

# **Stony Brook University**



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**Intersections**

A Thesis Presented

By

**Lorena Salcedo-Watson**

To

The Graduate School

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

For the Degree of

**Master of Fine Arts**

In

**Studio Art**

Stony Brook University

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Lorena Salcedo-Watson

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Abstract of the Thesis

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**2008**

This written thesis presents a visual chronology of work created during my three years at Stony Brook University. The bodies of work I developed within this period reveal my fascination with the “intersections” of observation, sensation, and experience. The imagery is based on aspects of nature; including entomology, botany, and particularly the human body. My thesis travels through a personal chronology into a description of the sources of my imagery. In addition to describing the work of artists who were inspirational to me, this text will trace the development of my work within various mediums. My experience at Stony Brook has been punctuated by four distinct bodies of work; “Possett”, “Morphologies”, “Intersections”, and “What We Wished For”, the final MFA Group Thesis Exhibition. Through the work in final Thesis Exhibition and in this written work, I hoped to synthesize my ideas about the varied and often intense qualities of a lived and witnessed “experience”.

In memory of my sister Lucy,  
my guide and inspiration.

To my family,  
whose love and encouragement gives me wings.

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## Glossary of Printmaking Terms

**Aquatint.** In *intaglio*; a technique used to achieve tone. Finely pulverized rosin (crystallized pine resin) is dusted over the surface of a copper/zinc plate and heated to melt on the plate. The acid-resistant particles adhere to the plate, which can then be immersed into acid or a mordant, to create pitted depth. The length of time a plate is etched determines the tonal values achieved.

**Burnish.** In *intaglio*, a hard polished metal tool, a “burnisher”, is used to smooth a pitted or scratched surface. Burnishing is used to reduce the amount of ink a plate can hold in a given area. For example; it can be used to create highlights in *aquatints*, or erasures in *drypoints*.

**Chine Collé.** The process of adhering a (usually) thin sheet of specialty paper to the printing paper simultaneous to the printing process. A technique used in both *intaglio* and *lithography*.

**Counter-etch.** In *lithography*, the process of de-sensitizing the stone or plate surface to make it again receptive to greasy drawing materials. Counter-etching is performed when more information needs to be added to an image.

**Drypoint.** In *intaglio*, drypoint refers to non-acid plate-making techniques. These include *engraving*, *mezzotint*, as well as abrading methods, for example, sandpaper. Drypoint itself refers to the use of an etching needle, which is a steel pencil-like shaft with a finely sharpened tip. Drypoint needles are also made with diamond tips for extra hardness. In drypoint, a needle is drawn across the plate, creating an incised line, as well as burrs, which are the product of the displaced metal. Drypoint lines can range from being delicate and wispy, to wide, rich, and velvety, depending on the size of the burr (which is controlled by the amount of pressure applied when drawing on the metal).

**Deletion.** The process of removing information on an *intaglio* plate or *lithographic* stone or plate. In *intaglio*, this is achieved by; scraping, burnishing, etc... In plate lithography, it is done chemically with acidic solutions. In stone lithography, it is achieved by abrading the surface, modifying the drawing with hones, etc...and etching with acidic solutions.

**Engraving.** A traditional *intaglio* technique where drawing is rendered on a copper or zinc plate by incising lines with a burin, a tool with a diamond-shaped point capable of gouging wedge-shaped lines in the metal. Engraved lines are clean and precise, and undulating line weights are possible.

**Etching.** Etching is a broad term encompassing intaglio techniques which involve the use of acids or mordants to create incised lines or recessed areas, which will in turn be capable of holding ink during the printing process. The depths of the etched areas will directly determine the strength, or darkness of the line or tone when inked and printed. Etching includes *hard ground*, *soft ground*, and *aquatint* techniques among others.

**Ground.** In *intaglio*, an acid resistant solution made of a combination of ingredients, including bitumen, rosin, wax, etc...to protect areas of the plate when exposed to acid.

**Hard ground.** In *intaglio*, a linear technique; where a plate is covered with an acid-resistant ground which dries to a hard, stable layer. Lines are drawn through the *ground*, exposing metal, which is then *etched* to varying depths. Tone is achieved through cross-hatching.

**Intaglio.** An umbrella term used in printmaking to identify printmaking techniques for working on metal, especially copper and zinc. Various *intaglio* techniques include; *etching* and *drypoint* techniques. The etching or acid- using techniques include: *Hard ground*, *Soft Ground*, and *Aquatint*. *Drypoint* techniques include: *Drypoint*, *Engraving*, and *Mezzotint*. These are non-acid techniques used in creating information on a metal plate.

**Lithography.** A “planographic” printmaking process which occurs completely on the surface of the plate or stone. It is based on the antipathy of grease to water. An image is drawn on a receptive surface, either stone (polished Bavarian limestone), or aluminum plates which have been treated to obtain a stone-like surface. Using greasy drawing materials to develop an image, the non-image areas are de-sensitized, so that they attract water, while repelling greasy printing ink. Maintaining a chemical balance of those relationships makes it possible to repeatedly ink the stone or plate while keeping non-image areas damp, thus, many impressions of the image can be printed.

**Mezzotint.** A *drypoint intaglio* technique where, a “mezzotint rocker” a steel tool consisting of a shaft with an arced edge with pointed “teeth” is rocked back and forth over the surface of a copper or zinc plate to yield lines of small indented pits with burrs. The plate surface is often thoroughly roughened with the rocker to hold a velvety, rich layer of ink. The image is often created by *scraping* and *burnishing* areas to draw out highlights, and define the image through deletions. Mezzotint was a precursor to the use of *aquatint*.

**Monoprint.** A printmaking technique where imagery is painted on the surface of a plate, usually metal or plexiglas, and then run through a printing press with dampened paper which will lift the image off the plate, transferring it onto the paper.

**Printing.** The process in which a plate is prepared or drawn using various plate-making techniques. In *intaglio*; ink is applied to the plate, and wiped to retain information above and below the surface of the plate. Dampened paper is placed over the plate, followed by felt blankets, and then run through the pressure of an etching press. The paper is thus pressed into the ink-holding grooves and surfaces, yielding a “print”. In *lithography*, the plate, or stone is prepared and stabilized to hold ink in image areas, and repel ink in non-image areas. The dampened surface is then inked using a roller. Paper is placed over the plate or stone, followed by a layer of additional paper and a stiff synthetic sheet called a tympan, which when lubricated, allows the stone to pass through the press under pressure to yield an impression, or print.

**Proof.** An impression or print of an intaglio plate or lithographic stone (or plate), printed as part of the process of developing an image in the printmaking medium. Proofs are “pulled” or printed to determine the phases of a print’s development through the plate-making process.

**Silk Aquatint.** Silk-aquatint is a collagraph, or relief technique, where the image is built up sculpturally on the surface of the plate, or matrix. In a silk aquatint, a delicate silk-like fabric is adhered to the surface of the plate, which if printed as is, would print a solid black. The surface is then painted over with a polymer-based material. The image is created by painting layers over the surface to reduce its porosity, therefore making it capable of printing in gradations of lighter tones according to the number of painted layers applied. Painterly effects, such as brush strokes are possible. The result appears like an additive, rather than reductive version of a mezzotint.

**Soft Ground.** Used in *intaglio*; an acid-resistant *ground* with wax or grease added to it to prevent it from hardening. Drawings are made though paper (rather than directly through the ground) onto the grounded plate, and etched to create textured lines resembling pencil-like marks. The soft ground is also sensitive to capturing impressions of objects or materials pressed onto the surface.

**Spit-bite.** An etching technique used for “biting” *aquatints* with acid. Rather than immersing a plate in a bath of acid, or mordant; the acid is applied manually with a brush. A solution of the acid is combined with saliva to break the surface tension of the acid on the aquatinted plate. The technique yields a smoky or drip-like quality on the plate, depending on how it is applied. The values are determined by the amount of time the acid remains on the surface of the plate. Spit-bite is often used to create atmospheric tonal effects.

**State.** A phase at which an impression or “print” is pulled in between specific changes made to the information on a plate or stone.

**Tint roll.** In *intaglio*; a technique where a (usually) transparent layer of ink is rolled onto the surface of a plate to achieve an overall layer of tone.

I want to thank my advisors, thesis readers, and friends for their support and encouragement throughout these past three years at Stony Brook. I appreciate their generous spirit and also their stamina throughout the readings of my various drafts.

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Thank You.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

“In their physical occurrence, things and events experienced pass and are gone. But something of their meaning and value is retained as an integral part of the self. Through habits formed in intercourse with the world, we also in-habit the world. It becomes a home and the home is part of our every experience.”(Dewey, 108)

The objective of my thesis is to describe and discuss the range of reference materials, subjects, ideas, and curiosities that comprise my passive and active consciousness, memory, and realms of experience from which my artwork emerges. The three-year period I have spent as a graduate student at Stony Brook has permitted me to pursue an intensive studio practice which has resulted in an expansive exploration of my imagery. Personal reflection and provocative dialogue about my work has helped me to peel back layers to reveal aspects of my personal visual “history”. I have taken a journey in attempting to define and identify the influences and forces at play in my life, and their implications in my work.

The chronology of progress toward the imagery I am currently involved with originates in the imagery of my prints. My lithographs, etchings, and woodblock prints encompass investigations dealing with creatures, aspects of nature, and experience. My interest in natural specimens derives from observations of botanical life forms and entomological creatures. Interested in depicting their physical intricacies and physiological changes over time, some of my images describe stages in their life cycles, capturing fleeting aspects of transitory states. In my observations of insects in their developmental phases, I encountered grubs, pupae, chrysalides, cicada sheds, etc... I was interested in their forms, but particularly fascinated by the meaning of these phases representing imminent change and the transformation, specifically, the evolution of a life. The liminal moment of transformation was thrilling to consider. Though I would not directly bear witness to it in my insect specimens, I explored and imagined those levels of change through my work.

My fascination turned toward my personal physical and emotional changes and perceptions over time. I wanted to document and visually explore personal physical states

and changes, while also considering my sensual and emotional perceptions of those processes. Reflections on physical, sensual experiences led me to revisit a profound period of personal redefinition. Parenthood was perhaps the single, most consummate vehicle of personal change in my life. In my artwork, I reflected on aspects of the gradual yet radical physical and emotional changes brought upon through pregnancy, the actual delivery, and further to the change of role as a person; not only expanding but also separating from the previous “self”. The process made me a vehicle in the extension of life. I was completely altered, having undergone a solitary yet shared “passage”. I became a subject not unlike the insects, plants, and other creatures whose life cycles held my fascination. I was the closest witness to my personal “passages”. Describing and suggesting aspects of those experiences became a deep source of inspiration in my work.

Before entering a career as a printmaker, fresh out of art school I had felt equipped with the tools for image making, though I didn’t quite feel that I had anything particularly solid to say with them. I focused on my career, and as life moved forward, the luxury for self-focus disappeared. Returning to school to again concentrate on my artwork, I feel I have a plethora of ideas to discuss in my work, perhaps not particularly profound, yet personally meaningful and expansive. That is where I am now, mining my experiences and observations, not with any hierarchical order, but broadly and simultaneously, as life presents itself. The potential of a lived experience is relative to what we are receptive to at a given moment. Under different circumstances and perceptions, each moment’s contents and significance can shift or change in meaning. That fullness of lived, witnessed, sensed, and identified experience is what I am interested in representing in my work.



## **I. PERSONAL CHRONOLOGY:**

Prior to attending Stony Brook University I worked as a professional printmaker. Entering Stony Brook's graduate program represented opportunity to expand upon my professional background and to develop my personal artwork. In the nearly twenty years since completing my undergraduate degree, life and its full measure of experiences has occupied my time. My family consists of my husband Jamie and four daughters: Camille, Paulina, Emily, and Lili, who I mention throughout this paper. I am completing my three years of graduate studies, and punctuating it with a thesis paper; a summation or brief journey through some of the ideas and imagery which have permeated my thoughts and work.

After receiving my undergraduate degree at *The Cooper Union*, where I had fallen in love with printmaking, I decided to shift directions to pursue my studies in the field of anthropology. While at Cooper Union, I had taken courses in cultural anthropology as well as at *N.Y.U.* to supplement my fine arts curriculum. I was particularly interested in Mesoamerican ethnography. After taking a trip to my native Guatemala while in college, I became immersed, or actually, obsessed with Mayan culture. My imagery developed around my perceptions of where the native population stood historically in contrast to their current status; Indians in a nation dominated primarily by white European descendants and Ladinos,(the indigenous with European racial mixture). However, while pursuing my studies (in snow-bound Albany, feeling miserably depressed), I suddenly had a moment of clarity... that I was an artist, and felt that would shrivel up and lose a vital part of myself by not pursuing that path. I am still fascinated by my native heritage, though realized that I can retain that passion in ways other than specializing in a field to the exclusion of another which was calling to me more urgently.

### **U.L.A.E:**

Returning to New York City after my period in Albany, I began working as a printer and collaborator at a small printmaking workshop in Tribeca. While a student, I had seen a Jasper Johns exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. I was smitten by the

idea of someday working at *Universal Limited Art Editions (U.L.A.E.)*, the workshop that created his prints with him. After seeing Johns' "0-9" lithographs, I thought; "I can do that". *U.L.A.E.* remained on my mind. After working for three years at a smaller workshop, I felt worthy to attempt an interview at *U.L.A.E.* That was the beginning. I remember my first day there, meeting at the main house, where artists and printers gathered each day from the various workshops for a sit-down lunch, often with many courses. I was being introduced to the master-printers, when one of them jokingly said, "... you know, you are among the Gods of printmaking..." and I earnestly and innocently replied, "Yes, I know." I subsequently worked there for thirteen years, where although I was working full-time and often on weekends, life continued...I married, and started a family. I essentially "grew up" there, as had most of my colleagues. For a while I was the only female printer there, which had its own array of hurdles...as each time I left for a brief maternity leave, upon returning, I had to again prove that I was fully committed to the workshop. For the first several years, having young daughters, Jamie was the stay-at-home-parent. He often worked on weekends...partly to reclaim a bit of sanity.

### **Collaborations at *U.L.A.E.*:**

While working at *U.L.A.E.*, my central focus there was to apply all of my personal artistic and technical resources at the service of our artist's imagery. Their imagery essentially became also mine. With various artists, work would often begin from a handful of sketches, notes, and ideas. The artist would come in with "early" thoughts about where the imagery was to proceed, and then allow for it to find its direction in the medium. I think that imagery emerged most richly and fruitfully when there was little preconception toward the final result. The project would begin, and the journey and the progressive evolution of their statement through mark-making, proofing, and endless shifts would coalesce into a final state. This process could last weeks, or years on any given image. Proofing time allowed for clear reflection upon returning to the work with fresh eyes. Proofing often implied seemingly limitless and complex layering, where many variations of several plates would be printed in varying tints – to get at just the right tone, just the right mood, just the right energy from a color – or combination of colors. We often labored in search of; a contrast, an edge, an un-nameable, un-orderable

combination, or a certain result that could only be definitely described when it was arrived at, not before. Only when it “felt” right, we could then move on. There was always the possibility that we would be investing time in proofing variations that would never go beyond the proof. However many hours, weeks, months invested in a project, retaining an eager attitude of hopeful enthusiasm was essential. Everything was possible; nothing was ever too large, complex, or daunting. The thought of arriving at the desired combinations; the perfect contrast, the clearest and most luscious impression was fuel enough. When the desired result was achieved, it was a shared victory.

With some artists, a considerable amount of guidance was necessary. For other artists with more experience in printmaking, I essentially laid out the work area, and worked at anticipating their needs. Collaborating, in addition being technically available and responsive to our artist’s work, one needed to be mindful of remaining unobtrusive and maintaining a sensitive proportion of combined diplomacy, invisibility, and friendly conversation. This was further combined with responsiveness for technical troubleshooting and guidance, as well as attentive dialogue about a work’s direction at any moment. Investing all of my energy into wholeheartedly developing another artist’s work was rich and exhilarating as well as draining. At the end of the day I felt satisfied and tired, as if I had been working on my own art all day.

Working with artists in developing their work, my craft in printmaking matured and refined as I worked to meet their needs in our collaborations. Meanwhile, my personal creativity took many forms including sewing costumes for school plays and Halloween, and clothing for special occasions. It seemed natural to work on developing sewn clown-suits for an artist I was working with. Rather than cloth, the suit was made of hand-made Japanese paper with lithographs and silkscreen printings...it was a seamless progression. My “craft” as a printmaker involved my “craft” as an artist, technician, and seamstress, as well as someone essentially responsible for the organization of often absolutely bizarre projects. Thrilled to call upon undefined or unspecified abilities, I sought satisfaction in the range of possibilities that my collaborative work as a printmaker revealed, or necessity called upon.

**Teaching:**

I didn't really begin doing my work with any regularity in the midst of *U.L.A.E.* projects until I began teaching. In 1998 I was invited to give a presentation on the nature of *U.L.A.E.* prints to the advanced printmaking class at The Cooper Union. I came in with a tremendous portfolio of work to discuss how different projects were created. I described the nature of a professional workshop and the dynamic nature of artistic collaborations therein. I was subsequently invited to teach intaglio printmaking there. The facilities had just been renovated, since their ventilation ducts, after years of nitric acid fumes, had essentially dissolved. The shop was magnificent. I was thrilled yet anxious, since my "teaching" experience had been essentially in guiding artists through working on their projects with various techniques. I was a little concerned about addressing a group of students eager and ready for whatever I had to offer.

