6-4-1990

Body ornamentation

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

BODY ORNAMENTATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

As stated in July 1984, the purpose of my thesis work is "to create body ornamentations which relate to and which interact with the person in an explorative way". I believe that in man's search for his identity, jewelry has played a central role throughout history and across cultures. The adornment of the human body is among the oldest of mankind's aesthetic activities. In transforming the natural body into a cultural body, the individual is communicating, to himself and others, his identity, role, and social status. In this context, body ornamentations are not mere decorations, but tools of communication and carriers of information. They are powerful means by which man expresses and identifies himself.

My fascination with this theme is not only in creating body ornamentations myself, but also in the study of body ornamentation in different cultures, historical and contemporary.

In this paper, I will describe the process of producing the pieces, as well as their personal, technical, historical, and aesthetic references. I would like to mention how excellent the Wallace Memorial Library at R.I.T. proved to be during my research on this theme. Furthermore, I would like to express my appreciation for R.I.T.'s outstanding technical facilities, which enabled me to realize this multi-media project. Whether turning aluminum cones on the lathe, printing large Cibachrome color transparencies, or videotaping in a tattoo parlor, the equipment and expertise were available, and the ready access to tools, materials, and facilities made working enjoyable.

Most of all, I would like to thank my professors at R.I.T. for their help and support. It was in the interaction with them, in our discussions, dialogues, debates, and occasional arguments, that a creative, inspiring, and productive atmosphere was created. I would also like to thank my fellow students for their input and support. My

special thanks go to Jesse Goode for carving the wooden figures, to Michael Kolvenbach for producing the videotape, and to John Ericson for building the light-boxes.

II. MOTIVATION

In 1983, I came to R.I.T. through a scholarship from West Germany, the purpose of which was to enhance the cultural exchange between Germany and the United States of America and to contribute to the idea of international friendship. This was my first trip to the Unites States, and I was excited about the opportunity to study and live in a new country.

I had completed my undergraduate and graduate studies in jewelry design at the Fachhochschule fuer Gestaltung in Pforzheim, West Germany. After my studies in Germany, I operated a small studio with another designer, Isabel Hund, for one year. We taught jewelry classes to adults and produced our own jewelry. I also produced art performances in which my jewelry was dramatized by dancers, actors, and myself for live audiences. We performed in art galleries, art academies, and other places in England and West Germany. The highlight of my performance work was a piece presented to the British Craft Council at the opening night of their "Jewelry Redefined" conference and exhibition in London in 1982.

When I first came to the United States, I expected to continue with my avant-garde performances, especially because my work had been inspired by American performers such as Laurie Anderson and Robert Wilson. However, after presenting my first performance piece, together with Canadian student Eric Mosher, to teachers and students at R.I.T.'s College Union, I discovered that I was speaking the wrong language. The piece was not understood, nor did it touch any concerns or thoughts of the audience.

I firmly believe that everyone's work has to be useful in some respect. Even art work has to serve others and have a usefulness within society. This belief and my desire to be open to my new cultural environment and respond to it in my work was

stronger than the disappointment after the performance. I was now searching for new forms of expression in which I could join my European background and this new environment.

I chose the theme of body ornamentation and treated it on three levels: sculptural, photographic, and documentary. The result is the following body of work:

1. A group of three sculptural figures carrying body ornamentations.
2. A group of ten color transparencies dealing with the human body and light displayed in light-boxes.
3. A video film on tattoo.

In my mind, I had the following clear and distinct premises for my work:

- My work should be true to my European cultural background. I felt especially connected with the European avant-garde movement in the field of jewelry and body ornamentation through my own work from 1979-1983.

- My work should reflect my new experiences with the North American culture. Most helpful in this respect were the discussions in our Graduate Forum with Gary Griffin and Leonard Urso. I began to understand terms such as narrative and personal imagery, and their relevance in American art work. I became familiar with the concerns and belief systems, as well as cultural and subcultural issues, of my new environment.

- My work should make the best possible use of the outstanding technical facilities at R.I.T. This included not only the College of Fine and Applied Arts, but also the School of Photography, the Wallace Memorial Library, and other colleges at R.I.T.

- My work should have historical references.

- My pieces should be innovative, reflecting the time in which they are created. I wanted to contribute something new to my field, which could serve other students and professionals as a source of inspiration and a tool for their studies and development.

- The pieces should have an aesthetic appeal. They had to have a presence of their own and speak for themselves.

- The work had to be executed on a professional level of craftsmanship and, at the same time, exhibit a sense of experimentation .

- The work had to reflect the maker, myself.

In this paper, I wish to discuss the motivation, influences, and development of the work in respect to these premises. I would also like to evaluate the progress of their realization in my work and show the importance of my graduate work in the development of my professional career.

III. BODY SCULPTURES

The human figure has been a major concern and inspiration for my work as an artist and jewelry designer. Because jewelry is worn so close to the body, it seemed necessary for me to study the human form closely. I took figure drawing classes for six semesters at the college in Pforzheim. Drawing the human body forces one to watch it closely, to identify its proportions, and to find the main set of axes around which movement occurs. By drawing the human form, my awareness of it increased and I became more and more interested in it as a theme in the fine arts.

The human form has been a predominant subject in the fine arts over the centuries. I believe that the interest in depicting the human form by sculpting, painting, and drawing it stems from man's elementary questions about his own nature and existence.

During the first decades of this century, radical changes in the arts brought an astonishing imagination and inventiveness to the treatment and use of the figure in theater and performance. Italian Futurists were among the first to develop remarkable costumes which completely transformed the figure of the performer. The Russian Futurist activities began almost simultaneously in 1911 with an emphasis on face painting and the invention of utopian costumes. "One common impulse to innovation in costume was the use of their bodies to advance ideas for change and promote their dreams of a new synthesized art of pure experience". (14:8)

Dada and Surrealist performances introduced revolutionary ideas and manifestos to their audiences. Perhaps the most influential development in this field happened in the stage workshop directed by Oskar Schlemmer at the Bauhaus in Germany from 1921.

