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Secret places

K. Leigh Taylor

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

SECRET PLACES

By

K. Leigh Taylor
May 4, 1995
I, ______________________, prefer to be contacted each time a request for production is made. I can be reached at the following address:

2311 Tufton Ridge Road

Reisterstown, MD 21136

Date: 5/16/95
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INTRODUCTION

During my graduate study at Rochester Institute of Technology, I have concentrated on the personal exploration and sculptural expression of the different components of my self and my sexuality and how they relate and conflict with one another. In the past two to three years, the forms which I have chosen to express these components have evolved, starting with the use of the female figure to abstractions of the female figure, and then to abstractions of the essence of female form. For my thesis body of work, I went a step further, using forms from nature as a means of expressing the different components of my self. Being full of dichotomy, the elements of natural forms act as a metaphor for the spiritual, emotional, and physical extremes that exist within me.

I know that conflicting components exist in all of us, however, the ones I have chosen to discuss are personal visions and thoughts about my own experience as a woman. The core of my art is the core of myself, and the two are growing together, expounding in emotion as well as in form. In short, this group of sculptures reveals my secret places - my inner and outer feelings, struggles and parts. In the work, I hope to show that in order to achieve self-worth and inner strength, we must recognize and accept all elements of our beings: our fragility as well as our strength, our interior as well as our exterior, our pleasure as well as our pain, and our body as well as our spirit. Only after such recognition is achieved can individuality be attained.

"The intention of my pictures separately and collectively is to state a personal conviction - to express a purely personal approach... True modes of art are derived from modes of individuals understanding life." - Georgia O'Keeffe
INFLUENCES / PHILOSOPHY

“Sculpture, like sex or love, is an affirmation, an attempt to devise methods and installments, ‘to prove that you are.’ A ferocious desire for independence is present in all the work...a determination to exist at whatever fragile level you can achieve.” - Louise Bourgeois

There have been many things that have acted as forms of inspiration for me, ranging from painters, sculptors, literature and philosophies to nature and life experience. For me it is the feeling and content of an image or an idea that carries over into my art, not necessarily the style or form of another artist's work. However, if I had to choose my influences, they would fall under three subjects: women in art, paradox, and forms from nature. Reading about women in art and as artists (and understanding how the issues relate to my life experience) inspired the content and theme of my sculpture. The intrigue of paradox inspired my strategy, and the organic variety found in nature inspired my forms.

Although it is the work that gets me to read about a certain artist, often times it is an artist's words that inspire me more that the work itself. When I read about art, I find myself copying quotes rather than sketching ideas and art forms. Because my sculpture primarily deals with the issue of being a woman, colleagues and advisors have continuously encouraged me to read about contemporary female artists and their work. The word ‘feminist’ used to scare me away from reading feminist ideology, but the encouragement has led me to think about women’s issues in ways I never had before, inspiring me to want to push my concepts until they had an edge, until they made a bold statement and a direct impact on the viewer.

I have always considered myself a sensual person. The images I am drawn to, as well as those I create, have always been namely organic and decidedly ‘female.’ As a young woman, the first work that caught my eye was by Georgia O'Keeffe. At first,
it was probably the colors, the organic forms, and the intrinsic beauty of her work that interested me. Then, out of my own attraction to the work, I started reading about her, and it was then that my discovery of the issues revolving around women in art specifically began. I became aware of the fact that her abstractions of nature were clearly from a woman’s point of view, which, during her lifetime, I found to be unchartered territory. Because her work was so obviously female, it oozed “a social consciousness, a social struggle” (see figure 2).

What ‘female’ is or should be has been a political and cultural debate for many years, and reading about it has made me more aware of the influences of society upon my personal thoughts and actions, as well as upon other artists. O’Keeffe belonged to an art world that was predominantly male. However, before she painted she would ask herself, “‘Is this mine? Is this all intrinsically of myself? Is it influenced by some idea or some photograph of an idea which I have acquired from some man?’” O’Keeffe was obviously aware of the male influence upon her art, yet she did everything in her power to subside it. I was attracted to her work for what it personified visually and emotionally - pure female intuition (see figure 3). In itself her work is a “‘woman’s feeling,’..which ‘only a woman can explore.’” Her work has “honesty of aim, honesty of self-expression, honesty of revolt against the autocracy of convention.” She was the first artist to show me what it takes to perform the task of symbolizing the essence of personal emotions and what it means to be true to oneself.

