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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Report Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

A METHODOLOGY OF PROCESS

by

Belinda Bryce

May, 2001

SIGNATURE PAGE

Approvals

Chief Advisor Ed Miller

Date: 5.22.01 (Signature)

Associate Advisor Karen Sardisco

Date: 5.25.01 (Signature)

Associate Advisor Barbara Fox

Date: 6/5/01 (Signature)

Department Chairperson Dr. Tom Lightfoot

Date: 8/3/01 (Signature)

I, _____, prefer to be contacted each time a request for reproduction is made. I can be reached at the following address:

Belinda Bryce
148 Valley Road
Rochester, NY 14618

Date: June 6, 2001

To Tom Battley

whose guidance, encouragement, and assistance
with this thesis have been invaluable to me.

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INTRODUCTION

At what point in the evolution of our modern language did *process* become a verb?

Linguistics aside, the emergence of the verb form from the noun *process* suggests a shift from the static to the dynamic. This shift reflects the dramatic change in our understanding of the world, ourselves, and reality. Reality is no longer seen as fixed phenomena, rather it is a construction of each individual's perception of phenomena over time. If reality is a construction, it must include the constructor. This insight has led to a more highly evolved awareness of our own subjective role in creating reality, and to a profound understanding that has influenced many aspects of 20th century thought, from art to science to psychology and spirituality. Indeed, we've entered the new millennium with a sophisticated awareness wrought from a century that heralded modernism, quantum physics, nuclear power, space travel, plastic money, fiber optics, and the recovery movement. Likewise, we have experienced an evolution of consciousness. We can no longer separate the observer from the observed. To be unconscious is to be ignorant. Yet consciousness is always an unfolding, evolutionary, and dynamic process.

The verb *to process* connotes two things. The first is the idea of movement or sequence. To process an idea is to mentally move from one point of thought to another. Whether random or ordered, processing is what our brains do naturally, twenty-four/seven. The second thing the verb

to process connotes is the idea of *meta-consciousness*. The prefix *meta* is borrowed from Greek, a preposition meaning "beyond, higher, transcending" (*Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd ed. 1983 New York: Simon and Schuster, 1130). *Consciousness* is defined as "the knowledge of what is happening around one; the state of being conscious, the totality of one's thoughts, feelings, and impressions; mind" (Webster's 1983, 388). I use the term *meta-consciousness* to convey a mind state that transcends beyond awareness: we are aware that we are aware. In contrast, the term *metacognition* from educational psychology means awareness of one's own thinking. But what about awareness of one's own emotional states? In fact, recent brain research in humans has found that incoming data from sensory perception is first scanned for emotional content by the mature-at-birth amygdala, an almond shaped structure attached to the hippocampus (Sousa 1995, 3). Milliseconds later the data reach various areas in the cerebral cortex, where, in adults, rational processing occurs. For me, the word *metacognition* is too tidy and cerebral; *processing* is often messy and it allows for the emotional as well as the rational. The term *meta-consciousness* more aptly describes the movement from sensory perception through emotions, thoughts, memories, intuitions, and possibilities; awareness of this dynamic process is what characterizes the active modern mind.

Ken Wilber, in his book *A Brief History of Everything*, talks about *creative emergence* and the *evolutionary impulse*. He uses systems theory, specifically, holism, to explain the increasingly complex levels of organization which make up reality and evolution. Wilber adopts Arthur Koestler's term *holon*, which refers to "an entity that is itself a 'whole' and simultaneously a 'part' of some other whole" (Wilber 1998, 20). For example, a whole atom is part of a whole molecule, which is part of a whole cell, which is part of a whole organism (Wilber 1998, 20).

Holarchy refers to the "order of increasing wholeness" (Wilber 1998, 32). Evolution is the process of new levels of organization coming into being. Wilber states:

Evolution goes beyond what went before, but because it must embrace what went before, then its very nature is to transcend and include, and thus it has an inherent directionality, a secret impulse, toward increasing depth, increasing intrinsic value, increasing consciousness. (Wilber 1998, 41)

Like the sages and mystics, Wilber believes there is no final destination, only the endless process of transcending and including, unfolding and enfolding, the ongoing state of creative emergence. Moreover, as we have become more conscious of this evolutionary impulse, we can understand how our own consciousness has evolved from the subconscious to the self-conscious to the meta-conscious.

After much thought, I have come to realize that my artwork is most singularly about *process*, the ongoing state of transcending and including that which came before it. I credit my current approach to painting to the preceding years of printmaking. Printmaking is perhaps the most technical of traditional two-dimensional media. It involves many steps to achieve certain effects. However, it was monotype that absorbed me most. Monotype is a form of planography whereby the image is created on top of the plate. Once it goes through the press and transfers to paper nothing is left on the plate; hence *mono* for one and *type* for one-of-a-kind. I used the monotype technique to build an image from several runs through the press, as I moved from the most transparent layers to increasing opacity. More importantly, though, was my attraction to an art form that focuses on creating an image and, instead of editioning, starting all over again from a blank plate. As a printmaker, editioning for me was simply not an option. My passion lay in the excitement of beginning over, of creating something out of nothing with no matrix, only forward

movement like the evolutionary impulse. The blank plate, like the blank canvas, is what stirs me. It is this drive to reinvent my art and therefore reinvent myself, which motivates my work.

One of my original goals in attaining a Master of Fine Arts degree was to translate the process approach inherent in my printmaking to painting. Another goal was to expand and deepen my knowledge of materials related to both painting and printmaking. With printmaking, I have explored various non-toxic techniques for intaglio and monotype. With painting, I have investigated a wide array of artist materials with the intent of honoring archival principles and broadening my repertoire.

It has been a process.

For this thesis report, I will incorporate many related and seemingly unrelated sources. I will interweave analysis with narrative, exposition with poetry, inquiry with reflection. In short, I will provide a meta-conscious odyssey of process and discuss the recurring drive towards transcendence and inclusion, which characterizes both the approach and the content of my work.

THE DEMISE OF THE REPRESENTATION PARADIGM

Ken Wilber in *A Brief History of Everything* notes a critical distinction between "the modern and postmodern approaches to knowledge" (58). He identifies the modern approach (not to be confused with Modernism) as the Enlightenment paradigm or the representation paradigm. Somewhat outdated, the Enlightenment approach honors the belief that there is a single, pregiven world that can be "patiently mapped with empirical methods" (Wilber 1996, 59). Whether it be Newtonian physics or Cartesian philosophy, the mechanistic world view defined knowledge as the precise mapping or representation of the static, empirical, true world. Truth, knowledge and meaning consisted of making accurate maps, with the mapmaker standing apart from the map.

In painting, the French Academy embodied the representation paradigm. Founded in 1648 under royal patronage, the Academy dominated the production of art and secured both the reputation and livelihood of artists whose work was selected for Salon exhibitions (Arnason 1977, 21).

The typical Salon painting ranged from pseudo-classical 'machines,' whose scale illustrated the tendency to attention-gaining vastness, to the photographic history illustrations....particularly popular were works of extreme sentimentality combined with extreme realism. (Arnason 1977, 21-22)

Whether neo-classicism, romanticism or realism, painting in the European tradition was based on

representation. Art mirrored life (or idealized it) and exceptional draftsmanship was essential.

Impressionism, despite its consequential break from the representation paradigm, is thought by some to be the "ultimate refinement of realism" (Aranson 1977, 29). However,

The more the realist artists of the mid-nineteenth century attempted to reproduce the world as they saw it, the more they realized that reality rested not so much in the simple objective nature of natural phenomena...as in the eye of the spectator. (Aranson 1977, 29)

The major art movements following Impressionism moved increasingly further away from the representation paradigm. Neo-Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, and Abstract Expressionism were all a reaction to the Enlightenment paradigm. The focus of art shifted from representing life to representing the inner world of the artist. Inge Jade notes in the essay "Points of View--Perspectives--Horizons" that "in the early years of [the 20th] century, avant-garde artists were fighting salon art and searching for the sources of creativity" (1996, 31). This search was ultimately for a more authentic level of expression and it led artists to children's drawings, *primitive* art, and the work of the mentally ill. The term *primitive* was used to refer to the non-European art of African, Oceanic, Japanese, Chinese, Indian and Arab cultures (Douglas 1996, 36). Although the word *primitive* may possess inaccurate connotations, suggesting that anything outside the Eurocentric view was primordial, crude and uncivilized, its use here simply designates art from non-European cultures. During the early part of the 20th century these non-European influences suddenly infiltrated the canvases and sculptures of both European and American artists. Caroline Douglas, in her essay "Precious and Splendid Fossils," states:

The flight from Western civilization has been a flight from its exhausted and over-determined formal vocabulary, towards what was seen as a more innocent, spiritual

experience of unmediated and uncorrupted expression. A flight inwards to the unconscious to bring back trophies of authenticity. (Douglas 1996, 36)

Likewise, theorists and philosophers, beginning with Kant and continuing with Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault and Derrida, argued against the limited and naive representation paradigm. Ken Wilber, examining history from his own theory of social/cultural evolution, states:

The downside of the Enlightenment paradigm was that, in its rush to be empirical, it inadvertently collapsed interior depths into observable surfaces, and it thought that a simple mapping of these empirical exteriors was all the knowledge that was worth knowing. This left out the mapmaker itself--the consciousness, the interiors...and, later, it awoke in horror to find itself living in a universe with no value, no meaning, no intentions, no depth, no quality--it found itself in a disqualified universe ruled by the monological gaze,...and that, of course, began the postmodern rebellion. (Wilber 1996, 89)

THE POWER OF LINE

The postmodern paradigm opened many possibilities in all aspects of the evolution of consciousness. In art, the search for a more conscious authenticity of thought, feeling and expression led to a new recognition of children's drawings, primitive art from non-European cultures, and the artwork of the mentally ill. In fact, it was the art of non-*artists* (*artist* as defined in the European tradition) that possessed the quality of a deeper, more bona fide human spirit. In Germany, Dr. Hans Prinzhorn, an art historian and psychiatrist living in the early 20th century, put together a collection of artwork by psychiatric patients. The Prinzhorn Collection features mostly drawings and works on paper, some by actual artists, some by non-artists, but all by people from a clinical psychiatric environment. Through his book *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* and the attention it brought to the art of psychiatric patients, Prinzhorn made a significant contribution to the art world's quest for a more genuine way of expressing the inner source of creativity.

I had the opportunity to view work from the Prinzhorn collection last June at the Drawing Center in Soho. I came away from that show with a heightened appreciation for the element of drawing in both my own and others' artwork. Drawing has always been a key component of my prints and paintings. After seeing the Prinzhorn collection, I read the opening essays for the book *Beyond Reason: Art and Psychosis: Works from the Prinzhorn Collection* published in 1996. I

also found references to the Prinzhorn work in essays about contemporary artists I admire, such as Donald Baechler. At this point, I had begun several paintings as part of my thesis and, upon reflection, came to the conclusion that the power of line is perhaps the most fundamental and authentic level of human expression.

