

**THESIS**

**RHYTHM OF THE FOREST AND DISTANT SHORES**

Submitted by

Julie Jerman-Melka

Art Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree of Masters of Fine Arts

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall 1998

**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES**

NK  
6498  
.J47  
A4  
1998  
THESIS

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY

November 11, 1998

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER  
OUR SUPERVISION BY JULIE JERMAN-MELKA ENTITLED RHYTHM OF  
THE FOREST AND DISTANT SHORES BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING  
IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ART.

Committee on Graduate Work

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Adviser [REDACTED]

Department/Head/Director [REDACTED]

ABSTRACT OF THESIS  
RHYTHM OF THE FOREST AND  
DISTANT SHORES

This thesis explores the inspirations and passions which transform my ideas into physical forms. My thesis work is the integration of the visual, the tactile and my personal spiritual search through my experiences with nature. As an artist, it is important for me to represent a visual balance, combined with tactile qualities, to create a sense of movement. This is achieved by layering metals such as copper, sterling silver and brass. In combination with the traditional metalsmithing techniques of embossing, granulation, anticlastic forming and raising, I create work which has life and takes the viewer on a visual journey. The visual balance and sense of movement is created with various openings that pierce the metal, and also by playing with space and the asymmetry of form. I combine shapes, which have been stretched and textured. Finally, the pieces are soldered together to create rushing, exciting movement. I combine my vision of distant shores, the eyes of aspen trees and my interest in visual illusions and texture to create my metal work.

Julie Jerman-Melka  
Art Department  
Colorado State University  
Fort Collins, CO 80523  
Fall 1998

To my father, who taught me to dream  
and to Jeffrey, who helped me to  
follow that dream.

To: Nilda, the diva of metalsmithing, my mentor and my friend.  
Thank You! For everything.

To: Carol, for her command of the English language and love  
of the arts.

To: Ruth, my friend. Your guidance and insight have been invaluable  
and will be with me always.

To: Linny, for the bumper intellect that capably helped.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION ONE.....	2
PART ONE, RHYTHM OF THE FOREST.....	2
PART TWO, DISTANT SHORES.....	7
SECTION TWO.....	14
PART ONE, JEWELRY.....	14
CONCLUSION.....	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	22

## LIST OF PLATES

Rhythm of the Forest.....	5
Rhythm of the Forest.....	6
Surf Sonata.....	10
Inner Allegro.....	11
Iridescent Shoreline.....	12
Reservoir.....	13
Shoreline Rhapsody.....	16
Forest Floor.....	17
Frosted Rhapsody.....	18
Peel Away.....	19
Rhythm of the Shore.....	20

SECTION ONE  
PART 1  
RHYTHM OF THE FOREST

I love to tell a story. If something has a story behind it, I find it to be much more intriguing because it can elevate the experience and make it unique. Let me tell you a story with my work, a visual story. My story begins with growing up in a remote area in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan along the shores of Lake Superior. I spent much of my youth exploring these shores and the surrounding forests. This is the root of the two strong influences of nature in my work. One is the water: the sand on the beach, the serendipity of the shoreline and found objects such as beach glass I incorporate in my work. The second influence is trees: the texture of the bark, the gestural position of the trunks and the eyes of aspen trees, which I discovered during my years of living, hiking, and skiing in the mountains of Colorado. I find solace and inspiration on the beaches, the distant shores of my youth, and in hiking the mountains of Colorado among the aspen trees.

After enduring windstorms, snow pack, floods, avalanches and infestations, trees become individualized in their appearance. Lightning has scarred the trunks, wind has snapped off tops, fire has chewed at their bases, and rot has hollowed trunks and limbs. All of this creates a physical variety which is characteristic of a diverse and complex forest. For me, the most magnificent natural scene is to be surrounded in a grove of aspen trees, with thousands of eyes looking at me from every direction. Aspens are not long living trees, but there is continuous growth which gives a sense that the groves have witnessed centuries of life with growth, destruction and death. The eyes of the trees are always keeping a vigil. In my work, the eyes are the portals or passageways to

explore the form further and to move into uncharted territory.