Like many “pre-feminist” and feminist artists, O’Keeffe did not want to be called a ‘woman artist’; she did not believe that art should be separated into sexes. Sculptor

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2 Peters 16.
3 Peters 16.
4 Peters 37.
Louise Bourgeois was also "driven by the impulse to eradicate sexual difference." I had not realized how hard it was for me to refer to a female artist without calling her a 'woman artist.' It was simply a common socialized label that I had grown accustomed to, and once I became aware of it, I wanted to get rid of it. I wanted to stop looking at myself, my art, and at society through men's eyes. I wanted my work to be personal, individual, and to "expose raw emotions" without fear. Like Bourgeois, I wanted to be able to say, "I am a woman without secrets... Anything private should not be a risk, it should be a result, it should be understood, resolved, packaged, and disposed of." Her confidence is an inspiration to me, forcing me to realize that it is my emotions that matter, and that it is up to me to feel them freely and then to make them understood. "Sculpture is an exorcism, an emotional catharsis. It is not analysis, which is an intellectual process." 

So I read a lot about 'the female struggle,' which abounded in the 1970's and 80's, when women were entering 'his-story,' and trying to make a name for themselves in the modern art world. Women like Eva Hesse were "trying not to be sidetracked by all her feminine roles from menstrual periods to cleaning house to remaining pretty and young." Reading, it was hard not to be angry, not to want to rebel in some way. But my 'female struggle' is not with the world; it is more because of the world. Socially, women have begun to make names for themselves, and consciousness on a social level is changing. In my opinion and experience, however (and in witnessing experiences of my female friends), consciousness on a personal level is still immature and is what needs to change.

Many women still perceive of themselves only in sexual terms, which demotes

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7 Meyer-Thoss 49.
8 Meyer-Thoss 68.
9 Meyer-Thoss 61.
self-worth and a sense of individualism. I did not understand and resolve this for myself until I looked at it from a historical and societal viewpoint. Especially in the 1950’s and 1960’s, “heterosexual women were not encouraged to experience their bodies directly, but only as they were perceived by and used by men and children. Young women were taught to value their bodies as a trophy to give or withhold... in response to male desire...”

In my experience, this frame of mind still avidly exists on a personal level for many women, forcing them to pay more attention to their exteriors rather than their interiors. Because of upbringing, advertising, and traditional views of what is “right” and “wrong,” many women still try to be or look a ‘certain’ way in order to be accepted by men, children, and society. What I have learned is that acceptance should first come from the self, which requires an understanding of societal pressures, as well as a decided reconciliation of the differences and the opposites that live within us - “inside and outside, vulnerability and assertion, delicacy and things visceral, gender and androgyny, spirit and flesh, universality and subjectivity.”

Because of the extremes that I find inside myself, paradox has always intrigued me. My interest in paradox and duality really began at Hamilton College, where half of my studies were devoted to English Literature. While working on my art, I had the opportunity to be inspired by authors and poets like D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Jean Rhys. For example, D.H. Lawrence, especially in the novel The Rainbow, fascinated me with his vivid descriptions of love, passion, and sex through the rhythms of nature and landscape. In doing so, he elevated primal, even base, human needs and desires to a spiritual level. Through the use of paradox, Lawrence coupled emotions and actions that had once seemed each other’s extreme and made them belong together.

Because I had the experience of understanding paradox in literary terms, I

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11 Broude & Garrard 24.
learned to articulate how it played a part in my life as well. Dichotomy has affected my adult life and my artwork on a very personal level, especially the dual forces of spirituality and physicality. Being raised in a conservative Christian household, I was ingrained with many important, though traditional, morals, like the importance of remaining “pure,” being faithful, and remaining devoted to God. These spiritual and societal mores are still a huge part of who I am on one level. However, there is another side of me, one I discovered while rebelling against the protective nature of my home: it harbors and reveals free-spiritedness, sensuality, and passion. In one walk of life this side is absolutely wonderful and decidedly sought out. In another, its perhaps ‘shameful’ or ‘unladylike.’

