

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

PENTIMENTO AND UNDERLYING STRUCTURE

A Written Accompaniment to the Thesis Exhibition

by

Laurie Elizabeth Omstead

A PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ART

CALGARY, ALBERTA  
APRIL, 1998

©Laurie Elizabeth Omstead 1998



**National Library  
of Canada**

**Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services**

**395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

**Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada**

**Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques**

**395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada**

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

**The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.**

**The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.**

**L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.**

**L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.**

**0-612-31319-0**

**Canada**

## Abstract

This paper accompanies an exhibition of visual art entitled "Pentimento". It discusses my inquiry into underlying structures: ideas, bones, canvas and stretchers.

I have been slitting and combining canvases, removing material to discover its residue, bleaching to find imagery and form, and finally I am using light-sensitive emulsion to record and ultimately represent the gesture of reduction. By taking away objects such as pennies, stencils and bones, that create images, I have found new dimensions both on and within the surface of the canvas.

These processes have created illusions of form where there is actually nothing. Eventually, no medium remains, no residue, nothing to pollute the message or the image. The essence of illusion is now embedded in the underlying structure or support.

## Acknowledgements

Many thanks go to Gerry Hushlak, my supervisor. His question "Why don't you paint?", provoked me to write this paper. Gerry is enthusiastic, energetic and humorous. I wish to acknowledge the continued encouragement, feedback and friendship offered to me by my former advisor, Gerald Ferguson. I thank Bill Laing for pointing out early in my graduate program that my work is "more about water than it is about fish". He is responsible for the title Remembering Water in my recent work. The level of professionalism which both Bill Laing and Peter Deacon have brought to my Committee will leave an indelible memory.

Anne Severson, my academic advisor, has given me the confidence to write about my art work. Anne's dedication, resourcefulness, kindness, and friendship cannot be overestimated or sufficiently reimbursed.

Marcia Perkins has inspired me through her Anatomical Drawing Course. It is one of the most valuable 'art school' experiences that I have encountered. As her Teaching Assistant and student, I have had the opportunity to think and grow as a person, as well as an artist.

I thank Mogens Smed, of Smed International, for being a willing and generous corporate sponsor.

I thank the Alberta Foundation for the Arts for my scholarships and The Fine Arts Associates for honouring me with a Travel Grant to visit New York City.

I thank The Department of Art at The University of Calgary for giving me the opportunity to work at the graduate level. I especially thank Helen Miller, our Graduate Secretary. It was her kind and friendly voice at the other end of my long distance telephone call which encouraged me to apply to this particular MFA Program.

I thank Mamie and Grandpa Omstead for their continued interest in my education and for their extremely generous financial assistance.

Most of all, I am indebted to Arthur Nishimura. It is he who has unveiled the beauty of Alberta to me.

## Dedication

To my children, Jay and Colleen, for their love and flexibility.

To my parents, Maeve, a poet, and Jake, a fisherman.

To all of my new friends, especially Cheryl, Susan, Bernie, Jennifer and  
Anne.

For Art, my patient and inspiring partner.

# Table of Contents

	Page
Approval . . . . .	ii
Abstract. . . . .	iii
Acknowledgements . . . . .	iv
Dedication. . . . .	v
Table of Contents . . . . .	vi
List of Figures . . . . .	viii
I. <b>Pentimento: Introduction.</b> . . . . .	1
II. <b>Canvas: Underlying Structure.</b> . . . . .	3
A. Historical Context . . . . .	3
B. Mythological Context . . . . .	4
C. Making of Canvas Cloth: Spinning . . . . .	.6
D. Fabric Manipulation: Resist Dyeing . . . . .	.7
E. Fabric Manipulation: Shibori . . . . .	.8
III. <b>Life: Underlying Structure</b> . . . . .	11
IV. <b>Early Graduate Studies in Alberta</b> . . . . .	16
A. Early Work: Loaded Canvas . . . . .	17
B. Next: Manipulated Canvas . . . . .	21
V. <b>Post Modern Project</b> . . . . .	28

<b>VI.</b>	<b>Strange Attractors: Process</b>	31
	A. Strange Attractors I, Woven Imagery	31
	B. Strange Attractors: The Series	37
<b>VII.</b>	<b>Integrating the Past with the Present</b>	42
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>Transforming with Sunlight</b>	46
	A. Cyanotype Process.	46
	B. Thoughts on Cyanotype	47
<b>IX.</b>	<b>Recent Work</b>	49
	A. Bone Imagery	51
	B. Consequent Effects	58
<b>X.</b>	<b>Pentimento: Conclusion</b>	59
	 Bibliography	 66
	Appendix One: Recipe for Cyanotype Emulsion.	71
	Appendix Two: List of Works in the Thesis Exhibition	73

# List of Figures

Figure	Page
1-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Heads or Tails?</u> , January 1996 . . . . .	20
1-2 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Heads or Tails.</u> , February 1996. . . . .	20
2-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Wishing Well - Well Wishing</u> , 1996 . . . . .	23
2-2 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Fern Penny</u> , 1996 . . . . .	23
3-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Strange Attractors II</u> , 1996 . . . . .	24
3-2 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Old Fisherman's Wife</u> , 1997 . . . . .	24
4-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>The Rilke Piece, Verso</u> , 1997 . . . . .	26
5-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Post Modern Project</u> , 1998 . . . . .	30
6-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Strange Attractors I, Woven Imagery</u> , 1996 . .	36
7-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Strange Attractors IV</u> , 1996 . . . . .	38
8-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Strange Attractors VI</u> , 1996 . . . . .	41
9-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Fish out of Water/Net</u> , 1997. . . . .	43
10-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Bone Poem II</u> , 1997 . . . . .	54
11-1 Laurie E. Omstead, <u>Homo Aestheticus</u> , 1997 . . . . .	55



## I. Pentimento: Introduction

For me, Art-making is my bestowal of significance. Art-making is the human act of "making special"<sup>1</sup>, in Ellen Dissanayake's words. Visual art, like music or the Internet, has the potential to be an international, cross-cultural, universal language or medium.

I have the training to look at ideas and objects from a kaleidoscopic point of view. Because I have studied Art History, Colour, Design, Painting, Photography, Printing, Sculpture, Textile Manipulation and Weaving, I have the opportunity to single out or combine media as required. Working with a vast vocabulary of mediums has made me aware of the material qualities inherent in each.

I have traveled extensively and have become aware of other ways of seeing, other modes of art-making. My trips have taken me to Italy, France, England, Scotland, Holland, Belgium, The United States of America, Japan, China, Mexico, and across Canada. I have seen that Art is all-encompassing. It is not just concerned with covering up surfaces with manufactured pigment.

Currently, I have been researching alternative mediums to paint because I believe it is a politically charged medium. Like many other painters I continue to use the stretched canvas or fabric surface as a support for my

---

<sup>1</sup> "My own notion of art as a behaviour...rests on the recognition of a fundamental behavioural tendency that I claim lies behind the arts in all their diverse and dissimilar manifestations from their remotest beginnings to the present day... I call this tendency *making special* and claim that it is as distinguishing and universal in humankind as speech or the skillful manipulation of tools." Ellen Dissanayake, What Is Art For?, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991) p.92. (Italic emphasis is mine)





I spent the early part of my graduate research discovering the mysteries of reduction, subtraction, discharge, deletion and removal. "It is my intention to continue to push, probe, and manipulate the 'canvas' towards the greatest potential I can or cannot imagine for it", I stated in my letter of application to The University of Calgary in 1995. "I wish to further understand, through exploration and experimentation, the 'stretched fabric surface' as a medium which is capable of both telling a story as well as inspiring one."

For this reason, I have spent countless hours experimenting with the support, revealing and concealing the underlying structure of the painter's illusionistic surface. For me, this has become the essence of my painting research during graduate school.

Cloth canvas has come to be regarded as a dominant means of supporting and stabilizing the painted surface. It is my desire to deal with the artist's ground, paper or canvas. Incorporating the characteristics of this ground into the overall concept or design of a work of art is prime research for me now. When some or all of the underlying structure is revealed, or alluded to, there is a respect for the support that is conveyed to the viewer. This concern can symbolize a respect or recognition of human roots, traditions, and craftsmanship.

## **B. Mythological Context**

Cloth was first produced out of necessity. Embellishments were added to the human body to attract potential mates for the purpose of procreation, to repel illness and evil spirits, and disguise hunters from their targets.

Linen spun from flax is the earliest known fibre to be transformed into clothing, shrouds, funereal wrappings and wealth. Fibre and fabric production were directly linked with mortal and immortal wealth and prosperity in ancient Egypt. Human history is riddled with evidence suggesting the power and prestige that textile techniques and their manifestations held for particular societies. Trade, exploration and war dispersed ideas, methods and practitioners of particular techniques. Enthusiasm generated in ancient Egypt for the embroidery techniques demonstrated by their Syrian slaves can be compared with the embracing of acrylic gel medium by contemporary western artists. Sharing, copying, stealing, and implementing new ideas has always played an important part in the visual arts and crafts.<sup>3</sup>

Canvas is a fabric surface upon which to employ manipulative techniques as a means of attracting, camouflaging, embellishing or transforming. Textile techniques, their myths and implications run rampant throughout the history of western painting. Canvas, pigments, and techniques such as encaustic and stenciling, owe their very existence to the history and development of the Textile Arts. I would argue that contemporary artists have much to glean from the historically inventive methods which textile manipulators and illusionists have employed.

New onus is placed on the spinner of yarns, the weaver of myths, and the dreamer of dreams in our simulated, televised, virtual world. Story-

---

<sup>3</sup> For specific information on the history of weaving and textile manipulation see Elizabeth Wayland Barber, Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994) and Jack Lenor Larsen, The Dyer's Art: Ikat, Batik, Plangi, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976).





marriage and death. In many cultures dyeing, especially patterned resist-dyeing, is considered an art form. Although Europeans have tended to focus on woven clothes, the great fabric traditions of India, Japan, Indonesia, Central Asia, and West Africa show as much, if not more, concern for resist-dyeing than cloth making. In these cultures the cloth on which the batik and plangi are executed, or the process that interlaces ikat yarns is as important as canvas is to a painter.

In his book entitled The Dyer's Art: Ikat, Batik and Plangi, Jack Lenor Larson claims that these three terms are universal for the principle resist media. They derive from the Malay-Indonesian language. Larsen says that 'ikat' (to tie) has come to mean wrapping to pattern bundles of yarn so tightly as to resist dyestuffs. After dyeing, these image-making yarns may be used as warp, weft, or both. 'Batik' refers to the application of liquefied wax, paste, starch, resin, or clay to cloth so as to resist dyes. 'Plangi' denotes tie-and-dye cloths specifically, and generally includes 'tritik' or stitch dyeing and fold dyeing.<sup>8</sup>

#### E. Fabric Manipulation: Shibori

Larsen's term 'plangi' could be subtitled under 'Shibori' the even more descriptive and all-encompassing Japanese/now relatively universal term. "Shibori" is the Japanese word for a variety of ways of embellishing textiles by shaping cloth and securing them before dyeing. The word comes from the verb root *Shiboru*, "to wring, squeeze, press".<sup>9</sup> The verb root of the word

---

<sup>8</sup> Jack Lenor Larsen, The Dyer's Art: Ikat Batik, Plangi, (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976) p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Yoshiko Wada and Mary Kellogg Rice and Jane Barton, Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing, (New York: Kodansha International Ltd., 1983) p.7.



emphasizes the action performed on the cloth, the process of manipulating fabric.

Shibori is cloth that is given three-dimensional shape and then dyed. After the cloth is returned to its two-dimensional form, the design that emerges is the result of the three-dimensional shape of the cloth, the type of resist, and the amount of pressure exerted by the thread or clamp that secured the shape during the cloth's exposure to the dye. The cloth sensitively records both the shape and the pressure: it is the 'memory' of the shape that remains imprinted in the cloth. This is the essence of shibori.

Cloth may be drawn up and bound; stitched and gathered up; pleated and bound; folded and clamped between boards; or wrapped along a pole, then pushed along it to compress the fabric into folds. A cloth may be dyed repeatedly, using a different shaping method each time.

Designs created in this way clearly reflect the touch of the individual. No two persons fold or bind or stitch in exactly the same way. Some techniques are more precise and even; others are looser and free. The amount of force exerted on the binding thread, or in drawing up the stitching thread, or in the compressing of cloth into folds on the pole, varies from person to person. Individual hand and temperament are imprinted in the dye.

