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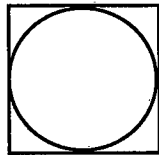
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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In candidacy for the Degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS



Conflict Within the Continuum

by

Sulyn Bennett

February 1997

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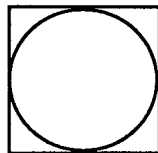
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I. Introduction

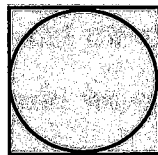


During the Winter Quarter of 1995 I produced a small intaglio print entitled "Contain," (Plate 1). Though not a part of my thesis exhibition, it became the spark that ignited and identified the issues that were to become the basis of my thesis work. At the time I had no idea how significant this print would become. The visual language of this print was abstracted forms of the circle to represent female/nature and the square to represent male/culture. After a number of such prints, I realized that the ideas were far more complicated than this simple language of circle and square allowed. I also realized that the work lost the freshness of mark and the energy in the drawing of the first print. I began to ask a series of questions of myself and my work. How could I generate a discussion about the complex issue of ecofeminism without becoming too literal? What is the significance of the juxtaposition of the circle and square? What methods could be used to capture the freshness of drawing and the integrity of mark-making? How could I develop a visual language for myself and bring life to the prints? At the same time I began to explore why I assigned organic and geometric forms to femaleness and maleness. Through this process of questioning I came upon the term ecofeminism. Here I discovered a rich critical discourse on the subject that assigned maleness to culture and femaleness to nature. I began to construct the meaning of ecofeminism as it related to my work. The primary concern became: how to develop a more articulate visual language to address these issues. At the same time, I was interested in developing direct technical methods that would be more responsive in translating my ideas through printmaking.



Plate 1
Contain
4"x 2": etching

II. Ecofeminism: The Concep



Ecofeminism considers the oppression of nature and women as somehow parallel; and that men, being "rational," "scientific" creatures, are somehow separate from nature. I discovered this dichotomy was more than an idea conceived in my thoughts, but an actual movement with critical discourse.

Ecofeminism is a topic many layers deep. Commentaries range from parallels drawn between the fur trade and the exploitation of women to the abuse of our ecosystem and domestic violence. Whether or not these parallels form any concrete connections-- a case can be made for the uncanny likeness between the exploitation of both our ecosystem and women. (*Public Bodies: Private Selves*. ed. Brettle & Rice)

First, for the sake of clarity, it is necessary to define certain terms as they will be used herein. Nature, for example, carries with it a multitude of meanings. In her book *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant traces the meaning of the word nature.

Natura in early modern times had a number of interrelated meanings. [With] respect to the material world, it referred to a dynamic creative and regulatory principle that caused phenomenon and their change and development. (Merchant xxiii)

Much of nature's processes were thought to be powerful and mysterious.

An example of this would be weather and the change of seasons. So, for the sake of this discussion, *nature* refers to the world we exist in. An entity that controls creation, destruction, and all things in between; nature describes our physical surroundings which are not human-made.

Another term used in relation to nature is organic. Merchant defines this term in her book by stating:

In the early modern period, the term organic usually referred to the bodily organs, structures, and organisms of living beings. (Merchant xxiii)

I have grouped these two terms together because of my use of organic shapes to represent nature. Since the premise of my thesis equates nature with women, the organic shapes represent women as well.

The idea of nature as female is deeply embedded within cultural constructs.

The vital connection between women and nature is not a new one. [Women] have been associated with the earth for centuries because we possess the power of reproduction. Also for centuries, this attribute has been harnessed and women have had very little control over their own ability to reproduce. Women who were barren or unable to reproduce were considered spoiled and cast aside as worthless. In short, women served to decorate and populate and little more. (Brettle and Rice)

We can find evidence to support this in the our own language. "Mother Earth," "Mother Nature," and similar cliché images are commonplace in our culture. Upon first examination, the idea of being equated with nature seems admirable and empowering. Under further scrutiny, as mentioned in the above quote, we find that women's ability to reproduce is often misconstrued as her *only* role. Furthermore, nature and women are often depicted as careless or random with their "power." The word "hysterical," for example, comes from the Latin *hyster* -meaning womb. Often both women and nature are equated with hysteria or unpredictable behavior. Until very recently all hurricanes and tropical storms were named after women. A few remaining cultures exist which see nature and women as sacred because of their life-giving roles and their importance in the community. North American Indians still base most of their spirituality on nature. Forward progress of Western culture necessitates the desecration of the belief that the earth is sacred. Because of this, Chief Seattle's words are even more poignant today than when he first spoke them:

This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the Web of Life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the Web, he does to himself.