> Schlemmer's approach to performance derived from the movement of the human body in space...Costume was an essential element in the performances and developed from the structure of the body and its extension in space, but also involved playful elements of pantomime and circus. (8:9,10)

The costumes and figurines for his Triadic Ballet gained him an international reputation, as expounded on by Lee Goldberg (6:63-78)

In 1960, Ives Klein presented his 'live' painting Anthropometries of the Blue Period for the first time to an audience in Paris. He painted with live female models by pressing their paint-drenched bodies against prepared canvases. (8:95)

In the following Fluxus and Happening movement, it was especially the work of Joseph Beuys which became a point of reference for me. In numerous performances, he communicated his idea that life had to become art.

How the Body Art movement of the beginning of the century through the present has influenced the contemporary jewelry scene in Europe, can be seen in the catalogue The Jewelry Project by the British Craft Council. In this catalogue, David Ward states,

> Most of the objects in the Collection are conspicuous precisely because their formal, technical, material, and even functional aspects do not derive primarily from other or earlier jewelry. However, there are references to certain ethnic and exotic cultures (notably African and Japanese); the non-figurative art of the first quarter of this century; particular developments in performance or live art and progressive clothing forms. (14:7)

The Jewelry Project is a collection of works by 25 European jewelry artists commissioned by the American couple Mr. and Mrs. Knaupp in 1983. It includes

among others, the work of Caroline Broadhead, Pierre Degen, Susanna Heron, and David Watkins.

> The Collection is unified by a tendency for the works to interact directly with the human figure or clothing ...A further group of work retains only the potential or hypothetical possibility of being worn, but again, both form and the potential for use derive from the same source of a dynamic relationship of objects to the human body ...Thus the human body emerges as the fundamental key to the scale and size of the works. Once this is established, then objects tend to be conceived in relation to the body and not separately from it. The interaction of the object with wearer is the visual point which means that the traditional interest in fine detail and technical intricacy loses its relevance. This together with the emancipation from the use of precious materials, means that all together new dimensions and structures become possible. (14:7)

The first group of my body ornamentations is based on the philosophy as stated above by David Ward. Originally, they were to be shown on live models at the opening reception at the Bevier Gallery, however, I discarded this idea because it seemed unpractical. But I did not want to show the body ornamentations in glass showcases either, because they were made in such close consideration of the wearer, that they could only be shown on the body. I found the resolution to this conflict by building sculptural figures for the jewelry. The figures needed to be life-sized so that they would adequately represent the human form and function as a display system for the body ornamentations. They also had to have an aesthetic presence of their own.

I named the first body sculpture "Private Space". It stands 5 feet 4 inches tall, with a diameter of 8 inches at the widest point. The figure was cut from a walnut log

with a chain saw for a primitive and unfinished look.

The ornamentation is a neck piece, 36 inches in diameter. It is made from red-dyed palm leaves, black-dyed sisal fibers, and anodized aluminum pieces. The palm leaves and sisal fibers are held in place by the aluminum elements, which are anodized in shades of yellow and green. It is interesting to note that anodizing equipment had just been installed in the metal shop at R.I.T. and that these pieces were among the first to be processed with this equipment.

When this ornamentation is worn, it creates a private space around the wearer, preventing anyone from coming too close. This is in juxtaposition to the use of the color red for the palm leaves. Psychologically, the color red attracts a viewer's attention more quickly than any other color. The inherent, and ambivalent, message in the piece is that it attracts the viewer's attention without allowing him to approach closely.

As mentioned earlier, body ornamentations can be carriers of meaning and tools for the wearer to express himself. When I made this piece, I imagined myself as the wearer. The ambivalent message of the piece corresponds to a certain extent to how I felt as a person at that time. Artistically and personally, I wanted to be noticed and yet at the same time I protected my independence and need for private space.

Beyond these connotations, there is a sense of royalty in the piece, communicated by its upright stature, the red coloring, and crown-like shape of the ornamentation. The combination of the primitive and the noble gives it a radiant personality which speaks for itself.

1. "Private Space", body sculpture, 5'4" x 8" x 8", walnut, palm leaves, sisal fibers, anodized aluminum, 1985.

Body sculpture # 2 is built from roughly cut individual pieces of pine and stands 5 feet 6 inches tall. The wood pieces are held together by natural strands of cane and raffia. Another roughly cut piece of wood is tied in horizontally, representing the shoulders and arms of the figure.

All the pieces of wood used in the sculpture were found in the scrap area of the wood shop, except for the arm piece, which was specially cut for the sculpture.

The body ornamentation on this figure is a neck piece, 20 inches in diameter, made from various synthetic fibers, sisal fibers, and feathers. The fibers are knotted together with a technique which I learned on a trip to Africa in 1979. I stayed with an old woman artisan in Kenya, who taught me traditional African braiding and knotting techniques.

The piece has a primitive feeling, reminding one of tribal ornamentations of ethnic or exotic cultures. No metal is used in this piece and the way the elements are joined together underscores its primitive connotations. I named it "Scarecrow" because it is made primarily with existing, otherwise useless, materials. The piece has a preciousness of its own which comes from elevating the useless into the useful and the ordinary into the beautiful.

The feathers give this piece a fetish-like character. In the magical consciousness of some ethnic cultures, the psychic power of the bird is transmitted to the wearer of the feather adornment. I used the feathers for aesthetic purposes. Their bright green, yellow, and orange were welcome touches of color in the otherwise mostly black piece.

The black sisal fibers look like hair in the piece. Hair and feathers are materials which address the sense of feeling and touch in the viewer. This gives the piece an underlying connotation of sensuality and eroticism.

The beauty of the piece is achieved by simple materials and by simple technical means. It can also be seen as a statement against my high-tech environment and the ideal of beauty through technical perfection and machine precision.

2. "Scarecrow", body sculpture, 5'6" high, pine wood, cane, raffia, synthetic fibers, sisal, feathers, 1985.

Body sculpture # 3 is 7 feet tall and 8 inches in diameter. It is made from a wood core which is covered with coconut fibers, which came from a floor mat which I disassembled. They are attached to the wood core with Elmer's wood glue. The figure is mounted on a base of steel.