My piece titled *Rhythm of the Forest* is a series of trees. The metals used are copper, brass and sterling silver. It is small in scale. The trees were formed, hammer textured, soldered together and finally patinated. Each has its unique personality, just as humans have. With growth comes differentiation and separation, in a sense like the trunk of a tree which differentiates as it grows and spreads into limbs, branches and leaves. The tree is still one, but its different and separate parts contribute to the whole (Lindbergh 97).

There are trees, there is the forest, and then there is my forest. My forest is composed of metal trees which are a metaphor for society and the different personalities within society. The life found in any natural ecosystem can be compared to life in society. For the forest, it would be a woodland society. I want the viewer to take a visual journey into the interior of the trees. I want them to see and explore the internal structure through the layered metals with different levels and portals. The designs of each tree grow organically. In them we can experience contemplation, inner strength and inward attentiveness.

The intimate size of the trees is important for the concept. Patriarch, millennium, sentinel and cathedral are all terms given to groves within the realm of ancient forests. They speak of unimaginable size, primeval emotions and spiritual reverence. They extend like columns to the sky. We feel dwarfed within a grove of trees. I want to create the opposite, an Alice in Wonderland effect, in which the trees are small and dwarfed in the presence of the viewer, creating an intimate visual exploration.

It is important that the *Rhythm of the Forest* be viewed as a forest and not as individual trees. While each tree has individual characteristics and personality, their strength is as a group. David Middleton, a writer and naturalist wrote,

"There is an honesty in music that stirs you to act. There is a rhythm that picks up your feet and moves your mind. There is a melody

that crosses the generations and makes you remember. And there are harmonies that make you become. There is music in the forest as well. Rhythms too soft to hear, but they stir you nonetheless. Melodies that carry you along and harmonies that fall on you as you pass beneath." (Middleton 12)

The trees in my *Rhythm of the Forest* stir you to further exploration of the piece itself but also into the internal self. There is a sense of moving into the forest through each tree with the various textures and layers visually entreating one to explore and discover inner experiences of nature and self. This is a forest of symbols and prolonged echoes.



---

*Rhythm of the Forest*, Copper, brass and sterling silver. Formed, hammer textured and patinated. 19" x 27".



*Rhythm of the Forest*, copper, brass, sterling silver and glass shard. Formed, hammer textured, granulation and patinated. 8" x 12".

SECTION ONE  
PART 2  
DISTANT SHORES

Lake Superior has worked her magic on me in ways that I cannot be put into words, or captured any other way than in my work. To understand Lake Superior, you must have lived with her. I have listened to the lake's voices, the sounds of waves crashing onto the shoreline, felt her calm and stood in the fury that follows her sudden change of action. I have seen her wholeness, her wounds, what she heals and what she doesn't. Her water is clear and cold. I can feel power of the cold, remembering the sensation of the water, my feet and legs exploding with agony. Looking into the deepest part of the lake is like peering into an infinite cosmos. In his diary, explorer George Grant, journeying west with the Fleming expedition wrote, "Those who have never seen Superior get an inadequate, even inaccurate idea by hearing it spoken of as a 'lake', and to those who have sailed over its vast extent the word sounds positively ludicrous. Though its waters are fresh and crystal, Superior is a sea. It breeds storms and rains and fogs, like the sea. It is cold in mid-summer as the Atlantic. It is wild, masterful, and dread as the Black Sea."(Wayland 42)

To comprehend Superior we must change our concept of what a lake is. Lake Superior has more surface area than any lake on earth: 31,280 square miles, roughly the same size as South Carolina. Its three quadrillion gallons of water, ten percent of the world's fresh surface water, could flood all of North and South America to the depth of one foot. This water washes against 2730 miles of shoreline. Superior is a lake bound by finite shores.

