A sense of self

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"A Sense of Self"

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Working with the concept of self, I will create my thesis using a variety of textile techniques in which I have become proficient during my two years of graduate work. The pieces will incorporate on and off loom weaving and fabric printing.

I plan to keep a journal recording my thoughts on the interaction of the concept and process of each piece.
Acknowledgements

The one thought that remained constant throughout my three years of study was that my education was for me. It was up to me to learn what I needed to learn. I had to seek out the knowledge that was important to my aesthetic growth. My thesis has evolved from this thought. This seemed like an appropriate way to culminate my graduate studies.

There are several people I would like to thank for their time and assistance: Donald Bujnowski and Max Lenderman, of the Textile Department; Ed Miller of the Painting Department; and Jon Brooks, a visiting Woodworking instructor whose personal philosophy and zest for his work was a great inspiration. A special thank you is extended to Fred Lipp, whose patience and centered manner of teaching guided me through my education and to Mary Sojourner, who helped me to begin.
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Introduction

The desire to become aware of my expanding identity, to embrace the old and venture out with the new, has led me to use the concept of self as the subject of my thesis. I chose to explore my being, to take a journey moving into and out of myself. Each piece combines a sense of source: a definite concept or inspiration, with a strong sense of self. My pieces communicate; they go beyond a personal statement and reveal themselves to those who choose to spend time with them.

My work is involved with subtleties. Much is revealed in a subtle statement to those who take the time to notice. My intricacies will be appreciated by those who stay with the piece for awhile.
My "Work Dress" is conceived out of a desire to construct a comfortable article of clothing, a garment to work in. I wanted the cotton to be indigo, as this color connotes work to me.

The pattern of the dress is taken from Cut My Cote, and is a pattern for a traditional woman's sleeveless dress, Greek, Mid 19th century. The pattern uses narrow pieces of fabric, which are cut into triangles, creating a fullness in the garment. This seems appropriate for something a woman could work in, since it is not confining or restraining.

The weave used for the fabric is called Log Cabin. Log Cabin is a variation of plain weave, which is the simplest interlacement of warp and weft threads--one over, one under. The pattern is formed by alternating two colors in a block pattern in both the warp and the weft. When like colors in the weft cross over like colors in the warp the stripes are vertical. When like colors in the weft cross under like colors in the warp, the stripes are horizontal. Blocks are created by alternating the placement of the colors, for example:

Block 1 - red/blue/red/blue/red/blue
Block 2 - blue/red/blue/red/blue/red
Block 3 - red/blue/red/blue/red/blue

I chose Log Cabin because I had worked with this weave previously and felt I had developed a sensitivity to it. I wanted to continue my work creating Log Cabin by varying the weight of the threads, while keeping the color constant. I used a 20/2 and a 10/2 cotton thread. Because of the mercerization of the thread, the two sizes of cotton took the dye slightly differently. There was a slight difference in tone as well as size, which worked to my advantage. The width of each block is one inch and the length of each block is determined during the weaving process. A shorter length was more appealing as it seemed to add an intricacy to the pattern.

The surface design of the cloth is subtle and delicate. An overall glance will reveal a blue cloth but a more studied look will reveal an intricate cloth, full of subtle shapes created by lines and tones. (Plates 1 and 2)
Spirit Figure

Last winter I heard a tape of a speech Anais Nin had given in Buffalo a few years ago. She spoke about her inner core, her strong center that enabled her to move through different situations, difficult times, pleasurable times, sad moments, and days of ecstasy. This strong inner core is the source for my "Spirit Figure." (Plate 3)

I choose to write nothing more about the imagery in the figure. Words will only complicate and confuse an image that speaks well visually.

As far as technique is concerned, the figure is woven on a simple frame loom, warped on nails. It is set at 32 ends per inch, using a fine 20/2 cotton warp, and is woven with fine silk and cotton threads using a needle. Slit tapestry technique is used.

The difficult area technically was the headdress. I wanted the feathers to be an integral part of the piece, not something added on. The feathers are stripped and the quills inserted into the warp and then wrapped. This extends the woven figure into the feather area. (Plate 3)

Weaving my "Spirit Figure" was a great comfort to me and could only be done effectively when I gave the process as well as the concept my full attention. At certain times I had to let it rest and not weave for a few days. Then I could resume work with a freshness that was lacking if I tried to push it.
Keeper of Secrets

As I have become more aware of myself and have traveled through my complex being, I have become more aware of my desire for secrecy. Some thoughts, expressions, feelings, and motives are only for me; they are not to be shared and need to be stored in an intimate, closed space. This space becomes a "Keeper of Secrets."

