9-1-2001

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A Thesis submitted to the faculty of
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences in
Candidacy for the degree of Masters of Fine Arts.

A Bridge’s Link

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September 1, 2001
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II. Introduction to Personal History and Issues

After taking the American Architecture course during my first year, I knew my thesis would evolve from my fascination with large, man-made structures. I have always been interested in architecture, especially architecture in contrast to the openness and big sky of my native Oklahoma. I deeply appreciate the natural environment of Oklahoma and the surrounding states. Simultaneously I have always had a strong curiosity and admiration for the architecture in earlier cities and towns in the United States where I have lived or visited. It was amazing to see the history of a community or area through its architecture.

Since coming to graduate school, I had made only small, wearable jewelry. The intimacy and delicacy of small objects and jewelry intrigued me. I also enjoyed the precision and sensitivity that making jewelry demands. Having left a good job to come back to school for something I had not touched in six years, practicality was also weighing heavily on my mind. But I understood that in order to have a successful thesis, I needed to step out of my boundaries and from what was comfortable.

Was I going to make only jewelry? What was the scale of the body of work and how would the pieces have presence? What was my visual vocabulary? Was the work going to be a cohesive exhibition or a grouping of individual pieces? Could I make clear the conceptual content in each piece? These were some of the primary issues I needed to resolve in the body of work for my thesis.
The American Architecture course introduced me to the bridges of Robert Maillart, a civil bridge engineer who strongly considered aesthetics in his bridge designs. Through discussions with my professors, I began to see bridges both as structural form and as a core concept for my own work.

The metaphors suggested by the concept of “bridge” are limitless. I wanted to explore some of these metaphors and interpret them in my body of work. The work had to be concise and clear to the viewer. The form needed to provide clarity to the concept. As Max Bill said, “I know a concept has to conform to its inner organization and its visual existence. This means a concept and the finally executed work have to be a unity.”\(^1\) The idea of “bridge” was both a definition of the forms and the basis of rich metaphorical possibilities.

Bridges are central to the history of a community and to our own individual histories. Bridges propelled progress; they are icons of progress. Most architectural historians note the importance of bridges in the development of civilization. “When the history of our time is written prosperity will know us not only by a cathedral or temple, but by a bridge.”\(^2\) Bridges are also personal; we build our own and cross them on our own. “Bridges speak to us. They speak to us about the places they are or the places they take us. They speak to us about travel, the excitement of the crossing. Above all, they speak to us about the values and aspirations of the communities, organizations, and


persons who build them. These ideas are the basis for the concept in my thesis body of work.

From the beginning in cultures across the world, jewelry is believed to have spiritual, social, religious, and protective powers. "In some Southeast Asian societies an item of jewelry may represent the universe in microcosmic form and express complex human relations with the supernatural realm. Jewelry may also articulate links with the ancestors, and serve to define and regulate the social interactions with the living." These ideals are shared with contemporary artistic jewelry. Commercial jewelry on the other hand is often a symbol of wealth and power. One major consideration for commercial jewelry is the financial and social impression. It is often bought to celebrate or announce an event such as an engagement, anniversary, or graduation. Artistic jewelry, by contrast, puts concept and design above the financial and social implications in a piece. Artistic jewelry can also be a sign of class and prestige and be bought to celebrate an event, but it is also worn to offer self-expression and a personal signature. Jewelry as art is usually made as a one-of-a-kind or very limited production instead of in large multiples.

Wearing jewelry is an act of self-expression. Whether it is a wedding ring or a toe ring, the wearer is telling others something about themselves. The difference between wearing a piece of jewelry and only seeing one on display is self-expression. When a piece of jewelry is worn it immediately becomes an extension of the person. A piece of jewelry intended only to be on display never becomes an object of self-expression by anyone but the maker. No matter what kind of jewelry it is, it gives the wearer a personal

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3 Gottemoeller, Bridgescape, 1.
signature and distinction in aesthetic value. Jewelry is self-expressive and begins to define the wearer.