For so long, I struggled between the “way I was raised,” and the way my mind and body wanted to think and act. They seemed to juxtapose each other, like ‘good-girl vs. bad girl,’ and I went through these phases where, in my mind, I lived in one extreme or the other. I could not seem to accept them as two parts of a whole, nor could I believe that all of my ‘parts’ were worthy enough to be created by God. Consequently, my opinion of myself, as well as my behavior, was confused and sometimes thwarted. I did not know how to think of myself, because I was listening to everyone but me - I’m supposed to act this way, not to act that way, look like her, be attracted to guys like him, feel this way at this time. Finally, after going through periods of aloneness and soul searching and then devastating periods of void-filling in-love-out-of-love relationships, things began to make some sense. In the words of Carl Jung, “without the experience of opposites there is no experience of wholeness... Wholeness is the bringing together of opposites...”13

In realizing that I am made up of a lot of different, even opposing, parts, I decided that the most logical format for the creation of a personal body of work was to

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make individual sculptures that resembled specific parts of my self, which would then create a cohesive whole. Such a realization was also an acceptance of my different parts, and therefore of who I am.

The use of forms from nature as a vehicle for expressing the different parts of myself gave me many advantages. In itself, nature is full of opposing elements - harmony/chaos, inside/outside, life/death, generation/decay, male/female, vulnerability/protection. Therefore, natural forms were also a logical formal format for my concept, offering a wide range organic forms that relate and conflict in a harmonious way, allowing cohesiveness as well as a sense of diversity and escapism.

I have always been fascinated with the forms and shapes found in flowers, pods, and seeds. *Secrets of Plant Life*, a large, old, out-of-print book I found in the library, offered me a wealth of visual information about the insides and outsides of plants (see figure 4). The book is filled with enlarged photographs of the internal and external development and the sex life of certain plants and flowers. I could not believe how certain parts of plants so closely resembled human (especially female) parts. The other aspect that intrigued me was how certain plants protected or hid their 'private' parts - their sexual organs, their eggs, their offspring (see figure 5). They have secret places and vulnerable parts, which are protected by tough exteriors and hard shells. *Secrets of Plant Life*, which encouraged me to go outside and look for nature's real objects, gave me the opportunity to see beyond the exterior, to get a glimpse of what is unavailable to the naked eye or the first glance. In my thesis body of work, I hoped to do for my audience what *Secrets of Plant Life* did for me - to reveal the core of my reality.
SECRET PLACES

"Then I thought what a fantastic thing, to reveal your vulnerability, to be so publicly exposed. We are all vulnerable in some way and we are all male-female." - Louise Bourgeois

The title from my thesis body of work really came to me Spring quarter last year (1994), when I created what I consider to be the first piece in the development of this series. Appropriately, I got the phrase from one of my favorite Psalms in the Bible. I was reading it one night, when I understood one of the stanzas in a way I never had before. The Psalm is about feeling physically and spiritually protected through knowing that God is everywhere and knows all of our parts.

Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens you are there;
If I make my bed in the depths, you are there...
For you created my inmost being;
    you knit me together in my mother's womb...
My frame was not hidden from you when I was
    made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
    Your eyes saw my unformed body."

In using the title ‘secret places’ I feel that I am acknowledging the fact that my ‘inmost being,’ my spiritual and physical parts and places, are God-made. Even the most vulnerable and base parts of ourselves are worthy to be seen by God. In revealing these secrets of mine, I feel that I am acknowledging their belonging. If God, the highest form of spirituality, acknowledges our secret places, why shouldn’t we? Hopefully, through the use of content, form, and surface, my pieces place the spiritual and the physical realms together.

Some of my pieces resemble or suggest female genitalia, images that are not as predominant as those referring to the male counterpart. In class critiques, a couple

of these pieces received comments (mainly from men) like: “Your pieces make me uncomfortable... I feel like I'm looking at something I shouldn't be looking at... I like this one better, because it is easier to look at.” Should certain things remain secret? Why? In one opinion, the vaginal image “attacks the basis of male supremacy from the point of view of depth psychology - attacks the most fundamental area of male supremacy - that a penis, because it is visible, is superior.” Should women hide their sex, simply because, biologically, it is on the inside? Why should we hide our sexuality when it is in our thoughts and in our beings anyway? These parts - male and female - are just as natural as our faces - why should we hide them? Why should we be ashamed of them or uncomfortable looking at them or knowing that they exist in other people besides ourselves? Comments like these were truly eye opening to me, making me wonder if anything really has changed for women. Perhaps some of my work does revert to a 70's mind set; I want to define my sexuality on my own terms, and celebrate it as they “openly celebrated the female body from an experiential viewpoint, exploring their and society's attitudes about the body and proclaiming female organs...as metaphoric emblems of women's independent power and freedom from male dominance.” I kind of liked that some of my pieces made people uncomfortable. It proved something to me. Moreover, in my mind, if our physical bodies and thoughts were less of a taboo or secret, perhaps there would be less physical violence and verbal abuse against women.

