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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

ART TALES:
ART AS A COMMUNICATOR OF NEW YORK STATE FOLKLORE

Erin Claire Tobin

April 2, 2004

MFA Thesis Exhibition Review – School of Art

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PAINTING

Department

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Date

Attach a copy of Thesis Proposal

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Erin Tobin

DEDICATION

I dedicate this accomplishment to my mother and father who have best parents in the whole world and shown me unconditional love though all the good times and bad.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There have been many people who acted as inspiration during the completion of my thesis and even thanking everyone properly still leaves me in a great bit of debt. Support and encouragement from these individuals pushed me further than I ever thought possible. We learn by doing and by doing we discover that the possibilities arrive at our fingertips. Thank you to everyone who put up with my schizophrenic run of ideas. I think they were crazy enough to succeed.

Specifically thank you to Pixel Physics for allowing me to use their arial photographs to inspire my work. Thanks to Andrea Sundloff and MaryJo Marks for sharing with me the secrets of Dansville. Thanks to my three advisors Alan Singer, Luvon Sheppard, and Keith Howard, who gave me solid advice as to the direction my painting should unfold and believing in the quality of my work. A special thanks to my family, in particular, my father who's books from childhood proved the best resources. Thanks to my mother Gail, two sisters Michele and Lisa for all your emotional support. Thanks to Zack who patiently suffered, listening as all my ideas unfolded into physical paintings.

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Long tales around the campfire

Few childhoods are spent without bedtime stories or tales around the campfire. Much of storytelling's appeal is its entertainment value, however, beneath the surface of everyday storytelling, we can uncover truths and mysticisms. There is a historical utility in these accounts of past lives and events. Our culture germinates from the knowledge provided in these stories, developing a civic pride uniting history with the present. One of the most beautiful things about folklore is the tradition of passing tales down from generation to generation. This generational storytelling's powerful effect became intertwined with my work. Looking back at my research for tales, I found that a majority of my reading was from books that my father gave me. Many were books that he read when he was little and then passed on to me.

Folklore, in my own definition, encompasses stories that contain some mystical, attractive qualities that make them unusual, worth repeating, and not easily forgotten. One of the most crucial aspects of the stories I chose was their truth, based on historical facts. As soon as I began the book, Shadows on the Wall, by Arch Merrill, I understood my father's fascination with stories. They are short stories concentrating on a people, time, and setting. Some of the stories contain clever little facts that few know.

My thesis uses these stories as a starting point to explore texture and pattern. I wanted to explore text on the canvas as a pattern, thereby transforming it into a texture. However, the idea of texture was not limited to the word element of the paintings. I wanted physical layers in the paintings creating spatial depth, as opposed to a traditional two-dimensional painting surface. In some cases, this exploration reshaped my usual paper stretched canvas into a three-dimensional wood canvas. Both investigations help to create a visual communication of these folktales.

After reading the story, one is amused to acquire historical facts. In this way, the factual

stories lend themselves as pieces of gossip or as a source of entertainment to a large audience. Captivated by the story, the audience becomes the storyteller using the story for their own popularity. And so a game of "telephone" develops with these stories as the non-fiction element grabs the listener's attention immediately as he passes the story along. Folklore plays an entertainment role and also has the potential to strengthen communities with tales and historical details of that specific area.

While folklore can be playful, it can also be thought of in broader terms. I think of the stories as bits to a puzzle. Similarly, an artist can have many different pieces of art each pertaining to a different mood and thought pattern. If one were to look at just one of these pieces, one may not fully understand the intent of the artist. The intent, or thought process, may only be evident by viewing the artist's work over a period of time. Sometimes the overall goals of an artist remain even a mystery to him or her until a body of work, or collection has been produced. Through the entire collection of pieces, a style develops that identifies that artist. All the pieces of the puzzle fit together somehow, giving credibility as they stand together. In folklore, the orator of the story gains status based on the quality of his tales. People's attention is short and you have to capture the audience and draw them in quickly. In art, the same is true as the viewer generally decides within seconds whether he or she likes the art.

Folklore must weave in and out of itself. Sometimes this will be through a character, such as Clara Barton and the "House on the Hill". Sometimes it will weave through time periods creating a linear pattern of history such as Baby Boy Murphy's tragedy connected to the present day problems with the Catholic Church. History is built on time and time gives life to all these stories.

Art history helps us understand how past culture influences art's future development. The challenge of art is based on what has already occurred and how to use those ideas in a present way, making it fresh and unique. History and critical opinion act as the final critique of art, judging if present day art meets up to past standards or surpasses. Since there is so much history of art, the artist must set his or her own personal goals to communicate with the public. As an artist, I attempt to document moments in time using a paintbrush as a communicating tool. I record culture: all that I see, hear, and experience. Then the information mixes into my imagination and a piece of art develops reflecting the time in which I live. Sometimes present occurrences associate with past occurrences in the mind of the artist, which leads him or her to records these related events visually. In storytelling, the orator's mission is to inform his audience of the importance of relevant culture such as dress, music, architecture, and new trends and remedies. All of these elements together create a specific time's culture, the same way a group of artists together create a movement.

Chronological order is important because past culture influences the future. Culture cannot be ignored completely because it surrounds life. The important culture becomes part of this chronologically documented history because it will be remembered and recorded for future generations. These stories are a prime example of this recording. Each story contains a part of history that eventually fits together on a timeline. After reading an entire book of Arch Merrill's stories, all of the characters and events fall into this timeline, creating a sense of this period's culture. Reading only a few stories, one might see only jumbled bits of information.

The stories I have selected, will lead you through the chronology of my experience. In this project each piece builds on top of each other. One experiment leads to new ideas and from

this new expansion the evolution continues. Chronology played an important role in my thesis show because my ideas progressed as they changed from sketches to finished works.

The Introduction Wall of the thesis exhibition embarks on the journey that will communicate my ideas, facts, and styles of painting.¹



This section documents the Introduction Wall of the thesis exhibition and examines *Figures 1-7*. This series of hand painted wood carvings examine the physical building of layers as a metaphor for the story of life. Each person, individually, can relate this idea that culture is built from many different layers of stories representing the past, present, and future where we exist in time.

¹ See Figures 1-6



Figure 1
"Stars in Space"
9 x 12 x 1"
oil on board



Figure 2
 "Building Blocks"
 12 x 8 x 1.5"
 mixed media on board



Figure 3
 "All Seeing Eyes"
 12 x 8 x 1.5"
 mixed media on board



Figure 4
 "Dancing Moons"
 12 x 8 x 1.5"
 mixed media on board



Figure 5
 "Flower Power"
 12 x 8 x 1.5"
 mixed media on board

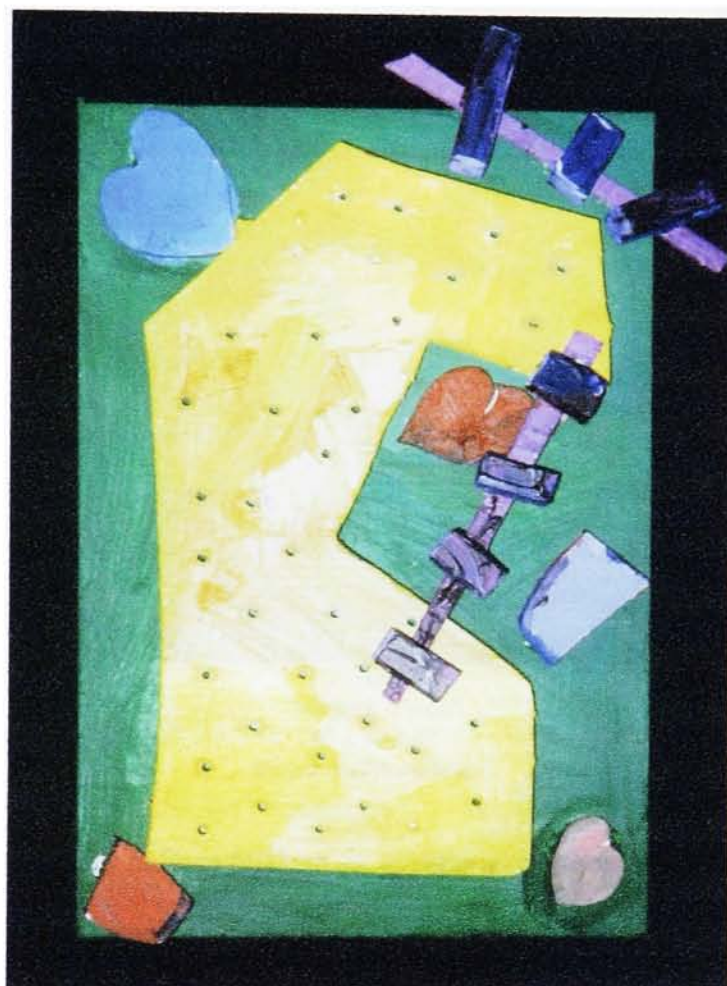


Figure 6
"Hearts in Space"
9 x 12 x 1.25"
Oil on Board



Figure 7
"Hinged Words"
16 x 20 x 4"
mixed media on board

Webster's Dictionary defines folklore as: traditional customs, tales, sayings, or art forms preserved among a people. A story may create a linear history by linking one person or place in time to another person, place, or time. Each piece of information becomes a building block of knowledge with a unique form. These building blocks are layered onto other building blocks mingled with present events, giving historical depth to a story. This layering of the tale is represented in the Introduction section of my exhibition. In Figures 2-5, the collage background represents the importance of words used as a pattern of communication. These words are the

backbone that hold the imagery of the story together. The collaged words in the background are the roots of the story. They are its strength and color.

The outer pieces, “Stars in Space” *Figure 1* and “Hearts in Space” *Figure 6*, use a three-dimensional effect symbolizing the distance between events on a linear timeline. Throughout time, events occur that are viewed to be significant, and subsequent events will occur that can be linked back to the first event and the two pieces will be connected. In other words, the path of the story became the focal point of my interest in storytelling because the heart of the story came from the people who kept the memory alive. Then, the next person who passed down the story was somehow affected enough to want to keep the memory alive for another period of time. Similarly with my artwork, to reach just one individual and have your art remembered through time becomes the goal; to touch a viewer on an emotional level is incredible because it means that an idea has been communicated.

The four pieces in the middle of the Introduction Wall (*Figures 2-5*) demonstrate three-dimensional paintings replacing a two-dimensional canvas, creating a new kind of surface. These four pieces were the first completed wood pieces finished in late January 2003. Previous to these pieces, I had presented my advisor the beginnings of “The Seven Sister’s Family Tree” and he suggested talking to another student about laser woodcutting resources. This student previously worked at The ToyCrafter, a company in Rochester that creates puzzles and three-dimensional works. I contacted them and set up an appointment.