A box is a container of space--space that can be intimate or revealing. When the box is closed, the space is private, intimate. Secrets can be stored and hidden. When the box is open, the space becomes public, revealing.

"Keepers of Secrets" begins as a concept of hidden, intimate space. Through the birth of this concept my creative process is also revealed. Two of the containers can not be opened. My mysteries are concealed. The third one can be opened: the space is revealed as my process is revealed.

The containers are made of felt. The felting process involves the physical manipulation of the fiber. I developed an intimacy with the form as I pounded the fibers, and felt the material forming. This process seems right for the concept with which I am dealing.

I began by weaving unspun silk into a fine linen warp, in a cross shape, on a four harness floor loom. I laid this weaving on to a bed of unspun silk and wool, and felted the two together. There were many excess warp ends to deal with and I was baffled as to what do to with them. They extended
far beyond the bed of wool and silk and if I cut them the weaving would unravel. Another problem was that the two parts remained distinct, unconnected. Felting was not enough to hold the two pieces together. I pulled the two apart and played with forming each into a box. I saw two directions I could pursue:

1. a fabric like box
2. a purely felted form

I chose to work with both. I took the felted piece, laid some linen threads into it in a grid pattern, and refelted the form. I pinned the edges together and saw my first box. The material and form excited me but I did not know how to effectively sew the edges together. For the integrity of the construction of the piece, I wanted the stitches to be seen, but they detracted visually from the surface. I left it for a few days while I worked on the fabric like box.

The drape-like quality of the fabric appealed to me; the form had a softness to it. I decided to create a small, cross shape cardboard loom. All my edges would be selvedges, thus eliminating the excess warp ends.

I wove unspun silk into a linen warp, on the cardboard, laid the woven cross in a bed of silk, and felted the two together. The drape-like quality was retained but again I had to solve the problem of holding the form together. With the woven outside, exposing the stitches was distracting to the surface. Also, the direction of the weaving changed from side to side. This prevented the form from having a unified surface. Both pursuits brought me to the same
I had to figure out a way to have a continuous surface. Again two resolutions seemed possible.

I constructed a wooden block, 3"x3"x5". I felted over the surface of the wooden form, laying unspun wool and silk in one continuous band around the sides and from top to bottom. I used wool as the core and laid the silk on the surface. By inserting a piece of muslin on the top of the box, I prevented the fibers from bonding on one side. This became the opening. I tied linen threads around the silk to hold it together and wrapped it tightly in a piece of muslin. The piece was then felted. My first success! I had to untie the linen to take the wood out and found that the linen left a delicate impression in the felt. Following these lines, I retied linen around the box, creating a more private space, a "Keeper of Secrets." (Plate 4)

The second way I tried to resolve the problem of a continuous surface was to create a double woven form. I wove a gauze bag, interlacing the warp threads in the center so that I would have a tube, connected in the middle with an opening on the top and on the bottom. I turned one bag inside of the other, stuffing wool and silk in between the two layers. This was felted.

I also wove a silk pouch, using the same linen warp and with unspun silk as the weft. This was also felted.

Both of these solutions worked in terms of a continuous surface, but I felt I was going in a new direction. I wanted to pursue the box idea; I wanted the space to be enclosed and decided to continue felting over the wooden form.
I tried a second box using the form. I tied strips of silk fabric around the unspun fibers. The surface was continuous but I was not pleased with the fabric ornamentation.

At this point my ideas were clear. The process I had gone through clarified my concept for me. I knew what form the last two containers would take.

I put small nails into the surface of the box, four to the inch. This became my loom. I wove around the four sides and over the top. Then I wove the bottom connecting the warp and weft threads to what had previously been woven. I laid raw silk over the surface and felted the piece. Another success! The drape-like quality I had been compelled by was realized. This container was left open. (Plate 5)

For the last box, I wanted to continue the idea of a form being tied. I dyed some spun silk and braided the four strands together. I removed the silk ties from the second box I had felted over the form, applied more unspun silk to the surface, and retied the box with the silk braid. In some places the felt covered the braid and in others the braid was clearly visible. I had to undo one corner to lift the wooden form out. (Plate 6)

My "Keepers of Secrets" were realized. I had given the process and concept my full attention; my ideas were finalized, and my secrets well contained.

Coda:

When my "Keepers of Secrets" were complete, I wrapped them in tissue paper and put them aside. A month went by
and I unwrapped the boxes and spent some time with them. Something was not right. I had a conversation with Fred Lipp in which he asked me why I had tied the linen around the first box. I responded that I wanted the secrets to be protected, and the box closed tightly. As I listened to myself speak, I realized I did not feel the same anymore. I looked at the box and the linen disturbed the surface; it was more of a distraction than an enhancement. I untied the threads. I knew my secrets would be safe. Perhaps I had become more open and willing to be more vulnerable.