Another similar viewpoint was given, in the mid 1800s, from Smohalla of the Colombian Basin Tribes.

You ask me to plow the ground! Shall I take a knife and tear my mother's breast? Then when I die she we not take me to her bosom to rest. You ask

me to dig for stone! Shall I dig under her skin for her bones? Then when I die I cannot enter her body to be born again. You ask me to cut grass and make hay and sell it, and be rich like White men! But how dare I cut off my mother's hair? (Merchant 28)

It is easy to see that the view of nature as alive is something which would slow the progress of an ever growing industrialized world. Who wants to think of themselves as a rapist or a murderer of a living being? This is one viewpoint through the eyes of those who worked for progress:

Nature, tamed and subdued, could be transformed into the garden to provide both material and spiritual food to enhance the comfort and soothe the anxieties of men distraught by the demands of the urban world and the stresses of the marketplace. It depended on the masculine perception of nature as mother and bride whose primary unction was to comfort, nurture, and provide for the well being of the male. In pastoral imagery, both nature and women are subordinate and essentially passive. [Unlike] the dialectical image of nature as the active unity of opposites in tension, the Arcadian image rendered nature passive and manageable. (Merchant 8)

As a result of the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, the earth lost its all-powerful stature, and the status of women mirrored that decline. When coupled with the rise of Christianity, nature and women are synonymous with evil. This is a result of Eve's alleged responsibility for the destruction of Paradise. History and myth portray women and their relationship to nature as sordid and evil. "It is observed that women are closer to the earth. That women lead to man's corruption. Women are 'the Devil's gateway -' it is said." (Griffin p7) This view of women as evil embodiments of nature is very different from the benevolent images that come to mind when thinking of "Mother Earth," who holds all creatures gently in the palm of her hand. On the contrary, the creative mother-type image is actually one which has facilitated the decline in the status of women and nature.

Because women's physiological functions of reproduction, nurture, and childrearing are viewed as closer to nature, their social role is lower on the cultural scale than that of the male. Women are devalued by their tasks and

roles, by their exclusion from community functions whence power is derived and through symbolism. (Merchant 144)

In early modern Europe, the assumption of a nature culture dichotomy was used as justification for keeping women in their place in the established hierarchical order of nature, where they were placed below the men of their status group. The reaction against the disorder in nature symbolized by women was directed not only at lower class witches, but at the queens and noblewomen who during the Protestant Reformation seemed to be overturning the order of nature. (Merchant 144)

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Francis Bacon, a celebrated "father of modern science," transformed ideas of the domination of nature into a total ideology advocating the domination of nature for man's benefit. " The expansive tendencies of his period have continued and the possibility of their reversal is highly problematic. " (Merchant 165)

It goes without saying that in contemporary culture the views of individuals such as Bacon have had an enormous effect on the state of nature and its continuum. The inherent problem lies then, as now, in the viewpoint that man does not exist within the continuum-that he is somehow separate from it. Furthermore, the notion that women are inherently connected with nature has simultaneously led to the subordination of women and their role in society. This idea is best expressed by Susan Griffin in her book Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her.

He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world, that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature. It is decided that the nature of woman is passive, that she is a vessel waiting to be filled. (Griffin 1)

It is here that the connection is made between the oppression of both women and nature. She later states:

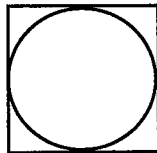
All nature, it is said, has been designed to benefit man. That coal has been placed closer to the surface of the earth for his rise. That animals run on four feet because it makes them better beasts of burden. That teeth were created for chewing, and that women exist solely for the propagation of the race. (Griffin 22)

The concept of ecofeminism repeatedly forms an interesting comparison of the oppression of women and nature. The formula is very much like a mathematical logic proof. *If* nature should be subservient to man and society, *and* women are inherently connected to nature, *then* women too should be subservient to man and society; all in the name of forward development and progress. I do not suggest that all men have set forth to consume and destroy women and nature. Rather, I am suggesting that the overall status of women and nature has been subordinate to the needs of an over-industrialized, over-populated world. Furthermore, I see this subordination as a result of man's overall belief that he is separate from the continuum (nature) he is destroying; and somehow superior to women because she is part of nature and its continuum. It is easier to devalue something that you feel separate from and not connected to.