These questions and thoughts are important ones in the creation of a few of my thesis pieces, especially "Carnal Spirit," "Inner Strength," and "Generations." Other pieces, like "Nurtured Phases" and "Intimate Separation" are more subtle, about other aspects of my female sexuality, such as fertility, family, growth, and change. At one point I was concerned about the cohesiveness of the work, because some were

16 Broude & Garrard, 24.
aggressive and others were more subtle. However, I had to remind myself that these pieces are individual parts of a whole. Some of the ideas are meant to be aggressive and have a direct impact upon the viewer while others are to be slowly digested and carefully thought out. Together, they should form a life-like image acknowledging that some things are meant to be shouted and others are to be whispered.

The creation of “Nurtured Phases” happened with a series of discoveries, the first being a technical enhancement of an existing notion (see figure 6). In the beginning of fall quarter, I made a sculpture about fertility; a large, volumous form with an opening and smaller egg forms inside. It was a breakthrough as far as the use of natural plant form and surface in conjunction with the essence of female fertility (see figure 7). One of the criticisms, however, was that, according to nature itself, there needed to be more egg forms, that it needed to be fuller, and that the exterior needed to be more responsive to the interior.

I went to making some small models, and for one of them, I used round red crab apples that I found on the crab apple trees outside our studio to represent the egg / seed forms. I tightly wrapped a slab of clay around a handful of the crab apples, leaving a tiny opening to suggest what was on the inside. It was a spontaneously made model, arriving closer to the affect I was looking for. I put it aside and worked on some others, and then something wonderful happened. As the model dried, the clay shrank, cracking around the apples, further defining the forms inside as well as giving the outside an energy that it didn’t have before. It was a discovery that not only enhanced the form, it brought a new vitality to my original concept.

I began to make the small egg forms out of clay, bisqued them and glazed them a deep red, a color I had been using to suggest flesh and vulnerability. I then wrapped thick slabs of clay around a handful of them, as I had originally done with the crab apples, and let them dry. Watching them transform, the red of the egg forms would
almost shine through the rough cracks; I felt as if I had caught them in the middle of a dramatic and significant change (see figure 8). Essentially, the pieces made themselves, suggesting a natural metamorphosis untouched by the human hand.

I then made more of the pods, glazing the exterior with a brown lithium satin matte. To me, the brown represents the short-lived nature of a strong, yet brittle, protective shell. I intended the red interior to be more dominant, because the changes that occurred on the exterior happened because of the suggested resilience and growth of the egg forms on the interior. Decidedly, the egg forms are about to leave behind their birth place and reveal themselves to the environment.

Obviously, the pod forms are quite narrative for me. Singly, as well as in a cluster, they hold a sense of past, present, and future. Displayed as they were in the gallery, in multiples arranged in a circle, the piece also begins to suggest a mysterious sense of nurturance: could they have been placed there by their birth mother, carefully arranged, with the smaller and more underdeveloped pods in the center? To me, the piece is also definitive of a significant moment, where one questions the protective nature of things; is the external shell losing its protective ability, like a parent does when their child becomes an adult?

The relationship between parent and child, vulnerability and protection, is also important in the piece “Intimate Separation” (see figure 9). The forms, two seemingly separated shell halves and a fetal egg form, were inspired by nature (a combination of fruits, nuts, and seed pods), and they became an intriguing metaphor for the emotional, physical, and spiritual ties between family members and among love relationships. The placement of the three forms in close proximity to one another was especially important to the content, and their actual separateness also relates to the idea of different parts creating a whole - in this case, three parts creating one piece.
Like “Nurtured Phases,” “Intimate Separation” also carries connotations of past, present, and future, of catching a moment in the process of the life cycle. The two similar shell halves were once together, containing the egg form, which is now outside and alone. But because of the placement of the smaller form near its creator, at present it still seems to be connected and protected. The fetal shape of the egg form suggests that further growth will occur, and the rough texture of the shell cross-section suggests that there will be further decay. In one way this piece tells the story of family growth, personally relating to the feelings I have about my relationship to my parents. Like the egg form, I am separated from my parents (my former creators and protectors), yet I am still joined to them. Similarly, the piece could also suggest the birth / decay of a love relationship - the ties we have with past loves, how they are always a part of us, and how the personal growth we attain from them acts as a form of protection from future vulnerability. Visually and thematically, the forms speak of intimate connection, but they also suggest that the connection between them used to be stronger.