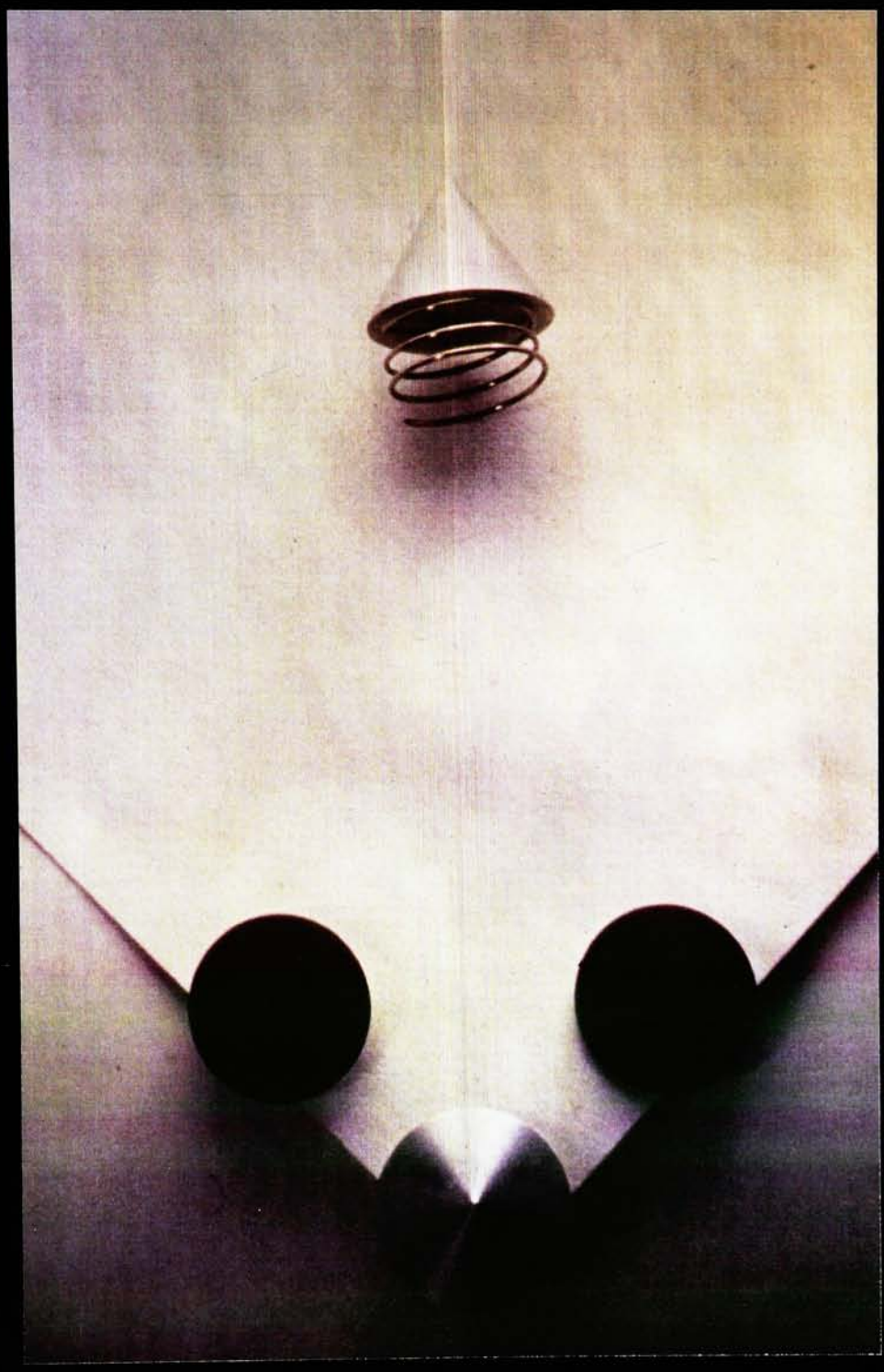
The ornamentation in this piece is a group of aluminum cones, 1/2 inch in diameter, which I turned on the metal lathe. Each cone has a spiral of stainless steel wire attached to its base which functions as a pin-back. The spiral allows the cone to be twisted into fabric or, in this case, into the coconut fibers.

These cones, which I call 'twist pins', are a conceptual piece and can be worn in many different ways. The wearer, provided he has several of them, can create patterns on his clothing according to his own creativity. The cones are designed as a module. They are like vocabulary. When pieces of vocabulary are put together according to the laws of grammar, they can form a sentence. The sentence can convey a message. The same can be done with the twist-pins. The wearer can make a personal statement by arranging them in individual patterns on his clothing.

When I first started to make these aluminum cones, I primarily wanted to learn how to use the metal lathe. I turned several dozen cones before I had a good feeling for the machine and the process. I liked the shape and the smooth, shiny machine finish. I was fascinated by how clean they could be turned off the stock material, with only a thin stem left which had to be cut off afterwards. By playing with them, the idea came to make them into twist-pins.

On the background of the rough coconut fibers, they look like they had grown there, giving the figure the appearance of a cactus. Just as divers wear neoprene suits and fire-fighters wear flame resistant uniforms, the twist-pins can serve as protection from unwanted overtures when worn on the body. In this context, this piece is similar to piece #1, both attracting the viewer and maintaining the wearer's private space.

3. Untitled, body sculpture, 7' x 8" x 8", wood core, coconut fibers, aluminum cones, 1985.



4. "Twist-Pins", aluminum and stainless steel, 1/2" x 1/2" x 1/2", 1985

IV. LIGHT-PAINTINGS

To allow the reader to gain an insight into the light-paintings, I wish to discuss them philosophically as well as technically. Philosophically, they are characterized as reflections about jewelry and body ornamentation as well as photographic images with their own aesthetic reality. Technically, they are a documentation of processes and experiments in the photo studio in which I explored the interaction between the human figure, space, and light.

> An image is not of itself, nor is it for itself. It rather springs from the thing whose reflection it is and belongs to it with all its being. It owes nothing to a thing other than that whose image it is. Nothing else is at its origin. An image takes its being immediately from that of which it is the image and has one sole being with it, and it is the same being. (10:107)

The first technical device which could project a vague image of a real object onto a plane was the 'camera obscura', invented by Renaissance artists. In the camera obscura, light-pencils fall through a small hole onto the opposite transparent plane in an otherwise closed black box. From the outside, this reflection can be identified as a depiction of the visible reality in front of the camera.

The technical-chemical technique of transforming the incidence of light into a usable image lead to the invention of photography in 1839.

