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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

BALANCE IN MEMORY

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

By  
Junichiro Baba

May 1996

## Approvals

Adviser : Michael Taylor \_\_\_\_\_

Date : July 1, 1996

Associate Adviser : Richard Hirsch \_\_\_\_\_

Date : 8/2/96

Associate Advisor : Tom Lightfoot \_\_\_\_\_

Date : 7/8/96

Chairman for the

School of American Crafts : Robert Schmitz \_\_\_\_\_

Date : 8-5-96

I, Junichiro Baba, \_\_\_\_\_ prefer to be contacted  
each time a request for production is made. I can be reached  
at the following address :

Junichiro Baba  
5-2-18-1111, Mita  
Minato-ku, Tokyo  
108, Japan

Date : Aug. 7th, 1996

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## INTRODUCTION

During my graduate studies, I have explored the relationship between forces of nature and human society. My work depicts characteristics from both, contrasts of flowing organic and sharply defined, geometric, forms. For me, this represents the forces which exist in my unconscious memories. The concept of expressing nature from my personal memories has inspired and directed my thesis work.

My major works during the first year of graduate studies represented memory fragments. I connected these memories with nature as it impacts upon society. Through this process, I gradually realized that my inspirations always came from the environment where I grew up. Surrounded by man-made materials such as concrete, brick, and steel, I could rarely feel nature there. However, even in an unnatural environment, the laws of nature, such as gravity, rusting, and floating, were powerfully present within man-made structures. I found that I could experience a sense of beauty especially where nature coexisted with man-made structures.

My thesis work is the results of simplifying the process of collecting and connecting necessary fragments.

Through this process, I became fascinated in researching memory fragments that I viewed as windows to my past. I also investigated contrasting forms that emphasized nature recalled from my memories. Therefore, my work consists of two aspects of memories from two different points of view.

## INFLUENCES

As it is true of many artists, my creative activities are strongly influenced by the environment where I grew up. There, all existing space is geometrically divided by man-made structures. These creations powerfully separate nature from society, forcing nature to the perimeter of our experience. Nature is denied a focal place in our contemporary lives. Nonetheless, the evidence of nature in such artificial environs prevails. I remember the gradual shading of the moonlight in the shadow of quiet, massive steel walls. It was as if the midnight moon focused all its energy on nature instead of human activities. On a winter evening, I am reminded of the powerful spirits of nature in tiny floating bubbles found in mundane, frozen puddles. The bubbles contrast sharply with heavy concrete structures massing around me. The manifestation of a fragile but powerful spirit of nature moving through my environment remains strong in my memories. The synergy, created by the strong contrast between nature and home environment, strongly influences my works.

When I was an undergraduate student, one of the most influential artists for my work was the Romanian sculptor,

Constantin Brancusi. I first saw his work at the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan, when I was ten years old. Even though I did not know anything about him at that time, I clearly remember that I was spellbound by his forceful, soaring form (Figure 1). His subtractive method to arrive at the essence of the form, still influences my search for natural forms and man-made materials found in memories. Through Brancusi I have also learned how to express weight in sculpture. In my own work I have combined steel and glass to emphasize the relative weightlessness of transparent glass, thus achieving the maximum impact of the image.

Although the force of nature is constant, I can sense this power clearest within the darkness of shadows. This is especially evident after dark when man-made structures turn into geometric compositions.

While researching the relationship between light and shadow, I was impressed by Takashi Kanome's work (Figure 2). His use of glass as a container for both light and shadow in a solid form was dramatic. Intense light, shining on and through the glass, creates an expressive solution using a massive glass and fragile, artistic details. The force of the light through the glass creates strong contrast between light and dark. I was fascinated by his expression of weight, incorporating light and transparent glass, which



