

THESIS

GIFTS TO A PAGAN GRACE

Submitted by
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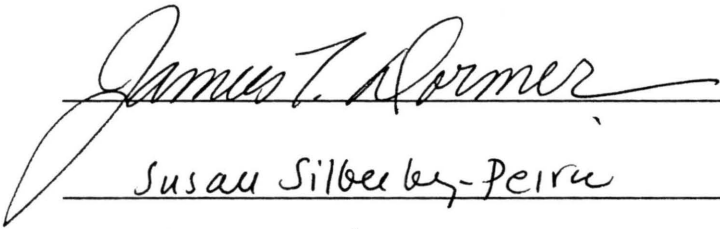
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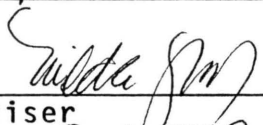
WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY CHERYL JOSEPHINE STREAMS ENTITLED GIFTS TO A PAGAN GRACE BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS.

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS
GIFTS TO A PAGAN GRACE

This thesis explores the inspiration and passion that have transformed my ideas into physical forms. By breaking boundaries, I explore both physical and surrounding space in the process of creating metal forms. Thus, in my work, form integrates with formlessness. This integration with surrounding space in turn begins to define the forms. The forms then take on their own life and movement.

My formative experiences are my inspiration: I look to family, river, rocks, Greek mythology, and my passions for the questions.

My creative spirit lies beyond reason,
Somewhere in the darkness,
Somewhere beyond the boundary.

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for Truley and Kebra

faithfully follow your passions

for they will led you,

intuitively assess these same passions

for they can misplace

you...

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INTRODUCTION

On the one hand, there is a desire for limitless expansion and discharge in pleasure. That's the human side. On the other side, there is pursuit of limits in order for transformation to occur. It's the god who is seeking limitation. It is the divine or transpersonal part of desire that seeks limitation. At the same time, the human part is always seeking expansion, limitless expansion. These two things are a pair of opposites and they define the dialectic of desire as it moves through human development (Kalsched, 1992, p. 93).

This quote speaks to what I search for in my art. My thoughts and private visions become the foundation for my metal forms. My personal vision is then expressed through a series of technical considerations and processes. Each individual technique requires its own level of expertise, thus defining its own boundaries and limits. I, in turn, work to transcend these boundaries, to find what is not there or what is hidden in the obvious. My ideas demand that I remove physical form and use the remaining space in and around the existing form. Therefore, in a sense, what is not there defines what exists.

This fascination with space, as opposed to verifiable dimensional form, has been with me always. I sense that there seems to be something more - something beyond what is on the surface. This something leads me in my personal

quest to the other side, the darkness, and places that can be travelled to only through the imagination, passion and art. This "limitless expansion" is an intriguing force behind my life and work. Breaking boundaries and explicitly exposing the nothingness is my motivation. Accepting this unrelenting passion allows me to create the form.

I look to the Greeks and their gods for inspiration and clarification because I believe they had an innate understanding of both the purity of perfection and of the darkness of ecstasy. Their gods represent both sides of life. Dionysus honored the darkness of the underworld and other side of life, while Apollo represented light and reason. Both gods played a vital role in the lives of the Greeks. They have been considered the "two art deities of the Greeks" (Carpenter & Farone; Henrichs, 1993, p. 24). Together their integrated energy "created tragedy" and the even balance of energy between the two produced the "continuous development of art" (Hofstadter & Kuhns, Nietzsche, 1964, p. 498).

Although I have a deep belief in the goddess cultures, I look to the gods because it was within the male that I observed the driving force of passion in my early life. It was the men who were a curiosity to me as a child. It

was their lives, their mining, and the dark underground about which I secretly sought knowledge. It was their mystery and their domain that was forbidden to me.

SECTION ONE

PART I

SILVER

Standing at the outside edge of the tunnel the small child heard familiar voices around her: "Don't go in old mine tunnels - there could be a cave-in, you could be trapped inside...There are deep shafts that drop off into nowhere...There's heavy poisonous gases - one breath and you could die...There are many tunnels inside you could become confused and lost...There are old dynamite caps lying around - there could be an accident..." The voices were coming from all directions and talking all at once. The child hesitated, then she quickly stepped inside (personal journal, 1994).

