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O

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Abstract

My work is driven by the metaphysical and the potential for healing through the manipulation of energy. Points of research include the enso (the only symbol used in Zen Buddhism), which uses the circle as a symbol of wholeness, divinity, and enlightenment. The writings of Alex Grey, Eckhart Tolle and the work of Ann Hamilton will also be investigated.

I plan to create work from turned wooden vortex forms, the shapes of which are based on the movement of energy within the body. These objects will be transformed from wood, through rubber, wax, plaster, iron, bronze to cast, and blown glass. This transformation through materials is becoming a metaphor for the continuous transformation of universal light and energy.

As part of my material research, I will exploit various casting techniques including kiln casting, hot casting, and pate de verre. Photography, film, and projection also will be explored. Conceptually, the process will become an integral part of the work where involved, repetitive methods will be treated as a meditation or mantra and will, in turn, add a performative dimension to the work. It is through these meditative practices that I intend to imbue the work with healing energies.
Chapter I - Introduction

This body of work is about the illustration of the invisible, about energies within the body with a view to creating an enlightening experience for the viewer. The first chapter will give a background to this body of work, not only to the situations that influenced its development but also previous work from which O developed. It will describe and explain key themes such as human energy fields and the various materials and processes used as well as relevant artists who were researched in conjunction with the work. Chapter II presents an in-depth description and discussion of each individual work. Additionally, there will be an analysis of the works as they are presented together at Gallery Kunstler. Chapter III offers a conclusion to the entire thesis and a discussion of its successes and failures as well as plans for developing the work further. Images of the works, processes, and gallery installation are found in Chapter IV. The appendix and bibliography are at the back of the publication.

The artistic philosophy of visionary artist Alex Grey is one that I keep in the forefront of my mind when creating work. Grey is very decisive in his approach, and his focus is on the healing properties of art in general. In his book The Mission of Art, he cites art as having the power to bring about a permanent enlightened state of being:

*Art that brings together sacred archetypes of various religions, based on personal experience and expression of non-denominational interfaith relatedness and multicultural awareness: I believe that this... art will be the handmaiden of a future universal spirituality* (Grey, p. 87, 2001).

I work with my hands using the healing technique of Reiki¹ and as such extend my healing abilities to my art as much as possible. Healing is a gift, which I treasure and share insofar as is possible. One way of sharing is through my art. Working intuitively is the key to how those healing skills affect the sculpture. Additionally, I use symbolic language in the work to enlist certain associations upon its perception. I also

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¹ Reiki is an energy healing technique, which was rediscovered in the late 1800’s by a Japanese Monk named Dr. Mikao Usui. It is a spiritual practice and an enlightenment producing system that allows a person to heal and to heal others (Coll, p.4, 2011).
have spent time working through other processes and materials outside of glass that I will outline in this chapter.

The work of Ann Hamilton has been of great influence in this body of work. In her practice she counts drawing, words, lines, threads, and fiber amongst her inspirations. She considers the “fundamental act of making” to be a spiritual one (Art:21, PBS). Hamilton grew up learning many techniques associated with textiles such as weaving and embroidery. Through the repetitive nature of these processes, she allows herself to be inspired and work intuitively. In the essay, “An Open Process,” by Marika Wachtmeister, it is stated that her working methods could be summed up in the word openness. This practice of working in a state of “no mind” allows the artist to be open to a bottomless well of inspiration, and Hamilton, like Grey, harnesses this intuitive method to exquisite effect.

By working in such a state of mind, it is true to say that this calmness can be tangible in the finished work. This is certainly true for Hamilton. In “Ghost...a border act,” the flowing fabric and moving projections, combined with a whispering sound recording, incite this otherworldly peace. In this way viewers may not be aware of the spiritual connotations of the work but would be subconsciously awoken to it. My intention is to achieve a similar affect in my own work.

As my work developed from arcs to cones and then to circles, I started to discover an array of meanings contained in the humble line of a circle. I took a day-long Zen meditation workshop in July 2010 at the Rochester Zen Center. I learned a great deal about the essence of Zen Buddhism and practiced Zen meditation or “Sittings” while there. One of the most valuable things I took with me on that day was from a conversation with Roshi Bodhin Kjolhede. From speaking with him I learned about the only symbol used in Zen Buddhism, which is known as an ensō (pronounced encho). The ensō is comprised of a circle. Similar to its symbolism in Christian faiths, the circle in Zen Buddhism represents the whole. It has no beginning and no end. Its shape is in perfect balance. The practice of drawing an ensō is very specific to
Zen. Ensōs are always drawn using a paint brush dipped in black ink on traditional rice paper. When drawing an ensō, one must be in a meditative state. It is not necessary to have the skills of a painter, but it is necessary to have presence of mind during the activity. It is said that the purer the person’s state of mind, the higher the quality of the ensō. I found this to be incredibly interesting. I had always been drawn to shapes that relate to the circle: arcs, cones, and variations the torus. My previous bodies of work had utilized these forms consistently, and it has been my intention to simplify these even further, to find the common denominator. The shape they were all related to was the circle. Learning that the circle was recognized as such a spiritual symbol in Buddhism was very exciting for me. It seemed like my plan was coming together. I was being given guidance and reassurance that I was on the right path.

Back at home, I began practicing my own ensōs on rice paper. Over three months I would draw one every evening after meditating in my quiet space. It was a very enjoyable practice and one that came very naturally, as painting with India ink in quick fluid strokes is exactly how I paint in my studio. Over these three months I created well over 100 ensōs. I experimented with various ways of displaying them, including stop motion animation (see DVD). In the meantime, however, I had concluded that I would rather create an interpretation of the ensō and the practice it represents. Thus I began a new body of work: O.

