

THESIS

CREATING FROM WITHIN

LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNKNOWN

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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This MFA thesis explores insights, relationships, journeys, and conversations with metal: focusing on the sensitivity of creating from the unknown.

People often approach metal as material that needs to be met with force, but for me, metal is sensitive; I joyously allow metal to manipulate me more than I can manipulate it.

My practice in metals is language, the visual play of textures and the journey while remaining open to the beauty and language of the unknown.

When creating, I listen not only to the voice within me, but to the voice of the medium. It never speaks loudly, but it speaks with intentional guidance, that only my spirit can hear. I embrace the metal's tendency to shift and redirect itself, finding peace and excitement in how it guides me towards different possibilities.

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to attending the Master of Fine Arts program at Colorado State University (CSU), I entered the CSU Metalsmithing program as a Post Baccalaureate student. As an older student in the metals program, there was much to adjust to, learn and skillsets to develop.

My undergraduate education developed as an agreement: I made a deal with my parents to study art. I had to agree to a field that they considered financially profitable - I had to study either graphic design or architecture. That was the deal. When I arrived at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I knew I wanted to study metalsmithing. I tried to sneak a switch in my major, but my parents reminded me that a deal was a deal. But I never forgot my love for metals. Finally, 30 years later, I entered a postbaccalaureate program that eventually opened a door for me to study in a graduate program for metalsmithing and jewelry design. Here I now sit as a woman in my 60's writing my MFA thesis, making sure that the dream I possess doesn't die with me. I am giving the dream and my love for metals a chance to live and flourish.

Entering such a technically detailed field as a graphic designer allowed me to be a free thinker when creating in metal. Since I didn't enter the CSU MFA program with the thoughts of how things "should be" when creating in metal, I was open to experiencing the field hoping to understand the possibilities of how things could be. I didn't have a rote memory of metals; I had an envisioning of metal, exploring creation through metal as an abstract thought process. I could see creating in metals differently; my hands and mind were not tied to prior experiences. In this way, I entered with an advantage. I got to see metal for what it is, full of "possibilities." And I am graduating still excited about developing my work in metals from a place of "possibilities."

THE CONVERSATION

How do you take five years of studying materials, concepts, and processes, come to the end of a formal education, and then pull that experience into a paper that solidifies your processes, enlightens readers about how it all manifested, and ultimately how it became the foundation on which I will now stand? This paper seeks to shed light and understanding about that foundation.

Writer Malcom Gladwell notes in his book *Outliers* that “achieving world class expertise in any complex skill requires about 10,000 hours of a deliberate practice.”¹ This thought comes from psychologist K. Anders Ericsson, along with many prominent experts in various realms that agree with this concept, but for me, 10,000 hours is not a magic number for the development of a level of expertise in the realm of the arts and the materials that I choose to work with. I find no truth in that thought process. 10,000 hours has allowed me to begin to understand metals more deeply, initiating a far more in-depth journey of exploration. In total, I’ve been in a 43,830-hour conversation with metals. That is five years of ongoing conversation with metal and here is what those hours have so graciously shared with me, while forming me into a creative, sensitive thinker.

As someone that enters their studio every day often not knowing what the day will bring, but always excited about the possibilities that will emerge, I have come to look forward to taking in the early morning colors of the sky, when I have surrounded myself in quietness and my connection to the universal God mind. My thoughts are hushed, transported, and transformed. These moments give me the breath to think and listen differently, allowing me to connect with

¹ Malcom Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2008), 47.

unknown ideas, experiences, and images. In Susan Stewart's book *The Open Studio*, the essay entitled "On the Art of the Future" follows a similar thought on manifesting experiences via art. She shares that "whatever art makes visible; it does by referring to the invisible from which the visible emerge bringing these abstract elements into tangible form."² Her thought supports that art can first exist in the unseen, then becomes visible as it emerges from the unknown. In my daily practice, I work to bring my materials into that state of becoming.

Ralph Waldo Emerson says art is an "activity of the spirit, the soul of the artist is the creator of the useful and beautiful, and to make anything useful or beautiful, the artist must be submitted to the universal mind...the God within us."³ For me, God speaks when I am still, when I can hear the "whispering beneath the surface of things."⁴ It is in this state of being fully present that one can "receive the drop of the initial impulse toward transcendent creation."⁵ It is here in these moments that I get to rest in unconventional thoughts, thoughts that allow the outcomes to be loosely controlled. This detour from the expected grid-like presentation to the world may be viewed by traditional metalsmiths as a metal practice being unacceptable, a little wabi-sabi, if that is possible for metals, but I receive it as refreshing! I see wabi-sabi as it relates to metals as a way of pulling possibilities out of unusual forms. Unusual things have become a norm for me in my working process. I'm thankful for the unusual.

² Susan Stewart, *The Open Studio: Essays on Art and Aesthetics*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 298.

³ Jeff Wieland, 'The Artist as Prophet, Emerson's Thoughts on Art', *Emerson Society Papers*, Volume 42, (2018): 35, doi:10.1353/phl.2018.001

⁴ Enrique Martinez Celaya, 'The Prophet,' *Psychology Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought*, Volume 59, 2 (June 7, 2016): 157-166, doi:10.1080/00332925.

⁵ Carlos Miguel Gomez-Rincon, Natalia Reinoso-Chavez, and Corina Estrada-Barrios, Unfolding Spiritual Understanding through Artistic Creation: Findings of the Laboratory of Art and Spirituality, *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, doi: 10.1177/00846724241295783journals.sagepub.com/home/prj. 10-11

The unexpected provides me with opportunities to look at creating in a way that is not formed from memory, but wide open to the unknown, bringing what is unknown into the known. Leonard Koren wrote in *Wabi Sabi, for Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers*, that “Wabi Sabi is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent and incomplete.”⁶ Wabi Sabi is one of the ways that I often approach metal (Fig. 1). While I may have a vision or sketch, the beauty that happens comes from the unexpected outcomes that emerge during various processes of soldering, raising and/or casting. Those unexpected outcomes often feel more beautiful or exciting than my initial ideas, always teaching me about the material and how we respond to each other’s energies. In all of this, I enter a place where I learn so much more about what’s emerging, while developing a deeper understanding of the material. This is how metal and I have our conversations. We respond back and forth to each other at every turn. Listening and watching what the metal wants to do is key to my working process. Can I make the metal do what I want it to do? Yes, but what’s the beauty and or wonderment of that? Especially when something otherwise unknown can emerge. Eric Georges notes in the book *A Craftsman’s Legacy*, that to “become good at anything you have to persist past the point where you even know what you’re doing. It’s stepping onto a bridge that you haven’t built yet.”⁷ Give me the UNKNOWN every time. I can always go back and create the known, but the unknown only comes when it’s ready to be received. An important part of my work is the ongoing journey of finding what is possible. Metal can present itself to us in a way that can be very unexpected. In my hands, metal begins to have a conversation with me about being open to unknown possibilities.