I did not choose my life with silver. It has always been a part of me. My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were silver miners. Growing up in a small Colorado mining town, I wasn't too old before I realized that silver was the life-blood of the community. It appeared that silver and gold contained magical powers - elusive forces which drove men underground on the sunniest of days. When I was young I did not understand this driving passion, but I always wondered about that dark other side.

Seeing old photos of my great-grandfather only reinforced my belief in the metals' mysterious powers. He was blinded in a mining accident; he wore a black

leather and cork glove on his missing hand. The aged photos were cracked with folded or missing corners. They spoke to me of transgression and imperfection, the rawness of the other side.

I find that this other side of life is more crucial and inspirational to my creative growth. It nourishes my growth: the darkness, the torn hand, the blinded eyes, and the ever-present element of imperfection. The pureness of perfection lies only within the confines of the boundaries of the metal. These are the boundaries of the shiny-clean silver waiting for form. It is by deconstruction that I find, and finally free, the form. Thereby, I reach an understanding of the whole. It is through pieces of pain that I get glimpses of perfection. It is in knowing the darkness that a realization of the total purity of light evolves.

Although a basic safety lies within the known, my search of the unknown has always been present. My passion always creates a tension with reason. It is in this area, beyond the boundary of order, that I am enchanted. Philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche compared the duality of the pure reason of Apollo (man) to the spontaneity of Dionysus (nature) in his first book, The Birth of Tragedy. He believed that Apollo represented a fantasy of dreams and plastic arts, and that Dionysus

represented the barbaric intoxication, the Lord of the Underworld. He believed both states are very natural to man. The conflict is the integration of the two opposing states. Nietzsche believed that:

...the origins of art and of all human creativity are to be found in the dual aspects of human nature which he calls dream and song.
(as quoted by Hafstader & Kuhns, 1964, p. 496).

The parallel of the Apollonian dream state is that of the impulse of nature; "the Apollonian is, then, first of all, an artistic energy that bursts forth from nature prior to the advent of the artist" (Sallis, 1991, p. 20). The Apollonian state is the point between where nature knows what the creation will be, but the artist does not know. The artist has not discovered the "art state" or "art state of nature". The paths have not yet crossed to produce the creation of the art form.

It is within the square, rectangular or circular foundation of silver that I find the Apollonian dream state. Although this silver has been milled, it is in an artificial state of purity. Silver in this form does not have the qualities of the high-grade silver taken from the dark underground. The roughness of nature, the other minerals and quartz crystals are gone. The silver is clean and smooth. It does not smell damp or dirty. It is undefined and formal. Although this state appears

flawless, the ideal state of silver could have only been in the ore before it was mined; before it saw the first glimmer of light; and before man's hungry imposition on nature.

This plane of silver then becomes my dark cave. Its physicality transforms my visions and my formative experiences into an existence that mediates the surrounding space. The resistance of the metal responds to the intuitive energy and force of my hand and hammer. I follow the metal's guidance. It senses my direction. The veracity of the silver frees my deepest consciousness. Together we transcend the physical level of being.

Magic is dependent upon the formless world to be found in the inner recesses of the soul - a realm of the infinite, composed of the most mysterious powers (Otto, 1986, p.36).

My personal transcendence begins during the raising and forming processes. The repetitiveness of the hammering on the silver becomes ritualistic. This pounding rhythm becomes a litany. Having learned to trust this chant, I am in a state of transcendence. I trust that the form created will express my internalized feelings; as well as my personal visions. It is during this process that the reliance on the "impulse of nature" is experienced. The Dionysian state frees me. It allows the breaking of

boundaries and the 'limitless expansion' to occur:

Dionysos invites us in the dark night of the psyche, pushes us into the depths of the cavern, but the going is often easier than coming back...(Paris, 1990, p.20).

I know that I must take the silver beyond its physicality and search the negative space to find the nothingness that will eventually define the form. The precious silver is sacrificed with tears and cuts in order to find and create the surrounding space. The space then works in and around the form to create the whole. The total transcendence is then captured in the silver forms together with the interaction of the surrounding space.

