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Fragments of Time

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Rochester Institute of Technology

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
School for American Crafts: Jewelry & Metals
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts

Fragments of Time

Jaclyn Didas

2010

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Abstract

Reminiscing upon my childhood in the countryside, I strive to find a visual resting place for these thoughts. By reinterpreting past moments through metal, my work becomes a tangible artifact of a personal history. I use metal to shape these abstract views into the past; often referring to the energy and feeling of a moment rather than a literal representation. It is my aim to immortalize special symbolic memories like this, giving them tangible form. This thesis reveals a collection of important moments in my life interacting with the natural world. These instances are not the so-called momentous occasions, but rather the quiet subtle moments that may have seemed insignificant at the time. However, upon reflection as an adult seem imperative to the content of my spirit.

Philosophy

The textures, colors, and quiet solitude of my life growing up in the country of Upstate New York has shaped my language as a metal artist today. I have directly addressed this natural landscape as my work has evolved throughout the years. In this particular body of work, I wish to reinterpret specific fragments of time that have occurred within the framework of the natural living environment. This refers to a great longing to treasure and validate times that have passed. Recalling such definitive moments, I aim to express how the natural world relates to my presence at particular pivotal moments. It also serves to explore human's inextricable role in nature.

The foundation for this thesis developed throughout my childhood living in a rural setting. At a young age, I began to cultivate a close relationship with the natural world. My stay at home mother greatly encouraged in me a desire to explore and engage in silent curiosity and wonderment at all that surrounds me. These outdoor interactions as a young child served to enhance and develop my ongoing fascination and reverie for what Mother Nature/God has provided.

Yearly trips to either the Adirondack Mountains, or the beaches of South Carolina were a long awaited highlight of the year. These short trips sparked a lifelong yearning to travel abroad and experience different cultures, art, and traditions. However, I have remained rooted in a relatively small geographical area that I call home. This has allowed me to develop an intimate relationship with this area. There is a certain comfort with the familiar. With its clearly defined four seasons, one can see an environment that is in a state of constant flux. In winter, for example, the body adjusts to the changing temperature, the moods change with shorter days, as you wait in

anticipation for warmer weather. To closely study and respond to the landscape over a course of a lifetime has slowly solidified and reassured my place here. It is an emotional and spiritual connection.

My earliest camping trips as a young child were the starting point for my love and fascination with water, plant and animal life. These ‘outdoor adventures’ were an excellent vehicle for me to interact directly with nature. I was given the freedom to explore and play alongside my two sisters. Reflecting on this now as an adult, I can find great importance in canoeing through quiet waters, running barefooted through fresh cut grass, and hiking through lush green forests. Nature has always served as an artistic ‘jumping off point,’ and the organic lines, textures, and rich colors influenced my artistic palate today.

Different seasons can conjure many emotional states of mind. For example, summer is certainly a glorious time to be outdoors. The senses are fully stimulated and the body can fully benefit from the many activities this climate supports. During this time I enjoy hiking, biking, and canoeing throughout the local region. There is so much to take in and my sketchbook is always open. My work reflects this mood, and is lively and delicate. On the contrary, a season can also yield drastically different emotional feelings as well as artistic inspiration. Winter in upstate New York fills me with a great loneliness. There is little sunlight, and shorter days, as well as little outdoor activities in which I partake. This unavoidable isolation is part of the human condition, as well a stigma of many artists. For example, Francisco Goya, Andrew Wyeth, and Jackson Pollock all fell victim to a great depression in their lives. During this time, the stark, visually quiet world reflects upon my own emotional status. I too feel withdrawn, quiet, and still in a world that is in constant motion. I am reminded that we are but tiny specks in the vast universe, seemingly insignificant. For me, time stands still in winter and I find little from which to draw

inspiration. However, it can be a very productive time, as I enter my own hibernation in the studio. While visual inspiration may be lacking, my emotions are not. With this as a heightened emotional time, I am able to channel many intimate feelings into each piece. My work takes on a strictly emotional tone. The result is work that is highly focused, and rich in content. In winter, I am often working with a particular concept in mind. Silver pieces are all oxidized, and involve more labor intensive techniques. When spring arrives, I feel as if several years have passed and take a deep breath. It is more glorious because I have waited.

With the passing of time, the way I view the natural world has changed and developed. As an adult, our lives are often met with great financial demands, work obligations, and physical and emotional stress. With this, I am unable to see nature with the innocent wonderment and curiosity as I once did as a child. These experiences were taken for granted, something as an adult we cannot afford to do. Camping trips, canoeing, and nature walks become fewer and farther in between. When I can take a break to experience the beauty of a sunset, I am filled with appreciation for the quiet, peaceful moment and try to 'store' this for later.

My work aims to explore these personal concepts and narratives. It is not my intent for the viewer to understand my intent, but rather to find their own poetic meaning through interpretation. I am aware that this is not always the case as some people are able to dig deeper into my own message. Preziosi states (p21) Works of 'art' are uniquely privileged in the degree to which they are able to communicate, symbolize, express, or embody certain fundamental truths about their makers or sources, whether that be a single person or an entire culture or people.