In preparation for my teaching at Cooper, I needed to generate working materials and examples of technical possibilities to use to teach my intaglio courses. It was then that I lost all feelings of self-consciousness in relation to openly presenting my imagery to students, who I suspected, would indeed be quite ready to scrutinize it. Every semester I created a new image to eventually trade with members of the class. As part of the course requirements, I had students print an edition of their strongest images to trade with the class at the end of each semester. Through this exercise, they became technically capable of consistency in their printing, and directly experienced the desire for establishing technical standards for themselves, and printing with a sense of quality control. I quickly had a portfolio of student images to show as examples for given techniques. They were flattered by their work being used as an example of quality and technical exploration for my future classes, and during the print trade, they held their work to high standards when they knew that I would be among their peers in the exchange. I continue trading with my classes, though most of my personal images were gradually retired from being used as examples.

**Artwork before Stony Brook:**

My image-making practice prior to Stony Brook was sporadic. My time and energy had been dedicated to years of collaborating with artists in developing their work

through printmaking. Until this time, I had not had the opportunity to create my work with a regular studio practice. I produced imagery primarily to be used in teaching printmaking, and my art production essentially consisted of developing those images and printing small editions to trade with my students. I also periodically worked on test plates and stones to demonstrate technical possibilities to artists I was collaborating with in the workshop. At home, I sporadically worked on paintings exploring or punctuating aspects of my life; having children, observing their growth and change, and the pleasure of my father-in-law's vast garden. I also drew from a gradually growing collection of insects; using them as subjects for my prints, drawings, and paintings. Throughout my years at *U.L.A.E.*, I found different levels of satisfaction in "making art", though the fact that the work was clearly not mine, didn't really begin to bother me until I began working with much younger artists, whose quality of dedication and focus to their own work was becoming less and less stimulating for me.

**Elizabeth Murray:**

My strongest collaborative bond during my time at *U.L.A.E.* (1989-2002) was with a wonderful artist, Elizabeth Murray. She was perhaps best known for her large-scale three-dimensional sculptural paintings. They were often as large as 10x10 feet, and protruded several feet as well. Her palette was pure, bright, often electric and energetic, though not without rich layers and dark zones of velvety shadow. Their dimensionality was powerful and dynamic. Elizabeth's paintings often consisted of wooden sculptural armatures which were covered with canvas, and then painted. Optical dimensionality was superimposed over physical dimensionality. Her subjects were her world, both wacky and soulful; she often transformed ordinary objects and spaces into a poem, a dance of color and form. I don't think I grasped the richness of her vision until I had the opportunity to work with her for a sustained period of time. I witnessed her dedication, patience, and clarity of vision, working to keep things fresh; constantly drawing with focused intention, but not hesitating to eliminate layers in an effort to clarify and refine her statement. I wanted to be true to that ideal with her. I began working on small color etchings with her, and later on creating her large three-dimensional assembled lithographs. I have to admit to feeling very protective of them. The lithographs often had printing on both sides of the

paper. They were assembled of numerous parts, often protruding several inches, held by invisible tabs and paper tension. One print I felt particular pride in was “*Shack*” (1994); it was a joyous exploding house. It was perhaps technically our grandest collaboration; 63 x 51" in size, composed of 22 separate elements, with 150 printings from 143 plates in total (fig.1).



Fig.1 *Shack* (1994), Elizabeth Murray © U.L.A.E., 1994

After a day of working with Elizabeth, I had always returned home feeling inspired. I was in awe of Elizabeth’s intense forms, and her fearlessness, especially about scale and color. She had an assertiveness to her mark-making and a self-assurance I admired, and hoped someday to also project onto my personal work. I particularly remember beginning a project with her... it was to be a huge three-dimensional

exploding shoe (c.1993). We used full-size (40x60") litho plates, and began with such intensity that we were quickly proofing and assembling a prototype. The project was paused and was never resumed...other ideas quickly followed...but during that particular period of intensity, I felt an irresistible urge to get into my own work again...with the same fervor we shared during Elizabeth's work sessions. Unfortunately, I didn't sustain it for long...there was too much going on at home after work hours...but I promised myself that I would not forget how good that particular time felt.



Fig.2 *Lovers* (1996), Elizabeth Murray © U.L.A.E., 1996

Working with Elizabeth Murray in 1996 on her mezzotint series “*Bedroom Suite*” was a significant time for me. Away from the usual bustle of the main workshop on Long Island, we would meet to collaborate in the print shop in Manhattan (on Watts St.), where we would steadily work for hours uninterrupted. The mezzotints were fantastic tapestry-like images created by combining a bold monotype of pure, often riotous color, over which a rich and dark velvety chiaroscuro mezzotint image was then printed, merging the two (fig.2). I would prepare her monotype plate, and while she painted over it following an outline of the key image on the plate, I would ink and wipe the mezzotint plate. Both

plates would be ready after about 30 minutes, and they would then be printed back to back. Each day's work yielded six or seven images. It was during this period that we had the opportunity to work in a meditative and intimate space. We talked about each of our versions of the joy and insanity of parenting, and she asked me about my personal artwork. This was a topic rarely if ever broached in our (*U.L.A.E.*'s) workshop situation, where there could only be only one acknowledged artist at a time, with our personal world and egos checked at the door, so to speak. We spoke about the richness and amplitude of the experience, yet also of the need to also feel that "fullness" in our personal creative work. I asked her... when did she decide to give her art production the time and focus it needed? At the time, she had one older son and two daughters who were still quite young... I wanted to know... how and when did she make it all come together? Basically she said; "It was time." It was time to commit to her art as much as to everything else. She found daycare, and just kept juggling, because "it" was important. She didn't offer advice, though periodically from that time on, we would discuss what was currently happening with our kids. A few years later in 2002, we resumed our conversation. I was working with her in the private litho studio at the main house at Skidmore Place (in West Islip). I had run some tests on various ways to counter-etch her stone to add drawing, while retaining some very delicate passages already on the stone. For the test stone, I had rendered a drawing with a full range of delicate greys (to approximate the type of drawing she was thinking of developing), not random marks, but an image (of a prickly dried raspberry). She studied it and asked me; "Is it time?" She completely understood how I had been feeling for a while. Perhaps I needed to hear that assurance from someone who had lived out that same desire. Working with younger and younger artists, I had started contemplating my age in relation to theirs. I had begun to experience a suffocating sensation. I realized that with that sensation, I was in the process of making a decision. I was making a choice to not speak through my work. If I didn't do anything about that desire, it also would be a choice. The convenient time was not waiting for me. I had to create that time.

At *U.L.A.E.* I had experienced the simple joy of collaborating on projects which were someone else's paper fantasy; including an actual clown suit on handmade Japanese



paper, printed and hand stitched, complete with hat and printed pom-pom buttons (fig.3), or a wizard suit or a delicate paper ballerina's tutu.



Fig.3 *Clown Suit* (1995), Jane Hammond © U.L.A.E., 1995

Some projects were initiated yet not completed, while others grew with mind-boggling layers of complexity. Each time however, the fullest and most enthusiastic energy had to be mustered for the collaboration, however brief, or however long. A master printer that I worked with had a donut analogy to the process of artistic collaborations and its effect on your personal artistic productivity; “There you are, all day long you work at making donuts, ...at the end of the day, you are not going to be thinking...“I’m so excited, I’m going to go home and make the biggest, best donut ever!” All of your wholehearted juices go into another person’s art... which can be truly wonderful, until you begin to wonder if your own work will ever come into existence...and that was where I was.

## **II. IMAGERY:**

### **On Nature:**

“But things remain external only as long as we merely observe them. When we reflect on them, they are no longer outside us; we merge with their inner aspect. The contrast between objective, external percept and subjective, inner world of thought exists for us only as long as we fail to recognize that these worlds belong together. Our inner world is nature’s inner being.” (Steiner, 211)

My artwork revolves around the ways that we perceive our natural world and our experiences as physical beings. Deriving from my interests in botany, entomology, and human anatomy; my imagery explores intimate views, both internal and external, of “bodies” in nature. It concentrates on formal and structural similarities in plants, insects, and humans continually undergoing change. In my imagery, skeletons, exoskeletons, plant structures, and networks of leaf veins intermingle and merge into neural and vascular patterns. Shared forms echo throughout my images, alluding to different levels of familiarity and experience. Perspectives shift from topical and topographical views to internal cross-sections. Physical spaces evolve into psychological spaces, with forms transcending familiar origins and crossing species and realms, and becoming identifiable in a completely different context. Juxtaposing familiar elements or aspects of natural forms, I create ambiguous landscapes.

Throughout these inter-connections, I want my work to reveal physical experience and sensation; both sensuous and uncomfortably disturbing. The commingling of familiar aspects of natural life challenge the viewer to make connections based on their own experience. My depictions explore the physical and psychological awareness of our bodies, and their malleability in the context of personal as well as more “universal” experiences. My work focuses on our relationship to the natural world, operating with constant change and transformation, and periods of growth and also depletion. I want to describe the continual expansion and contractions of a resilient physical existence. Transcending and experiencing those tensions is where we find definition and meaning in the moments and passages of relative ease.

“The marvel of organic, of vital, adaptation through expansion (instead of by contraction and passive accommodation) actually takes place. Here in a germ are balance and harmony attained through rhythm. Equilibrium comes about not mechanically and inertly but out of and because of, tension.” (Dewey, 13)

### **Imagery and Ideas: Dewey and Goethe**

My work encompasses observation, sensation, and aspects of experience, which links my interests with the writings of John Dewey and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In “*Art and Experience*”, he describes the qualities of a fully witnessed and savored existence in relation to his concept of “experience”. My connection with Dewey’s writings relate to his ideas about experience being brought into every level of human interpretation. Experience therefore consists of the cumulative range of moments which formulate perceptions which we apply to our lived passages. His ideas resonate with my interest in describing the universality of the lived moment and the understanding of our environment through lived experience.

In relation to aspects of experience and observation, I also became very interested in Goethe’s writings on botany. Carl Linnaeus’ analytical system of taxonomy classifies nature within a hierarchy based on observable characteristics. Goethe used Linné’s work as a basis to search for and develop a further methodological step. He took the method of the identification of species further in an attempt to present a broader theory of integrating and identifying plant types. His emphasis or distinction was toward identifying and “knowing” forms. Going beyond merely categorizing, he sought to identify the “essential nature” about the species, the “universal”. Goethe was concerned with whole or complete systems in nature rather than with the analysis of or dissection into separate parts. In his poetry on nature, he passionately describes observing progressive changes throughout the life-cycles of plants. In understanding forms, specifically in relation to plants, the knowledge of the metamorphosis had to be a part of the viewer’s interaction. The process of that knowledge had with it the responsibility of observation. He believed that only through observation would one obtain an understanding of a species.

### **Cabinet of Curiosities:**

In overview, I feel that my imagery represents the “*Wunderkammer*”, or “Cabinet of Curiosities” of my thoughts and interactions with aspects of nature and my personal “history”. This tangible yet ethereal *Wunderkammer* is essentially a repository of images and specimens. It contains a storehouse of memories of experiences and sensations in the context of a personal “natural history”. The collection has taken the form of specimens, drawings, prints, and photographs; recording physiological details of life forms through pensive observation, while also attempting to capture the essence of a fleeting moment and retaining mental images and sensations. Through my drawings I record aspects of that natural history, and work to distill it to a more essential significance. Rather than recording objectively, I want to take my perceptions of a lived or witnessed experience and re-infuse it with a living presence. In my work I want to suggest living forms and spaces, permitting passage into a personal interpretation by the viewer based on their familiarity with such creatures, structures, and physical experiences. The concept of a “Cabinet of Curiosities” is meaningful to me in the sense that it reveals my method of collecting specimens mentally as well as physically. The individual studies explore both ideas and objects. Thoughts become manifest as I describe and visually articulate specimens and lived experiences, whose fleeting “moments” can remain visible and afloat, as if in jars, preserved in silent formaldehyde or amber.

### **Creatures:**

I have always been interested in microscopic views of the structures of insects. Early encounters with electron microscope images in *National Geographic* magazines revealed the intricacies of insect structures. Their surfaces, antennae, compound eyes, and endless variations on hairiness thrilled me. I wanted to savor the range of possibilities ordinarily unseen by the naked eye. The real seemed unreal to me, so the composite variations I formulated could have been equally viable. Was someone going to fact-check my forms? I worked on drawings, visually exploring and emphasizing areas I found most interesting. These images not only filled my imagination with unbelievable details about specific creatures, but made me realize that “truth” and “reality” was relative to our visual experience with such forms and information. I gave myself permission to take

aspects of reality, after becoming familiar with actual structures, modifying and accenting details I found particularly intriguing.

My interest in collecting insects to seriously examine as subject matter for my artwork began when I received “damaged” discarded insects from a friend, a hobbyist entomologist. Although his passion is for beetles, he is expert in mounting tarantula sheds having them appear as the actual arachnid rather than merely the skin of one. His vast collection originates from areas as remote as Papua, New Guinea; receiving his specimens in glassine bags or carefully wrapped in cellophane over cardboard. Sometimes they arrive damaged, with broken wings or legs, or sometimes more seriously injured. I enthusiastically received his “rejects”, to devour with my eyes and to sketch profusely. They became a fascinating source of formal discoveries. Among these treasures were scorpions, hissing cockroaches, centipedes, millipedes, walking sticks, and many types of beetles. At different times, aspects of these creatures enter my work. The only problem I had with this particular stash of creatures was that smaller insects or mites were on their trail, and began to eat the larger insect carcasses. At the time, I shared a small room with my daughters; we called it the “Barbie room”, which was where they played, and I had an easel set up to periodically draw and paint, and it was where I kept my specimens. I was alarmed at noticing that my collection was being eaten by smaller critters, and was afraid of an infestation in our living space. I put the few boxes of insects I had in a shed outside, since placing them in the freezer (to stop the other mites) was a revolting idea to my family, not to mention that we didn’t have freezer space to spare. The insects were virtually consumed by the time I eventually pulled them out of the shed, having almost forgotten they were there. In hindsight, the freezer may have been the best solution.

In my sketches, I likened the insect-like form of a fetus to studies of grubs, pupa, cicada sheds, and millipedes. The morphology of early fetal development in many creatures echoed to me, continually inspiring works that linked these formal similarities. To me, the pupa form felt like a universal identifier of a stage in development which could result in endless varieties of creatures despite their early formative resemblance. I developed this idea throughout my work; commingling familiar aspects of natural life and juxtaposing analogous forms, which echoed in unexpected zones.

“If however, we observe all forms, especially organic ones, we find that nothing is permanent, nothing is at rest or complete, but rather everything is in continuous fluctuating movement.” (Goethe as an introduction to his study on metamorphosis, 1807) (Steiner, 7)

### **Aversion and Fascination:**

I have vivid childhood memories of viewing “scientific” images in the notorious “Itchy Book”. My parents had a Spanish medical encyclopedia: “*El Guardian de la Salud*”, which we called the “Itchy Book”. It was an old book with a weathered spine and rich maroon cover. It was one of the important medical references my mother frequently consulted. Its pages were yellowed, and upon opening it, one would get a waft of a particular scent; old ink, and paper musty with age. It was easy to imagine microscopic spores, germs, or any form of invisible microbe rising to ones face while breathing in the unknown air quality that emanated from its pages. When my parents were out, and only then; my three siblings and I would huddle around the book and dare each other to touch the pictures within it. They were images of worst-case examples of all forms of skin ailments, childhood diseases and “cancers”. We would nervously leaf through the pages. The powdery invisible sense of spores rising to our nostrils confirmed the validity of our fear and apprehension, the sense of danger. We projected and imagined the possibility of disease transmission through touching the photographs and juicy illustrations. All forms of cysts and pustules had a wet gleam to them, accenting their vivid presence. The images held for us a powerful aura of danger and illness. Each time the session was over, we sighed with relief feeling braver than when we began. The one important aspect of that early experimentation with aversion was the exciting thrill it provided. The odd combination of curiosity and fear, mingled with the excitement of perceived potential danger made it irresistible. As a childhood “game” it had the effect of a bonding ritual, it was a secretive shared experience, a personal challenge where we each tested of our limits of fear, individually and collectively. After my parents divorced, the contents of the house were divided, distributed as well as discarded. I was unanimously chosen heir to this marvelous book.

## **Botanical Forms:**

“Moreover, I must confide to you that I have come very close to the secret of the generation and organization of plants and that it is the simplest thing one can imagine... The archetypal plant will be the most extraordinary creature in the world, for which nature herself will envy me. With this model and the key to it one will then be able to invent plants ad infinitum that must be consistent. In other words, even if they do not exist, they could exist and are not merely painterly or poetic whims but possess an inner truth and necessity. It will be possible to apply the same law to all living things.” (Goethe, from *Italian Journey* in a letter to Herder, 1787) (Steiner, 17)

My interest in botanical subjects is impossible to localize. I have always loved plants and flowers of all forms. Perhaps my real relationship with them began when we first started our own garden after purchasing our home. The previous owners had two very large dogs, which had essentially decimated anything resembling intentional plantings. My father-in-law has always been an inspiration; a passionate gardener with a wondrous garden; dense, and layered, with hundreds of treasured specimens. He often obtained very special varieties of plants and shrubs, which we frequently received as gifts. Neighbors “thinning” their flower beds would often come bearing flats of irises, black-eyed susans, daisies, day lilies, all sorts of perennials and ground covers... we eagerly accepted them all. It was a thrill to plant my own bulbs, to turn the soil and compost, easily locating centipedes, all sorts of grubs, worms, and giant beetles. I enjoy collecting all sorts of seed pods in the fall, and after the winter, seeing the left-over skeletal remains of hydrangea petals and dried out leaves revealing their fragile structures. Year-round I collect specimens; some to plant, some to draw, some just to look at and to memorize. I am fascinated by botanical developments, like vegetables “going to seed”; like the rhubarb, revealing an incredible shaft of seeds like shimmering sequin, yellow edged in red ... or onion flowers with massive globes of tiny white flowers, each containing a single seed...or milkweed pods peeled back to reveal “silk” and fish-scale configurations of seeds. One year, we planted a magnolia tree. It is probably the most sensuous creature in the garden. Solitary fuzzy buds cling to the bare branches, patiently waiting out the winter. When the leaves emerge, velvety buds gradually swell and open to reveal a pure white firm tip...the flower eventually

blossoming to release a heady aroma; sweet and clear, so luscious in combination with the thick soft petals that one can almost taste the scent.