The edges of the metal act as a boundary for my forms. These boundaries are broken and then totally explored. The edges are irregularly worked. They are hammered and with the hammering they become thick and thin, varying degrees of existence and non-existence. Thus, my art emerges from a conflict with limits and boundaries, with reason and passion, and finally between physical form and empty space. The edges define, yet they confine nothing. They are highly polished and burnished, still they read as primitive and unfinished. They speak of being raw, broken, and untamed. They reach from the physical form into the surrounding space, thereby incorporating form and formlessness, resulting in unrestrained expansion.

Part II

FORM

...any form whatever, by the mere fact that it exists as such and endures, necessarily loses vigor and becomes worn; to recover vigor it must be reabsorbed into the formless if only for an instant; it must be restored to the primordial unity from which it issued; in other worlds, it must return to "chaos" (on a cosmic plane), to "orgy" (on the social plane), to "darkness" (for seed). (As quoted in Mircea Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return. Willard R. Trask. Calarco. 1969. p. 5).

Many of my forms are vessels. These vessels are in numerous states of transformation. They are chaotic. The enclosed shape of the vessel works in opposition to the tears of silver and the freedom of the edges. These dissimilar elements work in contrast to one another, thus, the result is a stronger presentation of each element. Because these forms are somewhat chaotic, yet retain an aura of grace, their energy speaks of an "elegant brutality" (J. Dormer, personal communication, April, 1994):

Seeing clearly in a chaotic situation is the means by which an artist becomes a participant and gains control. It is the difference between a ship sinking or sailing in rough seas. I cannot change the force, but I can be witness to it. The intention is not to tame the chaos but to tap its energy. (Goldsworthy, Stone. p. 49).

The shallow folded silver pieces also retain the same energy as the deeper vessel forms. All pieces echo my formative experiences as a female, the freedom of the mountains, and the organic winds of nature.

SECTION TWO

ROCKS

She knew the lunch box contained surprises. It smelled of the dampness of the underground. This smell remained on the worn black plastic, even when the lunchbox was freshly washed and placed in the dish drainer. When her father came in from work each evening, she would quickly open the box. It always contained moist candy bars with the paper wrappers sticking to the melted chocolate. Always when first tasting the chocolate, she knew it tasted like the musty mine smell. Sometimes, smashing the chocolate bars, were rocks. Just dirty old rocks. . . (personal journal, February, 1994).

Rocks are my gifts to the pagan graces, who have inspired my silver forms. The simple physicality of the rock forms reflect the strong influence of nature on my work and in my life. Rocks have always held a place of prominence for me. They also contain the silver, which is my passion.

Rocks are eternal. They move in and out of cultures. They are solid primitive forms that are timeless. These physical forms required millions of years to be produced and, since the beginning of time, most humans have responded to them. Carl J. Jung stated that men have "apparently assumed that certain ones were containers of the life-force with all its mystery" (Jung, 1964, p. 209).

The divination of rocks began in the Stone Age. Rocks were believed to contain spirits of the deceased. They

were used as boundaries for sanctuaries, headstones for graves, and have been a symbol for self. Jung also writes of the "holy" stones which were "wrapped in bark and hidden in caves (Man and his Symbols, 1964, p. 205). Probably, one of the most powerful of all rocks and stones is the Philosophers' Stone.

In the fable, The Alchemist, (1993), Paulo Coelho writes of the "Philosophers' Stone" and "The Elixir of Life". Although The Alchemist is a fable, I found that this story corresponded in a very similiar manner to my personal spiritual search. The Philosophers' Stone is the symbol of the physical in the search of the spiritual. It also represents the evolution and the natural opposite energies of everything. The power of this stone is immense. A sliver is said to turn lead into gold. The analogy of this action is following one's heart, understanding opposites and dualities, and allowing destiny to happen. It is about trusting intuition:

'I have known true alchemists,' the alchemist continued, 'they locked themselves in their laboratories, and tried to evolve, as gold had. And they found the Philosopher's Stone, because they understood that when something evolves, everything around that thing evolves as well.'
'Others stumbled upon the stone by accident. They already had the gift, and their souls were readier for such things than the souls of others. but they don't count. They're quite rare.' (p. 144-5).

