Thus I am constantly attempting to illustrate through my paintings and sculpture a spiritual connection with an interior light and an ethereal quality.

Exploring color and value in the paintings I originally would prime my canvas and then paint a value under painting in burnt sienna and burnt umber washes and then add Prussian blue for the darks. I have a tendency to prefer a cool palette, predominate with blues and violets. I was determined to give my paintings a warmer undertone, so I began experimenting with toning my canvas with cadmium yellow, cadmium red, and alizarin crimson. After a while, I decided that the cadmium red alone was a toned wash I preferred to apply over the entire surface before continuing with laying down my darkest values and then loosely blocking in the painting.

While working on a canvas that was newly blocked in, Professor Robert Heischman asks do I always start them so painterly?

“Yes,” I respond.

He remarked he’d never seen them in early stages.

“I’ve never let you see them this early,” I reply.

He liked a lot of the looseness and painterly quality.

“Be certain to keep some of it,” he said. And I always attempt to do just that, some more successfully than others.



Figure 6 Study for Inner Light III, 2002. Oils on canvas, 16 x 20"

I am partial to *Destiny* (figure 2), the first painting I felt captured an ethereal essence with an inviting, heavenly glow. The next painting in the series *Jagged* (figure 3) I am partial to because of the contrast from reality of the cherries and ring to its' abstract shapes. There is also stark contrast between the glowing interior space, and dark surrounding shapes with dark, hard edges. I remember thinking that my nerves were very jagged while I painted that piece, and how it became titled the same, compared to those "happy" paintings I create when I tend to be more relaxed during the summer.

Next was *Mollusk* (figure 4) that I believe is more evidently inspired by Chihuly and by O'Keeffe with a large seashell shape. I also like the strange red ribbon pea pod shapes, because they are such a departure from the rest of the soft flowing shapes.

Celestial Blue (figure 5) was the next painting in the series that is very romantic and tranquil, another painting that exemplifies when I am emotionally peaceful. It reminds me of some of Chihuly's blue glass chandeliers. Dr. Thomas Lightfoot was working with me when I began this painting. I recall that he said I'm always adding something new of interest to surprise him. He pointed to the hatched mesh patterns I had created in the top left corner saying the painting consists basically of voluptuous organic shapes and here you add "fairy wings." I was quite delighted with that analogy.

I had painted all of these on un-stretched canvas in order to facilitate transporting them back and forth from my home studio to the RIT campus. It was a challenge to stretch them afterwards considering their large sizes. I had never painted on un-stretched canvas



Figure 7 Study for *Inner Light IV*, 2002. Oils on canvas, 16 x 20"

before, and after the difficulties encountered from stretching them after being painted, I decided all future work would be stretched beforehand. I now had to be practical enough to consider my size limitations for a stretched canvas to transport within the confines of my van space. I also had to figure a system to transport these large pieces from my home studio through the outdoor elements to the loading dock, elevator and hallways of RIT to get to the basement level painting studio. There were a few harrowing times when the canvas caught sail in the wind and I went along with it!

Wherever the interior light of my subject is, I wish for that to illuminate an internal glow. I utilize warm colors for the shapes of light and all edges that also need a glowing effect and then dramatically contrast them with cool, complementary dark shapes to surround them. *Destiny* (figure 2) and *Inner Light* (figure 8) are my favorite paintings that I feel are most successful in accomplishing the feeling of spiritual light.

I had a box of small 16x20 pre-stretched canvases and decided that I should paint some small, fast studies using my preliminary sculptures combined with one of the “spirit sculptures.” I painted five of them, *Study for Inner Light III* (figure 6), *Study for Inner Light IV* (figure 7) are included in the thesis exhibit, and used the most successful ones to enlarge for future paintings.

In the paintings *Study for Inner Light III* (figure6), *Study for Inner Light IV* (figure7), *Inner Light* (figure 8), *Winter Blues* (figure 9), *Visceral* (figure10), and *Elysium* (figure11), the figurative forms are intended as spiritual beings, glowing with an inner



Figure 8 *Inner Light*, 2002. Oils on canvas, 36 x 48"

light. Some of the figures are more fused and blended within the composition shapes than others. One study for *Inner Light* was so well received by others that I decided it should be enlarged. I don't enjoy painting the exact composition twice, so I departed from the study by keeping the interior glowing shape with warm cadmium reds and yellows more prominent than in the study and some other minor changes. *Inner Light* (figure 8) has a visceral, labyrinth quality and the dark surroundings have a galactic appearance. It is one of my favorites.