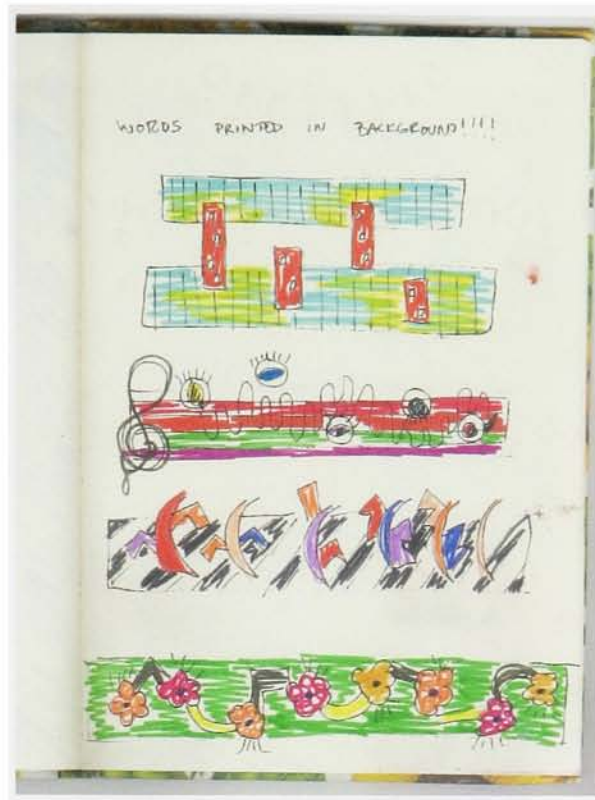


Figure 8
 Sketch for "Building Blocks, All Seeing Eyes, Dancing Moons, and Flower Power"
 6 x 10"
 marker on paper

The possibility of a laser cutting wood appealed to me. It would eliminate time spent jig sawing, not to mention the mess and space to set up a studio. So I began to sketch out simple repetitive shapes for cutouts using a laser. These repetitive shapes created patterns in each sketch, producing a textural pattern overall. These sketches shaped my next approach. The four pieces in the middle, *Figures 2-5* were originally one sketch seen in *Figure 8*. *Figure 9* shows the order *Figures 2-5* were hung in the exhibition.



Figure 9
Introduction wall Thesis Exhibition
"Figures 1-7"



Figure 10
"Stars in Space" sketch
5 x 8"
marker



Figure 11
"Hearts in Space" sketch
5 x 8"
marker

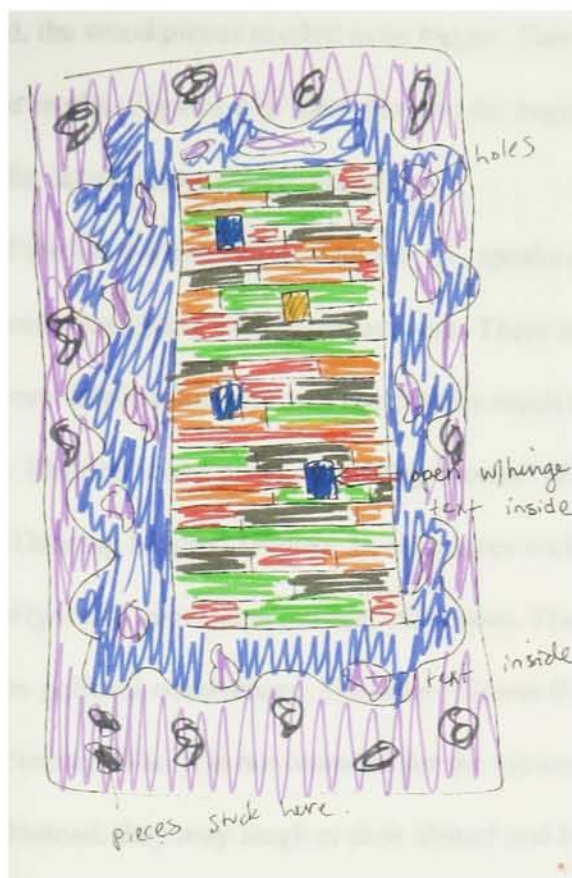


Figure 12
 “Hinged Words” sketch
 5 x 8”
 marker

I originally sketched *Figures 8, 10, 11, 12* thinking that perhaps someone else would cut them. Worried about time constraints, I hesitated to use a laser for my thesis work. Even if The Toycrafter assured me they could make the cuts, the following steps would still need completion: move tiny bits of wood into my basement, gesso the cutouts, repaint them, then glue everything together. These lengthy steps outweighed the benefits. Too many unknown variables meant that too much time would be lost, so I decided to conquer my fear of working with wood and cut the pieces myself. As I began to work, I had to deviate significantly from my original plan. To cut

out the tiny shapes by hand, the wood pieces needed to be bigger. This adapted the original sketch in *Figure 8* into four works, *Figures 2-5*. They became the beginning links between the definition of folklore and the act of telling stories visually.

The Introduction of the Thesis Exhibition, *Figures 1-7*, speaks about the culture represented in folklore by communicating with visual artwork. There is often a larger message behind my artwork at the core. My inspirations may not entirely reach the viewer, however, they have meaning nonetheless. The first wood panel, “Building Blocks” (*Figure 2*), references architecture. The second, “Dancing Moons” (*Figure 3*), references social culture. The third piece, “All Seeing Eyes” (*Figure 4*), represents musical influences. The final piece, “Flower Power” *Figure 5*, references political occurrences. The term “Flower Power” originated during the hippie protests of the Vietnam War. It is not intended for the viewer to comprehend the meaning behind the titles. Instead, they may laugh at their absurd and humorous nature. An overall view of what these four pieces hope to accomplish is stated in text on the adjacent wall of the room. The cutout shapes are just wood shapes, layered on top of each other to create depth. Similarly, folklore stories essentially break down into shapes because they are fragments of information that fit into a larger puzzle of events. Both folklore and the cutout shapes fit together any way that you want to arrange them. In *Figures 2-5*, the words in the background are collage pieces of newspaper. When selecting the pieces I was more interested in color than words. The words simply represent the communication of the tale, whether the story be told through newspaper, orally, or painted image.

“Stars in Space” (*Figure 1*) and “Hearts in Space” (*Figure 6*) frame the outside of the six-panel Introduction wall. They provide the same basic concepts of shapes and the space between them as in *Figures 2-5*. These pieces reshape traditional painting canvas, which normally

contains the painting within the four sides of the canvas. For example, in “Stars in Space”, I chose to extend the stars off the board. I made the same kind of extension when the track-like shape hangs off the board in “Hearts in Space”. Hence, that is why I titled these pieces with the word “....Space.” This idea of space is most important here, not only to extend the work off the board, but also to create a physical space around the raised wood shapes. A positive and negative space emerges by using a three-dimensional painting creating the illusion of air and openness. This empty space is just as important as the space filled with physical shapes.

The attempt to redefine the shape of the canvas was reached by creating a three-dimensional surface seen as a painting. Wood, as a medium, offered a natural solution to this challenge of reshaping the canvas. The use of paper or canvas material would have required advanced woodworking skills because I wanted curved edges like the clouds in “The Flying Allens.” I felt confident that I could reshape the canvas by layering cutouts one on top of the other to achieve this goal. I bought a jigsaw and began to carve using poplar, birch, and luan plywood.

Two-Dimensional Inspiration

There were many influences that inspired me to create my textural three-dimensional paintings. At first I began looking at two-dimensional artwork like, Treasures of Asia Persian Painting, text by Basil Gay. Persian painting often references stories of a cultural history. While these works fulfilled a decorative function, they also served a religious function as well. During the 4th and 6th centuries, Persian culture was extremely religious and since easel painting was unknown, calligraphy and miniature painting emerged. The paintings often place calligraphy

inside the image as seen in *Figure 13*. This text identifies Persian painting with its specific time period.

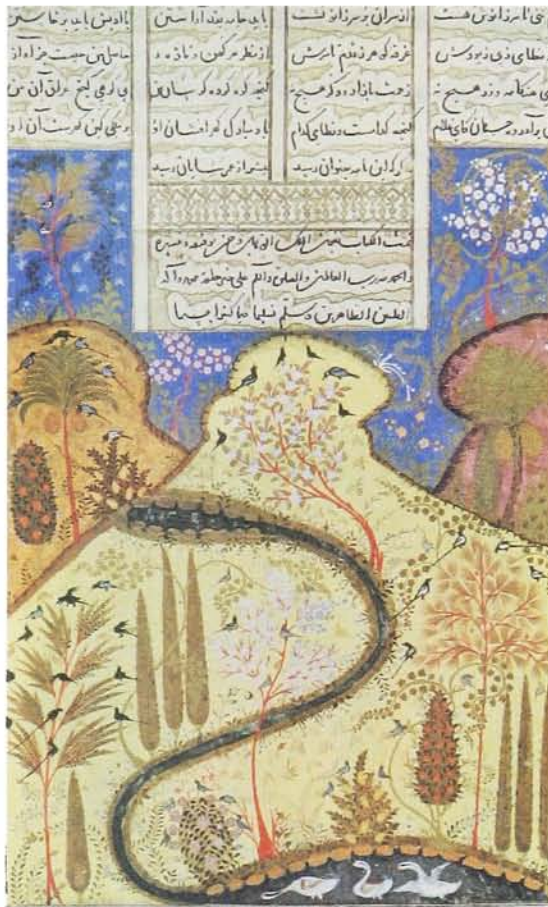


Figure 13
Bihbahan Fars, 1398
“Anthology: Mountains and Streams” 6.75 x 5”

The text in the Persian painting distinguishes it, yet also camouflaged from the viewer, it blends as a pattern in the sky. The text becomes just another repetitive shape. There is a harmony between the patterns in the painting and the calligraphy text. Neither shape dominates the eye; they work together, consistently throughout the painting. These repetitive shapes create the depth on a two-dimensional surface. The colors are vivacious and the design of the piece aids the depth

of the painting. I wanted to take these two-dimensional ideas of text and pattern and transform them into a painting with a three-dimensional surface.

Russian paintings also displayed this kind of depth on a two-dimensional surface. I researched Russian fairy tales because the story was told not only in a text, but also painted on a miniature ceramic vessel.

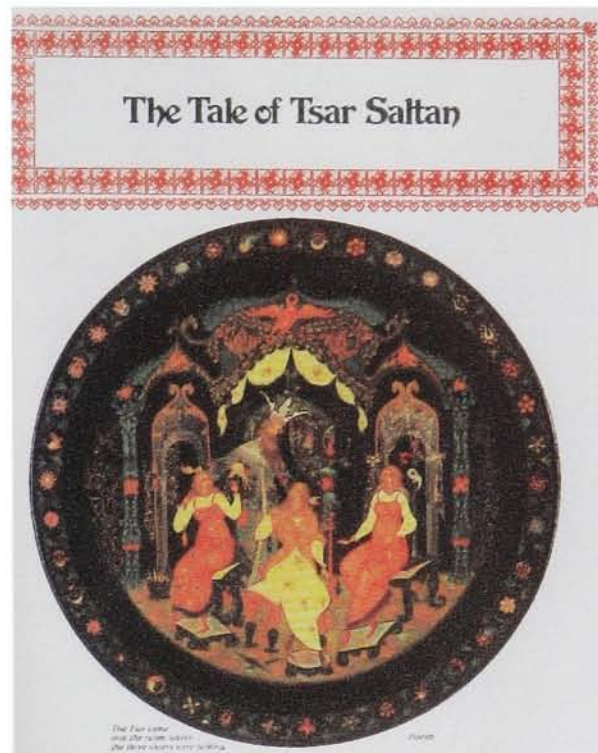


Figure 14
Alexander Pushkin
laquer paint on ceramic vessel

The backgrounds are usually black and have a border, enclosing the story. Similarly to Persian painting, the layers of the painting are created with patterns.

For example, in *Figure 14*, the black background is kept in the far back as the ground. Then the women's dresses also have another pattern. The palette is similar in each plane and very limited in the overall painting. This limited palette allows for the pattern and shape to not be

overpowered. Both elements live agreeably in the piece and the story is told in words while the painting constructs a visual image. These moments construct a mystical quality created by the painter, making the viewer desire to read the text, thereby linking the story to the painting.²

The artwork of Dorothy Iannone is more modern and the subject matter is often the nude with crudely drawn figures. In *Figure 15*, parallels can be seen through the same use of pattern and bright color. In this piece, the color is applied as a flat, solid, tone in a limited palette.

² Dieter Roth and Dorothy Iannone published Dieter and Iannone, a book of correspondence between the two artists. This book expanded the way I thought about text in art. This artwork creates a journal for the artists, using postcards and painting several years of their lives. The text was handwritten, giving a more casual feel compared to the Persian and Russian paintings. All the postcards placed together in the book tell a chronological story as well. The book is broken down into sections. The first part illustrates, in pen and ink, the story of how these two people met. The second part introduces postcards to represent their correspondence and exchange of ideas via mail.



