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### The Romance and Reality of Art and Laundry

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Fine and Applied Arts  
in Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

THE ROMANCE AND REALITY  
OF ART AND LAUNDRY

By

Susan J. Blumendale

September 1, 1985



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## CONTENTS

PREFACE .....	i
Chapter	
I.    INTRODUCTION: A WIDE DOMAIN IN PLACE OF A SMALL CONTAINER.....	1
II.   AS ART THEY ZIGZAG EASILY FROM TREE TO TREE.....	4
III.  A RETURN TO THE WORDS AND WORKS OF ARTISTS.....	7
IV.   A SENSE OF MATERIAL: THE NATURE OF FABRIC/THE FABRIC OF NATURE.....	11
V.    COLOR AS IMAGERY AND ARCHITECTURE.....	15
VI.   THE ROMANCE AND REALITY OF ART AND THE LAUNDRY PROCESS.....	18
VII.  SUSPENSION: A SUGGESTION FOR CREATIVITY, A PARAMETER OF DEATH..	22
VIII. SILENCE, IN CONVERSATION, IN ART, IN LOVE.....	25
.....	
FOOTNOTES.....	29
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	30
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	31

"Art is our most valuable thing, as close to us as anything can get, the most personal, the most intimate, the most to do with the feelings which are unique to us and are the best part of us. If we are going to get what it has for us, we must treat it as a friend."

Walter Darby Barnard  
Arts Magazine, September 1984

## PREFACE

Intrigued by the similarity of the processes of laundry and papermaking I have found personal significance and satisfaction through the "hands" on experience of touching, wringing, twisting and hanging paper. Using the elements of water and air I flow easily in controlling and letting go of its pattern of movement. My hands touch the earth as I touch paper like a child grasping for the experience of knowing an unexperienced touch.

Through a fantasy of color I name visions of nature while proclaiming my own naming of color through that which pleases me or that which words fail me. I see my daily world as a complex network of overlapping images and have selected for myself the fabric of nature to be woven with the nature of fabric as my material for expression. The constant action and reaction in nature as paralleled in our lives suggests an animation in my work which I suspend in time and place. It is with the process of this thesis as with nature and change that I have come to accept process as a trustworthy friend if I listen to the rhythm of my heart.

## INTRODUCTION:

### A WIDE DOMAIN IN PLACE OF A SMALL CONTAINER

My past has been the subject of a new beginning for me as an artist. It has been the resource for my language in art. My experiences growing up, the environment which surrounded me has made some impressions that I have used in my work. Perhaps it is that I felt close to nature then; now the relationship has been renewed. The times I would play outside rather than inside - a wide domain in place of a small container indicated to me the space I preferred. The large back fields and woods that bordered our house were my playgrounds for adventure and refuge when I needed it most. The images of burnt fields in the Spring, the smell of the land filled me with a life I could touch. This tactileness is important in the process of my work and in its visual result. It represents this reality to me that I transpose in my work, into an abstractness that is personal and magical. The wonder I saw and the knowledge I obtained through these textures of earth filled a need in me to communicate silently. Nature was a friend.

As a child I often played with an estrangement of materials: old bedspreads, blankets, sheets and curtains. I used these to fashion tent-like structures over our backyard clotheslines (of which we had many). It all seemed so

theatrical - with tall poles to lift the lines higher and fabric soaring as if raising a curtain on stage. My spirits soared. The space was enormous and I felt comfortable. I was at ease with the cloth. Perhaps this was inherited from my mother, a seamstress, and other members of her family who had worked in textile mills. I often noticed how gracefully she handled material and enjoyed watching her hang a wash on the line. She was so patient, orderly and relaxed in the outside air. I was fascinated with watching the clothes on a line float into the wind, snapping and twirling, lifting and falling unrhythmically. I saw shadows of tall grasses imprinted on clean white sheets and clouds of grey drifting easily across the line. I remember blue skies among these wonderfully changing forms and I imagined I could make them become whatever I wanted them to be.

Nature has fostered my visual mind and heightened my senses through my contact with it as a youth living among these fields, woods, streams and tops of hills. This organic world became the focal point of my imagination. It filled long summer hours of daylight and too brief a twilight after school. As my mind now wanders to the cloudy waters of a stream from my past, I become aware of how my past mirrors this stream with its mysteries and gifts of life, changes and dependencies. In hidden crevices and flickerings of light my past reflects these spaces I crawled into for recollections of great knowledge. They were my inspiration and my havens for adventure. Today I do not fear a



stream's murky bottom where unpleasantness and beauty lie together like the two foundations of my past. It was Loneliness and Nature (my friends called Pain and Pleasure) that became my stream of art - my flowing past in color, form and texture.

