

Rochester Institute of Technology

RIT Digital Institutional Repository

Theses

6-13-1997

Emotional and spiritual connotations of the vessel

Charles IV Carson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.rit.edu/theses>

Recommended Citation

Carson, Charles IV, "Emotional and spiritual connotations of the vessel" (1997). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the RIT Libraries. For more information, please contact repository@rit.edu.

*Emotional and Spiritual Connotations
of the Vessel*

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.

Emotional and Spiritual Connotations
of the Vessel

by

Charles Graham Carson IV

June 13, 1997

Approvals

Chief Advisor: Leonard Urso _____

Date 8-22-97

Associate Advisor: Mark Stanitz _____

Date 8/26/97

Associate Advisor: Steve Loar _____

Date 8/21/97

Chairperson: Bob Schmitz _____

Date 8-27-97

I, Charles Graham Carson IV, hereby grant permission to the Wallace Memorial Library of RIT to reproduce my thesis in whole or in part. Any reproduction will not be for commercial use or profit.

Signature _____

Date 8-25-97

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Elements and Symbolism.....	4
Ideas and Influences.....	9
The Work.....	13
Conclusion.....	21
Illustrations.....	25
Bibliography.....	41

List of Illustrations

Figure 1- *Old Man and Deanna*, Joyce Tenneson.

Figure 2- *Angelic Conflict*, Gustave Dore.

Figure 3- *Jerusalem*, Anselm Kiefer.

Figure 4- *Nike of Samothrace, (Victory of Samothrace)*

Figure 5- *Lament for Icarus*, Herbert James Draper.

Figure 6- *Giving Ground*

Figure 7- *Angel and Angel Skin*

Figure 8- *My Angel*

Figure 9- *Megiddo Plain, Winds of Torment*

Figure 10- *One Small Darkness Encloses*

Figure 11- *Stitch Me Together*

Den die todtten reiten schnell

Figure 12- *Megiddo Field / Feathered Rain*

Figure 13- *Silent Cry / Ascension*

Figure 14- *Fall from Grace*

Dance of the Fey

Figure 15- *Above Me, Her Young Shade*

Nest / Husk

“Sad task and hard, for how shall I relate
To human sense th’ invisible exploits
Of warring spirits; how without remorse
The ruin of so many glorious once
And perfect while they stood; how last unfold
The secrets of another World, perhaps
Not lawful to reveal? yet for thy good
This is dispens’t, and what surmounts the reach
Of human sense, I shall delineate so,
By lik’ning spiritual to corporal forms,
As may express them best.”

John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book V

“And like a weather-beaten Vessel holds
Gladly the Port, though Shrouds and Tackle torn;
Or in the emptier waste, resembling Air,
Weighs his spread wings...
...Thither full fraught with mischievous revenge,
Accurst, and in a cursed hour he hies.”

John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book III

It is an unfortunate fact that the bulk of humanity is often limited in its mental vision to weigh with patience and sometimes intelligence, those isolated phenomena which lie outside the common experience, seen and felt only by a psychologically sensitive few. Those of broader intellect must know that there is no sharp distinction between the real and the unreal; that all things appear as they do only by the virtue of the delicate individual physical and mental media through which we are made aware of them. But the dull materialism of the majority condemns as madness, the flashes of "super-sight" and spiritualism which penetrate the rigid veil of common experience.

I have often wondered if the majority of mankind ever pauses to reflect upon the occasionally titanic significance of dreams, for example, and of the obscure world to which they belong. While a great number of our visions are perhaps no more than faint and fantastic reflections of our waking experiences, there are still a certain remainder whose ethereal character leave no ordinary interpretation, and whose disquieting and exciting effect, suggests possible minute glimpses into a sphere of mental existence no less important than the physical world, yet is separated from the life we know. From my experience, I cannot doubt that the human, when lost from our earthly consciousness, is indeed straying into another and uncorporeal life of far different nature from our earthly base, and of which only the slightest memories linger after. From those blurred memories we may infer much, but prove little. We may guess that in a

higher state of being, time and space do not exist as our conscious selves comprehend them.

What do we really know of the world and the universe about us? Science and religion both have tried to explain this vast cosmos to us, each in their own ways. In both circumstances, and in life itself, we see things only as we are *constructed* and *instructed* to see them, and therefore, we may not grasp their absolute nature. If other “beings” exist, either physical or astral, or as ancient scriptures suggest, races of beings somewhere in-between those two states, with wider, stronger or a different range of senses, they might not only see things very differently than we see things, but might see and study whole worlds of matter, energy and life which lie close at hand, yet can never be detected with the senses that we have. Modern science tells us that these beings don’t exist and never did for the simple reason of lack of evidence. Yet in the scientific world, what is speculation today, often becomes fact tomorrow. In the world of religion, these beings once existed along with a world that they inhabited, yet over time the church has chosen to tell us how to think and to act, and has “banished” these ancient testaments from its teachings. So once again, science *constructs* a view of the cosmos, and religion *instructs* us on how we should consider spirituality. Both are very narrow in their visions, and discount all other possible explanations of reality and history .

Around the time of 200 BCE, the Jewish scribe Enoch, wrote down a

series of books which later became part of the original Hebrew bible. These books talked about angels “of the Lord” as bearers of a wisdom; an intelligence with which they studied the cosmos unlike man could ever dream. This, however, wouldn’t last. The angels on earth (which appear in many ancient cultures the world over), according to the ancient texts, began to mingle and fornicate with the “daughters of man” and produced and offspring called the “Nephilim” or giants (from which the Sumerians claimed to have descended from). Through this joining of races, man began to gain knowledge and insight which was forbidden to those not of Heaven. It was held that this was one of the main reasons for God causing the great flood. He wanted to create a race of man that would stay a distance from him. As Machiavelli wrote, it is better to be loved and feared, rather than just loved. The books of Enoch were eventually removed from the Bible.

When the Jews were persecuted in Babylonia in the Old Testament, they looked to the angels for guidance. It was during this time that man learned about the different parts of the soul from the angels. Many books were written and it appeared to the later church fathers that the angels in the scriptures almost gained a following of their own worshipers. These books were omitted from the later Hebrew bible and became the “lost books” or the Jewish *Pseudepigrapha* and the Christian *Apocrypha*. No one was allowed to know or to even speculate that someone could come close to God; that spirituality could come from another source.

From this early period of religion and spiritual lore, many scriptures were written, lost, discovered again and many of them were censored and banned through the ages due to their alternative views and theories on angels, God, the devil, the soul, and belief as a whole. The church still tells us how to think about and view things. The Catholic church in particular has skewed its view on the historical texts and created its own horrific view for its parishioners.

I am not a religious person. I doubt that I ever will be. Sometimes I have questioned the idea of whether or not there is a god, gods, or God. To this day I have no answer for myself. I was not raised in a religious family, although in my childhood my mother taught Sunday school and I learned the stories of the Bible by accompanying her to church almost every Sunday until I was confirmed (a Christian rite conferring the gift of the Holy Spirit and full church membership). After that the visits seemed to taper off, and at the time I was happy about it. But there has always been a fascination in the back of my mind about the idea of religion and devotion to a belief; the difference between religion and spirituality. Since I was confirmed, religion has been absent from my life. But every once in awhile, ideas and thoughts seem to creep out of the cracks of my mind. I have found myself in recent years fascinated with writings about the world that created the Bible and its original texts. I have many unanswered questions from my childhood about religion. What makes the questions even more difficult for me is the fact that I come from a family

with a somewhat religious mother and a very scientific father. In common terms I am faced with the conflict of, “creation versus evolution.” What half of my background would consider “transcendence,” the other half would consider “quackery.”