While painting *Winter Blues* (figure 9), Professor Robert Heischman exclaims, "Wow! This winter weather is really getting to you. This painting is so cold."

He likes the play between the cool color shapes and the warm glowing shape in the upper right-hand corner. Again he warns me to be sure to keep the painterly quality, don't overwork or soften it (my biggest fear).

He asks where was I painting it? Next to the window in my studio at home with drifts of snow and wintry weather engrossing me, I reply.

"It looks cold, but different", he says, "another winner."

Visceral (figure 10) and *Elysium* (figure 11) have a different feel to them than many of the other paintings in this series. *Elysium* was the final piece I completed only hours before I was to hang my exhibit. For both paintings I placed objects that held symbolic meaning with both "Spirit Sculptures" for my sculptural still lives. The steer skull is always hanging over the fireplace in my art studio and I felt this was an easily identifiable

symbol of death. Pomegranates are often referred to in mythology, and I believe they are meant as a sign for fertility or everlasting life.

I have my own personal association of my grandmother with pomegranates, an unusual fruit she and my mother often bought for us to share especially during the holidays. I thought of my dream state visit with my mother and thought of how pleasant it felt to be there with her, but now she is probably with my grandmother. Author Betty Eadie of *Embraced by the Light* writes about her near death experience in profound detail, “Things were coming back to me from long before my life on earth, things that had been purposely blocked from me by a ‘veil’ of forgetfulness at my birth.”⁴⁶ I thought of this when I draped cheesecloth between the two figurative sculptures to create wispy, cloud effects and the “veil of forgetfulness”.

I ask Professor Robert Heischman his opinion about my last painting, worried that I may be going off tangent again, although I believe it was addressing the next progression. I explain I was trying to follow my proposal to incorporate more figurative forms and evoke a mystical sense. (Bob says please don’t have any more visions.) He was hoping I had forgotten the mystical part, but said it looked as if it held great meaning for me. I agreed and explain that again I am trying to capture the feeling of the afterlife, but how does one illustrate that? He gave great direction on how to dissolve the shrouded figures to be in keeping with the rest of the organic forms, to make them less literal, and give the illusion that they may be in the process of becoming spiritual figures rather than being so

⁴⁶ Betty J. Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*, (Placerville, Ca.: Gold Leaf Press, 1992), 44.



Figure 10 *Visceral*, 2003. Oils on canvas, 48x36"

pronounced. That is what I was really striving for. I named it *Elysium*, in Greek mythology, the home of the blessed after death, which is surprisingly similar to my mother's name, Elisa.



Figure 11 *Elysium*, 2003. Oils on canvas, 78x48"

The Final Sculptures

As a painter I am able to welcome you into my world. A painting can have infinite space, where sculptural space may be limiting. It was quite evident that the quality of my paintings had surpassed that of my preliminary sculptures. My intent was to reinterpret the paintings and now create sculptures that would relate not only in imagery and form, but also in caliber. Initially I contemplated how I should approach that objective, what should be the scale of the sculptures, what media and which techniques should I use? Should the sculptures hold the same large scale as the large oils on canvas? If I choose to create them using a large scale, will they appear monumental or instead grotesque and frightening? Should they be colored to reflect the painting also?

After much debate and consultation with my sculpture professor, Dejan Pejovic, it was decided that I should reinterpret my three-dimensional work in bronze. It was a media I felt comfortable working with and felt the media itself would lend a sense of significance. They could be small in scale relative to the paintings but liken to the valued quality of the metal, as a precious gem with glowing interior space. The fluid property of the wax and molten bronze would translate well from the fluid organic shapes prevalent in the reference painting's imagery.

I sketched some ideas and worked in clay for beginning sculpture studies, but eventually I worked directly in wax. The wax was easily manipulated to twist and turn forms like the shapes in my paintings. By working with wax patterns directly I did not have to be

concerned with undercuts. I attempted to capture the essence of the painting series, a labyrinthian effect, visceral quality, interiors and infinity. I was hopeful to elicit a spiritual essence as interior space in the sculpture as well.