As I begin my work as an artist I have returned to these beginnings to review my relationship with my environment. I have learned through this process of writing we are all that we have experienced. It is that which we are drawn to, what we can and sometimes cannot control that forms us. We proceed then to fulfill our own story. I feel the experience of the clothesline is unique to me and have transformed this into art. It is through the continuum of this experience with the installations of clotheslines in the park, in a field and in the winter of my backyard that I have developed a process of using paper dimensionally suggesting natural figurative forms like those of fabric on a line. Paper holds my message and is a contrast to fabric which challenges my thoughts. Piles of laundry, clothespoles and clothespins, the smell of bleach on the sheets and the slight touch of fabric against my face are part of the context of my work. The sound of wind whipped clothes still turns my attention to music I am fond of.

## AS ART THEY ZIGZAG EASILY FROM TREE TO TREE

Through the process of writing this thesis and examining my work I have come to realize the importance of knowing more about the personal symbol, in this instance of my own work - the clothesline. I will discuss some thoughts about the meaning of the personal symbol, its power and what it represents to myself and the viewer. In uncovering this image I have discovered my relationships with this symbol.

The personal symbol is a visual representation of something I have known or experienced on a higher level that I want to discover more about. It is something I have formed an attachment with whose qualities suggest feelings and thoughts that in no other way could be expressed except through this symbol. It is instantaneous and non-analytical. I feel it.

The personal symbol portrays an image of myself, or part of myself that is fantasy turned reality. It is an ideal, perhaps an evil, something within and outside myself that I am drawn to. It is immortal. As a secret and a passion, it is part of my personal identity and I want to share it. I give life to this symbol - a birth through new personal meaning. As a tool for my imagination the clothesline implements my process of art with fresh discoveries and information I can rely on. As a form of



play, it seeks and hides with the formal elements of art. With each use I experience it more fully and will discard it when there is no more to learn. How I present the personal symbol becomes an honest transformation of myself in art.

The power of the clothesline as my personal symbol lies in its statement as art. As seasonal displays of cloth, profiling man, they become pastel canvases mixing man with his environment interrupting nature and backyards with sheer bravado. As art they zigzag easily from tree to house to tree and back again designing space quietly. This array is a gallery of calm or chaos in country or city dwelling places spreading clean, white images across the land. Its audiences are passersby who might notice them if relieved for a moment from the traffic of the road. Sometimes I will stop to photograph clotheslines and on occasion meet the maker of the line if she is around (it is always a woman). Strangers are often pleased I have admired their wash and share with me their perceptions. A contrast to nature and heavy architecture, clotheslines breathe thinness and fragility but continuously survive through their flexibility and strength - a true image of man. They illustrate family history through their shape and numbers. Bright red socks flash "person" when no one is around. On special pulleys on second story lines this troop of clothes marches rhythmically as the hauler pulls them in to disappear and change.

Clotheslines have taught me how to play as an artist; to feel the fabric and air and swing of the line; to use my hand in

space as a conductor of my own music. I become conscious of rhythm and flow, of lines beyond lines as greater knowledge, greater depth in this painting in space. I touch volume when shadows of clothes appear on the ground as the sides to an imagined enclosure. I am inside and outside at the same time.

Beyond my enthusiasm over the activities of the line I hide myself inside where pain, terror, anger or helplessness might hold me. It is here where I release my emotions as I transform paper into a cloth like substance through my touch with its properties. Frayed edges, soft scrubbed surfaces and fragmented pieces suggest wornness or a passing of time.

I feel every mark I make, every color I use is symbolic of something and different to the viewer. A fold of color gently securing an edge; a sweeping line that travels thick and thin with motion; a space revealing light are all symbolic to me. They have become the personal extensions of my mind, hand and spirit that represent nature. As my arm moves across a paper structure with pastel or paint the image grows unconsciously into a natural form. With chance, like the wind twirling through tall ashen grass and like the paper forms I create on a clothesline, I let go of my restrictions and medium to see what happens.

## A RETURN TO THE WORDS AND WORKS OF ARTISTS

The clothesline is a central symbol from my past but in my art work it is not there - it is understood. Independent of the line my pieces reminisce the physical spirit of the line in its changing identity. I admire Dubuffet's sculpture and paintings of the elemental symbol of man and Frank Stella's large prints and relief paintings of colorful, whimsical, jazzy fragments, but I chose to elaborate on three artists whose language was closest to my "understood" personal symbol. These artists have incorporated symbols from their past directly. I am concerned with wanting to know the origin of their work, what influenced them most and how they have influenced me.

Christo (Javachef), a Bulgarian, was a member of the Union of Communist Youth and later joined a propaganda organization whose responsibility it was to make the countryside attractive along the route of the Orient Express. He once taught farmers how to stack and cover their hay (wrapped hay), arrange waste barrels attractively (stacked oil drums) and place machinery on a hill so as to be viewed powerfully. From these experiences his art evolved into wrapped structures and environments: buildings, walkways and countrysides. Christo uses the

environment as his theatre of celebration as I feel I do the same. We share a reverence for fabric that parallels the land. He tempts nature with his coverings of island waters while thinking metaphors of Spring pink lily pads. Man looks twice. It is not supposed to be there but it is.