Over time I have developed my own ideas and thoughts involving these two worlds of science and religion. I have begun a journey between opposing forces and dualities that is leading me towards a spiritual transcendence of my self. The main focus is that of religion and spirituality, and the opposing views of what I was taught and what I have discovered. But I approach them with my scientific, childhood view; a theory called “what if.”

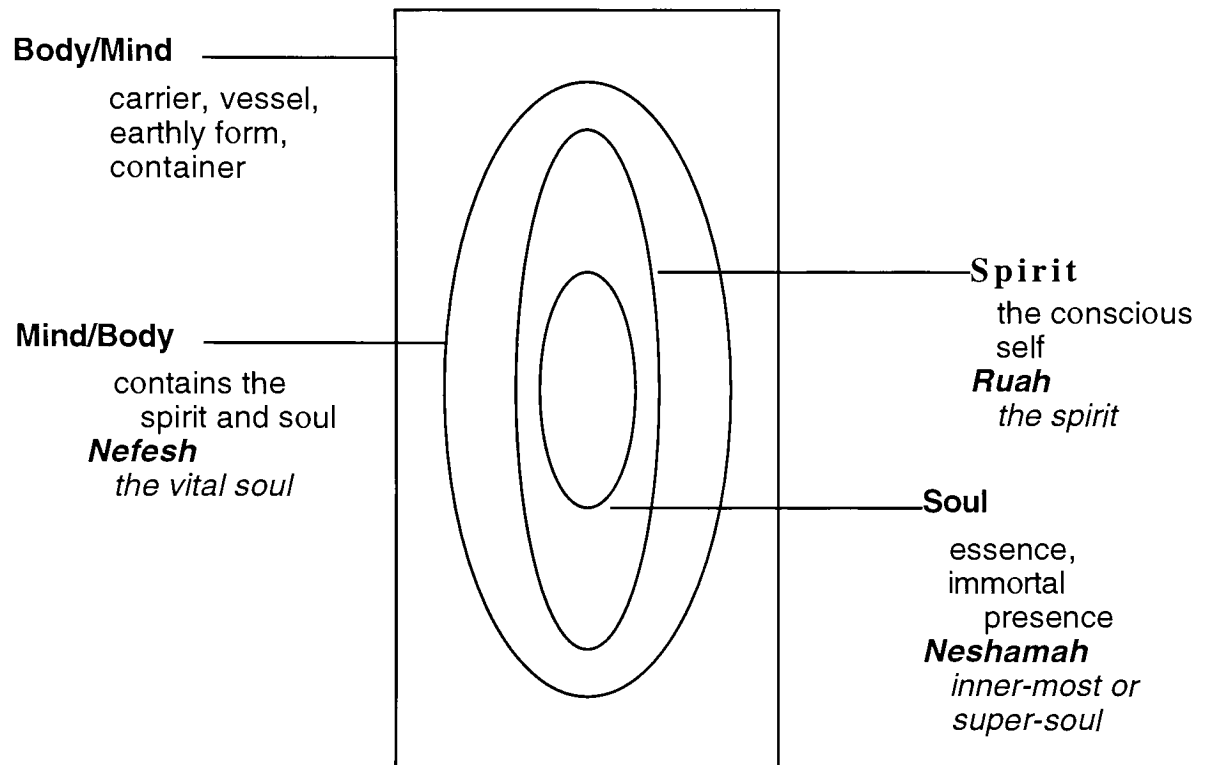
Angels have played a large part in this journey. Because they were a common belief in many different cultures the world over, they have always held my fascination. Texts were written about angels as real beings long extinct, about angels as messengers of the Lord, and about angels as being part of our own inner self. From here my thoughts turned to the Bible that we know today.

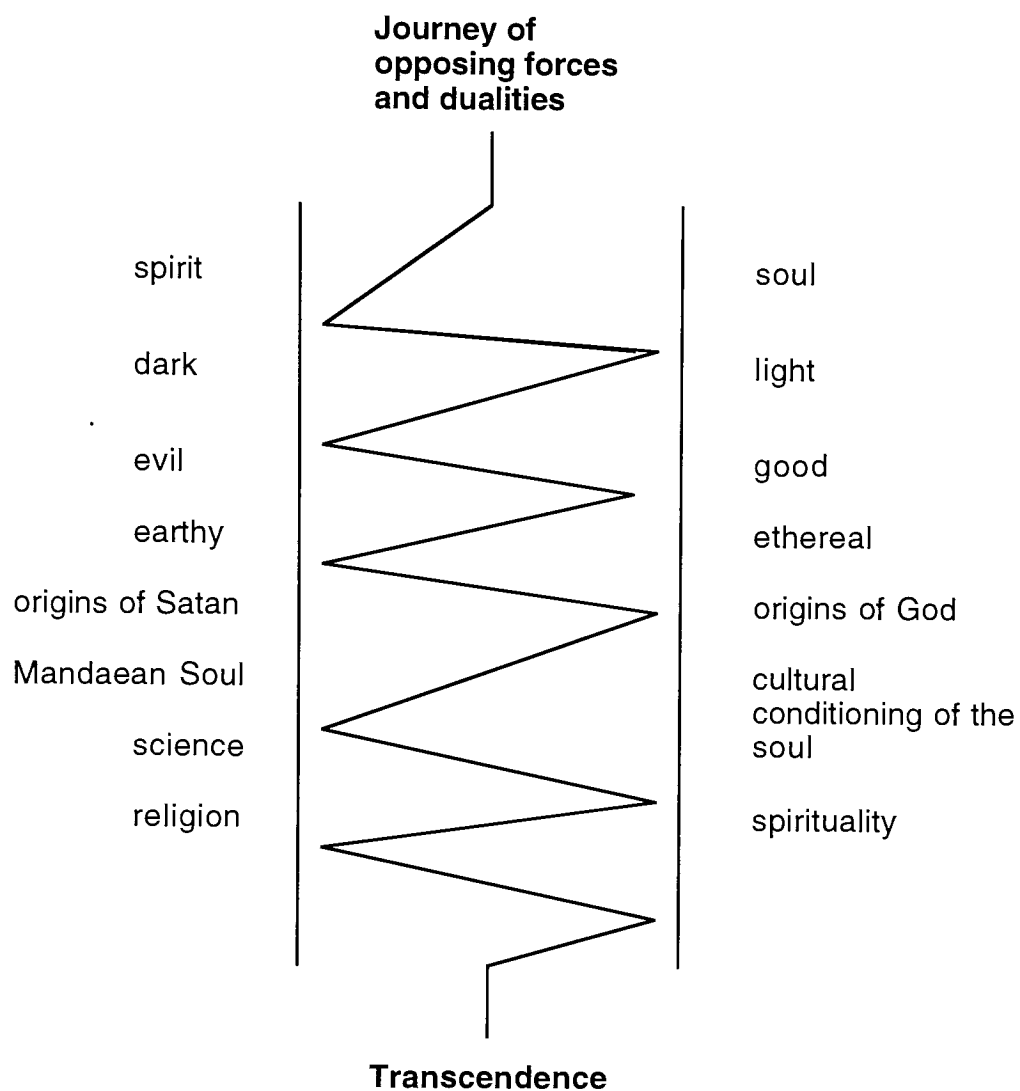
Many teachings of the modern Bible (since the 1300’s) have been changed from their original intent and meanings. One simple example is that of evil represented by the figure we know as Satan. In the original Hebrew bible, Ha-Satan is an angel who lives on earth to test man, as an agent of God. He is the “heavenly” adversary, not the evil enemy. In the middle ages, this idea disappeared, due to Catholicism and its “discovery”

