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Symphony of Nostalgia

Amena Saeed

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Symphony of Nostalgia

By

Amena Saeed

June 9, 2005
Approvals

Advisor: Michael Rogers  
Date - 

Associate Advisor: Robin Cass  
Date - 

Associate Advisor: Rick Hirsch  
Date - 

Department Chair: Michael Rogers  
Date - 

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Program: SAC (Glass Sculpture)
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Thesis Proposal

I feel that I can express my dreams and thoughts through glass. I am implementing glass to weave ideas and thoughts into reality; thoughts that can be felt and touched in reality, not just in imagination. Its frozen liquid state makes me relate it to a dewy morning (dew drops and water). Such images and thoughts are so alive in my mind that there is a need to bring them out in the open. For me these thoughts have perfect idealism. There were times in my life when I dreamt about things that I wanted, cherished those dreams and thought of them as perfect images in my mind. When those dreams were constructed, I felt the urge to draw them from the past and place them in the present only to see them turn out as a skeleton without a soul – a hollow dream. This elicits a sense of nostalgia, which makes me poignant because these dreams cannot be incorporated in the present. They are lost as something perfect and beautiful that cannot be achieved, like a glass swing that cannot be used as a swing.

Swings remind me of childhood, the time of blissful happiness with no realization of reality, when the to and fro motion of a swing could elicit happiness in me – an exhilarating feeling, a feeling of no present and future. I would like to execute an installation that reinforces the idea of innocence intangible. The hanging swings look forlorn as if looking for a reprieve. When I enter the hanging swings the cherished memories swivel in my mind, strumming the past memories in the quiet echoing present.
Life has left its beautiful, indelible marks of wisdom on me and that wisdom obliges me to be reflective about my past. In essence, by putting up this installation, I might be able to embrace it as my past, and then move forward to embrace the wings of time.
Artist's Background

I led a simple and happy childhood in my home land Pakistan. As I recall the far-off memories of my childhood, I remember playing with shoes by setting up an environment in the cupboard, arranging all pair of shoes and having a dialogue with them, talking to them as if they had an individual personality. In my progressing years, I found the love for reading. When I read books, I felt I was disconnected from the on goings around me by getting emotionally engrossed in the books. During those days I could live all the words in the book, perceiving them to be a felt reality in my perception as a child. At the same time, registering relationships and family bonds and how they change with the passing time. Hence sometimes I felt the need to gather the sands of time, but hands can hold only so much. I perceive life in a larger perspective but at the personal level, I feel the culture and family bonds are inbred in me at the deepest unconscious level of my mind.

I recognized how much my culture was inbred in me when I came to America. I realized how closely I held memories and culture to my heart. A film of memory and recognition had been wound around my soul at an unconscious level. This stark knowledge of my personal inhibitions burst upon me after being in America for the first six months. It triggered the cherished memories of the past. The need arose in me to orchestrate the reminisces of my childhood in my present. As those were the days of blissful happiness with the concept of never ending fortitude, hence came across the installation "Reminiscences of Nostalgia." As these thoughts were intangible, I wanted them to be
tangible in reality. I started investigating symbolism that would express my nostalgic childhood longing eloquently, so I thought of working with swings.
My Journey as an Artist

I got my undergraduate degree from the National College of Arts in Pakistan. I was always interested in exploring the beauty of literature and the working of mind through psychology. I have always been inclined to probe my intellect. It gave me pleasure to probe my intellect and explore tactile surfaces visually and with hands. Hence I chose to be a sculptor.