A soft-or blurry-edged pattern is a special characteristic of shibori resist. The effect is quite different from the sharp-edged resist obtained with stencil, paste and wax. An element of the unexpected is always present. Chance and accident give life to the shibori process. This is its special magic and strongest appeal. Early manipulations such as braiding, twisting and

knotting gradually led to similar resist technique discoveries in virtually every geographic location on earth, except for the Antarctic.

The term 'resist dyeing' is loaded with implied meaning and analogy. If one simply drops the 'e' in 'dyeing', a totally different concept comes to mind. I see the interaction between the artist and the canvas, which has the potential to become art, as being very organic. The concept of 'resisting the death' of the canvas, and of communicating with the canvas, is vital to my experience. I feel that I want to 'get into' the canvas. Through the application of certain techniques, I have the opportunity to reveal something within the surface of the canvas. Remarkably, and for me, magically, these techniques still preserve the integrity of the canvas.

Today, painters often speak of the exciting yet very intimidating moment just before the first mark goes onto the stretched canvas. By approaching the canvas cloth as a three dimensional material from its inception, I am free to begin a cycle of creativity that accesses the canvas from more than one point of view or perspective. It is something with texture, inherent colour, character, size, and a back as well as a front. The canvas can be equated with a living organism. It may start out as unbleached or black, with the potential to be bleached or altered in another way. It can be silk, linen, cotton, heavy or lightweight, smooth or rough-each has its inherent qualities. Canvas has a grain, a character, and many other special attributes. The cloth canvas loses exactly what it is naturally when treated as a stiff, predetermined-size of gessoed surface, that has been sanded to uniformity.

### III. Life: Underlying Structure

There is no way out from seeing art as a reflection or meditation or a comment on life. I became interested in the process, including the artist's life. I became interested in how art reflected the artist's life as well as how it reflected life issues, or existential issues with which we are all involved.<sup>10</sup>

#### Listening

*Grandpa was a fisherman, an entrepreneur, and an autocrat. When I was young I pictured God as looking just like Grandpa. I can remember sitting for hours listening to my grandfather's stories. He could captivate his audience and would not tolerate interruptions. He always put "Mamie", my grandmother, directly in her place if she interjected. "Humph. Who's telling this story anyway, you or me?" Mamie fell silent. Quietly, in awe, we listened as Grandpa spun his tales. He was always the hero, the 'idea-guy', the one who worked harder than anyone else. We could see that he was successful; one who was to be respected, emulated and revered. If Grandpa was displeased with anyone in the family; we all suffered, we all were miserable.*

#### Learning

*I began to wonder what stories a fish could tell. When I was on Pelee Island a few summers back, a huge female Lake Sturgeon was landed. It was documented, then returned to Lake Erie. One of the fishermen present remarked that "that there fish had a right to survive" having lived "through the founding of our nation, two world wars, over-fishing, and extreme pollution". I began to wonder what yarns this sturgeon would spin. I discovered that sturgeon used to be considered useless nuisances in nets that were laid to*

---

<sup>10</sup> Terry Barrett quotes Donald Kuspit in his book entitled Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary, (Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1994) p.76

*trap more commercially viable fish. Now these same fish literally have become 'worth their weight in gold' with the growth in human taste for caviar.*

### Connecting

*I have connected the Lake Sturgeon and Silent Women, like Mamie. What if these females could talk? What if they could tell their stories? In my large, Baptist, fishing family, women were expected to "put up" and "shut up". It has taken me a long time to actually think about the stories that haven't been told. Now I am a long way from my little fishing village. I am becoming a "spinner of yarns" and a "teller of tales". Sometimes, when I think of my past, I feel like "a fish out of water".*

I am the product of a poet and a fisherman. My Mother, a doer and a dreamer, taught my six younger siblings and myself to look beyond the obvious to find hidden meaning. My Father, a pragmatic, concrete thinker, brought fish home for dinner most nights. He used to live his life through his children. He loves the outdoors.

Growing up in a deciduous forest beside a Great Lake influenced my way of seeing immeasurably. I was extremely aware of seasons, change, the elements, and natural cycles. The patterns of tree bark and waves, and the layers of leaves and trees impacted me greatly. I appreciated the light that filtered through the trees in winter, its lacy look in spring, the density of the woods in summer, as well as the profusion of fall colours. The horizon, the water's edge, the calm and the storm, the blues, the greys, the snow, the ice, the debris, water...it was all important.

My initial creative experiences were the results of my constant interaction with the outside environment. I made things with what I found. I combined sticks, moss, pebbles and water in shoe-boxes lined with tin-foil. I

peered at my reflection in puddles as I walked  
bridge to school. The roads were made of dirt  
co-existed with composting imagery underfoot  
swam up the creek in spring. I caught tadpoles  
which I released back into ponds. I made plastic  
spring mud. I spent hours damming and unclogging  
run-off the woods eventually leading to the creek.

I learned to use tools such as pencils, compass, and  
projects. I would reproduce images that I saw in  
newspapers. Sometimes I would draw from life.

The potential of storytelling, myth-making, and  
something that I became aware of through art  
indoctrination into religion. The concepts of  
were ingrained in me as a fledgling. Faith, trust, and  
Christian cornerstones. Forgiveness is as well.  
were brought up and taught to accept, not to  
question.

I then learned and was encouraged to develop  
to formulate my own opinions, to lead and not follow.  
of fourteen, I was sent to Havergal College in  
years. As it was a girl's school, I was surrounded by  
actively participated in every aspect of school life.  
not on the sidelines, cheering for all-male team  
roles. Our role models were mostly accomplished  
geography, english, politics, physical education  
school was a woman.

I first studied the discipline of Painting in the Art History Program at Queen's University. I learned of the progression of Western art from the Greeks and Romans through the Renaissance and Baroque periods to Modern times. I was mesmerized by the colours, the stories, the methods and the masterpieces, which we experienced mainly through reproductions, slides and books. As expected of us, we faithfully regurgitated facts, dates, labels, and points of view that we were indoctrinated with.

A bus trip to Cambridge, Massachusetts and then on to New York City in 1976 helped to make the subject more real and tangible for us all. Later, visits to The National Gallery in Ottawa and The Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto assisted in the study of Canadian Art. It was enlightening to see the art and not just rely on the approaches of the traditional authors such as Janson, Gombrich, Reid and Harper.

I saw art in a new context when I took a course in Venice, Italy after second year. It was entitled "Painting, Sculpture and Architecture from the Medieval to the Baroque" There I saw art in a new context; it was conceived of as a part of a whole milieu. Artworks were not separate entities on institutionally white walls. Paintings were part of altarpieces for example. They were often produced to relate narratives to less literate masses. For example, a central panel would illustrate the birth, death or resurrection of Christ. Patron saints or pious family members would be depicted on side panels or pilasters which acted as framing elements for the central focus. Often a sarcophagus (burial crypt) of paint, bronze relief or stone, would underlie the entire ensemble.

We visited Ravenna where the shapes of the buildings echoed their interior's meaning. Inside domes were articulated with mosaic artwork that

reflected the Saints and the sky. Even the windows, as thin wafers of marble, contributed greatly to the overall visual, spiritual, and environmental artistic effect.

Art in Italy was not separated from life. It was integrated into secular, religious and political spheres. Art was visual, tactile, illusionistic and volumetric. It was not a thin veneer. It had substance and material craftsmanship. It echoed underlying structure and longevity. Art reflected technology, philosophy, beliefs (religious, political, social), and abilities. It had authority and relevance.

I was mainly equipped with my philosophical and educational experiences when I moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia, via bicycle, shortly after my experience at Queen's. While working part-time at the Dalhousie Arts Centre, I enrolled in NSCAD (The Nova Scotia College of Art and Design). I managed to do a BFA, taking almost every course available except Painting. I was inspired to take Sculpture, Weaving, Textile Design, Drawing, Photography and Printing. Many years after I had graduated and worked in the fields of Textile and Interior Design I went back to NSCAD to formally study painting. At this time I had the privilege of working with Gerald Ferguson. This encounter altered my perceptions and ways of seeing the discipline of Painting. Ferguson's encouragement and interest in my work had a tremendous impact on me, and he continues to be an important mentor today. Ferguson maintains that "it is not the what, but the how" <sup>11</sup> that is important in art-making.

---

<sup>11</sup>This quotation comes from a personal interview that I had with Professor Gerald Ferguson at NSCAD in the summer of 1994.

Through intensive reading, discussion, and debate at NSCAD I became increasingly aware of the fact that, in the words of Parker and Pollock, in Old Mistresses,

Art History views the art of the past from certain perspectives and organizes art into categories and classifications based on a stratified system of values, which leads to a hierarchy of art forms...<sup>12</sup>

Through this new awareness, I discovered that the way a work of art is viewed depends on who made it and with what.

#### IV. Early Graduate Studies in Alberta

In the end we all travel very lightly indeed.  
Nothing to carry more substantial than memories  
... and maybe that's the heaviest baggage of all.<sup>13</sup>

In retrospect, the progression that my work has followed in the past two and a half years in Calgary appears so logical. It seems natural that the cultured, heavily laden surfaces would gradually lighten and brighten; that the loaded down material-based imagery would dematerialize. Even the fact that I would question the historical and contemporary dominance of one artistic form of discipline over another seems inevitable now.

---

<sup>12</sup>Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts", Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, (London: Pandora Press, 1981) p.50.

<sup>13</sup> Keri Hulme, The Bone People, (Auckland and Toronto: Spiral in association with Hodder and Stoughton, 1984) p.323.



But I can honestly say now that when I started my graduate research in the Art Department at The University of Calgary I could not have predicted this turn of events. Heeding my supervisor, Professor Gerry Hushlak's advice, I set to work with gusto. As he said, "The more that was accomplished that first term the better". In retrospect, I really had an awful lot of stuff just to work through. There was much that I simply had to get out of my system.

Driving across Canada from Nova Scotia, via Ontario, metaphorically lightened my load. I remember explaining to others that I had the distinct feeling that I was shedding skins as my daughter and I traveled further and further west, eventually arriving in Calgary.

Unpacking the car, physically and visually realizing how much stuff I had not trusted to the professional moving company, should have been an indication that I was holding on to a tremendous amount of memorabilia; physical evidence that I had another life, with other experiences.

#### **A. Early Work: Loaded Canvas**

Initially, I had the need to represent all of my past in my studio work. My early graduate work was saturated with auto-biographical, art historical and mixed media references. Despite the fact that I had an enormous desire to 'start fresh' and intentionally covered a twenty-one foot wall in my studio with black canvas, I found that the desired state of 'tabula rasa' was impossible. The simple act of stretching that huge piece of dark canvas across the wall and standing back conjured up the blackboard in my grade one classroom. Its sheer imposition and authority set my mind and hands to work.

Responding visually to a new, yet structured, learning environment I first applied the cursive alphabet meticulously across the top. A school of fish (Sturgeon) followed in close succession. Using stencils I situated them in rows echoing the placement of desks in primary classrooms and then proceeded to individualize each with various techniques and mediums that I deemed necessary. Utilizing various media such as china markers, bleach, paint and collage I accentuated these shapes against the darkness of their background. The alphabet at the top was treated in a similar manner.

Eventually the canvas was shortened to fourteen feet across. The cut-off part was dissected and then incorporated into the remainder of the piece. When complete, I moved this work to the upper portion of the wall. It was an iconographic block of memory.

Below it I stretched another fourteen foot length of canvas. This time I started at the opposite end of the gray scale, using light unbleached raw canvas. On this surface I carefully depicted images of fishermen posing with their catches of Lake Sturgeon as large as themselves. I procured these images from the archives of The Fisheries Research Station in my hometown.

After using black Lithography markers to carefully delineate these full-sized figures, I painted a mechanically blown up 'ruching' pattern over the entire surface.<sup>14</sup> I call it an 'infinity' pattern. This layer acted as a visual 'smoke screen' or 'net' visually separating a viewer from the images. It gave the images the appearance of being behind glass- somewhat separated from reality.

---

<sup>14</sup> 'Ruching' is the pattern which is accomplished by wrapping (in my case, usually black) canvas around a sono tube, scrunching it down and bleaching it.

I had been experimenting on smaller pieces, in my studio, throughout this period of intense creativity. I discovered that taking two seemingly complete, imagery-loaded canvases, slitting them and combining them through a weaving process onto one stretcher was visually very effective. The specific information that I was utilizing, the obvious narrative, combined with the personal, historical and cultural messages that I was employing, were being subverted by the woven technique. The process determined what information surfaced and what sunk down to other depths -being physically covered up by a pre-determined mechanical process.

The surface was very rich. The materials and memories were embedded formally through the application of structure. The information was less obvious, not specific to one individual's experience. I had some positive reactions to these pieces. With encouragement, as well as words of caution, I decided to attempt to impose this concept on the two huge fourteen foot canvases.