My memories are now crystallized in my work: sensing the huge boulders strewn on

the lake bottom, watching waves so large the crests block the view of the horizons, surveying soft sand dunes blending into one another in graceful curves, searching the sand for treasures and simple patterns, marveling at the rugged shores of gravel and sculpted bedrock, watching the fog roll in. Superior is wild and vast, a landscape rich in mystery and illusion. Start your journey with me and become a beachcomber among these sensual forms.

I have witnessed the lake's emotion, expressed by her waves upon the shoreline. Each wave lasts only a moment before another follows, continuing the activity of crashing waves upon the shoreline interacting with each other. This constant movement of waves inspired my sculptural vessel titled *Surf Sonata*. Small in scale, this piece is three organic forms of copper. The vessels were raised by stretching, then hammer textured and finally patinated. They emerge and submerge creating active movement with spaces to explore and can be rearranged to interact with each other, changing the character and invoking further involvement.

As the infinite shoreline continues, the waves become larger and more active. A storm is brewing. This fast, lively movement inspired *Inner Allegro*. This is an open vessel of copper with extensions of copper and brass that hold a broken glass shard. The vessel was raised by stretching, cutting open and thickening and thinning the edges. The extensions were embossed, formed and soldered together. Finally the piece was patinated and the glass shard mounted. You are looking into the depths of the lake, its cosmos. Suddenly you discover a lively inner movement, the brewing storm. The inner pieces flow and move together to create excitement and exploration. A treasure is discovered emerging from the piece. It is a captured glass shard rushing toward the shore.

The activity of whitecaps crashing upon the shallow boulder-strewn bottom creates an iridescence of mist just above the activity. Another sculptural vessel, *Iridescent Shoreline* is the fury of the storm, the cold rushing water exploding upon the rocks. This

piece is a combination of fine silver, sterling silver and white glass shards. It is small in scale. The vessel was raised by stretching, then the openings were cut and finally the edges hammered and stretched. The extensions were anticlastic formed, the glass shards mounted and finally the piece was patinated. This piece creates a feeling of the intensity of the cold water. The glass shards are suspended and riding a whitecap, creating energy and movement in the piece.

Superior's expression is diverse and shows various emotions. The calm rolling waves gently touching the shore, leaving soft imprints are shown in my piece titled *Reservoir*. This piece is two open vessels of brass and copper. The vessels were raised by stretching, then soldered together and patinated. Again, it is small in scale. The brass vessel creates a calm movement with subtle textures. The smaller copper vessel is active, creating tension within the piece.

You have traveled among the sensual forms and explored the shores with me through my artwork. Perhaps now you have a feeling for the vastness and the power of Superior that is such an integral part of my artwork.



*Surf Sonata*, copper. Raised, hammer textured and patinated. 20" x 16" x 8".



---

*Inner Allegro*, copper, brass and glass shard. Vessel raised. Extensions embossed, anticlastic formed, patinated and glass shard mounted. 17" x 11" x 7".



---

*Iridescent Shoreline*, fine silver, sterling silver and glass shards. Raised, hammer textured, anticlastic formed, patinated and glass shards mounted. 7" x 8" x 4".



*Reservoir*, brass and copper. Raised, hammer textured and patinated. 15" x 9" x 5".

## SECTION TWO

### PART 1

#### JEWELRY

The same influences that inspired *Distant Shores* and *Rhythm of the Forest* are in my jewelry. I also incorporate found objects in my jewelry, to give the pieces an intimate relationship for the wearer and the viewer.

*Shoreline Rhapsody* is a brooch. It has an organic form with a found object. It is sterling silver, brass and a glass shard. It is large in scale. The metal was formed, textured, granulation added, soldered together and patinated. Finally the glass shard was attached. This brooch creates active movement and exploration among the layers of formed metal. This is a water piece. The found object is a glass shard found on the beach. I call it beach glass.