For me sculpture holds a reference point. It inspires me to bring thoughts and imagination into reality. I felt sculpture was another part of self, having a dialogue with me and making me to think and yearn to do more. It brought out my feelings and helped me to understand myself, which would not have come out any other way. In my journey as a Visual Artist I was inspired to take glass as a medium for my aesthetical experiences in my mind. I will never forget the synchronicity of nature when silica turned to glass in front of my eyes. I blew the molten liquid and turned it from fluid to its elegant essence, in many ways a fossil speaking of its existence. When I look at glass, I see its dormant silhouette, which has turned into an elegant frozen state. Academically this inspiration carried on and guided me from my undergraduate years to my Master of Fine Arts program in glass sculpture.
Glass has a dual personality one of delicacy negated by its volcanic synchronicity of nature, which has been an endless source of inspiration for me. To me glass in its frozen state is an illusion. It eradicates visual boundaries to culminate in a telescopic and microscopic vision. Its contradictory nature, fragility versus molten state, signifies the ambivalence of human nature including mine.
Andy Goldsworthy’s work symphonizes poetical visuals. The thought is an integral process culminating to the desired vision. The simplicity of the alignments of thoughts and its orchestration in nature is what Andy Goldsworthy’s work is about. His work seems to have a sequence of peace and harmony in it. It has a meditating aura to it. It seems to me that he strums the poetical chords of silence of nature through his visual scripts within nature.

Figure 1 – Ends of Bamboo [Andy Goldsworthy]
Nils-Udo

“A basic idea is to achieve absolute purity. Nature performs a demonstration of itself. Every non-natural element is ruled out as impure. No other materials are used than those found in each natural space. The characteristics, the respective possibilities for processing, and the character of the natural space itself plays the major role in determining the shape of the work. Botany, collecting, preserving and displaying: the overwhelming abundance of natural phenomena can often only be categorized under small or the minutest fragments of their inherent structures.

Even though I work in parallel with nature and create my interventions with all possible caution, they will always remain a fundamental contradiction to themselves. It is this contradiction on which all my work is based. Even this work cannot avoid one fundamental disaster of our existence. It injures what it draws attention to, what it touches: the virginity of nature.

To unite, condense and amalgamate the specific possibilities of a landscape at a given season to form a unique pinnacle, the apotheosis of that season in that landscape. Implementing what is potentially possible, what latently exists in nature, to literally allow what never existed but was always there to become reality; the ever present - Utopia. Even one second of a lifetime is enough. The event has happened. I have awakened it and made it visible.
Make natural space into Art-space? Where is the limit on the narrow line between nature and art? Art? Life! What counts is the utopian character, the life- and art-blending character of my actions. My response to the events that mark my existence. My life. Are there art-lovers interested in my life?

A picture. A leaf, laden with flowers, drifting down a brook. Life.”


Translated by Kieran McVey 03.02.02

Figure 2 – Summer in the Park [Nils-Udo]
I am inspired by Andy Goldsworthy’s and Nils Udo’s work, as I find it to be very poetical and pure. They work with mediums like pebbles, bamboos, leaves, grass and snow amongst the changing seasons in nature. The color in their expression seems to have a soul. They sequence an installation in nature which is temporary only caught in photographs but are lost in time. Their work is very romantic and it probes my intellect as well as the poetical aspect of my personality. In comparison to myself as an artist, I work with processed mediums but all arise from nature, especially glass. I romanticize about its nature of ‘being’.

My work is temporary installation which is common with Nils-Udo’s and Andy Goldsworthy’s work. I believe when I sequenced “Symphony of Nostalgia” in nature, I felt the gist of inspiration of working in nature as Nils-Udo and Andy Goldsworthy do. Simultaneously, I work with different media that can be natural or processed. It is essential to express my thoughts through different medium as eventually, they culminate in fulfilling my artistic intellect. I enjoy the contrasts of different medium, their dialogue amongst themselves and their synchronicity as a symphonic aesthetes as a whole. The different tactile surfaces and symbolism is also a source of inspiration (glass).
Ann Hamilton

“Hamilton’s work involves installation of objects, materials and often humans, in interior sites ranging in size from several of a museum down to a single room in a modest house. These installations are almost always temporary and the constituent elements are always subsequently removed. In doing so, Hamilton encourages us to recognize that the situation that she has created is the art not the things with which the space is populated.”