Like insects, the botanical forms and specimens provoke a vast range of visual and sensory experiences. The magnolia buds; their furry softness, are more animal-like and human than plant. The freshness of the blossoms in their fur-lined petals and their tactile sensuality merges with ambiguous zones within the same specimen. The blossom's white purity merges with rich, dark hairy spaces, both inviting and cautionary or repellent, as in the delicate fuzzy abdomen of a wasp, or bee, or the legs of a tarantula. The attractive sensuality of the soft and furry surface intersects the duality of danger and aversion with attraction and delight; an aspect of emotion or sensation we intermittently experience throughout our lives. I am fascinated by the contradictory yet simultaneous sensation of combined aversion and attraction to ambiguities in visual experiences. The duality insinuated in my combination of spaces and textures links some of my ideas to the work of Lee Bontecou. Her early (1960s) sculptural works contain, deep dark "holes", which invite one to come in closer to peer in curiosity, yet also caution through an almost ominous aura in relation to what may lie within.

### **Imogen Cunningham:**

In considering aspects of botanical forms and their visual representations, I am inspired by the work of Imogen Cunningham. Her botanical photographs are a rich example of qualities I would like to evoke in my images. An example of this quality is seen in her *Magnolia Blossoms*, 1925. (Lorenz, 103) I am drawn to the quality of sensual exploration and engagement she conveys through her photographs. She creates an ethereal quality of light that reveals a pulsing fullness of life, of the living presence of her subjects. Through a close focus on the details of her plants and flowers; delicate tendrils, petals, facets, cores, pistils ... she presents views of intimate space. The images present a unique quality of meditative contemplation. One visually savors her forms. Through the range of surfaces she visually caresses, her focus seems to emerge from the senses. Hers is a palpable, intimate involvement with an experience, rather than with an object. Looking at her forms involves exploration that alludes to tactile and olfactory suggestion, while remaining purely visual. The viewer brings personal associations to the mood she



establishes, to the aura she reveals about the sensual wholeness of the experience.

Cunningham bridges a technical clarity and engagement with the photographic process with a painterly, ethereal quality of light and space; a quality existing within the senses rather than in objective experience.

### **III. IMAGERY:**

#### **The Human Body:**

In depicting the human body throughout my work, my primary inspiration is the lived and witnessed experience. Personal physical experiences are my visual and sensory references. I want to describe the body's memory of its passages. Different events and incidents punctuate our "containers" in various ways, sometimes but not always leaving scars or external marks as evidence, although perhaps always permeating our memory and sense of awareness.

#### **Eyes:**

When my daughters were still quite young, we had two very frightening eye injuries. Camille had a puncture wound in her eye, and several years later, Emily received a paper cut in her cornea. In Camille's accident, she and Paulina were playing in the shopping cart while shopping with Jamie at a *Home Depot* (a large super-hardware store). They were playing with a doll, pretending that a caulking tube was a baby's bottle. Somehow, the tip of the caulking tube stabbed Camille's eye, puncturing the sclera (the white part of the eye), adjacent to her iris. Needless to say, it was an extremely traumatic experience for all of us; getting the immediate attention she needed, thinking the worst about her future vision, and worrying about the cleanliness of the tip, and if there were any particles within her eye... the healing process was so incredibly fast, that there was no time to waste. I remember the anxiety of the paper-work-related obstacles... that if the situation had been dirtier, could have posed a serious threat to her recovery... and then, just as quickly as it happened, it was over. She was fine. Within three days, the wound had completely closed, and vision tests looked promising. Jamie and I felt like we had easily aged ten years that day.

On another occasion, on Emily's third birthday, while unwrapping birthday gifts she suffered a paper cut across her cornea (the most sensitive part of the eye). We could not tell what was wrong with her when she suddenly placed her hand over her eyes, and began screaming uncontrollably. Her eye became blood-red, and we rushed her to the emergency room. Again, there were antibiotic drops and dyes to determine the nature of the injury...not something we wanted any more experience with... but again, it healed

amazingly fast, and the follow-up exams on her vision were fine. We aged a few more years that day as well. Camille and Emily's accidents began my obsession with drawing eyes. I initially drew images visualizing the slit across the cornea and iris, not unlike Luis Bunuel's famous image in the film: "*Un Chien Andalou*" (1929). I winced at the thought of Emily's experience, and kept visualizing the different components of her eyes and the different effects the slit may have had on each of them. In looking at the iris, I was absorbed by the multiple layers, the nuances and intricacies of the ridged forms, reminding me of mushroom gills. I was absorbed by the unique and magical details of an iris; the aqueous shifts in translucent tone, like glass or amber, holding layers of information while revealing infinite depths...each iris unique, often with freckle-like speckles, and a surprising lack of symmetry. Within each iris is a pool of layers, reading like information within a pond; with decaying leaves, perhaps animal life, layers of silt, and shadows of indefinable, unidentifiable forms. My daughters always humored me, when in the midst of having a conversation with them, or doing something mundane around the house; I'd catch a glimmer or reflection of color in their eyes, and ask them to let me contemplate them for a little while. They are all accustomed to my odd requests, and always oblige. In glimpsing within their eyes, I would feel transported by the wonder of that intimate world within them.

During this period, when Camille was in second grade, her teacher was teaching a unit on eyes, (to my delight!). They were planning to dissect sheep's eyes to complete the topic, and invited interested parents to come in to assist with handling the scalpels in the dissection. I was thrilled at the opportunity. However, it was nothing like I imagined. The eyes were preserved in formaldehyde, and upon opening them, they revealed: a sac of fluid (the vitreous humor), the lens, small and hard, which had descended within the fluid, and the iris, which was a like a thin grey washer, flat and unimpressive. I realized that my fantasy about what I would be able to observe was illogical. What made the eye seem magical to me was the life within it, pulsing fluid, the layers of tissue kept intact and distinct within their orbit, alive, and hydrated, with the tensions of a living organism. Once that living quality was absent, all was lost. The light and depth and clarity of the eye left, as did the pulse of its life, with all that was magical within it.

“The poor creature trembles in the net, rubs off its most beautiful colors; and if one captures it unharmed, it ends up stuck upon a pin, stiff and lifeless. The corpse is not the whole creature, something else belongs to it – an important thing, and in this case as indeed in all others, the main thing: its life...” (Goethe from 1770 letter) (Steiner, 5)

### **Muscles and nerves:**

My awareness of neural networks has always been in relation to incidents of muscle tension throughout my back as well as injuries, including ego-and-adrenaline-driven overuse and over-strain from karate drills and sparring, and pinched nerves; often a result of improper posture or overuse of specific muscles related to long and particularly strenuous lithography projects. Thinking about the cause and effect of physical problems and conditions, and becoming familiar with different anatomical zones has been a natural result of working, and straining parts of my body. While focusing on the task at hand, we often overlook the small adjustments in posture, table height, etc...that can put sustained pressure on parts of our bodies. I have for years had obnoxious knots in particular areas of my back. I can clearly visualize them, and have often tried to depict those sensations and locations (fig. 4, fig. 5).



Fig.4 Untitled, Charcoal on paper



Fig.5 Tension, Charcoal on paper

My sensory references here stem from visits to chiropractors, acupuncturists, and doctors with therapies ranging from deep tissue massage, electrode-to-muscle stimulus, manipulation of the spine, needle insertion (with and without electric stimulation), as well as exercise therapies and nerve-conduction exams. These experiences outline my interest and concern with the spine and the connections between nerve impulses and their relationships to varying ailments and sensations. I cannot disassociate those sensations from visual images.

### **Pelvic Imagery:**

After returning to work and to teaching after I had given birth to my youngest daughter, Lili, I suffered a herniated disc. One afternoon, while lifting her into a car seat, I felt a “ping”, a sharp sudden spike of sensation in my lower back. Pain radiated up and down my back. I was awkwardly bent over, and took a while to straighten out and to figure out what had just happened. After a day or so of painful shuffling about, and feeling like I had been broken in two, I finally sought medical attention. The doctor sighed with understanding when I told her that coughing felt unbearable. She prescribed a back brace, anti-inflammatory drugs, and to rest when possible. All the time, I couldn't imagine how I could have injured myself. I hadn't been doing anything glamorous or physically intense, just getting my little girl into her car seat! One evening soon after, Jamie and I were sitting at a concert. As we listened, I sat there visualizing what the radiating pain in my pelvis looked like... I felt that it would be bright red, glowing hot, with fiery impulses shooting throughout the openings in my sacrum. As I sat focusing on the sensation, transported by the music, I sketched those images on the concert program knowing in my mind, that someone viewing what I was imagining could identify the sensation I was trying to describe, especially if they perhaps had also experienced it. I tucked the paper into my sketch book. I later revisited the impression repeatedly, having consulted anatomical reference books. I felt that what I perceived as a sensation couldn't be rendered objectively, as was the pelvis, spine and sacrum in the anatomical text book. It was fascinating to see where my imaginings paralleled the illustrations, though what I wanted to describe wasn't to be found on the pages. That incident was the starting point

for my pelvic studies. I drew a series of pelvises in charcoal, with nerves emanating from the holes within the pelvic cavity (fig. 6, fig. 7).



Fig.6 *Untitled*, Charcoal on paper

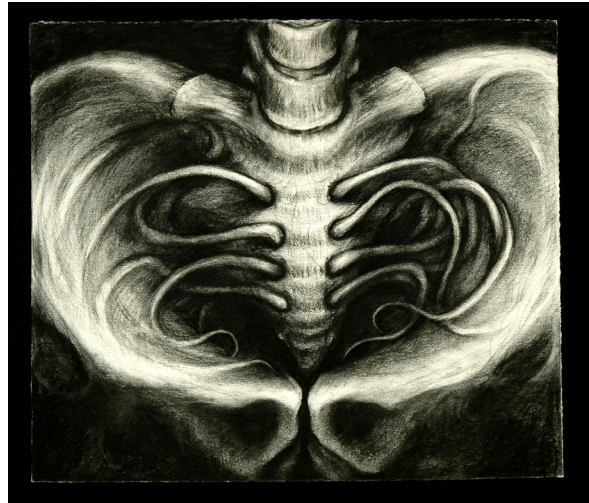


Fig.7 *Untitled*, Charcoal on paper

I also worked on charcoal images on stretched linen, with strings stretched from the holes in the sacrum, and reaching to the pelvic ridge. Beneath the network of strings were small red eyes, or rather irises, marking the punctuating zones of intensity and distress (fig.8).



Fig. 8 *Sciatica with Strings*, Charcoal on linen w/string

The eye was still lingering in my mind and work. As with incessant eye drawings, I needed to try to articulate the sensation or experience I wanted to describe, so I drew many, many pelvises. My girls would sometimes tease me by saying... have you drawn enough eyes? I would just say, no, I haven't described it the way I need to; I haven't found "it" yet. Similarly with the pelvis studies, I was working on that internal sensation, which would describe the experience. It was a core sensation, as if my framework (the structural bony system) was tangled with my internal network (the fluid, pulsing, electrical system). It was a static unyielding sensation, which I visually linked to my back; the bony posterior view of my spine. As I drew, I frequently traveled through that pelvic area, beginning with a frontal view, and taking it to a back view, rendering the cavity within, a void. In the drawings, I wanted to describe the structure, rather than the living, pulsing flesh, the guts of that internal space. I was interested in what was happening within the architecture of the spine. Neural networks within the pelvis were depicted; not as branching systems, but as lines and cords of tension, of forces acting upon that space, rather than neural or electric messages being transmitted. The nerves took the forms of tense, strained lines, lashing one area of the pelvis to another. The incident of a herniated disc opened an awareness of my spine and sacrum. Through my imagery, I wanted to describe neural "wiring", the projection and paths of sensation in general, and pain in particular.

### **Childbirth:**

In contemplating the structure and spaces of the pelvis for the charcoal images that referenced the herniated disc, I remembered the x-ray that was taken of my pelvis immediately before giving birth to my first daughter. In terms of imagery, I had always wanted to re-visit that impression of a completely formed creature within me. After her birth, life took over at an unprecedented pace, with a relentless flurry of shifting emotions and continual changes. The conditions and processes of pregnancy and childbirth provided an expansion of "sense experiences" through the progressive transformations within me. During this period, I experienced a sense of simultaneous emotional and psychological expansion whose magnitude and intensity felt impossible to process all at one time. I hoped that I could perhaps compartmentalize aspects of these experiences to

savor individually, or to ponder sensations and transformations at a more gradual and pensive pace... eventually. The physical abandon to natural processes of growth and developments within my body functioned with a mind of their own. They made me understand with awe that I was a vessel – an instrument of growth and change, and that I was wholly a witness as much as a participant. I was completely subjected to nature taking over a realm I felt I once possessed and controlled – my body. As the gestation period progressed I realized that I had altogether relinquished any control or authority over the changes occurring. “Life” continued on the outside in the form of work and professional responsibilities, while privately I created an entire universe within me. I would close my eyes and visualize the space within me; the compression of my lungs as my uterus grew, pushing organs into the cramped periphery of my interior spaces. I visualized the fluid motions as I heard a liquid reality within me, and then independent movements. Swelling and expanding, I was a mechanism, a vehicle – until the cycle was complete.

The nine months were interrupted at the sixth by contractions and the sudden possibility that I could deliver prematurely. I went into “early labor”, and was confined to bed rest for the rest of the pregnancy, or at least until the 36<sup>th</sup> week, when the fetus’s lungs would be adequately developed. As quickly as it came, I suddenly lost the panic-stricken realization that I would have to stop working. The gravity of the situation went far beyond my worries about letting my artists down, and about who would pick up my uncompleted projects... this was real. No art emergency could ever compare. I was permitted to sit up and stand for limited periods of time, and was put on medication to prevent contractions which could initiate the delivery process. It was then that I felt completely responsible for the outcome of this new life. The process had suddenly stepped out of typical bounds. I had to remain aware that every day I was bargaining for time, every week was an important landmark for growth. I read incessantly about the phases and possible dangers for a premature child once it is out on its own to continue developing outside the uterus. Days of growth and development could make a tremendous difference...and I was in control of it...to a degree. I had to be careful to keep it inside me...38 weeks and we would be in the clear. Childbirth-related literature



filled me with nervous anxiety about the gravity of the situation, while images filled me with awe – about the absolute magical nature of life, of growth, of the creatures we are.

Lennart Nilsson’s intrauterine photographs in *A Child is Born* helped me to visualize the constant physical sensations I felt. I had an image of what might actually be going on inside. I thought of the quality of sounds that might be perceived from within; the sounds and rhythms of my heartbeat and digestion, the sound of my voice as I spoke, vibrating my whole body, and sounds and touch from the outside – music, and hands on my belly communicating warmth to the growing creature within. Before delivering Camille, I was wheeled in to have an x-ray image taken of us to determine if she was still in a breech (feet-first) position. She never got a chance to invert inside me, since gravity had not affected her positioning as she lounged inside during the final weeks. This was her first “picture” (fig.9). The image of this perfectly formed fragile creature inside my pelvis was the most magical thing I had ever seen. She looked more like a fetus than a fully-developed infant, more like an insect or alien creature than a human...yet we were only minutes from the delivery.

I carried that impression in my mind for years afterward, until I realized that after five years, the hospital would discard the record, and it would have to remain in my mind.



Fig.9 Prenatal x-ray, 1990

I later went to get a copy of the film, which already was quite faded. Since it was needed immediately, it had not been “fixed” long enough to really last too long beyond that time. That impression was greater than the actual image. It became a powerful reference for the imagery I subsequently explored not only anatomically, but emotionally as well.

Since she was my first delivery, and in a breech position, I was prepared for a “C-section”. The process of a cesarean delivery was one of relinquishing control. It was essentially a witnessed operation...an extremely abstract experience. I felt somewhat detached from the process, perhaps due to the epidural anesthesia. Procedures were continually being performed on me by essentially a room full of people, each person attending their assigned task. I was lifted, poked, bound, injected, swabbed, adjusted, wired, etc... to the point that I stopped trying to follow everything being done. I also had no sensation below my chest, so I didn’t feel anything particularly interesting anyway. I eagerly tried to steal glimpses of what was going on beyond the barrier they placed to shield my vision, finally content in watching the process reflected in the polished metal of the operating room light immediately overhead. I kept asking Jamie to take a few photos of what was going on below...but he kept shaking his head “no”, as he sat beside me at my shoulder, looking serious and a little pale. (Luckily, an anesthesiologist’s assistant did concede...and I did get a few images. I think he understood that I really needed to see what I looked like inside.) So, I listened to the conversations, and felt nothing but tremendous tugging and pressure, and then it was over. I watched as they weighed, aspirated, and wiped her hairy, creamy body down with a towel...then a warm little bundle was placed by my head; she was bright red, swaddled in a soft blanket, wearing a cap over her tiny head. She smelled like fresh bread. I will never forget that warm delicious scent.

Camille and Paulina were both cesarean births. With Emily and Lili, having had relatively uneventful pregnancies, we decided to attempt natural deliveries. After needing bed rest for my first two girls, the female strength I felt I had always possessed felt a bit wavering to me. What kind of Amazon warrior would need drugs and bed rest to help her through the most natural of processes, the most universal of experiences? It took my last two deliveries to give me that very basic feeling of human, primal accomplishment.