With contemporary artists Sol le Witt and Jennifer Bartlett in mind, I tackled the project. One canvas was to be warp (vertical), and the other weft (horizontal). They were to be woven in a balanced 'tabby' weave, which rendered a checkerboard pattern, given the opposite backgrounds of black and white. The process would dictate what imagery would be revealed, and what would be concealed. Fate would now dictate the outcome of this work.

The result was a large, rich, textured piece, Heads or Tails?, (Figure 1-1) that hung with weight and presence on the wall in the Little Gallery exhibition that I shared with another graduate student in January 1996. Compared with the other pieces that I exhibited at that time however, I still felt that this piece was a 'never-ending story'-still in progress, not yet resolved.

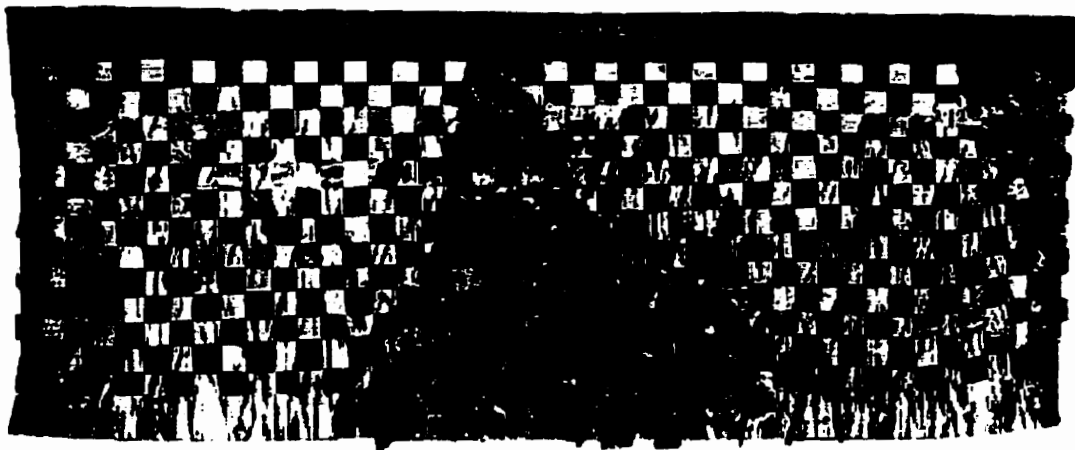


Figure 1-1 Heads or Tails?, Laurie E. Omstead, January 1996

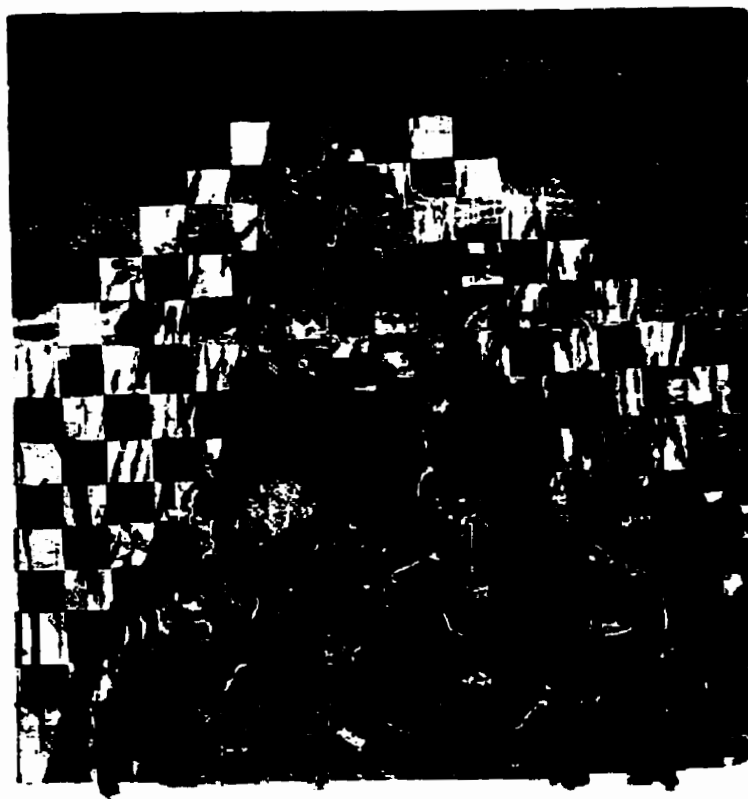


Figure 1-2 Heads or Tails., Laurie E. Omstead, February 1996

After the show, I reworked this piece until it embodied the stories, the visuals, the information, the materials, the memories and the experiences. I pared off the ends and wove the remaining portion, a square of about eight feet by eight feet, into a 'herring bone' or fish-scale patterned twill weave. Next, I secured it to a stretcher built to stabilize this structure. It was complete. Heads or Tails. (Figure 1-2) had become a rich, collaged surface of organized chaos.

Now I realize that this piece captures the essence of my creative thinking and process during the early period of this degree. It embodies the elements that I deem necessary in my work, water, magic, energy, risk, experiment, and memory, with the authority of the support as underlying structure. It was as though I had coalesced, through my art, with Jennifer Bartlett, Gerald Ferguson, Anselm Kiefer, Sol le Witt, and Robert Rauschenberg.

Concurrent projects feed off each other, inform one another and are reactions to each other. Nothing develops in isolation. I have always found it necessary to work on many projects simultaneously. The other pieces that I worked on and exhibited along with this one were quieter, more carefully executed, and possibly more art-like.

## **B. Next: Manipulated Canvas**

Subsequently, I investigated the potential of the canvas by coaxing and forcing imagery to the surface through bleaching, piercing, removing and lacerating. There was anger, frustration, exhilaration, repetition and torture in my work. I took some of my favourite pieces to the extreme, even to their death, because I did not want to stop working on them. Works that no





Figure 2-1 Wishing Well - Well Wishing, Laurie E. Omstead, 1996

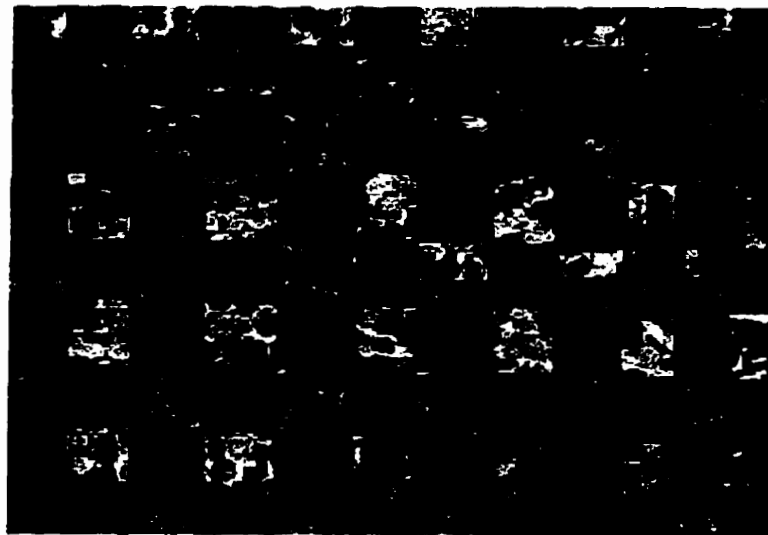


Figure 2-2 Fern Penny, Laurie E. Omstead, 1996

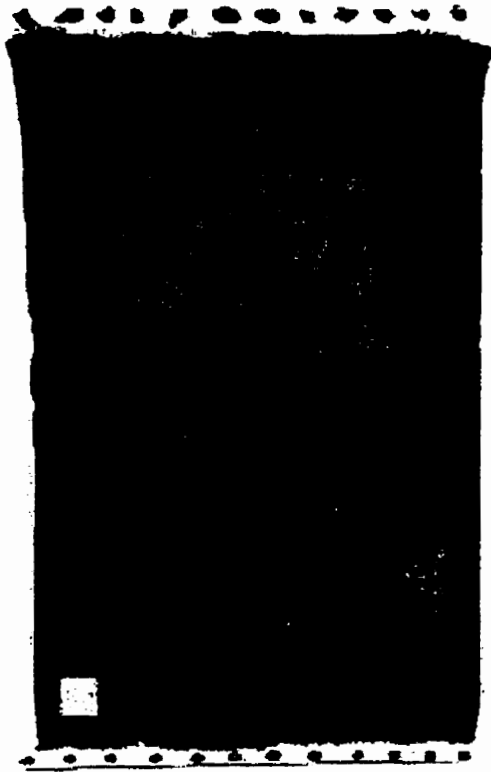


Figure 3-1 Strange Attractors II, Laurie E. Omstead, 1996



Figure 3-2 Old Fisherman's Wife, Laurie E. Omstead, 1997



infinity pattern. Eventually these bodies were surrounded by a dense layering of embracing humans which were created with collage, stencils and paint. After its exhibition, the entire surface was systematically reduced to black gesso and black paint.

I had started this piece with black canvas. On its surface I had gone through an extended process of thought, experience, concept and narrative. Later I attempted to cancel or consume all the evidence of work with black. The interesting thing is that the black paint was not successful in covering up the surface. It remains active. The story is impregnated into the surface. The information has been embedded in this piece.

Recently I removed this work from its stretcher and turned it around and then re-stretched it. The back side, that was never intended to be shown, reflects a memory of my work. Remnants of the story are there. They are evidence of the original marks that I made intentionally on the other side of the canvas. The 'Pentimento' has been revealed.

The Rilke quotation that inspired this piece continues to have some relevance. "Surely all art is the result of having been in danger, of having gone through an experience all the way to the end, to where no one can go any further".<sup>16</sup>

On the other side, or The Rilke Piece, Verso (Figure 4-1) which has now become the front, we are witness to unadulterated traces of activity and privy to a working process that is seldom if ever seen by the viewer. I have not responded to this side with any additional materials or process. It has an honesty and openness to it that I am learning to appreciate.

---

<sup>16</sup> Rainer Rilke is quoted by Chaim Potok in The Gift of Asher Lev, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990) p.1.

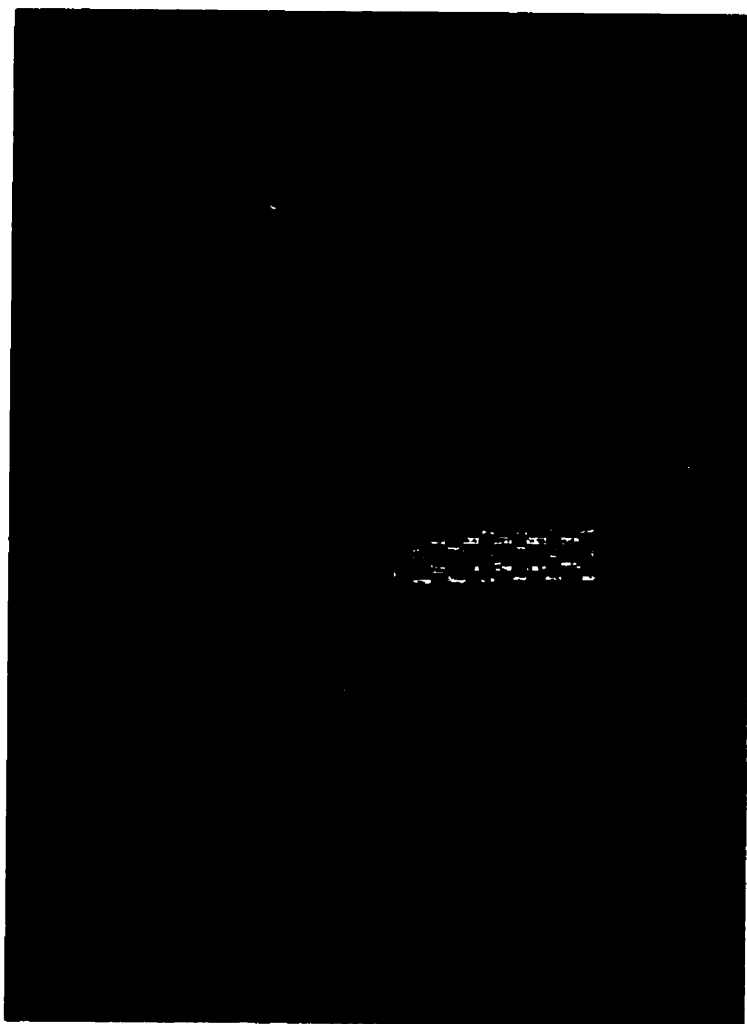


Figure 4-1 The Rilke Piece, Verso, Laurie E. Omstead, 1997

The imagery is the tracing, the remnant, the result of what has occurred or been imposed consciously to the outside of the piece. It shows clearly that forces acting on the outside affect the inside. Again I am delving into the canvas to find the real story- the clues, the action, the marks that are significant and intimate and probably disguised or concealed on the outside. Here are some secrets, inner dimensions and clues to the decision-making process that has affected the outside.