The form and surface of the egg form in “Intimate Separation” became important for me and my intentions of the piece as a whole. The form, subtilely curving in on itself, has its own minimal protective connotations, suggesting our often meager attempts to shield ourselves in times of vulnerability and change. The soft, off-white encaustic surface suggests pure vulnerability, innocence, youth, and impressionability. However, the youthful quality of the form also speaks of what it will grow into; namely, it will become what it came out of. The egg is a younger version of its maker, which cultivates the idea of life-process and the power and gift of the female cycle.

The two halves, with their large cavities, almost seem reminiscent of the form that used to belong there. The womb-like cavity is still fresh and affected, coated with the same soft waxy surface that is on its offspring. It has paid a price in the birthing of the egg, being now only a shell. The outside texture suggests strength and hardness,
but also age from exposure to the elements. One has to question the present purpose of the two shells; Is their work over? What will become of them?

In the gallery, the forms were separated and placed on three quadrilateral waxed bases, arranged in a triangular fashion. With their corners touching, the placement of the bases emphasizes the intimate connection between the forms on top of them. The triangular format, with the two halves parallel to each other and the egg seemingly embraced at the apex, suggests the symbol for strength and endurance.

For me, "Carnal Spirit" is also full of dichotomy and is about many things (see figure 10). On one level, like "Intimate Separation," it is about vulnerability and protection. The purest, most unbiased interpretation of the piece came from my father, who appropriately saw the three-part piece as "Mommy, Daddy, and Baby," the 'mommy' and 'daddy' being the two larger outside forms, and the 'baby' being the protected form in the middle.

Contrastingly, I also see the piece as being about penetration and completion; the smaller inside form entering the larger forms, completing them, in a sense. The soft outside forms are accepting of the smaller form, simply because it seems to belong there. It fits. It is the essence of the male-female connection. The piece is "carnal" - being 'of body' in form as well as in physical suggestion. Yet, for me, it is also "spirit"ual because of the feeling of a higher completion, of something primal and base, yet natural and profoundly beautiful. What is also intriguing to me about the piece, is the male vs. female representation. Although there is a connection, the female element is the larger. She, represented as the two outside forms (or even as the whole piece in its entirety, in one interpretation), is the place to be entered at her will as well as the place that protects. There is a strength in that the female element overpowers the smaller phallic form. It is the male form that needs protection. Alone, the small upright form would be directionless and non-aesthetic.
The form of “Carnal Spirit” was inspired by a seed pod, one I actually explored in an earlier piece. The first version was more literal: I used a bright red glossy glaze for the form in the middle, suggesting a fleshy vulnerability, and the two outside halves were more representative of a realistic pod shell. The form and surface of second version, “Carnal Spirit,” was intended to take the piece beyond the representational and into a more emotional, spiritual realm.

The off-white encaustic surface of the outside forms suggests softness and vulnerability, as well as the protective yet seductive nature of skin. One is hopefully drawn to the waxy sheen, but because of the connotations of the piece, resistant to the temptation (another paradox I find appropriate and appealing). The central form, glazed in a thick glossy white, is harder and less natural in feel as well as in tone than the encaustic forms. However, the surface, being so smooth, also attracts attention and suggests purity and belonging. In my eyes, the two surfaces together have a paradoxical element that one often finds in nature as well as in life situations.

Next to “Carnal Spirit” in the gallery appropriately stood “Inner Strength,” which juxtaposes “Carnal Spirit” in content, but compliments it in form and surface (see figure 11). In many ways the statement of “Inner Strength” is more important to me than the form itself. The large voluminous form, resembling a woman’s womb, stands defiantly upright, like a full vessel. However, contrary to one’s first glance, there is no opening, just a smooth slight dimple where the opening would expectantly exist. The purpose of the closed opening is to deny or resist entry of any kind: to bodily suggest the unbroken hymen of virginity and the decision to resist physical, as well as emotional, vulnerability. Symbolizing purity, I coated the form with a thick, matte-white glaze. In addition, I enhanced the hardness and strength of the closed opening by giving it a gradual glossy sheen to subtilely contrast with the soft body of the form.