As I was impressed with the grandeur of Christo's subject, I was equally impressed with the simplicity of Oldenburg's objects - the ordinariness of them, the enlarged versions of windshield wipers, lipsticks, mixers, bats and fans. Similarly, clotheslines are ordinary. This ordinariness, along with his emphasis on its large scale, was important to Oldenburg. As a youth, he received collages sent to him by an aunt in Sweden. These images were of modern household appliances, advertisements, food, clothing and consumer goods from magazines, all in different scales. As an adult he returned to these collages, for he saw in children's art a remedy for the staleness of adult art.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, I have returned to a youthful experience for my art.

Oldenburg's greatest respect was for the force of gravity as indicated in his soft sculptures. He called this a metaphor for death for they conveyed a life or air gone from them like the wilting of a flower falling closer to the ground.<sup>2</sup> I feel I am dealing with this concept also; my work is symbolic of suspension, a signal to death, with its halting of the flow of life. As the wind chases the forms on a clothesline twisting



and turning them, they remain in a suspended state, fastened to the line making freedom more obscure. These clothes on a line are images of man in shroudlike forms swinging inches from the ground. I respect this duality as I ponder my own mortality.

Magdalena Abakanowicz, a Polish fiber artist, shared her childhood with nature as an only child in a solitary country place. Because of this she was forced to form relationships with the organic world and so collected objects of nature - twigs, bark, stones, etc. They embodied stories in which she wanted to live. Her wall hangings suspend from tall places as heavy masses of fiber from the earth, existing existentially, each with its own essence. How significant they have become, and tender they remain - these storied objects from the earth.

What influenced me most was her wanting to create her own material, throwing out all the rules of weaving at the time - to go beyond tradition. Her work has been a struggle and her words were comforting when I was struggling with my own work. She describes creation:

"Creating is a very painful process. When it begins to be easy, it is no longer creation...We are weak and would like to have a quick result, but this doesn't happen. Sometimes I work on one drawing for a month because it is still not deep enough. I return and return and return. It is a constant struggle."<sup>3</sup>

I have questioned the degree to which I can struggle with my work. I return and return to artists words and works to help me clarify my thoughts. There are no photos of their failures, no solutions as to how to solve my visual artistic problems. There is no comfort for the pieces that I lost. I return then to my own personal symbol for a final evaluation of another risk taking move. As Christo painstakingly struggles with town, city or government and is rejected time after time he continues to pursue his art. I feel the struggle itself is important - in the unknowing of answers; in the interchange with what exists in our work and what is missing; and in our trusting pursuit to bring forth what we want our new work to be. These artists have helped me to see material (in substance and metaphor) through my own vision as I have seen their vision through their use of material as art.

## A SENSE OF MATERIAL:

### THE NATURE OF FABRIC/THE FABRIC OF NATURE

Fabric is defined as a cloth made by weaving, knitting or felting fibers and is similar to paper in many respects. It also means structure or framework. Nature is defined as the organic world unaffected by man. It also means the true appearance of anything, for example, as those of fabric. I have found nature and fabric to be synonymous and expressive of my thinking throughout this writing and will metaphorically describe their meaning and importance on my work.

Through our sense of touch we experience the tactile quality of fabric which relates to our experience of the tactileness of nature, the source of many fibers. Fabric, in turn, has caused us to look at nature in a fabric way. A blanket of snow, a sheet of wind, a curtain of fire and a thread of smoke are terms we sometimes use to describe nature. As the sea folds in on itself, as it enters the soft sands we are able to understand nature better. Through these universal metaphors we can communicate an image of nature that relates to our own human experience of fabric.

It is the structural nature of fabric to have interlacing threads winding and weaving into space, diffusing or

obliterating light. These strands are self contained and strongly bonded together in interlocking grid patterns forming an expanse. The surface of these strands varies from smooth, man made waxy finishes to crude, natural fibers of jute as do the textures of our land vary from polished sea stones to reliefs of rough tree bark. The structural nature of fabric also allows fabric to be flexible, a quality which has motivated me to use paper in the same manner as fabric - as a light, flowing material, billowing with air. When dampened, paper assumes this flexible character permittting me to use it like cloth. This flexibility says freedom and changefulness as I find in the gestures of clothes on a line - as in sheets buffooning with form. It is the nature of fabric to take the shape of what is imposed on it - a breath of air, a gust of wind, or a hand pushing through a sleeve. Assembled by man, through the gathering of its parts, it functions for his purposes as an essential in life. We are in touch with fabric constantly.