If we look closely at a drawing, we can begin to sense its power as the quintessential form of both conscious and unconscious expression. The work in the Prinzhorn collection is characterized by lines rendered thick, thin, smudged or crayoned. As a whole, the images are original and uninhibited, candidly conveying the fears, loneliness, humor, and desperation of people confined to an insane asylum. In a broader sense, the Prinzhorn collection underscores our 20th century understanding of the emotional and spiritual impact of line drawing. Artists such as Paul Klee, Jean Dubuffet, Juan Miro among many others employed line to convey a broad range of expression in their work. In Bettina Brand-Claussen's opening essay of the book *Beyond Reason: Art and Psychosis: Works from the Prinzhorn Collection*, she states:

Expressionism, in its vitalistic and metaphysical variants, undoubtedly played just as important a part in Prinzhorn's thinking as did his art-historical background. Many of his principles rely on an Expressionist vocabulary (primordially, spiritualization, empathy)....The whole avant-garde concept of willfully violating pictorial convention--a practice that emerged unscathed from any amount of hostile comparisons with the art of the insane--finds its ultimate expression in Prinzhorn's model, according to which the autistic, mad artist makes visible, in the '*unio mystica* with the whole world,' what it is that marks out the genuine artist. (14)

In the development of my own work, drawing has always played an important role. It was at the Atlanta College of Art--where my drawing instructor challenged me to "draw like a man!"--that I first began to think of the dramatic power of line. Breaking away from the academic foundation requires a conscious shift away from drawing in a representational format to drawing

in a non-representational format. On a metaconscious level, I try to access the most fundamental energy for drawing. To do this requires abandoning all earlier learning which was guided by the representational paradigm. Picasso is reputed to have said it took him a lifetime to learn to draw like a child (see Fig. 1). Likewise, in the realm of child development, the window of genuine and spontaneous drawing usually closes in the early years of grade school, when children become increasingly self-conscious and (most) parents and teachers respond to proffered drawings by asking, "What is it?" thereby resurrecting the representation paradigm. Even now, all but the more sophisticated of viewers look skeptically upon the drawing in my work as "interesting" at best.

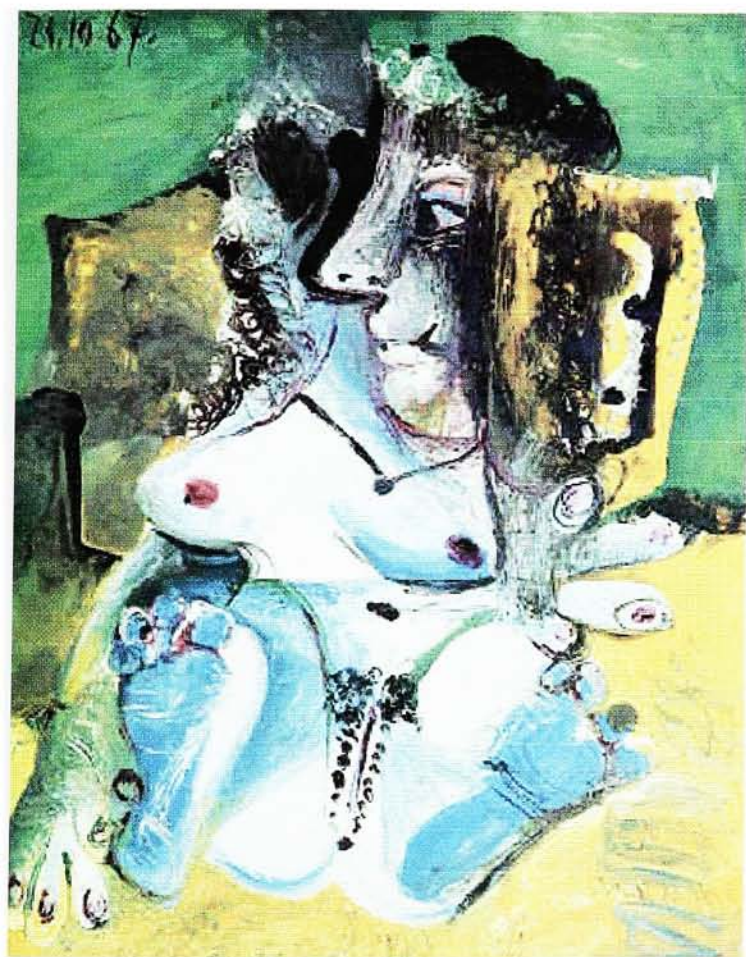
Ironically, I employ strategies to attain the "primordially" and "spiritualization" of my lines. One of my painting instructors suggested I stand to paint and lay down to look at the work. It's obvious to me an artist's kinesthetic style is a significant part of the creative process. Whenever I've done a summer intensive workshop for painting or printmaking, my legs are the first to get tired. In my own studio, I stand and move around when I paint. I dance and circle around, performing a primitive ritual that helps me connect to a less self-conscious energy which I cannot access while sitting or standing still. Another thing I do is use long objects to draw with. The more distance between my hand and the canvas, the less control I have over the line, which is what I want. These may seem like contrivances but I see them as strategies that allow me to draw from a deeper, more spontaneous and less studied, but paradoxically more meta-conscious, place of my own unique artist self.

Other artists use similar tactics. Donald Baechler's work employs his own style of uninhibited drawing (see Fig. 2). In an essay by Alan Jones published in the book *Donald Baechler Curated by Vittoria Coen*, Jones notes that drawing is "the foundation of Donald

Baechler's paintings, the central act of the artist" (1998, 92). Indeed, Baechler is seldom without pen and paper. But he takes it a step further. He asks other people to draw for him. Friends who are non-artists or strangers he meets in a bar are solicited for drawings on napkins, receipts, or errant pieces of paper. The artist contrives to access the authentic, elemental line by collecting drawings from non-artists and strangers (usually in foreign countries). Like Prinzhorn, Baechler understands that the most powerful and psychological line is often generated by those furthest from the traditionally schooled art world. Unlike Prinzhorn who collected, Baechler appropriates. However, bringing the images to his large canvases requires re-drawing and therefore the interpretation of the artist's hand. In this way Baechler remains true to his own line and gesture. The end result is that his work carries a sophisticated naivete that educated and sensitive viewers can appreciate.

Fig. 1 Pablo Picasso
Nu Couche 24.10.67
57.5" x 44.9"
1967

Fig. 2 Donald Baechler
The Zagreb Picture
96" x 68"
1982-1983



COLOR

As we begin principally with the material, color itself, and its action and interaction as registered in our minds, we practice first and mainly a study of ourselves.

Joseph Albers, *Interaction of Color*

Penne con Pomodoro e Acciughe

Serves 6

2 tablespoons olive oil

4 tablespoons butter

2 garlic cloves, peeled and sliced

10 salted anchovies, rinsed and dried (canned anchovies soaked in oil are not suitable)

2 heaped tablespoons chopped fresh rosemary leaves

1 28-ounce can peeled plum tomatoes

2/3 cup heavy cream

1 heaped cup Parmesan, freshly grated

9 ounces penne, rigatoni, or conchiglie

Melt the oil and butter together in a large pan, and saute the garlic gently, until light brown. Add the anchovies and rosemary and then mash them into the oil, almost to a paste. The anchovies do not need to cook, they just melt; this only takes a few seconds.

Add the tomatoes to the paste and stir to break them up. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer until the liquid has evaporated and the tomatoes have become a sauce, about 30 to 45 minutes. Finally, add the cream and bring to a boil, stirring, then add most of the Parmesan.

Cook the pasta in a generous amount of boiling salted water, then drain thoroughly. Stir into the sauce, and serve with the remaining Parmesan. (Gray 1995, 80)

* * *

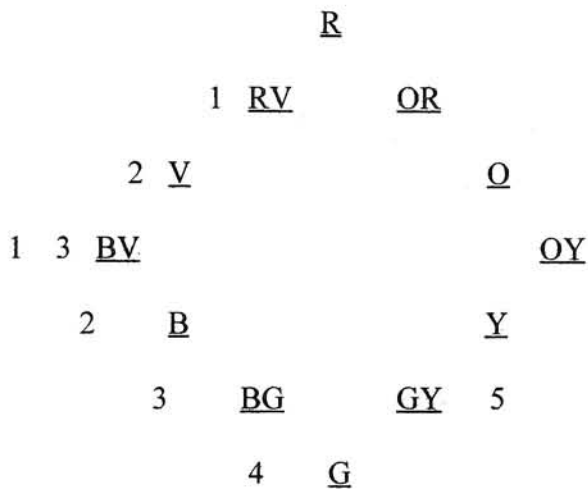
It is January, 1989. I park my car outside an old building and climb the stairs to the fourth floor. The room is dimly lit and chilly. January in Columbus, Ohio can be unforgiving. It's late, about 10:00 pm, and I have gathered here with three other women to hear what Michael has to tell us about color.

Michael is tall, pudgy, with a mop of thick brown hair. He is also an extremely talented landscape painter whose last solo show sold out. He can be silly and he likes to talk. He says he studied the color theory practiced by the Impressionists. He begins by explaining to us basic palette organization: warms, cools, and neutrals; the triadic color of primaries and secondaries; the Munsell color wheel, the analogous palette, accurate complements. He talks about what is meant by hue, chroma and value. He discusses the tempered palette. He references Liquitex's acrylic color chart and explains how to mix colors horizontally, vertically, and diagonally. Finally, he gives us his secret recipe, the key to achieving his lush landscapes, and we absorb his words

like faithful disciples.

The following page explains the 3/5 tempered palette which, according to Michael, was derived from the Impressionists.

- a. Start at one point on the triadic color wheel (there are 12 possible points).



- b. Using your starting point as #1, count 3 colors counter-clockwise. So if RV is #1, then #3 is BV.

- c. Now using #3 BV as a new #1, count 5 colors counter-clockwise. So if BV is the new #1, then #5 is GY.

- d. Now #5 becomes the new #1. Count 3 colors counter-clockwise. If GY is the new #1, then #3 is OY.

- e. Now #3 becomes the new #1. Count 5 colors counter-clockwise. With OY as the new #1, #5 is RV.

The idea is to repeat the 3/5 formula until you have eight colors in sequence. Now you apply the value scale from the bottom (or lowest value number) up. See Fig. 3 for an example of this particular 3/5 tempered palette.