Figure 15
Dorothy Deiter 1971
"Singing Box"
52 x 34 x 26cm

The colors in *Figure 15* play with complementary colors. For example, the red and green carpet in the background as well as the sky in contrast the orange wall. These contrasts are magnified by the pattern within each area. The carpet's stripes are chaotic compared to the circular dots in the orange wallpaper. The hair of the woman follows this circular pattern in her hair while the man's body and woman's stocking follows the line pattern of the carpet dividing the piece in half horizontally. Paintings like this one encouraged my art's development of shapes as a textural pattern and conscious choice of color.

While still keeping in mind ideas for texture using repetitive pattern, I also wanted to introduce a childlike, free element to my work, so I started researching naïve artwork. Someone who is not a professional artist makes naïve art. These artists are not educated in art, however they sometimes achieve the laws of harmony, balance and human form seen in trained artist's work. There is a lot of pictorial experimentation. Australian Aboriginal, for example, artwork tells a story by using a pattern painting. These works are painted with sticks and hand-made paintbrushes. Lots of dot patterns and animals play a large role in the folklore of their stories. These artists never reveal the meaning behind the artwork, except to pass the story down in their tribe. Naïve art may also include artists such as Miro, Rousseau, Max Jacob, and Max Ernst who use a folk, primitive style.

Adolf Wolfli used primitive patterns in his artwork by combining all aspects of his life into a postmodern era. For example, in *Figure 16* he uses music notes in his works as a pattern, establishing a rhythmic flow on the canvas. Wolfli uses repetition of the same objects and figures to place order in the composition and emphasis on the meaning of the painting. While the colors are bright and cheery and the painting appears organized, the content beneath the surface responds to a deep-seated disorder burdened with sex and violence.



Figure 16
Adolf Wolfli 1911
"General View of Island Neveranger"

Wolfli also kept written poems along with his musical compositions, which interested me because of the narrative element. His paintings create imaginary worlds so elaborate they seem to really exist. He also uses shading devices such as cross-hatching, dots, and stripes to make each form stand out individually. By these patterns the viewer sees light and dark contrast. I used a similar method in "Fetus," *Figure 17* where every section that has writing is broken down into its own section and a pattern is placed inside, giving life to each space. In this painting I used the repetition of words to make a textural pattern. Wolfli's pictorial world struggles between chaos versus order. The majority of his compositions are centered in the middle of the page giving it organization. The composition is carefully laid out and drawn. Then each section receives

attention and his statement comes to life.

Figures 2-5 of the Introduction wall expand on this idea of repetitive word use. Instead of actually writing the pattern of words on the canvas like “Fetus”, the background collage uses newspaper text for this function. The words themselves are somewhat hidden and there is no meaning behind the choice of words, only random selections. This example of works shows how words can be used to achieve a rhythmic pattern in a similar manner to Adolf Wolfli.

Categories for the paintings

After reading my sources, I had to understand the story’s commonalities to choose which stories to represent. All the stories were colorful and that made the decision difficult. I asked myself, how do these stories fit into groups? Which categories do I want to represent? Why do these stories interest me enough to tell other people? How does folklore come alive? These were complicated, puzzling questions. The folklore that I investigated appeared to fit into three categories, each consisting of different strengths. The first category relives catastrophic events. These stories are remembered based on their unusual and disturbing details. “Baby Boy Murphy” and “Columbia” both fit into this category. The second category is based on fame and fortune. Usually in these cases, the stories are success stories of hard working people, and their rise to fame; the money they make in the process. The examples of this category are Rattlesnake Pete, the Sutherland Sisters, and The Flying Allens.

The third category is a significant person who influences history. That person’s life introduces another story and the fame given to the place creates a sense of civic pride in that community. For example, Clara Barton and the first International Red Cross fit into this category. Clara’s story introduces Dr. Jackson’s “House on the Hill” in Dansville, NY. That story then continues on a different path and leads the original tale in a different direction. I concluded

that many of the stories developed because of social status of the characters. The more people that recognized the name they were hearing in the tale and associate it with a person, the more likely the story would survive.

In today's society the same thing happens when the public gossips about celebrities. We talk about these celebrities as if we know them. In reality, our knowledge is just gossip with no verification. To pass on the story and gossip of famous people is far more interesting than what the neighbor did yesterday. The narrators spinning these stories might be a relation of someone important in the story. Due to this distant relative, they would gain credibility among its listeners. These stories are often linked to family trees. The idea of family trees spawned "The Seven Sister's Family Tree" painting. This idea of passing down fame and fortune through families, distant relatives, or history of a place became the second section of the Thesis Exhibition.

The First Story



Figure 17
"Fetus"
30 x 36"
watercolor with ink

One of the most interesting parts of the folklore scouting process was the magnetism drawing me to the stories. It was enlightening to reflect on how the stories captured my attention. For example, the first story caught me while watching the movie "Agnes of God" with my mother. My mother asked me what was the basis of the movie. I responded that the plot of the movie followed a nun who gave birth and then strangled the baby. After watching the movie, my mother told me this plot was based on a true, local story. Sister Maureen was a nun of the Sister's of Saint Joseph, part of Nazareth College. I instantly became fascinated by the reality of the gruesome events, making this event another example of how art imitates life. I began asking different people from various age groups if they had ever heard of the story. Most people in the mid-forty age group who had lived in Rochester at that time remembered. But one of my co-workers, Barbara Rotolo, shared an interesting insight. She had been working as a secretary to a physiologist who had studied the case file. She told me she would lend me a fiction book based on the case. So I began to read, Unholy Child, by Catherine Breslin.

On April 27, 1976 Maureen Murphy was rushed to the local Rochester Emergency Room with severe bleeding. An 8-inch pair of scissors was found as they removed her bleeding body from the floor and loaded her into the ambulance. Hours after her arrival at the hospital, she delivered a placenta, confirming that she had delivered a baby. Later, the Sisters discovered "Baby Boy Murphy" stuffed in the wastepaper basket hidden in bloodied sheets. After the baby was autopsied, Dr. Edland concluded that the baby had died of asphyxiation (meaning the baby had been born alive). Sister Maureen was charged with second-degree murder. This painting represents the unborn child in the womb.

Sister Maureen suffered severe trauma during the birth process and remained in denial about her pregnancy even after giving birth to the placenta. She had blocked it out completely

from her memory. After the police began investigating, the story progresses into the courtroom where Sister Maureen's life became a checkers game. Facing a second-degree murder charge, her fate depended on the finesse of her lawyers. This case stirred up many controversial issues surrounding the Catholic Church and celibacy. Nuns are taught to reject any sexual feelings, but in this case, this rule was broken.

Importance of Text

After studying the artists mentioned earlier and reading Unholy Child, I was also exercising text placement in other paintings, trying to solve where and how to include text in the paintings. Up until now, the words were the last element I added to the painting with ink and marker. In "Fetus" *Figure 17*, the viewer has the traditional painting elements such as color, hue, line, value, etc. However, the words, or text in the painting separate it from the traditional. During this experimentation process I looked at many artists for inspiration.

Jean-Michel Basquiat's work interested me particularly because he included text, or graffiti seen in *Figure 18*.



Figure 18
 Jean-Michel Basquiat
 "In Italian"
 88.5 x 80"
 acrylic, oil paintstick, and felt tip marker on canvas

His use of fragmented phrases and repetitive words work as his commentary on contemporary life. There are no boundaries in his work and sometimes the paintings resemble the work of a child. Obviously, his is not the work of a child because of the strong content, concept, and the vivid colors chosen. Basquiat crafts a message for the public and voices his opinion loudly.

Inspired by these artists who use text as a vital means of communication through artwork, I set out to create my own paintings. In "Jessica's Story" *Figure 19* I experimented with placing the words over the surface of paint instead of designating a separate place for the words.

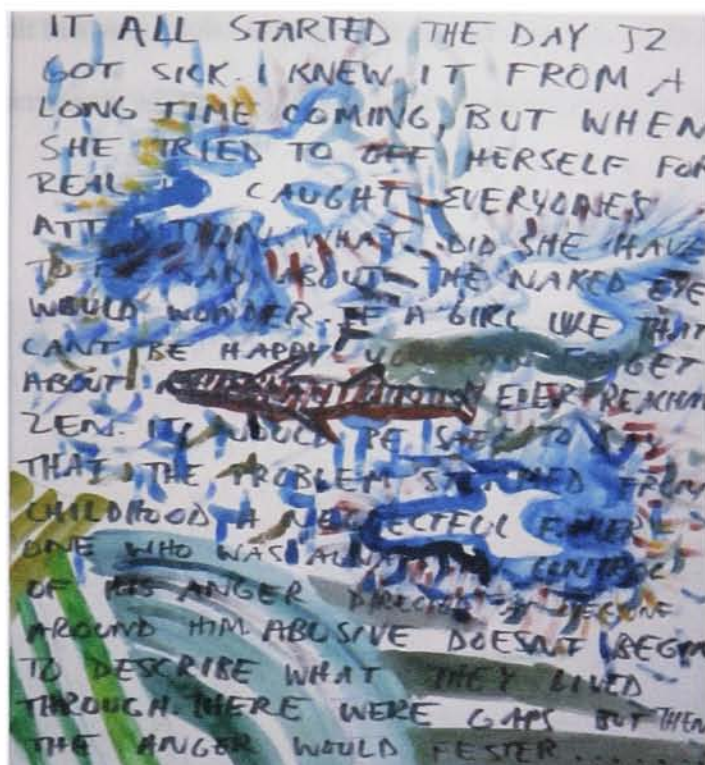


Figure 19
 "Jessica's Story"
 18 x 20"
 watercolor with ink

The words in the background create a beginning paragraph of a story as it might be printed in a novel and introduce the main character. The words were added after the painting dried with no regard for whether they were placed on an unpainted surface. This was a new technique for me because previously I always designated space for words only. There is an outline of a plane and aerial view from the sky. This story was a rather personal one. I sketched this drawing when returning on a plane from France. The previous day my cousin had tried to commit suicide. The text in the painting is the beginning to a mock novel explaining my cousin's life. Because the story was so personal and confidential, I am uncomfortable revealing the whole story on the canvas. I chose to cover up most of the written text behind the objects of the painting: the clouds, land, and the plane. In this way the words would weave in and out of the

painting. Overall, I felt this was a solid approach for the text in some of the thesis paintings. There were other experiments with words in paintings completed early in the first quarter of 2002.



Figure 20
"About Love"
22 x 12"
watercolor

“About Love”, *Figure 20*, places the words everywhere in the painting, but always above the paint or in the white space of unpainted paper. The words and shapes become symbols similar to the way Gottlieb uses this kind of hieroglyphic imagery in his work. The words come from inside my own head not from what other people are saying around me. You can see the words “FAITH”, “GOD”, and “LOVE”, referencing the nun’s story.

The piece “Experimentation 1” (*Figure 21*) was a wash experiment with the intent of including words only in designated areas of the painting. The words had the boundaries of the white paper, or the positive space set aside. Contact paper was laid down in all the places where

the text would later be placed after the paint washes were applied. Then after the paint dried, I used a marker to apply words that I heard around me in the classroom.