By showing this piece from the other side, I am trying to make room for the thoughts and feelings that people keep to themselves and that art has generally excluded.

I also worked extensively on a piece that I refer to as Net (1996). I took it back to Lake Erie to be sunk by my father into the same lake where I first saw a Lake Sturgeon. It is still there - under the ice. I may attempt to retrieve it this summer because I am interested in seeing what it looks like now. Perhaps it has been torn to shreds by wave and ice action. Perhaps it is laden down with zebra mussels. Perhaps it has been caught in a trawler's net. Perhaps I prefer to have its fate left with my imagination.

The degree to which I become a 'painter' is synonymous with what I make of myself as a person...In effect the person I am is a result of what I encounter, perceive, and learn.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Eva Hesse is quoted by Lucy Lippard in Eva Hesse, (New York: New York University Press, 1976) p.9.

## V. Post Modern Project

In the autumn of 1995, I planned an on-going, unit orientated project to coincide with the duration of my graduate degree in Fine Art. I secured a corporate sponsor for the materials and fabrication of this project. Smed International in southeast Calgary produced one hundred identical, black, tackable, 18" x 24" fabric panels, to my specifications, free of charge.

This project involved disseminating these 'personal bulletin boards' to individuals in the three provinces of Canada where I have lived: Alberta, Nova Scotia, and Ontario. The concept was that these boards would go to a variety of people who have been significant to me. The recipients, in turn, could use their boards in any way that they were so inclined.

Now I am gathering these boards back. I plan to exhibit as many of them as possible, unaltered, as part of my final exhibition.

I am obviously interested in people. Post Modern Project is a form of communication and connection. It could be seen as a visual metaphor for the so-called 'bulletin boards' that link people in this age of computers.

I have borrowed the concept of a commonly found image, the bulletin board, to assist in bridging the gap between my past and my present. I had the need to hold up a mirror to the outside world of my experience while working inside a studio within an institution.

Post Modern Project is my attempt to use a specific strategy to invisibly and then visibly connect a group of people. These bulletin boards are not 'slices of life' but constructions created by selective visions and then removed from their specific context. (a wall in an architect's office in Halifax, for example)

This project stems from my experience in the fields of Textile and Interior Design. When actively engaged in those industries, I was frequently conscious of the lack of opportunity given to individuals in corporate, commercial, or institutional environments to choose the visual attributes in their surroundings. Usually, a person merely controls the opportunity to embellish a desk or a side area with a couple of acceptable family-type photographs. Where available, tackboards or bulletin boards have the potential to reflect some specific individual personality traits.

I am interested in individual forms of organization, decoration, clutter, austerity, freedom and intimidation. I hope that participants in this project were able to 'forget' the origins of their bulletin boards and use them spontaneously and freely. The Post Modern Project is my attempt to understand some of the natural tendencies that humans exhibit when organizing visual, somewhat personalized information. I assume that these elements will include things like calendars, tickets, invitations, memos, as well as some unanticipated souvenirs. Perhaps placement, sequencing, spacing, and the tendency towards the random accumulation of 'stuff' will become issues surrounding this project. I am consciously trying not to have any predetermined expectations. I deliberately did not include any instructions on how-to or how-not-to use these devices. The elements of fate, chance, selection, evolution and individuality should be most interesting and intriguing when viewing the results. (Figure 5-1)

In this project I am attempting to move beyond the mode of monologue, the mode of self-expression that is non-reciprocal, where an artist imposes images or ideas on the world, but nobody can really answer back. My shift to a mode of dialogue creates an interactive, participatory kind



Figure 5-1 Post Modern Project, Laurie E. Omstead, 1998

of situation that is more relevant, I think, to the process and systems thinking of our time. It begins to break the spell -the notion that art has to be a totally solitary or individual pursuit. Post Modern Project involves ninety-nine other individuals across this country in a collaborative effort. They are making the 'content' choices, while I impose the 'form' or underlying structure.

Despite the seeming homogenization of culture, unique voices continue to rise out of the babble of mass production. 'Pastiche' is a word often used to sum up postmodern aesthetic. I think that it refers to a bringing together of many different elements to reveal something new. Perhaps this project brings art and everyday life a little closer together. Essentially, it is a collision of images that we encounter in everyday life.

## VI. Strange Attractors: Process

### A. Strange Attractors I, Woven Imagery

This series began as an 83"x 64" piece of black canvas which when finished was called Strange Attractors I, Woven Imagery. It was laid on the floor where a female and a male body were directly traced onto it with white china markers. The two bodies in the centre were interactively juxtaposed. Then, on the periphery of the canvas, each body was traced again -just at the edges of the piece -more aloof and cut-off. The female is actually upside-down at the top left, while the male is right-side up on the bottom right.

These simple outlines on black canvas had tremendous vitality. Using yarns of raw silk, linen, and cotton I reinforced these chalky lines with looped running stitches. The resulting images seemed to reference constellations in





front they were visual and tactile. From behind, as viewed through the plastic, body-shaped windows, the images revealed something about interiors.

At this point I was not particularly happy with the lack of distinction between the figures and the ground. I was pleased, however, with the colour that permeated the piece. The overall tonality was a softened plum-like gray. It was beautiful as well as being an inherent result of the bleaching process. In addition, I wanted a deep sea blue background, something reminiscent of the indigo colour of intriguing textiles of the past.

Cyanotype (sun-printing) had been introduced to me on a small scale. I decided to apply this very direct, magical technology to the front surface of this piece. In preparation I cut out about fifty fish shapes from cardboard. They ranged in size from three to five inches. These fish stencils were secured with stitches. It is important with this technique that images stay perfectly still. Then the cyanotype solution was painted onto the entire background and dried in a darkroom. Later, the piece was exposed to direct sunlight for about fifteen minutes. Like bleaching, the next step was a thorough washing and drying process. This essentially oxidizes and fixes the colour in much the same way that historical and contemporary dyers assist is the permanence of indigo. All the cardboard fish shapes were removed with exact echoes of each remaining permanently on the surface of the canvas.

Once again the cloth was ironed and hung vertically. The figures were now swimming and moving together underwater. I had read the ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris that morning over breakfast and was struck by the mythological nature of this combination of images. The indelible memory of Isis picking up fourteen ripped and scattered pieces of Osiris and patching him back together, only to discover that the fifteenth and

remaining portion of the puzzle had been swallowed by a fish was alarmingly graphic! The fifteenth piece had been his genitals...here before me was a canvas displaying an explicit heterosexual entanglement surrounded by probing, and agitated fish.

The organic, negative shape that existed between the two central interactive figures, begged for attention. I could almost see the positive ions running in parallel lines back and forth between the two figures in that dynamic space. From the back, I applied a commercially printed wave patterned fabric. It had reminded me of water when I procured it. I then cut the shape out from the front, leaving the hands in the positions in which they had originally been traced. I covered their shapes with commercial fish-fly patterned fabric. The area became hot and accentuated in a sensual sort of way. It was strangely attractive. There was a physical relationship taking place between these figures. I embellished the hands with beaded illusions of, and actual, fish flies. Once the strange attractor concept had been highlighted, (the fetish quality of the fish-fly is an irresistible element for me), I could stand back and take another look at what was happening to the overall piece.

The background was too straightforward and thin. It lacked the mysterious qualities that I associate with the mythical, under-the-sea, other world landscapes that we cannot completely see or define...but that we can experience or feel.

The technique that I had been experimenting with using acrylic gel as a memory residue for the impression and oxidization of pennies had the potential to add dimension and mystery and history to the background without annihilating the imagery. I applied gel and pennies to approximately three-quarters of the surface; leaving one large and one small

opening, exposing the deep blue depths of the cyanotype. Once the pennies were removed, the residue was revealed to have softened the contrast between the fish images and their blue background. The elements were blended, the colour undulated, and there was now a most alluring reference to mosaics-memories of Ravenna and Roman baths. Here was texture and time and repetition. Technical, mechanical and organic processes existed side by side. There was unit and there was whole. The deeper, more open spaces of blue with the more clearly defined fish shapes, offered another level-a deep visual place-a contrast to the other textured ground.

At this moment I thought that this piece, Strange Attractors I, Woven Imagery and I could be separate. I thought that I could walk away; that it could stand alone. Unlike the last piece that I had worked on, which I refer to as Net (1996), this canvas had not gone to the 'point of no return'. It had resisted visual death. It was loaded, but not over-loaded. A balance had been achieved and it was not the result of one single medium or perspective. It was an affirmation of the action/response cycle on canvas that I engaged myself in. It was my metaphor for life.

Finally, risking one more step, I cut up the surface and wove it together with another painterly cloth. "It moves and shimmers as the surfaces weave in and out of each other and the objects attached to it reveal themselves and then disappear. The piece is complete."<sup>18</sup>, said Jennifer Eiserman when describing this piece. I have entitled it Strange Attractors I.

---

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Eiserman, Personal Written Communication, (Calgary, September 1996). Jennifer wrote a response to my Strange Attractors Exhibition in September 1996. This is an excerpt.



Figure 6-1 Strange Attractors I, Woven Imagery, Laurie E. Omstead, 1996

Woven Imagery because it is a piece about interwoven experience. It is a tapestry of life. (Figure 6-1)

Joy and Woe are woven fine  
 A Clothing for the Soul divine  
 Under every grief and pine  
 Runs a joy with silken twine  
 It is right it should be so  
 Man was made for Joy and Woe  
 And when this we rightly know  
 Thro the World we safely go<sup>19</sup>

The final version of this piece is more mosaic than collage. Pixel-like elements make-up the composition yet even with the imposed (woven) visual regimentation, the organic, life-like lines pervade. The images are interacting. There is energy in this work. It is concentrated in the centre imagery where the two key human figures are exploring each other physically. There is a titillating quality to this piece. It is alluring and suggestive. It is about privacy and intimacy and special experiences. It is about touch, sensation and loving gestures.

### B. Strange Attractors: The Series

Throughout the process of creating and completing Strange Attractors I. Woven Imagery, I explored the individual components that make up this work in a series entitled Strange Attractors. On two 78"x 58" black canvases, which I entitled Strange Attractors IV (Figure 7-1) and Strange Attractors V.

---

<sup>19</sup> This text was taken from William Blake's lengthy poem, "Auguries Of Innocence", which was among a collection of writings found in a notebook believed to have been written in 1791-92. Audrey Snyder has taken Blake's words and set them to music in a piece entitled The Tapestry. (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1995). I was introduced to this song through the choir that I joined during my first year of graduate studies.

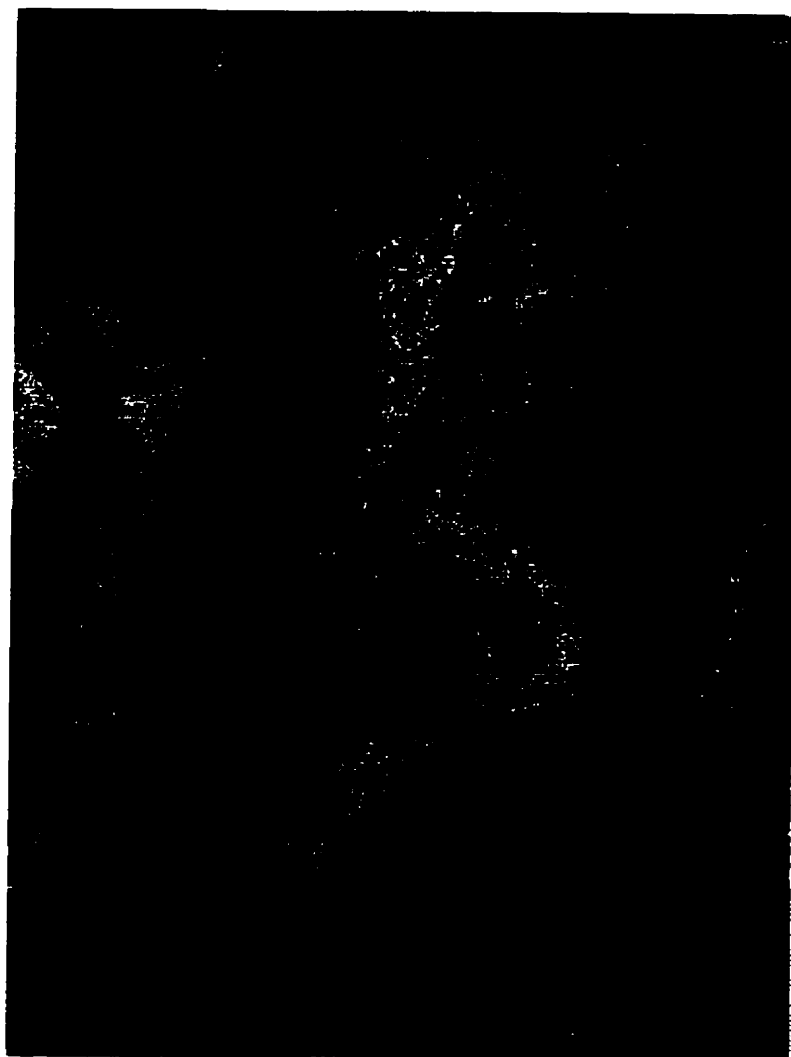


Figure 7-1 Strange Attractors IV, Laurie E. Omstead, 1996.