In the conventional, or straight, use of photography, photographic images are representations of real objects, events, or experiences based on similarity of shape, proportion, and detail. The predominant idea in the art of the 19th century was the idea of naturalism. Therefore, photography, due to its main characteristic of precise

depiction, was, at first, a threat to fine art. Since photography achieved the same or similar goals more cheaply and faster, and because it even started covering such areas as portraiture and landscape, two prominent and exclusive subjects of fine art painting, photography was despised and regarded as unartistic by many painters, at that time.

However, despite their disregard, many painters started using photography secretly as a pattern to copy from. There is no doubt that photography, solely by its existence, was a main factor in revolutionary changes in fine art painting.(9:9)

At the beginning of the 20th century, the painters went back to a complete reconsideration and reevaluation of their means. They critically questioned their subjects and stripped away all traditional modes of painting until only the basic elements of painting were left: color and form.

This time of searching for new ground and a new philosophy led to extremely productive and creative periods in fine art painting, during which innovative methods of painting were invented and developed. These methods are the 'isms' of modern art: pointillism, impressionism, expressionism, cubism, constructivism and futurism.

The primary result of this revolution consists not so much of the paintings produced, but of the establishment of a new type of image: the autonomous image. The autonomous image has its rights and reasons within itself. Color is used primarily as color itself and no longer as a property of objects. Form is liberated from its function of outlining the shape of objects and is used just as form per se, in an abstract way. Much attention is paid to the interaction of color and shape within the composition, and to the aesthetic reality of the image. The focus of the modern artist has not only shifted in terms of how they paint, but also in terms of what they represent. They go beyond the surface to the essence of things, which is not necessarily identical with their shape or appearance.

The modern man, according to Pawek, wants to explore all the dimensions of an object, including also its spiritual, psychic, historical and social dimensions. (11:20)

In this change from the physiological view, which sees three-dimensionality and its geometric perspective, to the phenomenological view, which is directed towards the "multi-dimensionality" of things, lies the complete new orientation of modern art.

The reality of modern art is an aesthetic reality. The autonomous image challenges the viewer to develop new ways of seeing. Since the subjects of the image do not directly relate to the visible world anymore, the viewer himself has to go beyond his own sense perceptions. The autonomous image appeals to the viewer's creative and intuitive faculties. By relating the image to his own experiences, and through the active process of connotation and association, the viewer can decode the possible meanings of the image. Only through his creative interaction and personal involvement, will the image reveal itself to the viewer. In doing so, he experiences the image in a new way: the aesthetic experience.

The ability of photography to image the visible world was so stunning, that at first no one considered using it for other purposes. Its ability to document made it one of the most popular instruments for private and professional use.

After painting had gone through the radical change from naturalism to the abstract image, and had established new aesthetic values, it was obvious that photography had to re-evaluate itself, should it want to be recognized as a fine art medium. Because of the close relationship to painting, and the inherent conflict with it, it was difficult for photography to establish itself as an independent art form. Just as fine art painting regenerated through the use of pure form and color, so did photography critically evaluate its elementary means. Contemporary, and specifically photographic, modes of expression were developed by artists who used the photographic means critically.

The Russian constructivist, Moholy Nagy, developed a group of work during the 1920's which he called photograms. He placed objects on light-sensitive photographic paper and exposed this set-up to a light source. After the photo paper was developed, it showed white shapes where the objects had lain and a black background where the

paper had been exposed to the light. The photograms were among the first abstract images created with the means of photography. It is interesting to note that they were produced without the use of the camera.

Moholy Nagy did not use the photogram as an end in itself, but rather as a method to solve an artistic problem: painting with light. He stated that traditional painting needed pigments, which he considered a kind of 'light-deposit', an in-between state which only becomes alive through the light. The photogram allowed him to record light directly. According to Moholy Nagy, the photogram was the most direct way of painting. (9:42)

In order to distinguish this conceptual use of photography from conventional photography, it has also been called subjective photography. Manfred Schmalriede states that

> In the moment before the picture is taken, a formal concept, born of the photographer's mind, feelings, or imagination is as necessary as in the moment before a painter touches the canvas with his paint brush. All photography that wants to go beyond flat representation requires a visual concept, according to which the picture is arranged or manipulated. The modes and the degrees of manipulations are as diverse as their ideological reasons. (9:42)

The subjective use of the otherwise very objective photographic method was only possible by a detachment from the objects, a step inspired by abstract painting. The conceptual use of photography allowed for the autonomous photographic image. Due to much innovative and inspirational work in this field, fine art photography is now established as an art form. It is being taught at college level and has found its place in art museums, as well as in public and private collections. Without these developments, through which fine art photography established itself, my light-paintings

would not have been possible.

My light experiments were done in a photo studio, where I had maximum control over the light. The camera was used as a recording instrument. We worked with an open shutter while the light-lines were being drawn around the model with a flashlight. When the process of drawing was over, I closed the shutter. What was the movement of the flashlight in the experiment was translated into traces of light by the specific mode in which the camera records images. Color was achieved by holding acetate foil of various colors in front of the flashlight.

At first, I used a 35 mm camera with black and white film. I systematically collected data of how much light was needed to show the light-lines. As I continued, I refined my tools as well as my technique. In most cases, drawing lines with my small flashlight did not produce enough light to illuminate the figure; therefore, after drawing the light-lines, I had to expose the model with a supplemental light source. The challenge was to use just enough light to expose the figure without erasing the light-lines. I wanted the light-lines to stand out bright around a subdued image of the figure.

After approximately 6 months of experimenting, I could control my results to a satisfactory degree, even though I was still always surprised when I saw the results on film. I was now ready to change tools. I switched from my 35 mm camera to a 4" x 5" camera, which meant working with sheet film rather than rolls of film. At this time, I also switched from black and white negative film to color positive film.

Using the larger camera brought several advantages. I could now open and close the shutter any number of times, still working on the same sheet of film, whereas, in my 35 mm camera, the film had to be transported after each picture. The sheet film allowed more time for my light painting because I could close the shutter when I needed time to switch color or to move the model into a different position. I could now layer several exposures of the model, as well as several sets of light-drawings, over each other on the same sheet of film.