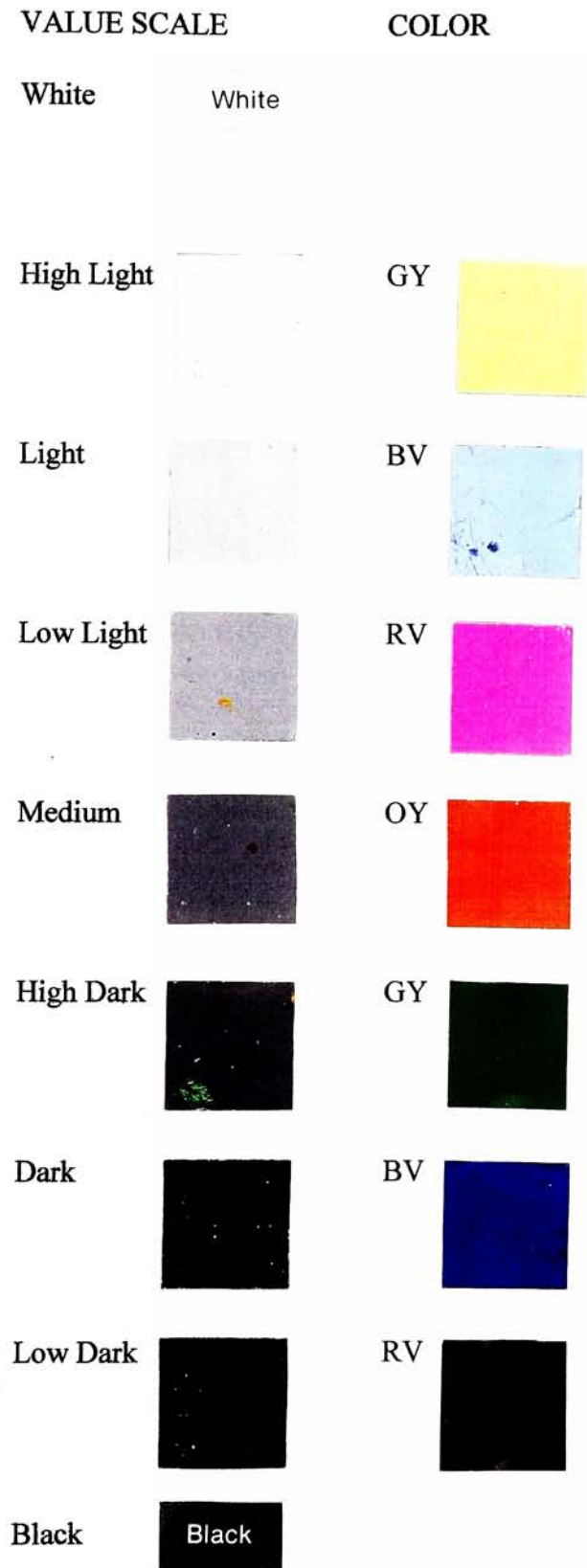


Fig. 3

The following summer I am enrolled in an upper level painting course at the University of Memphis. My project is to apply Michael's formula of mixing color and to produce beautiful landscape paintings. But my professor laughs as I try to explain to him this ingenious color system. "It's all relative," he says and walks away with a smile.

That summer in Memphis began what would be a year's time or more devoted purely to the exploration of color. I studied Joseph Albers's slim masterwork, *Interaction of Color*, in which he states:

Color, when practically applied, not only appears in uncountable shades and tints, but is additionally characterized by shape and size, by recurrence and placement, and so on, of which particularly shape and size are not directly applicable to tones. All this may signify why any color composition naturally defies such diagrammatic registration... (Albers 1975, 40)

I purchased two sets of Pantone color books and experimented with many different palettes. I went through a cool period, in which various blues dominated my work. Then I moved to a warmer palette. In retrospect, the cool period was a time of isolation and sadness when my marriage was falling apart. By the time my palette warmed up I was better adjusted and more genuinely focused on my art. Eventually I found myself returning to a certain palette. Like a writer who must find her "voice," a painter must find her palette. Color conveys the spirit and emotion of the artist. Finding one's palette, like finding one's way through life, is a solitary journey and an intimate process.

Mixing color is like entering a maze, a navigation of trial and error that encompasses many variables. At the time when I began to seriously explore color I had just moved back to the Rochester area after eight years of living in the southern and central areas of the United States. Upon returning, my appreciation for the Finger Lakes region rose to a new height. The rolling

fields of greens, ochers, and purples, the many blues of sky and water, the grays of wet slate, dry slate, and river rocks, these were what inspired my palette. I have come to appreciate the rich subtlety of nature's colors, the warm grays and cool umbers, color so subtle some may miss it entirely. Where one sees mud, I see mystery. The changing light of the seasons provided further abundance--winter's violets, autumn's siennas, the many whites of snow in sunlight, shade, or on a full moon night.

One of my favorite blues comes from the color of winter's dusk as it appears when I look out the windows of my house. The following poem pays tribute to this unique transitory moment.

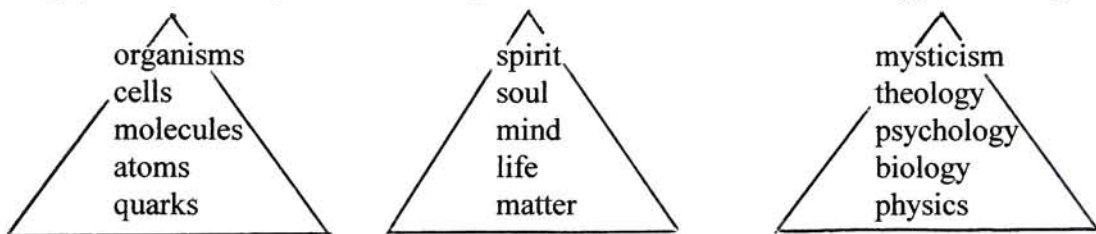
INDIGO HOUR

Winter's dusk
 from the inside looking out,
 after the fury of an afternoon squall,
 before the stars emerge,
 between the dimming
 western sky and
 the calm northern darkness
 becomes
 neither day
 nor night,
 but the moment in between.
 Each window a sapphire
 and trees,
 lines of cobalt on silverblue.
 Brief
 as the closing of an eyelid,
 elegant and fleeting
 as a wealthy man's mistress,
 her hyacinth scent
 fading to wood smoke
 in the evening air.

In *A Brief History of Everything*, Ken Wilber identifies twenty tenets or twenty characteristic patterns that are "true for evolution wherever it occurs, from matter to life to mind" to spirit (19). The eighth tenet states that evolution, the process of succeeding levels transcending and including preceding levels,

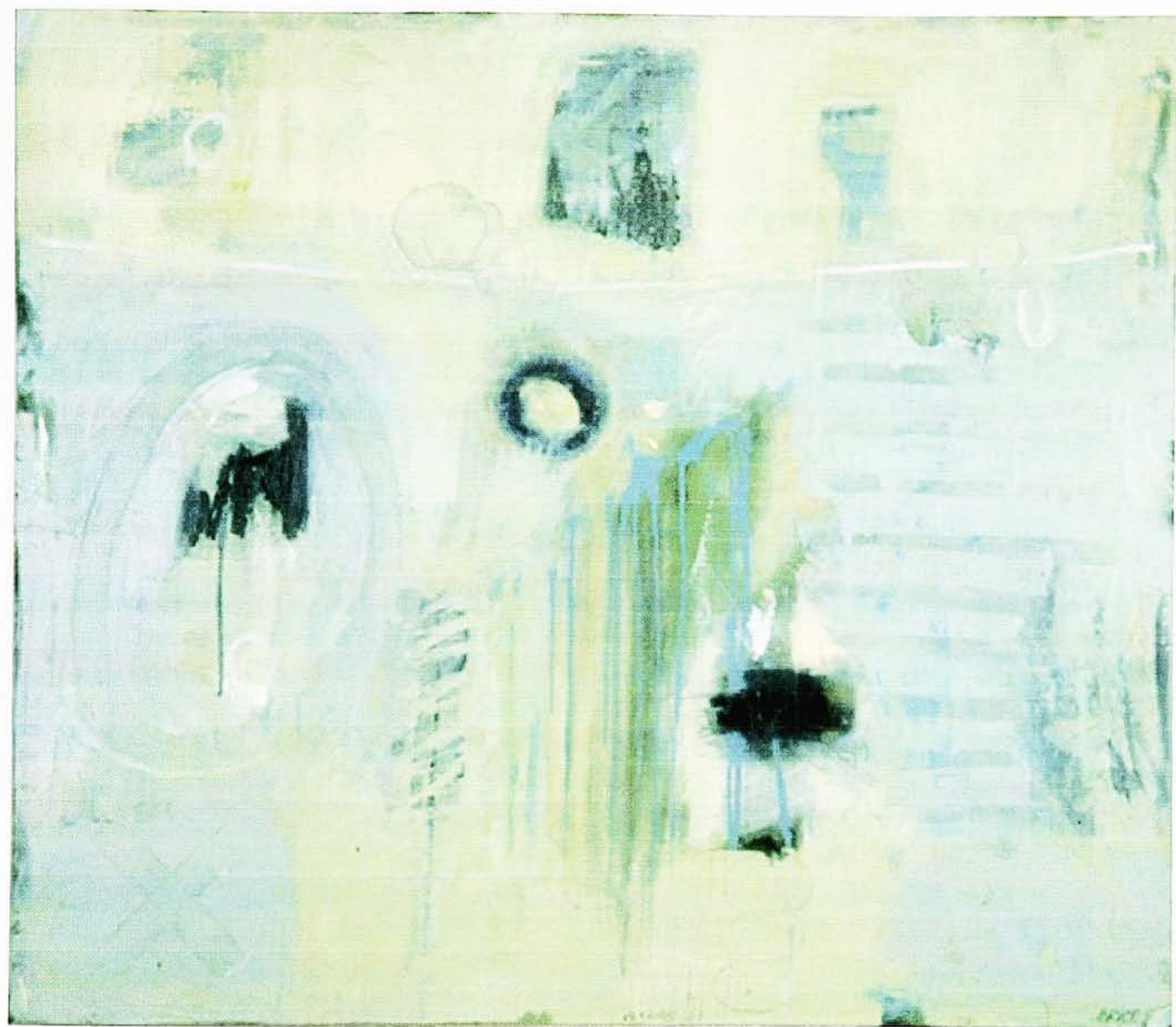
...produces greater depth [and] less span....There are fewer organisms than cells; there are fewer cells than molecules; there are fewer molecules than atoms; there are fewer atoms than quarks....there will always be less of the higher and more of the lower, and there are no exceptions. (Wilber 1998, 34)

In philosophy, this hierarchy of evolutionary levels is often illustrated with a pyramid diagram:



The idea that evolution creates greater depth and less span can be applied to the development of an artist. It is also characteristic of increasing levels of academic exercise. Often I will execute a painting, or a series of paintings, purely as an attempt to work within certain limits (less span) for the sake of pushing myself to a new level beyond where I was before (greater depth). A good example of this is the painting *Aqua Pura* (see Fig. 4). With this piece, the challenge was to create an interesting and varied surface using only blues and greens on a large (42" x 48") canvas without a formal composition or any recognizable imagery. Within a limited span of color, I created more depth by layering and varying the consistency of the paint, and by expanding the range of mark-making. There are drips, drags, spills, splatters, brushwork, linework, etc., all within a narrow color range. From a distance one sees a blue-green abstract painting; however, upon closer viewing, the layers and various types of markings become

Fig. 4 *Aqua Pura*
oil on canvas
42" x 48"
2001



apparent. I intentionally wanted to avoid painting a color field. Although I appreciate the work of Mark Rothko and other's, I wanted more visual information to engage the viewer as he/she moved closer to the painting.