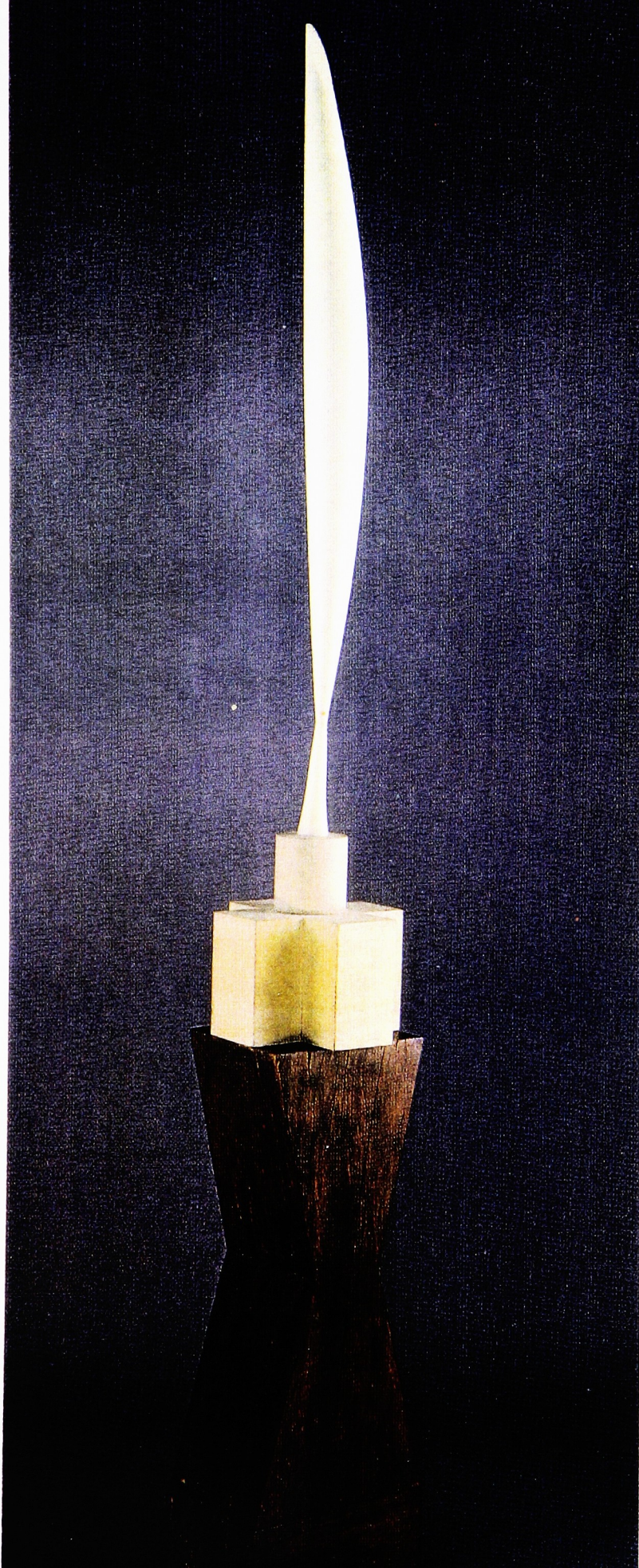


Figure 1.  
"Bird in Space"  
Constantin Brancusi, 1925



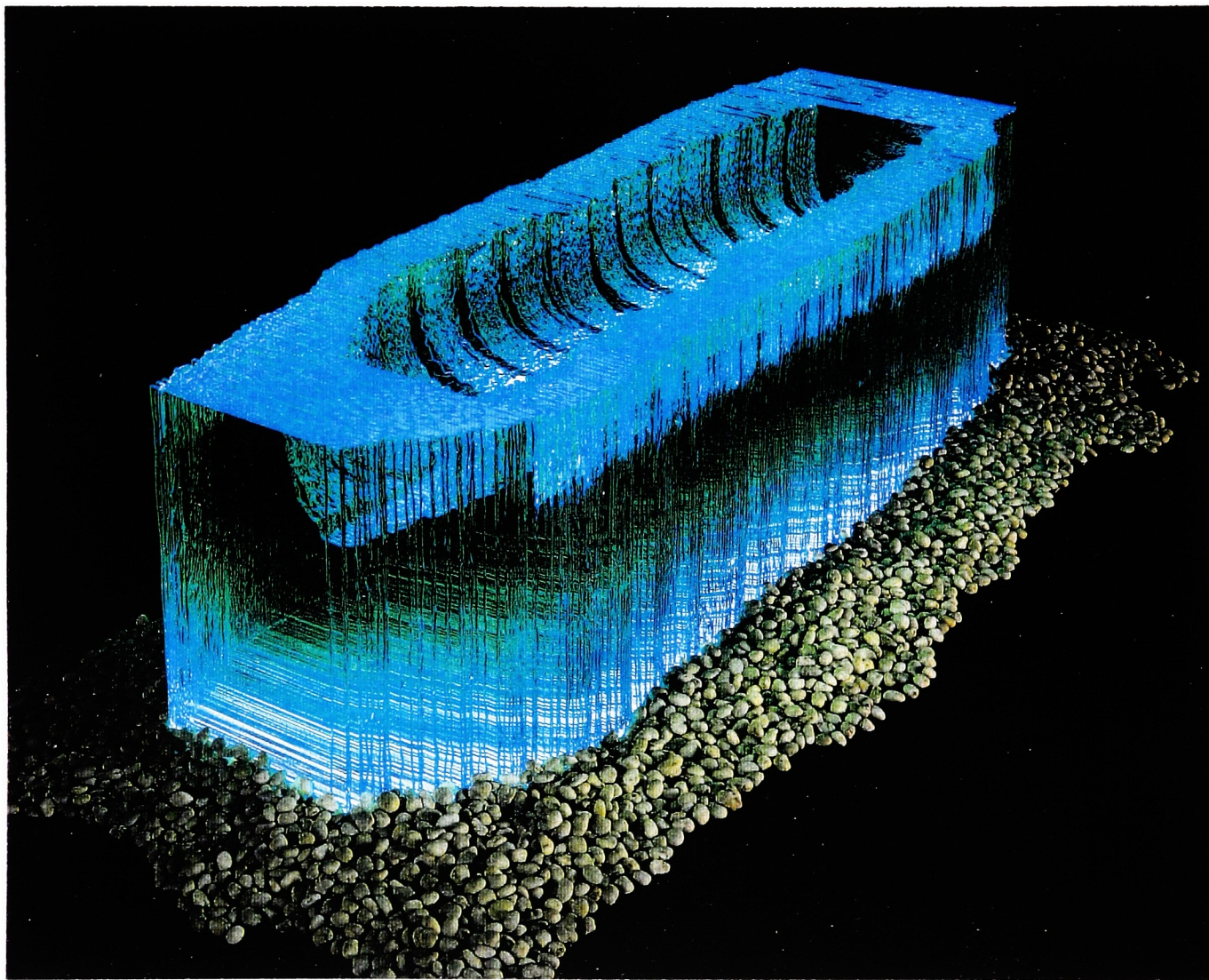


Figure 2. "B.C. Light", Takashi Kanome, 1987

described lightness in massive form.