Many contemporary jewelry designers using concept in their pieces have influenced my work. Bruno Martinazzi comments, “the finger and hand pieces are intended to remind us of the ‘hand as a creative instrument of knowledge and invention, and meant to establish a relationship with others.”\(^5\) Narration and concept exist in many different cultures. In Indonesian jewelry there are, “notions of the dynamic opposition between water and sky, birds and reptiles, mountains and sea, male and female.”\(^6\)

The primary objective in my thesis was to create a body of work that used a distinct visual language to embody the concept. I wanted people to immediately recognize the metaphor of bridges and to use that recognition to explore what else the work conveyed. In my body of work the form supports the concept. The thesis work explores a variety of metaphors in ten pieces.

III. Discussion of Body of Work

*Span Horizons* (plates #1 and #2) consists of two different pieces embodying one metaphor. This metaphor comes from the perspective of a viewer standing on a bridge, looking backward from where they came and forward to where they will go. The concept

is rooted in the idea that to completely know oneself requires knowing where one comes from and where one is going. I feel these were successful in design and execution. Both pieces are also important to the exhibition because of the variation in scale and my commitment to wearable jewelry. The small intimacy and intricacy carries its own presence and works to make these pieces even more intriguing than some of the larger works in the show.

Some concepts and designs had been developing in my mind and on paper since the end of my first year. Others developed right before I made them or even changed during the making of the piece. The concept in The Union of Two (plate #3) of a bridge uniting two people was one that had been in my mind since the very beginning, although it was one of the last pieces created.

Sometimes when the piece seems obvious it is easier to put aside. At various times during the year I began a design for this concept and it would seem to fade or another idea would take over. I found a design for the piece in a sketchbook from last summer that I had long since put away. The design needed further thought and time to fully develop, but the seed had been waiting for a year.

Whether through friendship, marriage or family, a connection of two people is easily represented by the concept of bridge. This double ring, intended to be worn by two people at the same time, clearly indicates the idea of a bridge uniting two people. The unconnected arches that fit over the fingers reinforce the idea that the connection is between two separate people. Each person keeps their own identity even with this union between them.

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6 Richter, Southeast Asia, 145.
Throughout meetings with my thesis committee they reminded me of the intersections and bridges created from roads and highways going over and under in high traffic areas. On the conceptual level *Options in Travel* (plate #4) represents the options created by different decisions. The option you choose influences the destination. One option may be the rougher, but shorter route. Another option may be the longer, but most beautiful route. The final option is the one you are not seeing but can find if you take the time. I showed these options in the brooch by taking different approaches to the metal.

The copper wire with the hammered texture is like a rough, short road. The wire that is half silver and half copper represents a longer, more refined and beautiful route. The third option is a chain that is worn on the inside of the wearer’s clothing. Magnets are embedded in either end of the rough copper wire and at either end of the chain, which allows the brooch to be connected and worn. The chain is visible only to the person wearing the piece, the option that requires one to take time to find. Although the elements in the chain relate to the larger, visible elements on the brooch and the concept is clear, I do not feel it was the best solution aesthetically. For the exhibition I mounted this piece on wood to hang on the wall, therefore the chain is not visible. Since the chain is not visible when worn, I did not feel it was necessary for it to be displayed in the exhibition. I believe the concept remains clear.

Based on my previous year at school, one issue I needed to address in my body of work was its presence in a large open space such as the gallery, especially since the exhibition was a group exhibition. Even though the elements in the pieces were getting longer, making the jewelry more pronounced and less traditional, I still needed to
explore visually bridging the body in order to enrich and enhance my concepts and make the work have more of a presence.

In *Overcome What We Did Not Believe Was Possible* (plate #5) the tapered wire element seems to naturally find its way over the shoulder. It creates a very elegant line traveling from one side of the body to the other. It has just conquered an obstacle. The one simple line of copper wire extending over the shoulder communicates the concept clearly. The silver arched element gives the copper a beginning, a place to start on its journey. The brooch can actually stay on the body by itself, since it can bend to conform to each wearer’s body. Nevertheless, I added a pin back to the silver arch as a safety clasp. With this piece I began to realize that I was starting to push the traditional boundaries of wearable jewelry. This piece was a break-through in how I began to see new possibilities for work to come.