**Processes**

The processes used were each quite involved, repetitive, and meditative and all incorporated circular motions. A prime example and one of the first I employed was wood turning. The carving would begin with an odd, slow rhythm until the outer layers had been carved into a perfect cylinder. I loved the intensity of the process. It awoke all of my senses with the sound, vibrations, and feeling of the shavings spraying back in my face. I used green poplar so it even smelled fresh. The process was exhilarating. The power of the lathe, combined with a good grip, a lot of concentration, and the perfectly sharpened chisel, allowed me to peel away the layers of wood. Furthermore, I was working completely intuitively. Each vortex form was very different (fig. 1). All I had in mind was a naturally sweeping curve. This brings me
back to the mindfulness of the process. Such a physical process is very grounding and forces one to concentrate on the present moment and the work at hand. Any distracted thoughts would cause the chisel to slip or to carve in the wrong place. Henceforth the process became a meditation for me where only the purest thoughts and energies were used in the making of each form.

This presence of mind carried over into many of my processes, most notably when sorting glass for the large Ensōs (figs. 2, 3, 4). For the casting process, known as pâte de verre (glass paste), I needed several buckets of frit sorted into three different sizes. To sort this material, I made some large sieves and using circular motions pushed the glass through the various mesh sizes. It was not the most pleasant of practices given that my hands would invariably get cut and pick up splinters. However working on my studio floor reminded me a lot of my experience of Zen sittings. As in the meditation, it was easy for my mind to wander, and when it wandered during the glass sorting process, I would almost invariably get cut. The sound of the glass falling through the mesh to the bucket below also was a welcome one. Likewise, the repetitive nature of moving from one bucket to the next and pushing the glass through gave the process a satisfying rhythm. All of these elements were so reminiscent of a Zen sitting that I was inspired to record the process, which eventually culminated in the film O (see DVD).

Paper making was another deeply meditative process I explored. Though little handmade paper was featured in the final show, I made enough to cover most of the gallery floor. This massive output was actually made with the floor piece Twenty One Days in mind (figs. 5, 6). I will describe and explain this piece in further detail in Chapter II. My efforts did not entirely go to waste in that the piece Working through...featured a cast paper vortex form (figs. 7, 8). The paper-making process used a lot of water. I would rip up and soak the cotton linters into pulp and use a framed mesh known as a deckle. I would lift out a sheet of pulp and push it out onto a large plastic tarpaulin to create one large sheet. The technique of pressing out each sheet is known as couching. The process is gentle, slow, and incredibly repetitive. The rhythm, combined with the sound of dripping water, made it quite therapeutic. Good paper making

2 Glass which has been broken down into smaller chunks and granules.
requires dexterity and rhythm. Having never made paper before, I learned the techniques as I went along. Professors Zerbe Sodervic and Henrik Soderstrom were particularly helpful in this regard. I explored several different ways of making the large sheets as well as different paper recipes. Ingredients included cotton linters, abaca, gelatin, India ink, and glass road beads. Visuals of the process were incorporated the film O (see DVD).

Another fundamental process in the series of work was hot metal casting. I cast both iron and bronze. The pouring of the hot metal on such a large scale was incredibly intense and involved a large team of assistants. It was not, therefore, as intimate or meditative as the other solitary processes I used. However, there is something mesmerizing at the sight of hot flowing material. This transfixing nature of iron pouring is, in itself, therapeutic in its ability to ground the viewer.

Background
This body of work really began as soon as I arrived at RIT in September 2009. Having moved to the US on short notice, I found that I didn’t have the time to think very deeply about my work, as my main concern was to settle into my new surroundings. I began with a series of drawings and paintings as an exercise to encourage a more creative frame of mind. I continued to research color and its effect on the psyche as well as Reiki and other related ideas within my work. Many of the paintings were made up of a series of arcs and sweeping lines, which came together to form some arching, pointed shapes. It was at this time when I first discovered the writings of the aforementioned Alex Grey. Until then I had been unaware of artists who work with the intention of healing. This was a great breakthrough for me, and I continued to be inspired by his ideas and concepts for visionary art. All the while I was still thinking about developing my undergraduate thesis work in some way. This series of work (titled Synapse*) consisted of a series of sculptural vessels and forms that developed from an investigation into the brain’s response to color’s effect on the psyche: Lines of energy that flow within the body are known as meridians or chakras. Each has its own unique color, and each of these colors has its own energy wavelength. Colors have different psychological properties that affect these chakras. Red, for example, is associated with feelings of stability; it is a grounding color. “As we go up the spectrum we leave the slower, denser vibrations of the material world, the reds, oranges and yellows, and enter the finer quicker vibrations of the mental and spiritual — the blues, indigos and purples” (Verner-Bonds, p.147, 2002).
healing properties. These color-saturated works exploited the fluid qualities of hot glass to create a form of pure energy, arrested and frozen in space, similar to the activity of neurons and firing synapses (figs. 9, 10, 11). In discussing my work with Professor Robin Cass, it was suggested that I leave out color for a time in the hope that I might discover a new visual language to make this healing. I took this quite seriously and have used only the smallest amounts of subtle color throughout my work ever since. As color had been the most important element in the Synapse® series, removing it from my toolbox was quite a challenge. I then was forced to concentrate more on form, material, and texture.