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1. Shanes, Eric. Constantin Brancusi. New York :  
Abbeville Press , 1998.
  2. Ogawa, Michiaki. Light Art Gallery. Tokyo, Japan :  
Libro Port Publishing Company, Ltd., 1989.



## THE WORK

Since my inspirations are strongly influenced by a man-made, structured society where I grew up, my objective was to maximize the contrast between the powerful, exisiting force of nature and man-made structures. In my fragmental series, "The Squares in the Evening Sky", I tried to combine particular characteristics of both nature and man-made materials as irregurality and regularity. I used the memory of my home town landscape as a motif. Since I wanted to show the fragments of my memories, I emphasized fragmentation by employing sharp and irregular edges, and using portions of the whole shape. In my first work, "The Squares in the Evening Sky #1"(Figure 3 and 4), my main concern was how to express the lightness of form recalled through my memory. I used light to emphasize the strong contrast between the thinness and thickness of the solid glass form. The light shone through the thin, transparent edge of the glass. Also, the narrow, soaring circular fragment implied the rising movement of the moon partially obstructed from view by man-made structures.

My second sculpture, "The Squares in the Evening Sky #2"(Figure 5 and 6), states a much stronger contrast between



Figure 3.

"The Squares in the Evening Sky #1"

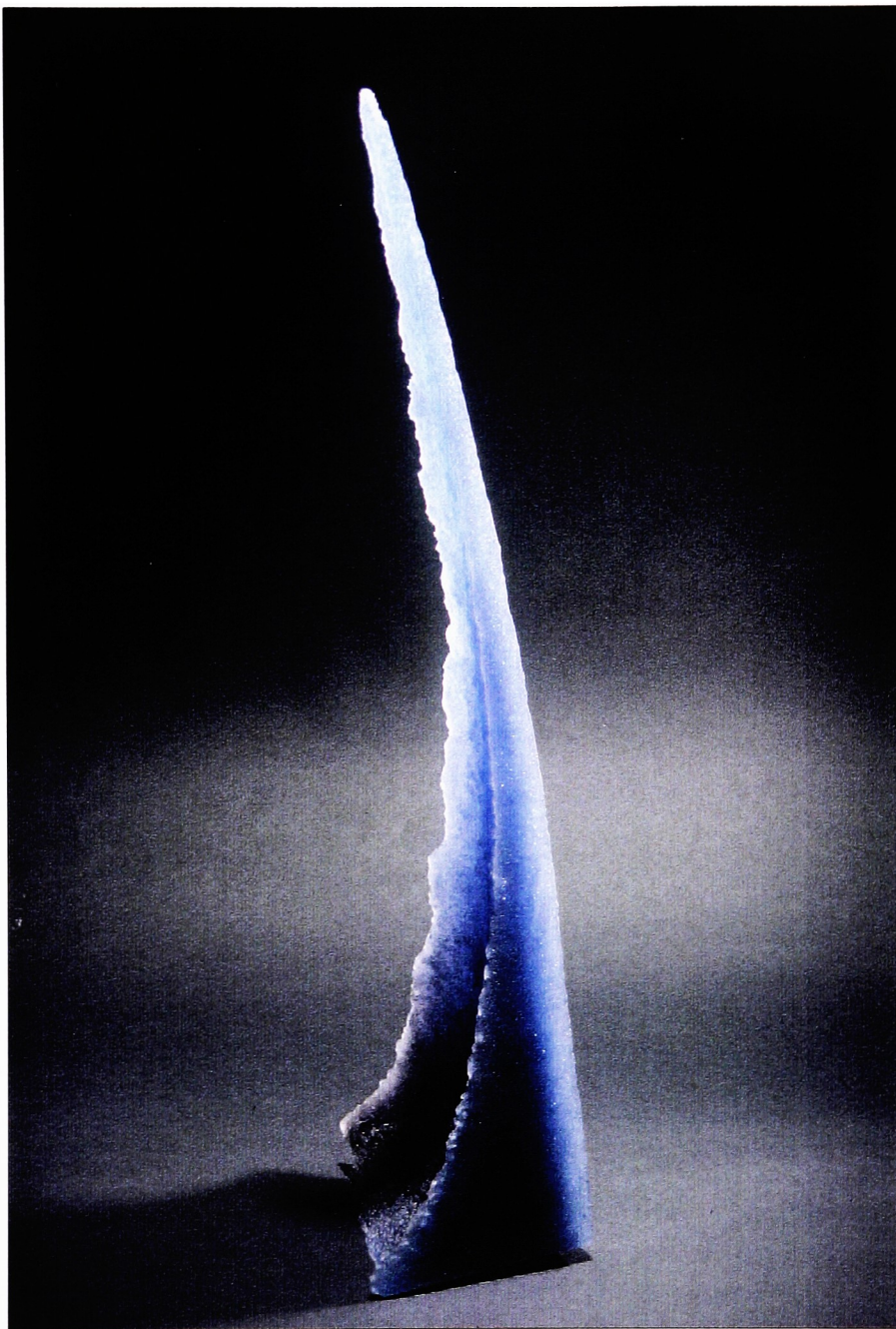


Figure 4.