* * *

I opened this chapter with a recipe because cooking is like mixing color. The particular recipe I chose includes two strong and very different tasting ingredients: salted anchovies and fresh rosemary. When they are mixed together in a sauce, the resulting taste is a new hybrid. Like the increasing complexity of evolving holons, the possibilities with color are limitless. As Albers states:

No mechanical color system is flexible enough to precalculate the manifold changing factors, as named before, in a single prescribed recipe. Good painting, good coloring, is comparable to good cooking. Even a good cooking recipe demands tasting and repeated tasting while it is being followed. And the best tasting still depends on a cook with taste. (Albers 1975, 42)

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF PROCESS

Thus, without commentary, Van Gogh wrote: "Life is probably round."

Gaston Bachelard, *La Poetique de L'Espace*

The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, in his 1958 *La Poetique de L'Espace* (The Poetics of Space), devotes a chapter to the phenomenology of roundness. He begins with the German philosopher and metaphysician Karl Jaspers, who stated: "Every being seems in itself round" (from *Von der Wahrheit* 50). Bachelard notes the ontological value of Jasper's statement in that "images of roundness help us collect ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside. For when it is experienced from the inside, devoid of all exterior features, being cannot be otherwise than round" (234).

Like a walnut that becomes round in its shell, "*das Dasein ist rund*, being is round" (Bachelard 1958, 234). Likewise, Ken Wilber's hierarchy of holons, or holarchy, in *A Brief History of Everything* is also conducive to Jaspers's idea that every being is round. Each holon is contained within another higher level holon, like concentric circles or, as Ken Wilber describes it, like "nested spheres" (140). As an image and descriptor, *round* assumes an element of motion; it cannot be still. It is, like the space-time continuum of physical reality, dynamic and curved. As

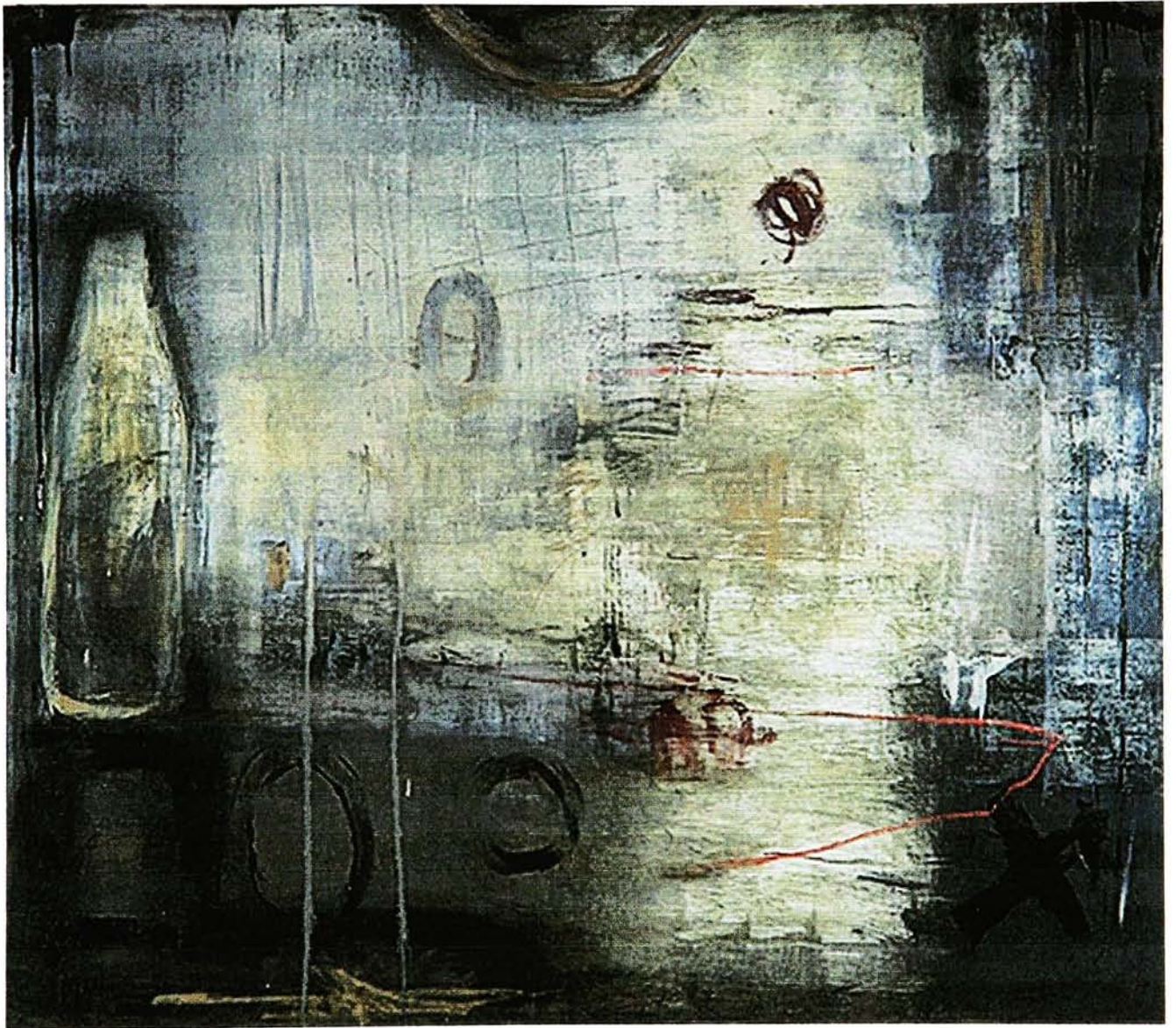
such, the phenomenology of process, i.e., growth, change, and evolution, is perhaps best represented by the idea of roundness.

In an effort to describe the process approach I use in making art, the dynamic image of circling comes to mind. The abstract painting with a bottle, *Untitled* (see Fig. 5), is a good example of the postmodern approach to painting. As with most of my paintings, I begin by preparing the surface with gesso, followed by a thin coat of modeling paste. I work the modeling paste quickly and randomly, smoothing it in some places and roughing it in others. The purpose is merely to provide textural information. Once the canvas dries, I rub it with a stain (paint thinned with medium and rubbed on with a rag). This brings up the light and dark contrasts of the underlying texture. These three initial steps--gessoing, applying modeling paste, and staining the canvas--are the only predictable sequence. Once the stain has dried, it's time to venture into the chaos. Working inductively, I wade through the obscurity of adding and subtracting information until I arrive at a point where the surface has a life and integrity of its own. Fundamentally, this is an intuitive process about uncovering a possibility. It is also an evolution that involves both transcending beyond and including what went before, a process of creative emergence, of pulling order from chaos.

During this stage I keep turning the painting until its orientation becomes apparent. If I feel I'm not getting anywhere, I may simply paint over all but 10-25% of the canvas, purposely leaving vestiges of the last and the penultimate layers. As I work, I move around the painting, much like a bird circling its target. Ultimately, I want my surfaces to narrate a history of process that concerns movement, space, and time.

In *Untitled*, the viewer sees through layers of circles, lines and textured areas. Closer

Fig. 5 *Untitled*
oil on canvas
42" x 48"
2000-01



viewing reveals more subtle information--washes and shadows fading in and out. Essentially, the viewing experience becomes round. The viewer's eyes circle or scan the surface, then penetrate the depth of layers, coming around and going through. Hence, both the artist's experience of creating the piece, and the viewer's experience of viewing it are, in essence, round.

However, what's more interesting here is not so much the issue of my particular process, for it is probably similar in principle to the process of many, many artists working these days. Of significance, though, is the urge artists have to honor *pentimento*, to make visible the layers of previous endeavor. Unlike the painters of the representation paradigm, who took pains to rework their compositions, covering up "errors" so as to get "it" (the representation from life) right, artists now intend previous layers to show through. This requires a different approach to painting. Whether it be glazing, using various media, working with different drying times, or different mediums, artists today have the license (freedom), the technology (in materials), and the meta-consciousness (higher awareness) to make visible the process of creative emergence.

Donald Kuspit, in his opening essay for *Process and Product: The Making of Eight Contemporary Masterworks* states:

The work process producing a work of art, like every significant process of production, is...a circular mothering process, in which the artist maintains an umbilical connection to the product while separating himself or herself from it, so that it can become as individual as he or she is, and be valued for its individuality in the world's eyes. (1987, 35)

For me, an important component of my own creative process, whereby I consciously leave traces of previous stages visible on the canvas, serves to fuel the elements of momentum and possibility. Whether I am focusing on one particular painting or several paintings at various stages, the dynamic process of creative emergence feeds itself. This is not to say I don't get stuck.

There are always impediments, some technical, some psychological. Overcoming these obstacles and solving visual problems forces me to think and grow in new ways. My biggest challenge is to stay out of my own way and let the paint do what it can. I try to keep myself within the rhythm of creation. This requires a sublimation of ego, or more accurately, a suspension of ego. If I become self-conscious, the flow of roundness is broken. I experience separation rather than connection. It is usually a sign that I need to stop, rest, and recharge for another session on another day.

The idea that creating art is like a "circular mothering process" is nothing new. Kuspit points out that "the dialectical process of art production re-articulates the complex rhythm of creative dependence and independence" (35). However, for me, the fruits of artistic labor are not simply the finished artworks themselves, but rather they are the seeds for future possibilities. In the past few years I have pushed myself to create new work for every exhibition opportunity that I've received. At times this has required that I produce work under a deadline, something I had previously thought was antithetical to artistic creativity. However, by coming to understand that my art is more about process than product, I began to show works that were developed but perhaps not quite finalized. Often, they're exhibited unsigned, and reworked months or years after they were originally exhibited. This is not to say that I don't finish pieces, for the urge to bring a painting to resolution motivates me to return to the studio regularly. However, as a friend from Ithaca once told me, "If it's done, it's dead." The key word here is the pronoun *it*, which for me refers to the creative process not to the creative product. Herein lies the deeper meaning of my work.

In the introduction, I explained how my foundation as a printmaker, specifically a maker of monoprints and monotypes, nourished my desire to begin again, over and over. The speed and

spontaneity innate in monotype naturally accelerated my working process so I couldn't get stuck on resolving details. Eventually, the sheer momentum and inherent looseness required of the medium defined my time and effort in the studio. However, it was a focused momentum. Each print went through the press several times in an effort to achieve resolution or *visual balance*. I use the words *visual balance* to mean that a piece comes together as a whole. Once a print reached this stage, I would clean the plate and begin the whole process over again, creating a new image from the blank plate.