⁶ Leonard Koren, *Wabi Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets and Philosophers*, (Berkeley, Ca., Stone Bridge Press, 1994), 7

⁷ Eric Georges, *A Craftsman Legacy. Why Working with Our Hands Gives Us Meaning*, (Chapel Hill, NC., Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, NC, 2019), 16

During my time at CSU, I have been given long and deep moments of insight and enlightenment, often producing the ending of thoughts and the beginning of awareness, both providing an opportunity to notice how my work speaks. Presently my work is sharing a narrative with the viewer. Sharing a story about how I am seeing and viewing a world that is fighting so hard to eliminate my presence and the history of my ancestors. While metal is often seen as solely for adornment, part of its role is to convey complex narratives evoking and providing insight into the artist's mind, soul and spirit. According to Japanese Mingei artist Tsubasa Yamaguchi “art is a language without words.”⁸ This language without words allows for the expression of true feelings, emotions and personal narratives, transcending traditional communication barriers, conveying a message that spoken words cannot, adding to my belief that work, and creating, comes from the unknown first, a place without words.

This past year, I have been creating and making from a place of weariness, this place where the pressing from the world outside of me has now positioned me to create and make in hopes of restoration of my thoughts, soul, spirit, energies. Presently, I feel deflated, searching for my breath, a light, a fractured glimpse of restoration. The world has placed me in a realm where I am consistently observant, working from a place of raw authenticity, a place from where I am deeply feeling my experiences. Presently, my work has begun to speak loudly about this now, a time in my life that I can't hide from. I'd love to cover myself right now and hide. Hide until the uncertainty, pain, and hate are over, but if I did, I'd miss this opportunity to create deeply from my inside, and I may never experience these feelings and emotions again. Being an empathic person often makes me hypersensitive to my environment, so my emotions never shut completely down anymore. I often take a moment to rest in hope of silencing my response to the

⁸ Tsubasa, Yanaguchi, *Blue Period, Kondansha Comics*, English Edition, Vol 1. (October 13, 2020)

world, but while in that state of reset I often wake with an urgency to create, to lay my hands on whatever material willing to allow me to have a conversation with it.

Metals and other mediums provide me with the opportunity to explore my own interior landscape and to figure out what's being said, what's pressing on me, what's yelling at me from my nervous system, my mind, my heart, my spirit, and then to figure out how those emotions want to be pushed out into the world through a different conversation, a different narrative. Lately I have been pulling material from nature and combining it with metal, to bring about objects and narratives that express the concept of hiding and emersion. It is my mental response to life and the need to hide all that is good and beautiful for preservation and protection.

Our mental and emotional response to life can become how we project our work into the world. Professor of Art and Education Elliot Eisner shares, "They [art] are images of feelings that formulate for our cognition, through the arts we learned to see what we had not noticed, to feel what we had not felt and to employ forms of thinking that are in general indigenous to the arts. These experiences are consequential, for through them we engage in the process through which the self is remade."⁹ In a study from the Laboratory of Art and Spirituality, it is shared that "artistic creations gives meaning to spiritual experiences because these experiences are commonly described as forms of insight into something felt as divine that is ineffable."¹⁰ This thought provides an awareness that we often create from our souls. Creativity comes from a place where only the heart can first hear. "Suppose it hints at another dimension other than common awareness."¹¹ Working from and through the unknown, I am inspired by artists that

⁹ Elliot W. Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, (New Haven CT. and London, Yale University Press, 2002) 12

¹⁰ Carlos Miguel Gomez-Ricon, Natalia Reinosco-Chavez, and Corina Estrada-Barrios, 'Unfolding Spiritual Understanding Through Artistic Creation: Finding of the Laboratory of Art and Spirituality,' *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*. doi:10.1177/00846724241295783journals.sagepub.com/home/prj.10

¹¹ Mary G. Padgelek, *In the Hand of the Holy Spirit: The art of J.B. Murray*, (Macon Georgia, Mercer University Press, 1952). 3

create from the spiritual realm, and philosophers and writers that think in the realm of the invisible to the visible, the unknown into the known, that share thoughts like:

Art that is spiritually inspired has reminded people throughout time that there exists those who believe they respond to another dimension and seek to express this understanding through visual arts. Such artists are assumed to possess a visionary style of gathering information from their lives; they believe they are able to see divine connections to the human and the spiritual enclosed in the material.¹²

For some this way of thinking and working feels foreign in thought, but it is true to my approach. Iranian artist Parviz Tanavoli in a 2021 interview with *Artsy* notes that, “the resurgence of spirituality is more present than ever in contemporary art...checking in with the spirit can remind us of something greater than ourselves and give us hope... spiritualist art in particular has resurfaced within contemporary art scene offering a space where viewers can engage with deeper questions of existence, purpose, and healing, bringing about a renewed interest in how art can connect with the unseen and intangible.”¹³

The spiritual part of this process is listening as metal converses with me and then pulling from that often-quiet conversation. Painter J.B. Murray is another artist that speaks about the creativity of his work coming from “an unknown place where the heart hears a word”¹⁴ (Fig. 2). Murray often places within his paintings writings that he notes as coming from unknown heavenly realms. Yes, very often while working my heart too, hears a word, a pulling to slow down and observe what is taking place within my hands. Creativity is beyond ordinary conception:

Perseverance, patience, belong to the making, and in that slow contemplation: colors, textures, words, fabrics, and weaves germinate. Then artworks take form. Sometimes they are imagined, sometimes improvised, and sometimes they result astonishingly.

¹² Mary G. Padgelek, *In the Hand of the Holy Spirit: The art of J.B. Murray*, (Macon Georgia, Mercer University Press, 1952), 2.

¹³ Salome Gomez-Upegui, ‘Why Contemporary Artist Are Embracing Spirituality in Their Work,’ *Artsy Magazine*, Aug. 12, 2021, [https:// www.artsy.net](https://www.artsy.net)

¹⁴ Mary G. Padgelek, *In the Hand of the Holy Spirit: The art of J.B. Murray*, (Macon Georgia, Mercer University Press, 1952), 2.