"The Squares in the Evening Sky #1", (Reverse side)



the geometric and natural form than my first work, "The Squares in the Evening Sky #1". Again, these contrasts of forms represent human society and nature. In this work, I emphasized the contrast by employing light reflected through transparent, solid glass. The shape of the triangular, external form and small rectangular elements underneath the work are enhanced by light passing through the curved surface of the sculpture. The thin depth of the clear, solid form enables it to pass light through the work easily. The light, penetrating the sculpture, also creates the illusion of weightlessness, and suggests a floating object.

Because I wanted to show the peaceful but powerful forces of nature, I simplified information in my works. Minimum use of color was intentional. One strong directional movement was created in the work. During the creative process, I used subtractive rather than additive techniques to arrive at the essence of the form.

In my last fragmental work, "The Squares in the Evening Sky #3" (Figure 7 and 8), I emphasized the strong rotating movement of the circle as a basic, natural form. By simply using part of the large whole circle, I could suggest this concept. Strong geometric, external lines addressed the reflections of a past visual experience, limited by man-made structures. The large circle implied a continuous, rotating



Figure 5. "The Squares in the Evening Sky #2"

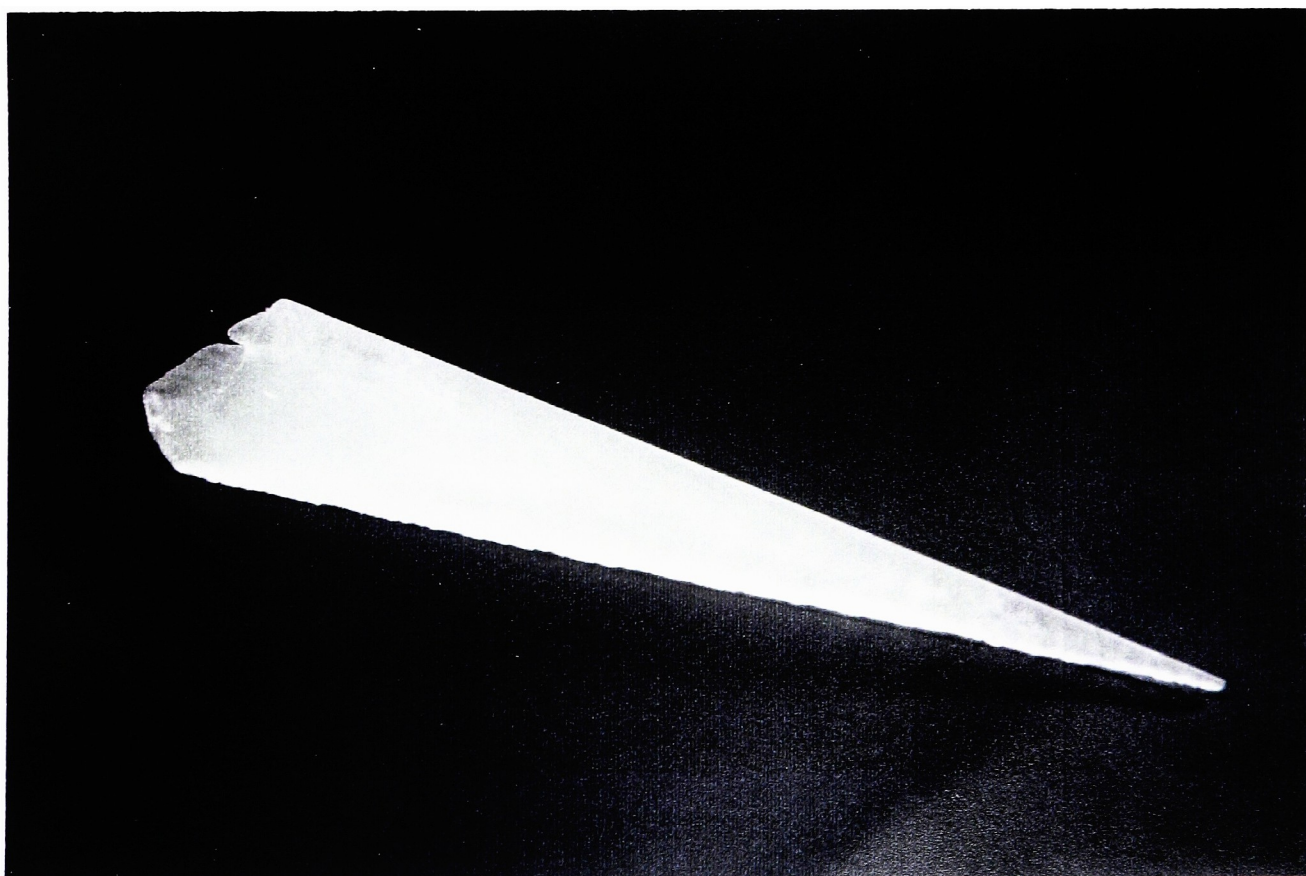


Figure 6. "The Squares in the Evening Sky #2", (Reverse side)