The drive to begin again, to bring forth wholeness and balance from divergence and instability, is more than a compulsive need for resolution, though I am certainly characterized by this quality. Of greater significance, though, is the (now conscious) intent to position myself at the precarious edge of creative tension, much like a surfer curling the vortex of a wave. Indeed, the creative process is a matter of gaining, then losing, then regaining aesthetic/artistic/creative balance. But with each new opportunity to ride the wave of creative tension, an artist grows and develops; she reinvents her art and therefore reinvents her self. This circling process occurs in space and time and so, more precisely, it is a spiral of growth and transformation, of transcending beyond and including what went before. As such, it is a manifestation of the individuation process. Transformation occurs each time balance is lost and regained. Donald Kuspit states:

The artist informs "selfless" material with his or her sense of self, breathing his or her life into it, as it were. Physical matter is reworked by the efforts of psychic transference into new substantiality....[T]he artist...struggles to achieve a subtler balance between the universal needs for separation from and union with the environment. The entire psychic interplay furthers the process of individuation. The work process producing the artwork can be understood as a manifestation and extension of this process--a way in which individuation vigorously continues in maturity. That is, the artwork is a mature acknowledgment and adult articulation of interplay, but also the artist's attempt to mature himself or herself by working

out a subtle, new balance between his needs for separation from and union with his environment--an unpredictable balance, unexpected even by the artist...when the old balance was becoming precarious. This is the real risk art takes, its true creative center: the daring achievement of a new balance of psychic powers that cannot be predicted beforehand, and that seems inadequate once it has been created. The artist assumes he or she is advancing the interplay toward a condition of greater stability, but not stagnancy....All selves are in a position of having to be re-balanced, for the self repeatedly loses its balance for external as well as internal reasons; but the artist actually attempts to do so definitively...the self's sense of balance is in the end its own responsibility. For the truly creative artist, this necessitates fresh creativity, new inventiveness--a new origination or restoration of the self. For the truly creative artist, the interplay remains a constant vitalizing--if terrifying--factor in art and life. (Author 1987, 35-36)

With my own work, since I follow an intensive process approach, each painting is different from what came before and what will come after. Some artists are able to produce a series on the same visual theme. I, on the other hand, find I need a wide range of palettes, imagery and techniques to fuel the energy of process and possibility. My passion resides in the excitement of creating something new, again and again. I respond to the blank canvas or the bare plate with what I call a *radical trust* of venturing into the unknown. The first few bold strokes I make I call *breaking the canvas*, for I have brought up something from my interior and, withholding all judgment, externalized it through paint. This requires courage because rarely is the internal information balanced, planned or whole. And so I begin the dance of possibility and creation. It's usually awkward at first, but eventually a rhythm sets in as I paint and scrub out color, line, form, and texture.

Deciding when a work is *finished* is another aspect that changes over time. A painting may be deemed *finished* in 1998, according to my judgment at that time. But I may decide the next year, with my 1999 perspective, that it needs to be repainted. As a result, I'm prolific and rarely hesitate to paint over a piece because my urge to create exceeds my sense of attachment. It is this

drive towards transcendence and inclusion, the circling about and diving down to come up again, the dynamic state of creative emergence, to reinvent my art and therefore reinvent myself, which characterizes both the approach and the content of my work.

THE DIALECTICS OF SELF

But what a spiral man's being represents. One no longer knows right away whether one is running toward the center or escaping.

Gaston Bachelard, *La Poetique de L'Espace*

The self is the modern substitute for the soul.

Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*

Perhaps the most salient revelation of the postmodern paradigm is the acknowledgment of the extent of subjective knowing and the understanding that all meaning is bound in context. This is not to say objective truth or facts no longer exist. However, a closer approximation to *truth* may be found in the synthesis of these apparent opposites--subjective knowing and objective perception. Hegelian dialectics allows opposing but equally assertible propositions to stand together. In contrast, Aristotelian or formal logic seeks to separate and analyze opposites. For example: A is A. A is not non-A. A cannot be A and non-A. This kind of reasoning underscores Cartesian duality, analyzing opposites rather than synthesizing opposing ideas. The paradoxical logic of Hegel, Marx, and Chinese and Indian thinking embraces apparent oppositions: A and non-A do not exclude each other as predicates of X. X is A and not A. According to Lao-tzu, 6th

century Chinese philosopher and reputed founder of Taoism, words that are strictly true seem to be paradoxical. Examples are: "Gravity is the root of lightness"; "Stillness the ruler of movement"; and "Without darkness there is no light."

Over the years I have come to understand paradox as a more accurate description of what is true, both in terms of external occurrence as well as internal circumstance. The paradoxes or seeming contradictions within each individual have puzzled philosophers, mystics, theologians and psychologists for years. From John Locke to Woody Allen, our attempt to reconcile these contradictions surrounding the inner self and the outward world continue to elude us. In fact, the concept of *self* is probably a result of our attempt to come to terms with paradox. *Self* is there but not there. As a concept, it allows us to talk about certain internal phenomena and the possible relation to external behavior. Mired in the humanities (philosophy and theology) and soft sciences (sociology and psychology), the concept of *self* was originally conceived as wo/man's "incomprehensible and self-contradictory union of two substances, body and soul" (Bloom 1987, 175). In his book *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom reports that:

Locke appears to have invented the self to provide unity in continuity for the ceaseless temporal succession of sense impressions that would disappear into nothingness if there were no place to hold them....But it was Rousseau who founded the modern psychology of the self in its fullness, with its unending search for what is really underneath the surface of rationality and civility, its new ways of reaching the unconscious, and its unending task of constituting some kind of healthy harmony between above and below. (175-177)

Modern psychology, specifically the work of Carl Jung, takes the standard dialectic of above and below, heaven and hell, good and evil, and brings it into the personal. Jung noted that within each individual there is "an unconscious as a counterbalance to consciousness...which demonstrably influences consciousness and its contents" (Jung 1957, 83-84). Jung recognized that

we are *duplex* rather than *simplex*, and that if we refuse to acknowledge our *shadow* (the deep unconscious), we will become victims of our own making. Jung states:

We imagine ourselves to be innocuous, reasonable and humane. We do not think of distrusting our motives or of asking ourselves how the inner man feels about the things we do in the outside world. But actually it is frivolous, superficial and unreasonable of us, as well as psychically unhygienic, to overlook the reaction and standpoint of the unconscious. (1957, 84)

For me, *dialectics* suggests logical opposites. I use the phrase *dialectics of self* to describe the duplex character of each individual's conscious and unconscious. We cannot know the depths of our own unconscious, and what is unknown is usually feared. The relationship of the conscious to the unconscious is like a tree in the ground; the interior roots extend far beyond the exterior branches. Similarly, the human cerebrum, which is the most recently and highly evolved part of our brain, also has the largest area of uncommitted function (Jensen 1998, 8). Through MRI imaging we have determined the function of the various lobes in the neocortex. However, the neocortex is merely a thin layer of cells that covers the cerebrum like the rind of an orange. The inner depths, to this date, remain unknown.

Traditionally, the unconscious, or the deep interior, has been marked by infamy or disgrace. Our mythological leading characters, from Oedipus to Adam and Eve to Bill Clinton to Tony Soprano, have inevitably been brought down by their untamed depths. However, it's never merely the good guy versus the bad guy. The urge to side with the protagonist belies our blindness to our own dark interiors. We are both the protagonist and the antagonist, hence, the dialectics of self.

* * *

The ultimate metaphysical ground is the creative advance into novelty.

Ken Wilber, *A Brief History of Everything*

In terms of the subject matter of my artwork, I would have to say it is an exploration of the interior landscape--both conscious and unconscious. Some viewers see darkness; some see light. Some see memory; some see sexuality. Some see feminism; some see humor. If I try to describe the meaning in words, it naturally dissolves to *meaning less*. My work is meant to be experienced. I want my paintings to draw viewers in so they can scan the depth of subtle imagery. I want them to experience the symbols of circles and windows and to draw their own conclusions. I want to create a sense of the universal within the particular without necessarily naming it, for naming belongs to the representation paradigm, and I want to go beyond that.

A landscape of the interior embraces the dialectics, or seeming paradoxes, of the self. As an artist, I spend many hours alone in my studio where I come face-to-face with my own darkness and light. The waning and waxing of mind states and emotions, the non-chronology of future, past and present, the alpha-state of flow, the tension of creative emergence, all these are experienced within the microscopic process of a day's work. I emerge distant because I have traveled the heights and depths of my mind and soul. On a good day I lose my self and regain it transformed. The more time I'm in my studio, traveling the inner world, the more I want to return to process and possibility. As Sam Keen states: "By returning, we begin again" (1983, 34). I want always to begin again.

* * *

Ken Wilber discusses the evolution of consciousness as "the stages of the inward I, on its way to the supreme identity. From subconscious to self-conscious to superconscious--Spirit's own unfolding, the extraordinary arc of consciousness evolution, a flight of the alone to the Alone" (137). Or, as Sam Keen and others might say, a flight from the *alone* to the *All One*.

Wilber uses the image of a ladder and identifies the self as the climber, the rungs as the fulcrum, and the ladder itself as the structure for increasing levels of consciousness evolution. The climber is a self-holon and, like any holon which is both a whole and a part of a larger whole, it possesses the drives of all holons: "Because all holons are whole/parts, they are subjected to various 'pulls' in their own existence. The pull to be a whole, the pull to be a part, the pull up, [and] the pull down" (Wilber 1996, 24). The pull up refers to the capacity for *self-transcendence*; the pull down refers to *self-dissolution*. As we all know, even the most accomplished of selves can fall to pieces. The decomposing of holons generally takes the form of regression, a direct vertical drop on the ladder of holarchy. For example, cells dissolve into molecules, which decompose into atoms. The dissolution of the self-holon, though painful at times, is necessary for self-transcendence. This process is a truthful paradox in and of itself. I'd like to end this section with a poem I wrote several years ago when I was undergoing enormous changes. I had basically leveled all exterior indications of who I was in order to reinvent myself. In hindsight, it was a difficult time, but it was also a necessary passage. I had to experience self-dissolution in order to achieve self-transcendence.

Chameleon

I can drink rainwater & wash myself out completely
or I can drink wine and grin at the fuzziness
that surrounds us. I can turn into liquid &
spill out of myself, what was once
snow turns to water, icicles melt
the streams are full. You can't
depend on me, I am slippery
and in a moment will
evaporate, leaving
you alone to look
for me, wiping
your forehead
wondering how
I could have
ever smiled.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE (CONCLUSION)

When you start on a long journey, trees are trees, water is water, and mountains are mountains. After you have gone some distance, trees are no longer trees, water no longer water, mountains no longer mountains. But after you have traveled a great distance, trees are once again trees, water is once again water, mountains are once again mountains.

Zen teaching

Every mystery needs its image.