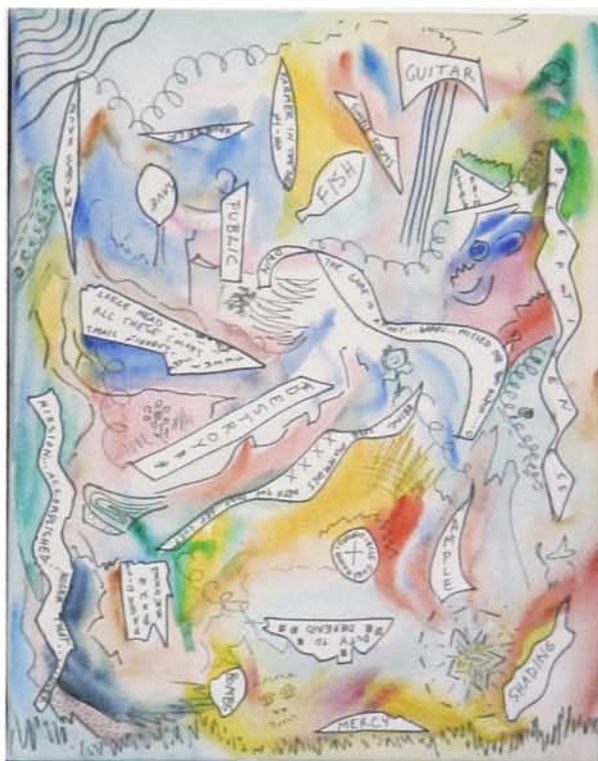


Figure 21
"Experiment 1"
14 x 18"
watercolor with ink

This way the words were random and not chosen by what was happening in my mind. Listening to conversation around me was an important part of making this piece. It is a technique of listening and writing spoken words, a technique previously used in my painting, "Harlem Church Scene" (*Figure 33*).

The painting "Experiment 2" *Figure 22*, explores not only text used as a pattern, but shape used as a pattern as well. Each section is divided off into its own part, much like Wolfli. The patterns are drawn into the piece before the paint goes on because each shape will have a

color of its own. Usually in one section, the color of shapes will be the same hue, while the background has its own solid color. These colors will counteract each other and push each other forward competing for space, giving the painting the same struggle for order versus chaos seen in Wolfli's work.

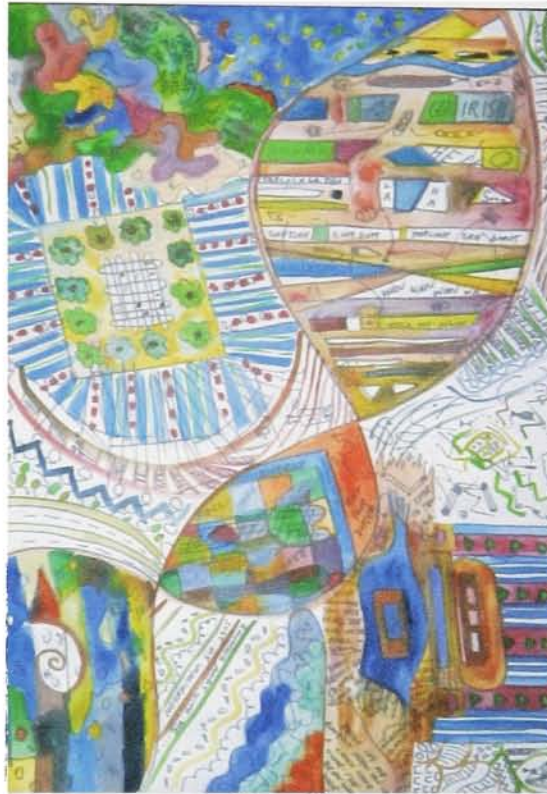


Figure 22
"Experiment 2"
28 x 20"
watercolor

Aerial photos given to me by Pixel Physics inspired the paintings, "Fetus" and "Checkerboard". Some of the photos are infra-red, some of natural disasters like hurricanes, and floods. Seen at such a great distance, the images are unrecognizable and become mystical images of color and patterns of shape.



Figure 23
Courtesy of Pixel Physics

I drew the bay's outline of *Figure 23*, in the upper left hand side of the "Fetus" painting. After this section of the drawing was complete, I was puzzled by how to complete it. I did not know whether this would become just another exercise with words or a real painting to include in my thesis exhibit. The canvas was still drying, so I left for a while and came back to my work with a new perspective. By chance, I left one of the infra-red irrigation fields near the painting seen in *Figure 24*.

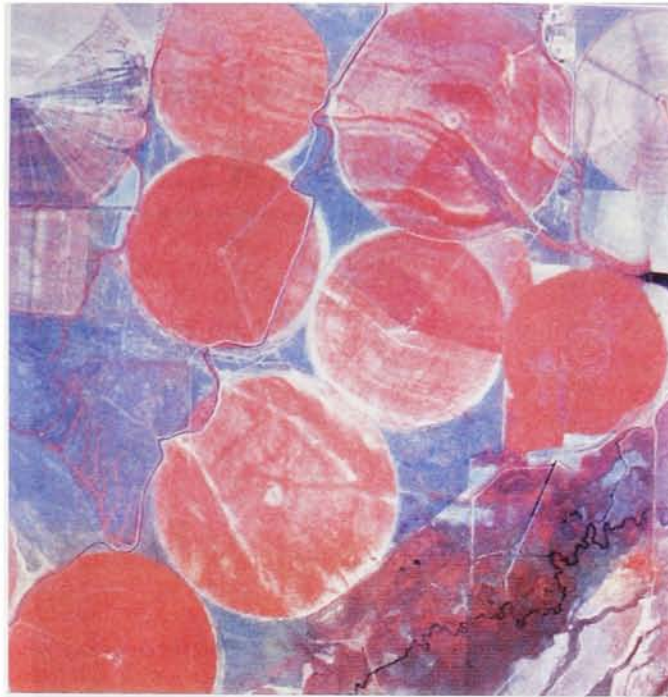


Figure 24
Courtesy Pixel Physics

At this point, I had finished Unholy Child. As the story soaked into my brain, I returned to look at the red circles of the irrigation fields in the aerial photos. Suddenly inspiration hit as I realized this was the fetus my painting needed. After I put these images together, the painting finished quickly. The canvas was still a little damp when I applied the paint in a wash with forceful gesture strokes. Laying flat on the ground, the words were placed from all different sides of the canvas, which is why some appear to be upside down when the painting hangs on the wall. In the story, Sister Maureen Murphy's pregnancy reaches the climax of disaster to her character. She had gotten pregnant as a nun, one of the most shocking details of the tale.

“Checkers” Influences for the painting



Figure 25
“Checkers”
30 x 36”
watercolor with charcoal

The second painting in the nun's story, “Checkers”, derived itself in a similar manner using aerial photos. The aerial shot of a field in *Figure 26* shows the infra-red color had been distorted because my desktop printer's color ink ran out.

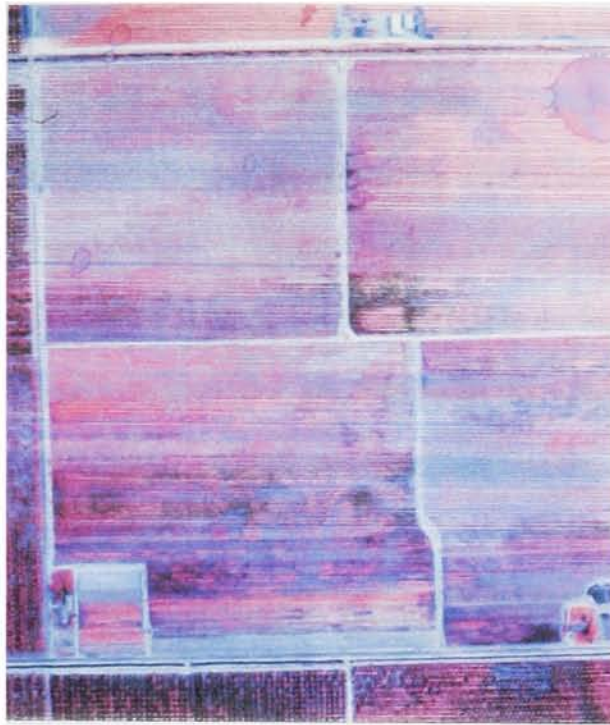


Figure 26
Courtesy Pixel Company

I kept the photo for one reason or another. In the photo, the fields are intersected with a vertical and horizontal line creating a cross-like image. This image is depicted in the painting with a thick charcoal lines intersecting directly in the center of my painting (*Figure 25*). This image resembles a cross, referring to the painting's religious nature. The little, charcoal, horizontal lines in the painting, represent the malfunction of my computer when it printed tiny, little lines all the way down the page. These malfunctions became "happy mistakes". While these images are taken from real references, the orange and black dots are where imagination interrupts the painting, representing the game of checkers. Checkers is a strategic game taught at a young age and simple to understand. The game is a metaphor symbolizing Sister Murphy's life as an object in the judiciary process. Her life became a controversial issue for society to judge. She broke her covenant with the Catholic Church and this left her dammed by conservative Catholics, the

Church, her convent, and God. I used charcoal to give the painting a raw, fragile feeling while the limited palette emphasized this feeling of desensitization.

This influence of using a limited palette came from the designer, Lucienne Day. Her patterns are all very restricted in color and reduce the chaos of shapes within each material. For example, in *Figure 27*, both samples of fabric have a solid hue in the background. Then patterns of shape, such as the ovals and lines seen here, are drawn over the monochrome hue. Lucienne's unique drawing over solid hue creates a texture that looks both two-dimensional and three-dimensional at the same time.



Figure 27
Lucienne Day, 1951
“Provence wallpaper”
hand block print

Past and Present: Controversial issues inside the Church

The story of “Baby Boy Murphy” is one example of how a past story can influence present controversies. For example, in “Hinged Words”(Figure 7), the holes in the board represent how you can see past events through the present. Their commonalities link these two events through

time. An example of this idea is celibacy relating to present-day controversy with the Catholic Church.

The summer previous to my thesis, I read a book titled Betrayal. In the novel, the staff of the Boston Globe documents Catholic priests who molested numerous young men. The Catholic Church teaches nuns and priests that sex is a mortal sin. The act of sex is forbidden, the thought of sex is forbidden, and masturbation is forbidden. Obviously some priests could not control these natural urges. The Church was fully aware of these priests' actions, but instead of addressing the problem, the priests were shuffled from parish to parish. Over two decades, \$1.3 billion was paid to silence the victims.

Catherine Breslin touches on the controversy of celibacy in her novel Unholy Child. One character in the novel, a former nun blamed the Catholic Church for depriving women of a natural desire for sex. She shared her own personal story of embarrassment when she was attracted to another nun. The Church taught her these feelings were sinful and should be erased from the mind.

The Catholic Church brainwashed Sister Maureen Murphy into thinking sex was a sin and she killed as a result. Murder is a crime and sex is not, but the end justifies the means when a girl has been taught since puberty that sex is a sin and must be covered up at all costs. A nun symbolizes a holy figure in society who shares a close covenant with God. When this ideal is shattered, the entire Church is scrutinized. In the novel, one explanation for the murder was a possible spilt personality, although this defense never appeared in the courtroom.

The book theorized that at the moment that Sister Murphy entered the convent two personalities emerged, one a nun and the other, a sexually promiscuous woman. This wild woman hid her life from the nun, therefore being more dominant. She blocked the sexual

encounters from Sister Murphy's recollection. This more dominant personality delivered the baby, suffocated the child, and took over Sister Murphy's personality during traumatic events, sheltering the more fragile side.³

Conclusions and emotions

The first story was religious in nature, dealing with controversial issues within the Catholic Church. Originally I pondered possible religious subjects for a thesis topic. One idea in consideration compared and contrasted Western religious practices versus Eastern practices. The paintings would reflect and explore from those differences and comparisons. Biblical stories relate to folklore because their validity is without concrete evidence, usually relying on blind faith.