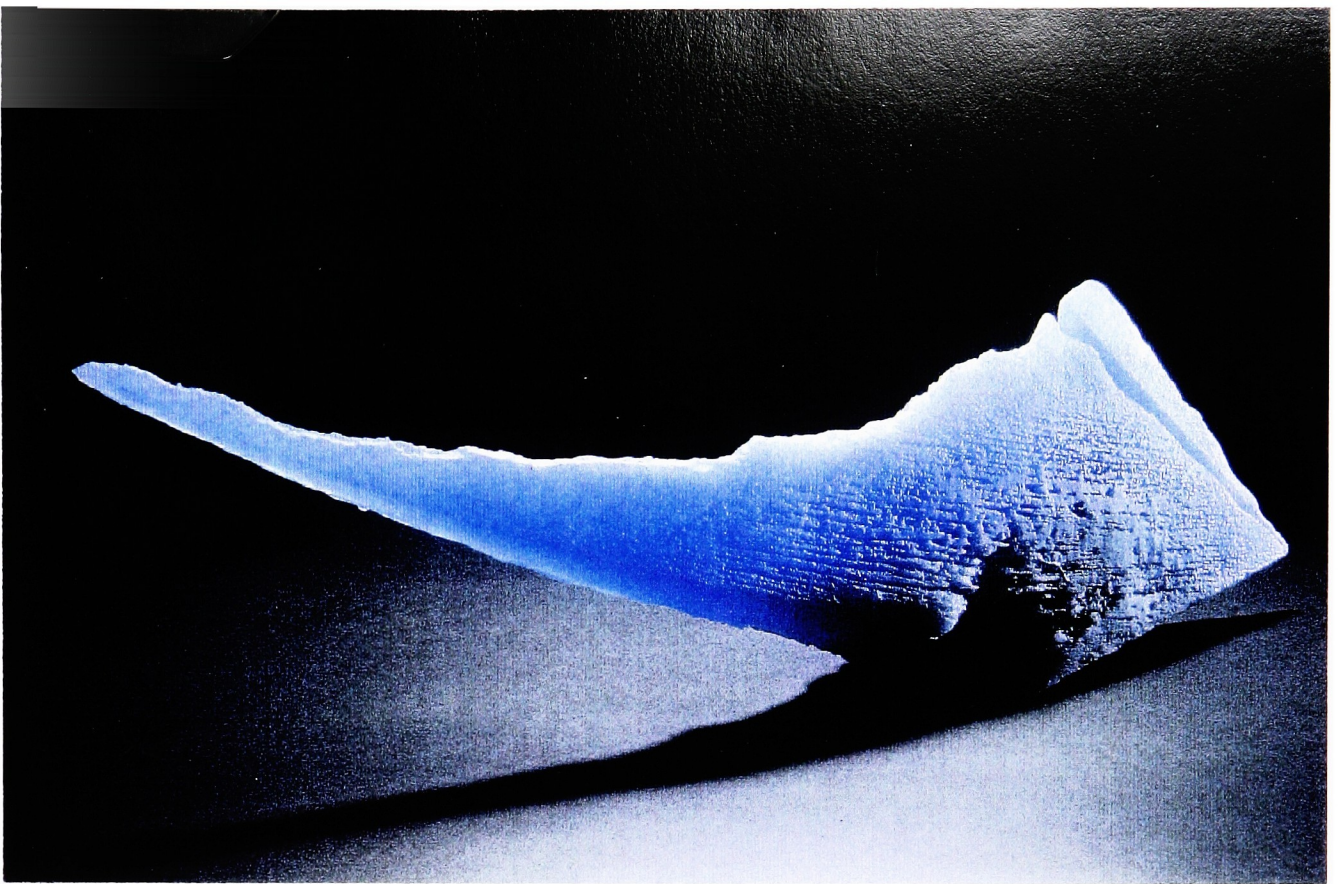


Figure 7. "The Squares in the Evening Sky #3"