I enjoy seeing no "perfect" shapes in nature, at first glance. I find pleasure in seeing no straight lines as in our architecture, no sharp angles, no structure by man. But I know there is geometry in nature, in the atoms of the earth, in the formation of plants, and in the design of the universe and stars. I realize that many of our spatial concepts come from nature in its state of perfection, in the perfect patterns which lie beyond the naked eye. I do enjoy the mathematics of nature,



of that which I readily see, in the ratio of grass to bush, of trees to mountain and moon to sky. How grand to see perspective and "feel" an expanse of land through the gradation of the cloud forms above; to view distance and "feel" ourselves extending in the process; to see myself and clouds as part of the fabric of nature.

This anatomical fabric of nature reveals: a complex order and symmetry as found in the organs of a flower; disorder as evidenced in the planting of trees through windblown seeds; the resulting new order from disorder. These scattered materials of nature are woven together by the elements of earth, air, fire and water as the strands of fiber are woven together by man. This interdependency of these materials in nature (as the water feeds the plants and the dead leaves nourish the ground) causes nature to progress. Its arms reach out as branches lengthen and leaves unfurl into gestures we are familiar with. The knurls in a tree, the unfolding of ferns comprise movement and motion that I reflect in my work. The dance of a leaf in the rhythm of the wind, the twisting of tree tops in fierce storms are movements found in fabric as it answers a breeze or a gale. The nature of fabric can be seen through this action, in the fabric of nature.

The intricate structure of paper, as viewed under a microscope, is an intricate network of fiber and cellulose which intertwine and crisscross in a similar way the rivers and oceans intertwine and crisscross with the valleys and mountains of our

material world. For this thesis, I wanted to create my own sense of material, to manipulate the substance of paper in an expressive, controlled manner as in the nature of fabric. I wanted to expose the inside of paper as I was exposing the inside of me. I feel my work is patterned after the structure of paper, a more natural structure, rather than the grid network of fabric. I enjoy the nature of fabric in its conformity but I do not want to sew it or work with it directly. I prefer the nature of paper itself and when simulated as fabric. As grass, mud, stone and water are woven together to form the surface of the earth, so I have envisioned my art as a "fabric of nature" gently falling upon the contours of land.

## COLOR AS IMAGERY AND ARCHITECTURE

As I slowly awaken each day routinely performing the morning rituals I become aware of the company of colors that surround me, inside and outside my home. The clothing I wear, the objects I see about me are part of an atmosphere that I have created. The colors I have chosen for my belongings give me pleasure and become my first canvas of the day. From bed to window I see the morning hue which suggests the weather "in particular" which suggests my first mood. A world without lush yellow greens, hazy, soft pinks and biting crimsons is incomprehensible yet as artists our work is colorless in its very beginning. Our world is blank as we face canvas or paper but we are the one people who can paint the world whatever we want it to be.

When I am in this process of working, of drawing, I like to feel engulfed with color. I like to feel it swimming around me. Each paper piece I make represents an environment to me which I can travel on and through. I walk the contours of the forms like land and touch its surface with sepias of brown, blue and gray, naming trees, water and grasses. As form is structure, color is the naming of the form. It gives identity and character. A spread of green stretches across an expanse of

paper which becomes a tract of land with a serenity that beckons and soothes. Color replaces words with an intimate and universal language of feeling. By its very nature it paints a landscape yet touches a "wanting" part of our being. As central to my work its impact is directed to my center, my intuitive self.

I receive a tremendous amount of pleasure using and viewing color. Sensual and evocative it sings and is alive. Like good food it is satisfying and nourishing for it feeds my soul with metaphors of nature, love and promise. It adds to my well being. Color warms me, cools me, embraces and entertains me. For this thesis it is my imagery and inner voice I trust.

In perceiving color singularly I dwell in the thickness of cool blue greens and saturated browns, the thinness of light orange and the volume of red in violet. Color is dimensional and in this respect it is the architecture of my work. Pushing and pulling, it is the designer of space, dividing, constructing and highlighting my symbols. Imposing when it is most pure, in its primary state, color is terrifying when used in conjunction with terrifying shapes and violent themes. But I appeal to the electricity of the oranges and blues in David Salle's work and to the shimmering bolts of fabricated colors in Lucas Samaras' sewn canvases. Contrariwise, I find it difficult to use harsh, acrimonious colors. Oranges, reds and olive greens are witnessed to cold, grey yellows to disturb, interrupt or provoke. Sometimes it is the unsettling that I seek to change

direction or to use as an instance in my work. Often, I enjoy using no color and prefer instead to concentrate on blacks, whites and greys exploring form, contrast and mood. This dark mythical side to me appears after completing several color pieces returning to the simplicity of shades and tints. This necessary drama is sincere and is a place where I can harbor my soul finding beauty and tranquility in lieu of the gloom of morbidity.