*Build Generations and Become Part of the Past* (plate #6) was another metaphor that was in my mind from the beginning. I wanted to show I was a combination of my parents and grandparents. To better understand my deceased grandparents, I had to learn from my parents. The most obvious metaphor I could use when describing my thesis was that my parents are a “bridge” for me to my grandparents. Immediately people could understand the concept.

To show the three different generations with the metal, my grandparents were the copper wire, my parents the silver, and myself the combination of the two. The copper wire representing my grandparents fits over the wearer’s shoulder to hold the piece on. With the copper wire only connected at one end, it also represents that they too are bridged in their past to their parents and grandparents. The silver wire with connections
at both ends represents my parents: it links the two generations. The combined wire representing me is open on one end without a connection to another element, indicating the future generations to come.

In Anchor Growth (plate #7) a bridge propels and permits growth. In order for someone to move ahead in life they have to link to the next stage, whether the link be physical, emotional, or intellectual. Conceptually these transitions are bridges. In this brooch the bridge represents growth from what is known and stable to what is unknown.

In this piece the copper is the stable, larger, more pronounced element that transitions into the smaller silver arch. It is a different sized arch than the copper in order to represent changes as one grows older. This design allows the piece to be personal in its expression. The brooch attaches with magnets, making it appear as if it literally grows from the wearer’s chest. The magnets also allow the wearer more freedom in the attachment to the body. I believe this is one of the most successful pieces in my body of work. The magnets not only solve the attachment problem, they create a more speculative and thought provoking piece. People are intrigued by this brooch because of the invisible attachment to the body.

I arrived at Past, Present and Future (plate #8) through a series of work that dealt with the same metaphor. The first piece was a sculptural tabletop object that used copper and silver to show movement through time. I began by using separate copper and silver arch elements and progressed into those that combined silver and copper. It was a sculptural object that articulated the metaphor, but at this point I had to decide the importance of jewelry and wearability in my thesis work.
I had consiencly left out a commitment to jewelry in my proposal statement. I didn't want to limit myself at that time. I had arrived at a point where I needed to address the issue in the context of my thesis concept. Wearing jewelry is a personal expression and the piece becomes an extension of the wearer. I decided that the ideas and metaphors I was expressing are personal and, in some cases, the person wearing the piece is a part of the metaphor being described.

In making that decision I was setting some guidelines. Being wearable meant limiting the scale of the work, being concerned about attachments, and creating pieces that were self-expressive for the wearer and me. I concluded that these issues don't necessarily limit creativity, but give structure in the process and allow for alternatives in construction. Some of the pieces were larger or more elongated than most jewelry-size objects, and I needed to find a non-traditional mechanism for securing them to the wearer without being visible. One way I solved this issue was by using magnets and another way was allowing brooches to fit over only certain parts of the body such as the shoulder.

From the initial sculptural, tabletop object, I arrived at a necklace that simplified the elements while retaining the metaphor. It became clear to me as I worked on the design for the necklace that it could become even simpler in form and stronger in concept by using just one of the elements and making the wearer part of the piece. Silver and copper came together in a fluid curve where any traditional fastener or clasp would have been disruptive visually. The embedded magnets provided an elegant solution. Although the brooch became distilled in form, technically it became more difficult to execute because it required perfection in the curve and in drilling the holes for the magnets after the piece was already formed.
The necklace has three elements: the copper representing the past because of its historical reference and because it is used to create sterling silver, the wearer representing the present, and the silver representing the future. The elements are arched and tapered towards the middle to remind the viewer of structural elements commonly associated with bridges. The necklace puts the wearer in the bridge of their own lifespan.

*Freedom to Explore, Expand and Conquer* (plate #9) is about the difference bridges have made in the history of every community around the world. Bridges give freedom to move beyond your world and expand your knowledge. Bridges have enabled discovery of land and people.

The necklace consists of two elongated, linear wires that curve and arch to find their way from one shoulder to the other. The two wires, one of copper and the other of silver, begin together and then separate, one going around the back side of the neck and the other coming around the front side. The two wires connect again and separate to end on opposite sides of the shoulder. One of the connections of the two wires is awkward because it is blunt and terminates abruptly. This awkwardness contrasts the fluidity and individual character of the two wires in the rest of the piece. Conceptually the blunt endings of the wires denote the starting point from which one begins to explore and move beyond what is known.