³ The Sister's convent claimed never to suspect the pregnancy. Recalling, the previous months, the nuns reflected on the camping trip where the conception took place. The father turned out to be a local burnout and loser. Sister Murphy met him during her visit with her relatives. The nuns also recalled noticing her ankles swelling, but they said she always had an excuse ready. Oddly enough, the day that Sister Murphy gave birth, no one was present in the convent; no one heard any cries of pain. One nun returned to find watery, bloody footprints in the hall. Sister Maureen started the process in the tub and then moved into her room. The same nun found Sister Murphy in her room covered in blood. Later, the nuns discovered the baby in the garbage, behind a bookcase, wrapped in a bloody sheet. After the event occurred, everyone was shocked into disbelief. The Church claimed that if Sister Murphy had confided in someone, help would have been provided. The Catholic Church supported Sister Murphy for political reasons. They hired her a lawyer, who eventually persuaded the court of Sister Murphy's innocence. The head Sisters of the convent visited her to update her on the outside world. Sister Murphy was kept in the hospital for most of the trial due to her severe injuries and recuperation. During most of the trial she struggled to remember the traumatic events of her child's birth. When she finally recovered physically, she moved into the psychiatric unit of the hospital for examination. Hospitals maintain a very limited palette in their facilities. The Different colors play a role in the psychological recovery of patients. The painting's use of color reflects this idea of limitation and confinement. The colors are not just randomly chosen. This limited palette represents the world where Sister Maureen was caged controlled and examined under a microscope beyond her control. She was kept away from the newspapers and her memory would not permit it to reveal the events. After she was freed, she was moved to live in another location, almost as if she was demoted. Wouldn't a person think that after an ordeal like Sister Murphy experienced, she would want to live back in familiar surroundings with the sisters who she already knew? I would want to be around familiar faces. The nuns of Sister Joseph's basically outcast her in the novel. From their position, this nun had committed the cardinal sin of having sex. So it was no wonder that they shunned her. The sister's take the vow of celibacy promising no thoughts of sex. These thoughts are considered guilty in any way and break a nun's covenant with God, the vow of celibacy promising no thoughts of sex.

I have been raised Roman Catholic. As I have matured, certain aspects of Catholicism troubled me, such as the issue of celibacy, the widening gap between Rome and America, the use of birth control, and the treatment of women in the Church. At present I am a non-observant Catholic. My problem with a religious topic refers to my lack of trust in the foundation and power of the Church. I doubted whether I possessed the strength to explore something so mystical without a solid trust of my own religion. I wanted a mystical quality surrounding the stories, but I wanted more concrete evidence, such as historical facts or things I could actually see and envision from a reality-based story. As I sat and watched the movie “Agnes of God” with my mother, I knew this was the right starting place because the story was based on real events.

After I finished, Unholy Child, I went to Rundell Library to verify the story only to learn that the files on this case had been stolen from the archives. I continued my search through *Democrat and Chronicle* microfilm, but found no articles in print. Finally, I found an article in *Ms. Magazine* written by the same author as the book, Unholy Child. The Rundell Library file’s disappearance and lack of newspaper articles adds to the mysticism of the story.



Figure 28
"The Columbia"
28 x 24"
watercolor

In February of 2003, the *Columbia* spacecraft blew up as it entered the earth's atmosphere at approximately twenty-five times the speed of sound. Scientists have yet to determine all the factors contributing to the explosion killing its seven crewmembers. What is

our fascination with space and the unknown? A representative, Dave Weldon, comments, "We are a nation of explorers and we'll continue to explore the unknown."⁴

This painting was based on the *Time* magazine cover seen in *Figure 29*.



Figure 29
Time Magazine

This explosion was a catastrophic event that was all over the newspapers, radio, and television. It remains unexplainable that the space shuttle detonated. Plenty of theories try to answer this question, but it remains a mystery. A bigger question is why space is so sought after as a great unknown, the last frontier? The "great unknown" types of stories directly linked themselves to the topic of folklore. We have a curious society and unsolved mysteries plague our conscious. We want to know why, how, who, and when? The "Columbia" documents an event in history,

⁴ Jeffrey Kluger, "What Went Wrong?" *Time*, 10 February 2003, 44.

which will remain part of American culture. My recording of this event works as folklore because the world remembers this event and it will be retold orally through time. A generation ago, the idea of traveling to space and back was a curiosity, but not accomplished until the Cold War. Today we accept space travel for the chosen few astronauts, but doubt that we will find other life forms in space or that the common person will be traveling in space anytime soon. These curiosities about space allow it to fit into my folklore thesis.

One duty of an artist is to record events that occur in society; to be remembered through a linear pattern of history. The very notion of space travel, once outrageous to older generations is an unbelievable advance looked at as a piece of folklore. Can the public really picture, "25 times the speed of sound"? Can one picture, "entering the Earth's atmosphere"? These phrases describe the catastrophic event and the public accepts these details as truth based on scientific evidence. However, these phrases justify an unexplainable moment in time. Similarly, the Challenger space shuttle failed from technical difficulties in 1987. These explosions prove that this final frontier is beyond science's control. History repeated itself when the Columbia exploded.

The "Columbia" painting is categorized under catastrophic events along with "Baby Boy Murphy" and "Checkers". Interestingly enough, these two stories originate from two different directions of belief, which are then passed on in folklore. "Baby Boy Murphy" comes from a religious background. The disbelief lies not in the fact that there was a murder, but that a nun murdered her own child. "Columbia" comes from a scientific perspective. A space shuttle blew up from a technical malfunction. One catastrophe deals with bad moral decisions from a person representing God, the other a technical mistake. In both events lives were lost. Interestingly that these two stories should be paired despite their splitting differences referencing the beginning of time. The Catholic Church believes that God created man and the earth in seven days, while the

scientists firmly believe in the Big Bang Theory. The fact that these events are paired further supports a later theory: a story starts somewhere and ends in a place that is unexpected, which, in turn, affects that point in time once again with a new perspective.





Figure 30
"Slither"
30 x 36"
acrylic, feathers, chalk, oil pastels

Rattlesnake Pete was the third painting I completed during Fall Quarter. Reading the Arch Merrill series I found many quirky stories about social status and high-powered acquaintances. There were many stories about Presidents or famous people. Rattlesnake Pete was one character who fit this category of famous people.

His real name was Peter Gruber, although few knew this name; everyone called him Rattlesnake Pete. Pete owned a museum on 8 Mill Street, Rochester, NY from 1894-1932.

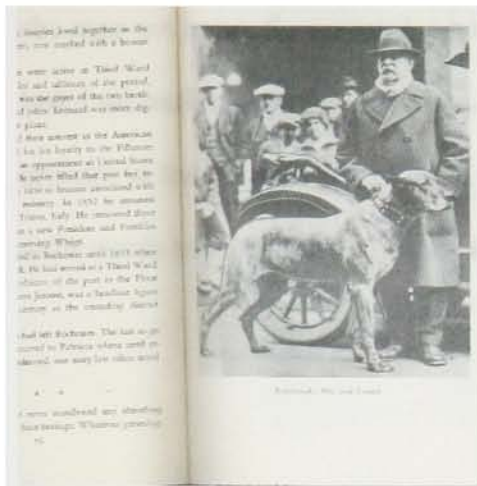


Figure 31
Rattlesnake Pete with his dog
Taken from Arch Merrill Shadows on the Wall

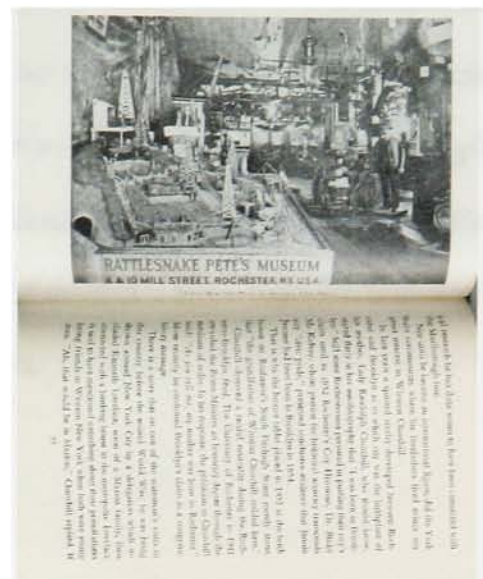


Figure 32
Rattlesnake Pete's Museum
Taken from Arch Merrill Shadows on the Wall

Here, he collected all kinds of historical treasures, such as the battle flag of Custer's last charge and the first electric chair. However, the more curious aspects in his museum were the tanks filled with slithering snakes. He took pride in catching and sucking the venom out of these rattlers himself. The extract from the venom Pete sold as healing potions and he became known as an expert regarding snakes. Rattlesnake Pete charmed Rochester and his personality lives on through the passages of his story.

Development of Slither

The presence of children affects my life greatly. My sister has a three-year-old child, named Olivia and we call her Oopie for short. Oopie and I are best friends and she often comes to play at Grandma's house, where I reside. I enjoy doing arts and crafts with her when she visits and on

one particular visit, she saw my blank, stretched canvas. First she ran over and jumped on it like a trampoline, nearly giving me a heart attack. I told her that she could draw on the backside, but she may not jump. So we sat down and I taught her how to draw snakes. When we completed the task I sat back and thought to myself, "That's it, Rattlesnake Pete!" I found inspiration for my artwork in the funniest places, such as reflected in the mind of a three-year-old. Sometimes an artist needs to relax and not force ideas on the canvas.

The concept of style

I still struggled with the text placement in the paintings and whether they would be present in the majority of works. I had done "Checkers" with a very limited palette and no words. This seemed to be effective for that piece. But I thought I would keep the words in some paintings as planned. "Jessica's Story" concluded that the words would weave out from under the painting. "Slither" is well textured with techniques like painting from the tube and the use of feathers, oil pastels, and chalk. The colors of the background and snakes are both bright which camouflages the snakes as they would be in the real colors of nature.



Figure 33
 "Jamaica Bar Scene"
 30 x 28"
 mixed media

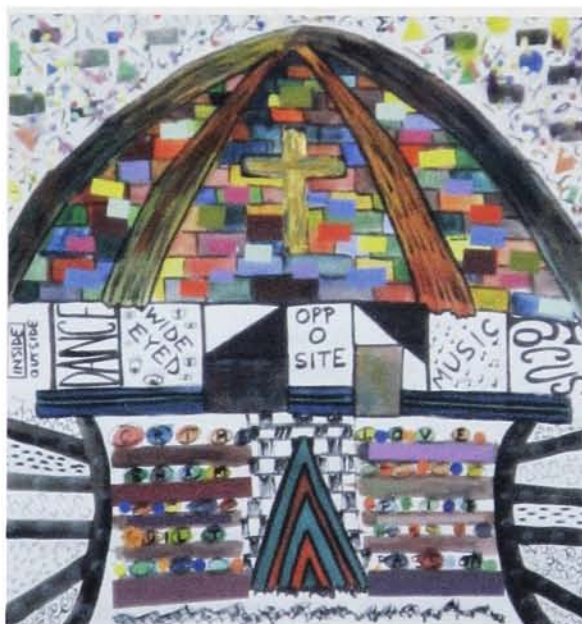


Figure 34
 "Harlem Church Scene"
 25 x 34"
 mixed media

One of the major reasons I like to stretch watercolor paper is that I can use mediums such as marker, oil pastel, ink, etc. These texture techniques were explored in some of last year's work, such as "Harlem Church Scene" and "Jamaican Bar". In many ways, Slither was just an extension from these works, but the text was a new addition.

Another artist who influenced the texture of my artwork was Zoltan Kemeny, *Figure 35*.