The images, which had started out to be very controlled and planned, now became more and more complex as I began using the possibilities of multiple exposure. This development can be seen in the five light-paintings shown here. Piece #1 is made in two steps. I first opened the shutter when I drew the red light-line, then closed it. The second step was to shoot an exposure of the model at a shutter speed of 1/8-1/16 second. Pieces #2 and #3 are made the same way.

Pieces #4 and #5 are more complex. In piece #4, the model is situated in three different places in the image, which required at least six exposures: one each for the light-lines and model in each of the three positions. Piece #5 is the most complex piece technically. I opened and closed the shutter separately for each color and each position of the model, so that there are at least twelve exposures layered on top of each other in this image. It is interesting to note, that the intensity of color decreases in this technique.

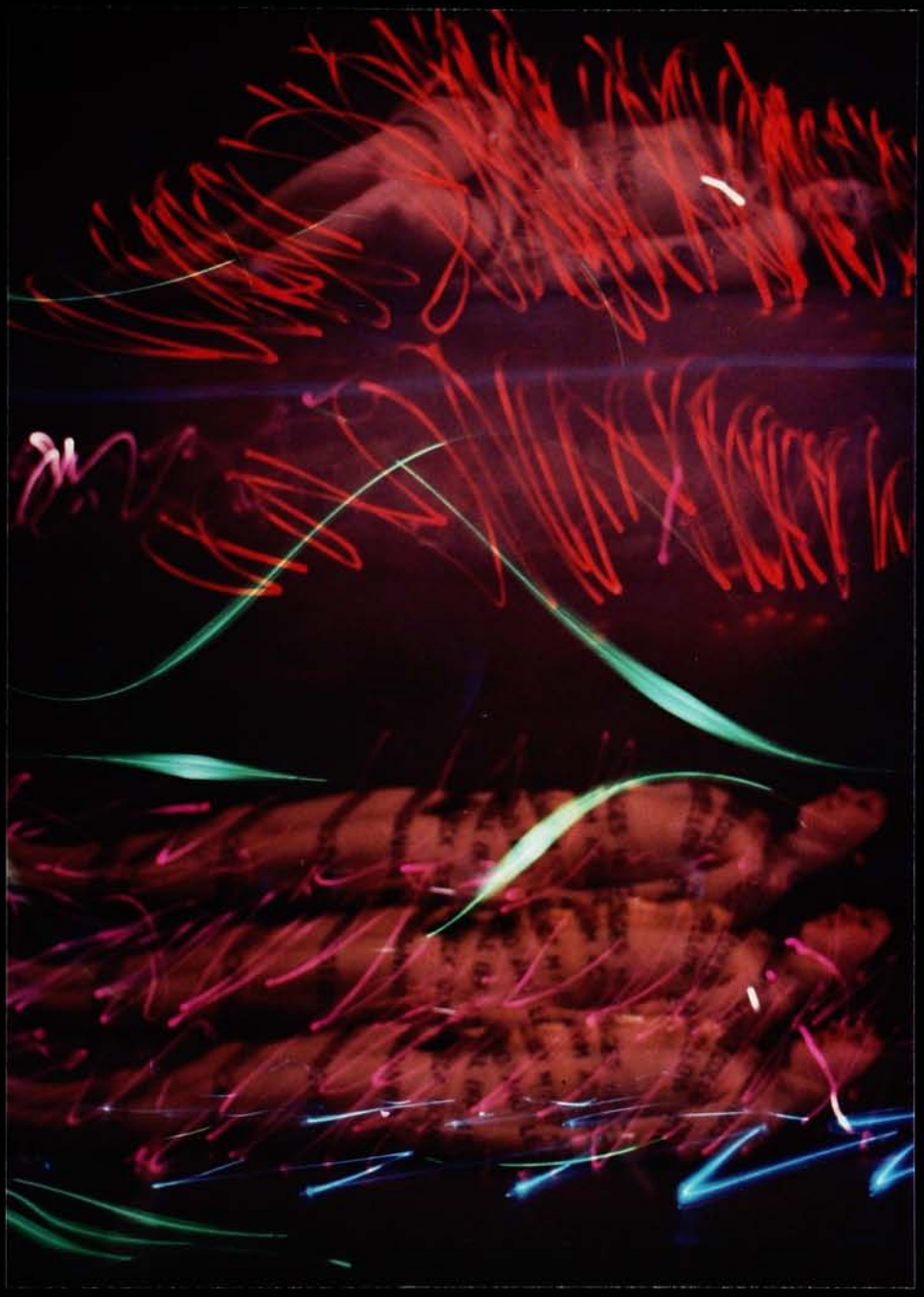
Technically, the images progressed from a few to many exposures, and in content from relatively conceptual and controlled to more experimental and narrative. For my thesis show, I wanted to exhibit the light-paintings as large format color transparencies so that the translucent quality of the light-images would not be lost. After selecting ten images to be included in my thesis show, out of the approximately one hundred I produced over two quarters, I printed the images from the 4" x 5" Ektachrome originals onto 11" x 14" Cibachrome color transparencies. I would like to thank Tim Callahan for his invaluable help during this unusual and seldom used process. Displayed in light-boxes during the thesis show at the Bevier Gallery, the color transparencies proved to have the same color intensity as the smaller originals.

5. "Light-painting #1", Cibachrome color transparency, 11" x 14", 1985.

6. "Light-painting #2", Cibachrome color transparency, 11" x 14", 1985.

7. "Light-painting #3", Cibachrome color transparency, 11" x 14", 1985.

8. "Light-painting #4", Cibachrome color transparency, 11" x 14", 1985.



9. "Light-painting #5", Cibachrome color transparency, 11" x 14", 1985.

I consider the light-paintings to be a documentation of an experiment, as well as autonomous images in their own right. However, as pointed out in Meister Eckhart's quote at he beginning of this chapter, images still belong to that which they are the reflection of, their origin. What then is the origin of the light-paintings?

They began as a thought, or dream, of a form of jewelry which had never been seen before. The jewelry would consist only of light which flowed around the body and decorated it. It would be immaterial jewelry which was not bodily tangible.