Many of the same art historical references and artist inspirations for my paintings are evident in the final bronze sculpture pieces. Henry Moore's and Louise Buorgeois' very organic sculptural work is influential for many of the pieces. O'Keeffe's floral have strongly influenced *Venus I* and *Venus II*. Dale Chihuly's glass sculpture form, especially his Seaforms series and his chandeliers are extremely inspirational to my sculpture work as well as my paintings. I believe the bronze sculpture studies from the "Edgar Degas: Figures in Motion" exhibit influenced me to be certain the work had a completed quality rather than an impression of an unfinished study. His quote, "It is too much responsibility to leave behind you anything in bronze" was often in the back of my mind to prompt me to only cast those pieces that are worthy.

When first creating the wax studies I remember keeping small color copies of some of the paintings or the paintings themselves in front of me while working. I was attempting to create a three-dimensional replica of each painting, a traditional, illustrative approach. I recall feeling that this illustrative approach did not feel successful. I think seeing the work of artist Constantin Brancusi may have aided me to stop taking an illustrative approach and instead illuminate the overall feeling or sense of the paintings in my bronze sculptures.

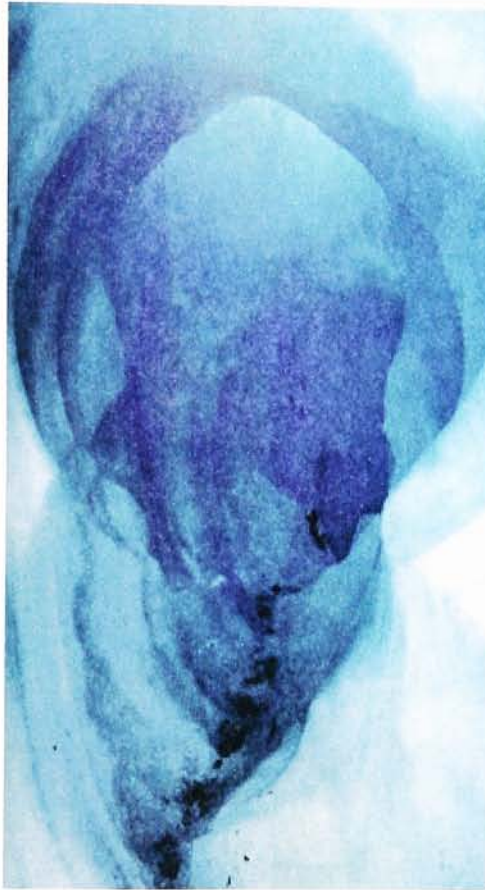
Constantin Brancusi (Romanian, French, 1876-1957) saw forms in their most basic shapes. His contribution to sculpture was to simplify forms down to their bare essence. He led a very private life even refusing to exhibit his work in Paris after his highly abstract portrait entitled *Princess X* was rejected by the Salon as being obscene. Without preliminary drawings, he worked directly in the sculpture materials to simplify his subject ideas.⁴⁷

I researched Brancusi's sculptures; searched for examples in art galleries and museums I visited and found some at Albright Knox Gallery and MOMA, elegant abstract bronzes, quite beautiful with highly polished mirrored finishes, while still creating my own sculpture wax patterns. I believe seeing some of his works influenced me to translate my final sculptures in a simplified manner, to capture the bare essence of the forms.

In April 2003, I experienced the multi-media exhibit, the Cremaster Cycle, of artist Matthew Barney (American, born 1967) at the Guggenheim Museum. It was a unique exhibit that draws from ancient mythology, and called a perverse fantasy by author Nancy Spector. It was erotic, sensual, shocking, bizarre, disturbing, surreal, mystical, mythological, theatrical, romantic all rolled into one. There were times that I was fascinated and times I was disgusted, but nevertheless, spent over three hours exploring the exhibit until I could no longer bare it. While at the exhibit, I was drawn to a cibrochrome entitled *the Drones' Exhibition*. It has a whirlpool or cave like appearance, a labyrinthian quality, all in turquoise blue. I came home from that visit and the very next

⁴⁷ Williams, 6-7.

day created a sculpture piece as a tribute to Barney, which I later entitled *Labyrinth* (figure13).⁴⁸



Matthew Barney, Photograph from *The Drones' Exhibition*, 1999, (detail) C-print.