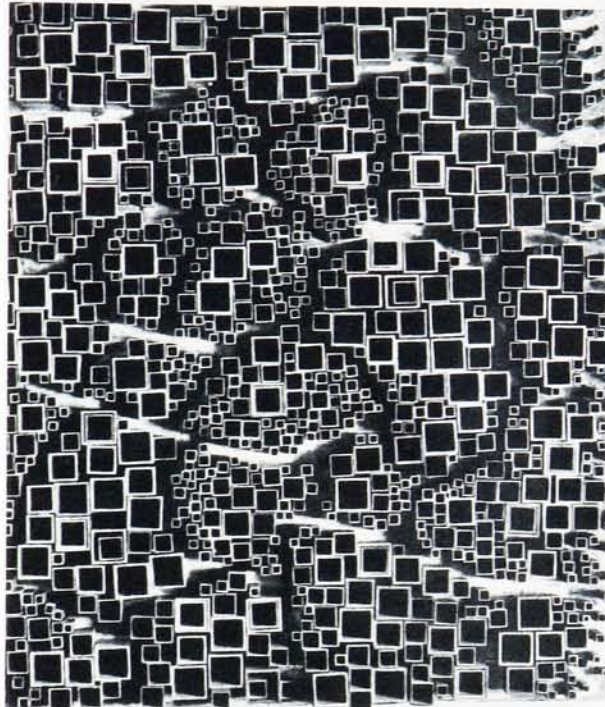


Figure 35
Zoltan Kemeny, 1956
"Chercheur d'amitie"

He uses materials, unconventional for painting, such as metals repeating one shape in all different sizes creating an organism of texture. His work has a similar feel of Wolfli where it provides a sense of order and chaos at the same time. Considered an outsider artist, his artwork develops a raw feel through his third dimension use of metal on a two dimensional surface creating relief sculptures. Kemeny's art assured me that three-dimension could be achieved with the right materials and the intent of hanging on a wall.

While I loved the textural elements in Kemeny's work, I also search for artists with extraordinary color as seen in Romare Bearden's collage art, *Figure 36*.



Figure 36
Romare Bearden
"Showtime"
collage with acrylic and lacquer on board

His color acts to distinguish planes in his art while also using the collage element in this piece, adding different mediums to traditional painting techniques. "Showtime" shows his jazz age influence, which significantly inspired his art and reflected the culture of his time. He stimulated my use of collage for *Figures 2-5* where I used newspaper in the background.

Every artist who influenced me contributed to the completion of my thesis in a different way. Each new painting that reached completion lead to new techniques for other paintings to explore. However, certain elements of artists show through more strongly in some pieces than

others. For example, I would have to credit Stuart Davis for influencing the color of “The Seven Sister's Family Tree” and “The Flying Allens.”



Figure 37
Stuart Davis, 1946-51
“The Mellow Pad”
26 x 42”
Oil on canvas

In *Figure 37*, Davis uses shapes chaotically scattered in his piece, providing its depth to be flat and three-dimensional. This phrase “flat and three-dimensional” appears to be an oxymoron. However, his shapes are flat if you take each one individually, but his shapes are layered on top of each other giving another dimension to the viewer. His shapes appear to be some kind of writing, however the only comprehensive words are the title, “Mellow Pad.” All of the shapes collage together creating a painting of texture and special depth. In my works the texture is actual three-dimensional shaped pieces of wood over a solid background. Davis speaks of his artwork, “That a picture must tell a story. This story can have a pictorial existence only through the artist’s concept of form. There are infinite numbers of form concepts available.” Davis

pushes the idea that a painting can create depth while pushing the planes together. In my woodcuts the planes are separated by a thickness of board, creating depth by two flat surfaces glued together and the foreground is glued to the background creating two planes of existence.

The Sutherland Sisters

This story begins the second room of the Thesis Exhibition, titled as "personalities of fame and fortune." Once upon a time lived the Seven Sutherland Sisters with the longest hair in the world.

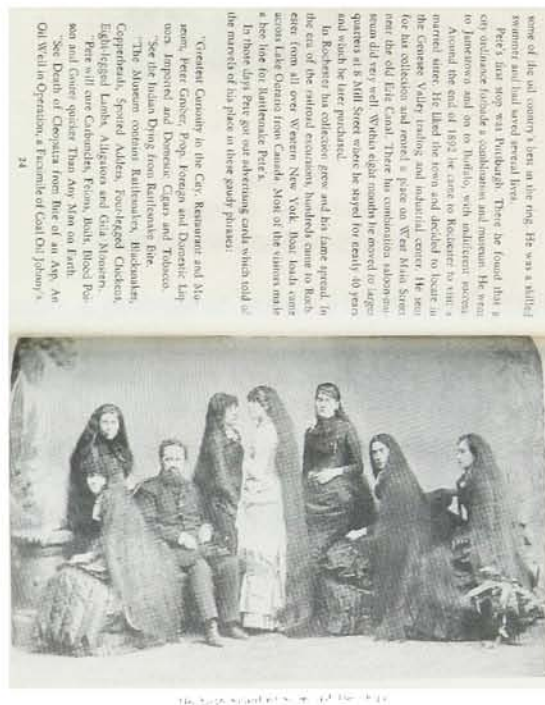


Figure 38
Photo of Sutherland Family
Arch Merrill Shadow on the Wall

To promote his concocted hair-growing potion, their daddy used his daughters as a marketing strategy. As proof of this potion's success, every bottle was sealed with a family picture. The

potion promised to grow hair seen in the *Figure 38*. The sisters profited handsomely from their father's hair tonic and they became a living legend of their time from the 1850's-1926.

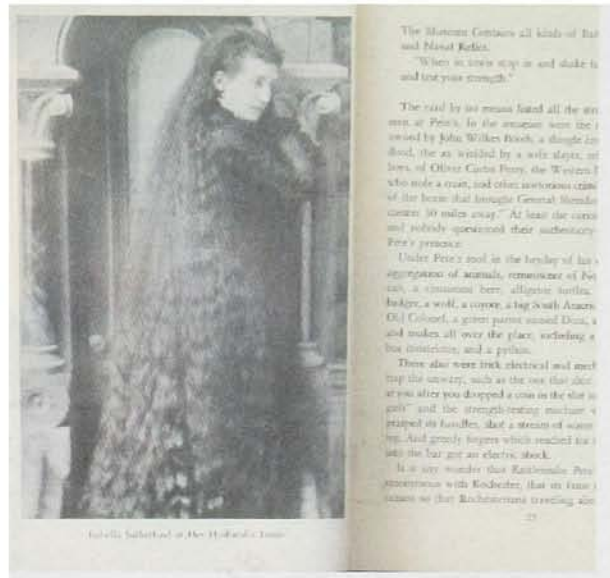


Figure 39
Isabella Sutherland
Arch Merrill Shadows on the Wall

When entering the room, a portrait of Isabella Sutherland greets the viewer. This three-dimensional work replicates the photo taken from Arch Merrill's book, Shadows on the Wall, *Figure 39*. The portrait painting is accompanied with real photos of Isabella Sutherland shown in *Figure 40*, the photo plastered onto the front of the potion shown in *Figure 38*, and an explanation in words.

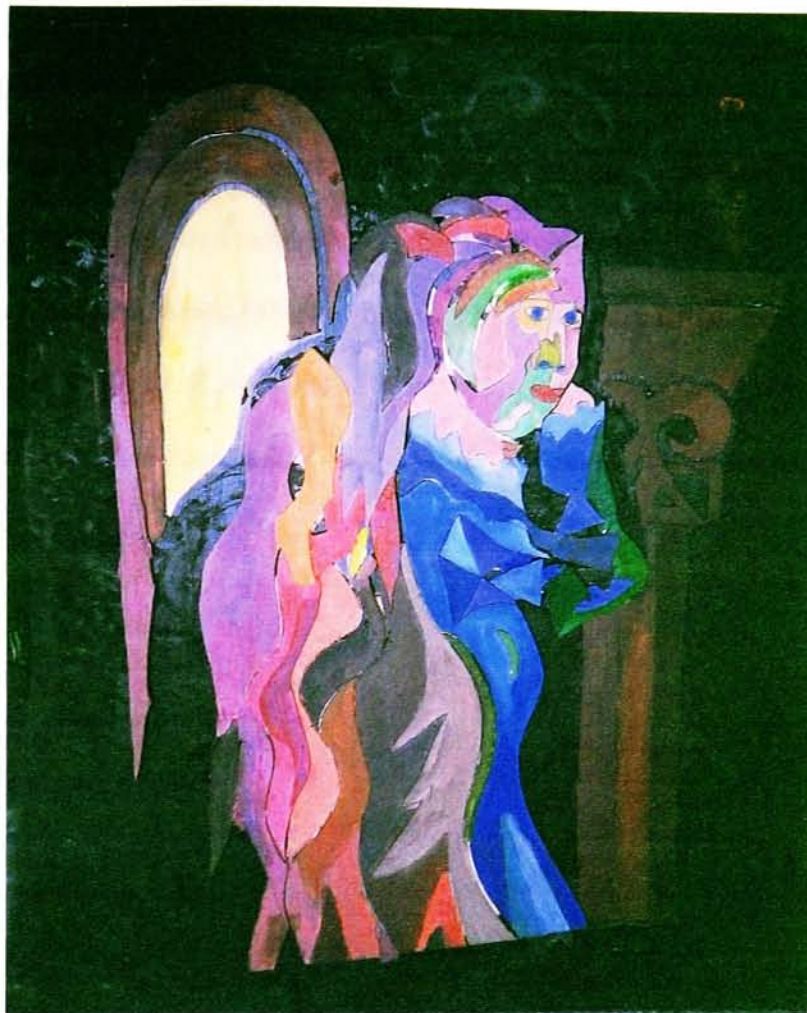


Figure 40
"Isabella Sutherland"
12 x 20"
laser cut wood on board

The following caption explains the piece in *Figure 40*:

This work shows Isabella Sutherland resting on her husband's tomb, which she had built. She met her husband, Ferdinand while on tour in San Francisco to sell the Seven Sister's Hair Potion. Ferdinand was known as a charmer and an excellent marksman and was always playing tricks. One day, he knocked a clay pipe out of a man's mouth with one sure shot. He was always

courteous about paying for any damage done while playing. He died of an overdose of morphine and Isabella built an \$8000 marble mausoleum in Glenwood Cemetery.

These photos presented crucial pieces of evidence proving the life of the Seven Sisters. Recreating this photo in a three-dimensional work was no small feat. The wood was cut by the ToyCrafter's laser machine. Being the only piece cut by a machine, it was considered an experimental process. I sketched a drawing of the portrait, which the ToyCrafter placed into their computer and formatted it to the machine sketch. Within minutes, the laser cut a 3/8" piece of board into tiny puzzle pieces.



Figure 41
Sketch of Isabella Sutherland
Marker

When I created Isabella Sutherland and Clara Barton, I kept Kemeny's influences about three-dimensional shape and pattern, in my mind. As I sketched Isabella, I divided her face, hair, and

body into simple shapes. These shapes would be painted individually and then placed into a three-dimensional environment. However, instead of creating textures for all the individually cut pieces, I knew bright colors would capture the viewer's attention. Jacob Lawrence's painting in *Figure 42* and David Larwell's art in *Figure 43* provided an example: paint solid colors on every



Figure 42
Jacob Lawrence
"Games-A Bid of Four Hearts"
24 x 18"
gouache on paper



Figure 43
David Larwell
"Demons"
152 x 213 cm
oil on canvas

cut piece creating a sort of Cubist effect. These two artists work also exhibited the childlike quality that I sought in my own work.

I returned home after the laser cut and primed the pieces with gesso and painted them in watercolor. Surprisingly, the small cutout pieces caused difficulty in reconstructing the portrait. I had two options when gluing these pieces together. One, I could place them all on a flat surface, which was easiest. Or second, I could layer them into a three-dimensional work, which I felt better demonstrated the ideas in the thesis. No matter how many times I put these pieces together, mass confusion ran wild in the gluing process. I used scrap pieces of wood to create the 3D effect to the puzzle portrait. Lack of planning for the base of the piece proved disastrous. After finally gluing all the pieces together, glue coated everything on the work and the entire thing needed repainting; I wanted to give up, yet somehow I pushed on. For the repainting of the cutouts, I used tempera paints. The background was still unsatisfactory due to visible glue. To

remedy this problem, I mixed molding paste with the tempera and swirled it onto the board.