My rocks need not be elevated to the status of the

holy stone or Philosophers' Stone. I relate to the rocks on a more basic level. I feel a natural connection with rocks and their form. Their texture speaks of their age. Their smell offers their location. Their dampness hides their mysteries. It is with the senses that I know rocks. Carlo Carrā, the Italian painter wrote:

'It is common things that reveal those forms of simplicity through which we can realize that higher, more significant condition of being where the whole splendor of art resides.' (Jung, p. 254, 1964).

Rocks are the altars for my silver forms. These rocks are raku rocks and natural river rocks. The river rocks were taken from the Rio Grande River, which runs through my backyard. I believe all rocks, the silver, and the river, as well, were given to me from another time. My response is to return a gift.

The importance rocks hold for me inspires me to create "rock forms". My ceramic rocks are made to blend with the natural river rocks. Although the search for the aesthetic integration of ceramic rocks and river rocks is crucial, I find that participation with the creation of the rock shape is where the true search begins.

I chose the raku firing technique because of its Dionysian qualities. It is an immediate and personal process. Raku invites the unexpected and spontaneous forces and energies to happen.

Hal Riegger states in Raku: Art and Technique:

Four elements enter into the making of raku: the clay, the glaze, the fire, and the person. Of these the least predictable and most fallible is the person. Raku is a technique; but far more than this it is also a philosophy. Knowing the technique is essential, but understanding raku's message permits an ultimate achievement in this extraordinarily simple, yet subtle and complex craft of the potter (Introduction, 1970).

The philosophy of raku lies in allowing the serendipity to happen. The potter needs to allow mistakes to occur and realize that this does not necessarily ruin the planned piece, but only changes its original form and direction. It enhances the freedom of creation and the acceptance of imperfection:

While he works, he attempts to create an atmosphere in which the unexpected may happen, and the moment be seized to create new feeling in form. This in no way implies that the potter tries to cause an accident! Obviously, unexpected things that happen may not all be good. Therefore, part of the discipline of raku is an ability to perceive the difference between good and bad, and the courage to discard the latter. (Riegger, p. 14).

Much like the process of raku, the integration of fabricated and natural rocks for this show was a totally spontaneous action. This intuitive placement of rocks, together with the integration of my silver forms, takes me back to the essence of what I feel and envision on the other side, in the darkness.

SECTION THREE
PLATES



FLAME OF DIONYSUS, sterling silver with copper, natural river and raku rocks. Raised. 6" x 6".



DREAM STATE, fine silver, natural river and raku rocks. Raised and forged. 12" x 12".



DANCE OF PASSION, fine silver with gold leaf, natural river and raku rocks. Raised and formed. 15" x 15".



GIFT OF WINE, fine silver with gold leaf and rainbow patina, natural river and raku rocks. Raised and formed. 9" x 12".