(Plate 7)
A Place of Rest

My personal/artistic journey is a struggle which brings many changes and strengths to my being. With each experience the struggle becomes easier, because I learn not to struggle with the struggle, but to explore. The struggle becomes an uphill run. I put my head down, focus my attention, and take on the hill. I know I will make it to the top but I am also aware that there are many more hills to climb. There is a sense of excitement to the struggle but it is also tiring, very tiring and I feel the need for a place to rest—a place where I would be separate from the rest of the world and be only with myself; alone and apart from my surroundings. "A Place of Rest" fulfills that need. (Plate 8)

After spending much time thinking about different techniques, I decided to crochet my "resting place." I am extremely comfortable with the process and knew I would have the control I wanted. I chose to work with raffia, a material that is very "alive" and has a spirit of its own. I felt that by using a familiar technique, I would be able to respond to the material more sensitively; I would be working with the material rather than fighting it.

I split the raffia into fine strands and crocheted it with a number eight hook. This gives the piece a fine, delicate surface. The subtle coloration of the raffia excites me and I am thrilled with the feeling the surface has.

The shape of the piece evolves out of my sensitivity to the material, technique and concept—all three integral
parts of my process. I crocheted the form according to a mental picture, always remaining sensitive to the spirit of the raffia. I originally conceived "A Place of Rest" as a piece that would fit over my head—a face covering that would block out the rest of the world. However, as the form grew, I no longer wanted to cover my face but imagined myself crawling inside. I wanted to be embraced by it, to nestle inside and be surrounded by this delicate, but strong material. I am spiritually cradled in this nest of raffia.
Beginnings are always difficult. It is not easy for me to begin something new, to leave old comfortable ways behind and venture out into the unknown. With every beginning I take a risk and wander in the darkness for a while, feeling lost, scared and alone. I continually journey from the certain into the uncertain and back again. There is a beauty in this cyclical flow of events. I wander into the unknown, feeling the uneasiness of the journey and the strength that will lead me through.

To make beginnings easier, I have decided to celebrate them. I want beginnings to be joyous occasions, thereby helping to ease the arduous task of starting something new. "M R W D C - A Celebration of Beginnings" evolved from this concept and is dedicated to two people who are presently struggling with beginnings. (Plate 9)

The piece is a collage, a composite of different things of which I am fond and with which I enjoy working. There are photographs, pieces of woven linen, xerox transfers on silk, and linen threads, all embedded in handmade paper. I surround myself with these treasures and create.
Conclusion

I did my thesis for myself. It is both the journey and the record of that journey into and out of myself. In doing a thesis of this nature, I realized that I will have to reveal myself to others. My work is going to be shown and I feel as though I am going "public."

The first piece I did is safe; I feel comfortable with my "Work Dress." It depicts a part of me and yet remains impersonal.

However, the next piece, by the nature of its concept, moves into a more personal realm; my "Spirit Figure." Because of the personal nature of the subject, I found I worked most effectively when I was alone. At that point I was not willing to expose so much of myself. As the piece grew, I began to see myself in the woven figure. This overwhelmed me because I realized I was achieving something I had wanted for a long time. I was a bit frightened by its power, but I felt strengthened. I saw how powerful an image could be when it is born out of my center, my core. There is a primitive quality to the piece and I realized this is an inherent quality of my work because it begins in such a primal place. My center is alive and I am thriving on the strength and passion I am feeling and exhibiting in my work. I had to create containers to house the secrets my journey was revealing.

As I grow stronger I realize I am more willing to share my feelings. I can be strong, yet vulnerable,
determined, yet open-minded. I can reveal my softness and know there is an aura of strength surrounding me. I looked at my "Keepers of Secrets" and decided to untie the linen threads that held the first container closed. The secrets would be secure, even if the box was opened.

I am opening up; feelings are flowing in and out of me. I need a place to hold myself still, to rest and comfort my being. I want a place where I can be away from the world, alone and still. "A Place of Rest" fulfills this need.

But I also know I could not end here. Rest is important but I have to keep working and push myself further. The journey never really ends; it continues on and I have to begin again. I decided that I wanted to celebrate this beginning, to celebrate the joy of something new and not be overwhelmed by my fear of the unknown. I am now rejoicing in the completion of my Master's Degree; I am celebrating my new beginning.
Process Information

1. "Work Dress" Calculations

Warp
Fibers: 20/2 and 10/2 mercerized cotton
Width: 24 inches
Sett: 24
Total number of ends: 576
Length to be woven: 4 yards needed
   1 yard loom allowance
   \[ \frac{1}{5} \text{ yards} \]
Total number of yards needed for warp is 576 x 5 = 2880 yards.
This weighed 245 grams.