I specifically dug down to expose, define and clarify the human form using a bleaching solution. I worked down into the canvas as if it were stone that I was chiseling away. In one I started with human outlines again. In the other I appropriated an image of two embracing dancers that appeared in the Globe and Mail newspaper, page A9, on June 10, 1996. The caption underneath read "celebrating primal energy at a dance fest in Ottawa" which seemed coincidental!

On two 78"x 48" 'ruched' linen canvases, entitled Strange Attractors II and Strange Attractors III, I recorded humans interacting using the cyanotype process. Here the light sensitive chemicals trapped silhouette imagery on the surface of the canvases. In Jennifer Eiserman's words,

The cyanotypes are traces of experience, memories of the past, that linger and give shape to the present...Embellishments of the surface are used sparingly in these works: a fish lure earring that catches the light and my eye; a stenciled squirrel romping between the figures, a kind of fig leaf; embroidered line to caress an edge; appliquéd shapes and fanciful beads. They are focal points, they "catch the eye". They attract our attention.<sup>20</sup>

These pieces, which utilize many of the elements and components that I have been concentrating on for a while now bring focus to my current experience. In this body of work I am no longer dealing with a longing for the past: for water, fish and people. This work is about living in the present and making gradual sense of the past. It is about letting go. It is about moments of bliss.

---

<sup>20</sup> Jennifer Eiserman, Ibid.

An unexpected thing happened when Laurie began the final piece in this body of work. (Strange Attractors VI) Laurie decided to use a length of patterned fabric quite different from the flat canvases that she had used in the previous works. She and her partner lay down on the chemically treated surface, once again allowing their bodies to block the light in the cyanotype process. After the exposure was complete, Laurie washed out the chemical. Her body's silhouette was strong, the other was faint, moving arms and legs behind Laurie's central figure. Meanwhile, the overall pattern of the fabric had been transformed by the exposure. In parts it was barely discernible, in others, it almost floats above the surface.

Laurie decided to explore this piece further. She articulated the central female figure, embroidering it's edge, embellishing it with beads and fish flies. She painted a self-portrait over the face and created a fanciful headdress of fish and bobbins for herself. Brightly coloured fish swim in the negative space surrounding her. Perched atop the work is a weaver's shuttle. It's yarn moves down the canvas and becomes part of the embroidered element. When I first saw the piece I thought, "It's Shiva! The goddess of life and of death who controls our destinies." Laurie tells me it is a piece about stories wove and told, fish tales of enticement and capture. For me this piece is an icon for this body of work, "Strange Attractors". It is a piece about storytelling, about creating and giving life to ideas and experiences...

Laurie entitled this series "Strange Attractors". In mathematics, these are entities that construct, giving order and meaning to chaos. The works can be understood as strange attractors, providing an ordered glimpse into the experience of passion and love. Passion and love become strange attractors through these works. The work tells a story of how they order our existence, frame





Figure 8-1 Strange Attractors VI, Laurie E. Omstead, 1996

it and provide meaning for it. Love and passion are Shiva at work.<sup>21</sup>

The Strange Attractor VI, (Figure 8-1) that Eiserman refers to as 'Shiva', has a triumphant appearance, it exudes a feeling of confidence. I have found ways of combining materials and imagery more clearly, more concisely, with more potency. I have discovered methods of communicating ideas without having to subvert materials. The canvases are complex but not confusing.

I was delving into inner experience with this series entitled Strange Attractors.

Using various methods of resist, reaction and response with easily accessible materials and direct techniques, I continued to combine my interest in process with my fascination with chance and serendipity. I learned that, to have life, materials can be manoeuvred and directed, but they cannot be completely controlled. I continued to resist the dying potential of my canvases by injecting the memory of touch, the directness of gesture and the intimacy of the hand.

## VII. Integrating the Past with the Present

The Fish out of Water/Net diptych (Figure 9-1) represents a breakthrough in my thinking, in the way that I finally allow myself to represent imagery.

---

<sup>21</sup> Jennifer Eiserman, Ibid.

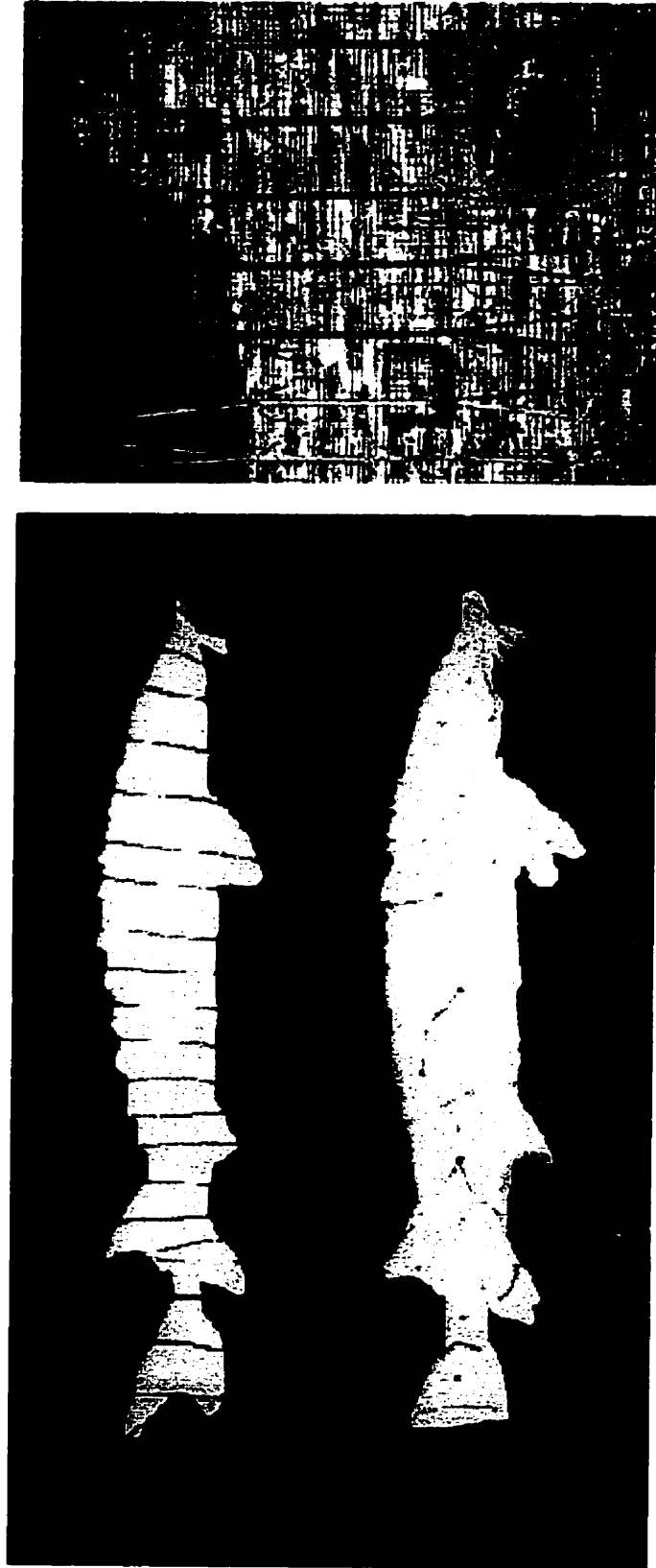


Figure 9-1 Fish out of Water/Net, Laurie E. Omstead, 1997

Central to the large painting are the shapes of two large sturgeon. These images, or the shapes where we imagine them to be, are derived through the process of laying down large stencils that I have made of life-sized sturgeon and then painting the canvas that surrounds them. The background becomes the imagery from a material point of view. The sturgeon, once the stencils are removed, are theoretically non-existent. They are merely shapes; empty spaces. But because these shapes are large and white against a dark, and somewhat chaotic background, we read them as being present. In actual fact, they are absent. What a conundrum!

The objects have been taken away, leaving a memory of their placement and interaction. The remaining image conjures up a presence in the viewer's mind when in actual fact it represents an absence.

At this point, the images become pure canvas. The topic, the subject, (in this case two lake sturgeon) is merely implied. The stencils that represented their shapes are memories of their existence. The empty canvas, or blank spaces become places for the viewer's imagination. We are allowed to participate in the illusion. All the information has not been fed to us. We are free to finish the picture.

I have done this before, but not as consciously. The silhouettes of human bodies in the Strange Attractor series operate in much the same way. In Fish out of Water I consciously make the decision to let the spaces stand alone and act as conjurers for images in the imagination of the viewer. Still, I was compelled to embellish the inner spaces. This time I used springs and other bits of fascinating hardware. Perhaps I wanted to underline the fact that these shapes are not fish but blank spaces of canvas surrounded by

background imagery. In Fish out of Water I am definitely referring to the support, the stretched canvas surface.

It's accompaniment Net (1997) is also a piece that helped me resolve some ongoing issues in my work. I have often used "commercial fish fabric", referring to the consumer driven material that sports fashionable imagery for clothing, household decoration...and such. I stretched commercial fish fabric on a 4'x 3' stretcher and then proceeded to individualize each of these industrially regimented fish-like images with paint, beeswax, and tinted Roplex. I collaged significant images onto the surface; an image of a lake sturgeon and my own rendition of net imagery (the ruching process that I have now often referred to). I darned some window screens or nets through the surface also. Next, I wrapped the entire piece in jute (rope), uniquely packaging this work. The process seems to symbolize the catching of the whole image in a net, or the securing of it in its own hand-crafted container.

I have often thought of the stretched canvas surface as a net upon or within which an artist captures imagery.<sup>22</sup> Net (1997) embodies this significant idea. It also led me to frottage actual fish net impressions onto raw canvas with oil sticks; thus encouraging me to think about what type of imagery I might actually wish to catch in my canvas nets.

My current work could not have been conceived of by me if I had not experienced this process of thinking and consequently had the actual experience of working through these ideas on canvas.

---

<sup>22</sup> Perhaps this is a throwback to my youth, when fish were literally the most important images, other than my family, (half of whom were fishermen), in my life. We ate fish five nights a week and on Sundays our Pastor read, "I will make you fishers of men" from the New Testament.

## VIII. Transforming with Sunlight

Recently, at the Robert Rauschenberg Retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City (Fall 1997), I saw two exposed blueprint papers from his experiments, with Susan Weil, in the 1950's. One was called Untitled (double Rauschenberg), and the other was entitled Untitled(Sue). They are both dated ca. 1950 and now forty-eight years later, they still seem remarkably fresh and intriguing. They were the first images to catch my eye upon my arrival at the entrance to this enormous show.<sup>23</sup>

These works were derived from traditional blueprints, the perspectively drawn diagrams or plans which acted as precursors to architectural projects. These formerly common modes of visual communication were printed as copies in several layers on special paper and developed using ammonia fumes.

### A. Cyanotype Process

The blueprint or cyanotype process which I am currently working with, was introduced to me, during graduate studies in 1996, by Arthur Nishimura, Professor of Photography, in the Art Department at The University of Calgary. First invented in 1842 by the English astronomer Sir John Herschel, he called the process 'positive image tracings'. This type of blueprinting only works on natural fibres such as cotton, silk, linen and viscose rayon; synthetic fibres will not print. The fabric being used must be

---

<sup>23</sup> These blueprint images can be seen in the exhibition catalogue by curators Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson, entitled Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1997) pp.46 and 47.

washed and rinsed in hot water with a small amount of liquid, non-phosphate, non-sodium soap.