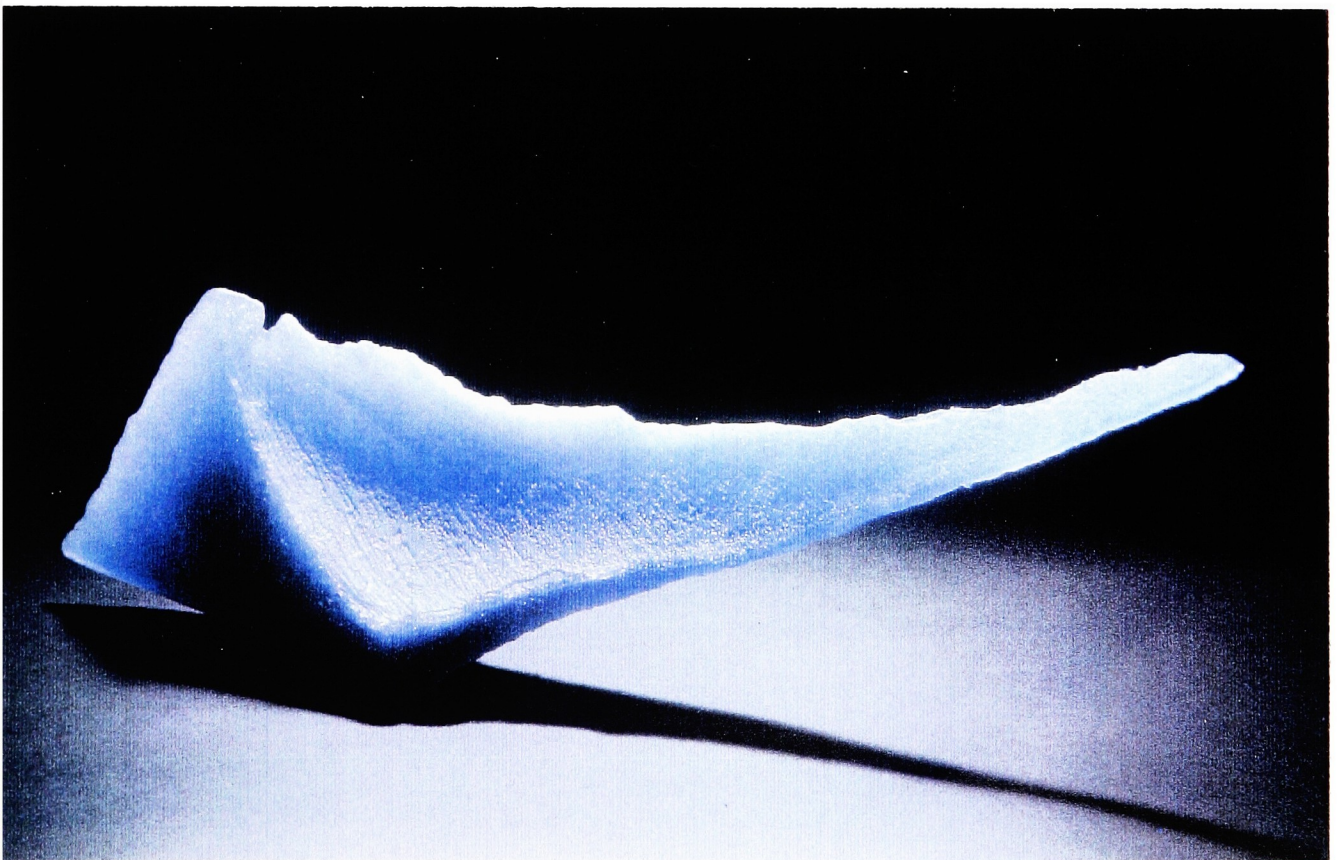


Figure 8. "The Squares in the Evening Sky #3", (Reverse side)

movement of natural form. While the circle showed a heavy, strong movement, the light, floating characteristics of the fragment was created by tilting the sculpture and by shining light through the thin edge of the transparent glass.

In contrast to my fragmental series which captured my memories, in "The Memories of Shadows", I concentrated on expressing memories of the balance between nature and man-made structures. In these works, I combined relatively thick sheet metal with solid clear glass. The geometric metal form incorporated one of man's physically strongest materials, while the solid, cast glass form implied the spirit of nature, both fragile yet powerful. In my work, "The Memory of Shadows (Wall)" (Figure 9, 10 and 11), I expressed the soaring force of nature passing through man-made, divisional lines of moisture, heat, and sound. Even though the solid glass form was divided into two parts by a thick metal sheet, the continuous rising bubbles from the bottom to the top, inside the glass, and the slightly tapered form, showed the rising force passing through the sheet metal. Also, the massiveness of the steel emphasized the light weight of the rising force.

The use of fabricated structural qualities, such as coldness, massiveness, and impermanence, played important roles in this series. I wanted to emphasize the eternal