“Hamilton’s art recalls the modernist use of found objects, but her incorporations of everyday materials aren’t used as a means of rejecting “High Art” values. Instead, her accumulations of materials are directed towards a sensory engagement much like the natural processes of growth, decay and transformation.”

“Hamilton saw installation art as a means of extending the emotional range of her work as well as a way of exploring what one learns from being surrounded and absorbed by a work of art. In addition, the temporary and contingent nature of the installations appealed to Hamilton’s interest in memory and experience.”

I also want to feel absorbed by a concept, wanting it to encompass me and resonate through me; that is why I aesthetically enjoy doing installations. The work turning into a memory is a thought that is of interest to me. It is like a thought brought out from a mind to be felt tangibly and receding back in its privacy, like water which sometimes laps at the shore and sometimes rushes to the land and then recedes back or tide. This is an inspiration for me in both, Ann Hamilton’s work and mine.
Figure 3 – Parallel Lines (Candle Structure) [Ann Hamilton]

Figure 4 – Parallel Lines (Candle Structure) [Ann Hamilton]
Figure 5 – Tropos (Burnt Books) [Ann Hamilton]
Figure – 6 Tropos (Burnt books) [Ann Hamilton]
Exploring Thesis Topic

I wanted to investigate the “Nostalgic Childhood Feeling” as my thesis topic. Therefore, I started to think how I could express my nostalgic feeling of childhood eloquently.

I went into the time frame of being a child, which triggered my mind to visualize those past pictures. Different symbolic images flicked through the projector of my memories; bicycling and swinging – the exhilarating feeling of to and fro motion, soft whistle of wind in my ears, the soft sunlight in winter, the fallen mango leaves from bare mango trees, the nostalgia of being happy at that present moment with no thoughts of past or future, just there on the swing absorbing the sun. Hence, I decided to do an installation of glass swings and leaves to bring out my memories of childhood in reality at a visually aesthetical level.
Technique Adding Content to the work

I felt I was stitching a thought gradually, to be perceived in reality, working in glass complementing other mediums with it. Glass swing seats were made to orchestrate the memories of childhood through the installation “Symphony of Nostalgia.” A memory that can be brought out in the present, but is empty “A hollow Carcass of Thoughts,” like a glass swing which is beautiful but cannot be used as a swing.

I, as an artist, am expressing lost memories of childhood trying to get hold of them in reality by setting up the installation of swings, using these as a symbolism for childhood, but these swings are in glass – a swing that cannot be swung, like a body without a soul. These thoughts are characteristically expressed by ‘glass swings’ as glass itself is temporary in nature, very beautiful, breakable, fragile like a dream that was orchestrated but alas a memory.
Procedure of Installation

I made graph drawings to concisely describe the area definition for the installation in Bevier Gallery, which is attached below.

The installation required the following procedure:

- Construction of ceiling
- The glass Swing seats.
- Burlap leaves.
- Suspension of Swings.

Construction of Ceiling

I worked in 8’x11’ space against the wall of Bevier Gallery. This space was set up with five panels. A total of eight wooden pieces, each $2/4$ were used to construct the ceiling. Four pieces of 11’ length and four pieces of 8’ length were overlapped respectively, placed horizontally over the panels. These wooden pieces were placed apart over the panels. They were set up to make a grid like ceiling. This ceiling was nailed down at the top of the panel to make it sturdy. The ceiling and panels were covered with burlap. The holes were drilled in the ceiling for suspension of swing keeping in mind the arrangement of swings.
Wall height = 1.5 = 1 sq

Floor height = 1.2 = 1 sq

Floor Width = 1102 = 15'

11' floor length

8' floor width

6 panels in total
If one side is against
The wall
Glass swing seats

Glass canes were pulled in the hot shop from clear glass. It was an ongoing process when a small lot of canes were pulled it was taken to the cold workshop to be cut. The swings were of different sizes when a small number was cut for a single swing, it was taken to the oven room. In the oven the kiln shelves were joined together to be able to hold the canes. These canes were fused together to make a glass swing seat at 1350 f. Longer canes were on outsides of the arrangement of canes. These canes were set on wavy sand with frax paper between the sand and canes in the oven. So the canes could slump on the form of sand.
Suspension of Swings