Lewis Hyde, *The Gift*

Throughout this thesis report, I have used the image of the circle as a metaphor for both the approach and content of my work. The principle of circling or spiraling aptly describes the methodology of creative process and self-transformation. I'd like to end by addressing the two tenets of any successful artistic career: talent and productivity.

Talent is generally understood to be a special ability or aptitude. The talent of visual artists usually comes in the form of drawing, painting, sculpting, designing, etc. Non-artists are quick to say that artists have a special talent. However, according to the authors of *Art & Fear*, "Talent, if it is anything, is a gift, and nothing of the artist's own making" (Bayles and Orland 1993, 26). The

word *gift*, often a synonym for *talent*, implies much more than a special aptitude. It also implies the act of exchange, contribution, and benefaction. As a verb, *to give* is to bestow, transfer, grant, provide, produce, proffer, the list goes on. A key element of the words *gift*, *gifted*, and *to give* is mutuality. For me, the word *gift* describes not only my artistic ability, but also my gratitude for this ability. Artists are gifted with talent. In return, they produce art, which is a gift to humanity. The mutuality of creation occurs on at least two levels: the art object displayed, sold, bartered or given away--here the two parties involved are the giver (artist) and the receiver (art appreciator); and the inner sense of *abundance* artists experience when their giftedness becomes manifest on a new, higher level of creation, i.e., I have been *gifted* with this ability to create...(a painting or monotype).

The relationship among the terms *gift*, *giftedness*, and *abundance* can be better understood if we consider the ritual of the native Maori hunting tribes of New Zealand. These people have the word *hau* which translates as "the spirit of the gift and the spirit of the forest which gives food" (Hyde 1979, 18). After a successful hunt, the Maori tribesmen give a portion of their game to the priests who cook the meat over a sacred fire. The priests eat some of the food and then use the rest to prepare "a sort of talisman, the *mauri*, which is the physical embodiment of the forest hau. This mauri is a gift the priests give back to the forest, where...it causes the birds to be abundant..., that they may be slain and taken by man" (Hyde 1979, 18).

The Maori ceremony, called *whangai hau*, is meant to *nourish hau*, or feed the forest spirit. By extension, the priests' ceremony creates a circle of giving that enlarges itself. The forest gives to the hunters who give to the priests, who give back to the forest to foster future abundance. Likewise, an artist's giftedness feeds the process of creation, which results in a

painting or sculpture. The painting (art object) is then given (exhibited, sold, or bartered) to an art appreciator. An important element of the Maori ceremony, however, is the distinction between *object* and *increase*. By *object*, I mean the talisman set in the forest. With art, the object is the painting or sculpture. *Increase* refers to the forest *hau* which causes the game to abound. In art, increase refers to the abundance, growth, and energy an artist experiences when s/he is engaged in a creative process. For me, the phenomenon of increase is more significant than the art object I have created. Ultimately, it is the challenge and satisfaction of creation which feeds the artist spirit. And here's where productivity comes into play.

Most would agree that talent without productivity yields a dilettante at best. The only way to become really good at something is to do it a lot. In art, especially, the truly prolific tend to experience the major breakthroughs of a fully realized artistic career. The authors (and artists) David Bayles and Ted Orland talk about a ceramics teacher who divided his class into two equal groups. All the students on the left were graded on the *quantity* of work they produced: those who made fifty pounds of pots would receive an A; those who made forty pounds of pots would receive a B, etc. The students on the right were graded on the *quality* of their most perfect piece. When it came time to evaluate the students' work, "the pieces of highest quality were all produced by the group being graded for quantity. It seems that while the *quantity* group was busily churning out piles of work--and learning from their mistakes--the *quality* group had sat theorizing about perfection and in the end had little more to show for their efforts than grandiose theories and a pile of dead clay" (Bayles and Orland 1993, 29).

Artists get better by learning from their mistakes and by acquiring new skills. The most productive artists are the ones who are more fully committed (or obsessed) to developing their

work and therefore developing themselves. With an art career, the level of commitment and the modesty of return insists that the artist follow the work of his or her heart. Some artists would argue that they have no choice but to be an artist, regardless of the career's demands that they work another job to pay the bills, along with all the other sundry and invisible sacrifices artists make without question. Are we blessed or cursed? Some of both, I think.

The past two years of graduate study have allowed me to focus on and examine closely my own image-making process. One result has been a clearer sense of who I am and why I must make art. Another result has been a clarification of personal values. I've come to the conclusion that the greatest gifts which we can give or receive are those of time and attention. Attention comes from the inside and we can choose where and how to direct it. Time is more external, abstract, and difficult to control. The more time I have in the studio, the more I want additional time to work through the cycles of personal evolution and creative emergence. For me, time is the greatest luxury. I end this thesis with both pride and humility. I am proud of the work I've done and humbled by the work I have yet to do. It is a long journey and, for this, I am grateful.

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Fig. 6 *Untitled*
oil on panel
30" x 24"
2000