After much experimentation, I arrived at images which captured this idea. I was now creating body ornamentations with light! They were not durable, nor could they be owned; they had no weight and could not be put up in a safe. Compared to other materials from which jewelry is normally made, the light has an intangible nature. The light ornamentations were produced in my search for a form of body ornamentation which related to, and interacted with, the person in an explorative way. They have a fleeting existence which can hardly be captured by words and explanations.

I was intrigued with the idea of making 'immaterial' jewelry as soon as I started it. Contemplative viewing and discussions with my professors, helped me to develop the work and to keep it out of the purely decorative. I became very attuned to the observation and visual experience of what occurs when light decorates the body.

Each piece became its own story which developed from my original concept, as well as from the interaction with the model. The fact that my friends modeled for me was important in so far as I knew them personally and could develop images and compositions that related to them. I cannot emphasize enough how much they inspired the work by their thoughts, concerns, and simply be their very being. In other words, I did not work with just 'bodies' in the studio, but rather with individuals whose presence is reflected in the pieces.

10. Installation at the Bevier Gallery, body sculptures with ornamentations, color transparencies mounted in light-boxes, 1985.

V. TATTOO

This chapter is devoted to a form of body ornamentation which has been practiced since prehistoric times: the art of tattooing. Tattoos are permanent marks on the skin which are applied by pricking soot or a colored dye into the skin with a sharp instrument, such as a knife or a needle. The videotape I produced in connection with this theme shows the production of a tattoo with an electric needle from a close perspective.

Tattooing is a very basic and direct form of decorating the body. I have included a discussion of it in my thesis because it provides an opportunity to discuss the practice of a basic form of body ornamentation as it is found in different cultures and time periods.

We have direct archaeological evidence of the use of tattooing in ancient cultures. Several preserved Egyptian mummies, dating from the second millennium B.C. show tattoo marks on their skin. The tattoos were applied in very simple designs composed of rows of dark blue dots, sometimes arranged in lozenges, variously placed on the arms and legs and on the lower abdomen. In 1948, frozen tattooed bodies were discovered by Soviet archaeologists in Scythian tombs in the High Altai. These 2000 year old tattoos were preserved by the low temperature of the soil and consist of complex designs of animals, birds, and fish. (13:2)

The Polynesian people developed a particularly artistic form of tattooing. Their designs consisted of elaborate ornamental patterns which were applied in dense sequences over the whole body, including the face. These designs were of such regularity, and were so skillfully executed, that they had a high aesthetic appeal to the first Europeans travelling to the Polynesian Islands in the 18th century.

> The marks in general are spirals drawn with great nicety and even elegance. One side corresponds with the other. The marks in the body resemble the foliage of old chased ornaments, convolutions of filigree work, but in these they have such a luxury of forms that of a hundred which at first appeared exactly the same, not two were formed alike on close examination. (1:58-59)

Tattooing was a profession in the Polynesian culture, and was taught as an art to young apprentices. The ornaments followed the curvilinear shapes of the human body. They indicated the social rank of the wearer and were an expression of the aesthetic outlook of this culture.

Captain James Cook sailed to Tahiti in 1769 and recorded in his letters and travel notes that the Polynesians tattooed their bodies. He introduced the word tattoo to the English language, from where it passed into nearly all modern European languages. For example, the German word for tattoo is 'Taetowierung'. The Tahitian root for tattoo is 'ta', which means to strike, beat, or tap. 'Tatau' in Tahitian literally means 'the results from tapping'. (13:6)

'Moku' was a tattooing technique unique to the Polynesians. It consisted of a low-relief design carved into the skin, colored by rubbing a black pigment into the skin. Instead of a needle, the artist used a chisel to make the incisions.

> On Bellona, tattooing was carried out to rhythms, punctuated by the beat of a song, sometimes a steady firm tap, sometimes a rapid succession of tapping. Singing and rhythm helped the tattooed person to fall into a kind of trance which provided relief from the pain. (13:56)

Hiler reports that tattooing played an important role in initiation ceremonies and rites of passage. (8:86) The tattoos which individuals received in initiation ceremonies

were more than mere decorations. They were symbols of the individuals entrance into a new stage of life. Beyond that, they were proof of wearer's courage, fitness, and endurance. This pain factor must have been important in the development of tattooing. The individual being tattooed showed his great courage by enduring the pain. The pain had a further effect on the wearer himself: it was the price he paid for his marks, and thus helped confirm his transition and increased his belief in the essence of the ceremony.

It should be noted that many African cultures have comparable traditions of marking the body during ceremonies. Since tattooing is ineffective on black skin, they use scarification to produce permanent body marks.

When Europeans first came to Japan in the second half of the 19th century, they found tattooing, comparable in beauty, skill, and complexity to the Polynesian style: the Japanese irezumi.

Though a later rescinded law was passed against it in the 19th century, tattooing continues to be widely practiced in Japan. Donald Richie gives various reasons why official condemnation was never able to eradicate the art of irezumi completely.

> One is that the need to identify is very strong in Japan: no matter how small the restaurant, the cook wears a chef's hat ...all students wear uniforms, all strikers wear arm and forehead bands. Consequently, those who traditionally wore tattoos--carpenters, scaffolding workers, laborers, gamblers, gangsters--continue to wear them as an occupational badge. Another reason ...is that to be tattooed is to be well-dressed. Among people who have little, wearing something as permanent and expensive as a tattoo gives the kind of assurance which others associate with a new tie or hat: one exhibits a sign of affluence and feels the better for it. The affluence is real. Japanese tattoos are as expensive as they are elaborate. The are no tattoo 'parlors' where one is hastily engraved with a heart or

'mother'. A traditional design is chosen, one which often covers a large portion of the body, and the completion of which can take months. The detail is enormous, the workmanship immaculate, and the cost can be staggering. That a hard-working man should so indebt himself is surprising ...unless one remembers a final reason for the popularity of the tattoo, the reason why it is still practiced and continues to exercise a virile appeal. This is because it is magical and its real function is a mystical one. (12:133-4)

The coloring of Japanese tattoos is extraordinarily beautiful. The single colors are chosen under careful consideration of their appearance under Japanese skin. The Japanese sense of beauty is extreme. Irezumi, like other Japanese art forms, has the potential of high style. It 'clothes' an individual and makes him a stylistic whole. The appreciation for irezumi goes so far that particularly artistic skins are collected and kept in an art museum in Tokyo.