I was surprised that the same piece resembles the sculpture by Georgia O'Keeffe. Despite her increasing frailty in her later years, she exercised a strong control over the perception of her own career. She continued to paint until the early 1970's, when she began to model in clay encouraged by her assistant, Juan Hamilton. During the 1970's, again assisted by

⁴⁸ Nancy Spector, *Matthew Barney: The Cremaster Cycle*, (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2002), 243, 467.



Figure 12 *Labyrinth (Tribute to Matthew Barney)*, bronze, 10hx10wx8"d

Juan Hamilton, she oversaw “fabrication of sculptures based upon plasters of graceful curvilinear forms, which she had modeled years earlier.”⁴⁹

I first saw an example of O’Keeffe’s sculptural bronze work after my thesis exhibition concluded, while conducting research of her work for my written thesis report. I was so enthralled when I saw the large sculptural piece that has a spiraling, labyrinth appearance. It was exactly what I would expect her to create in three-dimensional form and it was similar to the work I created, most evidently my bronze piece *Labyrinth*.



Georgia O’Keeffe with sculpture, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1982

Fabricated from a plaster model made in 1945.

⁴⁹ Eldredge, 152

The Bronze Casting Process:

How the Sculpture Evolved

The bronze casting process is adventurous, where initial fear turns to comfort and excitement once gaining experience. I had taken Bronze Sand Casting class with Professor Bruce Sodervick in the summer of 2000. It was such an exhilarating experience it became my deciding factor to pursue the MFA degree program. The following spring in Bruce's sculpture major class, I created another bronze piece, first meeting Dejan Pejovic through the Big Pour Event, sponsored by the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences in cooperation with the Sculpture Department. I took Bronze Casting taught by Professor Pejovic in the spring of 2002, in winter 2002 and again in spring 2003.

There is a lot of technical work, preparation and teamwork involved in the casting process. The technical processes for metal sculpture casting include sand, plaster and ceramic shell molds. Our class would be using the ceramic shell mold process, which utilizes wax artworks that are covered with ceramic materials. The wax is removed and replaced by the poured bronze. The main limiting factor to be considered is the technical skill of the sculptor, namely mine.

Lost wax casting is the process of placing a mold, in our case a ceramic shell mold, around a wax artwork and then melting out the wax to leave a hollow form. The wax



Figure 13 *Spiritus*, 2003, bronze, 11hx13wx11d"

mixture we used mostly consisted of brown microcrystalline wax. We could form the wax when softened by being placed in containers of hot tap water, or melt it in crock-pots to create sheets of wax for forming. There are commercial wax-working tools, such as wire-end tools and spatulas or tools as simple as a table knife. We used portable butane torches and soldering irons to achieve a smooth surface or to join seams. With practice it became easier to avoid the heated wax from dripping on your skin and burning it. Either that or you just grow accustomed to and calloused from the burns.⁵⁰

By taking this many of Professor Pejovic's classes I learned it is wiser to refine the wax patterns before casting, rather than try to refine in the metal state. He told me sometimes outside edges are just as easy to refine once cast in bronze, but interior surfaces are definitely easier to smooth, polish or refine while still in a wax state. With time I learned techniques to get the waxes to a more finished and polished condition, mainly with sand screen mesh and "Goo-gone", a citrus-based cleaning solvent.

I would think of the interior spaces in my paintings and try to capture the fluid organic shapes with wavy patterns and forms. I would look at the waxes as if they were my paintings, study the forms and edges. I tried to soften edges to look more "fleshy and visceral". I learned edges needed more relationship to the form, and for preferred craftsmanship the edges should be smooth, tapered and beveled.

⁵⁰ Williams, 161, 174-5.



Figure 14 *Visceral, 2003, bronze, 9hx13wx7.5d"*

I consider adding outside texture to forms to provide a contrast to the smooth interiors. I decide when seeing an example of Dejan's sculpture of his mother's hands in bronze, that enough contrast may be obtained through patinas and polishing. I attempt to smooth the interior spaces while still wax patterns, which was most challenging on some of my pieces for a final interior shine and polish.

The first bronze was inspired from studying angel wings carved in the architecture at my church when I was bored and daydreaming during one of the sermons. What if I took those wing shapes and twisted and bent them? I drew the very stylized shapes as soon as I was home and later cut them out of wax. It is *Spiritus* (figure 12), named after my church. Now when you strike it, it appropriately rings like a church bell.