Weft
Width: 24 inches plus 10% take up equals 26 inches
Picks per inch: 44
Length to be woven: 4 yards = 144 inches
Amount of weft needed: 144" x 44 = 6336
   \[ 6336 \times 26" = 164736" - 4576 \text{ yards} \]
Yards required for each size of cotton: 2288
This weighed 247 grams for 10/2 cotton and 123.5 grams for 20/2 cotton.

Cloth Measurement
After weaving: 22" x 156"
After fulling: 21\frac{1}{2}" x 144"
Shrinkage: \frac{1}{2}" in width
   12" in length
2. Indigo Dye Recipe (for 4 ounces of textiles)*

Stock Solution

A. \( \frac{1}{2} \) cup warm water
   3 tablespoons Sodium Hydrosulfite
   1 tablespoon Indigo Dye Paste, light color
   2 tablespoons Indigo Dye Paste, medium color
   3 tablespoons Indigo Dye Paste, dark color

Mix the above in a beaker. Stir gently. Set in a pan of hot water for 15 minutes.

B. Mix the following:
   \( \frac{1}{2} \) cup warm water
   1 tablespoon Lye (caustic soda or sodium hydroxide)

Mix A and B together in one beaker. Add 1 tablespoon of uniodized salt.

Fill saucepan with water. Place the beaker in it and heat slowly to 120 degrees F. (140\(^{\circ}\) will destroy the dye)

When the temperature reaches 120\(^{\circ}\) remove from the heat and allow to stand for \( \frac{1}{2} \) to 1 hour. When cool, the solution will be greenish-yellow with a coppery scum over the surface.

If the solution is not this color, or feels slimy, add \( \frac{1}{2} \) teaspoon of hydro-sulfite at intervals of 10 minutes.

Dying

Enter washed, wetted textile in dye solution for 20 minutes. Lift from the pot; allow to oxidize for 10 minutes.

If blue color is not strong enough, re-dip. Several dippings make the color darker; oxidation makes the fast.

Final Rinse

Soak the textile in a solution of warm water with 2 tablespoons vinegar for 10 minutes. This will neutralize the alkali of the lye. Then wash with soap, rinse, and dry in the shade.

I quintupled the recipe, using the amount given for a dark shade.

* Recipe compiled by Donald Bujnowski, from various Indigo Dye recipes.
3. Felting

Felt is a fabric composed of protein fibers which lie randomly in all directions, adhering to one another through a process of heat, friction, and pressure. The felting process I used is described below.

Both the wool and silk are carded. Layers of these fibers are laid on top of one another in alternating directions. The width of these layers determines the thickness of the felt. I chose to use wool as the core and silk as the surface decoration, in order to give the felt a more definite substance. The layers of fibers are then enclosed in a muslin bag, which is stitched around the edges. The bag is alternately submerged in boiling, soapy water and cold, soapy water. In between each dipping, the felt is pounded. This process is repeated four times. The shocking of the fibers with hot and cold water, as well as the friction and pressure of the pounding, causes the fibers to cling together.

I dry the felt and press it. Using the steam press gives the felt a finished quality, and helps to bring up the sheen of the silk. The boxes are pressed with the wooden form inside. Pressing worked most effectively on the flat pieces where the pressure acted with the steam.
4. Paper Making

Paper is a material composed of cellulose fibers, held together by hydrogen bonds. The method in which I make paper is described below.

The paper used in "M R W D C - A Celebration of Beginnings" is a mixture of newspapers (woodpulp), and Arches Buff (rag paper). In this instance I am beginning with paper and recycling it into my own sheets. Paper can also be made from any cellulose fiber that has been cooked in a lye solution; this enables the individual fibers to separate.

The newspaper and Arches Buff is torn and soaked overnight in water. The paper is then put into a blender, causing the fibers to separate. This substance is called pulp. The pulp is placed in a large tub, into which I add water until the desired consistancy is achieved. The ratio of water to pulp is determined by the desired thickness of the sheet. A mould and deckle, a screen-like device with a frame surrounding it, is dipped into the tub. When it is lifted, the pulp sits on the screen and the water drains out. The wet sheet is then turned over onto a damp piece of commercially made felt, pressed to remove much of the water, and air dried.

Papers will bond together in a wet state. I took advantage of this quality in my "Celebration" piece by overlapping wet sheets, creating a triangle. The collaged materials are placed in the wet paper, adding pulp to
help attach these materials to the surface. The pieces are pressed and then air dried.
Selected Bibliography