I took those large ink drawings to various studios and spent the college quarter turning wooden cones, blowing glass cones, flame-working glass cones, and even throwing clay cones. I allowed myself to get lost in the process and to focus on creating curving trumpet shapes, cones, and double-ended vortex forms as in the negative space at the center of a torus. The piece that I titled At-Onement naturally came to a conclusion when I began assembling the individual forms (figs. 12, 13). In the end, blown glass cones were ground and fitted to turned wooden forms. I made seven of these pieces, each of which varied slightly in shape and size. The pieces were placed in a small landscaped pond on the RIT campus and stayed in situ for about three weeks. Also during this quarter, I took a class in installation art by Professor Roberley Bell. Some of the significant ideas put forward in this class included the importance of site and the potential for changing the perception of a particular space. I found this invigorating, and it gave me the confidence to make the work site specific. It wasn’t until weeks later that I realized what At-Onement was about. For me, the vortex shapes represented the energy centers within the body and how humans act as funnels, constantly absorbing and transmitting universal energy.

My intent for making work that is healing seems to stem from my diagnosis with epilepsy at seven years of age. I began sessions of Bio Energy as a patient. This practice is a type of energy healing that works directly with the person’s aura and chakras. Energy healing methods “are built on the recognition that the body’s energetic nature is both reflected in and influences the functioning of the physical body, and that the body’s energy flows can be influenced in a positive way through outside intervention” (Verner-Bonds,
By balancing each energy center or chakra, the emotional, mental, and physical bodies soon follow suit. I loved the sessions. I would feel a variety of sensations as I was worked on, from tingling in my toes to almost losing my balance entirely. It had a very positive effect on the epilepsy, and eventually the illness left me entirely, so alternative forms of healing have always been a part of my life.

Upon enrollment at the National College of Art & Design, I began some sessions of Reiki that were offered on campus. It was at that point I realized how effective the technique was for treating stress and depression. I since have learned the technique and am now a qualified Reiki Master. I think of this sensitivity to energy as an extra ability that most people do not possess. Therefore, I want to illustrate this in my work so that it may be brought to the audience’s awareness.

I also am highly responsive to materials, and I do believe that it stems from this awareness of energy. Each material speaks to me in a different way. My interpretation is not necessarily different or original in its associations, but it is personal and very tangible to me. Iron, for example, is dense, heavy and from the Earth. Not surprisingly, it holds a very red, grounded, and physical energy. I associate it with the energies of the root chakra, which is located at the base of the spine. In contrast, glass as a material is something much more ethereal in terms of energy. This is a material, which contains, absorbs, and reflects light. In the case of Working Through..., the glass represents a lighter energy (fig. 14). I associate it with the crown chakra located at the top of the head.
What was more important than mastering their basic principles or techniques was to become one with their spiritual aspects. It is in this ‘inner’ approach that the real significance of the specific discipline lies – not just in the final attainment of a work of art or a new skill. This state of mind, known as mumen or muso – ‘no thought, no reflection’ – involves letting your natural ability act in a consciousness-free from, unburdened by thoughts, deliberation or partiality of any kind.

(Living Zen, p. 144)

My work is driven by the metaphysical and the potential for healing through the manipulation of energy. Much of the work for O was borne out of turned wooden vortex forms, the shapes of which are based on the movement of energy within the body. Working Through… (fig. 8) is the most obvious in this regard with each component being cast from the original wooden cone (fig. 15). Twenty One Days also is comprised of 21 of these vortex forms, while Centered (figs. 16-19) was cast from the base of the original form. I also will discuss, in detail, the film O, Still from O, Sittings, Vortex, Practice, the Ensōs, Verse, and Trispiral in this chapter. Images of these pieces are included in Chapter IV. The final paragraphs are dedicated to the layout and description of the gallery itself.

Working Through…

I learned to turn wood during my first year at RIT. Using this new technique, I turned several vortex forms out of green poplar (fig. 1). Though the forms were intuitively made, I later recognized them to represent a chakra—the pattern of moving energy within the body. The original cones became At-Onement (figs. 12, 13), and later the base of each cone was cast to create the Present Moment Reminders series (figs. 20-23). These were the precursors to O.

Working Through...developed from a desire to translate this powerful form into other materials to allude to the changing properties of energy as it moves through the body. Hence, I began casting the cone in glass, wax, iron, and paper. The paper and iron resonate with me for different reasons, the iron for its grounded, earthy nature and the paper for its connotations of purity (figs. 8, 24).
As the wooden cone had been cast through so many materials, I decided to apply gold leaf to the cracks and imperfections it had gained. Visually and conceptually these marks gave the piece more authenticity. The gold leaf signaled the significance of the piece—a piece that was the first to be made. It was also given center position on the shelf, further emphasizing its importance. My original plan was to place the cones in the sequence in which they were made. However, this did not read well visually. I trusted my aesthetic sensibilities and placed them in an order that was more intuitive and less cognitive in its arrangement.

For the exhibition, the iron was placed on the far left of the shelf. Next to this was the paper cone, which offered good contrast and acted as an introduction to the wooden piece as the installation is read left to right. After the wood in the center came the wax cone with its dense tacky maroon-colored surface (fig. 25). Being of similar color to the iron, the two were kept apart. It should be pointed out here that I intend to bring the surface of the iron form back to its raw state so that it rusts, developing more color and texture. The wooden form was cleaned, but the evidence of its past as a catalyst for the other works was impossible to disguise. I hope to give a similar suggestion of history to the iron form too. There is something very raw, rich, and authentic about a naturally rusted surface. I expect the paper cone to age too, but I am very open to the evidence of time within the work. Each piece has its own timeline and changes in its own way at its own rate. I would love to show the work again 10 years from now. I believe this would speak volumes about the energies, how they affect us, and how they are constantly in flux. Given the right environment, the iron would completely oxidize and reduce to a pile of rust, while the glass would take millennia to alter. As mentioned previously, the glass in the work is a metaphor for a perfect, enlightened energy and thus does not need to change.