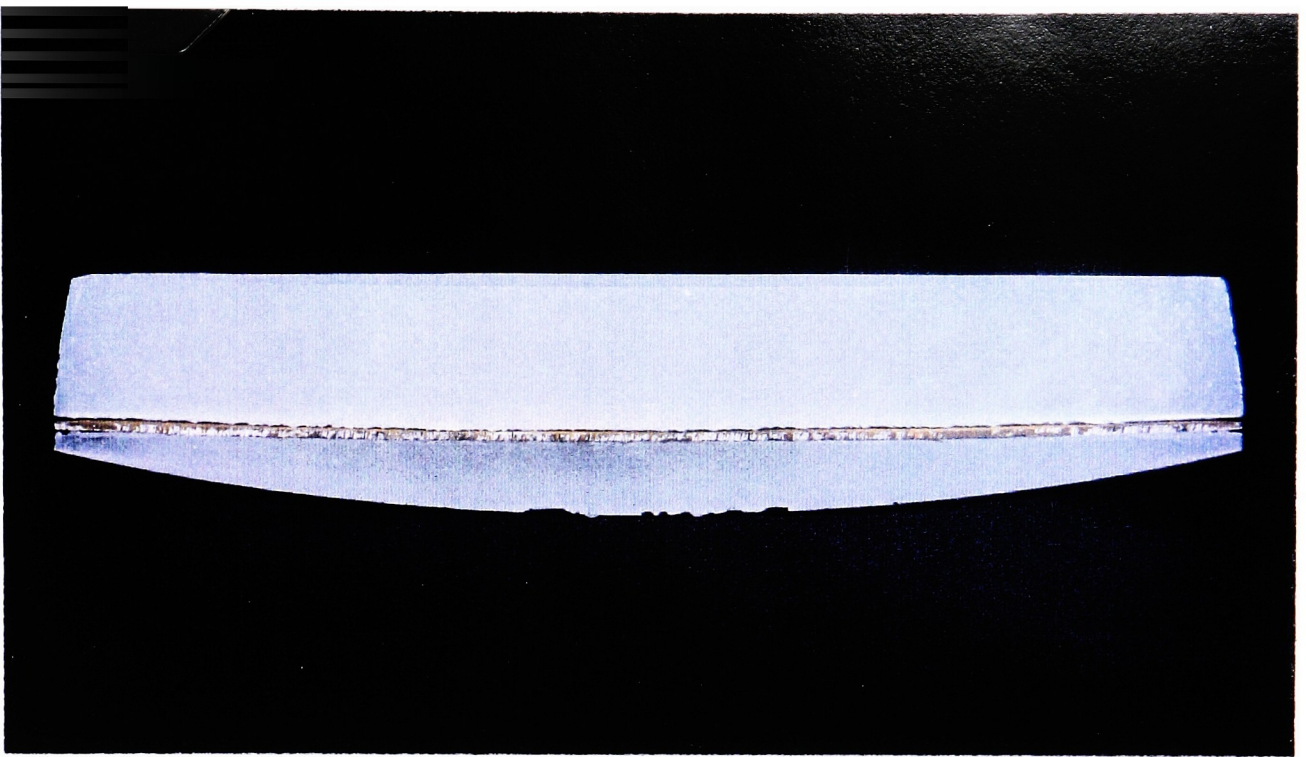


Figure 9. "The Memory of Shadows (Wall)"

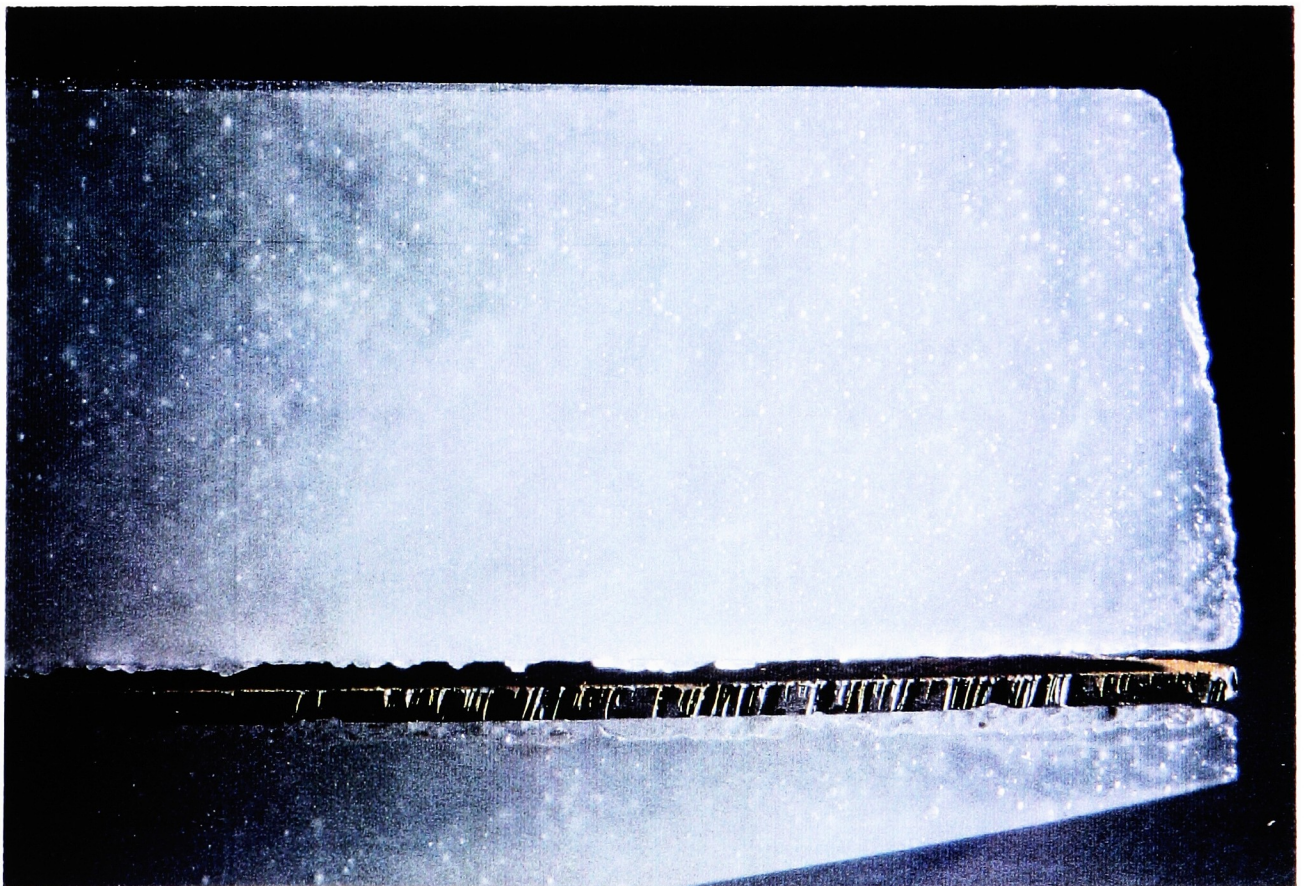


Figure 10. "The Memory of Shadows (Wall)", (Detail)