Through my examination of ecofeminism, my work began to resonate with greater clarity. The larger issue of ecofeminism is always present in the work, yet each print deals with more specific personal struggles of containment and oppression. Included in these ideas are: Women's reproductive rights, her status in the community, her role as vessel for procreation, her multiple contradictory roles in relationships and the family, and her connection with nature that allows society/man to justify the various forms of containment and oppression.

My concept originated as a simple juxtaposition of squares and circles. Why did I assign meaning to such abstract shapes? Though at the time I was unaware of my influences, the symbolism of the circle and the square are timeless.

III. Symbology of Circle & Square



Initially, the circle was representative of nature and of woman. My justification for this was simple to me at the time. Because both women and nature are cyclical, I felt that the circle embodied both. Women are often described as rounder and smoother than their male counter-parts, and this too justified my abstract language. I was unaware that my choice to represent nature and woman as a circle was deeply rooted in symbology from past to present.

In his *Tinaeus*, Plato endowed the whole world with life and likened it to an animal. [It's] shape was round, since it had no need for eyes, ears, or appendages. It's soul was female. (Merchant 10)

Men on the other hand are often perceived as more rational and more mathematical. Technology and machinery are manifestations of an industrial age created by men. The male component, therefore, should manifest itself as a square, separate from the continuum. In his book The Nude, Kenneth Clark describes these associations as driven by physical experiences.

The disposition of areas in the torso is related to our most vivid experiences, so that, abstract shapes, the square and the circle seem to us male and female. (Clark 27)

Finally, to illustrate the overall concept, I placed the circle within the square to show the continuum of nature contained by a logical, scientific, male society.

In fact, the circle juxtaposed to the square is ancient. The most famous example is the "Vetruvian Man" (Figure 2), created most memorably by Michelangelo in the 16th century. In his attempt to explain the perfect proportions of a man, Michelangelo places the square and the circle together with the man's body inside. Derived from architecture and mathematics, it was believed that a body, proportioned within these confines, was perfect. Michelangelo's Vetruvian man was less than perfect in reality. These mathematical proportions proved to the world that only through math and measurable facts was anything of worth. If it

couldn't be measured, it wasn't real. Pied creatures and unexplainable natural phenomenon were obviously not in this "perfect" category.

[The] starfish diagrams of the Renaissance theorists may be ridiculous, but the Vitruvian principle rules or spirits, and it is no accident that the formalized body of the 'perfect man' became the supreme symbol of utopian belief. (Clark 27)

Through my examination of the history of circle and square I have come to a richer understanding of this symbology. I began to reflect this new awareness in my work.