I think the essential difference between those experiences was that without being routed for surgical delivery, the process was going to be holistic, without any real sense or assurance of how it would progress. It was intense... physically, emotionally, and existentially. Without layering details, which become blurred through their intensity, I realize that the foremost lesson I carried from the experience was that our lives, in the most natural of circumstances can walk a solitary fine line. I know that during the process with Lili, I had left the room. Although there was a pulse monitor attached to her scalp, I realized that we were together, yet each on our own to emerge from that delivery. Despite the medical technology on standby and physical and emotional support (I was never alone in the room)... the journey was one to be traversed alone.

I had catalogued that image, or impression, for a later and perhaps more contemplative time, which I imagined might someday come. Beginning with drawings based on sensations within my pelvis due to the herniated disc, the moment for reflection had suddenly arrived. I didn't realize at the time, that the floodgates had opened. This was fifteen years later, and my body's memory of that period of time was clear, perhaps more acute than when it was happening. With it I brought layers of meaning and reflection of how it affected my current perceptions about me and the daughters who presented those changes to me and within me.

#### **IV. MEDIUMS AND PROCESS:**

##### **Printmaking: Lithography and Intaglio**

I was initially attracted to lithography because of my obsession with drawing. Lithography provided a way to work additively and reductively; in turn developing, reducing, and refining the image. Printmaking allows one to retain within the matrix, the history of an image. The record of mark-making can remain present through a full range of state proofs punctuating the image's development. The result is a tactile palimpsest of the history of a drawing. In a lithograph, remnants of complete gestures or forms echo in the transformed lines and spaces. Lithography is a "planographic" process, where the image exists completely on the surface of the stone. In an "intaglio" the drawing exists both on and below the surface of the plate. The image on a copper plate is articulated through a wide range of grooves, textures and terrains of varying ink-bearing depths. Traces and topographical nuances remain; whether through subtle embossments or erased passages whose scars remain holding subtle whispers of ink. The essential history of an image is what fascinates me most. It reveals not only a working process and the treaded territory of an image with all of its paths and meanderings, but through those traces of information it reveals one's thinking and working processes.

Because it is a reproductive medium, printmaking offers a unique sense of freedom in the creative aspect of image-making. While developing the imagery, "states" can be documented at any given point before going further. It lifts the pressure and hesitation about change. It liberates one from the confining sense of preciousness about the work, so the concentration is on the process of seeing and creating rather than on the final product. Through printmaking I learned to push my drawings without the fear of over-working the image, since I had a tangible record of where it was or had been. This process gave me a fuller dialogue with the work. Working from a drawing, which was itself a matrix, I could transform the image; selectively retaining passages, or stripping it to retain only the skeleton of the form. I attained a freedom within my own visual language. I allowed myself to fearlessly attack the image and enter the unknown, or to just push the image further, beyond prudence – which is often where magical things happen.

## Printmaking Process: Jasper Johns

The connection between my attraction to printmaking and my subsequent drawings is in the possibility of recording phases that have gone before. One can approach phases subtly or forcefully, fully expanding and contracting, while incrementally retaining aspects of its development as a history... and then select how much of that memory is retained. It essentially becomes the product of a selective memory after a long and complex journey. Printmaking involves a fluid dialogue that goes beyond recording gestures and re-entering an image. Retaining certain gestures and layering new information over them is where the richness in an image's history is developed. In intaglio, the process of working on metal, particularly copper, is a sculptural, tactile experience. The varying levels of information; containing deep grooves, subtle scratches, and rough and pitted valleys, as well as the use of subtle atmospheric spit-bites which create delicate smoky tonal transitions are all a part of that plate's history. To modify any of it will invariably affect the perception of the whole, as each aspect is relative to all others.

The most impressive image laden with a "history", which I was involved with printing was perhaps Jasper Johns' *"Untitled" (RYB)* (1998), (fig.10). It consists of three copper plates from an earlier editioned image: *"Red Yellow Blue"*, from 1991 (fig.11).



Fig.10 *Untitled* (1998), Jasper Johns © U.L.A.E., 1998.



Fig.11 *Red Yellow Blue* (1991), Jasper Johns © U.L.A.E., 1991.

After being editioned in 1991, the plates had undergone modifications which included; the physical scraping of areas of information, polishing, re-aquatinting, deleting entire passages, and essentially editing the original image or “information” toward a different level of complexity. The new passages revised the previous history of the main elements. The holes, arrows and hands in the image were mere echoes of their former presences, though they were far from absent. Those echoes suggested the imagery, no longer fully articulating it with the density of the prior print. The three plates became more or less audible depending on the subtlety used in applying the ink. Over these more subtle renditions, we rolled over a delicate transparent layer of ink, a “tint roll”, creating a richer dimensionality. The levels and temperature shifts in color were subdued, with a very different forcefulness compared to the black and white 1991 impression. The motifs familiar in Johns’ work; the hand tracing an arc in space, arrows, and stencil lettering were re-iterated with a different emphasis. The print contained the wisdom of a past. Working on the print was a unique and revered moment for many of us, not only because it was Jasper’s, but because we were re-visiting a historical piece. It contained the essence of his passages, re-emerging with a new statement – one that could not have been arrived at in one sitting, or one project session of a few months. In terms of regarding

printmaking and the evolution of drawings as a palimpsest, this was a palpable example. The technical recording of his images on the plates; the changes in the plate-work and the subtle shifts in inking, specifically the tint rolls, changed the information entirely. The transformation of the original matrix insinuated the possibility of varying “accounts” of what the image was implying. Those variations in plate-work and printing approaches were often what made some of the artists we were collaborating with feel consummately undecided about the best reading or the “right” reading of their images. Subtle changes in printing altered interpretive emphasis and shifted focus. The seemingly unlimited possibilities were all feasible, and equally exciting.

### **Printmaking Process: Imagery**

I feel that printmaking as a medium has a direct connection to the way I draw, develop, and conceive of some of my imagery. Individual explorations began primarily through my prints, stemming from direct renderings from observation which evolved through layering, adding, and deleting passages of information, always retaining an echo of the image’s physical history. The printmaking process was my laboratory. It enabled me to selectively build, dissect, and deconstruct layers, establishing and continually shifting hierarchies of value and meaning. Through printmaking I initially began developing imagery that was drawn either directly from observation or from “sensation”, that is, the visual interpretations of the inner workings and varied aspects of my body, and physical experiences therein; including physical ailments, medical procedures, and physiological “passages”. These prints were instrumental in reaching further into my files of sensory and visual memory (fig.12).

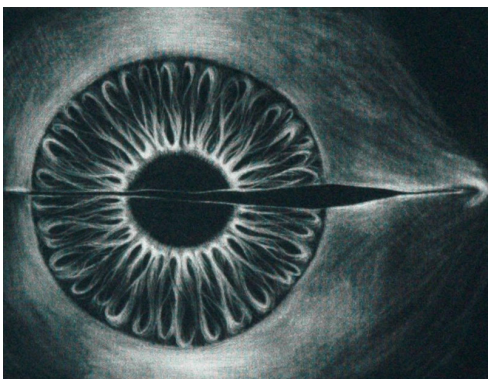


Fig.12. *Slit Eye*, Intaglio

Armed with various types of medical illustrations, I referenced information to develop an understanding of the geography of a documented physical reality, and then transformed that information into what felt sensually accurate to me. In modifying those references, I describe specific experiences as more evocative and conceptual realities (fig.13, fig.14).



Fig.13 *Screaming Pelvis*, Intaglio

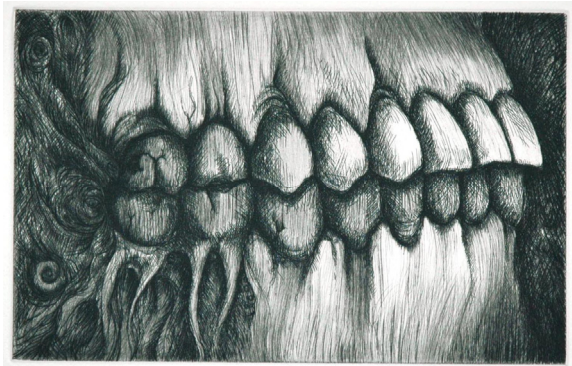


Fig.14 *Teeth*, Intaglio

I find printmaking to be conceptually analogous to processes in nature that I'm interested in depicting and referencing, specifically Goethe's ideas on natural development and transformations. Printmaking requires commitment to form, and in that investment is where decision-making possibilities emerge. As in nature, once a form is described, expansion can generate from that base, establishing a matrix and a point of departure or reference for transformation. In printmaking, as forms and ideas expand, layers of development can be recorded while histories of transformational states remain as echoes on the topography of the image.

My interest in the printmaking process stems from a desire to record the phases of development of my imagery. An essential aspect of the process is the sense of a tactile and tangible history of an image. I develop my work in an additive and reductive manner, keeping the image in flux, without the fear of over-working or losing the essence or memory of it. Through intaglio and lithography I can develop an image while retaining aspects of its understructure to re-use and transform, always with the possibility of



keeping an impression of its development. Through this medium, I can have a simultaneous record of past and present states of existence. This evolutionary process of developing, transforming, degrading, and re-forming permits a limitless range of possible directions to pursue. In this sense, my process as well as my subject matter develops around the idea of change and shared possibilities. Printmaking facilitates visual transformation, with the freedom to select and explore specific qualities of information useful in developing an image. One can keep the memory of an “under-painting” or “under-drawing” while building layers of complexity, or stripping down to the essential nature of an image.

Much of the language and approach to printmaking is precisely what I have been developing through my large-scale drawings albeit without the use of a press or any reproductive possibilities. As I began expanding my ideas and dimensions through my drawings during this three-year period, my use of lithography in particular focused on the developmental possibilities in the process; recording aspects of form, and selectively editing passages of information which felt extraneous. I did not develop my lithographs in multiples. I was instead more interested in layering selective levels of information that formally shared a common matrix or blueprint. Through the lithographs, structures echo across species, transforming passages to identify completely different life forms.

In printmaking, the possibility of reiterating the basis or core form creates a natural reference point for constructing and developing morphological comparisons. This base structure becomes the “given” from which expansion, progression, and development stems. In terms of process, it echoes Goethe’s ideas about morphological developments in plants, where the core form is the leaf, and from that “universal” form specific aspects unique to specific species emerge. The essential shared starting point was his emphasis, the incremental development and identification through observation.

“Goethe’s interest lay primarily in grasping the formative aspect of the plant world. The infinite variety of specific plant forms can be seen as arising through metamorphosis out of the formative potential of what Goethe called the “archetypal plant”. (Steiner, 266) Goethe described a participatory sense of evolution. A morphology informed by successive stages and incremental development is what experience and observation would reveal. According to Goethe, the phases of continual blossoming and emerging

changes, and latent possibilities in growth, would continually be in flux. Emerging shoots, buds, and shafts would in time clarify and define the form, although having originally begun resembling many other species. That clarity of definition would layer through growth and time, and through natural influences and elements. Similarly, my interest pulls Goethe's conception of metamorphosis and flux to the lived life; to the observation of change, the participation and identification of aspects of growth therein.

## **V. MEDIUMS AND PROCESS:**

### **Drawing and Painting:**

I have always considered drawing to be my primary medium. I especially enjoy working in charcoal because of the wide range of values, particularly the dense velvety blacks it can yield. I am interested in deletions or erasures as much as in additive drawing. I am particularly intrigued by the drawings of Odilon Redon and Lee Bontecou.

### **Odilon Redon:**

I am inspired by the rich density of the blacks in Odilon Redon's work; both in his charcoal drawings and his lithographs. There is a rich, mysterious quality to the dark passages and spaces he evokes in his imagery. Selective illumination on his subjects, whether derived from mythological characters or fantastic plant-and-creature morphings conjure a penetrating quality of intimate space. Areas completely immersed in darkness are as powerful and suggestive as the areas where the subjects are clearly discernible. There is an open-ended quality to his environments; they can be anywhere or nowhere. The dream-like spaces often feel like stage sets, evoking a sense of isolation. He creates intimate environments offering few spatial details describing location. Redon's depictions allude to emotional states or reveries, evoking a fascinating quality of mystery and formal ambiguity. There is elegance in his use of light, which in combination with or in opposition to his darkness, is as seductive as it is unsettling. Redon's imagery travels through fantastic creatures which combine dream imagery, botany, and life forms. His perceptions of "invisible worlds" combine the discoveries of microscopic life forms and deep-sea creatures with Darwin-inspired imaginings linking creatures of vastly different origins. His work combines mythological, scientific and observed creatures with imagined fantastic dream imagery. My fascination with his work is both thematic and technical. "Asked in an interview what his favorite works were, Redon responded: "My monsters. I believe that it is there that I have given my most personal note. I worked and studied a great deal on anatomy to arrive at the conclusion that everything is man – in every living being one finds under individual forms the lines of the human skeleton. It is with this principle in mind that I deformed, made larger, or simplified an aspect of my embryonic beings.'" (Larson 56)

**Lee Bontecou:**

Another artist whose work I refer to for inspiration is Lee Bontecou. In addition to her graphite and charcoal drawings, I admire Bontecou's soot drawings. They create the sense of an ephemeral environment with translucent layers defining a quality of infinite space. The drawings seem to float on the paper surface as if they just appeared there, or were always there. There is an organic un-touched quality to them, without the trace of a hand or tool having rendered the forms and created the values. Her soot drawings are just that; soot residue emanating from an oxyacetylene torch, used with the oxygen turned off. The torch was a standard tool she used in her welded steel sculptures and armatures. The quality of black is as rich as the most velvety charcoal blacks, while the quality of space is purely sensual and atmospheric, both lush and diaphanous. Her use of blacks has been inspiring to me not only in the way she uses it to create illusion, form, and describe space two-dimensionally, but also in her sculptural work. In her early (1960) three-dimensional pieces, she created holes, or voids, which elicited a different sense of atmosphere and mystery; one with a more menacing edge.

The dense gradations in Bontecou's soot drawings avoid absolutes in terms of solid value or tone; they sustain an aura that defies a sense of defined or finite space. I am interested in working with a similar sense of mutability, with an open-ended quality about transformational possibilities; where a single variable is capable of shifting and therefore re-directing the development of the image. In drawings incorporating insect and botanical forms, I want to capture a sense of the "unknown" through the use of smoky, suggestive spaces. I feel that the lack of a specific setting or context is powerful in communicating physical or emotional experience. The use of charcoal with erasures opens the paper surface to constant shifts, weaving back and forth within layers to insinuate relationships rather than describe them. In some of my earlier drawings, I enjoyed the open-ended quality of untouched open space in the drawing as an entry point for the viewer. After working on several images on large paper, I was challenged during a critique to push further still. In doing so, that particular image arrived at a more completed statement, although a similar approach on subsequent drawings may have over-stated some ideas. After "pushing" that first challenged drawing, I decided it was necessary to take the risk of killing a piece by over-working it. I wanted to release the sense of safety or technical

facility to dig deeper into the imagery. The result was mixed, but liberating. With a regular studio practice, I finally found a feeling of freedom to experiment, giving myself permission to create some lousy work in the midst of stronger work, as it was all part of the process.

I relished the feeling of expansiveness in having a studio space where I could develop more than one image simultaneously. My single-subject images began communicating with adjacent forms within my work space. Ready to commit to a larger format, the shift in paper dimensions also affected the scale of the subject. While the scale momentarily made you step back, the shift in the magnitude or magnification of the subject matter cancelled that gain in perspective, as it sought to pull you inside again. This sense specifically applied to my later large pelvis drawings.

One of the large drawings in the *Possett* show evoked a sensation of vertigo, which I was intrigued by. Although I could identify that quality, I was not always able to re-create that sense of space (fig.15).



Fig.15 *Thorax*, Charcoal on paper

Painting has entered my drawings as an element to enrich dimensionality as well as evoke organic qualities by using naturalistic color. The translucence and fluidity of watercolor enhances the subtleties I strive for in my charcoal work. I think that I have always had difficulty in painting with levels of opacity, because it is not how I see. In relation to paint, I think that my perception relates to the possibility of having more information lurking between layers, and that rendering with layers of opacity or solid planes creates a distance with what I'm trying to express. In the work following the "Possett" show, I regularly used watercolor to activate the space in terms of an under-painting, and to enrich the densities of deep shadow areas in my drawings. In conjunction with the charcoal, I think they create a deeper, clearer density than the blackness of charcoal alone (Fig.16).



Fig.16 *Satyr*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

While developing my large drawings, I also worked on a few oil paintings. I struggled with them. I felt that I was never really "painting", but drawing with paint. One artist on the faculty recommended painting on prepared paper, which to me, finally felt

like home. I relished in the smooth slippery surface, where my loaded brush could glide uninterrupted, not having to recharge my tool as frequently as on canvas. In that method, I found a feeling of exhilaration, where the image would virtually create itself. I could play with translucent tints, separating colors to overlay, resulting in a rich optical blending of tones. I also handled the wet surface as I would a drawing; instead of lifting marks with an eraser, I would wipe with a cloth or finger. The back-and forth dialogue with form and space; with positive and negative zones finally felt familiar. Working on paper, I finally felt that I could use paint to articulate my imagery with the breathable quality that I was interested in rendering in my drawings.

## VI. BODIES OF WORK: Early Images

### Prints and Drawings:

My early prints and drawings focused on portrait-like depictions of single subjects, especially “specimens”, including ocean life, insects, plants, and aspects of human anatomy; including teeth, pelvises, backbones, and eyes. During my first year in the program, I wanted to work on lithographs, and develop images with transformative possibilities through the medium. For the most part, my drawings were straightforward in representing singular ideas or moments, as compared to images that would soon follow.