**Twenty One Days**

The components from *Twenty One Days* (figs. 5, 6) are also derived from the wooden vortex form in *Working Through*.... The half cone forms that resemble shells were created using pâte de verre. This casting technique utilizes small broken pieces of glass known as frit. The glass is packed tightly into a
mold and under temperatures of 1400 degrees Fahrenheit is tacked in place and can hold the form of the mold.

Given my love of multiples and the different patterns and textures of each of these pieces, I chose to create a large-scale installation with them. The number 21 was most relevant due to its connection to Reiki; it takes 21 days for one’s energies to be fully cleared and restored to balance after a Reiki session. Furthermore, 21 is a multiple of three—a powerful number for empowering mantras and intentions.

Previously during the academic year, in critique I had shown this installation placed in a circular pattern on a grey concrete floor. This did not elevate the work in any way and left it devoid of life and contrast. This first trial directed me to investigate a form of pedestal to raise the work and incorporate more contrast. I worked on designs for a wooden base and metal base. I tried graphite, layers of handmade paper, and tarpaper to act as a cushion. I also experimented with a layer of water on the floor as well as mechanisms for hanging the forms in midair and on the wall. Upon installing, however, the work seemed resolved resting directly on the wooden floor. The color of the wood gave sufficient contrast, while the shape of the space in which it was situated framed it perfectly. There was no need for a base of any kind. Despite the diameter stretching across ten feet, there was an abundance of space for the audience to see it from all angles. The subtle sheen from the varnished floor also gave enough of a reflection to suggest the sharply formed underside of the castings. It is important to mention here that my choice of presentation for my work is derived from my desire to allow the work to speak for itself. I want the work to literally support itself so that it may do so metaphorically and conceptually too. By reducing the amount of bracing or mechanical support mechanisms such as pedestals and stands the work is given all the attention. There is nothing hidden; it is clear that gravity is holding it in place, which gives more time to focus on the object itself. This preference comes from my interest in Buddhist principles and readings of Eckhart Tolle. The essence of these teachings is to accept what is. Metal braces do raise the work, but they simultaneously trap it in place.
**Centered**

*Centered* is a solid bronze form cast from the base of the original wooden cone (figs. 16-19). The form is identical on both sides. My original design included a taut horizontal cable on which to hang the piece so that it appeared to be revolving on its axis. However, the piece explores the concept of consistent movement of energy even when still, and thus it was displayed on a white floating shelf. It also was suggested that I place the piece on a mirror or a black surface as a way of assisting the viewer to appreciate the double-sided form. As a result of my preference for a minimal presentation, I chose to leave the shelf white. Nonetheless, it was hung at four feet, which is slightly higher than normal. In this way the viewer can appreciate the underside of the form as well.

I believe the simplicity of presentation was successful because the viewing was not impeded by supporting metal contraptions, and consequently the piece was reminiscent of a spinning top that has just come to rest. It is a strong form and did not require enhancement or assistance. The piece became a gentle suggestion of potential movement and flow of energy. It also complimented the large Ensōs on the opposite wall, which were stationary but yet implied movement. The shelf’s shadow also helped integrate the piece into the space.

**Vortex**

This image is a digital photograph (fig. 26) of a blown glass form (fig. 27) of the original wooden cone. It was printed as an inkjet pigment print at 30 x 40 inches. This size allowed the viewer to be absorbed by the optical illusion. The center of *Vortex* may appear to recede or seem as though it is advancing toward the viewer. As a result, the work is activated by the audience, allowing one to be drawn in, suspending reality for a moment to investigate the transfixing quality of the image. In a split second of awe, one becomes lost in something that is not fully understood. This celebrated quote by Albert Einstein explains the phenomena well:
The most beautiful and most profound emotion that we can experience is the sensation of the mystical... He...who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe is as good as dead...That deeply emotional conviction for the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.

When you lose yourself in a work of art, you forget your egotistic self and immediately access the spiritual realm—your essence. Similar to looking at nature with enough intent, you may realize a oneness with what you are viewing. In Art 21, astronomer Richard Walker describes the subtle spiritual awakening people sometimes undergo when viewing a sky space by James Turrell. He describes how viewing the sky without any point of reference on the land, such as a horizon, gives you a sense of its closeness. He goes on to say that this sensation often brings the viewer to the realization that they are “in the atmosphere, not separated from the sky” and get a “feeling that you are one with the universe” (PBS, 2000).

*Vortex* is monochromatic, which is in keeping with the almost colorless exhibition. Despite the starkness of the image, it was given substantial space around it that allowed it to be viewed without interruption or comparison with another work. It was placed on the wall opposite the film, which strengthened the film by echoing its circular motif. Furthermore, I discovered a discreet hanging mechanism that included steel washers and black neodymium magnets to hold the print in place. As a result there was no need to puncture the paper or use visually intrusive bulldog clips or pushpins.

*O*

*O* is a process film and vehicle for meditation (see DVD). As discussed in Chapter 1, several of the processes I explored while making the work involved repetitive methods that were treated as a meditation or mantra. In the work of Ann Hamilton, this treatment of process has been referred to as the reconnection of the pragmatic with the spiritual, which I find rings true for my work also (Simon, p. 124, 2002). The essence of these processes were shot, cut, and edited to create the film. It was my intention to create a meditative film rather than a documentation of process. I reinterpreted the essence of some processes for the sake of cinematography. The plaster dissolving into the water, the paper making, the wax
pouring, the glass sorting, and frit making are all relatively accurate representations of the respective processes. It is the mold-making scene toward the end of the film that was recreated for visual effect. The making of my large molds was a very intense process and perhaps less poetic in a visual sense. Thus, I scaled down the process for the filming and used my hands in place of the steel tools I had used for making the actual molds.