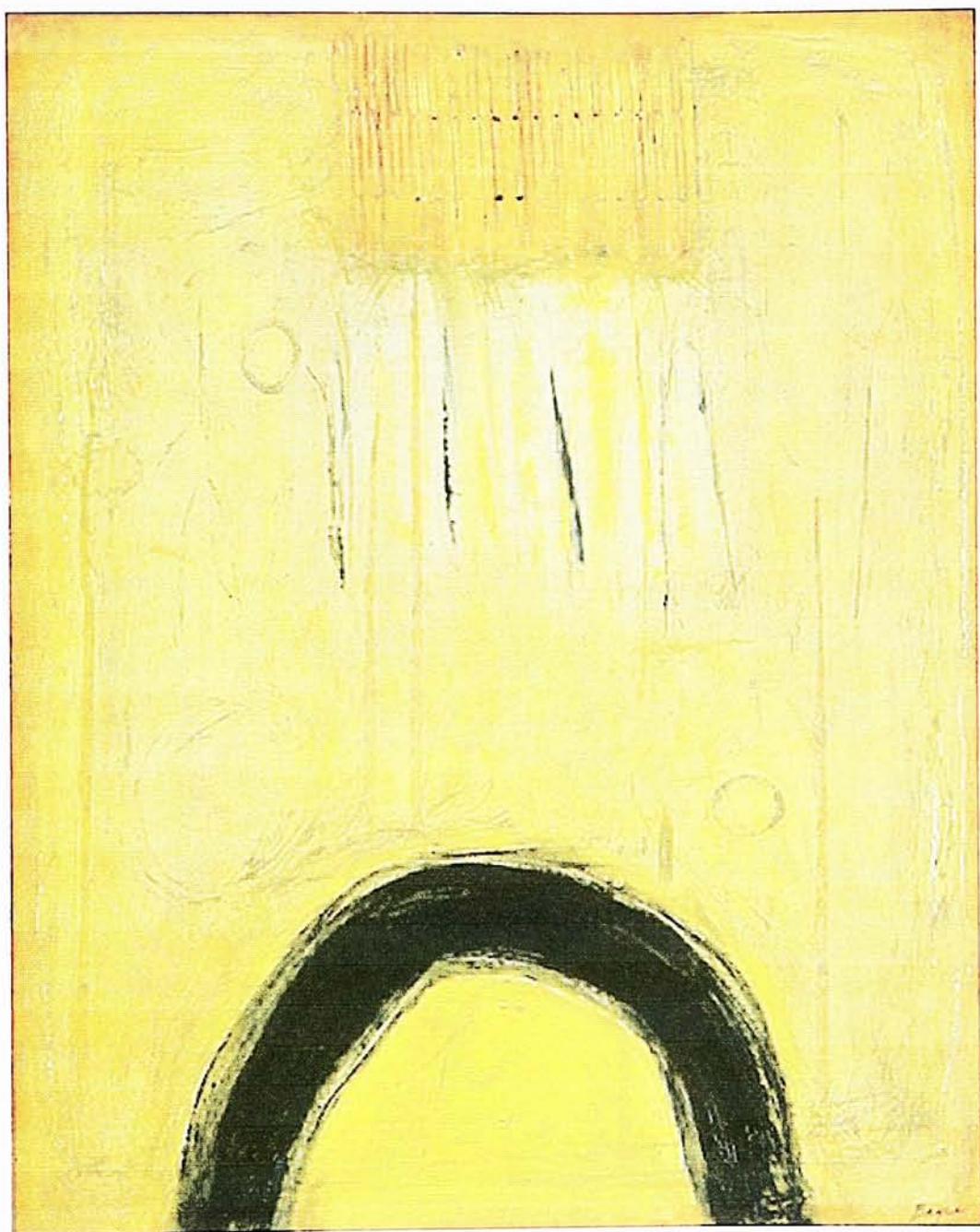


Fig. 7 *Untitled*
oil on panel
30" x 24"
2000



Fig. 8 *Untitled*
oil on panel
30" x 24"
2000

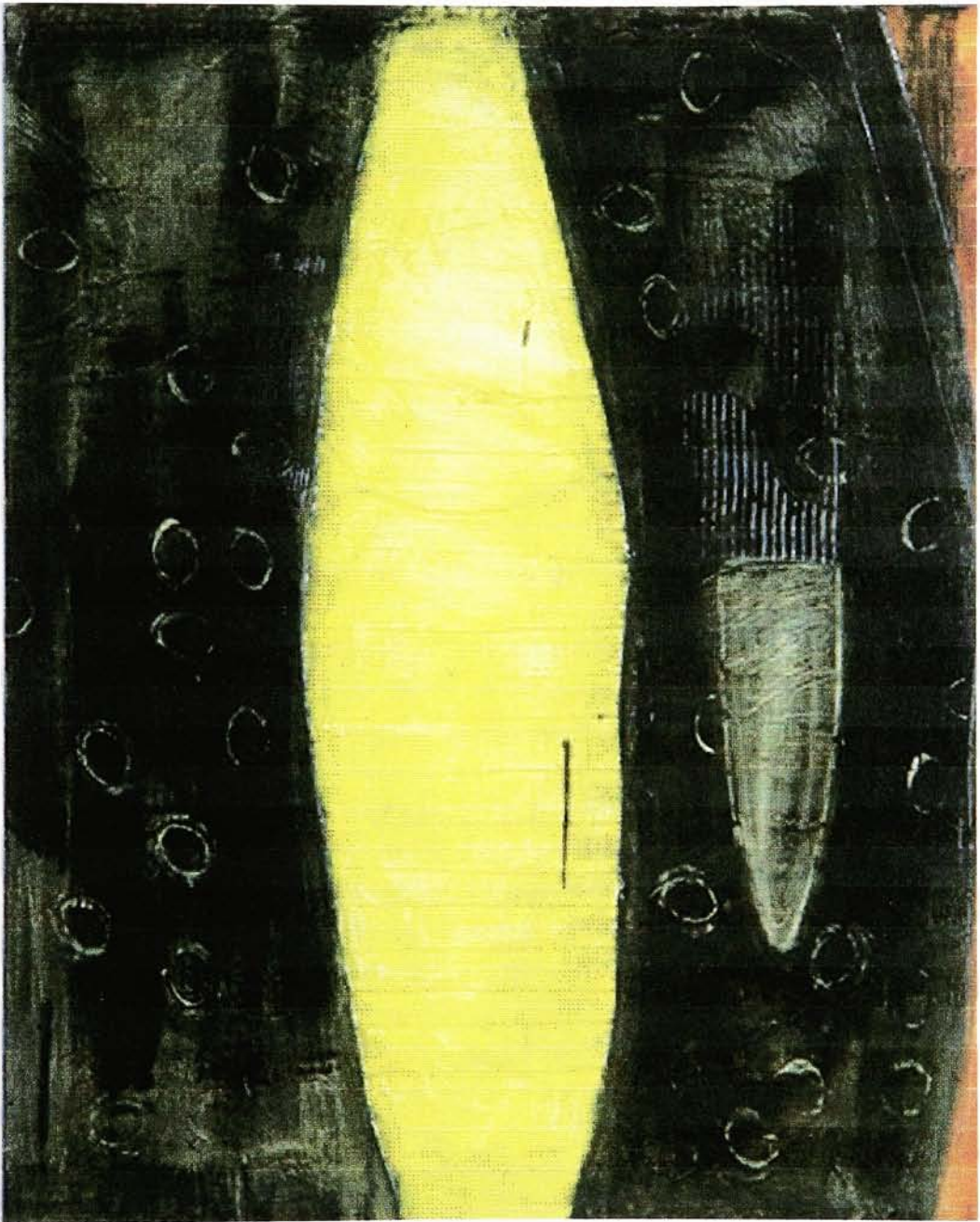


Fig. 9 *Untitled*
oil on panel
30" x 24"
2000



Fig. 10 *Untitled*
oil on canvas
48" x 60"
2000-01

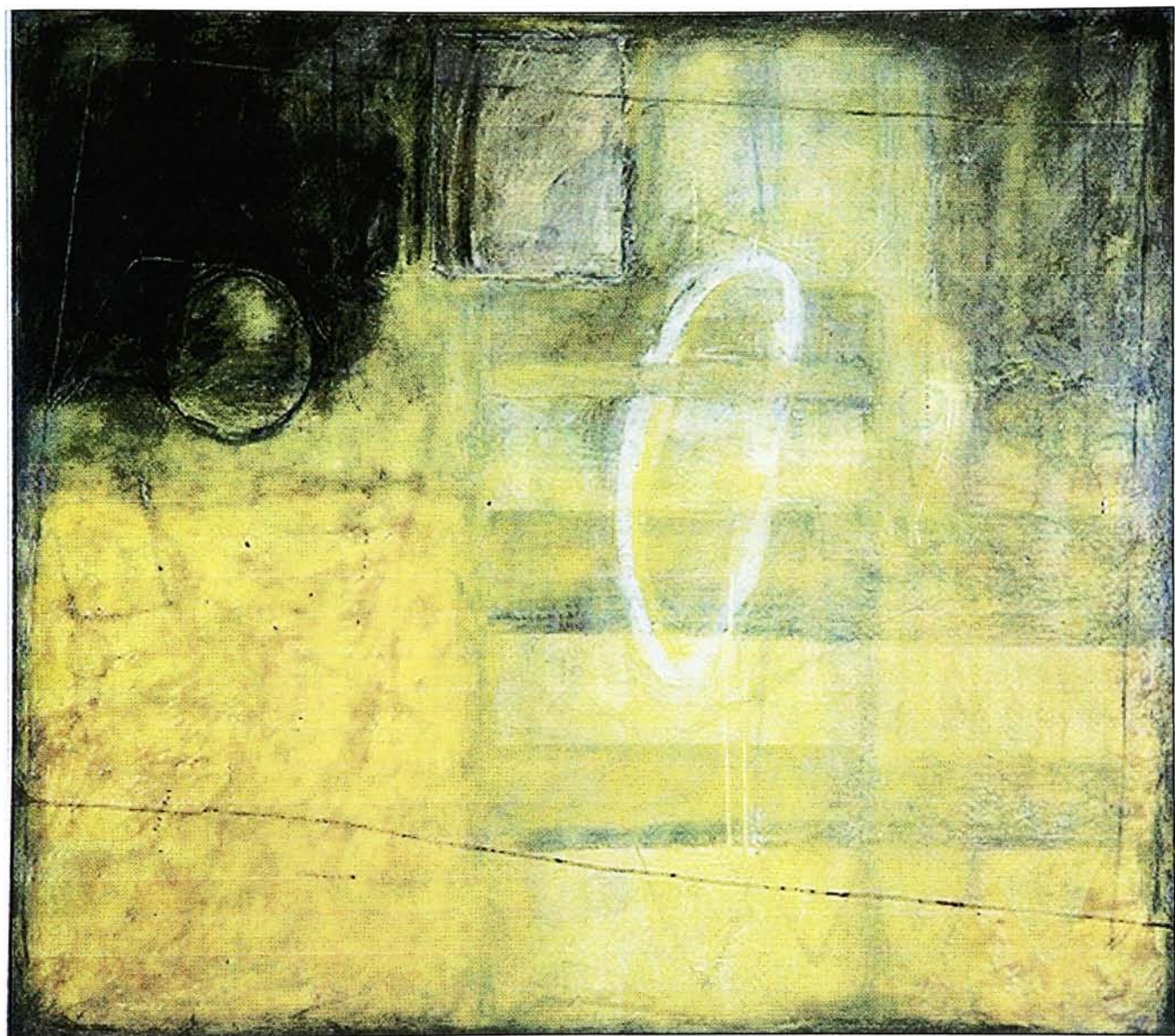


Fig. 11 *Cross Painting #1*
oil on canvas
48" x 36"
2000

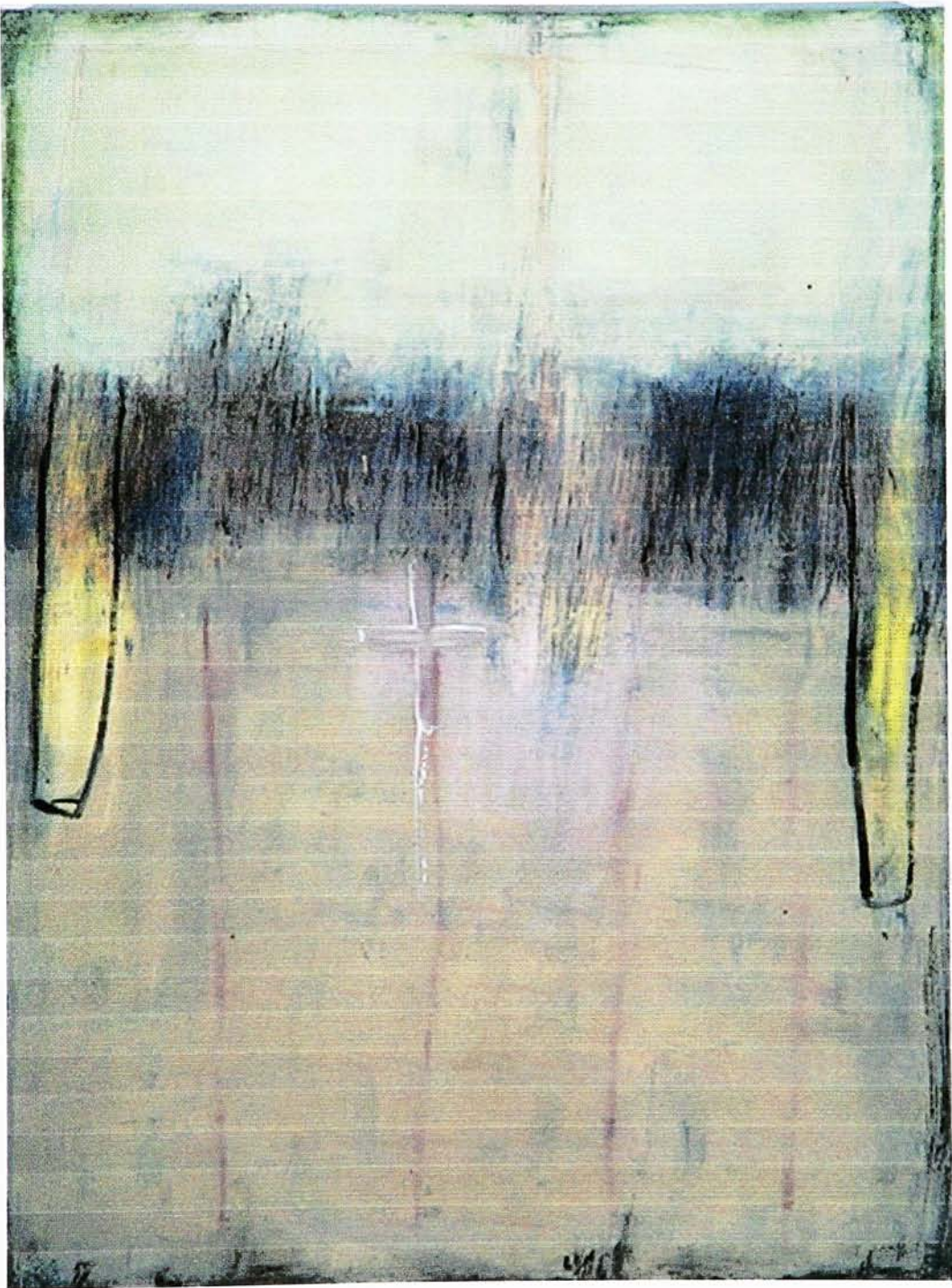


Fig. 12 *Cross Painting #2*
oil on canvas
48" x 36"
2000

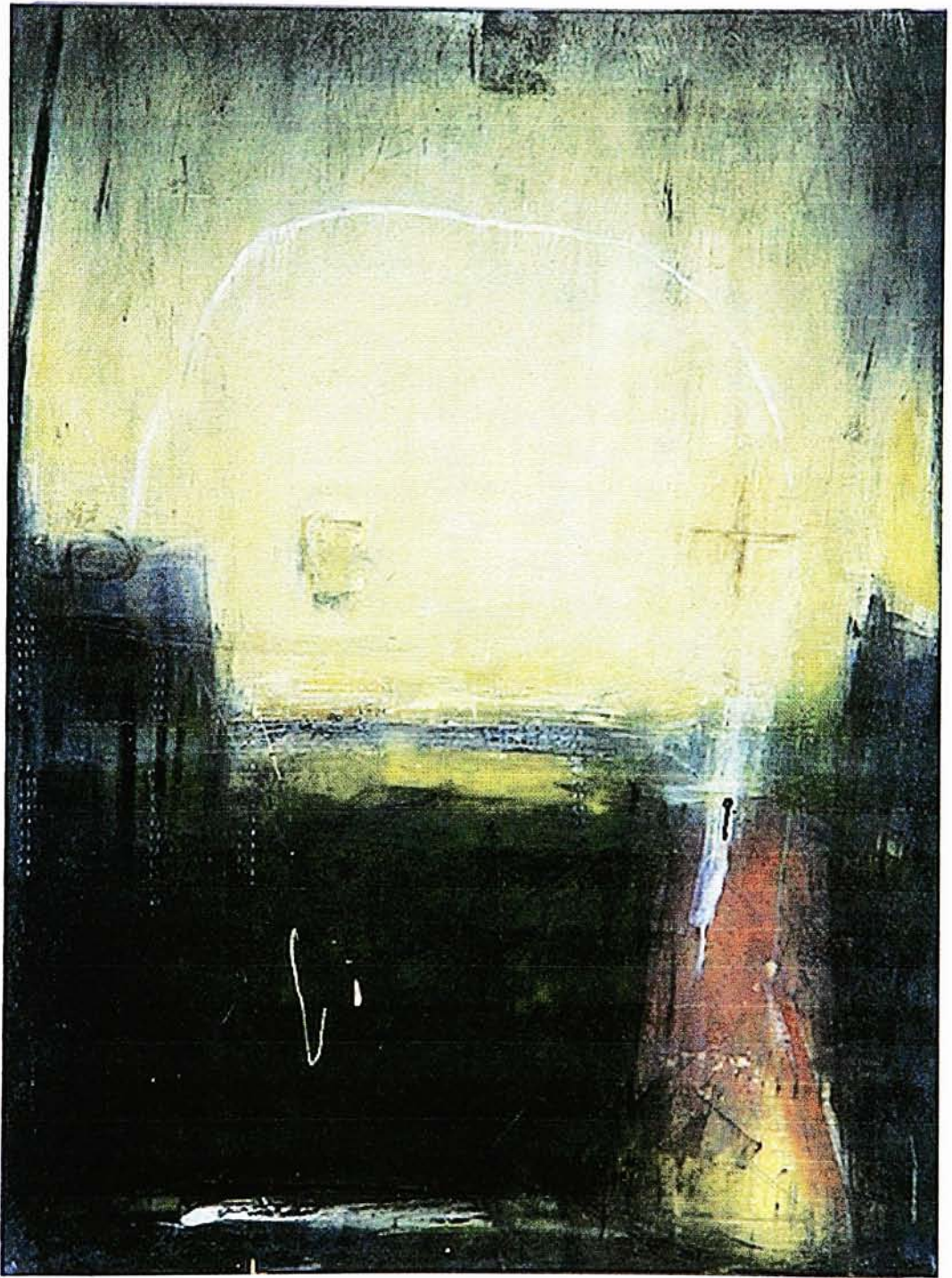