of Heaven and Hell. When John Milton wrote his masterpiece, Paradise Lost, he placed the fall of Satan during the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible. In the actual scriptures, Satan is not cast out until Revelations, the last and final book of the Christian Bible. Due to this and many other misguided views, I have come to question much of what religion has to teach as to what is right and wrong in life. But there are problems in this alternative belief as well. If God is all-knowing, he knew that Satan would eventually fall, and that the angels would mingle with man. He knew ahead of time that he would kill mankind with the flood and start over with Noah. Why all the problems if God is so good, and God is so great? Just as in the church itself, there is a darkness within the light of heaven, and similarly there is something deceptive hidden within the history of the Bible and the world that created it.

In the past year or two I have done a great deal of introspection, or what some might call, soul searching. Because of my lack of religion but an natural need for guidance, I looked for my own spirituality and my own transcendence. I have viewed my body as a vessel, and within my mind and my conscious self, I tried to find a form of guidance in life. The more I lamented, the more I discovered that my search for spirituality was not far from some of the beliefs that the early Hebrews were dealing with in texts that predate and include the Dead Sea Scrolls. I discovered within myself, three areas of the mind, all encased in the body or vessel. The ancient Mandaean texts called them the *Nefesh* or vital soul, the *Ruah* or spirit, and

the *Neshamah* or super-soul. Similarly, I had the body/mind, which was the carrier, or the vessel, containing the spirit or the conscious self and which in turn contained the soul, which is our essence or our immortal presence; our “angel.”





Because of the similarities that I keep discovering in my research, I have found myself returning to a religious basis of some sorts. I have felt the need to find the answers to the unanswered questions that arose when I was a child attending church. I have felt a long awaited yearning to know the sources of my wonderment and my fears. I have incorporated many symbols in my art that I didn't really understood until recently. I have discovered spiritual significance where I never knew any existed. Symbols and meanings that were always important to me were taken further and were not only more potent, but also had historical significance in many different beliefs the world over which corresponded to my own ideas.

My thesis had been conceived as exploring the "body as vessel." I could now consciously and purposefully explore my personal symbols and combine them with this earlier intent.

The vessel in short, is a carrier. The human body is a vessel in which man's ethereal form is contained. Sometimes this vessel acts as a shelter and other times as a stifler. As the vessel possesses this thing or inner form, the soul can feel trapped and long for escape, or simply cease to be.

The original drive behind this body of work and the thoughts behind the pieces was to involve the representation of the vessel once its use as a carrier or as a shelter was finished. Some questions were considered in the execution of the work: What happens when the soul departs? What is left when the spirit leaves? What remains when love and desire are

extinguished? What is the shape of darkness when the light burns out?

The vessel without a use has no life left. The form starts to break and crumble, crack and collapse. A human with no soul; a body with no spirit; an urn without contents. Collapsed hopes portrayed in a dead form; discarded elements or a shedding of the skin to represent freedom. The end result is a husk; what's left of what was.

The guiding force in these pieces and this work was emotion and spiritualism. The elusive myths from some hushed purgatory of the mind, became an examination of the self, a projection of thoughts, memories, dreams. I saw correlations with my ideas of the spirit and the vessel, along with, for example, the imagery of wings to represent the free soul, with the angels and the battle that went on inside the heavenly Host for control of mankind (souls). I mixed the many questions, fears and experiences that I had over the years with those that had built up the foundation for the thesis work.

Elements and Symbolism

Tar

I have used tar in my work now for a few years, using it for the most part to symbolize blood. The asphaltum or tar that I had been using for resist etching took on meaning for me visually one night when I used it to cover up an image that I had been painting on canvas. I hated the image so much that I wanted to blacken it out, erase it. Tar seemed the best way

to do this, because the stickiness of the tar, and the smell of it, symbolized the way that I felt. I buried the image by dipping my hand into the tar and rubbing my hand across the canvas, feeling the tar on my skin. Inside I felt tethered, the tar weighted down my hand like emotion weighted down my soul. I wanted to fly away but I was trapped. Within an hour my torso was covered with the asphaltum. I caked it on and scraped it off. As it molded and shaped itself to me creating a second skin, my emotions worked the tar across the surface of my soul and my spirit. It held me in place and seemed to bleed out of my finger tips. It oozed. It took its time running out; like a slow cleansing. But it felt good and the idea of the tar for blood stuck with me. The tar was a darkness in the light. It was the blood of the spirit, it encased the soul.

Bird/Raven/Flight

The symbol of the bird represents the form that the heart holds. The bird is the soul, or Neshamah. Encased in tar, it cannot go anywhere. Its wings are weighted down, its feathers bonded and stuck together. Like quicksand, or a tar pit, the more struggle that goes on, the further down you are drawn into darkness, the closer you come to death and the judgment of your soul. But these ideas gave forth room to new ones; the fact that both in darkness and in death there is a sense of freedom.

In death, all the trials and tribulations are through and are no longer relevant to existence because existence as a state, has changed. In religion, death frees the soul and the spirit from one life to another beyond. In

darkness there are no limitations, there are no obstacles that can be seen from any standpoint. Darkness is like spirituality. There are no shapes but the shape of darkness itself. Darkness in a sense, is complete and pristine. After all, the darkness in Heaven came out of the light. Darkness is safety, the return to the womb, the return to the mother, the original vessel, the return home.

The idea of the bird and freedom that the bird or the soul searches for took me to the idea of flight.

Flight is another representation of freedom. It is a journey not towards a new existence beyond, but to a rebirth, regeneration and a peace with one's self. It is a cleansing of the tar off the wings and the spirit. It is escape.

The first bird that Noah released from the Ark, was a raven. This raven did not return, but rather flew until it found land. It was the dove that Noah released that returned to him with an olive branch. But the raven, flying until it found a place for its feet after the waters had dried up, started a new life.

The bird and the feather has long held standing in the realm of Christian art and art related to other religions as well. In early Christian art, birds and feathers represented immortality and the incorruptible soul. In Native American beliefs, the feather was shown to represent man or woman. The quill of the feather was the person and the individual strands that grow out of either side to create the feather, were markings of each of

the events that had shaped the person's life.

When Gustave Dore was illustrating Milton's Paradise Lost, he often times would represent the rebel angels still possessing the feathered wings of the loyal angels. While he did represent them with the wings of a bat in other pictures, as did many other artists, Dore would continually go back and forth, perhaps with the intention of showing the duality inherent in life itself: Good cannot exist without evil; joy cannot exist without sorrow; life cannot exist without death, and so on.