I brought some wax patterns I had been working on during the winter class sessions. The cold wintry weather made them fragile and when I entered the sculpture studio and took them out of my box, one pattern dropped to the floor and broke. Dejan took my broken pieces that resembled a jigsaw puzzle and helped me put it back together so much better than I had originally planned. What an eye for form, how does he do it, I wondered? I guess it was a good thing that it broke apart, the next rendition was far better than I could imagine. Those pieces put back together with more time, adjustments and refinement eventually turned into *Visceral* (figure 14).



Figure 15 *Mollusk, 2003, bronze, 8hx12wx12d"*

I originally thought of the painting of the same name when I created the bronze sculpture *Mollusk* (figure 15). It has a resemblance to seashell form, but I wonder if it almost appears like crumpled steel from an automobile crash. Obviously not my intent, but I believe it is still interesting.

Venus I (figure 16) looked like a flower, but also like a squid capturing it's prey, I was told.

"Have you ever seen a squid doing that?"

"No, I've only seen squid in the pot of marinara sauce for Christmas Eve."

A classmate, Ryan at mid critique says they may look like floral, but he thought they also more likely resemble Venus Flytraps.

"That's what you always see" as I turn to Dejan.

He laughs back, "He's got your number". (What exactly does he mean by that?)

And that is how they became named *Venus I* (figure 16) and *Venus II* (figure 17).

Once the wax patterns are ready the gating system needs to be attached. We made dozens of wax sprues ahead to prepare for the gating process. We learned about gating and venting procedures before we were actually expected to attempt the process ourselves. I had attempted gating my pieces in prior classes, so I had hoped it would be easier this year. I found that complex wax patterns, however, need much more experience for successful gating than I have yet obtained.



Figure 16 Venus I, 2003, bronze, 10.5hx9wx10d"

Professor Pejovic directed each student on how best to approach gating his or her individual piece. He mentioned the problem of thick to thin feathery edges necessitated that I need to gate each floral petal starting from the bottom on *Venus I*. He was concerned that some of the crevices would catch investment and make it difficult to clean. I foolishly didn't wait for his aid, ladled melted wax in crevices, and overdid it with messy wax drips everywhere and then had to go back and refine all the surfaces with screen and Goo-gone again. Setbacks are discouraging in the bronze casting process, but for a novice like myself they happen often. I learned I must just charge ahead and persevere through the difficulties.

By the next week I was finally ready to attempt gating procedures and struggled during several attempts to gate *Venus I* myself, even with graduate classmate, Stan's help. At one point I cut my hand and then practically knocked Stan out with microcrystalline wax fumes after several futile attempts.

At last, after assisting many other students, Dejan rescued me and helped gate my piece. He was so exact and precise, showed me how to measure sprues better to begin with and he used the hot plate to get all the secondary sprues even. He used the soldering iron and had me place the toothpicks to reinforce each join and "voila".

We realized the RIT bronze class was behind schedule so that *Venus I* which was my one piece I had planned on pouring at the RIT foundry, had to also be done by Dejan at his own foundry studio or I wouldn't have it in time for the thesis exhibit. I had only *Spiritus*



Figure 17 *Venus II*, 2003, bronze, 11hx12wx10d"

completed and *Visceral* cast from two early pours at his studio foundry and I gated *Venus* I in class with his assistance. We synchronized our calendars to establish a deadline and a “drop-deadline”. Fortunately he did a pour just with the four additional pieces of my work in order to be finished in time for the exhibit.

Gated wax patterns were cautiously transported to the Pejovic studio foundry, where the casting shell mold is applied. I suspect that Professor Pejovic reexamines and corrects every piece of his students’ work before he begins the casting shell application. A week later, they are once again transported back to the RIT facility.

The wax burnout process was a pyromaniac’s dream. It reminds me of the movie the Wizard of Oz when his fiery presence is shouting, ”I am the great and powerful Wizard of Oz”! I avoided seeing this last year, either I was still at work and missed it or stayed away from the foundry and let the men do the pyromaniac work.