I called this piece “Inner Strength” because I feel that I get my strength out of
knowing that I am pure, that I have power over my body, and that my womanhood is decidedly intact and unviolated. Contrastingly, feelings of weakness (and even shame) arise out of thinking that I'm impure, that my past relationship experiences have tainted my innocence and purity. It is when I deny myself the acceptance and forgiveness I need in order to feel whole, that I lose inner strength. The creation of “Inner Strength” is the celebration and proclamation of my self-worth and independence as a woman.

Highly contrasting from the celebratory tone of “Inner Strength,” “Generations,” for me, is somewhat painful and relates my feelings during a specific moment in my love life. Creating “Generations: harbor” and “Generations: probe” was quite a drawn out process, and my intentions for the piece changed with each stage of development. In its finished stage, as it was in the Bevier Gallery, the two part piece intends to speak of my momentary view of the physical relationship between female and male (see figure 12). The two pieces, coupled by their monumental size and surface quality, belong next to each other, but are quite each other’s opposite. One is about cause, the other effect. One seeks, the other accepts. One enters, the other is entered. The piece has a large voice, one that, because it deals with the male influence, speaks of society’s patriarchal consciousness and its affect on me as a woman.

The creation of this piece began with the female part, and at the time, I had intended it to stand alone. The form is a large asymmetrical sphere, punctured with a small dark opening. The opening, which in essence signifies the vagina, is quite alluring and mysterious in its darkness. Through the opening, one’s eye is drawn into the fullness of the form, which metaphorically acts as the physical penetrator. The audience becomes the voyeur, the violator. In contrast to the uncomforting lure of the opening, the surface of “Generations: harbor,” with its fecund layering of raw umber, mars yellow, creamy white, and marshmallow white encaustic, is soothing, seductive,
and pleasing to the eye and touch. The surface, with its organic representation, is ironically attractive and inviting in comparison to the connotations of the piece. In my eyes, the surface symbolizes the external safeguard one exudes in order to fight loneliness. Society has taught women how to be attractive, and how to assure attention. Yet experience makes us wonder whether we really want that kind of attention. The surface and the form together symbolizes the essence of my personal struggle, the one that distinctly says, “one part be my lover, one part go away.”

“Generations: probe” carries the same message through a male form. The encaustic surface is luxurious, soft, and inviting, yet the black and blue layers suggest coldness and hardness, giving the piece the feel of a missile, a torpedo - a weapon. When I first conceived of making a piece about the male influence, I had intended it to be equal in size and feel to the already-made “harbor” form. I wanted the piece to be about the woman being as strong - if not stronger - than the man. However, in making the piece, the “probe” transformed into the dominant image. I realized that this piece was really about a moment, and that it had nothing to do with how I wanted things to be. Instead, it was how, in the past, I have let the male influence play a larger role in my life than I should have. At the time, I did not understand how to celebrate my strength, and how to be independent from the male influence. The finishing of this piece is me literally taking the advice of Louise Bourgeois. It is me “exposing raw emotions,” “understanding them, resolving them, packaging them, and disposing of them.”

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18 Meyer-Thoss 68.
CONCLUSION

As I reflect on my thesis body of work, I realize that I have truly evolved, conceptually, formally, and technically, since I have been at RIT. My work is the product of a lot of thought, many surface tests, and intense formal trial and error. For these reasons alone, I find my thesis work to be quite successful. I feel that I pushed myself formally and conceptually, and achieved the edge and boldness for which I sought. I am also proud of my work for what it accomplished for me emotionally and spiritually. It is, in many ways, a documentation of my emotions in their raw state, something for which I personally seek in my work, as well as in the work of other artists.

Although I like many elements of my work and see the improvements, there are still things that I have to work on in order to make it even more successful. One weakness I have is my lack of attention towards formal detail - the finishing touches. I tend to get so caught up into the concept or idea of a piece (concept is my strength) that I rush through the details of the form in order to see it finished. For me, it is the conceiving and building of a piece that has been most important to me, rather than the finishing and the presenting of it. I need to be a little more patient and spend more time on the details, even though they are not as enlightening as the concept. I need my statement to be as strong for my viewer as it is for me, and therefore have to push my forms a little further.