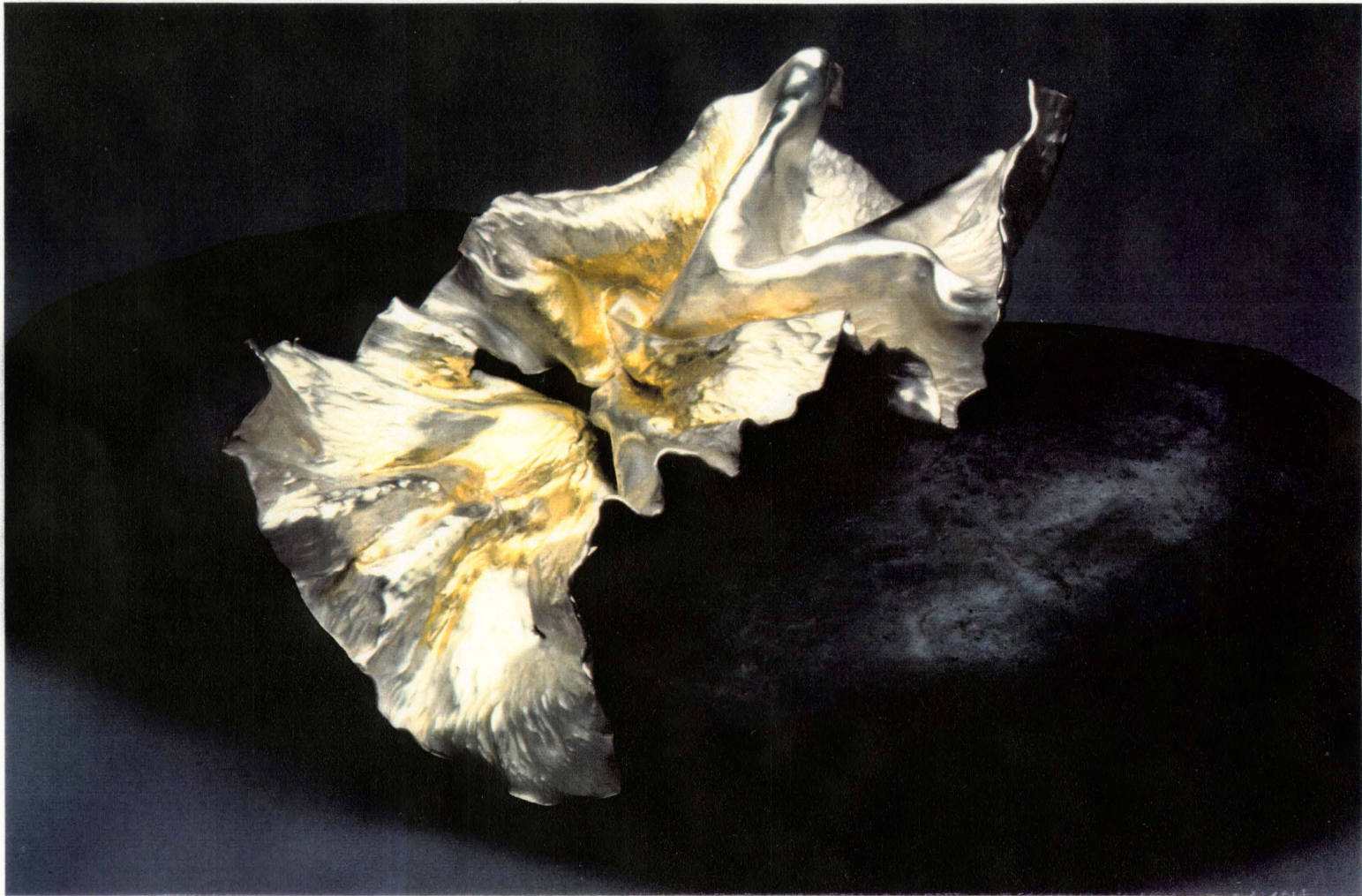
MAENADS' DANCE, fine silver with gold leaf and rainbow patina, natural river and raku rocks. Forged and formed. 12" x 32".