They happen, and to create is to float, to be adrift but in connection with the ether, which is with the sublime force of the intangible, which artworks make visible.¹⁵

Humans use stories to make sense of our experiences and transmit knowledge. Our stories communicate cultural and historical narratives which you will find in several of my neck pieces, preserving and transmitting stories through time. The narrative power in jewelry lies in its capacity to act as containers of stories. Unlike a great deal of painting, metal can provide viewers with a difficult time in locating a narrative. This is primarily because the mindset is to see jewelry as decoration on the body, not necessarily as a way for the body to tell a story outside of adornment, but jewelry does possess a unique ability to bring about complex narratives without uttering a single word. In my work, metal conveys a narrative through its visual and tactile elements (Fig. 3, Fig. 3.1 and Fig. 4.0). These neckpieces were created to bring to the wearer and or viewer an emotional understanding and connection to what is happening in the world around them. Wearing this work becomes an act of witnessing and commitment, thus broadening a narrative. Once worn, the piece becomes part of the wearer and via alchemy, the wearer becomes part of the piece, although once it leaves my hands, the interpretation is no longer mine. The wearer must be bold in his/her stance to wear some of my pieces, without flinching. Will there be a channeling of energy, yes, I believe so. Figure 3 is a neckpiece called “Adorned but Not Free.” This piece carries the weight and pain of never forgetting the past, while paying attention to how we as African Americans work so very hard to be part of what society says we need to be in order to be viewed as accomplished human beings while all the time, it never matters. No matter our accomplishments as African Americans we are not considered to be enough, regardless of our education, our finances or how pretty and shiny our houses and cars are. We are adorned, but

we are not free. “Strange Fruit” (Fig. 4) is a narrative about the physical hanging of African American men and women. This neckpiece is present to say very loudly, this hanging and treatment of Black/African Americans will never happen or be tolerated again. I created these pieces to tell and maintain the life history of African Americans, which our present government and parts of society are trying to erase.

Metal artist Daniel Kruger shares “Jewels that echo the artwork they encounter carried by the deep conviction that jewelry through its intimate connection to the body both physical and cultural is just as powerful a medium as the great works of art to question our existence, our identities, and our memories. Art seeks to capture the uniqueness of a subject.”¹⁶ Krueger goes on to say that the jewelry that he makes is to “empower the wearer, they contain a story. Its place can be found on the body or a space, it can be jewelry or an object of contemplation or protection, created to be touched, felt, to be held in conversation between your fingers. It can be both jewelry and an artifact conceived and made by one person for the enjoyment and or the understanding by another person.”¹⁷ (Fig. 5). When I’m working, I’m bringing a piece into the world to be held, to be worn, observed. An energy is present; a form has once again emerged from the unknown. Kruger goes on to share that, “Jewelry is not simply for decoration but belongs to a category of objects charged with meaning, precious values, and an invitation to hand down from generation to generation. Jewelry is both an object and a profound witness to our lives.”¹⁸ In my first year of studying metal, I never thought metal/jewelry as a vector for storytelling, then it hooked me. I created a piece called “I’ll Never Forget You” to remember the death of my father and his military funeral; this piece became a narrative for me about his history

¹⁶ Daniel Kruger, ‘Portrait in Jewellery as a Painter,’ *KLIMT02*, 09.12.2013.

¹⁷ Daniel Kruger, ‘Portrait in Jewellery as a Painter,’ *KLIMT02*, 09.12.2013.

¹⁸ Daniel Kruger, ‘Portrait in Jewellery as a Painter,’ *KLIMT02*, 09.12.2013.

as a soldier and never being forgotten (Fig. 6). A second narrative exploration was an etched and fabricated brass purse which holds the notes that my mother sent before her death from lung cancer (Fig. 7). Those pieces tell their stories, and they also tell mine. I was discovering narrative metal pieces to be the most beautiful way to convey messages, sometimes quietly, sometimes in a loud voice, but I noticed in most metal pieces the viewer still has to observe what is going on to read the narrative, to hear what is being said, because jewelry carries secret messages. Ana Maria Jimenez answers a question in the August 2025 *Metalsmith* magazine article about what jewelry conveys:

Why do some pieces become imbued with thought, power, and strength? What properties make an object that protects us, accompanies us, and gives us strength? Ana answers that working in full awareness - of the body in space, of the silent dialogue with materials and of the information present in the air - allows pieces to become charged. Charged with what? I wouldn't know how to name it. With that something we cannot define but we know exist. It is a force, a bond, a certainty that is felt in the piece and resonates through the body.¹⁹

Metalsmith Lori Talcott notes in a SNAG interview that, “when we put on a piece of jewelry our bodies react consciously or unconsciously, adjusting to its presence...jewelry is not merely symbolic in its transformation, it is an actual physicalized device of change and bearing. When we are properly adorned, holding our past, our pain, and our future close we don't go alone.”²⁰ Some jewelry can hold open time that has left us long ago.

Often, we do not recognize the power of a metal piece. Do we understand our attraction to a piece, do we notice the power of a metal piece when we are placing it on our bodies or holding it in our hands? At one point during the Fall 2025 semester, a raised vessel I was working on went missing from my studio, and I still question why. Was it the way it felt in one's hand that they made it travel with them? Yes, it was a piece that had energy. It was a piece that I

¹⁹Ana Maria Jemenez, ‘How Does Magic Happen?’ *Society of Northern American Goldsmith (SNAG)*, Summer, 2025 Vol.45, 34.

²⁰ Steven KP, ‘Directions in the Dark: The Work and Practice of Lori Talcott,’ *Society of Northern American Goldsmith (SNAG)*, Summer, 2025, Vol.45, 65,71.

was raising with thoughts of my great grandfather. I am happy that each day I was journaling about that experience of raising that vessel because journalling “allows things to deepen through memory, referring again and again to what has already been lived.”²¹ Although that vessel is no longer with me, that energy is somewhere with someone (Fig. 8, Fig. 8.1 and Fig. 8.2).

²¹ Makila Nsika, ‘Exploring Notions of Time, Craft and Design Approach to Jewellery’ *Klimt 02*, January 2026.

THE COMMUNION

The concept of “Communion” is central to my artistic practice defined as a deep intimate sharing and exchanging of thoughts, feelings, and or emotions, usually spiritual in nature representing a communication and relationship that nourishes the soul, spirit and mind. A form of communion with God is the process of creating, “mindful seeing, being completely with a work of art.”²² The moment of intimacy, and its homonymic secret: In-to-me-see.