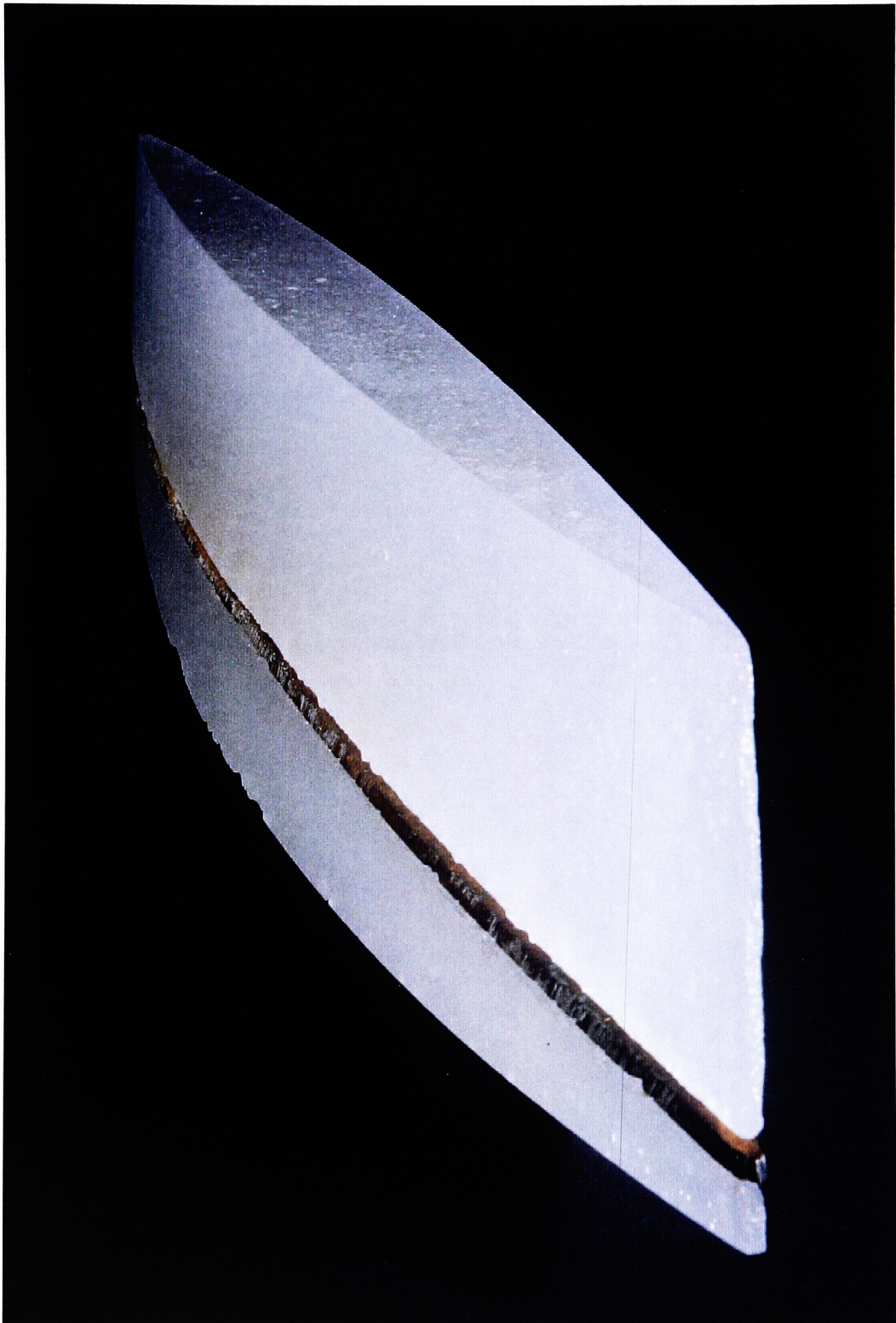


Figure 11. "The Memory of Shadows (Wall)"

characteristics of nature. In my last thesis work, "The Memory of Shadows (Vase)" (Figure 12 and 13), the soaring force of the solid glass form was emphasized by contrasting it with the downward gravitational movement of the steel sheet. This massive sheet of steel not only represented the physical strength of the man-made material but by contrast, it also gave lightness to the soaring form. Viewed from the ends of the sculpture, the solid glass form expressed horizontal tension, and created concentrated energy in the soaring form.



Figure 12. "The Memory of Shadows (Vase)"





Figure 13. "The Memory of Shadows (Vase)", (Detail)

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

I used the technique of casting the glass parts for all of my thesis work. Every mold was made of a mixture of silica and plaster to insure that the plaster mold had refractory resistance. Since I like both the flexibility and the texture of clay, I used clay for my positive molds. While the clay positive was still at the leather-hard stage, the mixture of silica and plaster was poured over the clay positive. In order to provide maximum strength to the negative mold, it was better to minimize the number of pourings over the positive clay form.

I tried to avoid the natural devitrification of the soda lime glass. I sought clear glass that would allow light passage easily through the glass. I minimized the devitrification by shortening the firing time beyond the annealing temperature. Also, in order to shorten the firing time, I made simple forms. Glass could flow quickly into the mold.

In my series work, "The Memory of Shadows", I used in combination sheet metal with the glass parts. I simply forged and created rust by the application of salt to the surface. This created natural surfaces. During the rusting

process, I minimized the rate of rusting to maintain the structural strength of the steel sheets.

## CONCLUSION

Experimenting with studies of my personal memories and background became one of the most valuable experiences of my graduate studies. Beginning with the gathering of memories from my home environment, I realized how both man-made structures and nature coexist in my memories. Also, juxtaposing other materials with glass, I noticed how each media influences the parts and the total work. This research provided me with a variety of possibilities for future, creative work. Based on my research, I will continue to pursue these concepts in order to deepen my own sense of beauty.

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