Beach glass is something that gives joy. It is a memory of a stone or glass once retrieved from the sand. I put these fond memories into a talisman to keep and wear on the body in a personal kind of relationship. The process the glass goes through is part of the intrigue. The glass is tumbled and polished by the sand and wave action on its way to the water's edge, the beach, waiting to be discovered. The lake does not reward those who are too anxious, greedy or impatient. Digging for treasures shows impatience, greed and lack of faith. One should wait patiently for the treasures to emerge from the lake. The glass is a treasure discovered on the beach.

*Forest Floor* has an irregular shape. It is fine silver and a glass shard, intimate in size. The metal is hammered and stretched, the granulation applied, round wires forged, then soldered together. It is then patinated and the glass shard mounted. The piece was created for the history, mystery and story of the glass shard.

I want my jewelry to make a personal statement depicting the wearers as

adventurous and self-aware. *Frosted Rhapsody* is a shoulder and neck brooch with several extensions that intertwine. It is sterling silver, brass and glass shard. It is large in scale. The metal was anticlassic formed, hammer textured, the glass mounted and finally patinated. This piece expresses movement through the various layers. It is alive with texture, allowing visual exploration around the neckline.

I love the surprise element of hidden stones, textures, layers and openings within my work. Large in scale, *Peel Away* is an organic form. It is sterling silver and brass, with citrine, green tourmaline and cubic zirconium. The metal was stretched, textured and soldered together. The stones were set and finally the piece was patinated. This piece has layers that peel away and expose another layer, invoking further involvement with the expression of the piece. The faceted gemstones are peeking out from behind openings. They sparkle and wink at the viewer.

For me, the brooch is the purest and most self-contained form. It can be attached to the body's surface and looks like a small painting or sculpture. They are portable pieces of art, *Rhythm of the Shore* which is an organic form. It is sterling silver and brass with three cubic zirconium. The metal was stretched, textured and soldered together, the stones set and finally patinated. This piece has layers of metal with different levels and portals enhancing the interest in exploration.



*Shoreline Rhapsody*, sterling silver, brass and glass shard. Formed, hammer textured, granulation, patinated and glass shards mounted. 9" x 5" x 2".

17



---

*Forest Floor*, fine silver, sterling silver, glass shard. Formed, hammer textured, granulation, patinated and glass shard mounted. 3" x 4" x 1".



---

*Frosted Rhapsody*, sterling silver, brass and glass shard. Anticlastic formed, hammer textured, patinated and glass shard mounted. 26" x 4" x 3".

19



---

*Peel Away*, sterling silver, brass, citrine, green tourmaline and cubic zirconium. Hammer textured, repoussed, patinated and stones mounted. 7" x 5" x 1".



---

*Rhythm of the Shore*, sterling silver, brass with three cubic zirconium. Hammer textured, granulation, patinated and stones set. 12" x 6" x 1".

## CONCLUSION

My work is a visual landscape which explores the inspiration and passion I have that transform my ideas into art. Philosopher Suzanne K. Langer defines art as the "creation of symbolic forms for human feeling" (Langer 30-32). Dynamic structure can express an experience which language is unfit to convey. Feeling, life, motion and emotion are integral parts of my work.

I have taken you on a visual journey, an exploration of my work. I have shared my personal experiences which inspire my work. You have before you the *Rhythm of the Forest*, the *Distant Shores* and my jewelry which tell my visual story.

Nature is constantly growing and changing, as is my artwork. I have enjoyed the challenge and growth in this stage of my artistic life. I look forward to continued growth and the challenges ahead.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Blacklock, Craig. The Lake Superior Images. Cambridge: Adventure Publishing, 1993.
- Langer, Susanne K. Feeling and Form. New York: Routledge, 1953.
- Lindbergh Morrow, Anne. Gift from the Sea. New York: Pantheon Books, 1975.
- Middleton, David. Ancient Forests. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992.
- Wayland, Drew. Superior: The Haunted Shores New York: Gage Publishing, 1983.