Models

The thinking process for me begins with quick sketches in a personal sketchbook. This develops into full detailed designs as well as relevant imagery and notes on techniques. Many times I will place magazine cut-outs in my sketchbook and alongside place my own reaction in black and white. Such colorful glossy images help to inform the quick-handed black and white sketches. For this body of work, I began to amass models in conjunction to sketches. In previous work, the thinking, planning, and visualizing of each piece was done two-dimensionally in a sketchbook and was seldom realized through a full scale model. In an effort to visualize the thesis as a cohesive whole, I began to construct to-scale paper models. These models were 'frames' or boxes with delicate organic interiors. The idea of framing each piece came from two directions. The first was to reference a photograph, such as those scattered throughout a household. These framed photographs serve to immortalize a person or moment as it was. A group of photographs represents a lineage of time, marking important milestones, people, and moments in a person's life. The second reason is in response to the work of Andrew Wyeth. He uses windows and doors to reference time, and space. The result is a heightened emotional composition.

These models were constructed in white poster board and then pinned to the wall next to my jewelers' bench. The all-white wall grew to resemble a Louise Nevelson sculpture and I was pleased with the overall effect. I chose white in order to create a neutral setting where material and color could be addressed at a later date. Because the all-white was soothing to me, I found it a detriment to adding color at a later date. Grouped together, it was important for me to see a

connection from one piece to the next, to see how the models worked as a sculptural whole, and to evaluate the scale of the project. Grouping the models so closely together proved to hinder my ability to properly space the completed pieces with the space I was given in the gallery.

It was the event, the moment, the place, and the people that were the impetus behind the models. Some models reflected a concrete memory I found important to recreate and others referred to the energy and feeling of a moment rather than a literal representation. These ‘feelings’ translated into textures, and abstract shapes. With others, I was unsure of the concept, but they spoke to me poetically and I was unable to abandon these models. For these, I found a personal significance through the recreation in metal. Days and months after completion, some of these pieces have revealed themselves to me, and I am finding great meaning.

Materials

My work has always reflected an understanding and respect for traditional jewelry concepts and processes. For example, I use ‘traditional’ materials; sterling silver, gold, gemstones, etc. not just for their wearability, but because I find intrinsic enjoyment in working with them. The cool feel of metal in my hand, the sound of sawing, filing, and sanding continually soothe me. In performing these actions, I have time to meditate about the piece before me. I believe this is another way to transfer meaning and spirit into each piece. As I increase in technical prowess, concepts can be better realized. Choosing the best technique to shape and form a piece, rather than picking from a limited knowledge base is important in my development as a craftsman. In the contemporary jewelry world that has expanded into materials such as plastics, resin, felt, CAD, steel, etc., I find myself at odds, unable to abandon these classical values.

Innovations

The traditional methods of crafting through fabrication are the foundation for each piece. Because each piece reflects some aspect of nature; fabrication allows for me to react rather than to merely copy through casting methods. Reflecting, commenting, and fabricating are the thought process I employ. I do not set out to copy the beauty of each moment, rather seek to recreate how I see it in my mind, and this is not always a clear picture. This is because I could not possibly recreate the beauty of the natural world. Therefore, I wish to abandon the idea that I may do justice to what God has created. Instead, I sought to react and interpret through the use of my own two hands. In that way my memory of that moment can carry through as I bend, fold, and hammer each piece. In crafting through fabrication, I am also increasing my technical prowess. I find motivation and excitement in increasingly challenging designs.

Each piece was constructed with sterling silver as the primary material and focal point. I choose to use silver as a way to emphasize a sense of preciousness. By focusing on this material, each piece could be configured into a wearable art piece. I prefer to work with 20 gauge silver and heavier wire to create weight in each piece. This is so the viewer is aware of the piece as they move. For me, the wearer should interact with the piece.

There is a central theme of time in this thesis. Each piece is a reflection and comment on something that has passed. A fragment of time that has been plucked from my mind as time has turned has smoothed its rough edges. In doing this, the work becomes timeless, existing in the present in time-resistant material. If each moment was not recreated in metal, I found it could be lost forever in the recesses of my mind.

Time

Reflecting, responding, and recording time are central elements in this thesis. Time as a subject and of artistic interpretation has been quite a challenge for me. In frequent conversations with other more experienced artists, they found it a difficult as well. As part of the thinking process, I was looking back to many specific moments and thinking how time has changed my perspective of each. As an adult, I will never see a moment as I did through the eyes of a child or teenager and that left me troubled. The true reality of those moments is gone forever. Personal experiences and the passage of time dictate how a moment is remembered in our mind. Knowing this, there developed an urgency to recreate that moment in metal before it was lost in the recesses of my mind again. It is all I can do to respond as an adult and hope this new perspective is at once poetic and insightful. The next time I relive that memory, new experiences and life views would again change my perspective of that moment. Therefore, time is always changing the way we view the past. Momentous occasions are revisited and relived many times over. However, I wanted to find rare moments that have not been turned over and over in hopes of finding ones closest to reality. Constructed in metal, each piece can withstand the test of time; a resting place for my thoughts. They serve as tangible documents of a personal narrative. Because this thesis was so rooted into this setting, I wonder and anticipate how travel to a different culture would influence my work. I would be interested in creating another body of work so that I may find similarities and differences in the materials, content, and tone.

Conclusion

It is my aim that the culmination of these “fragments of time” will serve as a reliable form of memory, and withstand the test of time. As years pass, I may visit each piece and relive that moment. Perhaps I may add to this body of work to reflect a life lifetime of memories, and journey through time.

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Memento, sterling silver, fur.



Reflection. Alabaster, sterling silver, sapphire, paper.





Abis: alabaster, sterling silver, garnet.



Fresh Cut Grass: alabaster, paper, sterling silver.





Spring I: Sterling silver.



Spring II: sterling silver, shibuishi.