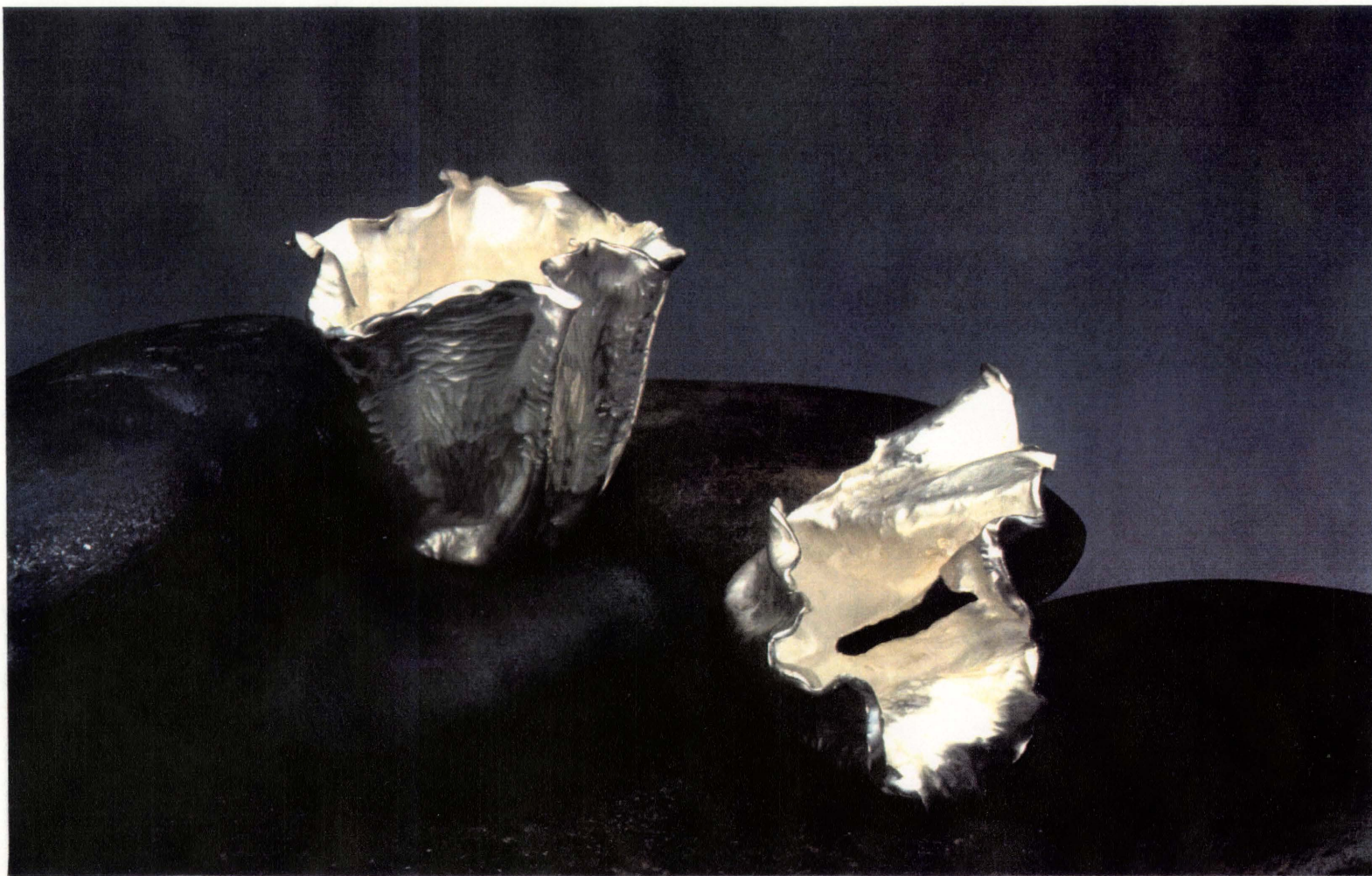
MYSTES, fine silver with gold leaf, natural river and raku rocks.
12" x 12".



BEAUTY WITHIN, sterling silver with gold leaf and rainbow patina,
natural river and raku rocks. Forged and formed. 9" x 12".



UNBROKEN, fine silver with gold leaf, natural river and raku rocks.
Forged and formed. 8" x 12".



THE OFFERING, fine silver, natural river and raku rocks, red sand
from New Mexico. 10" x 10".



THE TEAR, fine silver, natural river and raku rocks. 3" x 6".



CIRCLE DANCE, sterling silver with gold leaf and rainbow patina,
natural river and raku rocks. 12" x 12".



PURITY VESSEL, fine silver, natural river and raku rocks.
12" x 12".



LITANY, fine silver, natural river and raku rocks. 12" x 12".



SACRIFICE, fine silver with gold leaf, natural river and raku rocks. Raised and forged. 10" x 10".



BROKEN BOUNDARIES, sterling silver with gold leaf,
natural river and raku rocks. Raised. 10" x 6".

CONCLUSION

'My philosophy an inverted Platonism: the further removed from true being, the purer, the more beautiful, the better.' (Heidegger cites a remark from Nietzsche's early sketches for The Birth of Tragedy, Sallis, 1991, p.2).

In Greek mythology the duality of Apollo and Dionysus represents the conflict within humans; passion and reason. In this conflict, transition occurs.

This body of work represents my exploration into my transitional conflict. The thesis attempts to integrate my spiritual search, formative experiences, and my response to the physicality of nature. This integration results with the material expression of my exploration.

The use of positive and surrounding space is integral to my search and presentation. Abstraction of form is used to explore and break boundaries. The breaking of boundaries inspires my transition to the other side. The technical and mental processes that I use to create the work allows me to explore the empty space. Passions create my art; and the incorporation of simplicity of shape (rocks - physical) and abstraction of form (silver - spiritual) unveil the emotional content of my personal transformation.

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