Boat/Body/Container

These elements of my art are symbolic of the journey that must be taken in order to cleanse the soul and the being. It is a shell or a carrier; a container that keeps the soul from sinking beneath the tar. The boat, like the symbols of the body and the container does not last forever and begins to break apart from the outset of the journey of life. Trials and tribulations smash against the hull and split the timbers. The boat is the strongest of the vessels that we have, but it is the first to break beneath us. We lose the boat in the storm of the mind and the fury of our actions. When the boat is lost, it is our body (Nefesh) that carries us next through the tar. But the tar sticks to the body as well as penetrating it, and the body is pulled down. As the desire in the heart leaves, so does the lust for life in the body. Last is the mind, or spirit, the container form (Ruah). It is the most fragile of the vessels, but the most crucial in means of escape and flight. The container is light and despite the stickiness of the tar, it will

float. But the mind is easy to decay and deteriorate. If hope is lost the container will succumb to the pressures of the environment and collapse. If desire and hope have not left, the soul will grow wings and fly away before the container is swallowed.

Boats and containers have played many significant parts in religion and beliefs. Many ancient cultures used the boat to symbolize a journey involving the soul. The Egyptians buried their dead with boats, as well as in boats. The dead pharaoh would make his journey to the afterlife, in accordance to some religious sects, in a boat fashioned of reeds. The Valley of the Kings, which was a significant burial place for many of the rulers was reached by crossing the Nile river in an elaborate procession of boats that symbolized a type of transcendence.

Charon ferried the souls of the dead across the river Styx. The Holy Family was ferried across the river by an angel as portrayed in some paintings of the flight into Egypt. Dante and Virgil were transported by boat in The Inferno.

The early Christian fathers and apologists likened the church to a ship in which the faithful found safety and were borne into salvation. The ark of Noah, and the boat that bore the disciples in the theme of Christ walking on the waves can be referenced. It first appeared in early Christian painting in the catacombs of Rome, with the mast of the boat being the resting place of a dove. *Hope*, one of the theological virtues was often portrayed wearing a model of a boat on her head.

Ideas and Influences

I noticed that many of the artists that influence me the most, deal with religious, ethereal or mythical art in one way or another. This was another revelation that came to me while I was working on the pieces in this body of work. Whether it was chance or subconscious I don't know, but I found it rather intriguing. It made me accept my own questions a lot more easily, because like me, these artists were not, for the most part, making religious art, but rather art that referenced religion, or the spiritual.

The first of these artists to affect the body of work presented was the photographer Joyce Tenneson. It was the work of Tenneson that made my idea of the "darkness within the light." start to sprout, composing itself around dualities: angel and menace, childhood and age, beauty and sorrow, naked and clothed, earthy and ethereal. One of her photographs of great influence to me involves a little girl, posed like a suppliant. (Fig. 1) The old man that stands next to her has turned away and does not notice her or her presence; perhaps he simply chooses to ignore. He seems to be receding, not only physically, but emotionally. Is he dying, or fading? The child's profile has produced a layered effect, a dim double image, and she is equipped with wings. However, the wings are the wings of a bat, which contradicts the beauty of the young girl, as if this angelic creature were somehow in league with the dark. It shows an uneasy edge, or as Tenneson says, "a recognition that darkness can shadow the most lyrical

human encounters.”

In order to foster new ideas and to help extend those that existed, I began to surround myself with books like the Bible, Milton’s Paradise Lost, The Apocrypha, many translated Hebrew texts and related books of the Bible. Another artist that had long interested me, again came to the forefront of my investigation. (Fig. 2) Gustave Dore’s many drawings of angels and demons, and other religious themes affected me to where I started to draw on my canvases. More than that, he influenced me to take biblical stories and historic places to use in furthering my ideas for the battle of the soul and what remains of the vessel after the soul is lost. The plain of Megiddo in Israel became a place that held great meaning for me and later played the main theme in two paintings. The field of Megiddo is where the armies supposedly will muster for the battle of Armageddon in Jerusalem. Historically, it has been the sight of centuries of warfare. To me this place became a place of lost souls and the valley, a vessel.

Like Dore, Anselm Kiefer, a contemporary painter also gave me many ideas and visions in my own work. Much in the same vein as Dore, Kiefer’s painting entitled Jerusalem, (Fig. 3) affected me because of the fact that Kiefer used a place as reference towards a religion or a religious belief. In his case, Kiefer was making reference to the Holocaust through his ongoing paintings involving Judaism. A long time fan of Kiefer’s work, I began to look at his paintings even closer in the next few weeks until I had to put them away, for fear that my work would absorb too much of an influence

from his paintings. But his landscapes burned hard into my mind and they played a large part when I went into the execution of my own canvases. His landscapes were veiled beneath layers and layers of paint. I felt that this both added to and obscured the work and the meaning, therefore making a powerful piece that had great depth, but did not overwhelm the viewer with meaning. This idea appealed to me, because as I have stated before, I did not want my art to come across as religious. My vision was that of spiritual awareness and longing; a search for transcendence.

Kiefer also used materials that I had been in contact with in my own work such as wood shellac, tar, lead and liquid photo emulsion to create different effects on his paintings.

The last two influences for my work came from religious mythos outside of Christianity. The first is the Greek statue of the Nike of Samothrace. (Fig. 4) The winged woman, shrouded in her veil-like garment stands high on the bow of a boat, her massive wings out behind her. She is a messenger of the Gods, an envoy, an ethereal form from another place. She, along with the Greek and Roman gods, Victory, Mercury and Isis (who was taken from the Egyptians) are the descendants of very ancient pre-classical winged figures.

The last major work that I found during my research was a painting by Herbert James Draper entitled, The Lament for Icarus. (Fig. 5) The beautiful Victorian era painting shows the fallen Icarus surrounded by three nymphs. Along with the painting, the story of Icarus intrigued me.

Icarus wanted to fly away from Crete and to do this, his father Daedalus, fashioned wings. Upon flying too close to the sun however, the wax that held Icarus' feathers together began to melt and weaken the strength of his wings. He fell, plummeting to earth. But he fell, due to his own ambition; the same reason that caused the revolt in Heaven and the fall of Lucifer in Christian mythology.

The Work

Nine major works were produced for this thesis and were put together in such a way that an environment was created. Throughout the year however, a number of related works were also created that I think need attention because of their interplay with the rest of the art. In addition to that, to works from the previous year must be given special note as well. I feel that it was these pieces that unknowingly laid the ground work for me.

The two pieces are copper torsos that each hold a bit of significance in light of these late ideas. The first is a male torso entitled Giving Ground. (Fig. 6) The reason I would like to discuss this is the fact that at the time this piece seemed more of an exercise to me, but since then has come to mean quite a bit more. The rip or tear that was cut into the piece took on a dual meaning as I stared at this piece over the year. It was a symbol of escape and also perhaps the after effects of a wounding experience; the escaping of the soul from the body, the bursting forth of the spirit, or the

ripping of desire from the body or the exorcism of the soul from the spirit.