As I lay a skin of soft pastels over my paper art, I feel I am tending a child, conscious of the slight forms underneath my fingers while patterning my way across its figurative construction. I, as caretaker, transfer my role to color, to be "consoler," appeasing and offering repose, as a refuge for the refugee or the aspiring and again as "projector" always emitting a reflection of "somethingness" to the viewer.



## THE ROMANCE AND REALITY OF ART AND THE LAUNDRY PROCESS

My process of working is best described through the similarity of the psychological and physical aspects of art and laundry. I am attracted to the romance and reality of these procedures. My behavior with paper is based on my personal experiences with cloth and is unconsciously patterned after the laundry process. Similar to papermaking in general, the process of laundry is also not unlike the process of art, with its concern for material and infusion of physical labor.

The concept of laundry fills me with romantic images of a non-romantic life. A return in time to peasant women scrubbing their clothing and bedlinens against rocks in a nearby river, composing a scene of rich earthy browns, beiges and musty greens. This genre painting image illustrates the reality then that everything was done by hand - like an artist. Touching the water; touching the cloth; with hands, with no machines. It is the same actualness of touch an artist has with his materials and of "holding" his process. The reality and romance of art as with laundry is with the hands.

The common and universal qualities of paper and laundry suggest that my materials and my art are not rich in exotic splendor but reflect a humanness, a closeness to earth and man,

an everyday association, comfortable and familiar. The two processes involve a beating of the materials, a recomposing and regurgitating of water and substance. In the laundry process the laundry becomes clean; in the papermaking process the cloth becomes paper. Both processes are basic and timeless.

In addition to discussing processes, I will discuss the meaning of my work as "process." In this sense of the word, my work contains the process. I do not draw landscapes or portraits or begin my drawing with a theme. My work is interdependent upon the steps of the process and goes through many changes. I rely on the stimulus of the material for my motivation. I need the touch and feel of developing the surface of the paper to proceed to build an image. Through discovery and disappointment with my materials and methods I am led to new confrontations, new solutions. As pleasure arises from mistakes that happen and as fear of losing it all occurs, I find beauty in the process.

I also find satisfaction in the structure of the laundry process - the sense of order and completion in washing, rinsing, hanging, drying, ironing and folding. This seemingly mindless, physical activity that reaches the soul is the same seemingly mindless but necessary activity of the physical labors of art. *Is it not so futile to let your mind wander when scrubbing clothes or making pulp and to stray in your thoughts? Is it not so heedless to think about whether it is going to rain so you can bring the clothes in before you go out, or to make sure you have put fresh newspapers between the sheets of handmade paper*

*so they will dry properly? It is important to think about how I will fit my new drawing, framed, in my car!*

The direct procedure of my process with paper can be compared to that of hanging a wash on a clothesline. I begin by wetting large sheets of manufactured rag paper in a tub or shower; wrinkle them slightly; and suspend them from a line to dry. I become conscious of the forms produced by hanging, folding, and tearing and continue these processes with this motivation. In the wetting process the paper becomes like cloth, supple and free, but is transformed into paper again through the drying process. I respect these characteristics of paper; of holding a shape and receiving an image readily; of tearing easily whereas fabric does not; and of the crisp and hollow sounds unlike the quiet of fabric.

Papermaking is also reflective of the laundry process. The equipment and materials used in papermaking are similar to those used in the laundry process. Sinks, tubs, cloth, water, irons and clotheslines refer to both processes. The Hollander beater (used to beat cloth to a pulp) is a washing machine; the wood and metal mold and deckle (used to form a sheet) is the wood and metal washboard from the past; the clotheslines used to hang damp felts (from newly formed sheets) are the improvised clotheslines found universally. In the process of papermaking itself, a cotton sheet, torn into shreds, is beaten to a pulp whereby it is mixed with water and suspended in a tub. To this



more water is added and a sheet is pulled by hand, drained, pressed and laid out to dry, on a clothesline or board - all to become a different material, paper. With the paper's inherent softness made hard I break into the fibers again returning it to a cloth like state. As in nature where the processes of growth and death are intertwined and distributed to become part of the earth, always emanating, so too is the process of my work. From cloth to paper to cloth again.

As an adult I have yet to hang my own wash - I have always used washers and dryers. Perhaps this is why this process is special to me. The romance of laundry is gone. As a woman, but not a mother, the clothesline and the laundry are perhaps symbolic of providing for a family I do not have. I do not refer to the clothesline or laundry process as a symbol for wife servantry or any other negative statement on womens' work. I simply like them. I feel it represents peace and a breath of fresh air, a farewell perhaps to a very old method of drying. I have noticed on recent visits home that my mother still uses her clothesline - and handles her laundry with care and attention. Upon leaving she gives me gifts of towels and sheets - like the gifts she gave me as a child - the old bedspreads and curtains. She knows I enjoy them too.