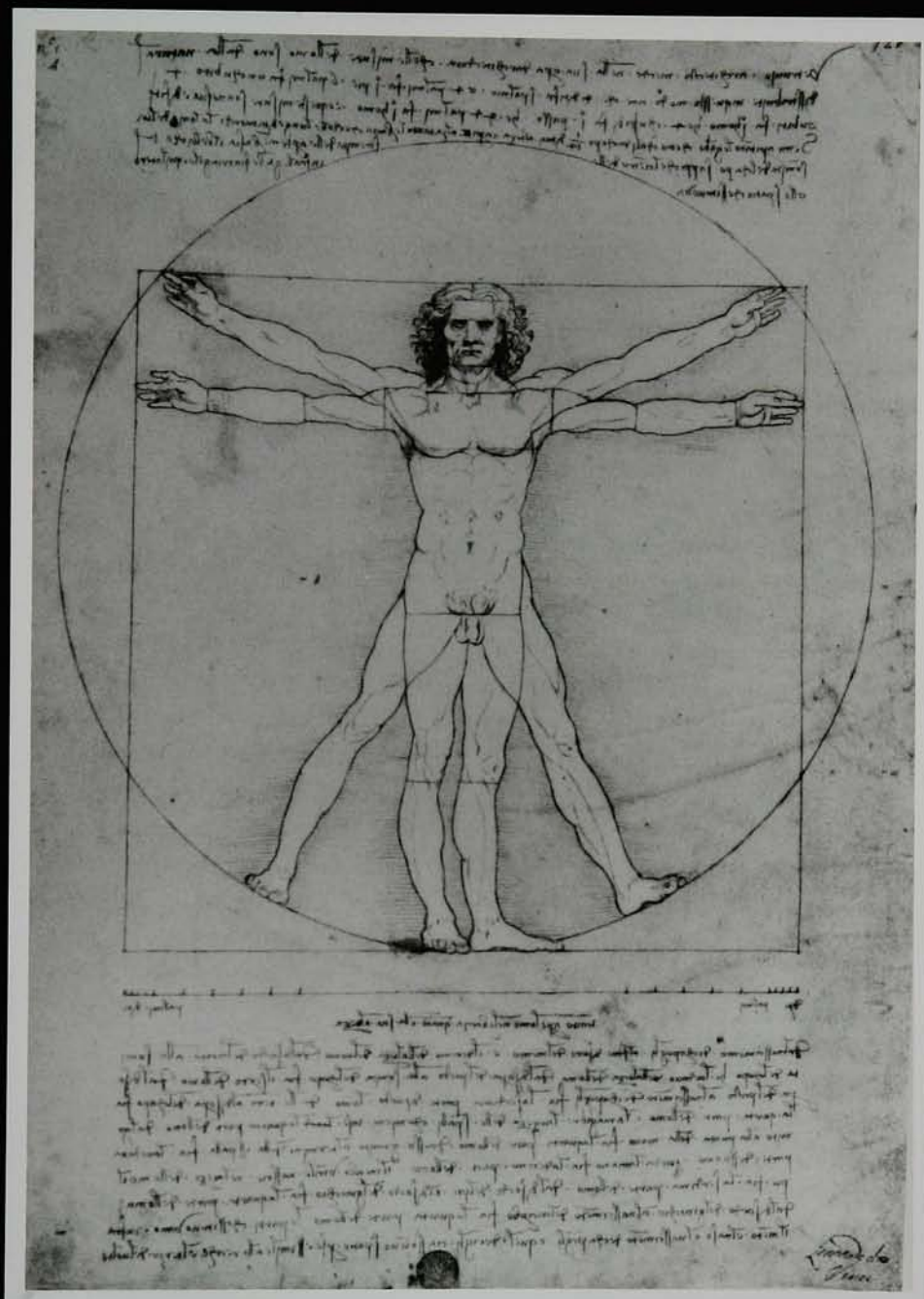
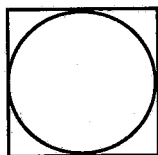


Plate 2
Vitruvian Man (L. di Vinci)

IV. Methods & Materials



When I first began to create the plates for this body of work I found the approach I was using was too calculated. I was trying so earnestly to "say" something in every mark and stroke, that I lost my direct relationship to the materials. Also, because of the indirect nature of most printmaking processes, I was losing a key element that was present at the beginning -the immediacy of mark was being calculated right out of the work. I repeatedly asked myself how I could bring the concept of conflict to the work through process.

One of the first successful prints I completed, "Critical Mass" (Fig. 3), was a monotype that was inspired from the figure. Using my fingers, rollers, and rags soaked with solvent, I added and subtracted the rich black ink until the marks themselves reflected the history of my process. The energy in this monotype was what I was trying to capture in my intaglio and lithographic prints. The traditional etching process of stopping to question, evaluate, and proof was inhibiting my ability to gain momentum for the print's further development. I decided to use a monotype as the foundation for an etching in order to loosen the process during the beginning stages. Using a zinc plate rather than plexiglass, I worked the image, then let the ink sit for about 2 days until it was quite stiff. Using the ink as my resist, I open-bit the monotype image in an acid bath of 5:1 until I had a sufficient foundation from which to build upon. After it's acid bath, the ink was loose from the effervescent action of the acid and it was easy to clean the ink that was earlier quite hard to penetrate. After cleaning the plate, I had a reverse of the original drawing that had effectively captured the freshness and integrity of the marks made from my immediate responses to the materials. This initial stage of the zinc plate gave me an outline from which to work into, building my value ranges through the traditional process of aquatint.