The workmanship and elegance of the Japanese tattoo is so great that collectors have been known to buy the skin off a man's back. The eventual fate of the skin is that it is exhibited (Tokyo has a museum, unfortunately closed to the public, where an astonishing collection is kept), and many a worker must have laboured content in the knowledge that at least a part of him was unique and the object of a learned admiration. (12:132)

The Japanese tattooing technique is usually painful because the needle is not used. Instead, small triangular-edged awls and gouges push the pigment under the skin. The colors are so strong that local inflammation is expected, as well as severe itching for up to two weeks after the design has been completed.

That irezumi is painful and expensive has never been a deterrent because it makes the individual distinguished, beautiful, and magically enhanced, which is reason enough to sustain it in the Japanese culture.

The concept of voluntarily undergoing such pain is an unusual thought in our Western culture. An almost painless tattooing instrument, the electric tattooing needle, patented in 1891, has been developed here and is commonly used.

Tattooing could never develop freely in a Judeo-Christian cultural context because the Church actively prohibited the practice of tattooing through the centuries from early on.

> The earliest written evidence for tattooing appears in the Old Testament, where there are prohibitions against it because of its connection with a cult of the dead (Leviticus 19:28, 21:5; Deuteronomy 14:1) ...Classical Greek and Roman writers describe tattooing as a loathsome, barbarian custom ...Several passages in the New Testament (Revelation 7:3, 13:16, 22:4; Galatians 6:17) imply special tattooed marks on the forehead to identify followers of Jesus ...tattoos as markings of religious significance among Christians survived into the 19th century; but there was also a contrary, stronger, tradition which prohibited tattooing among Christians ...At the Synod in Calcuth in Northumberland in 787, all forms of tattooing were forbidden as body decoration, probably because they were viewed as a pagan survival ...During the Middle Ages, the Old Testament passages forbidding tattooing were also taken seriously. Tattooing disappeared from most of Europe. (13:2-3)

The practice of tattooing must have been very rare in Europe, for there is much evidence of its unfamiliarity when the Age of Exploration brought Europeans into contact with extensively tattooed peoples. It was from the European contacts with

Polynesians at that time that tattooing became more popular in Europe and America, particularly among seamen. Sailors, coming back from their adventurous explorations with tattoos of foreign cultures, exhibited them as cosmopolitical symbols. Similar reasons account for the popularity of tattooing among seamen today.

Tattooing never developed its own aesthetic sense in our Western culture. Compared to the highly stylized Japanese or Polynesian designs, most Western tattoos look crude and clumsy.

Although tattooing never became a major form of expression in our culture, it continues to be practiced in certain subcultures, such as prisoners and prostitutes.

Due to the specific uses of tattooing in our culture, it has many negative connotations. However, there are also people who refuse to submit to these negative connotations and who use tattooing to express their own personal aesthetic perception of the beautiful body. The following is an excerpt from a videotaped interview, which I conducted with a lady in a tattoo parlor in Rochester, New York, before she received her first tattoo:

Q: What motivated you to get a tattoo?

A: While we were at Penland School of Crafts, there was a woman attending classes there who has several tattoos. I was surprised how lovely they looked. I always expected a tattoo to be something harsh and brash. But she was wearing them as little paintings and revealed them according to what she was wearing. You could not see all of them at one time. I was intrigued by that, so I always wanted to have on of my own which I could reveal whenever I wanted.

Q: There is something intimate about a tattoo. Were you intrigued by that?

A: No, it was just a matter of painting. I love to adorn my body with clothing, make-up, jewelry. I thought, well, why not a painting, something that I can call a painting on my body that is permanent.

Q: So, it is more the art aspect that draws you to tattoo?

A: When I used to think of tattoos, I would always think of a muscular person riding down the highway on a motorcycle. Not that there is anything wrong with that, but it does not have to be that way. It can be an art form, a form of body ornamentation. In fact, I wish it was not called tattooing, but I wish it was called painting because that's what it really is." (Excerpt from videotape by Barbara Heinrich, Tattoo, a Form of Body Ornamentation, Camera and Production by Michael Kolvenbach, Rochester, New York, 1985)

Tattooing as a form of body ornamentation is a form of expression which has no meaning in and of itself. It can be used for the expression of whatever is meaningful to a person or a culture. The negative connotations of tattooing in our culture derive from religious, historical, and social mores and customs. Tattooing represented to the Polynesians that which jewelry, clothing, hair-style, and make-up represent in our culture: the fundamental need and desire of people to express themselves aesthetically.

VI. PROGRESS EVALUATION

I wish to evaluate the progress which my work has made during my graduate studies based on the standards set for myself in the beginning: being true to my cultural background, responding to my new cultural environment, making the best possible use of R.I.T., historical references in my work, innovation, aesthetic appeal, craftsmanship, and personal expression.

Being true to my cultural background: Simply by choosing body ornamentation as my theme, I was dealing with the same concerns and issues which, at that time, were the focus of the contemporary jewelry scene in Europe. The use of non-precious materials in the projects coincided with the political and philosophical concepts of the European avant-garde. It made the jewelry affordable to more people and emphasized the aesthetic value of the pieces rather than their material value. "One of the most liberating forces in contemporary jewellery is the moving away from precious materials and single, unique pieces." (2:10)

I was also true to my European background in my experimentation with concepts, images, and materials. At no point in the development of my graduate work did I feel that I would be stripped of or lose my cultural heritage. Rather, I found that my teachers and fellow students were very interested in it. In fact, I found that there was more of a question as to whether I was ready to respond to my new cultural context.

Responding to my new cultural environment: The most obvious way in which I responded to my new situation was in productivity. Never before had I been similarly productive as during my two years at R.I.T. Conceptually, however, my response was not as dynamic. The figurative character of the body sculptures and the narrative qualities in the light-paintings were my only response to what I perceived as major

concerns in American art work. Gary Griffin remarked on the differences between European and American stylistic means when he wrote about the International Jewelry Exhibition 1900-1980 in Vienna:

> The European work appeared far more minimal than the American. It represented a design distillation process which resulted in a reductivist aesthetic. Good design and, in most cases, inventive design, [was] an end in itself in the European approach. This was significant when compared to American use of imagery or narrative. Here the hierarchy changed. The image became important; concept displaced the formal elements. The artist's personal philosophy was predominant, not predicated upon a design idea. (7:14-17)

Today, five years after completing my thesis work, I must say that the impact of the American culture went deeper than I realized at the time. It went further than what can be recognized in the work. I believe that at first I was afraid that I would lose my strength of expression were I to allow the American culture to influence me too much. I had a strong sense of 'peership' with my European contemporaries and a network of friendship and support there.