The second piece was also done during 1995 and 1996. The finished piece is made up of both a copper torso and a painting. The two were put together in such a way to produce an environment for the sculpture as well as an intended background. The sculpture, independent of the painting is entitled, Angel, and the two together called Angel and Skin. (Fig. 7) The painting was produced in oil and tar on canvas, and going along with the themes that I have been investigating, again puts forth the idea of the darkness within the light. The graceful female form stands peacefully, giving a sense of calm. Behind her is the tar covered skin underneath which are flashes of red, symbolizing angelic conflict.

These two pieces, while finished a year in advance of the rest of the work to be presented and also produced without (as it seemed then) the intentions and ideas that later evolved from them, show the unconscious mind at work. Spirituality, religion and transcendence were undertones of these works and it wasn't until later on, that this revelation made itself evident. It was these initial pieces that were the stepping stones to what became the thesis construction.

Two paintings were produced during the fall of 1996 that would later be reproduced on a larger scale for the thesis work. The first of these was a painting entitled My Angel. (Fig. 8) Borrowing visual ideas from Tenneson's photographs and a technique of layering the paints, I began to draw between the layers in order to achieve a ghost-like image of a wing.

The ethereal quality of the work was achieved by giving a sense of atmosphere; of clouds and mist. The wing seems to disappear as it moves across the scene and out of the painting.

Megiddo, Winds of Torment, (Fig. 9) was painted after doing research on biblical and religious stories, involving the city and town of Megiddo in Israel. The plain and the adjoining Valley of Jezreel play a major part in the histories of Christianity, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Hebrews, all the way back to the ancient Sumerians and other Mesopotamian cultures. The plain is barren today except for the modern city that exists on the outskirts. But nothing protrudes into the desolate expanse of sand and rock that spawns the stories and myths. The painting set the scene for me, textured with thick paint and copper dust for the ground, marble dust and medium for the sky, with shellac dripping down from the heavens, staining the light, marking the trails of the fallen.

Central to the thesis work was the vessel. It was placed as the focal point of the final show, with the rest of the work occupying the four surrounding walls. The piece, constructed from copper, steel and wood, focused on the idea of the human as vessel. (Fig. 10) Entitled One Small Darkness Encloses, it brought the ideas together and then pushed them out to the four walls around it. The vessel was lined with tar that oozed out of a seam that ran down one side of the piece. This seam or slice was reminiscent of the rip in the chest of the male torso from the year before.

This scar or rip however, was stitched up with a series of steel staples eluding to surgery. This promoted the idea of work on one's self, letting the tar inside drip out. The oars that were used as supports tied in with the ideas and histories of the boat. A single feather lay in the bottom of the vessel, showing that the soul had gotten away.

Stitch Me Together was arranged with the baptismal font placed in front of it. (Fig. 11) The painting with the wings nailed to it and the faint image of a landscape behind it start an interaction between the ideas of religion and those of the personal beliefs and searches for the soul. The feelings of one being torn between their own beliefs and those that are taught to them in religion. This religion, is symbolized in the font below; another vessel, its base covered in a layer of tar. The wings are the torn appendages of the soul, and the landscape, a battlefield of the mind; a personal Megiddo. The font is entitled, Den die todten reiten schnell, (For the dead travel fast). The canvas, blackened with tar, paint, graphite, fire, and dead animal parts, "reeks" of decay. The meaning of the font comes into play; the baptismal ritual juxtaposed against the amputated wings remind the viewer that in the soul, life and death walk in tandem.

Megiddo Field / Feathered Rain was produced after the smaller painting of the same idea. This time instead of drips of shellac portraying the trails of the fall, feathers were fashioned out of copper and hung off of the surface of the painting and blew in the breeze giving movement to the finished piece, as if these feathers were falling or floating down to earth.

(Fig. 12) The feathers produced in copper are heavy and symbolize a guilt or heaviness of the soul, the ambition that made the angels fall along with the feathers of their brethren that they had slain in the battle for Heaven. The plain in the painting, again as with other canvases was layered with paint and drawings to produce the depth that was desired. Charcoal was smeared to show darkness and the smoke of battle, while marble dust and sand made up the ground of the battlefield. As with the other paintings in the work, this one was interacting with its own sculpture, a large copper wing.

Silent Cry / Ascension was made to take the shape of a bird's wing while at the same time mimic the construction of the side of a boat. (Fig. 13) The individual panels were bolted together in an overlapping fashion, like the planks on the side of an old wooden ship. Red and copper colored on the reverse side of the sculpture, the outside of the wing or the top, played against the dark blackish-brown that made up the unfolded or hidden portion of the wing. In this case it was the inside of the wing that the viewer could see, the dark soul that lay hidden beneath the shining exterior that Lucifer and his rebel angels originally possessed. As the hull of a ship it takes on a new meaning, with the bright inside protecting the soul, and the dark outside beaten and burned by the elements.

Fall from Grace and its companion sculpture, Dance of the Fey, also drew from previous investigations. (Fig. 14) The painting once again containing the image of the wing, abounds with angelic presences, drawn

in a style that was to elude to the anatomical drawings of Leonardo Da Vinci. The skeletal wing with its clinging feathers drip with a sickness or decay, a loss of faith or desire and hence the title of the painting. In the background, is the trail of a bird as it takes skyward, another soul in the process of escape. The copper figures are shells or skins that have been cast off for the same two reasons as in the painting. They either fulfilled their duty and were left when the soul departed or perhaps they suffered the torture of the fall from grace or the destruction of the spirit. The title, Dance of the Fey, invites the idea of pagan ritual, the dance of the doomed or the insane. But at the same time, beneath a painting called Fall from Grace, they also become the Three Graces of Greek mythology. The three sisters who bestowed on mankind charm and beauty, suggesting to the viewer the duality of the ugliness of deception and the beauty of giving.

The final two works that made up the forth wall of the environment, were again a combination of painting and sculpture displayed together. (Fig. 15) Above Me, Her Young Shade, another 5' x 5' painting that, like Fall from Grace portrayed the ideas involving the free and the fallen soul. In this case, a slight variation of the fallen soul was suggested in the hanging appendage of the snared and entangled bird in the center of the painting. The ceramic figure wrapped in steel binding wire, rested at the point where the bird that was drawn in the layers of paint originated its path of flight. One soul released into freedom while one lay trapped in bondage. In Renaissance paintings and art, a shackled or otherwise bound

figure symbolized man being enslaved by his “baser,” earthly desires. The painting itself is a division of both the earth and the heavens, with the tangled bird or soul being suspended in the middle of the two worlds, caught in a spiritual or religious limbo. The earth is represented with steel and metal dust applied thickly and coarsely, with many sharp and jagged points protruding from the painting. The heavens are rendered in layers of whites and neutral grays to produce a light or halo-like brilliance to the top half of the work. In the back however, the first layer that can be seen bleeding through to the front are dark patches of tar; drippings of darkness hidden within. The frightening parts of the spirit, the darker histories of religion, the cracks in the vessel.