Some of the sounds recorded during the making of the film were very beautiful such as the hissing of water as the molten glass touched its surface. I had planned to include these sounds, which heightened the meditative effect in the film, but it proved to be impossible due to the sounds of the air conditioning and electric kilns in the spaces in which I worked. In place of these, I set the film to a soundscape of an ancient system of sound healing known as the Solfeggio Tones. This set of tones, originally used in ancient Gregorian chants, is unusual in that there are nine tones in contrast to eight in a standard octave. Furthermore, the tones are not the usual notes found on a piano. For instance, the middle C on the Solfeggio scale is measured at 528hz, while a standard C on a piano is 512hz. Furthermore, research\(^4\) has proven that 528hz is central to our very being. Today the tones are used primarily by practitioners of sound healing with tuning forks. The composition itself was recorded in a soundproof room where the tuning forks were played intuitively in various combinations by hitting them off my knees. Those particular tones heard in \(O\) are the source of the wave patterns in the glass discs or \(Ensōs\). (fig. 28) Thus each \(Ensō\) is a three-dimensional realization of a specific healing frequency as I will discuss later in this chapter (figs. 1-4).

\(^4\) In 1998 Dr. Glen Rein of the Quantum Biology Research Lab in New York performed experiments with in vitro DNA. Four styles of music, including Gregorian chants that use the Solfeggio scale, were converted to scalar audio waves and played via a CD player to test tubes containing in vitro DNA. The effects of the music were determined by measuring the DNA test tube samples’ absorption of UV light after and hour of exposure to the music. Gregorian chants had caused a 5-9.1% increase in the absorption of UV light due to the unwinding of the DNA helix. Sanskrit chanting caused a similar 5.8%-8.2% effect. Rock (0-1%) and classical music (0-1.1%) had little or no effect. Glen Rein finally concluded that the audible sound waves of the Solfeggio scale can cause resonance in DNA and can have profound healing effects (Solgeggio.net, 2012).
I experimented with circular and oval vignettes to soften the edges; however, these gave the film a voyeuristic feel and badly affected the composition. As a compromise the edges were blurred slightly and the corners softened. It seemed that the circle motif was so dominant that a vignette was not necessary.

The most successful aspect of this film is that it speaks to a broader range of people than the solely-informed artist types. In the case of O, anybody can get a feeling for the materials. One can almost feel the plaster and wax. It is very evocative. I believe the processes can be related to, as they reference such a broad range of processes such as bread making.

Still

*Still* is a small print from the film O (fig. 29). This piece came from a dream I had about this image. I looked for the right still in the film and had it printed on archival paper. The image was placed close to the entrance to the gallery and, in hindsight, acted as an artist statement. It portrayed the importance of the making process in the exhibition as a whole and also suggested the intimate connection I had with the work. Energetically, much of my inspiration comes through my hands as I create. When I practice Reiki, I feel heat and a tingling sensation in my hands. It is then that the work is imbued with the positive intentions and healing energies. The black-and-white image of my hands sorting glass summed up the essence of the work.

Sittings (fig. 30-33)

The idea for this work developed at the same time as the film O. At that point in the year, I had been strongly considering a live performance piece. The practice of sorting glass frit through differently sized meshes had become such an integral meditative process to the work that I had hoped to include a real experience of it in the show.
I blew the large glass bowls with the assistance of my fellow graduates and used some layers of handmade paper to create a kneeler. It was important for me to portray the comparisons between my process and a formal Zen Sitting. In a formal Sitting one kneels facing a wall with eyes open but downcast and focuses on the breath, allowing all thoughts to dissipate. This became my practice when sorting the glass. It became a deeply meditative and grounding process. The form of my knees was naturally molded into it during the sorting. It was this detail that I hoped would lead the viewer to understand the process I had undertaken. The first bowl on the left contained the unmixed frit. The center bowl contained a small mound of sorted frit under the mesh, while the third contained the larger leftover chunks. In the end I decided against the live performance as the film was being projected on the wall nearby with its soundscape echoing throughout the entire space. It is my belief that a performance would have taken away from the experience. It could be a very successful piece if performed in a quieter, more intimate space where the quiet sound of the glass dropping through the mesh can be heard clearly.

In retrospect this work was not as resolved as others. It was apparent through the feedback I received that the viewer needed more information to gain an understanding of the piece. For future exhibitions I would show it in conjunction with *Still* or with a small glass pâte de verre disc (*Present Moment Reminder* [figs. 20-23]) sitting on the kneeler. I also plan to work the piece into a performance eventually.

*Ensō I, II, III*

Three large glass pâte de verre discs were hung on the center wall of the gallery (figs. 1-3) These pieces were central to the exhibition. These were my ultimate interpretation of a Zen ensō. The process and materials were drastically different but the intention remained the same. The forms were created from the sound recordings of the aforementioned Solfeggio tones. Three different combinations of the nine tuning forks were recorded and converted to sound wave patterns (fig. 28). I then had these patterns CNC plasma cut into steel in order to make tools to shape the large plaster and silica molds using a scrimming technique (figs. 34, 35). Each *Ensō*, therefore, became a three-dimensional realization of a specific healing frequency.
These works took a year to realize. It was a huge project to take on due to the improbable scale and delicate nature of the pieces. The size was important. I believe the scale of the other works seems more purposeful thanks to the size of the Ensō pieces. Moreover, in contrast, Verse (figs. 36-38) on the opposite wall can be experienced as more intimate. I see these discs as my strongest works in the exhibition.