Finally, the portrait reached completion with success.

In reflection I felt this piece was the weakest of the thesis, but experimenting with a laser justified the piece. I was glad that I did not rely on this process of laser cutting for the whole show because of the problems mentioned above. Also, more importantly, the laser could only cut the 3/8" board. This width would not allow the layering effect seen in the Introduction wall.

SEVEN SISTERS FAMILY TREE



Figure 44
"The Seven Sister's Family Tree"
46"x56"
tempera on board

The second piece in the fame and fortune category is "The Seven Sister's Family Tree." The family tree creates an imaginary place where the Seven Sister's dwell. Each sister lives in her own tree house and their fortunes hang in the moneybags surrounding the branches. Tempera

paint coats many layers of the branches and trunk of the tree. For the final coat, I watered down the tempera paint and poured slowly from a container and the swirls seen occurred naturally. As mentioned earlier, the tree was the first cut by jigsaw, but the last finished. The tree became such a long process because the outer branches and cutouts were so numerous. Looking back, I should have used the ToyCrafter for the hundred little leaves cut from luan board. These pieces troubled me from the beginning because they were hard to cut and once cut, blended into the mess on the ground from other scrap wood. These tiny pieces could not be sanded because the board was so brittle, creating lots of splinters.

One other problem with the tree was the moneybags. Originally, when sketching this idea, I thought the moneybags would be constructed using green tissue paper and then attached to the tree branches with leather string. However, once I constructed them, they took away from the integrity of the piece.



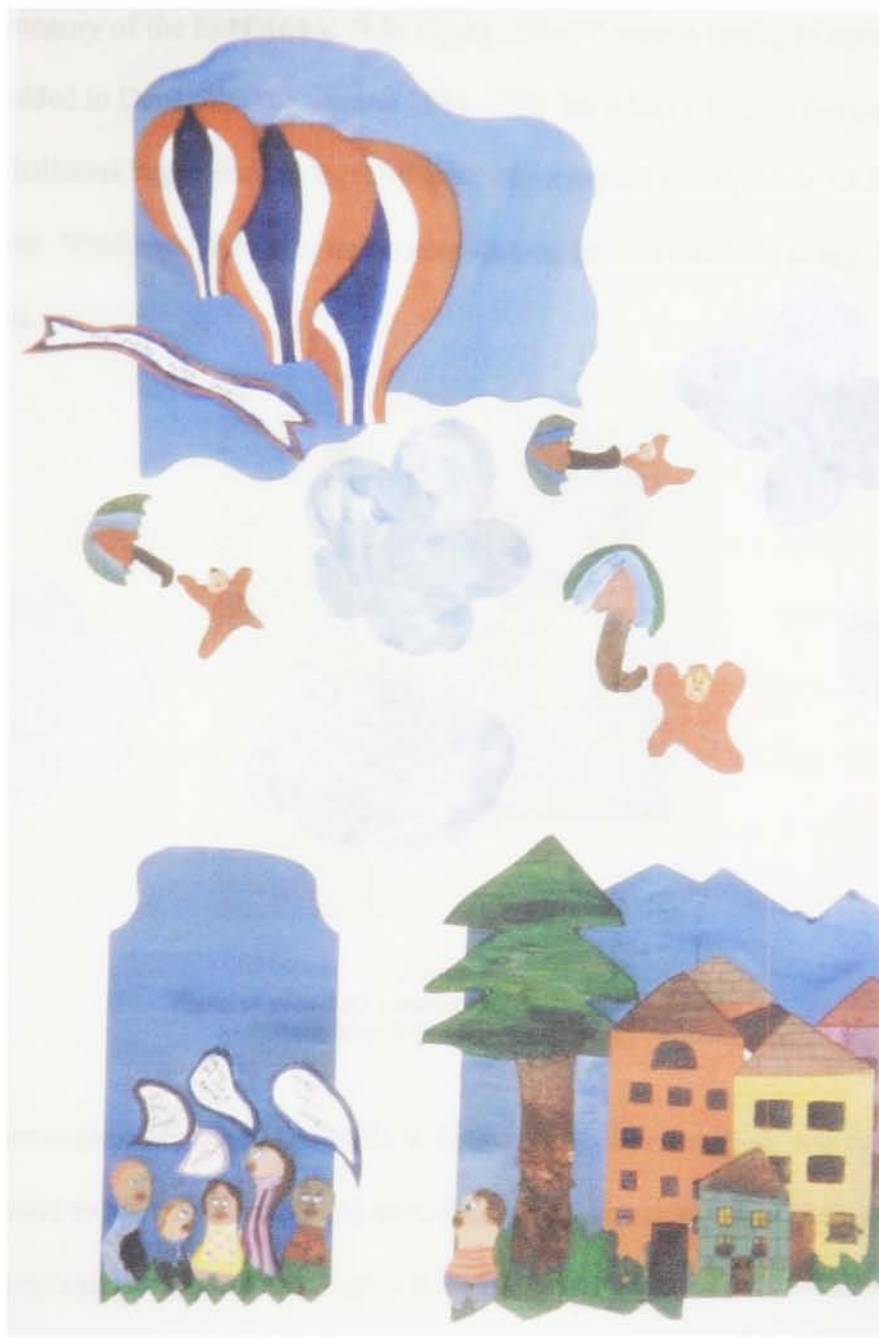


Figure 45
 "The Flying Allens"
 46" x 56"
 acrylic on board

"The Flying Allens" hangs next to "The Seven Sister's Tree", also located in the fame

and fortune category of the Exhibition. "The Flying Allen's" were a family of inventors/stunt devils who resided in Dansville, NY around 1844-1900. Ira Allen's interest for creating and flying hot air balloons began during the Civil War. He observed Union Army's Chief Astronaut, Thaddeus Lowe. "Professor" Lowe as he became known, created balloons to spy, from the sky, on enemy lines.



Figure 46

Photo of parachute constructed by The Flying Allens
Arch Merrill Shadow on the Wall

Ira Allen returned home to Dansville in 1866, but his love for flight was not curtailed. His enthusiasm spread to his two brothers and soon they joined forces to follow their dream of building balloons and parachutes. On August 8, 1894, three balloons ascended simultaneously. The third jumper, Warren Allen, represented a new generation of the Allen jumpers at only 18. On this particular jump one of the spectator's commented, " My, my, he's just a speck in the sky." From that moment forth, Warren was known as "Speck."

Origination of Story

The Flying Allen story, "A Speck in the Sky," was included in the Shadows on the Wall book. After reading the story, I was clueless as to how to recreate this story. When I am stumped on a problem, I often review and revisit the knowledge I have previously acquired. For example, in this case, I had just finished the entire book of short stories and begun to categorize them. The category for the Flying Allen's fit into the same category as the Sutherland Sister's Family Tree. They were both families who gained fame and status in society by inventions, the Seven Sister's invented hair potion and while the Flying Allen's invented balloons and parachutes. I began telling the Flying Allen story to a co-worker, Andrea Sundlof, in order to think about the facts orally. Ironically, she lived in the same town where the Flying Allens had lived, Dansville, NY. She claimed the Flying Allen's were still remembered and their story passed down to each generation and had made the town famous. She went on to tell me more history of Dansville, telling me we could visit the town together. She asked me if I knew the story of Clara Barton and the "House on the Hill." This is how the stories of Clara Barton and Dr. Jackson's "House on the Hill" found me.

Recreating The Flying Allens

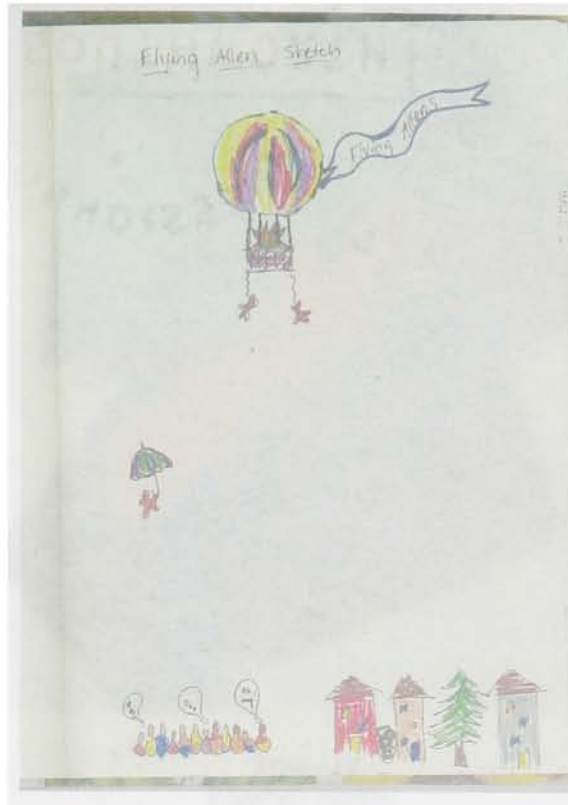


Figure 47
Sketch of Flying Allens

In my thoughts about the construction for “The Flying Allens”, I had two major concerns: first, I wanted there to be wall space in view in order to redefine the shape of the canvas as done in “The Seven Sister’s Family Tree”. Second, I wanted there to be a layering effect allowing three-dimensional pieces to emerge. For example, the houses are built on top of one another creating a neighborhood feel, the characters are gathered in a crowd by stacking the figures on top of one another, and the balloons fly off into space creating a sense of motion through the clouds. The edges of the board were not intended to be straight, but instead curved or jagged, breaking away from traditional canvas. Elizabeth Murray influenced this thought process by using an unconventional canvas shape in *Figure 48*.



Figure 48
Elizabeth Murray
"Like a Leaf"
99 x 87 x 2"
Oil on canvas

Next, I decided that the men and clouds could be cutout shapes stuck on the wall. Now all of my ideas started to come together and I had gathered most of my research and stories. I felt fairly comfortable at this point. One of the problems with wood is hanging the work flat on the wall. Unless the eyehooks are placed on the top edge with the wire showing, a board must be nailed to the back and another placed at the bottom with the wire and eyehooks. This backing allows the piece to hang flat on the wall. For this process I used scrap wood, which was an effective and easy way to solve this problem. All the wood boards are hung on the wall in the same way.



The “House on the Hill” brought Clara Barton to Dansville. Clara Barton founded the first International Red Cross in the United States in 1881 under President Garfield. She introduced this fine establishment to the small town of Dansville, New York, the same town of the Flying Allens. Born in Massachusetts in 1821, Clara became a teacher. In 1854, she moved to Washington where she worked as a copyist to the U.S. Patent Office. As the Civil War began to sweep the south, Clara resigned in 1861 to aid the wounded in the war. She quickly became a hero known as the “Angel of the Battlefield.” During the Civil War she also compiled and published lists of the deceased. Later President Lincoln employed Clara to produce an official list of missing Union soldiers for government records; she was the first woman in U.S. history to head a government bureau.

After many years of strenuous work, Clara needed some time to recover. Dr. Jackson’s “House on the Hill” was suggested as a getaway place. The “House on the Hill”, located in Dansville, NY, was much like a spa. Patients were encouraged to eat healthy food, exercise, and bathe in the natural water springs. This “House on the Hill” brought Clara Barton and the first International Red Cross to Dansville.



Figure 49
"House on the Hill"
36"x30"
watercolor

The "House on the Hill" was a resort for the wealthy. The House's philosophy linked good health to a good diet (including no red meat, sugar, coffee, or tobacco), regular exercise, and their secret water cure. In the present day, the "House on the Hill" could be compared to a spa. The water cure, or hydropathy, was an alternative medicine practiced in the mid-19th century based on the belief that pure water was the key to good health and long life. In 1858, Dr. Caleb Jackson opened his "Home on the Hillside." There were homes along the hillside

including the big one where families could stay and practice his preventative medicine. In the main house 300 people could live and be serviced. There were regular dances on the rooftop and social gatherings. Figures such as Clara Barton moved here in 1876 to rest and recuperate. Unfortunately, the original wood structure burned in a fire in 1882 and the structure was rebuilt in brick. The new name of the building became the Jackson Sanatorium. In 1868, a retired wrestler named Bernarr MacFadden bought the Sanatorium and it became MacFadden's "Castle on the Hill." Today the "Castle on the Hill" is quickly deteriorating and privately owned.