So, how do we create from the inside first? What is the language that we commune with that begins to speak to us, moving us from thoughts to creating? What is the language of art, that silent yet profound dialogue that transcends words and speaks directly to our senses and emotions? Art in its many diverse forms is a powerful medium that allows avenues for various types of communication of thoughts, feelings, and ideas, giving room for understanding the world in which we live. The language of art allows us to convey narratives, evoke emotions, create realities, and express abstract concepts. These concepts can speak a language that resonates with our heart and mind, enriching our understanding of the world and how we fit within it.

My work speaks truth as I feel it. It talks about sacredness, protection, hidden thoughts, hidden beauty afraid to present itself to a world so full of hate and contradiction. Yet it peeks at us, afraid to come out because the carelessness of others may damage its essence.

I've been given the gift to create. There is nothing more important to me in this world than allowing my mind, soul, spirit, and body to dance in this realm of creating.

²² Turner Houston, ‘Communion: The Art of Observation,’ *Making It*, Posted March 16,2018, [March 2018 – Making It!](#)

Some of my pieces talk about the history of pain, the pain no one forgets because it's traumatic, ongoing, everlasting. It is historical pain, pain I must look at because it runs through my blood, through my soul, through my spirit. And yet some pieces there is a vein of peace that surfaces.

Most of my work is textural because I believe that we need to feel when we see, touch and hold works of art, and it needs to touch us back. When our eyes see texture, that texture has a conversation with our brain. When we hold and feel something, it tells a deeper story once in our hands or being stroked by our fingers. Touching and feeling creates a more intimate relationship not only with work but with life itself. In my piece "I'm Hungry," the deeper story is about food insecurity. The image shows a spoon surrounded by spikey thorns, the piece itself tells us, that food can be present in many places, but if we as humans don't have access to food, no matter how loud that dinner bell rings, we cannot eat (Fig. 9). Touching and seeing the piece describes how painful hunger can be.

This work means life to me; it gives me my breath. It connects me to my past and opens every avenue in the future. The more I understand my relationship with metal and painting the deeper our conversations with each other become. Although resolution to concepts at times can become complex and the answers can become a long slow dance with each other, I have learned to never stop the dance or the movement in the process of working or understanding the conversation trying to take place. Ralph Waldo Emerson says that "a person is always spoken to from behind and is unable to turn to and see the speaker, if he listens with insatiate ears richer and greater wisdom is taught to him, his health and greatness consists in his being the channel

through which heaven flows to earth, and an ecstatically state takes place in him.”²³ Our work will always speak to us; the question is how often do we listen.

²³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Method of Nature, *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Fireside Edition* (Boston and New York, 1909), Vol.1.

THE JOURNEY

Writer, Steven Pressfield, author of *The Artist's Journey: The Wake of the Hero's Journey and the Lifelong Pursuit of Meaning*,²⁴ suggests in his book that the stories carried by our soul and spirit are written within the "secret history" that we acquire during our personal life journey. Our soul and spirit carry stories. This thought seems to speak a similar language to my journey with metals. When I am working it feels very much like a private journey of solitude and magic.

This journey of creating involves a deep introspection and connection to my inner self, allowing space for my spirit to emerge, and courage to pull forms from the unknown. I often have to ask myself, should I pull from that space and bring it into the world? Are people ready? Am I ready?

As a metalsmith, I am carving out a space for myself in a world that once believed that we as metalsmiths and blacksmiths possessed powers. Powers to change and manipulate solid materials, creating a spiritual presence within the community. In the Mande tribe of West Africa, blacksmiths have been noted as intermediaries between the physical and spiritual realms from ancient times to the present day. Others like me, who historically have only been a few, would have rested in our connection with metals and the belief that we possessed the power to transform objects and nature.

Spending time in my studio has given me the opportunity to begin to understand the process of emergence; emergence from hidden places or the past, sometimes revealing and sometimes concealing, but intentionally developing an understanding of how things can become.

²⁴ Steven Pressfield, [*The Artist's Journey: The Wake of the Hero's Journey and the Lifelong Pursuit of Meaning*](#), ed. Shawn Coyne (New York: Black Irish Entertainment LLC, 2018)

When ideas or concepts begin to emerge from the unknown it feels as if I am creating from a spiritual realm, pulling ideas and or possibilities from a deeper place within me. My ability to see the emergence of a piece comes from my capacity to hear and see from within my spirit.

Creating from my spirit means approaching the process from my inner self, creating a deeper connection, a spiritual practice that's also an aesthetic pursuit, prioritizing the process over perfection, releasing judgment, and allowing my authentic self to guide the work, often leading to a deeper sense of self-discovery.

Sometimes this process of creating is known as alchemy, and at the heart of alchemy is the aim to “imitate nature and transcend it, to create a new reality.”²⁵ To move matter and things beyond their natural form, structures and energies, always leaves something changed. At times it is creating a new reality for myself and the wearer. Bringing with it mystery, and giving objects a soul, “doing what the divine creator has done.”²⁶ Being able to see and sense in a greater way through awakened spiritual senses, the ones we've hidden for protection to keep our sensitivities and vulnerabilities safe, are two important things which make us fearless, beautiful spirits in human form.

Cecile Maes shares that, “artists use and claim jewelry as an ingredient in a device questioning society, the body and its interaction with the piece's production holds significant importance.”²⁷ My neckpieces “Adorned but Not Free,” “I Hear You Coming,” and “Strange Fruit- Never Again” question society's acceptance and how society saw and/or sees the presence of African Americans in America.

²⁵ Nora Landes, How the Mysterious Practice of Alchemy Continues to Influence Modern Artist, *Artsy*, Nettoday, October 2016.

²⁶ Nora Landes, How the Mysterious Practice of Alchemy Continues to Influence Modern Artist, *Artsy*, Nettoday, October 2016.

²⁷ Cecile Maes, What is Contemporary Jewellery, A Proposal for a Contemporary Definition of Art Jewelry, *KLIMT02*, May 22, 2024.