Beneath the painting lies the sculpture Nest/Husk. A large cushion of barbed wire circled into the form of a bird’s nest. The center holds a ceramic bird form. This figure, unlike the one that is hung above it, is made up of many broken pieces that have been placed back together, leaving gaping voids in the walls of the form here and there. It is reminiscent of an eggshell that has been broken and reassembled, some shards still missing. The bird is a husk, its soul having departed and left an empty vessel behind. Perhaps it belonged to the black raven flying in the painting above it. Maybe it has long been abandoned, left for the elements to decide its fate. The barbed wire seems to cradle it and watch over the shell as it lays in the depression made for it. The barbs are not sharp, but long rusted down and eroded round on the tips. The piece is not

threatening, but almost soothing. The bird husk is broken but laying comfortably, its use having been exhausted.

What meaning this piece holds is not clear, but it seemed right, and it seemed a fit ending or termination to the series. And although there are many more questions and concerns in the layered fibers of the steel nest, for now it is a resting place. It is a place to sit and to think about the questions this work has awakened in my mind and in my self.

Conclusion

“The artist, with his sensitiveness, acts like a sponge. He may not know about [what is going on in science, politics, religion, etc.] but he sucks in the ideas that are in the air... and they work on him.”

Naum Gabo, Russian artist.

Kandinsky said that, “the awakening soul” of something deeper, is still only “a tiny star in a vast gulf of darkness.” And the soul, “when it sees it, trembles in doubt as to whether it is not the light which is a dream, and the gulf of darkness which is the reality.” But maybe it is this light in the dream that holds the chance of pulling out of this possibility of spiritual darkness; knowing that you don’t need an outside source to bring in that light, but that it is within, and once the soul finds it, the soul is free.

A soul with wings can reach that light. Wings involve a certain amount of freedom. An angel is not necessarily a magical, separate entity

out there, in heaven or wherever, as most of us are brought up to believe, but is perhaps just another state of consciousness. The angel is a potential part of each of us, it's an inner wisdom or higher self. Our vessel keeps us afloat in the "gulf" as we try to reach this higher state.

Religion may be one of man's ways of explaining this higher state of being. This enlightenment of the soul and the conscience. Spiritually, we either rise or we fall. With religion, we either rise or we fall; our soul being either pure or tainted. But how high can we ascend and how far can one fall, or is it best to hover somewhere between the two; a condition of homeostasis?

In Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Kandinsky suggests the spiritual significance between colors and the relationships that they have. But I feel that his ideas can go beyond a "color theory" as some consider it, and take on a spiritual meaning all its own. For me, there is a correlation between his theories of black and white and the hierarchy of Heaven and Hell; spirituality and the soul; of Darkness and Light. Everything is intertwined; there is a balance, neither can exist without the other. One must not think white and black, but rise and fall, dark and light, salvation and damnation. The soul ascending or descending, or somewhere in the middle.

"White is a symbol of a world from which all color as a definite attribute has disappeared. This world is too far above us for its harmony to touch our souls. A great silence, like an impenetrable wall, shrouds its life from our understanding.

White, therefore has this harmony of silence, which works upon us negatively, like many pauses in music that break temporarily the melody. It is not a dead silence, but one pregnant with possibilities. White has the appeal of the nothingness that is before birth, of the world in the ice age.

A totally dead silence, on the other hand, a silence with no possibilities, has the inner harmony of black. In music it is represented by one of those profound and final pauses, after which any continuation of the melody seems the dawn of another world. Black is something burnt out, like the ashes of a funeral pyre, something motionless like a corpse. The silence of black is the silence of death. Outwardly black is the color with the least harmony of all, a kind of neutral background against which the minutest shades of other colors stand clearly forward. It differs from white in this sense too, for with white nearly every color is in discord, or even mute altogether.”

Wassily Kandinsky,

Concerning the Spiritual in Art

“White in discord,” can be seen as light in discord; the uprising in Heaven, and the “ashes of a funeral pyre,” as Dante’s Inferno. The soul is caught between the two, floating a little south of spiritual awakening and a little north of spiritual corruption, or spiritual loss. Like Kandinsky’s

passage, religion can be interpreted many different ways. The stories take on different meanings for different people. I have discovered that one does not have to be religious to find fascination with the history of religion and its many teachings and stories. That one need not be religious in order to have a “religion,” or in order to achieve a higher state of consciousness. Spirituality is a state of mind; an ease with one’s self and the questions that one possesses. Our vessels and our souls are borne up by our own beliefs and our own desires. Peace of mind keeps the waters calm, the vessel afloat, the tar in recession, and the wings of the soul ready to take flight.