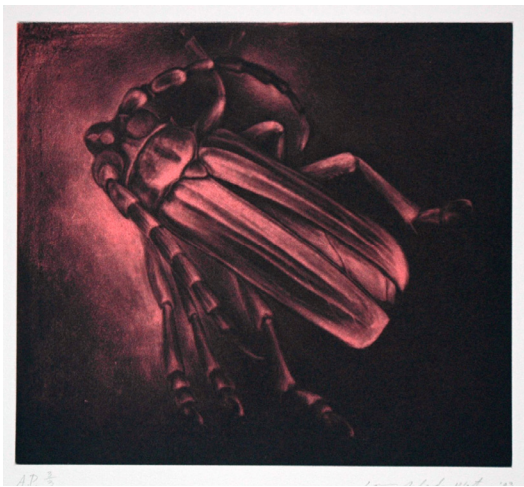


Fig.17 *Red Beetle*, Intaglio



Fig.18 *Cicada Exoskeleton*, Intaglio



Fig.19 *Sea Robin*, Intaglio

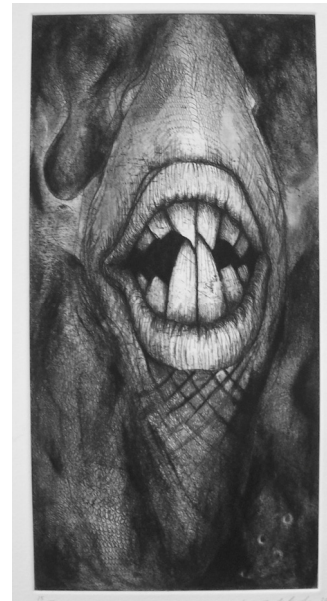


Fig.20 *Trigger Fish*, Intaglio



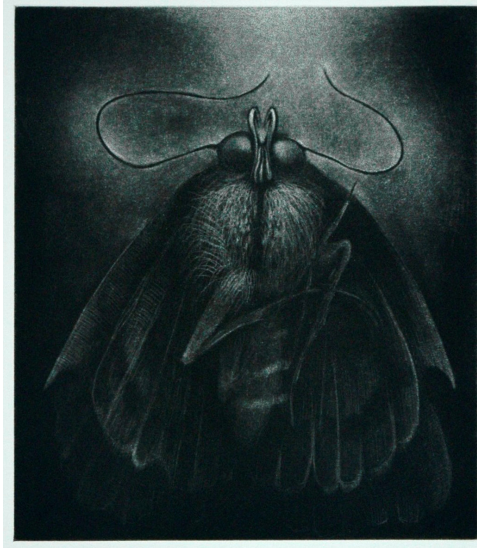


Fig.21 *Moth*, Intaglio



Fig.22 *Amber Beetle*, Intaglio

In my initial stone lithographs, I began the images with a fairly direct representation of the frontal pelvis. My intention was to work through the body in layers by making additions and deletions to the initial drawing and transforming the image while retaining the basis of the drawing, in this case the spine. As the deletions were being made I retained aspects of the drawing and created new gestures in the form of deletions, that became notations on the form; more energetic and suggestive than the tightly rendered beginning. The vertebra essentially remained, while changes took place in the pelvis and echoes of the rib cage. Through the various transformations, I printed the states on delicate hand-made Japanese papers in organic tones ranging from soft white to earthy ochres. The idea was to separately print each new state while also printing over previous states with the newer transformed drawing. Once the stone is printed and the drawing is subsequently modified, there is no going back. The layering has to be somewhat projected, although there is no way of preconceiving what the resulting combination will look like. In developing the image, I thought of the process of traveling visually through the body, and stripped the drawing until the essence of the space remained. The series yielded many variations. I think that the more successful impressions were the leanest, where I was suggesting spatial relationships and activating the negative spaces surrounding the forms. Earlier layers were over-laden with

descriptive information which resulted in over-saturated and dense images that suggested mass more than they described space and form. In terms of process, I was interested in working in cross-sections, echoing the form, working through layers of transparency and keeping some of the history of what was there before. Through these lithographs, I arrived at the bare-bones echo of the original image. The overall gesture of the image felt complete. I realized that in the image, the subtle residual markings completed the sentence, so you didn't need to have the entire statement. (Figs. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27) This was the most valuable impression I carried with me, and tried to put into my drawings.



Fig.23 *Pelvis*, (state 1)



Fig.24 *Pelvis*, (state 3)



Fig.25 *Pelvis*, (state 4)



Fig.26 *Pelvis*, (state 2 + 3)



Fig.27 *Pelvis*, (state 2 + 5)

While working on these images in a small studio at Staller, I quickly filled up the room. I was offered a small studio at South campus instead. While developing the lithographs, I also worked on charcoal sketches. Already, the drawings were moving at a faster rate than the prints. The prospect of a larger space immediately led me to working in a larger format. The start of a steady studio practice was already beginning to feel expansive and exciting. In addition to the pelvis series, I developed a lithograph of a whelk egg case transforming into a human spine. It was the beginning of work relating to formal transformations between life forms. I used the same reductive techniques I applied to the pelvis litho series (fig.28, fig.29).

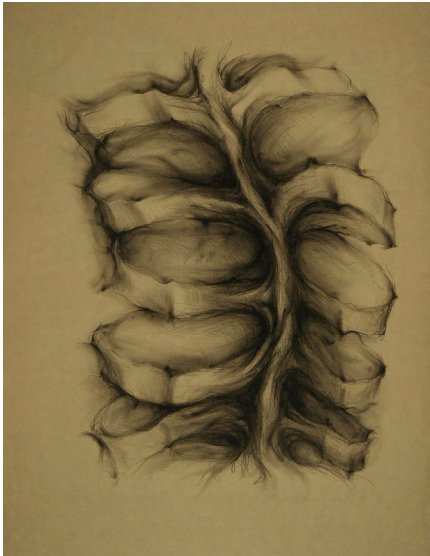


Fig.28 *Whelk Egg Case*, Lithograph



Fig.29 *Whelk/Spine*, Lithograph

In my study of a whelk egg case, I was interested in aspects of its sensual form. Its delicate translucence and elegant curves brought me to compare them to human curves, not on the surface, but along the core, or stem. Through a visual analogy I wanted to evoke the sinuous elegance inherent to the whelk egg case's structure. Both the whelk/spine images and the pelvis series ended with my move into a larger studio. Drawings of similar themes were developing more quickly than the prints. The reductive approach of my lithographs was something I had also begun to develop in my drawings. I continued making prints and experimenting with "silk aquatint" and using spit-bite on copper plates with a painterly freedom, although my imagery primarily expanded through the drawings (fig.30, fig.31)



Fig.30 *Whelk Curve*, Charcoal on paper



Fig.31 *Whelk/Spine*, Charcoal on paper

### **Large Scale Drawings:**

“Hence experience is necessarily cumulative and its subject matter gains expressiveness because of cumulative continuity. The world we have experienced becomes an integral part of the self that acts and is acted upon in further experience.”(Dewey, 108)

At the end of my first semester at Stony Brook, I had been working on pelvis drawings relating to the x-ray impression of Camille. Thinking about the image of the creature within my pelvis, I realized that my visualization of just how intense and magical that moment was didn't compare to the scale of my actual pelvis. I wanted to increase the magnitude of the moment, and therefore, the scale. I pieced together sheets of heavy watercolor paper, since I did not have paper larger than the 22 x 30” sheets. This was the beginning of my work moving into a larger format, as well as the beginning of working through levels of emotion through the imagery of the body...my body.

During the break between semesters, while waiting for my new studio space to be emptied, I began working on a drawing in the studio at Staller. I was there one afternoon while Camille was taking an academic evaluation exam to enter private school (at the Stony Brook School nearby). She had been feeling depressed and under-challenged in her high school, and wanted to look into other options to finish her high school education. It had been a stressful time for all of us, in terms of communication and under-met

expectations. I was in the studio, feeling a bit dejected at the thought that we were not meeting her needs, and that her aspirations could not be satisfied locally...since she had her sights set on schools outside New York. Though she was only initiating the process, I knew that it would only be a short time before she would leave home, and two short years later, she would be off to college. I felt that I would not have the chance to share with her all that I needed to tell her (although at the time I wasn't exactly sure what that was yet)...I felt mournful and sad at the prospect.

I started working on the large piece in charcoal; it felt like a crucifixion...the image just emerged. In this large drawing, I wanted to describe the physical tension that the emotional changes were evoking... like the lump one feels in the throat upon preparing to utter something particularly difficult, or suppressing that same utterance, that asphyxiating ache. I wanted to open into the sadness of the possibility of my child leaving, and the sensation of powerlessness, of bleeding out from the surfaces and feeling pulled apart. I wanted to reflect on how impatient Camille felt; frustrated with her school, frustrated at being her age, and frustrated that we were such stupid parents... feeling powerless herself. The tension and force of the emotional pull was to manifest itself physically, visually, in recollection of my pelvis as a void, and the emptiness... of someone being pulled out and away from you, from your body. I was merging the sensation of that physical surrender, with the emotional bondage that I was feeling.

I began drawing and working with ink washes and watercolor, building up layers of charcoal and watercolor tints, and then scraping back to white. The scraping revealed a fuzzy pebbly paper texture. The process of scraping the surface became a flaying, a whittling meditation, revealing hints of earlier layers of drawing, the sternum, with ribs hinting through the surface of the "skin". The scraping focused on the sternum, the glowing center of the form. The physical attack on the paper was not a gashing or puncturing kind of attack, but a persistent scraping; a psychological erosion of days and nights of hearing the same thing, of getting up for feedings, of the daily-ness of being a parent or just a family member, and loving and doing what you do as a duty, because that's your role, tired or not. The scraping in the piece merges the sense of resistance with steadfastness, complementary in building scar tissue, the fiber to withstand it all... repeatedly if necessary. Within that image I found myself layering associated sensations

and perceptions about our history together, experiencing my daughter as a force. It became a recollection of a personal history, which visually had a layered simultaneity that memory converged. I was not recalling the issues of the moment; I found myself virtually dredging impressions long reserved (fig.32).

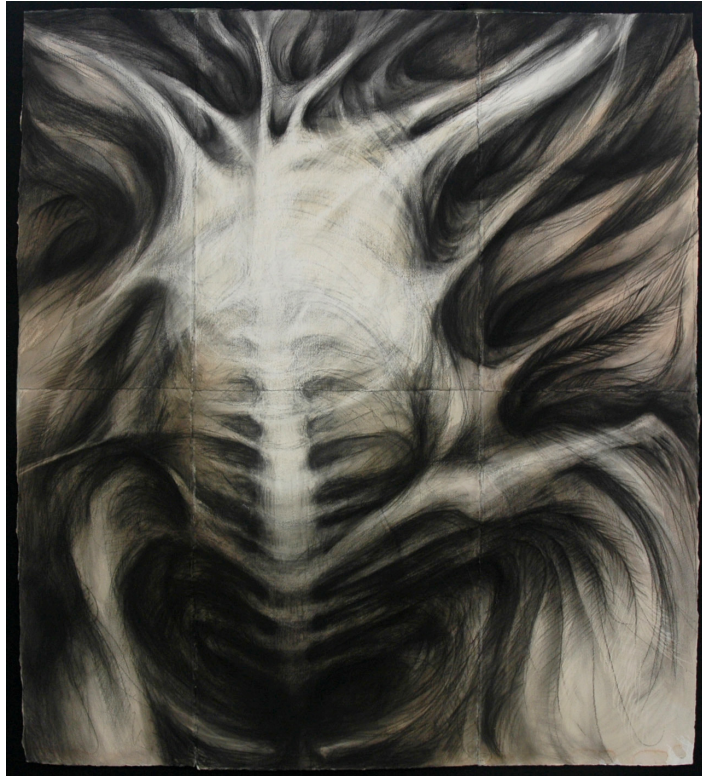


Fig.32 *Flayed*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

The drawing evoked the very direct memory and sensation of having a creature pulled out of you, and the physical restraints used in the process. Necessary restraint was always used...just so you wouldn't flail around for whatever reason in the middle of surgery. Arms outstretched and attached to a board, your finger giving a reading to a pulse monitor, you lay there in wait for what would come next. In the image I recalled the feeling of having no control, the abandonment of one's autonomy... people going about the business of doing what they will to you because it's necessary, because they have the authority, because you've signed the paperwork. There you are, on your own, although Jamie sat there at my head, I had the feeling that it was all out of my control. I later realized that it was just the beginning of letting go, of loosening one's ego. I guess it's the

gap you cross when you are having your first child, and you endure the embarrassment of using the bathroom in front of somebody, of being catheterized ... how humiliating, or having people step into the room, and without even exchanging two words they're suddenly inserting things into your veins... and then you're wide open, and you hear conversations about baseball while they're working on you. You are essentially nonexistent, because you shouldn't be too lucid anyway. I wanted to recall that whole feeling of relinquishing control, of being processed, and feeling disembodied.

Relinquishing control...it continues... at first with the nursing, you're so modest... you go and hide to feed the baby privately, then you realize it necessary to lose some more of that modesty because you're continually on duty. So yes, the world will glimpse at your breasts, and babies might nurse under the table so you will get to eat as well. You gradually realize that you incrementally let go of aspects of yourself and you become more the "universal" being instead of the private self that you thought you had evolved into. Whoever you fantasized yourself as being, all of that...is gone; you've become neutralized because you are now one of the archetypal mothers. I think this is often what bonds women... their war stories; every woman wants to hear somebody else's labor stories because it's an opportunity to share one's own. That shared moment is so personal and not at all glamorous; it is the way it is, and you nod in agreement and understanding, "...yeah, I've been there...", or "...ooh, remember that Pitocin?" There's a solidarity to a shared experience or sensation that is really a part of what helps you to stay intact, or afloat ...like when teenagers are being particularly evil or brutal toward you, talking to another parent who is being brutalized in their own flavor is sobering and reassuring at the same time. You realize,... yes it's natural, so you give in to it and try not to let it under your skin because, that is nature... that is part of life, and you realize there is no way to really prepare for it. Experiencing physical and psychological processes and relationships - we have each had our own moments of reflection, challenge, hardship, and endurance; we are often eager to commiserate about those shared experiences – though unique to each, we find they are nonetheless "universal". We each have a particular aspect to share, an offer of guidance to each other; for comparison and shared support. Even if the event is long past, those moments are eagerly recollected and relived. These shared links create a level of closeness, a shared humanity. The human plight; of nature,

life, change, passages, intersections, metamorphoses, are not new to the universe, but new to the individual. They are renewable each time that experience is revisited with a new of understanding— each time with a new sense of added value to human growth and personal endurance. Visually I want to represent levels of experience – not frontal, but layered, as our layers of awareness present themselves in constantly shifting sequence with varying levels of receptivity at different times in our consciousness.

“The act of expression that constitutes a work of art is a construction in time, not an instantaneous emission.” (Dewey, 67)

During this time, as I was beginning to glean images for my work, group dialogue was beginning in the form of midterm and final critiques. In discussing the ideas I was working from, I became very self-conscious that I was among the older students in the program, and that what I was discussing in the work was distinctly abstract from their own reality. (One student had a grown daughter and only a couple of male faculty members had children.) I chose not to dissect my intentions in the imagery, and rather, just move forward in the work. I re-affirmed my conviction that my experiences were fueling my need to be in the program at all ...with the need to put some of it down visually, outside of myself.

I think that at one point, I was very consciously trying to make the image genderless, just so the conversation wouldn't go wholly in a feminist direction, toward "...ooh, I have suffered the pains of childbirth"... because it wasn't so much about the female experience, as opposed to the human physical and emotional experience. As I developed the drawing, I thought..."it could be chicken". I had been drawing bones, mostly human, from anatomical references. One day I found a complete tailbone while making chicken soup. It was in perfect condition. I then cleaned and bleached the bones and made various drawings of them. The response to the images was one of recognition, though with reservation as to their absolute identity. The structure was clearly related to the image or concept of "spine". The drawings didn't indicate scale, which increased the ambiguousness about their identification.

I became fascinated with working with the idea archetypal forms. The specific creature of origin became unimportant to me as a "source" of the image, since I was physically describing a sensation, a posture, and a "process" affecting a physical entity.



At the time I was reading the ideas of Goethe, and his concepts of archetypal forms, specifically in relationship to botany.

“He (Goethe) had in mind the complex of formative principles that organizes the plant, that makes it what it is – the principle through which a particular object in nature evokes in us the thought: “This is a plant” – that is an archetypal plant.” (Steiner, 16)

Goethe’s archetypal plant would be an “ideal” which could be grasped in thought, although it would be of specific form, size, color, and number of organs. His interest was in the formative principle, that is, the archetypal “picture of the plant”, with the “outer phenomenon” of the plant being capable of undergoing endless variations. Similarly, I wanted to work with the imagery of “spine”, of core structure. The ambiguity of the source of my specimens was what I found most interesting; the idea that the viewer’s personal knowledge would enrich the visual experience with more layers of information, or keep it in question, with the feeling of “familiarity” remaining elusive. The revelation of similarities in the morphologies of creatures was fascinating to me. I enjoyed the idea of drawing a series of bones with a structural logic to them, which upon viewing one could easily assume is a spine, yet left to decipher the “truthfulness” of the representation.