Fig. 13 *Omicron Variant #1*
oil on panel
24" x 30"
2000

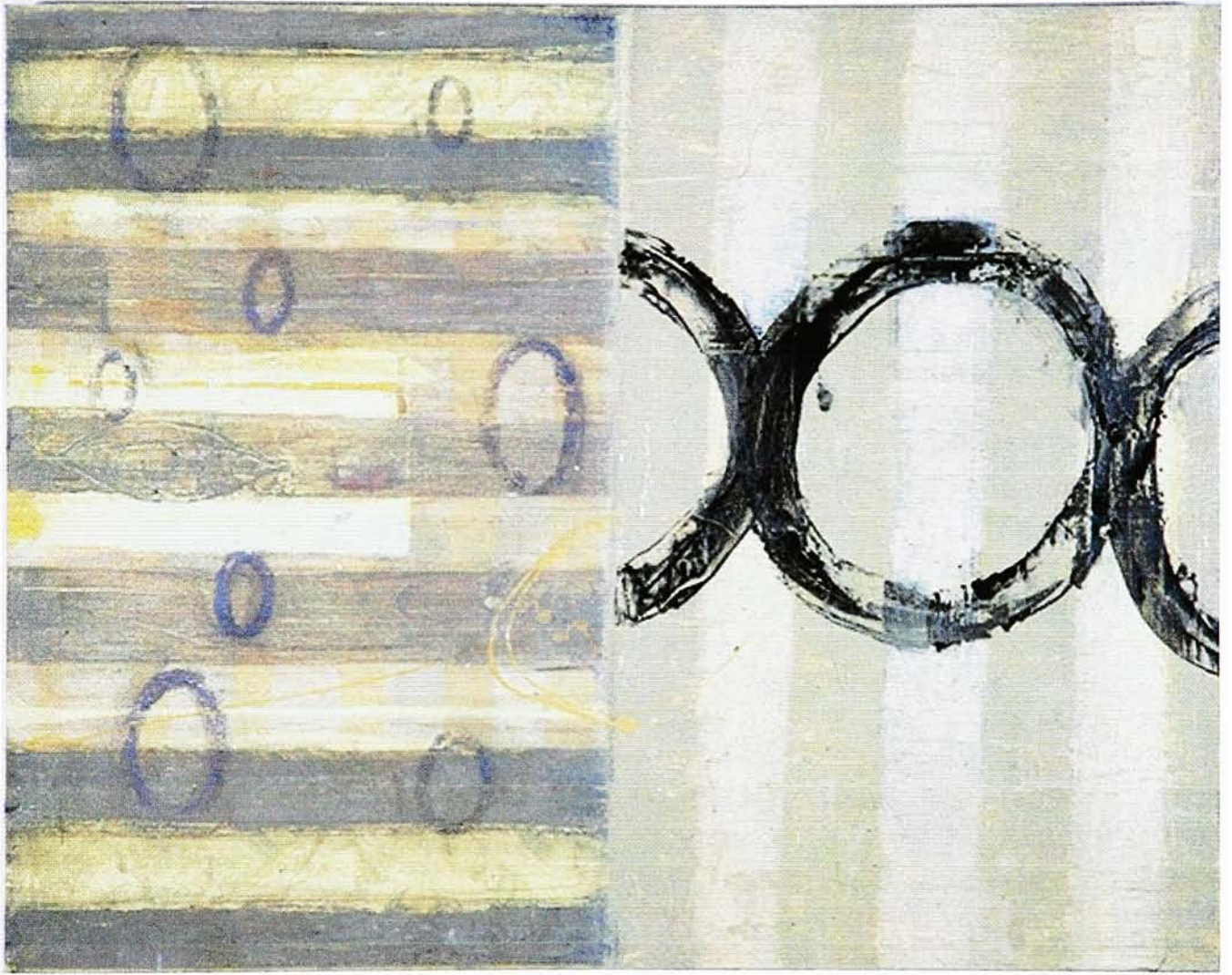


Fig. 14 *Omicron Variant #2*
mixed media on paper
10.5" x 12.75"
2000-01



Fig. 15 *Untitled*
Intaglio Type
10" x 10"
2000



Fig. 16 *Untitled*
Intaglio Type
7" x 7"
2000



Fig. 17 *Emergence*
oil on canvas
42" x 48"
2001



Fig. 18 *Coverture*
oil on panel
30" x 24"
2001

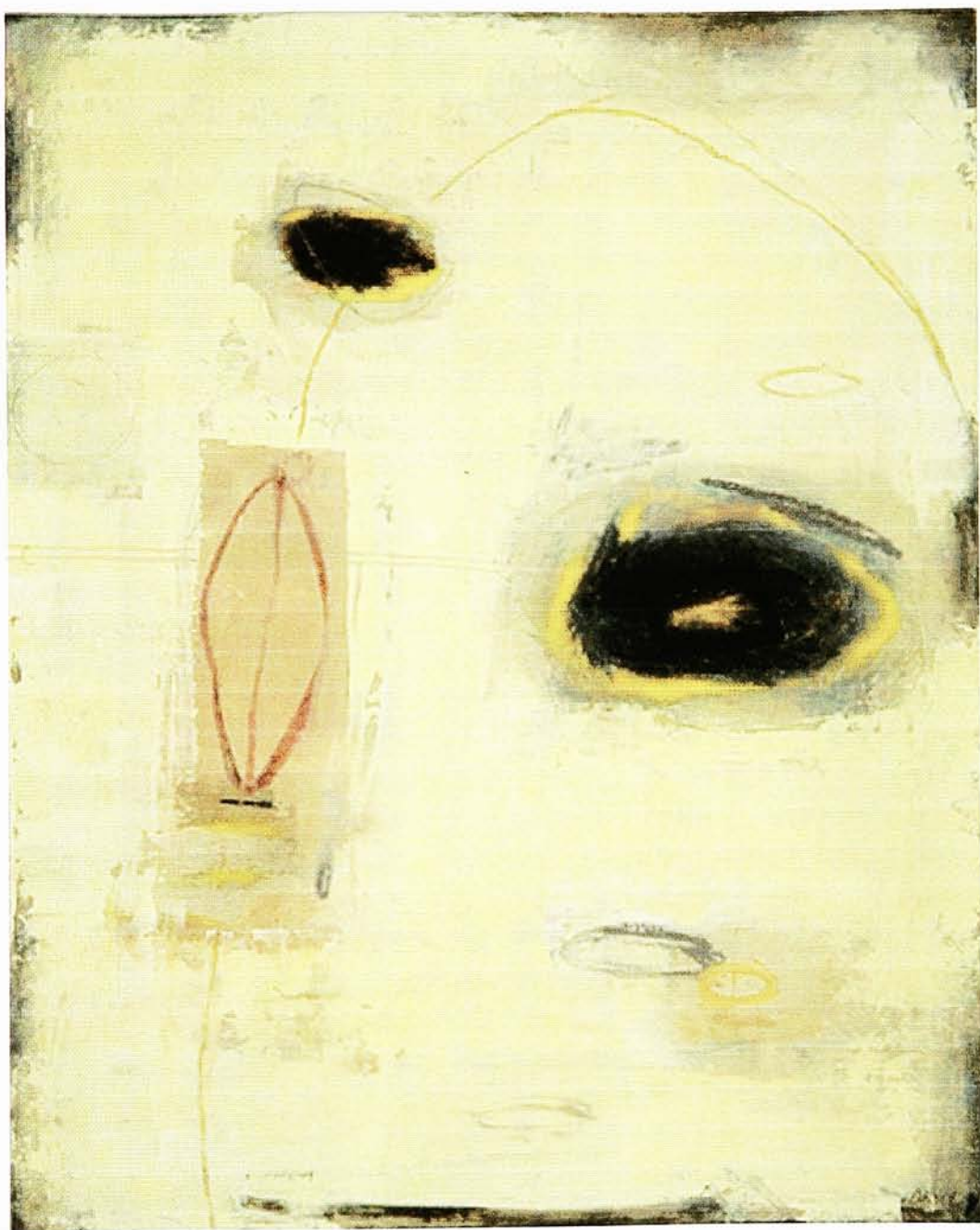


Fig. 19 *Left Out*
oil on canvas
49" x 37"
2001



Fig. 20 *Heart Song*
oil on canvas
42" x 48"
2001