The first successful print pulled as a result of my newly discovered technique (new only to me of course, I make no claim for being it's originator) was "Story of

My Life," (Fig. 4). After the initial stage of this print I continued to build the value range by adding aquatints and developing calligraphic line work with sugar-lifts. Approximately three to four more stages of the print were tested until the value range was full and the textures rich. By no means was my technique a way to achieve quick results. Rather, it was a way to gain momentum on the original energy and idea.

Although not all the prints in the body of work were developed in this fashion, I returned to my "monotype-method" whenever I felt the work was becoming too contrived. All the plates were the result of a layering of many stages. The process of multiple stages and layering of texture produced aggressive, high-contrast prints. The integrity of the prints depended greatly on the strength of mark making.

Other prints, such as "Carefully Contain Yourself" (Fig.5), were a result of a deliberate re-use of an unfinished plate. The earlier concept of placing the circle within the square yielded many undeveloped plates which carried some of my earlier ideas. This re-use of the plates maintained the original imagery but built upon it, creating a rich history for the plate. Like a painting that becomes historic as a result of layer upon layer of paint, these plates carried with them my original idea, sometimes overt and sometimes obscured. In "Carefully Contain Yourself," the circle within the square is hardly visible, but it's still there, in the same way that the larger idea of ecofeminism is always present but sometimes secondary to a more personal struggle or experience. The contorted form is contained within the rectangle much like the circle within the square.

Because contrast was vital to the pieces, I chose to work only in black and white. It was my intention for the marks and forms to be the primary focus and I did not feel color to be significant. Also, the work itself is about theoretical opposites - man/woman; nature/society; containment/release. What could express

this relationship of opposites better than black and white? Contrast being crucial, it was very important that I develop the richest value range possible. In one print, entitled "Burden" (Fig 6.), it was necessary for me to actually use the white of the paper as an element in the composition. This was done in order to intensify the blacks and compliment the overall darker values of the print. To achieve this, I actually left the large zinc plate in the acid until the acid bit directly through the plate and created two pieces. As a result, the white of the paper became a graphic element within the piece.

Other techniques and materials used in my etching processes were: litho crayon, a spit-bite process using gum arabic and full strength acid, direct painting of ground paired with an open bite, burnishing, soft-ground texture transfers, and sugar life using water soluble "Aquarelle" crayons. Although there are subtle textures present in many of the prints, most of the plate-development was done aggressively and very physically, without concern to the fine quality of the plate. If I was having difficulty with a particular plate's development I would set it aside, often working several plates at one time for this reason.

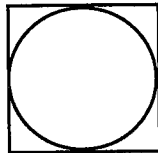
In addition to the etchings that made-up the majority my thesis work, there were two lithographic prints. To achieve the same energetic freshness that existed in the etchings, I used a graphite drawing process to create the image on the litho-stone. Using a fine powder of pure graphite, the entire surface of the image area of the stone was buffed to a consistent dark gray surface. Out of this surface the drawing was created by erasing and gently scratching away the graphite with white art erasers and "snake-slip." Much like the concept of a Mezzotint, the drawing developed out of a dark surface. Subtle grays could be developed by working and re-working the same area. Since the graphite did not effect the surface of the smooth stone like a lithographic crayon or a touche wash, the image could be manipulated just like a traditional pencil drawing. The difficulty in this process came in the

processing and printing of the stone. Since there was very little grease on the stone, there was a very specific technique that was necessary to maintain the qualities of the original drawing.

First, the stone had to be evenly sprayed with a mixture of gum arabic and water in a 1:1 ratio. Using an airbrush with a large 2 oz. cup, the stone was sprayed in a steady even coat that was sprayed from each side of the stone to ensure complete and consistent coverage. The stone was sprayed in sixteen fine layers and allowed to dry. It was absolutely crucial at this stage that the stone be kept totally dry and free from any water drops that would effect the distribution of the gum. After being allowed to dry, the graphite was then washed out using lacquer thinner until very little of the drawing was visible (this was the scary part, for it was here that I found out if the gum spray would be successful or send me back to the initial process of drawing again.) It was important in the removal of the graphite to use a clean soft disposable cloth such as a "Webril" wipe, and that the cloth be changed often to maintain a clean wiping surface. After the graphite was removed (some graphite would remain) the image was quickly wiped down with red lacquer. This substance required a ventilator and good gloves. The red lacquer adhered to the areas where the graphite once existed. At this stage the image was still very unstable, so it was best to proceed without haste. I rolled the image up in black ink (Senefelder's crayon black). I then wiped the surface with a clean wet sponge to begin to loosen the gum. When the printing gods were with me, the ink would begin to stick and fill in only the areas where the drawing existed. It took many passes to bring the image to its originally drawn state. Once the image was fully charged, it was processed like a regular lithographic print. Only one etch was necessary. (10-15:1 gum to acid mix.) Since this process was delicate it was possible to lose subtle values-(and I did). This occurred especially in areas that were re-worked several times. The first print I processed, entitled "Mother's Pulse" (Fig. 7), I wasn't able to