## SUSPENSION: A SUGGESTION FOR CREATIVITY, A PARAMETER OF DEATH

As leaves suspended from a branch depend on that branch which holds them, so too, clothes suspended on a line, depend on that line. They hang free except at one point of dependency. While this dependency does allow movement, the movement is confined within a defined space. In so doing it defines them for they cannot entirely change. I am interested in this movement and dependency in suspension as it is in nature.

It becomes a parameter for creative imagination - a suggestion for the stirrings of the imagination and a physical fantasy. As the heavy clothes laden with water lose their burden of weight it is the process, the near metamorphosis that intrigues me. For I see clotheslines as a series of forms playfully swinging, remindful of humans and inventively humorous. They are the would be creatures of the day, appearing and disappearing with the rhythm of the wind. They are the remnants of culprits of dirt punishable by hanging! Delightful images of whom they represent they tell a story.

In another state of suspension these objects become frozen. As suspension also indicates a halting, stopping or delaying for a time, it also defines my art. Through the hanging and moving of wet paper in air, I imitate the hanging and moving of

fabric. As I stop the movement of paper, the paper freezes the motion. Fabric, being more flexible, will return to its initial shape - shirt, sheet or trousers. I see my art as this suspension of animation that is personal, poetic of nature and a fabric of my imagination.

The indication of a clothesline in my work is suggested through the act of suspension (hanging) and shown in the physical properties of the paper - in the folds and stretched corners, as in a towel hung on a line. The act of suspending is implied metaphorically and read in the work itself, through a line that is not physically present. The mystery of this implication is attractive in the process of creating. The integrity of the clothesline is maintained but read not as a towel but as art. In the cases where my work is not indicative of the line I feel they have left the security of the line to develop on their own but become suspended again when hung on a wall. When "hanging" my pieces in the gallery for the thesis show I felt I was in a clothesline space once more, a large open place, comfortable and familiar.

I have yet to see a disorderly clothesline. It seems there must be an order to this line, a progression, and in most cases its feet first. From socks to underwear, to shirts, jeans, towels and sheets the clothesline "hanger" puts it all out there, properly. In a sense, though not so humorously, I am doing the same thing - putting out my most intimate belongings, my thoughts and my art. As a series or progression the

clothesline has become a time line for me. A time to suspend motion - to examine myself, and my life.

Suspension is also a hanging on to life and a closeness to death. We are dependent on time and it makes us responsible for ourselves. I feel suspension is this point between life and death. As the morning dew hangs momentarily from an arched blade of grass and leaves gently stir from their branches I become more aware of life. In time nature turns downward with gravity falling towards the earth, towards death, towards conclusion. Perhaps it is my age and time going by that I am more conscious of suspension - of this point between life and death. It is my art now and it holds a sacred feeling for me - of touching an intangible to make complete an image.

## SILENCE, IN CONVERSATION, IN ART, IN LOVE

As an artist I am alone with my work in silence. I am alone with myself, facing myself, promoting myself. Yet, I share a slowly developed dialogue, a silent conversation, with my work - with the "strange paper forms" in front of me, limp with water but reflecting an image of myself. I stare at freshly painted fragments of paper trying to figure out what to do next. Always searching for a clue, an impulse or idea generated by me or the paper's behavior, I listen. More color is needed, the form is wrong! Perhaps I shall mix the green with the brown. This will give me what I want. What is it that I want? I am in control but control is not the governing agent. It becomes a sharing of the responsibility - of the medium and myself. It is finding something in common with our performances that is a hit! The pulling and wringing from within me, the struggle with trying to get out what I want to say, at times is overwhelming.

The moments of tender creativity give credence to my art. The intimacy that evolves between myself and my work wrestles my thoughts. The physical closeness, the response of the color in my hand, my hand and how it is feeling! My inner physical being, my nerves, muscles and skin around my skeletal body reacting, tightening, shifting, retreating then freezing with



stillness. Like the way paper reacts after being broken into, with its fibers being continuously cut making the paper tough and hard - so that drawing on it with pastels over bumps, creases and in deep crevices an echo could be heard as if I were running through dark valleys. I become aware of something about to happen. I begin hitting the paper with chalk, lightly, into a rhythm where the sound is rebounding. A momentum builds and a pattern of drawing develops into an essence of the work. It is this instance that I enjoy the paper for what it is - not a continuous flowing fabric but a hard, stable medium full of tension and strength suggesting permanence. Like the wind rustling into the paper forms on a clothesline twisting them up to a point - and holding them steady. As in suspension the moment is halted.....

As a viewer of art a silent conversation with a work of art is a private moment with beauty in my life that is for my interpretation only. My dialogue with art is a language of feeling and imagery with unspoken words in a noiseless world. The communication is personal and trusting.