I listen to what my soul and spirit have communicated with the material, and then we bring things into the world. Elliot Eisner, professor of art at Stanford University, shares that:

In the process of working with materials, the work itself secures its own voice and helps set up the direction in which it will go. The maker is then guided and in fact at times surrenders to the demands of the emerging forms. At this time opportunities that happen in the process of working are encountered that were not envisioned, then the work begins, speaking so eloquently about the promise of emerging possibilities that new options are pursued succinctly, providing a surprise of a fundamental reward. For all creative work is bestowed by the work on its maker.²⁸

I create giving myself permission to shift direction, to rest with a piece when I'm not understanding its process, to redefine my intentional purpose. Philosopher Jane Bennett shared in *Vibrant Matter* that "objects are actors within their own right, they possess thing power, an innate ability to act, affect, and exert agency, rather than being merely passive or inert material"²⁹ The question will always be, how will we interact with them? How will we listen to objects as actors? Sometimes those objects are pulled from my historical past, something that comes from deep within me, past impressions of my ancestors, an ancestral history that is encoded in me wishing to present itself in the now. Philosopher and writer Karen Barad reminds us that "The past matters and so does the future, but the past is never left behind, never finished once and for all and the future is not what will come to be in an unfolding of the present moment; rather the past and the future are enfolded participants in matter's becoming."³⁰ Every object stands for something more than itself; it is a symbol, layered with meaning, memory, and spirituality. Objects have a purpose and they as objects are committed to that purpose. Barad continues to share that, "objects are not passive, but are active participants in an ongoing process of

²⁸ Elliot W. Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, (New Haven CT and London, Yale University Press, New Haven CT. and 2002) 7

²⁹ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010). 6

³⁰ Karen Barad, *Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter in Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2007). 181

becoming. Objects are never still, they are always emerging and developing with themselves and the environment surrounding them.”³¹

Many contemporary artists and designers have influenced my work. I use the world around me and my experience to create various works in metal as well as painting. As much as I would like to believe that I am the creator of the final piece, I am not. Metal and I together do this dance of the two-step, the slow drag, and the wind me up, I cuss it out, and it cusses me out, and metal always wins to emerge into the world as it sees fit. I will start with developing a piece but in the process that piece may take on a life of its own and within that process I have no fear of exploring where that metal may take me. At times the thought process of my work comes about through my life experiences; other times there are pieces that have come about through experimentation or materialization. There are some pieces in my work that are about transforming consciousness. Shifting one’s perception, awareness and hopefully developing the understanding of the why in one’s own thinking. Asking oneself, why am I thinking or responding this way? With these questions, there is also the hope that one will release old, outdated patterns and gain a deeper understanding of their responses to various concepts in their life. Connecting the tangible to the intangible allows for a new way of being and thinking in the world, one that goes beyond preexisting thought processes. There will always be a desire to create in a way that brings about deeper thoughts, and feelings, a more profound awareness of that which stands before us. The fact that sometimes people looking at an artist’s work may never connect with the work itself, but if the work makes you think or want to get closer to

³¹ Barad, Karen, *Agential Realism: How Material-Discursive Practices Matter In Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. (Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 2007). 182

experiencing it, then that is a spirit-opening moment. Hopefully, a work of art can break you free from seeing the ordinary.

Beginning with a question mark, in a what if, I begin with a seed. In his book *The Creative Act: A Way of Being*, musician and producer Rick Rubin shares, “Allow the seed to follow its own path toward the sun. The time to discriminate will come later. For now, allow space for magic to enter.”³² For me that means I hold what was not meant to be. I literally hold it in my hands; I have moments when I sleep with objects under my pillow that I don’t understand, in hopes of developing a conversation while I sleep; I often wake up with a possibility or an answer. Rubin goes on to say:

Not every seed must grow. But it may be that there is a right time for each one, if a seed does not seem to be developing or responding, consider storing it rather than discarding it. In nature some seeds lie dormant in anticipation of the season most conducive to their growth. This is true of art as well. There are ideas whose time has not yet come, or perhaps their time has come, but you are not ready to engage with them. Other times developing a different seed may shed light on the dormant.³³

This rings deeply true for me in how I approach my work. All things rest with me. I believe that when objects take a turn and go left when I was expecting them to go right, then that is a seed for my next possibility. I hold everything and eventually most things find their place in my work. I’m always open to taking risks. Failure is learning. I learn so much from things falling apart. I find odd beauty in things that should not have been.

Imagination provides a safety net for me to experiment and explore. I’m not afraid to make mistakes or to fail. My professor Haley Bates said, “perfection is the boogeyman.” Upon understanding how I processed my work, I had to release the need for flawless results. I once

³² Rick Rubin and Neil Strauss, *A Creative Act: A Way of Being*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2023), 152.

³³ Rick Rubin and Neil Strauss, *A Creative Act: A Way of Being*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2023), 152.

thought for metalwork to be received and appreciated; it needed to be this smooth shiny object or thing. But I have come to understand that the experiences of my soul are a little too rugged for the smooth shiny approach to metal. Are there pieces of my work that appropriately reflect the smooth and shiny, yes there are. But the majority of the time my spirit moves my thoughts, and hands so much deeper than a smooth peaceful surface.

Embracing the imperfections have become part of my authentic expression. I love imperfections. Imperfections allow me to see and respond differently every time. They have raised my thought processes and taught me to see and understand the unknown. I love living in the unknown. Elliot Eisner wrote in *The Creative Mind*, “A culture populated by people whose imagination is improvised has a static future. In such a culture there will be little change because there will be little sense of possibility.”³⁴ One of my favorite painters, Helen Frankenthaler, shares this thought by noting that the “unpredictable nature of the process is just as important as the canvas. You have to know how to use that accident, how to recognize it, how to control it, allowing for the unexpected outcome, one that allows for a the piece to look intentional as if no accident occurred.”³⁵ Usually, if the metal is intentional in its emergence it never looks like an accident, it always looks like something that should not be, has become.

In 2021, I entered this program knowing nothing, empty and hungry, and now I am leaving with more knowledge and a deeper understanding of metals, myself, how I think and approach my work, but still having a huge capacity for learning and acquiring more. There is so much more to learn and experience as a maker. I am so thankful that I will never be full!

³⁴ Elliot W. Eisner, *The Arts and the Creation of Mind*, (New Haven CT., and London, Yale University Press, 2002) 5

³⁵ Kelly Richman Abdou and Margarita Cole, ‘10 Famous Abstract Artists Who Changed the Way We Look at Painting,’ *My Modern Met*, (August 30, 2022): <https://mymodernmet.com/abstract-artists>.

This work has become part of my lineage. I often journal when working on difficult pieces. It helps me understand what I'm feeling and the reasons behind the difficulty. When I work, I may step away from a piece before it's finished, because I don't presently see place for its emergence, I may not understand it, or have a language for it as yet; sometimes our conversation with each other needs a rest so I can catch up with it. I journal to remind myself to never sacrifice the imagination and a sense of the sacred, never give up on the unknown.