A water-based solution of green ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide is applied to rag paper or natural fibre cloth and allowed to dry. When exposed to ultraviolet light, the ferric iron of the citrate is reduced to the ferrous state. After exposure, the exposed paper or cloth is rinsed in water, and an insoluble iron salt, ferroferricyanide, is formed which permanently stains the surface. The colour of this new iron salt is 'Prussian Blue'.

Of particular interest to me is the fact that objects can be placed on top of pretreated canvas and then exposed to the sun. The objects block the light, preventing the first chemical change, and the following water rinse clears the chemical out. The result is a high resolution 'copy' of the objects.

## **B. Thoughts on Cyanotype**

The cyanotype process is a magical way to directly affect the surface of the canvas or cloth. The Prussian Blue colour that it produces naturally is reminiscent of Indigo. Even the way the colour changes in sunlight and water is similar to the way cloth dipped in an indigo vat darkens from green to blue as it oxidizes in the air. Setting the cyanotype permanently on canvas by washing it is easy and also compares favourably with the type of permanence the Indigo dye is famous for. These attributes, combined with the directness with which patterns and images can be developed, makes cyanotype an intriguing technology.

Cyanotype work can best be accomplished on crystal clear blue sky days. Murky, polluted atmospheres create clouding and blur imagery. Places like

Calgary are ideal for this type of work. Not only is this process dependent upon clear skies and unpolluted water, its inherent blue colour refers directly to the sky as well as conjuring up images of underwater environments.

*Enroute from New York City to Calgary, Nov. 12/97*

*A large portion of the world's artists live in areas where populations are extremely concentrated. (New York, Paris, London, Tokyo) Only bits of the natural environment are visible, if cultivated, in any of these places. These urban areas are saturated with material, garbage, imagery, and extremes of wealth and poverty.*

*Artworks, I believe, are reflections of people's relationships with their environments and other human beings. For this reason, it is not surprising that Twentieth Century, urban-based painting has been preoccupied with covering, smothering, and disguising the canvas.*

*Traversing Canada, from Calgary, Alberta to Halifax, Nova Scotia, with its vibrant history, its smaller scale, its rainy grays, splashes of sea and deciduous leaves, then going on to New York City where there is a concentration of more than nine million people at all times is an amazing trip to experience.*

*In New York City artists are reflecting the city. I can see why media, noise, junk, and neon, affect and influence attempts at creativity.*

*Moving to Alberta has affected my work significantly. It is lightening and brightening and reflecting my new and real experiences. I am in awe of this new space and my place and my relationship with it. I need to explore its variations, its protrusions, its underlying secrets and uniqueness.*

*Looking out over the vastness of the prairie with its cultural grid of farms and its organic lines of waterways and shadows, I am struck by the new palette that I am learning to appreciate. Amongst the earthtones, pools of water reflect the sky. I am lucky. I*



*am relieved to be almost home. The entire horizon of this beautiful blue dome seems rainbow-like. Glancing back I see the full moon. It is white in an air-brushed late afternoon sky of bluish-pink. I am tired, but happy. Now I see a gorgeous deckle of mountain shapes with feathery clouds overhead. I am back in the landscape of cyanotype, fossils, old bones and blue, blue sky. There is a glorious balance between land and sky here. How does one depict such a heaven without being cliché?*

## IX. Recent Work

Presently, my cyanotype work is dependent on sunlight. On sunny, cloudless days I am able to expose my specially treated canvases to the sun. Objects placed on their surfaces resist the sun's transforming power while the exposed cloth absorbs it. Water is used to develop the potential imagery. The images that remain represent the objects that were once present on the surface. The sun also records their shadows. There is a permanent record of composition on the surface. The resulting finished canvas is a reminder of the placement of objects on its surface. The image even reflects the wrinkles and folds inherent in the surface of the cloth.

Since I am arranging human bones on the light sensitive surface, I am actually laying down parts that make up a whole, the human skeleton. Like jig-saw puzzle pieces, they have the ability to fit together, to create something else -something that all humans have in common. Separately, these fragments resonate a familiarity without being too specific to one individual. They are parts of a whole that have potential to exist yet they are also complete entities unto themselves.

My cyanotypes, or Bone Poems have become final products. Unlike their architectural predecessors (blueprints) they are not merely the means that anticipate a specific outcome. They are not striving to be something larger or more complete. They simply represent themselves. They are the 'bare bones', the essential ingredients -the underlying structure and the images combined.

Cyanotype is a very direct method of capturing imagery, of recording what once existed. It is a magical, transient and illusive medium. My work is totally dependent on natural light, air that is relatively free of particulants, and unpolluted water. Southern Alberta is a perfect place to work with cyanotype.

The same essential ingredients that my work is dependent upon; also ensure that humans will continue to exist: water, oxygen and sunlight. I am glad that my work reflects the importance of these essential ingredients. We are dependent on them for our survival. Perhaps that is why there is a fresh, pure, honest combination evident in my work at present. I am dealing with vital ingredients for human life and the underlying strength of the canvas itself; not superficial materials and facade.

Calgary, Alberta, December 1, 1997

*Our fascination as humans with natural history, such as dinosaur skeletons, has prepared us to look at our own potential remains in new ways. Fossils of prehistoric creatures preserved in rock strike me as being particularly significant here in Alberta. The clues, memories, and silent stories that are implied through these shapes and impressions are links that we have with the past. No longer as remnants of grief, despair and destruction, our bones, our underlying structures, can be re-examined as forms and shapes to be captured on canvas. There are a multitude of bones*

*in each of our bodies. They are extremely varied and specialized. They make up our skeletons. Because of our skeletons, we humans are able to sit, to walk, to run, to swim, to dance, to articulate fine movements, to draw, and of course, to turn cart-wheels.*

*When we humans die, our skeletons can remain as reminders of our bodies, our existence. In our bones our individual stories are embedded. Much can be learned through the examination of our bones, yet visually, to the untrained eye, these same images are ungendered signs representing the underlying structures of former people.*

### **A. Bone Imagery**

I first saw an Egyptian Mummy at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1970. It was there that I first became aware of a completely different culture from a physical point of view. The concept and image of old bones wrapped in cloth impacted me greatly. A recent trip to New York City (Fall 1997) reminded me of my utter fascination with this remarkable imagery, its impact and its implications. This time, in addition to seeing an actual mummy in its open sarcophagus at the Metropolitan Museum, I was able to separate out different aspects of the burial procedure. Mummies were carefully wrapped in linen clothes that took on geometrically layered patterns as they were bound. The designs remind me of the traditional 'log cabin' quilt pattern. The relationship between the preserved human body and cloth is important in this highly developed form of preservation. Belief in an afterlife was what essentially propelled ancient Egyptians towards such extremes (by our standards).

When I visited Mexico with friends the spring before I entered graduate school, I was intrigued with the seeming 'preoccupation with death' that the Mexicans have. 'Day of the Dead' costumes fascinated me as did the

diverse ways in which skeletons were positively incorporated into rituals, visual arts and crafts. Again a rich belief in an afterlife seems to inspire many bizarre, thought-provoking and fanciful creations.

I am determined not to be voyeuristic in my approach to using imagery however, early in my graduate degree I did have the concept of 'Day of the Dead' costumes in the back of my mind as I attempted to integrate bits of my past into my studio work. I subverted obvious references by weaving various elements together to create more formalized statements which I entitled Old Surgeon's Coat, and Old Fisherman's Coat.

It was only this past Fall (1997) after having been a Teaching Assistant with Professor Marcia Perkins in an Anatomical Drawing class that I started thinking more seriously about skeletons and the underlying structure of the human body. At first this curiosity manifested itself in the actual study of the bones of the human body.

Calgary, Alberta, October 25, 1997

*Drawing is a medium that is expanding, like yeast, in my mind and body. My mind is as involved as my hand. I am slowly learning to articulate from the inside out. I am dealing with bones. I am figuring out the structure that underlies each individual human. This is difficult. It involves a lot of detective work. This work is making me extremely aware of my own structure, my own frame.*

*Drawing in this way reminds me of the links that Art study has with other disciplines such as Medicine, Psychology, and Sports. It underlines the seriousness of my pursuit to understand what is essentially human. As Virginia Woolfe once wrote in A Room of One's Own:*

"One must strain off what is personal and accidental in all these impressions and so reach the pure fluid, the essential oil of truth."<sup>24</sup>

*Drawing is about realigning, reconnecting, and restructuring. It is about tools and practise. It is about getting in touch with a precise moment.*

*It is reassuring to learn about my underlying structure. To know that we all have ischiums and clavicles and vertebrae is helpful in a world that superficially compares hair colour and breast sizes. I find it invigorating to discover the strength that supports us all.*

I began experimenting with human bone and skeleton imagery using the cyanotype process on linen and cotton canvas. The resulting series of work which includes Bone Poems I-VI, (Figure 10-1) Remembering Water I-IV, Homo Aestheticus, (Figure 11-1), Time Amphibian, Still Developing, Past Time, Reflecting, and Pentimento stems from the interest that has been kindled in me. Drawing what we know to be there, but often cannot see (such as the skeletal frame that underlies us all) is challenging and intriguing. One looks for clues, such as boney landmarks, as well as precedents in the history of Art. One looks at and into oneself in a new way when faced with the problem of depicting what is inside and thus hidden.

Studying the skeleton of the human body is not about surface beauty and decoration. It is about finding the facts, discovering the essential mechanics of form and movement. It is arduous work combining revealed and concealed knowledge. It is about both guessing and knowing, digging, feeling, and really looking (not just skin deep) to discover actual shapes not

---

<sup>24</sup> Virginia Woolfe, A Room of One's Own, (London: Grafton Books, 1977) p.26.



Figure 10-1 Bone Poem II, Laurie E. Omstead, 1997



Figure 11-1 Homo Aestheticus, Laurie E. Omstead, 1997

just the camouflaging elements such as skin, muscles, hair, fat and make-up that we are tricked by and so familiar with.

The Bone Poems seem to capture a fleeting moment or a glimpse before the objects might rearrange themselves on the surface to be caught once again by the canvas or net-like (woven) structure. They also seem to imply a past. Like 'the printed word' they are frozen evidence of experience, of tales and stories alluded to, yet not totally clear or particular. They exhibit beautifully shaped organic images caught in a spatial medium -perhaps water, perhaps air. We are privy to something inside: a private vision, a fleeting moment, another way of looking, of presenting, of seeing. The ordinary appears extraordinary.

Calgary, Alberta, October 25, 1997

*After painting the cyanotype solution onto various pieces of canvas, I composed arrangements of human bones (synthetic) on the surfaces and exposed them to sunlight. I had prepared some of the canvases with frottage (rubblings of fish nets with oil stick) on their surfaces.*

*Once washed, permanent images of the bones and their long October shadows revealed themselves on the surfaces of these canvases.*

*They are fresh and exciting and seem to capture the feeling of the moment and the light. (The net imagery underlines this concept.) Working with cyanotype involves energy and a fast pace. These images are totally dependent on sunlight. They are almost instant memory(not real, not actual, but poignant and satisfying).*

*I coated a large canvas and utilized an entire skeleton and various bones on its surface., The resulting blue is very intense in this piece (Homo Aestheticus) and the image is bizarre. I am arrested by it. It startles.*



*Once it is stretched , the illusion is going to be very eery and somewhat illogical. The cyanotype solution was applied to wrinkled canvas and the outcome is representational of the very nature of the cloth. It has the look of dappled sunlight on water (because of the blue). This canvas appears to have a life of its own.*

*If I had not been involved in the Anatomical Drawing Class, I may not have thought of using human bones in conjunction with cyanotype. It was an excellent step. I feel direction with an open aperture (focused, but not blind-sighted). I am on a journey once again and that makes me feel connected and realigned.*

Homo Aestheticus, Time Amphibian and the other pieces that are derived from the use of the complete skeleton are human first, rather than being gendered, coloured, aged, or specifically referring to one group or individual. So much art, whether historical or based in the contemporary, voyeuristically represents people as other, pointing to colour, gender, beauty, age, or class. My new images have no skin and no genitals. They are unassociated, uncategorizable human entities. Thus they peak our curiosity. Skulls, crossbones, and skeletons often connote death, destruction, remains and funerals. My images, especially Homo Aestheticus, seem to be more about resurrection. They convey optimistic, powerful, unearthly feelings. They appear to be records or reflections.

What a pity... that we humans don't have aesthetically pleasing skeletons. None of the elegance and beauty of your humble mollusc. Just a knobbily serrated jumble, headbone connected to de breastbone etcetera etcetera. On

the other hand, maybe just as well... something might decide to start collecting us...<sup>25</sup>

## B. Consequent Effects

The results are fresh and intriguing with the added benefit of variation depending on the time of year that the exposures are made. The objects, their forms and their meanings change depending on what light they are exposed to. I will be exhibiting specimens from October Light, December Light, February Light and April Light. My future intentions are to continue these experiments so as to eventually represent these images in light from each month of the year.