*Tri Spiral*

This painting on the long white wall opposite *Working Through...* was intended to be a quiet piece (fig. 39). It is formed from tiny glass beads usually made for road marking. These were mixed with water and a small amount of non-toxic adhesive. Using paint brushes and a projected image on the wall, I applied the beads in a traditional tri-spiral pattern. My intention in using this pattern stemmed from a wish to reconnect the work with my own personal heritage, that of ancient traditional Irish symbolism. The tri-spiral is synonymous with pagan spirituality in Ireland from as early as 5000 BC. It can be seen on dolmens, cairns, and burial sites across the country. One of the best and well known of these burial sites is Newgrange in the Boyne Valley, Co. Meath. In December 2010 I visited the site and collected images of the various symbols carved into the stones. The painting in the exhibition was based on the entrance stone carving at Newgrange (figs. 40, 41). The meaning of the pattern is not fully understood though there are many theories. For me, it is a meditative, spiritual, and grounding pattern.

The painting on the wall was well received by viewers especially as they were forced to view it in a different way compared to the other works. In this case, many would walk past it, not noticing it until there was a shift in the lighting where they stood. It was only then that they would come up close to the wall to investigate what it was that was sparkling. The entire pattern could not be viewed at any stage; it could only be seen in sections as the light was altered depending on where the viewer stood.

To me the painting was weaker that the other works. In many respects it was a successful work but would be stronger if shown on its own. I plan to create more works using this technique and to develop it further.
in the future. One such endeavor would be to apply the beads in thicker layers, building it out from the wall so that it might become more three dimensional and tactile. I believe that its success could lie in using an entire room to alter a space with the beads, texturing, and lighting so that it moves with the viewer. Overall, I believe that Tri Spiral was successful as a piece but perhaps did not fit in with the other works due to its visually subtle nature.

**Verse I-XI** (figs. 36-38)

*Verse* was one of the last pieces to come to a conclusion; however, its beginnings stem back to the previous summer. At the time, I was investigating every possible process and material to illustrate my ideas. I began trapping circles of air within the solid hot glass forms. These pointy forms resided in my studio all year until I noticed their potential. Friends visiting my studio would be drawn straight to them. They were seductive. Trapping air within the glass in a specific composition was mysterious even to those who knew how it was created.

In the hot shop I allowed my mind to be absorbed by the spherical form. I explored different combinations of bubbles and rings or air and played with size and centering of each piece. Some rings sit at angles and some have droplets of air bursting from their center while others hold one small bubble sitting just off center. I found a sense of poetry in the making of them, as each piece was a spontaneous creation. At first glance the work appears as a series of similar spheres but became more intriguing the closer the viewer gets. I now see how these spheres reference the technique of scrying through their connection with light.

The placement of each form was intuitive; there was no particular logic to it. I believe this randomness worked well in connection to the other works in the space. It balanced out the measured placement of other works such as *Twenty One Days* (fig. 5).

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5 “The word scrying means ‘seeing.’ It is divination —seeking the future— by peering into any reflective surface such as glass, water, mirrors, or crystals in which are formed visions, symbols or pictures” (Verner-Bonds, p. 324, 2002).
**Practice** (fig. 42)

The ancient practice of the Zen ensō was a major influence on the entire body of work. I included one drawing from my own ensō practice to acknowledge this. In hindsight, I believe that this addition was unnecessary. It read as a rather literal explanation, which was quite separate from the other works.

The layout of the exhibition was based on my research on Feng Shui, Zen garden layouts, and the practice of walking labyrinths. I spaced the work so that the white walls formed a vignette, an unobtrusive frame that allows the work to speak for itself and be observed. Each work is presented as an isolated visual experience. *Twenty-One Days* (fig. 5), for example, was given a frame sufficient to let the audience walk 360 degrees around it, in a similar fashion to walking a labyrinth. Additionally, in the manner of Feng Shui, the corners were given special attention where pieces like *Sittings* (fig. 30) were placed in such a way that they softened the corner and helped the gentle flow of chi or energy through the space. In essence I wanted the space to feel balanced and even somewhat sacred. During the planning, I considered what path viewers would instinctively want to take around the works and how much time they would need to appreciate each work. In retrospect, I believe I was successful in this endeavor and was very glad for the large gallery I had to play with.

The lighting also was well considered. The bulbs were arranged in such a way that each piece rested in a pool of low light. Similar again to my research of Zen gardens, the light acted like a soft frame that rippled from the work just as the gravel in a Zen garden is raked around the rocks to give the effect of water. This helped the viewer to be drawn into the work and created a more intimate feeling despite the great spaciousness of the gallery. The lighting used was tungsten as opposed to halogen, and thus left a softness and perhaps a more feminine energy in the space.

The absence of a traditional artist statement was by design on my part. It was my intention not to feed the viewer too much information. Words like “God” or “spirituality” can be distasteful and offend some viewers. By being more elusive with the title *O*, which could be pronounced, “o,” “circle,” “round,” “disc,”
or “ring,” the viewer can draw on his/her own level of awareness and past experiences to inform him/her on the work. In this way, they can bring their personal interpretation to the work and take from it what it is that they need. This could manifest on several levels. One viewer might take the shape of the circle, decide that he/she likes this shape and enjoys the work from the point of view of this repetition. Another might appreciate how the concentric rings remind him/her of a drop of water, which has a peaceful connotation to most. Likewise another viewer with a very different set of values might see how Centered (fig. 16) reminds him/her of the massive collection and movement of energy that occurred at the creation of the universe or Big Bang. There was enough in the work, both visually and conceptually, to offer each viewer enough information to enjoy the work within his/her comfort level. As hints to the origin of the work, I offered a numbered list of the works to the audience. Each piece was titled with a word or phrase that resonated greatly with me and held some meaning of the original idea behind the work. In a similar way, some of these phrases may have been recognizable to certain viewers such as Sittings. Those who were not familiar with Zen may have interpreted it very differently. Either way the interpretation is perfect. I would rather that my audience be gently guided as they so choose rather than being funneled into a certain way of thinking about the work. I believe that a well-resolved body of work can be read in many ways without much prior knowledge about its background.

I also created an option for the informal collection of responses from the viewers to use for my future work. The visitors’ book contained some very interesting responses. One in particular that stood out was that of a viewer who had had a miserable day. His comment describes how, despite passing the gallery everyday on his way home from work, he had never gone in before. On the evening of the opening, he felt strongly drawn in and was glad he went. He described the memory of the bad day drifting off upon entering the gallery. He was lifted by the work. Through the combination of the visitors’ book and lack of traditional artist statement, my research was grounded in the emergence of spiritual themes rather than the suggestion of them.

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6 Several viewers had this response to the bronze piece (Centered).
Chapter III - Conclusion

O sought to provide a healing or enlightening experience for the viewer through the use of the circle motif. It also employed references to the movement of energy through the human body and meditation and utilized sacred sound to enhance the experience. Rhythm and movement have always informed my work, and O is no different in this regard. The repetition, curved lines, and concentric circles all give this sense of flow to the work.

I gathered feedback through the informal collection of data by way of a comments book within the exhibition space as well as taking into account conversational responses from viewers. As a result the reactions were given without prompts, guidance, or direction. The only suggestions of the content of the work could be found in the works’ elusive titles.

In conclusion, I would like to reference four works that have taught me a great deal and will help develop my work further in the future. The first of these is the large photographic image of Vortex (fig. 26). I was understandably so deeply involved with the work that my audience, without prior glass-making knowledge, might not recognize the origin of the image. Not presenting the original blown glass form alongside the image was an effort to avoid being overly literal. In hindsight, however, I believe there is a compromise to be found that could subtly illuminate the image’s origin. An entire sequence of images would reinforce photography as a process to which I have intently committed. Conversely, the inclusion of a series of the blown glass forms (fig. 27) nearby would invite the image back into the context of the show as a whole.

Another work that has more potential than was exploited in the exhibition is Tri Spiral (fig. 39). For future projects I would consider utilizing an entire exhibition space for this painting technique alone, particularly since good lighting is imperative to make these glass beads come alive. Secondly, I would work with a less specific set of marks. Tri Spiral attempted to reference my Irish heritage but in doing so
made for a rather self-conscious work. The movement of the ripple patterns on the periphery is a subtle visual acknowledgement of the sound in the space. This is the most successful aspect, especially since it reinforces the idea that every piece leans on the others. I also would explore the highlighting of shadows with the beads so that the audience is forced to question everything in the space.

The film *O* was an excellent addition to the exhibition since process as a meditation has become one of the most interesting aspects of my work. The recording of process, therefore, is something that I plan to explore much further in the years to come. In the context of the exhibition, it related well to *Sittings* (fig. 30) in that *Sittings* became a mediator between the film and the other works. After seeing these two pieces, one is forced to look at the other work in a very different way. Furthermore, while *Sittings* was not fully resolved, it has abounding potential for the illustration of process as a meditation through performance. Again, I plan to investigate this in future works.

The show lacks verticality. I always was interested in the idea of reaching up, particularly when my work was so linked to a higher energy, something greater and out of reach, that we are always striving for perfection in some way, shape, or form for ourselves personally and for situations of others. To me, that can be illustrated in forms and silhouettes that arc upwards. *At-Onement* is a good example of where the form reaches upwards and outwards (fig. 12). However, *Working Through*...utilizes the vertical, despite the fact that these forms close toward the top rather than open. I would seriously consider returning to the open vortex form for future works since it so clearly references potential energy and movement.

Another realization I have had since the show is that the work may need to be more experiential in order to provide a more healing or enlightening experience for the audience. In his piece *Square Words: New English Calligraphy*, the artist Xu Bing invited the audience to participate in the art of calligraphy. He installed a classroom-like setup within the gallery with desks, brushes, inks, and a video that took the audience step by step through mastering the various strokes. Bing explained that “Calligraphy is good for health, it is like a spiritual exercise of meditation...when the mind concentrates, it is clean and the heart is
quiet” (Weintraub, p. 370, 2003). Consequently, Bing ensured that the audience actually experienced the spiritual practice of calligraphy. This practicality in instilling a spiritual awareness in the audience seems very logical and something that I hope to apply to my work in the future. Spirituality in contemporary art tends to be an elusive aspect of the work itself. However, it does not diminish the potential for enlightenment. In the cases of Ann Hamilton and Xu Bing, the audience is taken unawares of this higher nature upon first engagement with the work due to the incredible experientialism. Although there are no “direct religious ties… they are as spiritual as Rothko’s somber chapel paintings in that they engage our whole being, eliciting the most personal of revelations” (Herbert, p. 76, 2001). It is this phenomenon that I ultimately intend to achieve in all my work. I have learned a great deal through bringing O to fruition and am now a small step closer to achieving that goal in the future.

Overall, I believe that the show was a success. As discussed, I would make changes to several of the individual pieces if exhibiting them again. However, I learned a great deal over the course of the two years and developed my work quite dramatically within that time. It must be considered that my previous body of work, *Synapse*, as described in Chapter I was a series of vessels and forms that were anchored in a craft and design context (figs. 9-11). O is a more sculptural body of work not only through its use of media but also by way of scale, presentation, and concept.
Fig. 1 Vortices
turned wood
tallest 19”, 2010
Fig. 2 Ensō I
cast glass, oil paint
Ø40" x 6", 2011
Fig. 3 Ensō II
pâte de verre
\( \varnothing 40'' \times 6'', 2011 \)
Fig. 4 *Ensō III*
pâte de verre
Ø40" x 6", 2011
Fig. 5 Twenty One Days
pâte de verre, form cast from turned wood
∅10’, 2011

Fig. 6 One of Twenty One
pâte de verre, form cast from turned wood
10” x 23” x 5”, 2010
Fig. 7 Working through...
cast iron, handmade cast paper, turned wood, gold leaf, cast wax, cast glass
variable dimensions, each component h23”, 2011
Fig. 8 Working through…
detail
cast handmade paper
h23”, 2010
**Fig. 9** *Synapse*, Expression, Vitality
blown and hot sculpted glass
10, x 5 x 5, 8 x 7 x 6, 2009
Fig. 10 *Synapse*, Peace
blown and hot sculpted glass
12, x 8 x 7, 2009
Fig. 11 Synapse*, Liberation
blown and hot sculpted glass
12 x 10 x 7, 2009
Fig. 12 At-onement
installation view
blown and coldworked glass, turned green Poplar
variable dimensions, 2009
Fig. 13 At-onement
detail
Fig. 14 Working through...
component
cast glass
h23”, 2010
Fig. 15 Working through...
component
turned wood
h23”, 2010
Fig. 16 *Centered*
Cast bronze, form created from turned wood
∅ 10", 2011
Fig. 17 Centered
detail
Fig. 18 Centered detail
Fig. 19 Centered
detail
Fig. 20 Present Moment Reminder IV
installation view
pâte de verre, found wood
dimensions variable, 2010
Fig. 21 Present Moment Reminder IV
detail
Fig. 22 Present Moment Reminder IV
installation view
pâte de verre
variable dimensions, 2010
Fig. 23 Present Moment Reminder IV
installation view
variable dimensions, 2010
Fig. 24 Working through...
detail
cast iron
h23”, 2010
Fig. 25 Working through...
detail
cast wax
h23”, 2010
Fig. 26 Vortex
digital image of mould blown glass vortex form, originally cast from turned wood
2011
Fig. 27 *Vortex*
mould blown glass vortex form, originally cast from turned wood
h23”, 2011
Fig. 28 Soundwave patterns derived from recordings of Solfeggio tuning forks
Fig. 29 Still from О
Fig. 30 Sittings
blown glass, handmade paper, glass frit, wire mesh
dimensions variable, 2011
Fig. 31 *Sittings*
detail
Fig. 32 Sittings
detail
Fig. 33 *Sittings*
detail
Fig. 34 Skimming the mould with steel jig
Fig. 35 Finishing and smoothing the mold surface before packing with glass
Fig. 36 Verse
installation view
hot sculpted glass
dimensions variable, 2011
Fig. 37 Verse
detail
Fig. 38 Verse
detail
Fig. 39 *Tri Spiral*
glass road beads, light
10’ x 4’, 2011
Fig. 40 Newgrange, passage grave, Boyne Valley, Ireland
Fig. 41 Entrance to Newgrange
Fig. 42 Practice
india ink on rice paper
8x8, 2011
Fig. 43 O
MFA Thesis Exhibition, installation view,
Gallery Kunstler, Rochester, NY, 2011
Fig. 44 O
MFA Thesis Exhibition, installation view,
Gallery Kunstler, Rochester, NY, 2011
Fig. 45 O
MFA Thesis Exhibition, installation view,
Gallery Kunstler, Rochester, NY, 2011
Fig. 46 Layout of gallery Kunstler
Notes

1. Reiki is an energy healing technique, which was rediscovered in the late 1800’s by a Japanese Monk named Dr. Mikao Usui. It is a spiritual practice and an enlightenment producing system that allows a person to heal and to heal others (Coll, p. 4, 2011).

2. Glass which has been broken down into smaller chunks and granules.

3. Effect of color on the psyche: Lines of energy that flow within the body are known as meridians or chakras. Each has its own unique color, and each of these colors has its own energy wavelength. Colors have different psychological properties that affect these chakras. Red, for example, is associated with feelings of stability; it is a grounding color. “As we go up the spectrum we leave the slower, denser vibrations of the material world, the reds, oranges and yellows, and enter the finer quicker vibrations of the mental and spiritual — the blues, indigos and purples” (Verner-Bonds, p. 147, 2002).

4. In 1998 Dr. Glen Rein of the Quantum Biology Research Lab in New York performed experiments with in vitro DNA. Four styles of music, including Gregorian chants that use the Solfeggio scale, were converted to scalar audio waves and played via a CD player to test tubes containing in vitro DNA. The effects of the music were determined by measuring the DNA test tube samples’ absorption of UV light after and hour of exposure to the music. Gregorian chants had caused a 5-9.1% increase in the absorption of UV light due to the unwinding of the DNA helix. Sanskrit chanting caused a similar 5.8%-8.2% effect. Rock (0-1%) and classical music (0-1.1%) had little or no effect. Glen Rein finally concluded that the audible sound waves of the Solfeggio scale can cause resonance in DNA and can have profound healing effects (Solgeggio.net, 2012).

5. “The word scrying means ‘seeing.’” It is divination —seeking the future— by peering into any reflective surface such as glass, water, mirrors, or crystals in which are formed visions, symbols or pictures” (Verner-Bonds, p. 324, 2002).

6. Several viewers had this response to the bronze piece (Centered).
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Art: 21, Spirituality, PBS, video.


Reiki Mastership 3, Jan Coll, 2011.


http://solfeggiofrequencies.net/