I believe the highest form of communication or dialogue is love. An example of this is Martin Buber's "Thou" relationship with a tree. When looking at a tree that has caught his favor

he becomes bound up in relation to it. Everything about the tree, its form and structure, color and chemical composites, its intercourse with the stars and the elements are present in a single whole.<sup>4</sup> It has to do with him, as he with it. The visual language communicates this intimacy with the viewer and that viewed if the dialogue is direct and exclusive.

I feel my own communication or dialogue with my work is love. It is all that you have just read. Love as a simple gesture, uncomplicated by words, philosophy or reason and which stirs affection by ordinary acts - as in the processes of laundry and art in the manner of handling cloth or paper; in the touch of warm folded clothes placed carefully in a drawer; in the images of women from my past, my mother and grandmother outside in all seasons hanging their wash on a line; in myself as a child making tents out of sheets and in myself presently making forms out of paper. I see love as that which is beyond the geometry of paper, cloth and nature extending itself into unstructured, uncharted paths of creativity unpredictable as a painting, yet found still in the quiet disciplines of art, in the long structure of its process, in the tiresome details and insignificant tasks to the meaningful drawing that comes from our hands.

I believe the nurturing feelings acquired through tending a wash is likened to love and the process of art. It is the Thou in my relationship with my work. The process of laundry

illustrates the one to one relationship man has with his materials and his environment, as laundry washer, and in my opinion, as artist also. It is the romance and the reality of laundry that establishes the romance and reality of my process with paper.



a



b

1. A stream from my past.....

Pittsfield, Massachusetts  
April, 1983





C





a

2. Summer Clothesline

The fields behind R.I.T.  
Newsprint  
.1982



3. Summer Clothesline No.2 (Detail )

R.I.T. (Inside)  
Handmade Paper  
1982

a



b





a

4. Fall Clothesline

Genesee Valley Park  
Newsprint  
1982





b



c





d



Summer....

2b



Fall.....

e



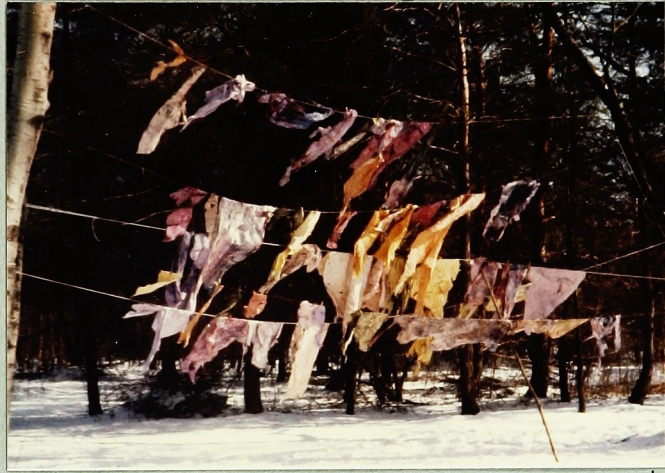
5. Winter Clothesline

My backyard at Bastian Rd.  
Dyed newsprint  
1983





a



b



c





6. SHADOW

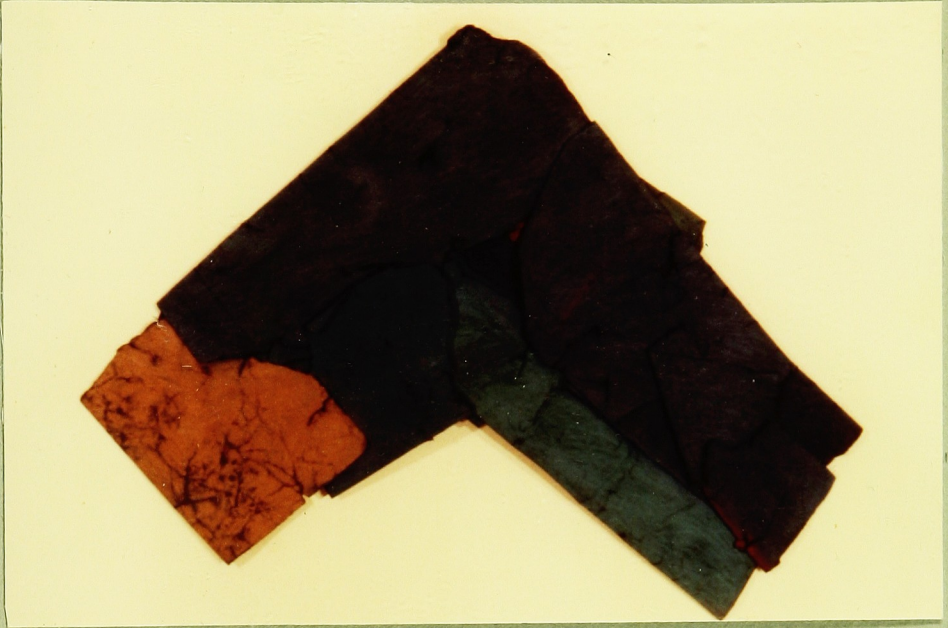
32w x 70h x 4d  
Charcoal on paper  
1983



7. BLUE HIGH

54w x 40h x 5d  
Soft pastel on paper  
1983





"The blue zenith is  
the point in which romance and reality meet."