Proper protective clothing must be worn at all times when working near the foundry furnace and molten metal for the casting process. The following protective gear must be worn: safety eye equipment, heat resistant leather apron or suit made of heavy reflective aluminum material to protect the body from flying metal as well as heat, long sleeves to protect arms and leggings to protect the legs and feet, heat resistant gloves, leather shoes or boots to protect feet, not only from flying metal, but from stepping on part of the dross from the crucible. (Dross is the scum waste that forms on the top of the molten metal.)

Dejan calls a week before my pieces are needed for the exhibit to ask how to weld back together one of my pieces cast in two parts. I remind him I have *Visceral* from before still in two parts that needs to be weld. He laughs and says my sculptures are everywhere and how can he keep track of them all? I offer to take care of the skimmer job for next class and he seems surprised. A skimmer is a metal rod with a cup or spoon on the end. It is used to scrape dross (floating waste) from the top of the hot liquid metal from the crucible. The casting crucible, made of silicon carbide or graphite, is the pot in which the bronze is melted.⁵¹

Next class, looking tired, he tells me my pieces are complex and taking more time for clean up than he anticipated. The last bronze class before I have to hang my exhibit, Dejan takes a free moment from the foundry and helps me decide which paintings he believes should be included. He insists I remain and paint, not to worry about class. I protest that he's letting me off the hook. He responds he won't leave me out on a limb when I need the foundry work done. Again he insists I continue to paint because they're pouring which I've done all before and it won't even be my pieces.

When I venture up to the foundry to catch the day's final pour, my fellow graduate students tell me I was missed and so was my usual commentary regarding what to expect next. I notice the skimmer job is different now than when I had done it last. The skimming is done from the crucible right while it is still in the furnace, then skimming and steadying during the pour.

⁵¹ Williams, 164-5.

Dejan looks more fearsome than usual at this point, his face all black with soot. He loves working like a wild man, out behind the foundry cleaning casting shell, grinding and cutting off gates, sprues and vents, for all of his students. A friend and fellow female grad student admits to me that he does the majority of clean up on her piece and I don't feel as badly now.

After my exhibit is already displayed, I become the official video photographer for the remaining bronze classes. There is a great camaraderie that develops from the teamwork necessary for a bronze pour crew. The process poses the threat of eminent danger that makes each of us involved totally aware to keep each other safe, determined to do your job right in order to protect your team. Professor Pejovic, with his easy-going manner fosters a calm atmosphere among the students during this learning experience. When the time is ready, the crew becomes a fully orchestrated, synchronized team, each person knowing what their responsibility entails. He directs and is constantly supervising every step of the procedure, ready immediately to aid anyone needing assistance.

My friend Stan and I trade places during the next class. I put on his safety equipment gear, which appears comical on me due to my petite size, while he staffs the video recorder. The leather apron falls at my ankles and the leather spats are so big I waddle in like a penguin. When I appear at the foundry door, we announce it's the "Stan and Paula routine" and Dejan says it's about time they had some comic relief. I arrive in time to be part of the casting crew as the skimmer for the final pour. When I am that close to the

Biomorphic Abstractions: *Exploring the Relationship
Between Two- Dimensional and Three- Dimensional Art Forms*

molten bronze, it is like pouring sunshine, liquid gold. It is such a beautiful sight and with the intense heat it feels like the sun is right upon my face.



Figure 18 Bronze pour at RIT Foundry while I am skimmer. *Photo by Stan Rickel.*



Figure 19 Thesis exhibit at the Bevier Gallery with *Venus I* and *Jagged*.

Final Thoughts

When all paintings are transported from my home studio and are in my RIT painting studio cubicle together in that small space, the colors appear too intense, too purple. I needed sunglasses it was so bright, it was practically giving me a headache. I was extremely worried that my palette was too intense and it would look just as bad on exhibit in the Bevier Gallery. The last few days before hanging my exhibit, I just kept going

around from painting to painting inside my cubicle, toning down colors, especially the preponderance of purples, sharpening edges, increasing contrast.

Trying to edit how many pieces I may display in a limited space, my committee advisors, Professor Robert Heischman and Dr. Thomas Lightfoot convene to assist me in the decision making process. We set up a mock floor plan of my space that will ultimately be in the Bevier Gallery, in the painting studio. They help me juggle my paintings for well over an hour. Professor Robert Heischman suggests I hang *Mollusk*, a horizontally oriented piece, vertically instead to garner more space. He's a genius! Dr. Thomas Lightfoot is ultimately not happy about that option and instead maneuvers a way for me to garner four more feet in my gallery display section. He is brilliant and I am ecstatic! We reconfigure until *Mollusk* may hang correctly as a horizontal work as it is intended.

In the meantime, although he tries to join the other two professors in time for our committee meeting, Dejan Pejovic is at his studio foundry, calling me with updates on my bronzes. Originally hoping I would be present for the patination process, I request my patina favorites and then trust his masterful judgement. He works to the point of exhaustion in order to deliver my bronzes to the gallery in time for our "drop-deadline," later that afternoon. He explains he encouraged me to create pieces that in order to be successful necessitated that he finishes because I lack the skill. He does not mean to criticize my abilities, he tells me, just that he would expect it only from a professional foundry. One bronze looks more beautiful than the next. He questions if the patinas are all right.

“Oh yes”, I reply, “they are gorgeous”.

I am so touched by his valiant efforts on my behalf I am moved to tears.

I ponder how absolutely wonderful these three kind professors have rallied for my benefit and how fortunate am I to be blessed with their patience, knowledge, keen talent and insight. They have given me many gifts. Not only have they helped me strengthen my art abilities, they taught through example how to encourage and inspire students so that I may improve my own teaching skills. I recognize I’m nearing the finale of the thesis exhibition and it is exciting. On the other hand it is bittersweet. I may never experience this same close time again with these talented men I so admire. Again I am reminded of the *Wizard of Oz*, feeling like the character Dorothy, with my favorite professors to guide and protect me with brains, heart and courage.

I have worked diligently for three years and the day to install my exhibit is finally here! I was happy to use my mathematical abilities, formerly a math and art major, to factor the calculations of measurement for installing the paintings. The more practice calculating the correct measurement from the visual center line, the easier it became. I think I could really become good at this installation measurement process; maybe I should become a gallery coordinator.



Figure 20 Thesis exhibit at the Bevier Gallery.

After two and a half days of work, I was satisfied with the results. My fears were over, the colors of my paintings looked remarkable with enough space to enhance them. The bronze sculptures were thoughtfully arranged to reflect the paintings. Although they may not render the illusion of infinite space, the bronze sculpture offer concrete tactile objects that better simulate the fluid, soft forms present in my paintings. I have accomplished exactly what I set out to do: explore the relationship between two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms through biomorphic abstractions. I was ready to welcome my friends and family to my world.



Figure 21 Thesis exhibit at the Bevier Gallery.

The reception was exceptional FUN! If everyone were able to exhibit his or her work with so much fun at a reception, everyone would become an artist. (Well it seems almost everyone wants to become one now, but there could be even more). I was showered with so many floral bouquets I felt like Miss America or Queen for a day, and afterward my house looked like a florist shop. I received compliments for my work the entire time it was on display. I even had requests to autograph my invitation card. Isn't that silly?

My brother John says my paintings look like another world and he could imagine the Lord of the Rings or Harry Potter flying through them. Visiting artist Terry Winters is very complimentary of my exhibit work and especially likes my bronze sculptures. He is curious about how I created them and asks many questions about the bronze casting process. He politely asks permission to touch the sculpture while we speak.



Figure 22 Renowned painter and printmaker Terry Winters views my thesis exhibit at the Bevier Gallery. *Photo by A. Sue Weisler.*



Figure 23 Thesis exhibit at the Bevier Gallery.

Dr. Thomas Lightfoot during my first thesis committee meeting asks how do I feel about creating my new abstract work compared to my old, representational style. I respond that there was a time for those prior paintings, each one hold special meaning. For instance as I point to a painting I named *Three Generations at Seabreeze* I explain the three models are my mother, sister and niece, so it holds fond memories. But the new abstract work is an exciting, liberating experience where I can get lost in the color, shapes and light.



Figure 24 My professors, Dejan Pejovic, Robert Heischman, Dr. Thomas Lightfoot and I in front of my thesis exhibit at the Bevier Gallery.

I plan to continue this biomorphic series and have endless possibilities. I consider creating new compositions by enlarging the most interesting parts and close ups of those paintings I like best. I really am interested in continuing the cycle by using the bronze sculpture as visual reference and reinterpret them in new paintings. I'm certain I will continue creating more bronze sculpture. It's not the end. I'm only just beginning.

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