This necklace is not completely successful because the copper piece has a surface texture of hammer marks that interrupts the fluidity of the elongated, curvy wire. It sets up a visual disturbance and the curve of the wire appears to be compromised by a lack of appropriate craftsmanship. Overall the piece has a distinct presence and adds variation
among the pieces in the exhibition. It is obvious it has been created in the same visual language.

In Unseen Similarities (plate #10) I worked with the concept of bridging two worlds that do not connect physically. I thought about the similarities I have discovered between myself and my Korean and Taiwanese friends. I do not see their environments, which exist on opposite sides of the world from mine, just as these two identical elements exists on opposite sides of the body, but there are connections and similarities between us. I had difficulty translating the idea into jewelry form. One day I found myself holding two identical elements made of combined copper and silver round wire. Suddenly the concept seemed obvious. The obvious differences between the cultures are represented by the slight curve of the backside element that follows the slight curve in one’s back. I have found the essential value systems to be the same in the various cultures, but we retain characteristics to call our own.

From the beginning I defined my visual language to include only tapered wires. I primarily worked in copper and silver, with one piece in the show made from yellow gold and palladium white gold. Copper and silver were practical choices because of the amount and cost of metal needed for the body of work. In the future I would like to use materials other than metal, perhaps plastic or stones that can be altered and formed. I would also have liked to use more gold in my work in order to explore the use of gold’s colors and properties to support ideas.

Copper and silver did allow me to enlarge the elements and to work with a variety of patinas. The coloring of the metal was very similar in the work. The copper was treated with liver of sulfur and rubbed with steel wool or a brass brush. The red copper in
the ring *Span Horizons* (plates #1 and #2) is a controlled heat patina achieved with the use of flux. The silver is either treated with liver of sulfur and brushed with steel wool or brought to a matte white and brushed with a small glass brush. All the elements were glass bead blasted before applying the patina and this enabled the metal to better accept the patina.

My main goal was to select a body of work that was clear in communicating the concept. Deciding which pieces to put in the show was easier than I anticipated. Certain pieces were easily discarded based on design and others were not as clear in conveying their metaphor. Some were obviously a starting point to fully developing my visual language and various concepts. Within the body of work you can separate pieces that are structural and obviously wearable jewelry, (such as *Span Horizons* (plates #1 and #2) and the *Union of Two* (plate #3)), from those that needed the body as a reference to show how the pieces are to be worn. The two groups combined together made a stronger statement than either would have alone.

In the case of *Past, Present and Future* (plate #8), the piece requires the human neck to be completed. The interaction with the body is as important as the metal elements in order for it to be understood. When it came time to display the work it was apparent the pieces needed the human reference. A friend was willing to make a mold of her torso and to pour five plaster models. I cut the molds to end just as the breasts began, so the ending effect is more neutral in gender, which is appropriate because I never identified the work as specific to gender or to include gender as an issue.

The molds were worked and sanded to a refined surface that I then layered with gesso. I debated about the color of the molds and in the end decided on keeping them
pristine, clean and non-disruptive to the pieces. My main concern was to make sure the molds did not overwhelm the actual pieces. I feel the molds evoked a quiet and classical, yet still contemporary feeling, and were successful in appropriately displaying and giving human reference to the work. Most importantly they were not distracting to the pieces and worked to enhance the perception of the work.

With the structural, smaller jewelry the busts were not appropriate. I needed to find a way of displaying that related to the figure, but was scaled to the actual piece. After a discussion with Mark Stanitz, the solution was to mold plaster that would elevate the piece and give reference to an abstracted human form.

The body of work changes dramatically when seen in a gallery setting. The work became smaller and more linear when seen farther away. They had the proper presence when you walked about them, but from a distance it becomes harder to distinguish the elements. They appear as drawn lines rather than objects with mass. In the future I want to make my work more exaggerated and with larger elements so they are not visually lost from a distance.

In the future I will continue to address my work in the same manner. Defining a body of work with form and conceptual content is exciting and challenging for me. My work pushes the traditional boundaries of jewelry and above all contains a unique visual language.
V. Bibliography