print consistently and therefore it became a monoprint. The image was too unstable and I was unable to hold delicate textures without them filling in. I reprocessed the drawing and changed it to become "Re-surfacing" (Fig.8), which had a dual meaning since I scraped away half of the original image. I re-worked the surface of the stone using touche washes and lithocrayon. Since this version was in a more stable medium, it processed and printed very consistently and became an edition of 10. Because of the hours of labor spent printing the first stone, I decided to work primarily in etching since the actual printing of the editions was much more predictable.

V. The Prints



The prints map out a journey from the initial articulation of the "Conflict Within The Continuum" premise to its resolution. The following list is chronological (to the best of my ability) and manifests itself as a timeline.

- " **Critical Mass**" *monotype* (31" x 19")
- " **Story of My Life**" *etching* (26"x33")
- " **Mother's Pulse**" *lithographic monoprint* (28"x34")
- " **Carefully Contain Yourself**" *etching* (17"x31")
- " **Re-surfacing**" *lithograph* (28"x34")
- " **Bound To Bear**" *etching* (26"x33")
- " **Burden**" *etching* (25"x33")
- " **First Lesson in Vertebrae**" *etching* (26"x33")
- " **Rock Garden**" *etching* (14"x34")
- " **The Journey**" *etching* (35"x12")
- " **Pulse, Beat, Rhythm**" *etching* (26"x33")
- " **The Dance**" *etching* (7"x6")

The first print "Critical Mass" (Fig. 3), was a monotype. This print simultaneously represents a female torso in the prone position and a landscape. This dual representation signified the beginning of the journey of understanding and representing my ideas through a more articulate language. The mark making is aggressive and highly-charged, yet the form is soft and undulating; organic if you will. Though I had not completely abandoned the idea of the circle as my representation for female/nature, I decided to elaborate and use more dynamic, yet ultimately organic shapes

A print which used both the original circle within the square symbology and organic shapes was "Story of My Life." (Fig. 4) This print forms a discussion about relationships between women and men. In this print, the primary forms are two organic "bean" shapes, one colliding with the other in an attempt to connect. Though both the male and female are represented as organic forms, they are not able to be one. This is because the male believes himself to be separate from his

existence as organic in an organic world. Secondary to the two larger shapes is the sequence of squares containing various organic shapes. These abstract shapes reinforce the larger issue of the dichotomy between woman/nature and man/culture. By seeing himself as separate and in control of woman /nature (squares containing organic forms), he in turn impacts his own existence. By not allowing the connection with woman/nature, he creates a barrier which hinders the woman from reaching her full potential in a culture driven by patriarchy.

While simultaneously developing "Story of My Life," I was also developing a lithograph entitled "Mother's Pulse," (Fig. 7). In this print I reference the body through the use of organic shapes. Working out of a dark field with soft textures and gradations, the print possesses a quiet mystery. Though at the time I was not intentionally rendering reproductive organs, I did want to give the feeling of a female body. The round circle seems to be an egg released from the ovary. The intent was to represent the "mystery" of the female body and the silent power it embodies, while at the same time having those powers controlled by society .

The next print produced was "Carefully Contain Yourself,"(Fig.5). This print was a result of multiple layers over a plate that originally consisted of just circles and squares. The abstracted contorted figure is contained within the narrow image area, with her backbone distinctly described. I found myself using this abstracted "fish bone" configuration to convey an underlying sense of stability within the female form. Though often thought of as soft, weak, and emotional, the female is generally the "backbone" of the family structure. Often not considered the "head" of the household, it has traditionally been the woman's role to be the "tie that binds" the family together. This undercurrent of stability is something that I have brought to the work through the addition of this spine-like element. This element is intentionally repeated in later prints.