Another shortcoming is that the verbalization of my concept is often stronger than my visualization of it. I came to RIT this way, with my ideas on a higher level than my ability for visual translation. Since I have been at RIT, my abilities in both concept and form have evolved, but they are still uneven - closer, but uneven. However, I find it an accomplishment to have found a concept and a strategy strong and intelligent enough to want to continue to explore and to develop. I feel that my concept, forms,
and surfaces have great potential, and I feel confident that, in my artistic future, they will compliment and balance each other even more than they do now. I am extremely looking forward to the time I have ahead to follow through some of my later discoveries, to work through the details of my forms, and to continue wholeheartedly the exploration that I have begun.
TECHNICAL DATA

CLAY:

My forms are coil and slab built in a clay body that I acquired at Hamilton College:

FRED'S CLAY BODY - cone 04
20 lbs. - Hawthorne Fire Clay
30 lbs. - OM4 Ball Clay
15 lbs. - Fine (or medium) Grog
5 lbs. - Talc
shrinkage 10%

I work with Fred's clay body when it is quite wet, giving me room for flexibility in the building process. I build quickly, stopping only to let the clay set up to a working strength.

SURFACE:

My thesis body of work included two different surfaces, the glaze surface, and the encaustic surface. My breakthroughs with glaze formulation began at the end of my first year, and by the middle of my second year, I had acquired a wide range of rich surfaces, many of which I haven't even had the chance to use. I also started using encaustic, which is a substance made of purified beeswax, damar resin (hardener), and pigment, when I was trying to solve the surface of what became "Generation: harbor." I was looking for a soft, smooth, seductive surface, one that was inviting to the touch and to the eye. Encaustic was my Thesis Committee's suggestion, and it was so successful and rich that I used it in many of the pieces that followed.

Encaustics:

The encaustic process is best described in The Artist's Handbook of Materials and
Techniques:

The "classic" or "basic" encaustic method is extremely simple; it consists of painting on any ground or surface with paints made by mixing dry pigments with molten white refined beeswax plus a variable percentage of resin (usually damar), working from a warm palette...A final heat treatment, or "burning in" (which is the meaning of the term encaustic) by passing a heat source over the surface, fuses and bonds the painting into a permanent form without altering it, and a light polishing with soft cotton brings out a dull, satiny sheen.19

I acquired my encaustic materials and information from R&F Encaustics, a company that proved to be helpful, speedy, and reliable:

R&F Encaustics
P.O. Box 248
Rifton, NY 12471
1 (800) 206-8088

I started with an introductory kit that included a small block of the encaustic base and a variety of the premixed encaustic colors. The kit offered me a chance to test the product before I purchased the raw materials in bulk. To heat the wax, I used an old skillet and bought tin muffin and baking pans to act as my palette. The wax melts at 162 degrees, but I had to keep the skillet at around 350 degrees in order to retain the heat. In its melted state, I painted the encaustic onto the ceramic surface in layers, often the darkest color on the bottom layer and the lightest on the top. To adhere the encaustic to the surface I used a hand torch, which gently re-melted and smoothed over the wax surface.

To mix the raw materials, I first melted the beeswax in a pan. After it was completely melted, I stirred in the damar, which became sticky and took a while to dissipate into

the beeswax. I then added some linseed oil for an extender. To get different colors, I used either the blocks that came with the introductory kit (they were very opaque and could be extended quite far) or the pigments in the glaze pantry. I would stir the melted encaustic and sprinkle in the pigment until I got the color I desired:

**(revised) R&F Encaustic Formula:**
- 1 part - damar resin
- 7-8 parts - purified beeswax
- linseed oil (extender)
- For white - add titanium dioxide
- For black - add black cobalt oxide
- For yellow - add yellow iron oxide

Because of the clay's porosity, the encaustic sometimes stippled. In order to get a completely smooth surface, I had to scrape the surface with a metal scraper. I used a hair-dryer to soften the wax, which made the job a little easier. Scraping was also advantageous in revealing the different layers of encaustic color. Because some areas were thicker than others, scraping the surface created a depth that it did not have before. I also discovered that by painting the clay surface first, I could save myself some money. The paint, with the encaustic coated on top, acted as the first layer of color, and I did not have to bother with trying to hide the naked clay body surface.

All in all, I am very happy with the marriage of encaustic and clay. It offers an immediacy that glaze application does not, and I found it easier to control, especially on pieces that had larger surface. I will definitely continue using encaustic as a surface option.