Waking the Dead

One of the more crucial ideas in this thesis is the proof of the life of a person or place. I visited Dansville, where the Flying Allens, Clara, and the "House on the Hill" existed. Dansville is a very tightly knit community where families have lived and passed down stories for generations. The first thing I saw when entering the town is Dr. Jackson's "House on the Hill."

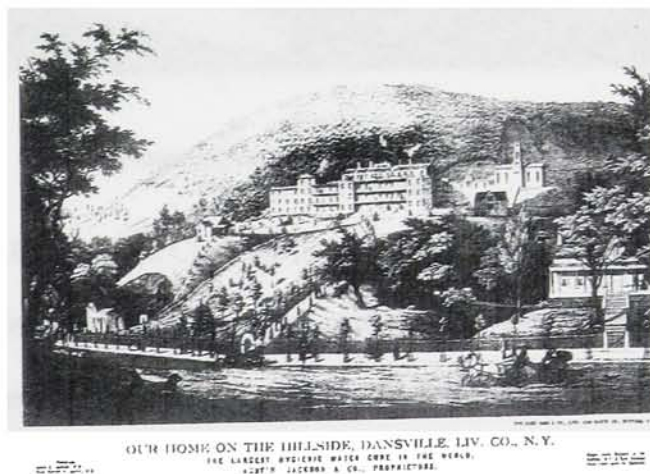


Figure 50
Original wood structure of "House on the Hill"
Courtesy of MaryJo Marks

There were beautiful gardens surrounding the landscape and a greenhouse kept up by guests. The guests were required to exercise to keep their bodies fit, usually in the form of a morning walk. Sometimes entire families joined in the House's philosophy. They lived in cottages made available to guest's families shown in *Figure 51*. Some of these cottages still exist, although they are rapidly deteriorating along with the House.

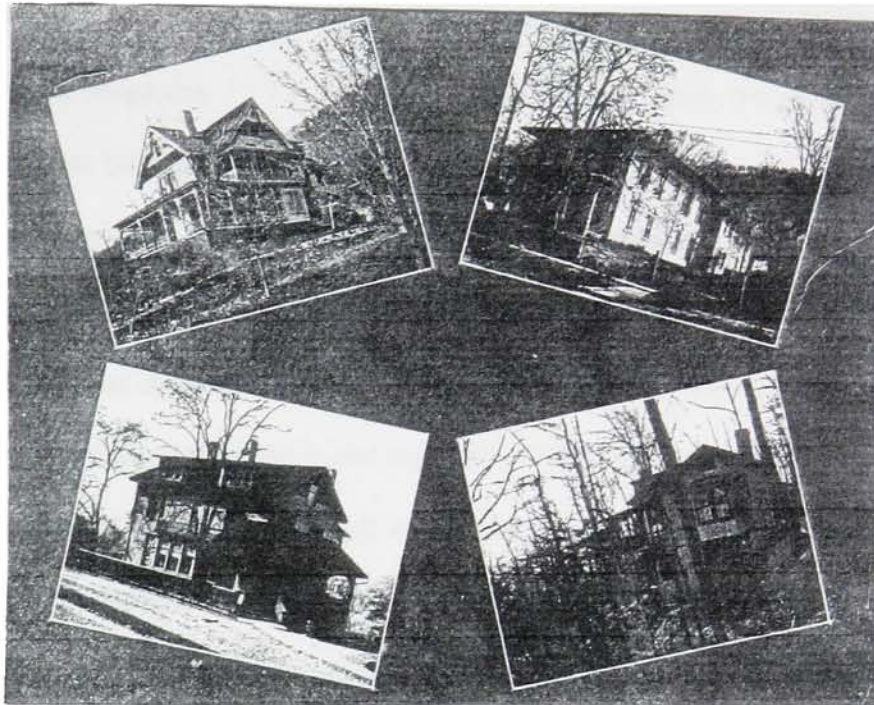


Figure 51
Cottages surrounding "House on the Hill"
Courtesy MaryJo Marks

The houses where Dr. Jackson and Clara resided have burned to the ground. Dr. Jackson's "House on the Hill" witnessed many important personalities such as Frederick Douglas, Susan B. Anthony, and Clara Barton. One may presume that the town sympathized with the abolition movement. An underground passageway which connects Dr. Jackson's personal house and the "House on the Hill" serves as more proof. Clara Barton's biography led me to the House's history, which uncovered these facts.

These two tales support my theory that fame can be transferred from a person to a place. Fame and money often attract attention from a public audience. The public consumes itself with details of who stayed where and when. Celebrity's lives are open for public knowledge and obsession, such as the life of Clara Barton. The "House on the Hill" gained publicity largely due to the personalities who frequented such as Clara Barton and Frederick Douglas. In today's society this fact stares us in the face as we learn who has bought which stars old mansions and at what price in People Magazine, E! TV, and many other sources. Again, the idea of gossip, the game of telephone are both consistent factors in these stories.

In my own obsession to learn more information about the house, I contacted MaryJo Marks, a local historian. Her great grandfather and family had once resided in Dr. Jackson's "House on the Hill." She showed me many artifacts from the house, such as dinner menus, philosophical booklets about what the house stood for, bills, new dress reforms, information about granola, photos of the cottages as well as original pictures at the time it was bought by Dr. Jackson. During my visit with Mrs. Marks I began to clearly understand what it meant to live at the House. I cannot thank her enough for the knowledge she shared with me that afternoon.

Our Home Granula Co.

GRANULA was perfected slowly by one of the most discerning and progressive men of his time in matters pertaining to the preservation of health and cure of disease. The experiments were begun at Glen Haven by Dr. James C. Jackson before he came to Danville and founded the great health institution on the hillside, nearly forty years ago. Here they were continued, and here he found the unequalled white winter wheat of the Genesee Valley essential to the perfection of the food, and here, after a few years, when his patients and guests and the ten thousand copies of his health magazine had created a far-reaching demand, he introduced the necessary machinery for its rapid manufacture.



OUR HOME GRANULA COMPANY BUILDING

The production and sale of Granula soon became an important industry at Our Home on the Hillside, surpassing the most sanguine expectations of its distinguished inventor. It had become almost unyielding in connection with the care of multiplying patients, at the time of the fire of 1882 which destroyed the old wood building, and therefore when the new fire-proof building was going up the exclusive right to manufacture the food was sold to Our Home Granula Company, which with better facilities in a new brick building has developed the business until its market extends to all the states and nearly every civilized nation.

Figure 52
Granola Factory Dansville, NY



The American Costume

Dr. James Caleb Jackson rebelled against the wasp waist styles of the ladies and the long tresses which were bundled into various hair-dos. With Dr. Harriet Austin he developed and advocated "the American Costume" as a healthful dress style for women which would allow a natural

Figure 53
Dress Reform 1890's

Technical for Clara



Figure 54
"Clara Barton"
8 x 12 x 5"
acrylic and newspaper on board

During my brainstorming about the Clara Barton piece, the importance of symbols ran through my head. Sometimes, a symbol can be as powerful as the written word. For example, the Red Cross sign universally communicates aid to the sick and wounded in time of tragedy. I felt that for this piece that the real International Red Cross symbol communicated its message clearly. In my readings, Clara Barton was described as the, "Angle of the Battlefield". I was awestruck by the visual power of this phrase. What a perfect image to represent Clara Barton and to associate her with the Red Cross. The three dimensional piece has shaped many of my other pieces. I wanted to create a gravesite for wounded Civil War soldiers. The Red Cross stands for a

universal time of reconstruction and devastation; it transcends time and honors all soldiers regardless of their specific affiliation. I originally was going to print a picture of Civil War soldiers using Intaglio Non-Toxic Printmaking Techniques. However, I felt that the image might still not be enough and I intended more of a symbol of what their gravesite represented. A stacked woodpile covered with newspaper and drizzled with red paint represented the gravesite. This gravesite represents a battlefield of the wounded for eternity. Clara, the "Angel of the Battlefield" watches the wounded from above.

Technical for House on the Hill



Figure 55
"House on the Hill"
Courtesy MaryJo Marks

MaryJo Marks provided this picture, which is hand painted in color over black and white photo paper typical of early postcards. I gave thought to building this piece out of wood. However, it would have been too difficult with the amount of time I had left to construct such an

elaborate piece and give it justice. Also, I felt that there should be a balance between traditional paintings and woodcarvings. This watercolor painting replicates an old picture of the Dr. Jackson's Sanatorium given to me by MaryJo Marks. This painting uses watercolor with ink and oil pastels as a top layer to give it more intimate details.

Afterword

In the future I would like to explore new directions picking up where my thesis has ended. This exhibition slightly resembled a book of stories accompanied with paintings as illustrations. This idea sticks with the thesis's theme, storytelling to an audience, a process that has existed since the beginning of time. The schizophrenic artist, Henry Darger influenced this book like presentation of the exhibition. This past summer his work was displayed in the New York Museum of Folklore.



Figure 56
Henry Darger
Untitled
22 x 95"
carbon tracing, pencil, and watercolor

The text of his novel was illustrated by his watercolor/ collage paintings. These works use a variety of newspapers, magazine articles, and other sources, which were traced and drawn into his novel. The most interesting aspect of his work is that he creates an entire world that is very real with maps of areas and battles. His imagination lived in this world and he believed that it really existed. Many of the artists that I gravitate towards are mentally insane or have some kind of breakdown. I believe in these broken down periods an artist's can create work uninhibited by the rest of the world. Darger was also an untrained artist, which is why he used the collaged material, instead of drawing. This lack of education in the arts I believe leads to originality.

Another focus for this thesis relates to shape and color. Some of the pieces in the thesis could be seen as installation works. For example, "The Seven Sister's Family Tree" and "The Flying Allens." These pieces contained many little cut out shapes hung separately from the core piece. Potentially, I would take this idea a step further and have entire gallery walls of tiny little cutout shapes each hung on the gallery wall separately. Some may overlap one another and create depth as seen in the Introduction wall. However, the scale of the completed piece would be enormous, covering the walls from top to bottom. The construction of this artwork would be done in the same manner as this thesis show, all jig sawed, sanded, primed, and painted by hand. Then these tiny cutouts would be placed on the wall, creating the puzzle effect discussed earlier. The imaginary exhibit would have different rooms pertaining to different themes. Perhaps one room would exist all in blue tones, while another all in red tones. One room might be ABC's, while another created chemistry's periodical table of the elements. The rooms would be grouped in relevance to each other and the viewer would step into an experience of color, shape, and texture. Taking this idea to the next level, sounds or songs might help to create moods within the

different rooms. Installation work, such as this imaginary gallery show, introduces a very new concept for me.

This thesis provided me the opportunity to choose a topic and complete a series of paintings within this subject. Focusing on a topic for an entire year is not an easy task. Challenges arise which must be tackled and solved. Surprisingly, this problem solving often opens doors of opportunity. These happy mistakes, which at the time seem to be life and death, become blessings in disguise. As I struggled to find more stories or an approach for a painting, each answer was found. The struggle cannot be rushed and the answer may take longer than hoped, but in the end the reward is the finished product. I felt a great sense of accomplishment when all of my work was hung in the Bevier Gallery because I had communicated these stories to an audience. I wanted the artwork to be playful and fun; a naive style yet sophisticated at the same time. It was important through the art to welcome viewers of all backgrounds to enjoy the stories and paintings. When communication level reaches maturity, my task will be complete.



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