In the print "Re-surfacing," (Fig 8) the use of the circles and squares becomes overt once again. Built upon the re-working of the first lithograph, "Mother's Pulse," this new lithograph is very different in its overall sensibilities. Unlike "Mother's Pulse," "Re-surfacing" is highly-charged; its surface is almost kinetic as a result of the abundance of textures and marks. The quiet dark field from which the sphere once emerged is now noisy by comparison. The squares, as metaphors for man/culture, are now smaller and stacked like Chinese characters, while the tumultuous activity behind them rages on. The touche washes that make up much of the print reference water. There is an overall sense of unrest in this print. From one perspective, it discusses the amazing activity that takes place inside a woman during birth. From another perspective, however, it expresses the expectations for women to become mothers, and the connotations of those women who do not. As discussed before, much of the "power" a woman personifies comes solely from her ability to conceive and bear children. Women who *do* not wield this power are seen as selfish or un-natural. Women who *can* not were often cast aside as "damaged goods." So it is that motherhood becomes more than a choice; it becomes an expectation that culture/society has laid on all women. For this reason I have tried to create an image that places the viewer underwater, just near the surface. The element of fear present in not reaching the surface for air, is what provides this image with its sense of unrest.

Another print that deals with a woman as procreator is "Bound to Bear," Fig. 9). This print shows an organic pod-like form wound tightly; contained. To the left of this form are again the squares, stacked vertically. Within the squares are tiny fertility symbols, some ancient. This print came to fruition as a result of research I was doing on the subject of infibulation. This practice, done in many cultures, is still performed in Africa and is a source of great controversy. Infibulation entails sewing closed the vulva of an adolescent girl. The vagina is abraded and then sewn

closed. These abrasions heal together to leave a very small opening. There is only enough space left for menstruation and painful intercourse. Many women die of infections and blood loss as a result of this practice. Deeply rooted in cultural tradition, this process was primarily practiced to eliminate the possibility of a woman's infidelity. This renders her void of any independent sexuality or sense of ownership over what is rightfully hers. This hideous practice devalues the woman and overtly makes her a mere "vessel waiting to be filled." (Griffin p5) The print created out of this idea is, ironically, passive. For a long time the women who were its victims had no voice. Infibulation was part of their culture and not open to debate. Fate was quietly accepted; my print reflects this passivity. It is only recently that this practice has become widely known. Western culture, in particular, has initiated public protest.

"Burden" (Fig. 6), the next etching that I developed, deals again with the expected roles women. In our culture, women have certain definitive roles which are often contradictory. There is the virgin, the whore, and the mother. One is a symbol of purity, one of lechery, and one of benevolence. In this print I depict three organic forms being bound and held by a weight. These three forms represent a woman in her youth, sexual prime, and maturity. This print is characterized by energetic calligraphic marks. The background pattern of squares becomes a metaphor for a pattern of history that has been patriarchal (squares) and has fostered false roles which a woman must personify. The forms are held down by their restrictive "roles." Also omnipresent is the distinct vertebrae-like line that divides the image. The white of the paper creates an incredible contrast and gives the print its stability or *backbone*, a reoccurring symbol

This recurring symbol also appears in "First Lesson in Vertebrae," (Fig. 10). This print refers to a memory I have as a small child. I was about 7, and my brother was taking an anatomy course. He taught me the names of my vertebrae and how

many of each there were. How this relates to the print I created is a bit more complex. The etching is figurative; abstractly describing a back and buttocks. Juxtaposed to this figure is a narrow white field with three elegant calligraphic strokes, continuing the contours of the figure to the left. This print only begins to unravel an idea I have struggled with for some time. The idea that the formal representation of women in art has somehow contributed to the view of woman as object. The print was not consciously created to present this discussion. The print was part of my visual language development and relates to the others in its formal qualities. The energetic marks and aggressive handling of the ink and plate create a highly charged surface. Contrasting this is the delicate plate to the right that was gingerly created and wiped to reveal only three black calligraphic strokes. The idea, noted previously, is one I struggle with in my work. Though I will always remember my first lesson in vertebrae, I struggle to understand where the use of female form became second nature to me. I realize this print poses important questions which I intend to pursue in the future. This is a question I plan to pursue further and make a more integral part of my work.