In critically evaluating my success in incorporating new concepts and ideas into my work, I find that I was slow in doing so. Initially, I was antagonistic to the American style and one and a half years in America were not enough time for me to incorporate the new influences in a way which was strongly recognizable in my work.

Making the best possible use of R.I.T.: R.I.T.'s curriculum, which demands that graduate students choose a major, a minor, and electives, promotes the idea of interdisciplinary studies. I am thankful for the opportunities to study not only in metals, but in other media, such as photography and textiles. Investigating the areas where two fields overlap is very interesting and can be very productive. Some of my work is

a direct result of this investigation.

What are the parameters of jewelry? Where do the parameters of jewelry and textiles or jewelry and photography overlap? By asking these questions, I found much material for discussion and I was breaking new ground for my field.

As mentioned earlier, access to the facilities at R.I.T. made working easy. The question was not how to get the work done, but rather how to ration my energy.

Historical references: My body sculptures have strong ethnic resemblances without losing their contemporary feeling. Studying the history of jewelry was imperative to developing my own ideas and developing my visual statements.

The light-paintings have a close relationship to the history of photography, as shown above. My study of the history of fine art photography has deepened my appreciation and understanding of it and allowed me to create a body of work which relates to both fine art photography and body ornamentation.

My research of tattooing brought much understanding of tattooing as a historic and universal form of body ornamentation. Through learning how tattooing has been used in different cultures, I could identify prejudices against it in our culture and see its potential to fulfill man's need to express himself aesthetically.

Innovation: To evaluate innovation, one must have an extensive knowledge of the current and historic precedents in one's field. With respect to this, the following made my work innovative: the conceptual use of the twist-pins, the use of light as body ornamentation, and the use of body sculptures to display the work.

Aesthetic appeal: In my discussion of the premises of modern art and its reception, I introduced the theoretical framework necessary for the appreciation and understanding of modern art. An aesthetic presence, or appeal, is necessary if a piece is to be appreciated as a work of art. For the educated viewer, art should not need an explanation nor should it require a recipe of how to use it. Works of art should speak for themselves and have a presence of their own - their aesthetic appeal. I believe that both the body sculptures and the light-paintings successfully meet this

requirement.

Craftsmanship: In my premises, I said that I wanted my work to be executed on a professional level of craftsmanship while, at the same time, maintaining a sense of experimentation.

In the body ornamentations this craftsmanship is seen in the gradual color transition from yellow to green in the anodized aluminum elements and in the technical perfection of the aluminum cones. The sense of experimentation is found in coupling these technical elements with primitive and unfinished elements, such as the rough chain saw marks of the first body sculpture.

The quality of the Cibachrome color transparencies was possible only through professional craftsmanship in each step of the process: use of the photo studio, technical use of the 35 mm camera to determine exposure needs, use of the 4" x 5" camera and sheet film, the use of the flashlight and acetate foil to produce the light-lines, techniques of composition, and the printing of the color transparencies.

Because the technical process of creating the images could not be precisely controlled, the light-paintings have an inherent sense of experimentation. Also in regards to experimentation, it is important to note that the true reality of the light-paintings happened in the photo studio at the very moment they were created. The color transparencies are only the documentation of the work and not the work itself. Creating immaterial jewelry with light was the work and the color transparencies are a record of it and the means of sharing it with others.

Personal expression: During my first year at R.I.T., I avoided making the work too personal because I believed that, if it were, it would lose its validity and strength and could not be entered by others. While creating my thesis work during my second year, I started expressing my beliefs, philosophy, and concepts of jewelry in a more personal way.

I now believe that in expressing myself openly in my work, the work becomes more accessible to others. This change is, in part, a reflection of the difference

between the European concept of design and the American concept of content as an integral element of the piece. This is also the difference between design and art. My graduate studies at R.I.T. played an important role in developing this understanding and in my growth as an artist.

VII. CONCLUSION

In the field of applied arts and crafts, it is easy to overwhelm with technical brilliance and mastery of material and process. However, because my thesis concerned the exploration of a conceptual idea, my investigation was not focused on the technical aspects of metalwork or jewelry design. Rather, my concept was to inquire and develop new forms of body ornamentation. This led to the incorporation of materials and processes from other fields, such as photography, textiles, and sculpture.

By considering such intangible elements as light and space to be as integral to my body ornamentations as metal is in traditional jewelry making, I was reaching for the outer limits of jewelry design. In shifting my focus to concept and idea, the technical aspects of the work became secondary. This coincided not only with a trend in current European jewelry design, but also with contemporary American metalwork, as stated by Arline Fisch:

> But art is not about technology - it is about concept and personal expression. It requires discipline and self-restraint to prevent technique from becoming an end in itself. For a time, metalsmiths did revel in technical virtuosity, allowing themselves to be seduced into excesses of materials and process to produce objects which were extravagant, self-indulgent and frequently, of little visual significance.
>
> Recently, technology has taken a secondary role while metalsmiths focus increasingly on concept and substance. ...The ability to focus on ideas, to bring form, technique and materials into the visual realization of that idea is evidence of artistic maturity....It is now equally appropriate that personal expression and imagery, content and meaning, ideas and

> attitudes become the primary motivations for creative work in metal. This is not to suggest that there will be any less mastery of material and process but, rather, that there will be an even higher level of skill which allows the idea to transcend any awareness of the details of fabrication. (5:3)

The value of my thesis work lies not so much in the pieces created, but rather in the engagement of the creative process in which the inquiry was conducted and through which the pieces evolved. This commitment to one theme, and the repeated cycle of exploration - experimentation - evaluation, made the work stronger and more substantial over the course of the school-year.

My thesis pieces are now a creative repertoire, from which I have since drawn many times. They are a solid foundation on which much further work has been built. They, and the processes learned in their development, have opened new doors for future work and research.

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