This space of creating a sacred journey is between my relationship with self and the world. It is a place where intimacy happens between me and my work. The emotional side at times often shows up as my spiritual side; spirituality remains an important presence in my journey as a creative. In the seat of my creativity is my spiritual practice. "Consequently, both artistic creation and spiritual searching are forms of commitment to an open-ended search for richer, deeper, more vital and fruitful ways of seeing and living out the sense of who we are and why we are here."³⁶ Knowing this often leaves me fearless.

Spiritually, I live in my rooted heritage holding on to as much as I can, as much as my ancestral nervous system can remember, always making sure that I am listening to my inner truth.

In my hands, metal becomes a conduit for the spiritual energies to have access, for forms to become present before I have an actual understanding of what is to become. There is layered thinking, and a huge beaver building thought process. I am truly a beaver builder. I begin and then I reflect on what I have begun, and then I enter again. Always looking, questioning what is working.

³⁶ Carlos Miguel Gomez-Rincon, Natalia Reinoso-Chavez, and Corina Estrada-Barrios, 'Unfolding Spiritual Understanding Through Artistic Creation: Findings of the Laboratory of Art and Spirituality,' *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, (November 29, 2024): 20, doi:10.1177/00846724241295783journals.sagepub.com/home/prj.

CONCLUSION

I do believe my work has its own language, and I want to continue developing this language, along with a deeper understanding of what the work itself tries to communicate to me to establish itself in the world. I intentionally leave room for my work to *become*. The process of becoming is slower and more intentional in the how and why. The WHY is a big question for me and offers a deeper responsibility in or when creating. I'm no longer a naive student, the questions that come forth when working are moving me much closer to becoming the artist that all of my professors have worked so hard for me to understand in the realm of who and what I need to become before they release me into the world. They have done a great job of helping me understand “intent” being grounded in the intentions of creating and making, knowing who you are, knowing what you do, and knowing why exploration needs to be so very intentional. Being intentional takes time and thought. I've learned a great deal in the freedom of things falling apart, and I will always believe that there is beauty in the unknown.

For me, metal has always been more than just rings and pretty shiny things. This year my work speaks about memories and things in the core of my soul that I never want to forget. I want my work to leave traces of memory; there is the need for African American material culture to exist and remain present in a time that it is so evident that people would prefer to erase it. In this present time my work is leaving traces of the past, hidden secrets, and a present that needs protection. All of my work has become sacred to me because I have come to understand how easily and carelessly it can be erased so I am creating pieces that are reminders of the sacredness of living. I've spent a lot of time over the last few years thinking about texture, spirituality, the language of metal, and learning to understand the message in the waiting.

As I begin to end my 40,000 plus hours here at CSU, I can best explain how I get to where I am in my studio; one day on a walk, I found this dried piece of pumpkin on the ground. I pushed it around with my foot to make sure something wasn't going to jump out at me. Finally, I picked it up and held it. It felt and looked rough, and solid. Another piece for my collection of metal, wood and found objects. As you have heard, I love figuring out how things fit with each other. The pumpkin has waited the longest (Fig. 10). I always knew that it would be a chest plate of some kind, I needed it to cover and protect. I lived with that pumpkin for a long time, always looking for the possibility of it, although I never knew what it would become. Then one day this year I sat it next to a ceramic piece and they married. And then another piece popped up from somewhere and that new piece showed me how to connect the pumpkin and ceramic piece together, once connected a deeper language about protection started pulling from my thoughts about submersion, covering, hiding, and protection. After the connection of pieces and stones, the breast plate began solidifying the conversation on hiding, covering, and caution. The breast plate encompasses my journey in studying metals. It's all about thought, exploration, seeing, listening, understanding, moving, pulling back, starting over, waiting, praying, listening, listening, listening, and listening some more. Our work can tell us the direction it wants and needs to go, but often we pay no attention in our busyness to hurry and complete something. I can't emphasize enough the importance for me to stop and listen waiting for something to be said in my spirit, or something to be shown that I didn't see. For me, these past three years have all been about listening, observation, patience, sensitivity, listening to my soul and spirit, as they move me to the next movement within my work.

John McDonald wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald that “to transform raw materials into things of intricate beauty can be the most painstaking of occupations.”³⁷ For me it will be a love that never ends. Philosopher Suzanne Langer believed, “It’s an Artists greatest ability to know what it feels like to feel the world, and to construct a symbolic image that articulates and carries and embodies such feeling or complex of feelings.”³⁸ All of this comes about through listening from and through your soul.

Five years have taught me a lot, primarily to never quit, to work through until the piece presents itself or until the piece fails. If it fails, figure out why, then go back at it, or see what else can come from it. “Art is all about starting again.”³⁹ Writer David Herzog says, “Keep an appetite for the impossible.”⁴⁰ I stay hungry for the unknown.

Bring the unknown to me, and I will embrace it. Forty-Three Thousand Eight Hundred and Forty Hours has given me the passion to continue the exploration of becoming and to enjoy the journey that continues to lead me to explore the unknown. To always be excited about what each day asks of me when I step into my studio, wherever that studio may be. Whether the studio is as large and gracious as the one I have had at CSU, or as small and tight as the kitchen where I started before arriving here. Either will produce with me. I will continue fearlessly to bring forth from the invisible to the visible. This is my language of metal. I will rest in the continuation of creating my history, my narratives, my stories, because history cannot be erased. Emergence... the invisible into the visible... is my story, my language.

³⁷ John McDonald, Journey of Time Review: Objects of Painful and Perfection, *Sidney Morning Herald*, (August 3, 2018).

³⁸ Susanne Langer and Ian Thomasr, *Problems of Art*, (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1957), 16.

³⁹ David Bayles, and Ted Orland, *The Art and Fear, Observations on the Perils and Rewards of Artmaking*, (St. Paul, MN, The Image Continuum Press, 2005), 10.

⁴⁰ David Herzog, *The Glory Invasion*, (Pennsylvania, Destiney Image, 2007), 25.