Ralph Waldo Emerson



8. MY CONFECTIONS

48w x 40h x 5d

Soft pastel on paper

1983





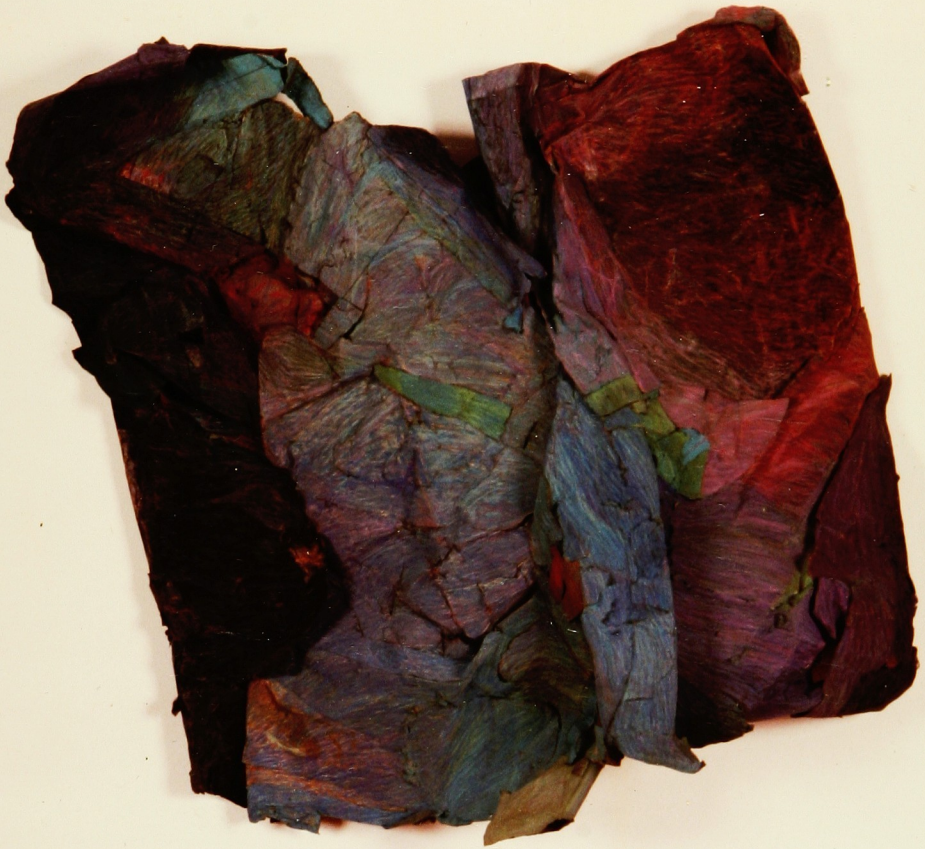


9. MARIPOSA

66w x 60h x 11d

Pastel on dyed paper  
1984





#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Barbara Rose, Claes Oldenburg, (New York. Chanticleer Press, Inc., 1970), p.20.

<sup>2</sup>Barbara Haskell, Claes Oldenburg: Object into Monument, (Los Angeles: Anderson, Ritchie and Simon, 1971), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup>Betty Parks, "Magdalena Abakanowicz Speaks," Fiber Arts, March/April 1983, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Martin Buber, I and Thou, 2nd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1958), pp.7-8.



## ILLUSTRATIONS

1. a,b.      A stream from my past.....1A  
       c,        Tall ashen grass.....1B
  
2. a.        Summer Clothesline.....2A  
       b.        Summer Clothesline.....5A
  
3. a,b.      Summer Clothesline No. 2 (Detail).....3A
  
4. a.        Fall Clothesline.....3B  
       b,c.      Fall Clothesline.....4A  
       d.        Fall Clothesline.....4B  
       e.        Fall Clothesline.....5A
  
5. a,b,c.    Winter Clothesline.....6A
  
6.            SHADOW  
               32w x 70h x 4d, charcoal on paper, 1983.....7A
  
7.            BLUE HIGH  
               54w x 40h x 4d, soft pastel on paper, 1983.....8A  
               (Wallace Memorial Library Collection)
  
8.            MY CONFECTIONS  
               48w x 40h x 4d, soft pastel on paper, 1983.....9A
  
9.            MARIPOSA  
               66w x 60h x 11d, pastel on dyed paper, 1984.....10A

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