The swing seats were suspended from the ceiling. Manila ropes were used to hang the swings. These manila ropes were dipped in water based beige white paint to give it a worn out effect. Loops were made at both ends of the ropes and were tied with wire. The wire was sandblasted and then sprayed with rustoleum to give it a rustic effect. Once prepared, the wire was wound on the loops of ropes. Two ropes were used for each swing. The ropes were pulled through the holes in the ceiling and held from the above with screws. Then the swing seats were placed amongst two ropes. The ends of swings were put in the loops of the ropes for it to suspend.

Exploring leaves

Different methods were tried for leaf making to synchronize with and compliment the concept of my installation. I investigated by making leaves from blown glass method. Leaves were made from graphite moulds. Such a medium was required in the making of leaves that would complement the whole aura of the installation and the suspended glass swings.

The burlap mango leaves were stenciled. They were dipped in wax and then molded to achieve the desired form and effect. The autumn colors such as brown and yellow were put in the wax. I chose this process for comprehending the concept of my installation.
Installation Sequenced

Symphony of Nostalgia
Figure 7 – Symphony of Nostalgia (Bevier Gallery)
Figure 8 – Symphony of Nostalgia (Side View)
Figure 10 – Symphony of Nostalgia (Close up)
Figure 11 – Symphony of Nostalgia (Swings)
Figure 12 – Symphony of Nostalgia (Close up of Swings)
The Outdoor Execution of “Symphony of Nostalgia”

These thoughts were further explored by putting up this installation outdoors instead of the gallery environment. A lot of character was added by sunlight, the breeze and the changing light. The swings moved to and fro delicately. The changing time and light emphasized on the beauty of the concept and it got more eloquently expressed in the outdoor installation. When I and the viewers watched, the swings had a solemn and a serene aura.
Figure 13 – Symphony of Nostalgia Outdoor Installation (2:30 pm)
Figure 14 – Symphony of Nostalgia outdoor installation (Close up at noon)
Figure 15 – Symphony of nostalgia outdoor Installation (Evening)
Figure 16 – Symphony of Nostalgia Outdoor Installation (Evening)
Figure 17 – Symphony of Nostalgia outdoor installation (At night)
Culmination of Thesis Installation

In the 8’x11’ Installation, an aura of nostalgic memories was orchestrated. The twenty four swings were suspended with antique looking ropes to reinforce the reminiscence of the past. Mango leaves with mango essence were depicted as to have fallen naturally like in autumn. As though the time of rejoicing had passed never to be caught, but in the pages of my mind.

Falling rain outside the glass
Seeping memories reflect through eyes
Living in myself stagger when I touch the vision
They blur within themselves when I sway in their span
My soul is being absorbed away in the whirl of time.
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Bibliography

1  "Basic idea is to achieve .....drifting down a brook. Life” Nils Udo – Towards Nature
   Translated by – Kiwrah Mcvey

2  "Hamilton’s work involves .......... which the space is populated.”
   ANN HAMILTON – SAO PAULO\SEATTLE  Pg. – 9

3  "Hamilton’s art recalls the ............. of growth, decay and transformation.”
   ANN HAMILTON – SAO PAULO/SEATTLE  Pg. – 10

4  “Hamilton saw installation .......... memory and experience.”
   ANN HAMILTON – SAO PAULO/SEATTLE  Pg. - 16
Acknowledgement

With all my love, I would like to dedicate my thesis to my parents. I am thankful to my parents and other family members for their cooperation, encouragement and patience throughout the journey of my educational years. Special thanks to Michael Rogers and Robin Cass for their guidance throughout my studies at RIT. Thanks to Michael Rogers, Robin Cass and Rick Hirsh for their productive criticism and innovative ideas. They were a source of inspiration for me in the completion of my thesis exhibition.

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