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FIGURES



Figure 1.
Joclyn W. Goss
Hidden Secrets, 2025
Bronze, Fine Silver, Amethyst Stone
3" x 2" x 25"
Photo: Sofia Rankow



Figure 1a. Details
Joclyn W. Goss
Hidden Secrets, 2025
Bronze, Fine Silver, Amethyst Stone
3" x 2": x 25"
Photo: Sofia Rankow



Figure 2.
James B. Murray
Untitled, 1987
Marker and Paint on Paper
23.75" x 17.75"
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY
[Untitled | Souls Grown Deep](#)
(accessed 03.01.2026)



Figure 3.
Joclyn W. Goss
Adorned but Not Free, 2023
Argenteum Silver, Cornelian, Garnet, Steel
4"x 1.5" x 25"
Photo: Haley Bates



Figure 3a. Details
Joclyn W. Goss
Adorned but Not Free, 2023
Argenteum Silver, Cornelian, Garnet, Steel
4" x 1.5" x 25"
Photo: Haley Bates

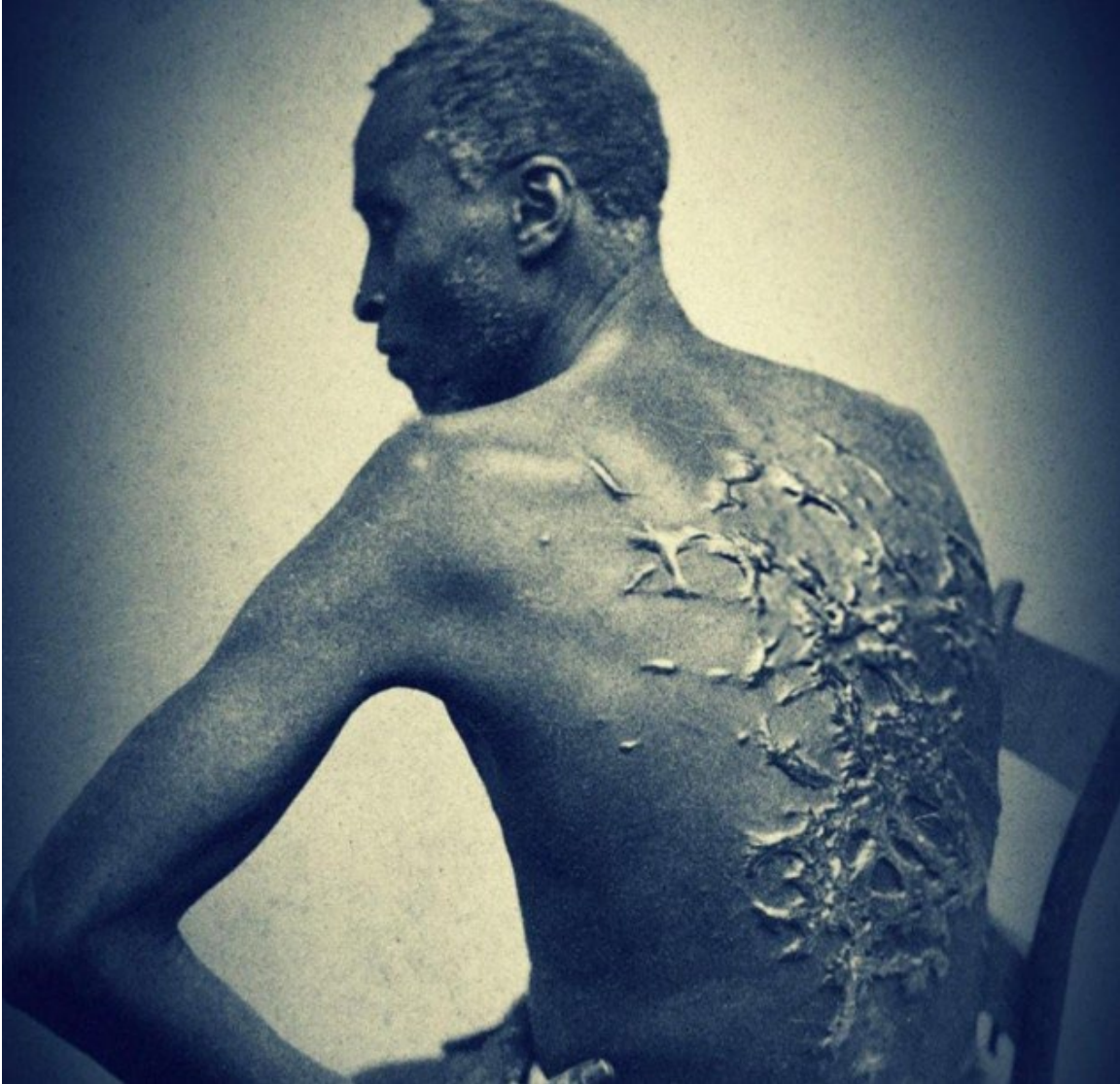


Figure 3.1.
Scourge Back, Poor Peter, April 2, 1863
[The Shocking Photo of 'Whipped Peter' | HISTORY](#)
(accessed 03.25.2026)
Source: McPherson and Oliver, Harpers Weekly



Figure 4.
Joclyn W. Goss
Strange Fruit – Never Again, 2025
Bronze, Fine Silver, Brass, Garnet. Sterling Silver
3" x 2": x 25"
Photo: Sofia Rankow



Figure 4.a Details
Joelyn W. Goss
Strange Fruit – Never Again, 2025
Bronze, Fine Silver, Brass, Garnet. Sterling Silver
3" x 2": x 25"
Photo: Sofia Rankow



Figure 5
Daniel Kruger
Bracelet, 1966
Amber, Div, Gemstones, Gold
Jewellery - danielkruger.de



Figure 6.
Joclyn W. Goss
Memorial Pin - *I'll Never Forget You*, 2023
Argenteum Silver, Brass, Steel
3" x 2"
Photo: Sofia Rankow



Fig. 7.
Joclyn W. Goss
Memorial - *Remember What I Told You*, 2023
Brass, Simulated Sapphire, Glass Beads
6" x 6.5"
Photo: Haley Bates