"Rock Garden" (Fig. 11), simultaneously developed with "First Lesson in Vertebrae," was meant to be the plate juxtaposed to the figure. Both prints possessed such similar marks and contrast levels that they seemed to compete and create an unwanted tension. I decided to let "Rock Garden" stand alone since it was not complimentary to the figure. The "rocks" are organic representatives of woman/nature. They are piled to signify a history or a layering of time. The earth is foraged for what lies beneath its surface, and so too are women.

In the print that followed "The Journey" (Fig. 12), I have again referenced a historical perspective. "The Journey" is a time line that traces the life of a woman-me. At about the mid-point of the timeline, there appears a spinal reference. This reference becomes the point of departure for the traveler when she develops her

sense of self, based on her own journey. It is a long arduous process, perhaps not even linear. But, linear is what it has become in this formal representation.

One of the last prints, "Pulse, Beat, Rhythm" (Fig. 13), again references the spine. A figure is drawn again utilizing fresh marks and layers of aquatint. The figure is tightly placed between two small circles, one on either side. They seem to fit within the curves of her back and hip. In the earliest stages of this thesis development there existed three circles within squares. Now a larger figure has replaced one of those three components. In addition, the other circles are no longer contained by squares. Eventually, all exist without visible confines. The backbone of the figure has been straightened and again gives stability to the figure. The journey to resolve the conflict is almost complete.

The final print, "The Dance" (Fig. 14), is the resolution to the "Conflict Within The Continuum." No longer does man see himself separate from nature. What he is a part of must be celebrated. The two elongated shapes that are the primary elements of the print represent the physical and spiritual union of man and woman/ nature and culture. The multitude of marks present in the previous prints has been replaced by a dark, rich brush stroke that brings us through the print. Always present are the circles contained within the squares- a reminder that, if forgotten, history repeats itself.



Plate 3
Critical Mass
31" x 19": monotype



Plate 4
Story of My Life
26" x 33": etching



Plate 5
Carefully Contain Yourself
17"x 31": etching



Plate 6
Burden
25"x 33": etching



Plate 7

Mother's Pulse

28"x34": lithographic monoprint



Plate 8
Re-surfacing
28" x 34": lithograph



Plate 9

Bound to Bear

26"x 33": etching



Plate 12

The Journey

35"x 12": etching



Plate 13

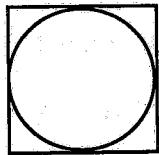
Pulse, Beat, Rhythm

26"x 33": etching



Plate 14
The Dance
7"x 6": etching

VI. Conclusion



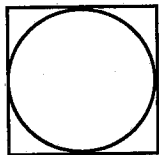
"Conflict Within the Continuum" explores the concept of ecofeminism and some of the issues that separate man from woman; culture from nature. This broad idea became a point of departure for issues that exist as a result of the ancient ideation that woman is "one" with nature and man is separate from both. Expectations and clearly defined roles exist today because of this ancient idea of women being synonymous with nature. These expectations confine women in metaphorical boxes, as objects to be used when needed. Men, as part of the animal kingdom, also exist of the continuum of nature. The fate of nature and women lies in the resolution that we are all inherently part of the continuum. Man continues to harness nature as he has women. If this continues he will destroy himself and the continuum of which he is part. Because of the immense ideas explored in this thesis, I have only begun to articulate them.

The primary outcome of my thesis work has been the development of a cohesive, articulate visual language that allowed me to explore my ideas and bring those ideas forward in the work. This language was created through the use of strong (often calligraphic) marks, repeated use of historical symbols of male and female, high contrast, and a character of freshness in the drawing. These elements combined to give the work a sense of continuity.

The way in which I approached the processes evolved as well. Through experimentation I discovered ways to circumvent the traditional processes of printmaking. Initially, I treaded the plate like a precious object, scrutinizing each mark. Eventually I developed the ability to work more loosely with the plates, making them a more direct vehicle for my message. As mentioned before, many of my plates were re-used and re-worked for this reason.

Before I created this body of work I felt my art lacked focus and my intentions were inconsistent. I now believe that my work reflects my experiences and begins to inform, activate, and communicate issues that are both personal and political. Developing this thesis work allowed me to aspire to a more thoughtful, expressive, and creative process, making my ideas clearer and my translations more articulate. The ideas contained herein have become a point of departure for my heightened awareness of the relationship between process and content.

VII. Bibliography



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