The images are more distinct or distorted depending on the angle of light that hits the canvas when it is exposed. The light (especially when at a low angle in winter) picks up incredible details describing the cloth canvas as well as the objects set upon it. Light gives us information about the objects without literally translating them. Consequently, the images that result are open to many readings. These images are more than still lives composed of human bones. They become objects of curiosity or fascination.

This work feels fresh and exciting. It seems to reveal something of significance without being shallow or boring. I am delighted to see what has transpired and appreciative of the collision of predictability and unpredictability that occurs. I get the feeling that I am looking inside, that I am sharing some information, that I am experiencing something that was not necessarily expected. I want to accept what I see, not reject it or change it.

---

<sup>25</sup> Keri Hulme, The Bone People, (Auckland and Toronto: Spiral in association with Hodder and Stoughton, 1984) p.320.

I have the desire to let the information stand as it is, be as it may be, without further manipulation or pollution. It is a relief to have found a way to make work that resonates something human, something that many can relate to, without pointing to the same old clichés.

## X. Pentimento: Conclusion

How does one write about a process that has facilitated a change in the way one sees and possibly perceives? Working with the 'cyanotype' process is not really about addition or subtraction. The support remains as one surface physically, yet implies another dimension. The integrity of the picture plane is upheld. Magic occurs in the relationship or contract between the surface and the depth of the illusion. The canvas is the medium. The canvas is the message. "Anything more would be decorative",<sup>26</sup> in the words of Gerald Ferguson. "Any more medium would pollute the message"<sup>27</sup>, is an idea derived from a conversation between young contemporary artists Ron Walkary and Luke Murphy, and with which I concur at this moment in time. Still, I do not wish to be definitive at this time. To be too concerned with closure is dangerous for me right now. I want to continue to be open to new opportunities and new possibilities.

---

<sup>26</sup> Gerald Ferguson said this in response to slides that I showed him of my Bone Poems when I visited him in his studio at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia on November 1, 1997.

<sup>27</sup> This quotation has been taken from a *Dialogue* between Luke Murphy and Ron Wakkary, that was published as part of an exhibition catalogue for their show Luke A. Murphy. Paintings. Ronald Wakkary. (Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia, August 20th to September 27th, 1992) p.35.

Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent. When that happens it is possible, in some pictures, to see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman's dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called *pentimento* because the painter "repented", changed his/her mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again.<sup>28</sup>

I remembered the word **Pentimento**. It encapsulates a concept that I first learned in the study of Art History. In the drawings and paintings of great artists, one can often find beneath the surface, traces of an underlying sketch that originally served as a structural foundation. This is especially true where parts of a drawing or painting were left unfinished or where, in the search to establish a composition, the artist abandoned one idea in favour of another. The remnants of these preliminary underdrawings or underpaintings, where the artist has had a change of mind, are known as *pentimenti*.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines *pentimento* as the "reappearance of earlier underlying painting when layer added later becomes transparent, revealing artist's change of mind etc. (Italian=repentance)."

Next I felt that I had to be absolutely comfortable with the ideas expressed in this definition. Back I went to the first accessible dictionary to look up the significance of the words that Hellman had so aptly strung together.

---

<sup>28</sup> My favourite definition of *Pentimento* is by Lillian Hellman in her book entitled Pentimento, (New York: The New American Library Inc., Signet, 1974) p.1.

The following words are the ones that I selected as needing clearer definitions: *transparent, original, repent, change, concept, replace, choice, see, and again*.<sup>29</sup>

Once I had decoded Hellman's compilation, I thought about how the word *pentimento* and its implications actually refer my work and my processes.

I try to approach objects or concepts literally from every angle. I strive for a kaleidoscopic view. This includes a wide range of experimentation in many mediums, in many ways. I asked myself some questions.

First, is it necessary to uncover what was there for me once, in order to see what is there for me now?

---

<sup>29</sup> H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976).

**Transparent-** "transmitting rays of light without diffusion so that bodies behind can be seen; easily seen through attempted disguise; evident, obvious (transparent sincerity); easily understood, free from affectation or disguise, frank; shine though"

**Original-** "existing from the first, primitive, innate, initial, earliest; that has served as a pattern, of which copy or translation has been made, not derivative or dependent, first-hand, not imitative, novel in character or style, inventive, creative, thinking or acting for oneself"

**Repent-** "creeping, esp. growing along or just under surface of ground; think with contrition of, be regretful about or of, wish one had not done, resolve not to continue wrongdoing; feel regret or penitence about something"

**Change-** take or use another instead of; give up, get rid of, make different; become different, arrive at fresh phase; become new"

**Concept-** "idea of class of objects, general notion; invention"

**Replace-** "put back in place; take place of, succeed, be substituted for, be superseded, fill up place of, find or provide substitute for; hence replaceable"

**Choice-** "choosing, selection; decide between possibilities; power, right, faculty, of choosing; of picked quality, chosen"

**See-** "have or exercise the power of discerning objects with the eyes; discern mentally, attain to comprehension of, apprehend, ascertain by search or inquiry or reflection; consider, foresee; take view of, have opinion of"

**Again-** "another time, once more; make second effort"

Second, what was I taught? What did I learn? How have I processed or connected all of this information?

Over the past two and a half years in graduate school, I have been peeling back layers to look underneath surfaces. Inevitably, I have found a new way of seeing, a new beginning, an essence.

Essence is what is called the **Strange Attractor** in fractal mathematics. It is a construct that provides order, meaning, and direction to apparent chaos-to celebrate its pattern and discern its future possibilities.<sup>30</sup>

I have been slitting and combining canvases, removing material to discover its residue, bleaching to find imagery and form, and finally I am using light sensitive emulsion to record and ultimately represent the gesture of reduction. By taking away objects such as pennies, stencils and bones that create images, I have found new dimensions both on and within the surface of the canvas.

These processes have created illusions of form where there is actually nothing. Eventually no medium remains, no residue, nothing to pollute the message or image. The essence of illusion is now embedded in the underlying structure or support.

In my work I acknowledge the traditions of painting by image-making on canvas. The cyanotype solution is created by dissolving chemicals in water, painting the resulting solution onto canvas, and then using it to impact colour onto the canvas surface with the assistance of light.

---

<sup>30</sup> Jean Houston, *A Mythic Life: Learning to Live Our Greater Story*, (New York: HarperCollins, 1996) p.8.

I practise the same rituals as any painter. One difference is that I am not covering the canvas support. Instead, I emphasize it.

The next question to be asked is: What places an artist or an object in the tradition of painting? What are the key premises upon which the idea of painting are based?

First, historically, theoretically, and descriptively speaking, the act of painting should include the utilization and manipulation of the substances known as pigments, oils, varnishes, and thinners that we associate with the medium of paint. Treatment of surface seems key to the concept of painting. Second, the need for a support is generally accepted as a crucially important factor in the craftsmanship of painting. Substances that an artist combines to create paintings need to be supported by a certain degree of stability structurally. These supports are traditionally in the form of walls, stretchers, and panels, made of paper, canvas, stone, wood or metal. Third, images and illusions are generally thought of as being synonymous with the notion of painting.

Again, referring to the dictionary, I discover that paint is defined as "colouring matter, especially when suspended in liquid in order to impact colour to a surface." In fact, one can "paint with words" when writing with eloquence, and "a painter is also a rope attached to the bow of a boat for making it fast to a ship. It effects a separation". The Oxford Dictionary defines painting as the "art of representing or depicting by colours on surface".

In the history of art-making there have been many attempts made to arrive at a pure concept of painting, of refinement, of minimalism. By their

very natures these distilling processes, such as colour field painting and Abstract Expressionism, are incapable of dealing with recognizable imagery.

Through my inquiry into underlying structures such as ideas, bones, canvas and stretchers, I have discovered that for me the actual material of paint is no longer needed to create a "painting". I have met the criteria that is necessary to 'painting' without being reliant on the actual medium of paint. The idea of 'painting' is implicit and understood in my new work. In my current work, there is no longer a need for an intermediary tool or material to create illusion or imagery on the stretched canvas surface.

Through experimentation and thought processing, I have simply cleared away the excess of paint in order to find the essence of painting. I have tried to make my work 'universally accessible' and less 'polluted', to draw upon some appropriate buzzwords of our time. For me, the word **pentimento** suits these ideas precisely.

Countless projects, processes, questions, experiments, and ideas over the past thirty months lead me to conclude that the concept of painting is not dead in my work. It has been researched and has undergone transformation and reinterpretation in my recent work.

Finally, I would like to share the words of Howard Risatti from his book entitled Postmodern Perspectives,

Since we all share a human existence, exploring the question of what it means to be human would certainly be a place to start. To do this art must first recognize that to be a human being in society today is not a simple matter; it entails a complex psychic existence in which economic, social, political, environmental, biological, and many other demands all come into play at the same time. As



human beings we simply cannot be reduced to some kind of either/or dichotomy, nor can the issues we face. As we enter the next millennium, if art is to continue to play a meaningful role in society, artists must find new ways to bring the power of the aesthetic dimension to bear on this issue.<sup>31</sup>

"New can mean a fresh way of looking at a shared experience"<sup>32</sup>, says Lucy Lippard in Mixed Blessings. She also points out that Joseph Campbell once remarked that "art is the only ritual medium we have left today, but that not many artists realize what they are handling."<sup>33</sup>

Eventually getting down to bare bones and raw canvas has helped me to clarify what the essential ingredients in my work actually are. The cyanotype process has allowed me to work with imagery without obliterating my primary medium, which is the cloth canvas. By 'pushing, probing and manipulating' the canvas, I have finally discovered that it is no longer necessary for me to tell a story. Working with the inherent qualities of canvas, as a medium, I have gradually learned to assist it in its ability to inspire.

---

<sup>31</sup> Howard Risatti, Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art, (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1998) p.309.

<sup>32</sup> Lucy Lippard, Mixed Blessings: New Art in Multicultural America, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990) p.14.

<sup>33</sup> Lucy Lippard, quoting Joseph Campbell near the end of her book entitled Mixed Blessings: New Art in Multicultural America, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990) p.244.

## Bibliography

ABM Artbibliographies Modern, Volume 26, Number 1, Abstracts of the Current Literature of Modern Art, Photography and Design, Oxford: CLIO Press, 1995.

A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology, by various authors, edited by William Smith, Volumes 1 and 111, New York: AMS Press Inc., 1967.

Bailin, Mitchell Craig, Voices of the Loom: Weaving and Metaphor in Homeric poems, (A.B., Honours in Classics-Greek) Harvard University, 1992.

Barber, Elizabeth Wayland, Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1994.

Barrett, Terry, Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary, Mountain View, California: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1994.

Blake, William, text, (1757-1827) and additional text and music by Audrey Snyder, The Tapestry, Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation, 1995.

Bull, George, trans., Giorgio Vasari, The Lives of the Artists. Maryland: Penguin Books, 1975.

Carmichael, Elizabeth and Chloe Sayer, The Skeleton at the Feast: The Day of the Dead in Mexico, London: British Museum Press, 1992.

Chadwick, Whitney, Women, Art, Society. London: Thames and Hudson, 1990.

Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, by H.W. Fowler and F.G. Fowler, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Constantine, Mildred and Jack Lenor Larsen, Beyond Craft: The Art Fabric, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972.

Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art, by James Hall, introduction by Kenneth Clark, London: John Murray Publishers Ltd., 1974.

Dissanayake, Ellen, Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes From and Why, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.

Dissanayake, Ellen, What Is Art For?, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1991.

Dunand, Françoise, and Roger Lichtenberg, Mummies: A Voyage Through Eternity, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994.

Eiserman, Jennifer, Personal Written Communication, Calgary, September 1996.

Encyclopedia of Themes and Subjects in Painting, by Howard Daniel, Introduction by John Berger, London: Thames and Hudson, 1971.

Ferguson, Gerald, curator, Luke A. Murphy, Paintings, Ronald Wakkary, Art Gallery, Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. August 20- September 27, 1992.

Ferguson, Gerald, Professor of Art, Personal Communication, Halifax: NSCAD, Summer 1994 and November 1997.

Gablik, Suzi, Conversations before the end of time, London: Thames and Hudson, 1995.

Gervers, Veronika, editor, Studies in Textile History, Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1977.

Goldwater, Marge and Roberta Smith and Calvin Tomkins, Jennifer Bartlett, New York: Abbeville Press, 1985.

Goldwater, Robert, and Marco Treves, eds., Artists on Art from the 14th to the 20th Century. London: John Murray, 1981.