“There can be no question of any truth other than subjective human truth. Truth is the projection of subjective experiences into the objective interrelationships of phenomena. These subjective experiences may even assume a completely individual character. Nevertheless, they express the inner nature of things. One can only put into things what one has experienced in oneself. “What is important is not that people all have the same thoughts about things, but that when we think about things, we all live in the element of truth.” (Steiner p. 214)

While still in the process of moving out from one studio and into another, the image (*Flayed*) was still on my mind, so I started another piece very closely based on it. I still needed to “talk” to the piece, and it was going to be a big production to move the drawing because I needed to first take it apart and then fuse the different pieces of paper together. This was how I ended up working on two at once (one in each studio space). Since I had the mental “history” of the first image, I would have more freedom with the second one. Working with a common matrix, I wanted to develop more of a “shorthand” version of the first drawing. I had already retraced the core image, which was essentially

familiar to me. Having previously articulated it, I was familiar with the gesture as much as the form contained in the drawing. I was working on activating the space with my entire body. One of the most wonderful aspects of shifting scale for me was the physical involvement with the image. By merely making the gesture in the air, the form came into existence. The full sense of the mark exists for me on the paper even if the pencil was just set down at the tail end of the gesture. It takes off from the beginning and then lands, my eye filling in the blank space, where the motion existed, the visual current of drawing. The second piece flowed from the memory of articulating the first image. I had memorized the form, and used that freedom to take it in another direction. The subject still felt vital to me. The second image was a somewhat distilled version the first, though with less of the visual weight. This had been my original intent with the early pelvis lithographs, to reduce them to arrive at an essence of the original image (fig.33).



Fig.33 *Apex*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

## VII. EXHIBITIONS:

### ***POSSETT: First Year Group Exhibition***

“*Possett*” was the name of our First Year MFA group show at Melville Library Gallery. We chose the name randomly from a dictionary. “Possett” is the name of a warm alcohol-laced milk-based beverage popular in the middle Ages, as a medicinal and comforting drink, much like eggnog. My colleagues included Amy Marinelli, Ha Na Lee, and Yana Kraeva.

The images I hung for *Possett* were three large charcoal drawings on paper (about 60x42”). The drawings reflected the change in scale facilitated by a larger studio. Working in a larger format, I was excited about expanding the scale of some my imagery, including ambiguous insect-based forms merging with human anatomy, and human forms melding with plant and seed pod structures.

In developing work during the first year, a large part of it was a mental editing process. Sifting through the diverse directions my different imagery was taking me, I realized that in order to be productive, I needed to clarify what I was most interested in developing in my work. Faculty members periodically offered critiques, with everyone in the department giving feedback in the form of mid-terms and final critiques. I had a couple of lessons in learning to navigate the layers of criticism and receptions to the work. I learned to embrace some criticisms, consider some, and discard others. That year we had a couple of inspiring visiting artists who brought with them different offerings of encouragement and motivation. From one I received permission to make some hideous work mixed in with the stronger work, to get past my own mental obstacles. Another artist was filled with analogies to her personal experiences and visions, which I found very interesting, as I was thinking about the communicative aspects of some of my imagery. Also, one artist brought the simple offering of the suggestion of a particular paper and type of eraser, which was taken, and appreciated. I was not accustomed to discussing my work, and both relished and dreaded it, and came to realize how instrumental it was to utter clear ideas that became self-seeding in a way. I also met an artist that freely and regularly granted me permissions to cross my own imagined barriers. I was therefore equipped with a studio, encouragement, and private time to focus on my

own ideas. My imagery was primarily based on aspects of the human body, especially vertebrae, with subtle relationships to insect thorax and larval forms, and to plants, specifically to seed pods. I became very interested in transformative qualities in developing imagery, by adding and deleting simultaneously, while primarily working in charcoal on paper.

Fig.34 “*Possett*” Exhibition:



## ***MORPHOLOGIES: Second Year Solo Exhibition***

*“Morphologies”* was the title of my second year solo show at Melville Library Gallery. The term “morphology” references the branch of biology dealing with the form and structure of organisms. I thought the title was appropriate to encapsulate the feeling of biological interconnections I wanted to describe in the work. The work in the show consisted of six large drawings and two paintings. The drawings were based on interrelationships between forms, spaces, and species; primarily human and insect. I had been exploring the image and structure of the human pelvis. I was interested in thinking of it as a vortex, a source of refuge, or a place of human origin. The images focused on anatomical transformations and formal explorations which paralleled structures while crossing species. In comparison to the *Posset* exhibition; scale expanded further in this body of work, and there was also the marked introduction of color within the charcoal drawings. While the exhibition was open, many science majors from throughout the university came in out of curiosity about the title of the show, and were eager to discuss their own responses to the work. I think that the title directly put the imagery within their realm, and therefore the topic felt more approachable. As a result, I had many interesting conversations that further fueled my ideas. For example, x-ray technicians spoke about trying to localize angles or views to correspond with the images, while a few biology majors tried to “place” the body parts I was depicting.

Prior to developing the large drawings in *Morphologies*, I developed a series of drawings which articulated three physical zones I was interested in working on; the pelvis, the human sternum or thorax, and the shoulder and scapula. The pelvis was an image I wanted to relate to as a source of life. The shoulder area and scapula related to the memory and sensation of pain and dislocation. Although not included in *Morphologies*, the imagery found itself repeatedly in later work. The third zone I wanted to focus on was the sternum, or in insect form, the thorax. The thorax-pelvis form was an image I included in a drawing in the *Possett* show. I wanted to continue developing possibilities with the idea of a central core, which was at once thorax, pupa, and sternum; all focal points of energy in my mind. In a pupa, the imminent quality of a new developmental phase signified the energy contained in the thorax of an insect (the central

part of the body where vital organs were contained), as well as in the human body, with the sternum being the protective shield. This image of a protective shield or covering also extended to the exoskeleton of an insect and the outer covering of a pupa or chrysalis. The sternum in relation to the human chest covers the heart, the center, (conceptually) from where emotions emanate. The concept of a sternum being a core of energy, found itself iterated throughout the body of work; from the *Magnolia Bud* drawing with the imminent bud to blossom transition, to the *Luminous Core* and *Amber Core*, where I wanted to describe zones of intense emotion, energy and imminent life (Figs.35, 36, 47).



Fig.35 *Magnolia Bud*, Charcoal and watercolor



Fig.36 *Luminous Core*, Charcoal and watercolor

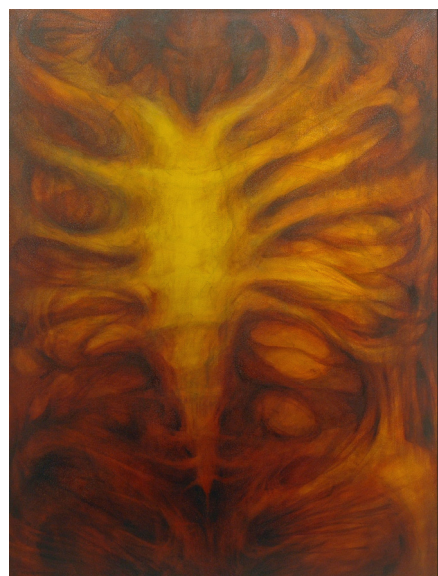


Fig.37 *Amber Core*, Oil on canvas

In *Grand Pelvis*, and *Luminous Core*, I developed images of the pelvis in dark, almost ominous spaces, reminiscent of masks or endless voids. In *Grand Pelvis*, I wanted to render a quality of space that would feel like an embrace. The scale of the form would physically accommodate a human body. I wanted the scale to reflect the magnitude of the subject and possible experience. Rather than describe a pelvis within the context of a body, I wanted to explore its architecture and suggest an ambiguous sensual point of origin through the dimensions and the quality of light within it. *Grand Pelvis* has a mossy surface, with a structural bony sense to it, like an aged stucco wall. The dimensions describe the form in a totemic way. I wanted the viewer to feel as if stepping into a familiar home, seduced by soft fuzzy fur-like hair at the lower opening.



Fig.38 *Grand Pelvis*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

In retrospect, I see the influence of Lee Bontecou's relief sculptures, the images of the 1960's which featured holes, or voids. Her sculptures were welded steel armatures with old military surplus canvas affixed in panels. The images she created were a combination of sculptural forms with illusionistic space. She created physical facets of canvas sections, and then drew on them or painted them to accentuate volumes insinuated

by the forms. The sculptures had a powerful presence. Sometimes she would have a singular opening, sometimes multiple voids. The effect was fantastically tactile; with both ominous and sensual connotations. These openings lent an air of curiosity, irresistible to the viewer, yet were also potentially menacing. One's satisfaction in viewing could only be fulfilled by really stepping in closely, perhaps close enough for something from within to reach out of it. That psychological game and the associated ambiguous tension are still intriguing to me. Her work carries with it a sensation of duality, which involves a risk which is at once discomfiting and exciting. I think of the game of the "Itchy Book" as a child, and emerging excited and almost refreshed from the challenge. In other pieces in *Morphologies*, I wanted to approach the sensation of being pulled in to an ambiguous space larger than life, creating an illusion of that potential risk, as well as an invitation to sensual comfort or tactile pleasure. *Luminous Core* is another drawing which feels closely related to *Grand Pelvis*. I needed to develop it to try to reveal a relationship I felt it had with the sense of a core of vitality or emotion, as in a sternum or bud. It is also the one piece that shared a direct dialogue with *Magnolia Bud*.

*Magnolia Bud* was a drawing I developed before the end of the spring semester. I had sketched a magnolia bud during a drawing session with a nude model. We were permitted to hire models for drawing sessions for a small group of interested graduate students. I had been thinking about the sensuality of the magnolia buds beginning to bloom, and during the drawing session, I wanted to focus on the power of accurate and engaged contours, and the quality of pure voluptuous flesh. Inevitably, I linked that aspect to the flesh of the emerging petals emanating from their fuzzy moss-toned buds. I brought the sketch back to my studio, and wanted to develop an image that would engage with that lushness of experience; of the immanent quality of emerging and transformational states in botany, but also in the tactile sensuality of the experience. Again, I thought about the similarities of textures and structures between creatures. At the time I had also been sketching and examining some huge wasps that a friend had found while doing construction on an old porch. The wasps had seemingly emerged from underground. They were delivered still alive in a huge jar, very agitated. Their wings and restless activity made them appear three times their size. The wings were a glassy amber color, and their abdomens were fuzzy, with blonde short, silky stubble. The fuzziness

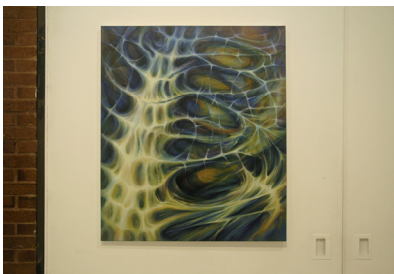


appeared appealingly tactile, yet the fact that it was an angry stinging insect's abdomen, quickly redefined the invitation. Within the *Magnolia Bud* drawing, I wanted to include passages of that sense of ambiguity, perhaps not of menace, but of reaching in to the unknown in the darkness. I wanted to evoke a sense of sensual indulgence mixed with an unspoken caution. The *Magnolia Bud* piece did not seem related to the development of many of my concurrent images, but it continued "talking" to me although I did not see aspects of it appearing in the work. It was then that the semester ended, and with it a new studio assignment. I got to move into one of the larger studios available. One aspect to the physical expansiveness I was experiencing was the possibility of having enough space for the larger drawings to remain hung on the wall while newer work developed. Images began to communicate across the walls, one piece to another. Very subtly, aspects of completely separate ideas and forms began to insinuate themselves into other pieces. I had never experienced this before. Prior to the studios at Stony Brook, I had the space to work on only one small piece at a time; without enough continuous wall space to place one image adjacent to another. The dialogue between my imagery now was self-nourishing. My ideas and themes, forms and motifs shared a home, a familiar incubator. My inter-species communications were fluid and frequent. Sternum became thoraxes, and then pupas. Larval forms echoed buds and thoraxes. I witnessed or rather participated in a silent dialogue between the different ideas I was developing in my imagery.

The magnolia bud found its way into the *Luminous Core* – the glowing swell of the internal sacrum in the pelvis swelled – like a thorax – like an emerging bud – and the delicate soft fuzziness also entered the basin of the pelvis, pulling external aspects into the interior. I think this was one specific piece that I felt achieved what I was attempting to evoke. At the end of the *Morphologies* show, I read what had been written by visitors in the sign-in book. Entries shifted from confused identification, to enthusiasm, and ambiguous attraction as well as discomfort by the imagery. One entry I read thrilled me. She wrote: "...I was at peace, for a moment in love." I later worked on a project with a philosophy student in an Art/ Philosophy class, based on interpreting Barnett Newman's claim to painting the "sublime". We had discussions about the intent of art and the actual effect. The student asked me if I "did" that in my work, as if merely wanting it could make it so. I said I surely would love it if I could... pull one into a purely sensory state.

The *Morphology* images collectively focused on mainly human anatomy referencing similar forms in insects, particularly through the thorax / sternum / pupa form, as well as hairiness, which linked various species; plant, human, and insect. Within these images, I wanted to develop a quality of intimate, enveloping space, where despite unsettling aspects and associations, the viewer is seduced with the urge to step forward into the space and explore its ambiguous environment.

Fig.39 “*Morphologies*” Exhibition:



## ***INTERSECTIONS: Solo Thesis Exhibition***

“*Intersections*” was my third year Thesis Show at the Melville Library Gallery. It consisted of six large charcoal-and-watercolor drawings, and one large oil painting on paper. The images focus on physical sensations in relation to formal comparisons with botanical forms. In using *Intersections* as the title, I wanted to suggest the physical intersecting, layering and un-layering, and dissecting of physical forms, rather than transformations between specimens and creatures as I had in earlier work. The drawings explored aspects of internal as well as external landscapes, alluding to x-rays and of traveling through muscular layers; revealing networks of connective structures of the human back, knee, pelvis, as well as neural networks. Many of the images stem from personal physical experiences. As with my “early” large drawings, I wanted to focus on interpreting qualities of physical sensation. These images layered the human with the botanical. The names of the drawings primarily refer to the genus names of the plants depicted or rather, insinuated. *Nexus* and *Juncture* allude to the physical dynamics of the specific images. As far as offering guidance for viewing the work, I wanted to offer only a slight entry point into identification. After the *Morphology* show, I felt that the titles of the pieces had been overly descriptive. Viewers seemed satisfied with merely identifying what I had intended to depict. So, if the work needed identification, I felt a clear description in Latin would be equally honest, and hopefully turn attention to the act of viewing as opposed to the descriptive reading of an image.

*Lilium* was a drawing that took me back into the image of the eye, in an inflated and intimate scale. I was still thinking about the quality of swelling light and almost glowing quality of the center of *Luminous Core*. I recalled the clear bluish- white aspect of the sclera in the eye, which was essentially a sac swelled with fluid, containing a network of nerves converging behind the socket in a cord-like bundle. In addition to my daughters’ injuries to the eye, my father had an incident where he suffered a momentary loss of blood flow to the optic nerve, which has severely compromised his vision. That delicate constriction was always on my mind. I thought of the precarious balances within our bodies; the endless current of fluids and energy circulating throughout our systems which can wreak havoc when interrupted. In dialogue with imagery in the studio as well

as the pods of various plants I was regularly collecting, the image grew on its own; layering aspects of botanical details throughout the ocular landscape (which was its unshared blatant title). I was experimenting with composition while also playing with different brushes and drawing tools to vary line quality by working with India ink and watercolors in reeds, ruling pens, and fine tipped brushes. I wanted to define the space with layers of watery washes and clear lines of undulating thicknesses (fig.40).



Fig.40 *Lilium*, Charcoal, ink, and watercolor on paper

*Nexus* and *Passage* were developing immediately after the *Morphologies* show. *Passage* was a piece I was working on during flare-up of shoulder pain from an old injury. Despite physical therapy on the area, I still experienced intermittent throbbing pain along my clavicle and shoulder. My range of motion was painfully limited. In the drawing I wanted to describe the physical sensation of a separated shoulder, where ligaments have been over-strained, and therefore have lost elasticity and strength. *Passage* was sketched out, and I planned to continue working on developing it.

We suddenly suffered a tragic death in the family, of a young nephew who we all adored. A beautiful person was suddenly pulled out of all of our lives. I returned from the memorial services feeling hollow. It was a while before I could clear my head to work again. My nephew Matthew was a big supporter of my work. His siblings teased him that if he had any of my drawings hanging in his dorm room, they would surely keep potential girlfriends away. I returned, and could not re-enter *Passage* (fig.41).



Fig.41 *Passage*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

It was fractured, and incomplete, exactly how I was feeling. I left it alone. Getting back into the studio, I wanted to talk about the physical, the human physical; full of strength and tensions, yet consummately fragile as a system where interconnections affect and influence all functions.

Another drawing, *Nexus*, focused on a posterior view of the pelvis, the sacrum; a point in the tailbone area where bundles of nerves converge. Muscle tension in the area can result in nerve constriction, often causing deep pain and numbness along different

parts of the lower body. *Nexus* re-opened a herniated disc dialogue I had in earlier drawings. In *Nexus*, I wanted to suggest the layering of ligaments, muscle, and bone, engaging in an intersecting dialogue of tensions, each affecting the other. *Nexus* was drawn and re-drawn repeatedly. I began by covering the paper with a dark grey India ink wash. From there I established a middle ground where I could define forms through the description of highlight as well as shadow information. The image began with a basis of shadow, where negative and positive aspects of space coexisted and merged. I wanted to describe the complexity of interrelated tensions and ambiguities in spatial relationships. In earlier prints, the silk aquatints, I was interested in working from a similarly dark ground to achieve a silent other-worldly or existential space (fig.42, fig.43).

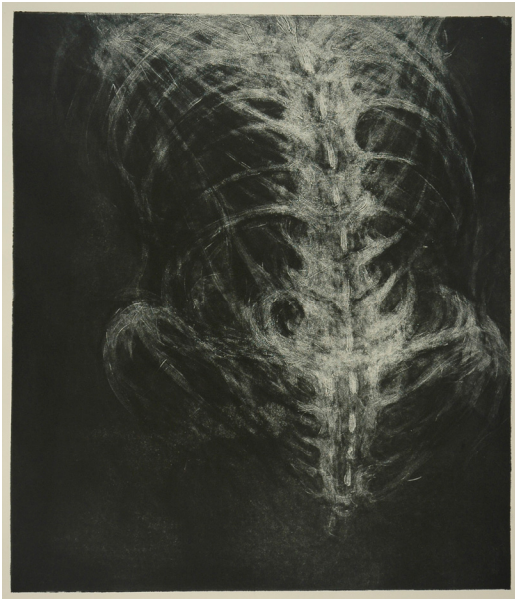


Fig.42 *Torso*, (state 1) Silk aquatint

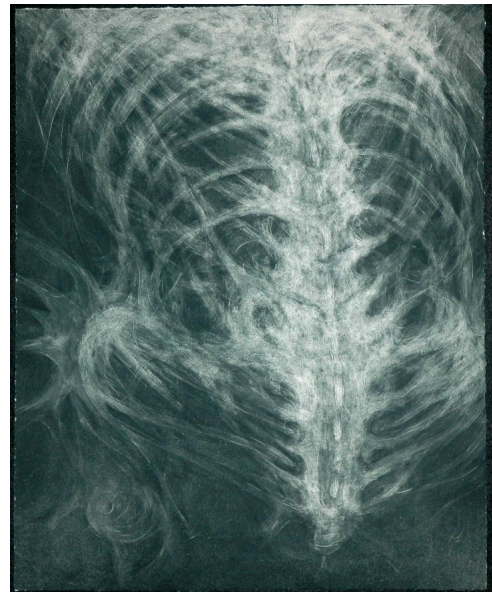


Fig.43 *Torso*, (state 2) Silk aquatint

Within that environment I wanted to create a physical form with an almost transient solidity. The ephemeral and other-worldly quality of that space alludes to internal visions of anatomy, as described through x-ray images, or electron microscopic images (e.g. of insects). Black was used to describe negative space in relation to describing form, but also in alluding to surreal interior spaces or other-worldly zones (fig.44).



Fig.44 *Nexus*, Charcoal, India ink, and watercolor on paper

As I developed the drawing, I drew and erased to re-iterate marks, and to describe highlights on forms. The erasures lifted and altered drawn areas, but also penetrated the ink wash tones to reveal the white of the paper. In attempting to describe physical layers with “actual” and imagined tensions, I re-drew and erased the drawing through many states. I pushed the image so far with continuous drawing, erasures, and repeated washes, that the paper’s surface became fuzzy, and drawn lines had a physical softness because of the raised paper fiber. Its black velvetiness was both optical and physical. In some areas I had reworked the paper so completely that washes no longer wanted to adhere, nor was there tooth enough on the paper for the charcoal to want to hold on. I had tested the range and limit of the paper, which in no way disappointed me, because I had developed an image that if I could I would probably have continued re-working. I was given permission to stop and move on. I had begun working on *Nexus* before losing my nephew Matthew. It was far from complete when I left. Re-visiting it, I began going around in circles of both development and indecision, at a time when I was trying to regain perspective on what felt valuable in life after experiencing a profound loss. Not

until writing this do I realize just why it was such a necessary exercise. It was not about over-working a piece, but almost a test in determining what it would take to push something to its limit.

Emotional tensions are often manifested physically in people. I have always carried mine on my back and particularly in my neck. I have frequently depicted images of my perceptions of pain and tension along my back. At different times I have described layers of back muscles, and their relationship to the hot focal points of pain and tension. Sometimes pain spreads broadly but at other times you can literally put your finger on a particular spot. Due to different types of chronic pain; my mother was always willing to drive her strong little fingers into painful zones, where she practices do-it-yourself “Shiatsu”, or “Acupressure”. She would touch upon points where nerves are allegedly blocked in order to release pain. Shiatsu is an Oriental massage in which fingers are pressed on particular points of the body to ease pain, tension, and symptoms of disease. These points, called are specific places in the body’s muscular system where nerves are aggravated when the “flow of energy” through the body is blocked. In Shiatsu, they are manipulated to start the energy circulating to relieve the pain. They are not necessarily located where the pain is. “The 361 *tsubos*, also called Acupuncture points and pressure points, are located along “meridian lines”, the fourteen channels through which the body’s energy flows. These channels are invisible, but according to Oriental philosophy; exist as surely and definably as the nerves.” (Ohashi, 7)

After a particularly grueling few days of writing a long term paper, frozen at the computer, I emerged having lost sensation in several fingers in my left hand. I evidently had pinched a nerve in my neck, which was causing pain and numbness along my arm and hand. I visited the chiropractor all summer in hope of relief. It is still not resolved, but it became a reference point for a few images. In *Physalis* I wanted to describe the spine. Rather than describing the different vertebra and their links, I wanted to focus on the flow of energy within the spinal cord and its branching neural networks. I was interested in tracing the networks that intersected bone and soft tissue to create the tensions that were causing the pain. Drawing the networks of nerves, and their all-encompassing sensation, I was reminded of the pervasive networks of veins in certain plants, particularly in the “*Physalis*”, commonly known as “Chinese Lantern”. There is a



simple elegant clarity in the branch-like networks in the flower's sealed petals. The delicate veins protrude, meandering throughout the intense red balloon pod. In the drawing, I wanted to merge networks throughout my nervous system reaching outward, and merging with the veined structure of the *Physalis* (fig.45).



Fig.45 *Physalis*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

This was physically and emotionally a tense span of time for me, and the imagery reflected it. The drawings focusing on different zones in the body were usually developed during a period of active pain, which made the visualization easy.

In "*Platycodon*", the discussion on the back continued. In it I was essentially mapping out areas of pain while illustrating muscular levels. Formally, I incorporated it with the structure of a *Platycodon*, or "Balloon Flower". Delicate blue veins outside the inverted pyramid-like balloon form suggest the human torso. Layers of muscle along the neck, shoulders, and back narrow at the base, imply a source of the network of energy, comparable to the stem at the base of a plant. I wanted to create a feeling of airiness in the drawing, which could let you visually penetrate through layers of muscle, and

different directions of fiber traveling through delicate yet tense depths and layers. It was a map for guiding someone to lift the layers and disengage the tension level by level. This image is perhaps the most diagrammatic of the drawings (fig.46).



Fig.46 *Platycodon*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

One of the most powerful inspirations for the drawing was the actual burning sensation that I was experiencing in the process of working on the piece. I thought of the layers that meshed and covered the individual hot spots along my scapula, visualizing their stiff knotty presence that felt as if they went miles deep. I visualized the stiff vertical cord or bands of muscle extending the full length of my spine, and wanting to reach my fingers between the layers to release the tension. I also imagined the branching patterns of the nerves traveling sturdily down the length of my spine, as in *Physalis*, though with electric branches with tips hot and focused on specific targets. I again thought of the neural mapping on anatomical texts as well as acupuncture points to guide through the sinewy terrain, through intersecting layers of information.

*Juncture (menisectomy)* was a drawing I did while finishing the work for the *Intersections* show. I had received arthroscopic surgery in my right knee a year earlier. I had injured myself when I slipped on a patch of ice and fell down hard on my knee. After months of pain, an MRI revealed a large tear to the meniscus, which warranted surgery. The repair would essentially slice a moon-shaped piece from the meniscus, the shock-absorber for the knee. The tear had laterally de-laminated the disc, and the torn area could not be stitched, so instead, the damaged area needed to be cut away. Everyone I spoke to familiar with the procedure reassured me that it was a common procedure, and not to worry. A “menisectomy” was done through two small incisions with a “*laparoscope*”, a multi-function device that consisted of a slender tube containing an endoscope for viewing within your body. This device was equipped with fiber optics, scalpels, devices for slicing, sucking, pulling, etc... , entering the body through an incision about ½” long. The gadgets within the small tube would perform the operation, guided by the surgeon viewing it all on a monitor! I was very excited... I heard that they sometimes let you watch it all on the monitor. However, on my scheduled day, a Friday 13<sup>th</sup>, I was prepared for a 10 a.m. operation that didn’t take place until 5 p.m. Two earlier routine operations had been more complicated than anticipated, so mine ran late. I didn’t care... other than I wanted to make sure that my surgeon had eaten something and had his coffee. It was late. Needless to say, I did not get to watch. As they were preparing to administer general anesthesia, I did get to argue my case for an epidural (I heard that it was optional). I had already had two when delivering my daughters, so I was not worried. I was determined to have some choices in this one. Though as soon as my legs went numb and I was asking about watching, the anesthesiologist soothingly said, “... don’t worry, you don’t really want to watch...”, as he swiftly injected a sedative into the intravenous tubing. Oh well... One thing I had been told was that it would really hurt afterwards. That was true. Recuperation went quickly, especially since the elevators in the building were not an option; they were inoperable for as long as I had been there. The next Tuesday I was climbing the stairs to the fourth floor.

In terms of imagery, I started an etching where the plate began with a velvety black aquatint. I then proceeded to scrape and burnish; polishing areas to define highlights, essentially pulling the image out from the darkness. I also engraved lines to

more richly define shadow areas, and to add linear drawing around the burnished areas. The image described tensions, and lines of force pulling from the patella, developing the space in an otherworldly landscape. While completing work for the *Intersections* show, I injured my knee again. I had been doing yoga exercises to release the tension in my back. Part of the routine involved an aerobic segment with mild jumping. I decided to test to see if my knee could handle it. That was a mistake. My knee swelled up again, and I had the terrifying feeling that I may have just undone my surgery. My knee was screaming in pain and frustration. That was basically where *Juncture* (menisectomy) came from. While developing the drawing I referenced my anatomy books, and found a mind-boggling complexity to the network of muscles and ligaments within the knee. The meniscus is at a juncture within a complex, interwoven network of ligaments. In some of the sketches I tried to recreate the physical separations that provided the tensions and elasticity, though I didn't want to re-describe an illustration or confirm an anatomical understanding, but evoke the sensation that I was experiencing.



Fig.47 *Juncture (menisectomy)*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

One important aspect about the drawings related to the knee was that they had a sense of immediacy that stopped me from over-developing them. They were brief statements as

compared to all of the other recent work which had more layers of information. I had run out of my sturdy paper that allowed intense erasure and repeated manipulation. The large paper I had available was a soft printmaking paper. It responded beautifully to the watercolor I applied, though gave no latitude in manipulating the surface, which was so fragile that it peeled off with any erasures. This limitation locked in my gestures. I knew what I wanted to describe, and kept it direct and immediate. *Juncture* felt much airier than everything else in the show. I wasn't sure it belonged with the other work, though it felt like a moment of respite from the more saturated multi-layered images. After the *Intersections* show, I wanted to leave it on the wall to keep "talking" to me about immediacy and clarity.

"*Koelreuteria*" was the only oil painting in the show. It was painted on prepared paper. The image was based on a cluster of seed pods which are essentially the blossoms of the *Koelreuteria*, or "Golden Rain Tree". I came upon them while taking a walk near our home. The pods were a fabulous clear screaming-green color, with delicate deep red veins weaving throughout the three petals configuring the faceted pod. Inside were rich reddish-brown seeds. The interior view was translucent, with structural fins reinforcing the intimate spaces where seeds were nestled (fig.48).

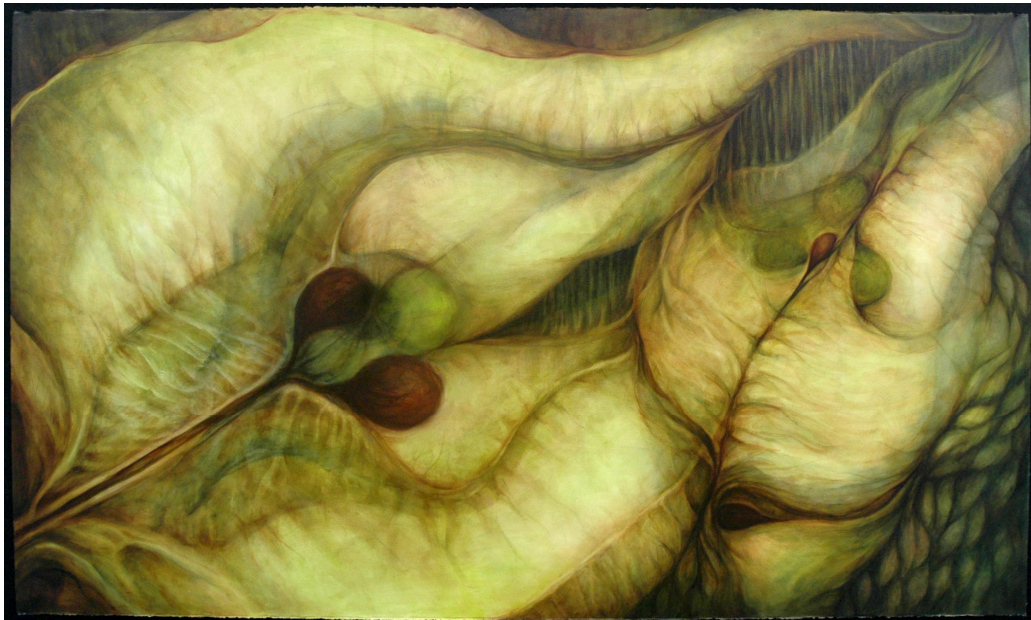


Fig.48. *Koelreuteria*, Oil on prepared paper

The translucent use of color expanded on a purer level from the charcoal and watercolor pieces, with the composition's internal views offering a somewhat more benign quality of enveloping space than the moodier charcoal imagery. The piece gradually painted itself. My engagement with the painting was very different from my other work. There was a looseness that remained in flux for a finite span of time each session. When the medium began to set, I had to stop. The glazing I was developing to build intersecting layers of tints allowed me to wipe away layers as I often did with the drawings, while the time factor forced me to stop between layers and engage with the work, unable to re-enter it for a while. *Koelreuteria* shows a dialogue with other work hanging in the studio at the same time, especially *Lillium*, which had the seed pod structure expanding and contracting throughout.

Fig.49 "Intersections" Exhibition



## **“LINKS” PROJECT:**

While developing my artwork at Stony Brook, different bodies of work were punctuated by exhibitions. Each semester resulted in new work which progressively encapsulated or distilled different perceptions. I participated in a project which resonated deeply; influencing the direction of my thoughts about the thesis show and this written work. After *Morphologies*, in the spring of 2007, I was involved in a collaborative project linking writing, art, and music, entitled “*Links*”. It was the thesis project of Chris Watkins, a friend completing his M.F.A. degree in creative writing. A musician and poet, he is linked to Amy; a friend, artist, and colleague in the program.

In his project, aptly entitled “*Links*”; a network of interconnecting artistic communication was orchestrated, with a haiku poem as the essential connection between artists. A haiku poem was initially written in response to a visual image. It was then passed on to a second artist to create artwork in response to the text, leading to more poetry, and in turn more response imagery, along eight different artists... I was part of the link. A musical aspect of the project linked musical creations with poetry as well; music was written in response to poems submitted to various musicians. In his description of the project Chris Watkins wrote: “The project is a metaphor for the bonds that connect us as creative, feeling beings that inspire one another in ways we can hardly imagine. We are all inextricably linked, and this project strives to present the abundance and the beauty of these bonds.”

The poem I received as my link to the project was entitled: “*Still Life With The Future*”

### ***Still-Life With The Future***

*A scavenger hunt*

*to save your life*

*beginning with your first*

*true love*

*and already you have failed.*

We had four days in which to develop our part of the “link”. I was excited to receive my poem, and thought... yes...I feel where I can take this...but as I carried the poem in my head for a few hours...then a few days, the poem took on a life of its own. I realized that my reflection on the words, and the suggestion to delve into my past ... into the concept of emotional perception at a given or infinitely wide expanse of time took me into recollections and redefinitions of time and emotion that were constantly changing and evolving. Beyond my visual response, or actually preceding it, I needed to search ...and revealed an ever-shifting and redefining sense of time, experience, value, and emotion. As I searched for clarity in my interpretation, I fumbled with the ambiguity, the pop-quiz feeling of navigating through, and needing conclusions about my personal experience and emotional “history” ... my life and loves. I realized that I had evolved, and in the process, redefined all concepts I had earlier held as “truths”. Had I pondered this poem five, ten, or twenty years earlier, I would invariably have had a very different perception of its meaning each time. Running out of time within my appointed slot in the sequence of collaborators, I reminded myself ...it’s not about my art; it’s about the text... Though, I realized that the text was of course about me addressing a search for clarity, for naming or defining my past. The resulting piece needed to feel that vastness of memory, and the difficulty in attempting to designate a hierarchy to experience.



Fig.50 *Still Life with the Future*, Colored pencil on paper



After submitting the image and a written reflection on the project, there was an exhibition of the work and the poems linking them. Only Chris had seen the separate components of the project until then. I think that the most pleasantly surprising part of the experience was the sense of pure insight and generosity I felt from Chris's response poem to my image. It has a very powerful sensation... that connection. This was his poem:

***The Strand***

*Was it five stones  
that we threw  
to the lagoon,  
to learn of how our lives  
could keep on touching  
even as we disappeared?*

*And did the thin jets overhead  
point their three bony shadows  
towards the dark spot  
in the water  
for a reason?*

*I was Paula home in Ireland,  
you were Theo on the sea,  
and my computer  
only found you  
as a white dot  
in a black world  
of white rings.*

*Was it the kraken  
that most scared you,*

*or the maelstrom,  
or the deep hurting urge  
to hurl your hatreds  
like a stone from a sling  
into the midst of the whirlpool?*

*And I can see those fighter planes.  
I can see those fighter planes.*

*Remember, from the plane,  
the desert cities  
I described as  
spirograph desert cities  
in a song I called  
armageddon days?*

*It was the seventh angel  
who poured his vial into the air,  
and did we know  
what our stones  
in the lagoon  
had conjured up?  
A plague of hailstones  
trailing feathers  
made of lead dust?*

*I can see those fighter planes.  
And I can see those fighter planes.*

The experience of working on an image in response to his words forced me to detach from my personal imagery and work only with my intuitive response to the text. It turned

out to be unlike anything I had been focusing on in any of my work. It was wholly mine, yet on a very different plane. Getting back into the studio, it followed me there and has entered my current work. I feel the need to include this collaboration because it pulled my work in a different direction. Chronologically, the project came between the *Morphologies* and the *Intersections* shows. I feel that it most strongly influenced the large drawing which was at the core of the body of work I presented in the group thesis show.

The reflections prompted by *Links* did not synthesize visually until I began pondering the concept of a “thesis” in relation to my body of work. It led me to address my perceptions about the nature and qualities of the lived experience. I wanted to incorporate motifs I used in the *Links* drawing which I felt articulated sensations of the all-at-onceness of the lived experience. They included; radiating concentric circles over the “landscape” of the image, as well as redefinitions of spaces, forms, and light, including shadows shifting from negative to positive space, creating inverse or contradictory definitions of space. I became interested in developing interactions within spaces and surfaces that would define levels of awareness, and simultaneously shift those very same implications.

Concentric circles allude to interconnections and communication...radar...the radiating waves of a droplet of water, an aqueous or atmospheric vortex, different zones of separation creating waves, and interrupting continuity in the pattern upon contact, deflecting and shifting the scene and its spatial relationships.

Nerves and networks of veins reading white on a black background linking positive and negative space – on the one hand, there are positive forms as well as negative shadows, which at one point becomes inverted, so you wouldn’t know if you were above or looking beneath the surface of the water, which becomes ambiguous due to the upper rings sitting on the surface.

I wanted to allude to the sense of looking deeply; as if peering into a rich and murky pond, looking at of decaying leaves below the surface. In it, one would glimpse a form, which would disperse, or be confused because of an intersecting reflection on another part of the surface. In my work I wanted to explore the multi-leveled quality to perception, using the pond as a metaphor, where one views and responds to a wide range of elements; some solid, some liquid, some tangible, some optical, some of them

illusions, others very real. My thesis work encompassed those multiple levels of experience, defining different forms and qualities of space that I've memorized from observation. *Links* was influential toward my thinking about interconnections in levels of awareness; recollections, and the super-saturated quality of a lived experience that causes one to choose a focus, although it's all out there, simultaneously. The hierarchy to personal perception is dictated by a given moment's focus. However, there's always a shift in that information too. Levels in a murky pond hold layers of the history, lived and perceived; as in decaying leaves, followed by layers of whatever solid forms hold a presence, layers of creatures or objects in flux, currents of slow or implied motion, as in water currents, as well as in reflection, reflection that is perceived simultaneous to glimpsing beneath the surface.

*The "Links"* poems opened a wellspring of thoughts and reflection about what my work was attempting to communicate about the lived and recollected experience. I had not previously considered the experiences in terms of a landscape or panoramic view of experience, but rather, very specific compressed sensations or moments, which were spatially contained or restricted within their format. In the panoramic view, which evolved into my thesis project, I was prepared to encompass "experience" on a broader scale. The process of having developed my work throughout the past three years held that feeling of amplitude for me. Rather than depicting specific and singular sensations and experiences through hybridized representations, I wanted to find ways to describe layers rather than zones of perception. Levels of clarity would shift, which while retaining detail and complexity, would also indicate passages lacking resolution, implying reflections or areas not in focus. My thesis work would describe the constantly shifting visual acuity we navigate with throughout our lives. That perception would affect our responses to events, passages, and stimuli from the world around us. In the panoramic landscape, I wanted to describe a sense of a progression or evolution from a relatively primal origin. The image would define layers of complexity by elaborating on detail, but also by editing, intensifying, and distilling those ideas to an essence of experience. I wanted the imagery to feel layered and simultaneous, as presented in life.

## ***“WHAT WE WISHED FOR”*: M.F.A Thesis Exhibition**

*“What We Wished For”* was the name of our MFA Thesis Show at the Staller Gallery. Amy Marinelli, Ha Na Lee, Yana Kraeva, and I again exhibited together. The work I included in the Thesis Show consisted of a wall of fifteen prints; including lithographs, intaglios, and woodblock prints. The prints function as notes, or rather, sketches in a varied “Cabinet of Curiosities”. They were hung salon-style, establishing a reference point for the imagery incorporated in the larger drawing and paintings. In addition to the wall of prints, I had a huge wall, where I hung a large central drawing, flanked on both sides by large oil paintings on paper. The central piece in the show was rendered with watercolor and charcoal on connected paper panels. The drawing is a panoramic “landscape” which encapsulates essential aspects of my common imagery. Flanking the landscape drawing on both sides, the two paintings attempt to establish links to the main drawing, with the imagery continuing outward from the drawing into the paintings on each end. The painting on the left side of the drawing is a tangled, colorful precursor to the primordial stew suggested at the beginning of the drawing. The painting on the right, *“Tingler”* attempts to suggest the extension of the sensation of freedom, and physical optimism in clarity of spatial relationships and color, while maintaining the quality of layering in a suggestive rather than descriptive manner.

### ***Wunderkammer of Prints:***

Throughout my time at Stony Brook, I steadily worked on developing prints. I had not been interested in exhibiting them earlier, as the opportunity to show the large drawings in the library gallery was more appealing in terms of a whole exhibition. The ample space and the idea of presenting a thesis or whole statement made the wall of prints seem appropriate for the Staller show. I had developed these images as idea studies and sketches of imagery that developed more fully in the larger drawings and paintings. In a sense, I wanted to provide a glossary for entering aspects of my imagery which I incorporated into the large panoramic drawing. The nature and clarity of some of the elements I integrated in the image had become significantly abstracted in comparison to drawings in previous shows. Organizing my thoughts about writing a thesis that would in

a way document my thinking and the development of my imagery in the past three years, I realized that my work's development had followed an almost linear progression. I had always thought of it being more of a meandering type of development. My early imagery began through the print, and permeated my entire experience at Stony Brook (fig.51).



Fig.51 "*Wunderkammer*" of Prints

In the exhibition I included one state of the series of pelvis lithographs. I also included *Whelk Egg Case* and *Whelk/Spine*, two lithographs mapping the formal transformation of a whelk egg case to a human spine.

I included a woodblock image of the skeleton of a hydrangea flower petal. I referenced it in relation to the ideas of interconnected and branching networks. I developed variations of it transforming tonally, and in shifting spatial relationships from positive to negative space. I printed and juxtaposed one set in a gradation of black-to-white *Hydrangea*, and printed another with a transparent ink, so that the physical design

would have impregnated the paper, and then painted over it with dark indigo watercolor to suggest the negative reading of an x-ray or evoke an internal view of an organic network or structure.

Other images included two silk aquatints, which evoke an otherworldly quality of light and space. The image is of a posterior view of a torso, with light falling over it from above, suggesting ribs and vertebrae. The silk aquatints allude to technological images of human structure; although in an almost immaterial or transitory state. They depict an image, or rather, an impression or illusion of a body than a representation of one.

I also included a silk aquatint was based on a frontal image of a pelvis, printed in a sepia tone. The ghostly quality of light and the pitted brushy surface echoes a stucco-like quality makes the pelvis appear to be made of a palpable bony material. The textured quality of a silk aquatint is perhaps more fluid and spontaneous than more traditional printmaking techniques. There is also a lack of absolute “control” in the wiping process, which I welcome, as each impression is therefore unique. In my larger imagery, I referenced the silk aquatints; which represented a looser, more atmospheric quality.

Another pelvis image I included is *Screaming Pelvis*, which referenced the physical sensation of a herniated disc. It was created using traditional hard ground with aquatint for the grey tonality.

Insect imagery included an intaglio print, *Cicada*. It was rendered in soft ground with spit-bite aquatint. In it, the cicada’s form is clearly articulated with soft lines reminiscent of pencil marks. A smoky spit-bite aquatint conceals overly-descriptive passages, revealing the essence of the cicada through the visible lacy wings. The insects’ wings are further echoed in the nearby hydrangea skeletons as well. Another insect form I included to suggest an archetypal insect presence was “*Pupa*”. It is a small, almost amorphous segmented spit-bite aquatint image. It was printed in a dark sepia tone to reinforce the earthy translucent quality of an egg sac, chrysalis, or early fetal “pod”. The segmented quality of the pupa is also echoed on the wall by the interior vertebra of the pelvis silk aquatint.

The earliest intaglio image I included is *Eye*; it is an engraving with passages of mezzotint to create shadow areas and tonal gradations. In terms of technique, it is the most time-consuming and traditional. In comparison with the other images, it provided a

detailed point of tension in the midst of the more atmospheric imagery. The quality of the iris is almost flower-like in its detail, alluding to a human as well as a bird-like eye.

I also included an aquatint image entitled *Knee Landscape*. It begins as a solid black, and the image emerges through scraping and burnishing. It also incorporates engraving to define linear contours, as well as provide shadow detail through cross-hatching within the dense shadow areas. The image developed in response to reflections on the dynamic and almost surreal nature of the technology in arthroscopic surgery. The process becomes a part of the “landscape” or history of a body’s experience. It is one of the most recent images, and has clearly moved away from the sense of a portrait-like depiction of a subject as in some of the previous prints.

A final image is *Spinal Pod*, a muscle-covered back, suggesting a soft-tissue spine, while alluding to a blossoming plant form or seed pod. It is rendered in dry-point, which offers a combination of hairy soft velvety lines, as well as engraved lines which have a clean dense clarity to them. *Spinal Pod* is also among the most recent prints I’ve developed. It merges aspects of the human and the botanical. My most recent prints have a shared biomorphic sense about them, departing from the singular statement quality of earlier work.

An aspect of having the wall of prints hung salon-style was that they represented a wide range of ideas and directions that were subsequently expanded on or distilled on larger images. Here in juxtaposition, they represented the range and variety of sources, organisms, atmospheres, moods, and interrelationships I was interested in pursuing. Although it filled the wall, it was but a small opening into the realm of my curiosities. On the wall I wanted to represent the sense of the simultaneity or multiplicity of the lived experience, and the seemingly endless interpretations, influences and juxtapositions that can enter and affect our perceptions.

### **Intersecting Landscape:**

The large panoramic drawing in the Thesis Show was titled *Intersecting Landscape*. In a way, it represents the amplitude of the experience that this span of time has represented for me through my visual work. Inspired by the “*Links*” collaboration, I began to think of the representation of my imagery and experience in terms of layers as



opposed to individual moments or portraits frozen in two-dimensional space. On a panoramic format, I wanted the image to flow, not in a linear manner, but in a multi-leveled simultaneous and pervasive spread of visual energy.

*Intersecting Landscape* is composed of five joined paper panels. I chose to fuse the sections together since the quality of paper I wanted to work on would not accommodate my dimensions due to the narrow width of the roll. I joined sections of paper with an archival heat-sensitive fusing material, reinforced with an additional strip of paper. The process of joining them was meditative, as I had not worked in this scale before, and I was developing the image in my mind for weeks before I actually made a mark on the paper. During my time at Stony Brook, I worked increasingly larger, and was comfortable with the idea of going far beyond my standard dimensions. I also realized that I had an opportunity to describe an expansive experience in an impressive exhibition space. I knew it would be a unique opportunity to work in this scale, and luckily I also had a large enough studio space in which to generate it (fig.52).



Fig.52 *Intersecting Landscape*, Charcoal and watercolor on paper

In terms of the imagery, I wanted to describe an emergence from a primal vortex. The specific forms and energy would emanate from a focal point. I first conceived of this core as a whirlpool, or a maelstrom. The central source of energy would be dense and turbid, holding within it a complex tangle of organic material, in the form of stems, branches, seed pod, buds, etc... These elements would all be cradled in an ambiguous space that would simultaneously be negative, in terms of concavity, as well as positive as in the incipient form of a larva or pupa, echoing the translucent, succulent thorax of a cicada or the chrysalis of a butterfly. In developing an image, I activated the entire

drawing with a watercolor sketch, over which I drew the various forms I wanted to encompass within the composition. I was thinking of the core of a cicada shed after having torn out from the back of its pupa, with the spreading wingspan of the transformed mature insect. The amber translucence of the vacant “shed” and the amber tinted glassy wings formed facets spreading across the landscape. That was where the dialogue began, although with each visit to the studio; new, or rather old thoughts emerged. My whirlpool or core of insect became a pelvic cavity cradling seed pods. The language of growth, propagation, and abundance flowed simultaneously from this center of energy that visually seemed to continue redefining itself as the drawing progressed. The feeling of density from the tangle of emergent forms became more and more botanical as it emerged from a human-feeling sacrum. The view was from the posterior, revealing a fissure, or split from where the seed-like forms would emerge. Larger buds and seed pods opened to reveal silky threads, furry coverings and varieties of follicles. The skeletal networks of hydrangeas and silhouetted veins and nerves defined a receding landscape entering a shadow-engulfed space. To the right, and along the upper ridge of the vertebra, grew extended rib-like segments, revealing earlier layers of the cicada pupa, which also echoed vertebral ridges, flowing outward, gaining a wing-like structure. Their spans crossed layers of smooth fleshy boulders, with gaps revealing flower pods opening to reveal delicate filaments enveloping seeds. Erasures echo forms while repeated edges continually shift the sense of spatial layers. Aerial views of land formations appear in fissures and openings of atmospheric haze. Concentric radiating rings echo motion extending outward, encompassing some areas into foggy levels, while activating a sense of movement into others. Radiating droplets of disrupted surface tensions continually reveal edges and newer aspects of form. On the far right of the image is a large radiating disc. It can at once define an iris, a sinkhole, or the source of a branching network of nerves or veins of energy, or traveling fissures opening new gaps between the boulders throughout the ambiguous terrain. Throughout the drawing, I wanted to depict the sense of a voyage. Working and traveling through layers of information and reference, I wanted to edit the quality of a form, reducing its complexity to essential gestures, or structural bases, suggesting the sense of archetypal cross-species. The density and detail in its

evolutionary growth would become purer, streamlined in understanding, as a shared language.

The paintings on each side of the drawing were to punctuate the drawing through an extension of color and continuation of form (fig.53).



Fig.53 *Intersecting Landscape* flanked by *Beginnings* (left) and *Tingler* (right)

The left panel consists of a complex tangle of ambiguous primal biomorphic references. Mossy botanical forms inhabit an almost tropical environment, ripe with heat and moisture for propagation. The painting references human spine and plant stem relationships, continuing the entangled sensibility of the left side of the drawing. The painting to the right of the drawing echoes the radiating iris, another vortex of energy, although significantly less dense, with a sense of clarity or essence of form. As I was developing the painting on the right, I was re-iterating the circular rings echoing from the drawing, when the curve of a spine emerged, rooted like a ginseng root, though revealing nerve endings, as those in the lower sacrum, strong, and intense when activated. The title refers to a Vincent Price film, “The Tingler” (1959), which I had recently watched with my daughters. Returning home after working in the studio, I mentioned that the *Tingler* had appeared in my painting (the creature in the film was a centipede-like spinal parasite). They asked me to name the painting after it.

## **VII. CONCLUSION:**

### **Punctuation:**

The connection I hoped to make between my last two shows at Stony Brook was to contextualize the aspect of “singular” moments and experiences, as they have been represented in separate portrait-like depictions; and place them in a constantly shifting and interconnecting “landscape” which the forms co-inhabit and intersect. At the core of my thesis is my desire to articulate layers of awareness in relation to our experience, both on an extremely personal level, as well as in a universal sense.

Thematically, my work hovers over aspects of nature, observation, and lived experience. The simultaneity of change, observation, and the lived moment can be caught and focused as in a camera view-finder, yet at the expense of excluding other stimuli on the periphery. My work strives to present that simultaneity through layers of information; through echoes and plays on forms, and in ambiguities discerned only through observation and lingering attention.

Immersed in working and focusing on children and family responsibilities, I thought that images that came to me would forever disappear without having the opportunity to commit them to paper. I wanted an opportunity to solidifying these thoughts, ideas, and momentary visions. During my time at Stony Brook, as an artist I was given the time and opportunity for that selfish focus. At first I began working with current ideas and images. Within a brief period, my emotional memory merged with deeper long-ago sketched or thought-about spaces. Those ideas and images all returned to me with a fullness not originally perceived; they arrived laden with extensions and richer associations.

I realize that we do not re-invent ourselves through our imagery; we live out our visual histories informing them with sense perceptions. Our perceptions are affected by living, aging, savoring the fullness of experience as well as discomfort, grief, pain, and fear. It is in the contrasts, in the relative tensions that we can identify the pleasure and the pain; that we can appreciate release after tension, after the weight of physical and psychological oppression however pronounced or subtle. Without one extreme, we would

not fully experience the other. The art exists in those tensions. The *Links* project pulled me into thinking about our pasts' multi-layered quality of experience and our perceptions of our personal histories. Defining our first true love is a question in constant flux, relative to the time when the question is posed, as well as our definition of "first" and "true", and also "love". There are no absolute, but constant truths throughout our lives, each time in its time. There are no fixed moments, just points of awareness and of recognition in the midst of the ever-echoing - degrading – progressing - expanding and contracting flux we experience as life.

“As human beings, if we want to know the essential nature of things, we must allow them to speak through our own mind. All that we can say about their essential nature is taken from the spiritual experiences of our own inner being. Only out of ourselves can we form a conclusion about the world.” (Steiner, 212)

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