fig 1



fig 2



fig 2



fig 4

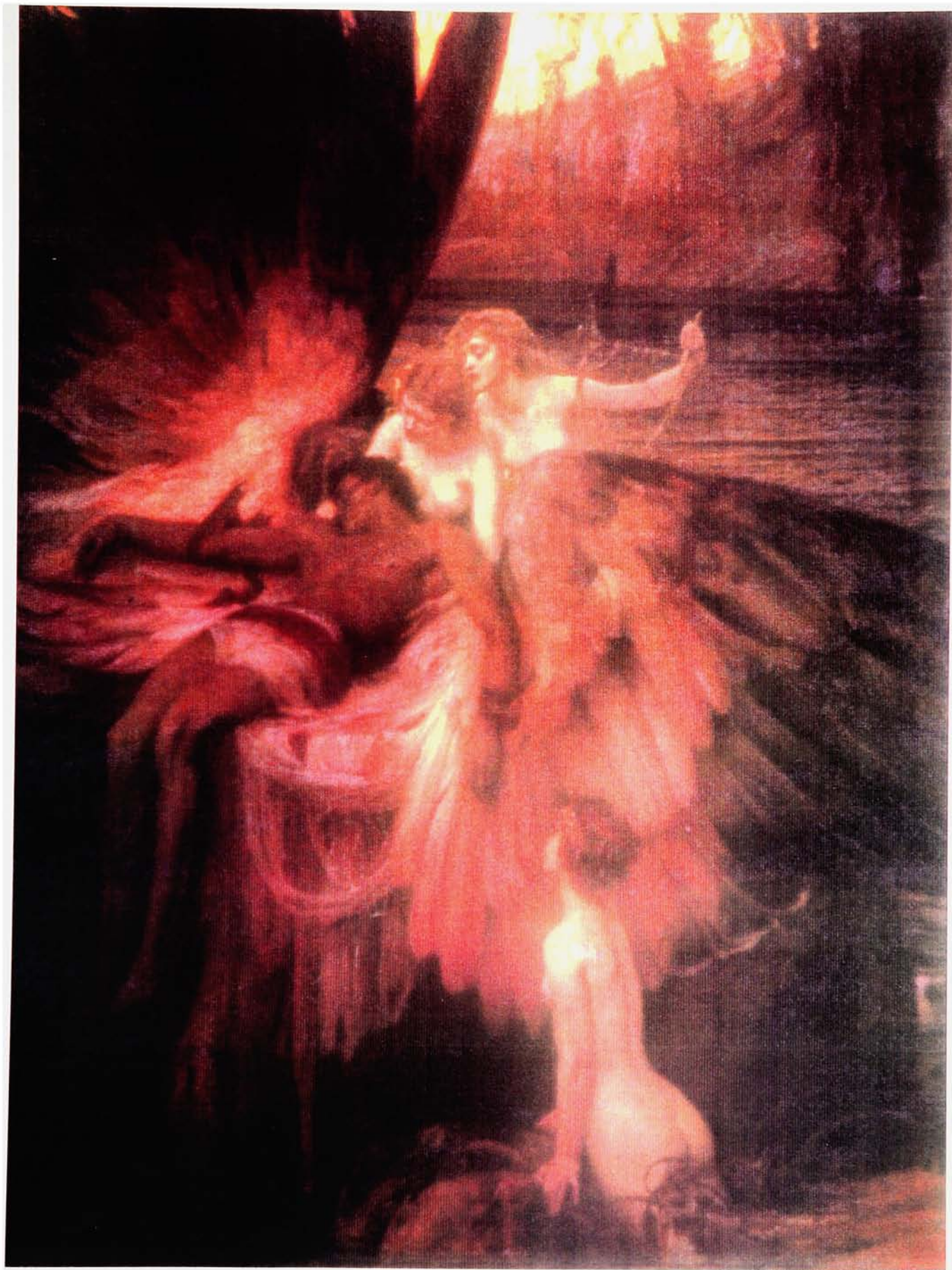


fig 5

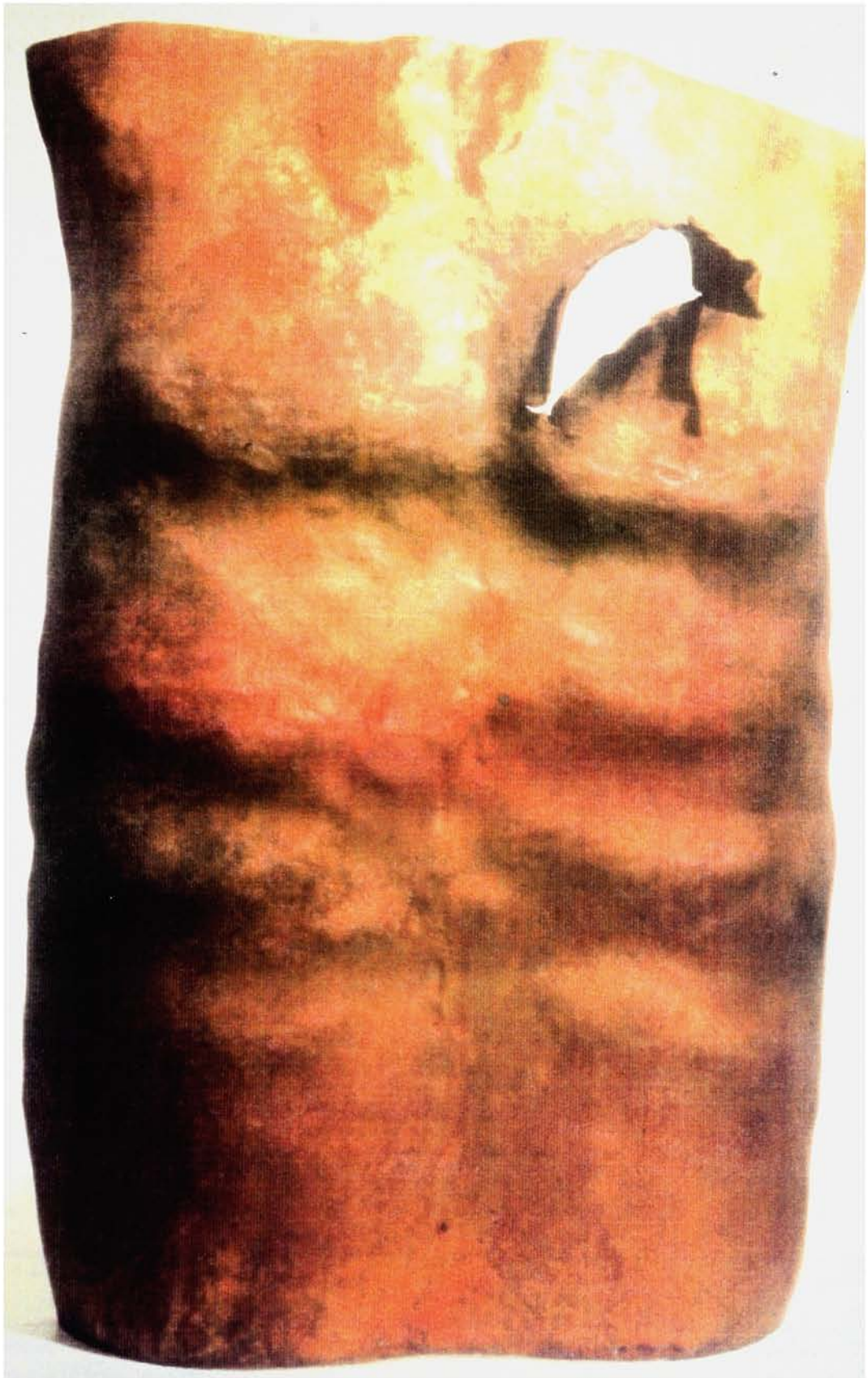






fig 8

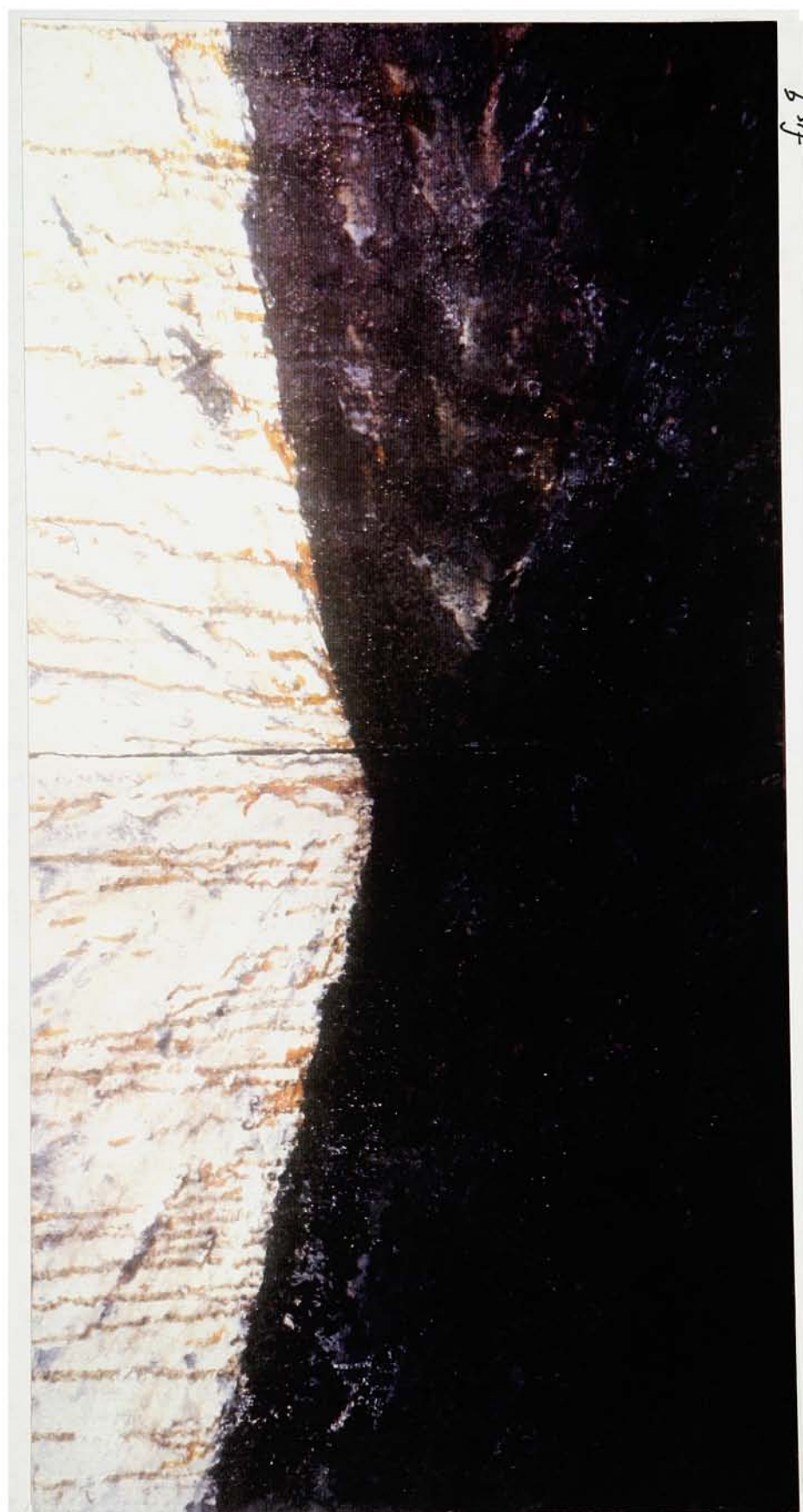


fig 9





fig 11



fig 12



fig 13



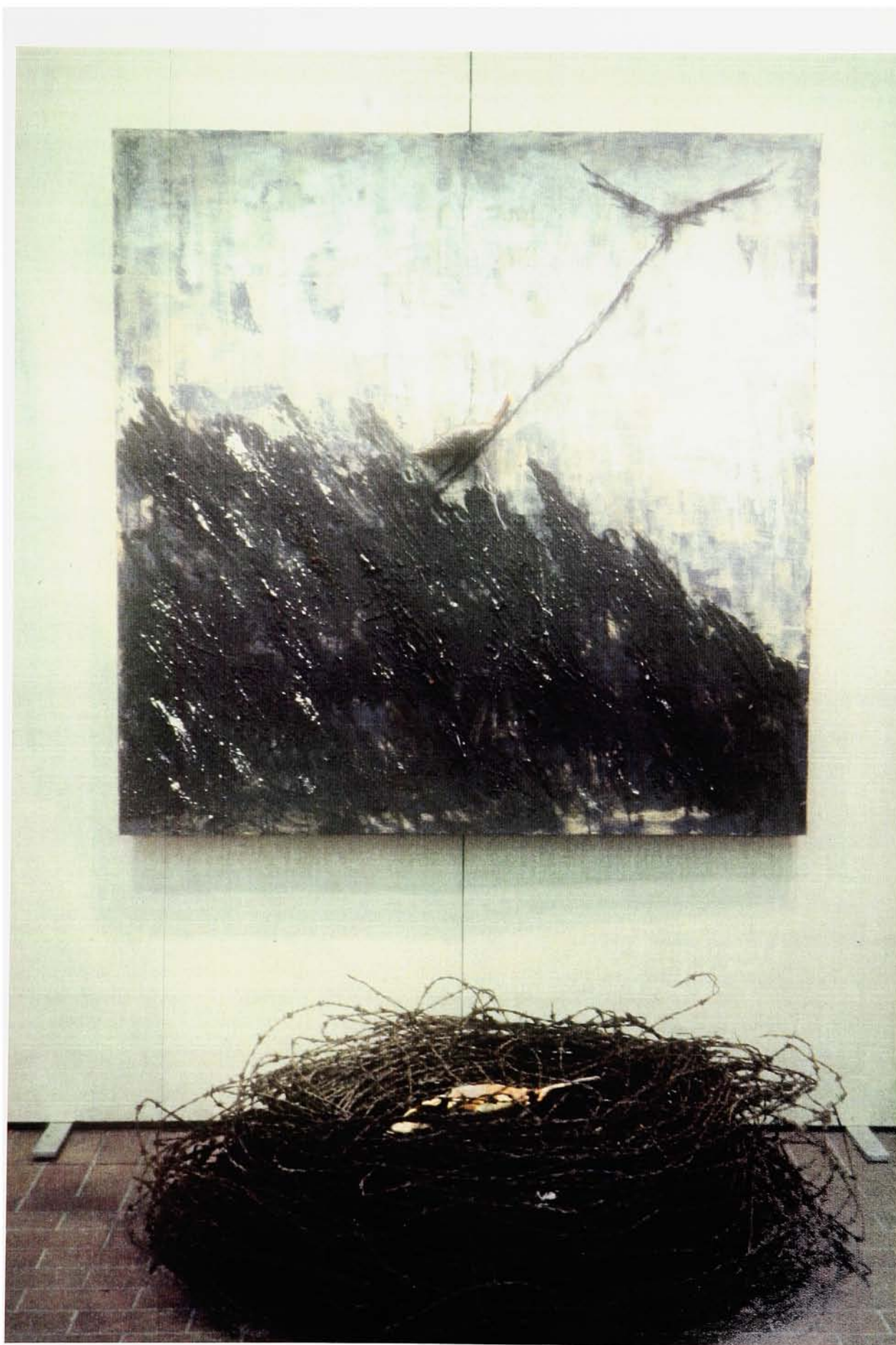


fig 15

Bibliography

Barnstone, Willis; Ed. The Other Bible: Ancient Alternative Scriptures.

Harper Collins Publishers. 1984.

Carratelli, Giovanni P.; Ed. The Greek World. Rizzoli International

Publications, Inc. 1996.

Cooke, Catherine. "Kandinsky: Establishing the Spiritual," Abstract Art and the Rediscovery of the Spiritual. St. Martin's Press. 1987.

Fisher, John A.; Ed. Reflecting on Art. Mayfield Publishing Company. 1993

Gaiman, Neil. Angels and Visitations. Dream Haven Books. 1993.

Gibran, Kahlil. The Prophet. Alfred Knopf, Inc. 1995.

Godwin, Malcolm. Angels: An Endangered Species. Simon and Schuster.

1990.

Goodspeed, Edgar J.; Trans. The Apocrypha. Random house, Inc. 1989.

The Holy Bible. Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1972.

Malan, Dan; Ed. Angels: 100 Engravings by Gustave Dore. Malan Classical

Enterprises. 1996.

Milton, John. Paradise Lost. Merrit Hughes; Ed. The Odyssey Press. 1935.

Rosenthal, Mark. Anselm Kiefer. Philadelphia Museum of Art. 1987.

Takamiya, Toshiyuki. From the Deep Waters. Treville Co., Ltd. 1993.

Tenneson, Joyce. Joyce Tenneson: Transformations. Bulfinch Press. 1993.

Wilber, Ken. No Boundary: Eastern and Western Approaches to Personal Growth. Shambala Publications, Inc. 1985.