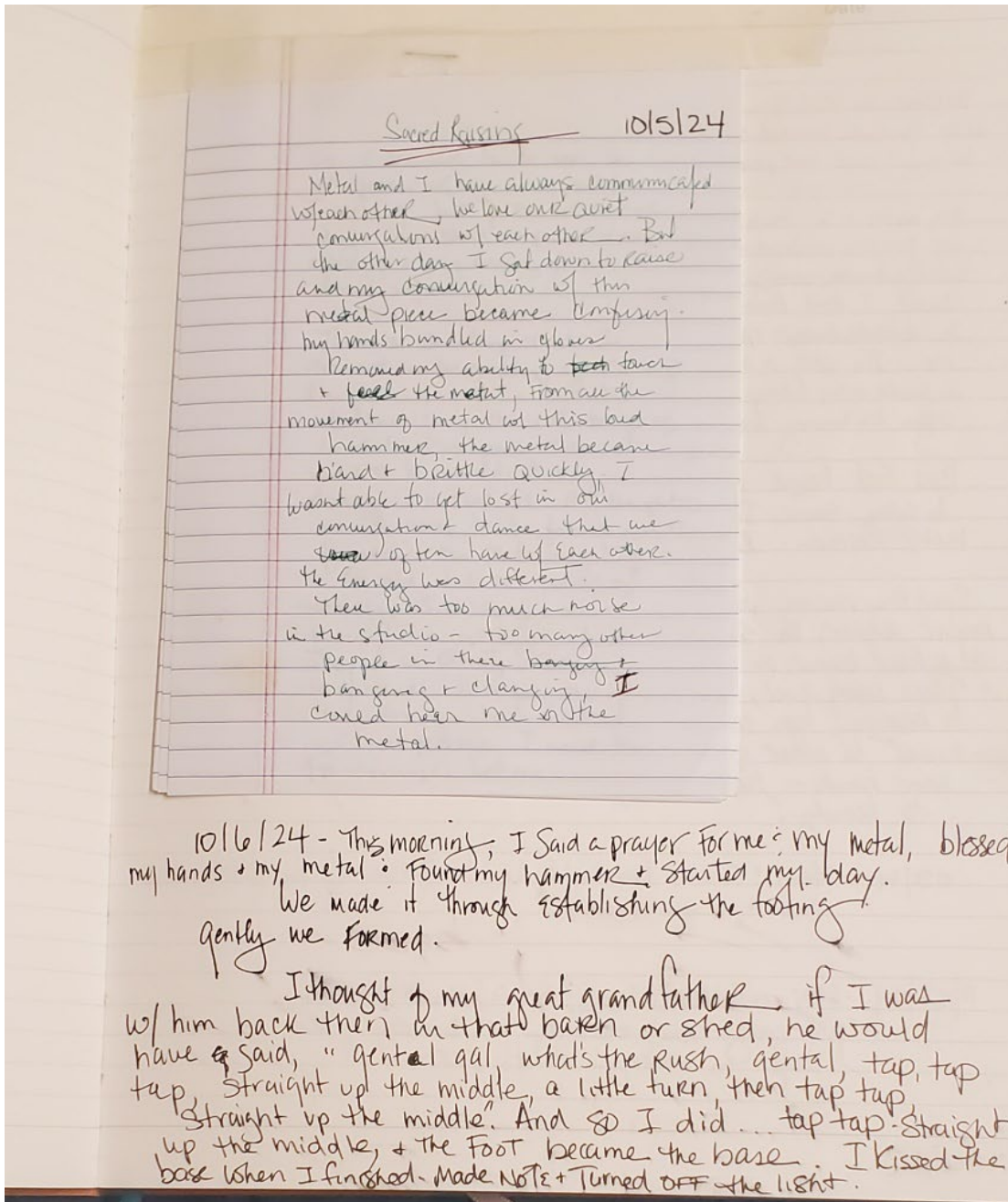


Figure 8
Journal Entry
Joclyn W. Goss

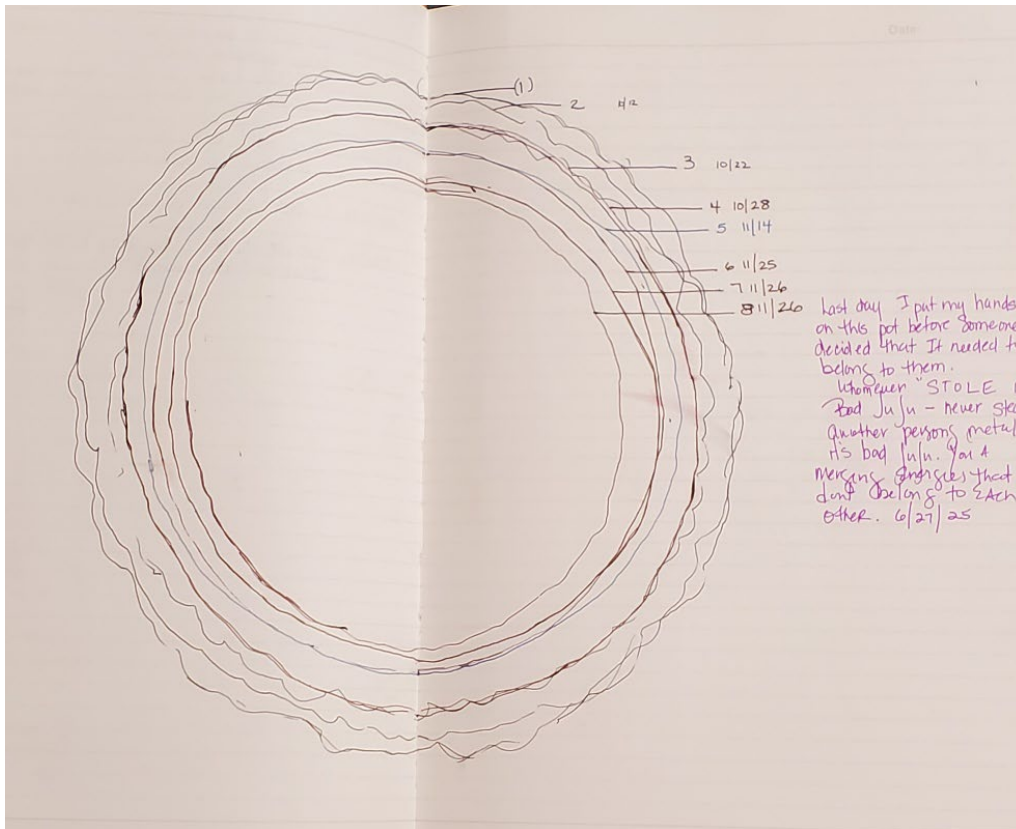


Figure 8.1. Journal Entry



Figure 8.2 Missing Raising Bowl, Copper



Figure 9.
Joclyn W. Goss
I'm Hungry, 2024
Wood, Copper, Amethyst Stones, CZ Stone, Brass
5" x 3": x 3"
Photo: Sofia Rankow



Figure 10
Joclyn W. Goss
Protect Me, 2026
Pumpkin Skin, Bronze, Brass, Wood, Copper, Silver, Clay
24" x 18"
Photo: Joclyn W. Goss