**Glazes:**
I am only documenting the glazes that I used on pieces this year. I discovered many
other variations and combinations of these glazes and others that offer desirable
depths, textures, and colors.

**J.R. MATTE** - cone 04
base formula:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kona F-4</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc Oxide</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gerstley Borate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frit 3124</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.P. Kaolin</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barium Carbonate</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mason Stain Additions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stain</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep Crimson-6006</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaf Green</td>
<td>4-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seal Brown</td>
<td>4-6%</td>
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</table>

**LITHIUM MATTE** - cone 04
base formula:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magnesium Carbonate</td>
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<td>Frit GF-115</td>
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<td>Lithium Carbonate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alumina Hydrate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whiting</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>E.P. Kaolin</td>
<td>7.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flint</td>
<td>40.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bentonite</td>
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</table>

Mason Stain Additions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stain</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chromium Alumina Pink</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- alone, it is dry and pink, with a light green in the cracks; works well on top of JR Matte or under/on top A. Gill White

**IRON RED** - cone 04
Red Art 25 parts  
E.P. Kaolin 25  
Frit 134 20  
Talc 5  
Flint 20  
Zircopax 12  
**B2 (Satin Matte)** - cone 04  
  Gerstley Borate 20%  
  Lithium Carbonate 10 - works best when layering with other glazes  
  Cryolite 10  
  Zircopax 35  
  Spodumene 25  
  color additions:  
  Yellow Iron Oxide 4-10% - light yellow to a rich brown  

**B2A (Satin Matte)** - cone 04  
  Gerstley Borate 20 parts  
  Lithium Carbonate 10 - turns JR Matte glossy and runny; works well over  
  Zircopax 5  
  Spodumene 25  

**B3** - (White Crackle Matte) cone 04  
  Gerstley Borate 10%  
  Lithium Carbonate 20  
  Zircopax 45 - on top of J.R. Matte, the color will show through the cracks  
  Spodumene 10  
  Cryolite 10  
  Zinc Oxide 5  

**ANDREA GILL WHITE** - cone 04  
  Frit 3124 1000 grms  
  E.P. Kaolin 150 - apply thickly; high-gloss  
  Barium Carbonate 40  
  Zircopax 480  
  Malcaloid 1
A2 (Matte White) - cone 04

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frit 3134</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frit 3110</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OM4 Ball Clay</td>
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<tr>
<td>Flint</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Whiting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zinc Oxide</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zircopax</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- apply thickly; works well alone or on top of A. Gill White - creates a smooth, subtle crackle

**Surface Treatment:**

**"Nurtured Phases"**
- interior = JR Matte (+ 8% deep crimson & 10% Gerstley Borate)
- exterior = JR Matte (+6% seal brown) + Lithium Matte (+10%
  Chromium Alumina Pink)
  = color variation through different temperatures in the 04-05 range

**"Intimate Separation"**
- interior & egg form = encaustic (titanium dioxide and Mars Yellow encaustic)
- exterior = J.R. Matte (+4% seal brown) + B3

**"Carnal Spirit"**
- internal piece = A. Gill White
- external pieces = encaustic (titanium dioxide)

**"Inner Strength"**
- A. Gill White + A2; etched the form with a hydrofloric acid formula to make the glaze surface more matte

**"Generation: harbor"**
- encaustic (Burnt Sienna + Mars Yellow + titanium dioxide + Titanium White)

**"Generation: probe"**
- encaustic (Cobalt Blue + black cobalt oxide)

**"Carnal Parts"**
- interior = A. Gill White + Lithium Matte (10% Chromium Alumina Pink)
- exterior = A. Gill White + A2

**"This Woman's Work"**
- interior = J.R. Matte (+8% deep crimson +10% Gerstley Borate)
- exterior = J.R. Matte (layered +6% leaf green, +4% leaf green, & +6% seal brown) + B2A + Iron Red

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"Internal Spaces" - interior = J.R. Matte (+8% deep crimson) + B2
(10/94) - exterior = J.R. Matte (+6% leaf green) + B2A + Iron Red

**BASES:**

I constructed the bases out of blue foam core with 1/4" plywood glued on top. I then painted them with a molten wax mixture:

75% paraffin wax
25% carduba wax
linseed oil (extender)
titanium dioxide (colorant)

I used wax on my bases in order to draw a parallel to the encaustic surface that is on many of my pieces. The wax, because of its surface quality, also created an unusual seductiveness and intrigue that painted bases could not have accomplished.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