Hellman, Lillian, Pentimento, New York: The New American Library Inc., Signet, 1974.

Hewitt, Barbara, Blueprints on Fabric: Innovative Use for Cyanotype, Loveland, Colorado: Interweave Press Inc., 1995.



Oka, Hideyuki, How to Wrap 5 More Eggs, Traditional Japanese Packaging, New York and Tokyo: John Weatherhill Inc., 1975

Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-1990s, by Jane Davidson Reid with the assistance of Chris Rohmann, Volumes 1 and 2, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Parker, Rozsika and Griselda Pollock, Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology, London: Pandora Press, 1981.

Parker Johnson, Media and Glen Kaufman, Design on Fabrics, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1967.

Postman, Neil, Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology, Toronto: Random House of Canada Limited, 1992.

Potok, Chaim, The Gift of Asher Lev, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

Proctor, Richard M. and Jennifer F. Lew, Surface Design for Fabrics, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1992.

Risatti, Howard, ed. Postmodern Perspectives: Issues in Contemporary Art, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1998.

Rowe, Ann Pollard and Rebecca A.T. Stevens, editors, Ed Rossbach: 40 Years of Exploration and Innovation in Fibre Art, Ashville, North Carolina: Lark Books, 1990

Sandberg, Gösta, Indigo Textiles: Technique and History, London, U.K.: A & C Black, 1989.

Singer, Susanna, ed., Sol LeWitt Drawings 1958-1992, Eindhoven, The Netherlands: Lecturis, 1992.

Scott, Tanya F., Fashion: from textiles to text, Thesis (M.A.) Emerson College, 1995.

Smith, Christine Marie, Weaving: a Metaphor and Method for Women's Preaching, Thesis (Ph.D.) Graduate Theological Union, 1987.

Textile Designs of Japan: 1 Free Style Design; 11 Geometric Designs; Okinawan Ainu and Foreign Designs, Tokyo and New York: by the Japan Textile Colour Design Center, 1980.

Transformations of Myth Through Time, Joseph Campbell, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990.

Tuer, Andrew W., Japanese Stencil Designs, New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1967.

Wada, Yoshiko and Mary Kellogg Rice and Jane Barton, Shibori: The Inventive Art of Japanese Shaped Resist Dyeing, New York: Kodansha International Ltd., 1983.

Wolfe, Tom, The Painted Word, Toronto: Bantam Books, 1980.

Woolfe, Virginia, A Room of One's Own, London: Grafton Books, 1977.

## Appendix One

### I. Recipe for the Cyanotype Emulsion

**Safety Measures:** Rubber gloves should be worn and there should be adequate ventilation for all stages of mixing the emulsion and coating the paper or canvas.

#### Mix two stock solutions

##### **Stock A:**

Ferric Ammonium Citrate	68.0 grams
Oxalic Acid	1.3 grams
Distilled Water to make	250.0 mls.

##### **Stock B:**

Potassium Ferricyanide	23.0 grams
Oxalic Acid	1.3 grams
Ammonium Dichromate	0.5 grams
Distilled Water to make	250.0 mls.

**Note:** Store the stock solutions in brown bottles. Mix equal parts of A and B and spread the emulsion immediately on the paper or canvas. The emulsion is sensitive only to blue light, and standard safelights can be used during preparation. Spread the emulsion with a nonmetallic brush or sponge brush and dry the coated canvas or paper in the dark. The emulsion must be completely dry. Work with a ultraviolet rich light source (a sunny day without much wind is perfect). When the canvas or paper is dark enough, wash it in cold water until the yellow dichromate stain is gone. Wash the canvas in the washing machine to ensure that the blue colour is fixed.

### II. Colour Variations

#### **A. Blue**

When the cyanotype solution is applied to coloured fabrics or canvases, secondary colours result from the blue blending with the original colour.

The possibilities are as varied as the shades of colours available. By varying the

time of exposure from three to twenty minutes, a wide range of colour intensity can be achieved.

## **B. Removing the Blue**

Ammonium hydroxide, chlorine bleach, hydrogen peroxide, phosphate-based soap, sodium metasilicate, sodium silicate, sodium sulfate, tri-sodium phosphate (TSP), and washing or baking soda are substances that will remove the blue colour from the cyanotype image.

The fastest and easiest way to remove the blue is to use TSP. Wear rubber gloves, mix TSP in a bucket using hot tap water to dissolve the granules and then cool the water for comfort. Prepare enough solution to completely submerge the canvas. If the fabric is particularly heavy or dark blue, one cup of TSP will be needed.

Once the blue colour is removed, rinse the yellow image well in clean water. Large canvas pieces can be rinsed in a washing machine without adding soap. The resulting yellow and white image is permanent.

## **C. Brown Toning Cyanotypes**

First Step-Remove all of the blue.

Second Step-Apply tannic acid to tone the yellow areas brown.

Tannic acid is found in dark woods, red wine, and dark teas, and it can be purchased from chemical suppliers. For small projects, Lipton's Orange Pekoe Tea is an inexpensive, easy-to-obtain source of tannic acid.

**Recipe:** Bring two cups of water to a boil, add eight to ten tea bags, and steep approximately ten minutes until the colour is a rich, dark brown. After toning, rinse the canvas in clean water a dry. For a darker brown, use a more concentrated tea bath. For larger projects put one cup of tannic acid in a plastic or glass container and slowly add about two gallons of tap water.



## Appendix Two

### List of Works in the Thesis Exhibition

#### **Heads or Tails.**

interwoven canvas, bleach, acrylic paint, fabric, buttons, pennies  
h 68" x w 67", 1996

#### **Camouflaged Sturgeon**

ruched black canvas, appliqué, acrylic paint, gel  
h 60" x w 60", 1995

#### **Old Fisherman's Coat**

ruched canvas, printed fabric woven, buttons, earrings  
h 50 1/4" x w 37 3/4", 1995

#### **Old Sturgeon's Coat**

bleached, dyed and woven black canvas, fish flies and lures  
h 49 3/4" x w 37 1/2", 1995

#### **Flickers of Sturgeon**

black canvas, netting, acrylic paint  
h 13 3/4" x w 13 3/4", 1995

#### **Bleached Pattern**

black cotton fabric and bleach, stitching  
h 13 5/8" x w 13 5/8", 1995

#### **Live Impression**

black canvas, acrylic paint, fish fly  
h 13 3/4" x w 13 3/4", 1995



**Homo Aestheticus**

unbleached canvas, cyanotype, October light  
h 71 1/4" x w 54 1/2", 1997

**Bone Poem I**

unbleached canvas, oil stick, cyanotype, October light  
h 19 1/4" x w 25 1/4", 1997

**Bone Poem II**

unbleached canvas, oil stick, cyanotype, October light  
h 19 1/4" x w 25 1/4", 1997

**Bone Poem III**

unbleached canvas, oil stick, cyanotype, October light  
h 19 1/4" x w 25 1/4", 1997

**Bone Poem IV**

unbleached canvas, oil stick, cyanotype, October light  
h 19 1/4" x w 25 1/4", 1997

**Bone Poem VI**

cyanotype on unbleached canvas, April light  
h 48 1/8 x w 36", 1998

**Remembering Water I**

linen, cyanotype, February light  
h 41 5/8" x w 41 5/8", 1998

**Remembering Water II**

unbleached canvas, cyanotype, February light  
h 41 1/2" x w 41 5/8", 1998

**Remembering Water III**

linen, cyanotype, February light  
h 49 3/4" x w 37 3/4", 1998

**Remembering Water IV**

cyanotype on unbleached canvas, diffused April light  
h 36" x w 48", 1998

**Time Amphibian**

ruched linen, cyanotype, December light  
h 41 5/8" x w 41 5/8", 1997

**Fish out of Water (diptych)**

collage, black gesso, roplex, metallic powders and hardware on unbleached canvas  
h 49 5/8" x w 80", 1997

**Net (diptych)**

commercial fish fabric, acrylic paint, roplex, beeswax collage, wrapped in jute  
h 49 5/8" x w 38 1/4", 1997

**Drumheller**

stencils, jute, button, stitching and acrylic paint on linen  
h 25 1/2" x w 35 3/8", 1996

**Penny Study**

penny residue on canvas, gel, modelling paste and dyes  
h 21 3/4" x w 25 7/8", 1996

**Enwrapped**

silkscreen on "dotted" fabric, wrapped with yarns  
h 35 3/4" x w 16 7/8", 1997

**Gold Leaf**

pennies, gel, acetate, paint, "Gold Finger" on linen  
h 13 5/8" x w 13 5/8", 1995

**Penny Play**

acrylic paint, gel, modelling paste with pennies on linen  
h 13 3/4" x w 13 3/4", 1995

**Woven Fish with Fly**

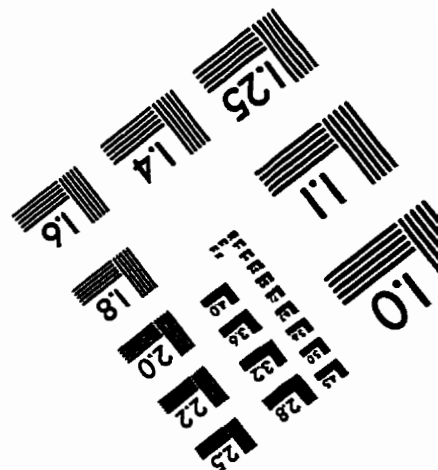
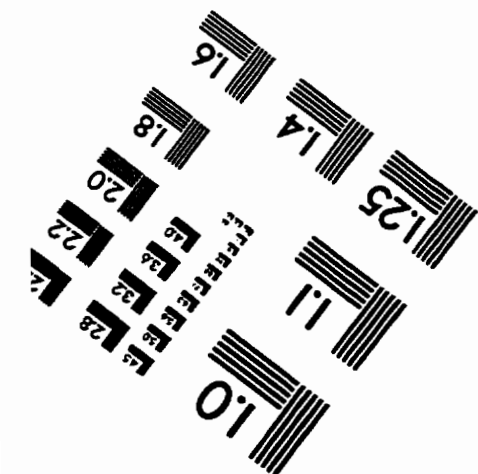
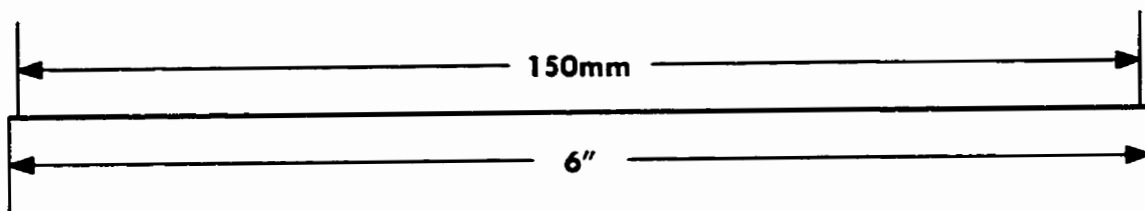
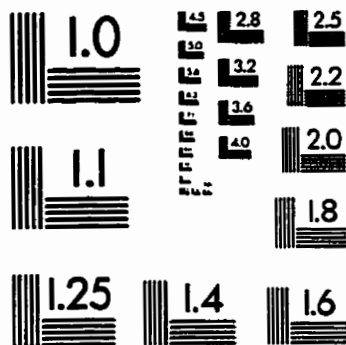
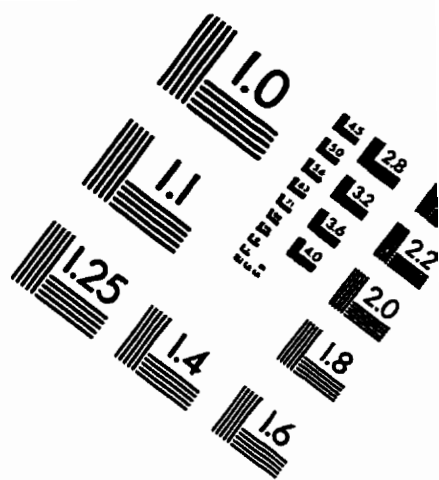
dyed and printed fabrics, woven, netting and fish fly  
h 13 3/4" x w 13 3/4", 1995

**Reflecting**

cyanotype on unbleached canvas, bleach and acrylic paint on black canvas,  
April light  
h 36" x w 48", 1998

**Past Time**

cyanotype on unbleached canvas, copper wire, iridescent and opaque beads,  
April light  
h 48" x w 78", 1998



**APPLIED IMAGE, Inc**  
1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, NY 14609 USA  
Phone: 716/482-0300  
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1983, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved